

WARRIOR ARISTOCRATS IN CRISIS

The Political Effects of the Transition
from the Slave Trade to Palm Oil Commerce
in the Nineteenth Century Kingdom of Dahomey.

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PREFACE

This thesis could not have been completed without the assistance and encouragement of a considerable number of people to whom the author owes a debt of gratitude. The list of academic staff is, unfortunately, too long to permit a comprehensive enumeration. In particular I am indebted to Professors J. D. Hargreaves and A. G. Hopkins whose own work pointed the way and whose initial advice helped me avoid the most obvious pitfalls. My thanks are also due to Marion Johnson who provided early encouragement and enlightenment, particularly as regards the technicalities of small scale trade transactions; to Joel Michelle for many hours of discussion on methodology and approach, and to Anselme Gezo for giving of his time to consider sections of this work.

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CHAPTER 1INTRODUCTIONINTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Few exploratory ventures would ever be undertaken if the explorer appreciated his own limitations at the outset. Although his ultimate destination is unclear, the route uncertain, the terrain unfamiliar and the tools inadequate he is spurred initially by a self-assurance born of his own limited knowledge. Unfortunately, that same self-assurance ill-equips him for the difficulties which he inevitably has to face en route.

This thesis has been no exception to this pattern. It has involved more than its fair share of blind alleys, false trails, disorientation, retracing of footsteps and re-establishment of bearings. It has occasionally been marked by that feeling of despairing bewilderment which confronts the uncertain traveller lost in unfamiliar territory or overwhelmed by the novelty and complexity of his surroundings. Like most exploratory journeys, it has been difficult to decide when the ultimate destination has been reached and almost impossible in retrospect to recall the exact route by which that particular point was achieved.

However, the historian of Dahomey is fortunate in comparison with the explorer venturing into virgin territory. For he is well served by the pioneers who have blazed the trail before him and by the signposts which are available to him. The Kingdom of Dahomey has been well covered by primary source material and contemporary documentation and publications.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SOURCES

The Public Record Office in London provides the most lucrative source of English language primary material on Dahomey. The core of the material concerning Dahomey during the period with which this study deals is to be found in the F084 (Slave Trade) Series, which includes reports and consular correspondence from Lagos and Fernando Po as well as Whydah itself circa 1849-52, and general material relating to the slave trade in the period 1816-92. Volumes 3-1750 of this series, covering the period down to 1856 proved particularly useful. Series C0147 (Lagos Original Correspondence 1861-94) provides material on Dahomey in the subsequent decades. Series F02, containing further material and consular reports concerning the Trade, and C096, covering Colonial Office correspondence mainly relating to the Gold Coast from 1843 and the Gold Coast and Lagos in the 1880's, provide a useful supplement, although references to Dahomey are less frequent and more incidental in this series.

Several other sources of material exist within the Public Records Office which provide occasional references or useful background to Dahomean developments particularly in the earlier part of the century. Volumes 31-36 of the T70 (Treasury) series contains the inward letter books from 1762-1818 and Colonial Office file C098 contains the minutes of the Cape Coast Council between 1829-44. The Colonial Office series C0267 (Sierra Leone), the bulk of which deals with Gold Coast Merchants and the Slave Trade itself, provides scattered references to events concerning Dahomey in material (vols. 54-147) covering the period 1821-41.

The British Parliamentary Papers (I.U.P.) in Stirling University Library provided a complementary source of British archival material to

that of the Public Record Office. While much of the material available in this form duplicates that in the Public Records Office, a significant proportion of it - particularly the oral and written testimony presented to the Select Committees of both Houses of Parliament - is an essential supplement to the manuscripts in the Public Records Office. In addition, however, the more structured presentation and ease of access make the Parliamentary Papers particularly useful. The most important series are those of the Colonies: Africa and the Slave Trade. The former series affords a rich source of material concerning the West Coast. This is especially true of volume 1, dealing with reports of the settlements on the coast and volumes 2, 3 and 5 which respectively cover the 1842 and 1865 Select Committees. Also worthy of particular mention in this series is volume 8 which includes extracts from the Board of Trade Journal and volume 50 dealing with correspondence returns and other papers concerning West Africa from 1812 through until 1884.

The Slave Trade Series of 95 volumes also furnishes easily accessible published sources, especially IUP volumes 4-7 covering the reports of the Select Committees on the Slave Trade in both Houses of Parliament, 1847-9; volume 8, "Instructions for . . . guidance of . . . Naval Officers employed in the Surpression of the Slave Trade"; volumes 40-60 concerning correspondence and reports from Naval Officers and the Admiralty relative to the Slave Trade between 1854 and 1889; and volume 91 containing papers relating to the occupation of Lagos.

A number of papers in Edinburgh University Library proved useful as background material although they fell outwith the immediate chronological scope of this work. The collection includes papers

relative to trade "including the Negro Traffic with Africa" around 1700 and, of more relevance, a collection of letters written by Archibald Dalziel, between 1762-1807.

The correspondence and reports in the Archives of the Methodist Missionary Society, lodged in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, are a useful supplement to the official and commercial correspondence in the Public Records Office. The files contain, in boxes 262-5, the bulk of the correspondence from Methodist Missionary sources on the Coast from Whydah, Porto Novo, Badagry and the surrounding area. Boxes 258-261 include earlier material, from 1835-54, emanating mainly from the Gold Coast.

Towards the end of the period with which this work deals several West Coast English language newspapers provide information and reports with a relevance to Dahomey. Birmingham University houses microfilm copies of a number of these including The Anglo-African (Lagos 1863-5), The Lagos Observer (1882-8), The Lagos Times (1880-3), The Eagle and Lagos Critic (1883-8), The Mirror (Lagos, 1887-8) and the Gold Coast Times (Cape Coast, 1874-85).

FRENCH ARCHIVAL SOURCES

The French archives also contain much material central to this study. In the National Archives, the Section Ancienne contains instructions to and from the Dahomean coast, including information on the state of internal affairs, and information pertaining to the Slave Trade in the 1780s. The Section Moderne, series F12, does refer to commerce and industry, but the file which refers to Consuls' reports (Commercial)

from the West Coast of Africa, includes very little of direct interest. Nevertheless, there is, scattered throughout the National Archives, a fair amount of material on the palm oil trade, particularly through the medium of Régis Frères.

The archives in Ministère D'Outre Mer contain general political material on the Kingdom of Dahomey during its independent period prior to French colonisation, mainly between 1845 and 1888. The later material, in the late 1880s and 1890s is primarily concerned with the military situation prior to the conquest, but military reports on geography and on exploratory missions occasionally furnished information useful to this study.

In Ministère des Affaires Etrangères the material is overwhelmingly composed of documentation relating to the diplomatic affairs of France, particularly dealings with other European countries on the subject of Africa. However, it does, from time to time, include commercial reports, often dispatched by visiting naval commanders, on the various ports in the Bight of Benin and surrounding area, including those of the Kingdom of Dahomey. Similar remarks apply to the documents in the Service Historique de la Marine.

The Bibliotheque Nationale was also consulted for a range of French language publications, although only two contemporary documents proved to be of any value to the subject of this particular work.

The French Archives provided in particular a number of reports which furnished useful material in connection with the early palm oil commerce. These reports helped to compensate for the relative lack of reliable statistical data during the emergence of the trade. A report

of 1821, for instance, by a visiting sea Captain, speaks of the trade of Whydah as being confined solely to slaves and palm oil. A further report in 1838 suggests that da Souza had by then given up the palm oil trade due to its relative lack of return. A report dated 1850, but dealing with the early 1840s on the subject of a visit by Regis's agent to the King, suggests that not only was the King prepared to tolerate the trade, but that he formally and publicly initiated encouragement of the trade and aspects related to the production of oil, and issued a specific instruction to this effect. At the latter end of the period with which this work deals Serval's reports, on the commercial and political situation of the Dahomean Kingdom in the 1870s, were fuller and more detailed than the normal naval reports. They are of particular interest because, in contrast to the constant and varied justifications supplied by some, like Regis, to encourage French intervention, Serval displays an anxiety and pessimism regarding the waning of the central monarchical power for which he himself can see no realistic substitute.¹

The British and French archival sources form the bulk of the primary material used in the preparation of this thesis. Archives concerning Dahomey do exist in The Hague and in Lisbon, but they refer almost exclusively to the period prior to 1800.²

The author did not have the opportunity to consult the archives of the Roman Catholic Society of African Missions which are now deposited in Rome. Fortunately the most relevant material from this source is available in published form in Annales de la Propagation de la Foi, especially in volumes XXXIV to XXXX (1862-8) of that publication.³

It was the intention of the author to supplement the above archival and contemporary sources with a period of fieldwork in Dahomey itself, but, in a period of increasing financial stringency, the Social Science Research Council did not feel that such a project was sufficiently important to justify the necessary financial expenditure. Fortunately, Dahomean oral tradition has been comprehensively recorded by anthropologists, notably by Le Herissé and Melville Herskovits.⁴ In addition, the author has benefitted greatly from regular discussions with several observers with first hand knowledge of Dahomey, including Dr. Robin Law, Douglas Harrison and Anselme Gezo, a descendant of King Gezo of Dahomey and a historian of his country in his own right. These discussions have provided considerable compensation for the absence of the desired fieldwork.

CONTEMPORARY PUBLICATIONS

Prior to 1800 the coastal area of Dahomey, both before and after its incorporation into the Kingdom proper, was the subject of considerable attention.⁵

For the period with which this thesis deals, contemporary publications are no less abundant. In the early years of the century M'Leod's description, though less reliable than later writers, does provide some useful descriptions of the kingdom at the beginning of the 19th century.⁶

Duncan and Freeman in the 1840's and Forbes in 1851, though primarily preoccupied with western diplomatic and commercial concerns, provide comprehensive accounts of the kingdom and detailed descriptions of contemporary events.⁷

Two later writers, influenced and no doubt prejudiced by contemporary western interest in anthropological studies, Burton in the 1860's and Skertchly in the 1870's, provide more detailed and analytical comment on the Kingdom.⁸

These published works are usefully and fortunately supplemented by frequent and extensive reports in the English and French sources, mainly of a commercial and diplomatic nature, from visiting or resident officials on the coast.⁹ French publications throughout the period tend to be less detailed and comprehensive but perhaps more regular than the English language publications.¹⁰

MODERN BACKGROUND STUDIES

Modern historians of the Kingdom of Dahomey, as of all West Africa of this period, owe an immense debt of gratitude to those among our contemporary colleagues who first undertook the painstaking work of marshalling the evidence and providing the regional framework which is the essential backcloth against which particular studies take place.

Colin Newbury produced the pioneering account of the commercial and political development of the Slave Coast.¹¹ A.G. Hopkins furnished the first comprehensive account of economic development of West Africa for the last millennium and conceptually integrated African economic history within the wider context of global economic developments.¹²

John Hargreaves provided a meticulous study of the political interrelationship between and among Europeans and Africans in the period prior to Partition.¹³ And Phillip D. Curtin undertook the immense task of collating and interpreting the daunting mass of data concerning the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁴

MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It is against that background that the modern historians of Dahomey have undertaken their task. I. A. Akinjogbin, drawing on primary material in London, France, Portugal and Brazil, has traced the political development of Dahomey in the 18th century, while David Ross, basing his work primarily on British and French Archives, completed the pre-conquest period in historical terms.¹⁵ Patrick Manning pioneered the study of the economic history of the region, originally for the period from the French conquest and, in more recent publications, covering the period 1640-1960.¹⁶ Pierre Verger and Bernard Schnapper have provided an insight into Dahomean commercial developments, particularly in relation to the economic linkage with Latin America, based on detailed studies of Portuguese and French archives.¹⁷

In addition, Dahomey has been the subject of extensive work based primarily on secondary anthropological studies. The most notable have been those of Polanyi and Argyle,¹⁸ but a debt of gratitude is also due to Katz and Maroukis who undertook respectively an examination of aspects of political power and of warfare in the Kingdom of Dahomey.¹⁹ However, these works are mainly based on contemporary published materials and subsequent anthropological descriptions of the Kingdom; recourse to primary archival sources is limited.

Despite the extent of work already undertaken, a number of unresolved questions remain in the 1818-1890 period, particularly concerning the inter-relationship of politics and economic change during the critical period from the 1840's to 1870's.²⁰

These questions remain outstanding notwithstanding the considerable contribution of David Ross to 19th century Dahomean historical studies. Although this present work overlaps chronologically with Ross, there are several differences of emphasis, approach and perspective. Approximately half of Ross's thesis concern the years 1876-94 which are covered more sparsely in this work. Conversely, this thesis is aimed at providing a more detailed treatment of the four decades between c.1835 and 1875 than is presently available. This difference in emphasis is reflected in the consultation of primary sources. Whereas Ross relies heavily on French archival sources in the last two decades prior to French military intervention, this work employs them more extensively as a complement to English language sources in the half century from 1820.

There is also a difference of aims. Ross's primary concern throughout was "to provide . . . an accurate outline of developments in Dahomean political society during the course of the 19th century", rather than to explore the relationship between economics and politics which is the burden of this work. As a corollary, Ross in his pioneering work provided a description of the Fon political system, whereas this thesis attempts to undertake an investigation of the dynamic underlying Dahomean political power, with particular reference to the manner in which material control was translated into social and political status.²¹

Finally, the perspective employed in Ross's thesis is essentially concerned with the personal motivations which prompted political change, in contrast to the approach adopted here which seeks to explain the response of individuals and groups in terms of economic and political determinants which shaped the choices available to them and largely determined the course of their actions.

Thus, although this work does differ from Ross on several specific points of detail and interpretation, it is essentially intended as complementary to his work. It is aimed primarily at a number of questions which have remained unresolved in his own and subsequent studies, in the hope that an alternative perspective might contribute towards clarification of these issues.

AREAS/QUESTIONS UNRESOLVED

Considerable controversy surrounds four major issues in particular; firstly, the nature of the political economy of Dahomey; secondly, the relationship between the slave trade and the early palm oil trade; thirdly, the effect of economic change on the contemporary political regime and their response thereto; and, finally, the determinants which underlay colonial conquest.

The most substantial area of controversy which persists despite the considerable volume of historical literature is the nature of political power in the pre-colonial Kingdom of Dahomey. Several historians, notably Akinjogbin and Yoder, have interpreted Dahomean politics along lines comparable with the development of European nation states. Thus, Akinjogbin depicts 18th century Dahomey as essentially an enlightened dictatorship under a centralised monarchy characterised as economically progressive, anti-slave trade and socially benevolent.²² Yoder, dealing with the 19th century Kingdom, characterises the Dahomean state as a proto-parliamentary system of competing "parties" under a monarch whose power is more constitutional than despotic.²³ Such interpretations not only contrast sharply with the portrayal of

contemporary European observers,²⁴ but have also been subject to penetrating critique in recent years.²⁵ Several other writers have attempted analyses of Dahomean political economy from perspectives which draw upon economic and anthropological models as well as historical data, but with widely differing conclusions.²⁶

The nature of political power in 19th century Dahomey has important ramifications for three other areas of considerable controversy.

The first of these is the relationship between the structure of the existing slave trade and the growth of the new palm oil trade, particularly from the 1830's onwards. Several historians have suggested that the new export trade in palm oil was not only compatible with that of slaves, but that its period of early expansion coincided with a thriving slave trade.²⁷ Others have been more inclined to stress the disjunction between the two trades, and the fact that the trade in palm oil waxed as that in slaves waned.²⁸ The study of contemporary evidence from the Dahomean coast provides the opportunity of delineating both the course of the new commerce and the state of the export trade in slaves at that chronological juncture.

Secondly, an understanding of the nature of the political economy of the Kingdom would seem crucial to an understanding of Dahomean response to the economic changes of the 19th century. This is a further area where there has been little agreement among historians. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch has suggested that, as a consequence of the largely "tributary" relationship of the slave trade to the Dahomean regime, the transition from slave to palm oil trade was achieved with relative ease and speed.²⁹ A.G. Hopkins and Robin Law, on the other hand, stress

discontinuity and dislocation in contrast to continuity and ease of transfer.³⁰ Hopkins suggests that the structure of legitimate commerce "marked an important breach with the past" and, moreover, that the strains involved in its creation and the African response thereto are central to an understanding of the partition of West Africa.³¹

In this, Hopkins suggests an alternative, or supplementary dimension to those interpretations of imperialism which derive largely from motives or determinents emanating from the European side of the equation,³² and a revisionist justification for the economic determinism of late 19th century imperialism in West Africa.

METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

This thesis was originally conceived as an attempt to clarify these and other related issues by the application of Marx's model of historical change to the 19th century history of pre-colonial Dahomey. The choice of the expression "Marx's model", rather than "Marxist" or "Marxian" is intentional. Since the 1970's there has been a torrent, some would say deluge, of "Marxist" interpretations of pre-colonial Africa, much of it initially undertaken by economic anthropologists.³³ More recently a number of historians, moved among other things by what they term the "theoretical poverty of the existing historiography of the period", have felt compelled to demonstrate "the pertinence, indeed the necessity for the application, of the concepts of historical materialism to the pre-colonial history of Africa", and to retrieve African historical studies from "empiricism".³⁴

It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that this work should start not by affirming Marx, but by disclaiming "Marxism". Firstly, because the nomenclature has now become so all-embracing as to signify little unless accompanied by an inordinately long qualification of exactly what is meant by the term.³⁵ Partly, this stems from the fact that there has been little agreement on the precise nature of the "Marxist Method" or the definition of basic Marxist concepts.³⁶

But secondly, it arises because the reaction against perceived "empiricism" has often led to a sanctification of abstract theory and a denigration of facts (indeed the denial that they can objectively exist) which has resulted in an equally distorted conceptual framework as the one which is initially condemned.³⁷ If empiricism without theory is deemed to be blind, then theory without a basis in empirical fact is surely sterile.

Thus, much of the recent effort to "introduce" marxism into pre-colonial studies has been accompanied by sterile, at times almost theological debate which has been more concerned with the internal coherence of Marx's writings than with application of his model, however imperfect, to the test of historical data.

This appears to particularly the case in the "Modes of Production" debate during which perhaps the most penetrating insight has come from Kitching:

". . . the 'impasse' which we appear to have reached in these debates is two-fold. Firstly, we do not know how they could be 'resolved' (if by resolved we mean "how one side or the other could be unambiguously vindicated by the evidence") for "the evidence" seems irresolubly contradictory or fragmentary or both. But secondly, and more significantly I think, we do not know what would be attained by "resolving" them even if we could."³⁸

This work, therefore, does not seek to argue the coherence or otherwise of Marx's model, or to attempt a precise definition thereof. It does not seek to categorise the social structure of 19th century Dahomey into this or that "mode of production". It is content and primarily concerned from a conceptual point of view to apply what is, in the opinion of the present writer, the central and much neglected component of Marx's view of historical change - the dialectical interplay between forces and relations of production - to the history of 19th century Dahomey.³⁹

Moreover, it treats historical materialism as an empirical theory. Firstly, because this is the manner in which Marx himself rendered it.⁴⁰ And secondly because Marx's model of historical change was derived largely from a study of capitalist society while his work on pre-capitalist social formations was much less systematic, much less central and based on much more fragmentary data than that which formed his primary concern and the primary basis for his theoretical model - western European capitalism.⁴¹

The approach at the outset, therefore, is tentative rather than assured. The model is flexible rather than fixed. And the primary concern throughout is whether Marx's model can assist a better understanding of Dahomean history, rather than whether Dahomean data can offer a retrospective vindication of Marx's model of history.

Within this framework the study seeks to define the material basis of political power in the Dahomean kingdom. It attempts to identify the means by which surplus produce was appropriated from the general population to the differential benefit of one group within Dahomean society. And it tries to better explain the nature of 19th century

Dahomean developments in terms of a burgeoning conflict between the new forces of production represented by the growing, export-oriented palm oil produce and a political formation based on the hitherto existing economic structure.

CHAPTER 1 FOOTNOTES.

- 1 Cf. also Brand to Russell, 18/4/1860 in Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 47. For details of the most informative of these French reports, see below, footnotes 9 and 10.
- 2 The Archives in Lisbon have been consulted by Pierre Verger, and those in The Hague by both Verger and Postma. Cf. Postma, J. "The Dimension of the Dutch Slave Trade from Western Africa", in J.A.H., vol. 13, no. 2, 1972, pp. 237-248: Verger, P., Flux et Reflux de la Traite des Negres entre le Golfe de Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du 17e et 18e siecles (The Hague), 1968. For a compilation of archives by location and consulting author, see Manning, P., "The Slave Trade in the Bight of Benin, 1640-1890", in Gemery and Hogendorn (eds.), The Uncommon Market, pp. 109-111.
- 3 The records of the Society of African Missions have previously been consulted by David Ross who found them of most use in the 1880's. Ross, D., "The Autonomous Kingdom of Dahomey, 1818-94", unpublished Ph.D., thesis, University of London, 1967, p. 510.
- 4 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey, (Paris) 1911: Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom, 2 vols., Northwest Press (Evalston), 1938: Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative (Evalston), 1958.
- 5 Atkins, J., A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies, (London) 1735, New Impression, F. Cass and Co., 1970. Barbot, J., "A Description of the Coast of North and South Guinea" in Churchill (ed) Collection of Voyages and Travels (London), 1732. Bosman, W., A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea (London), 1967. Dalzel, A., The History of Dahomy, (London) 1793, New Impression, F. Cass and Co. 1967. Pruneau de Pommegeorge, Description de la Nigritie (Amsterdam), 1789. Dapper, O., Description de l'Afrique (Amsterdam), 1686. Labat, Jean-Baptiste, Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée, Isles Voisines et à Cayenne fait en 1725, 1726, et 1727, vol. 2 (Paris), 1730. Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomy (London), 1968. Smith, W., A New Voyage to Guinea (London), 1744, New Impression, F. Cass and Co. 1967. Snelgrave, W., A New Account of some parts of Guinea and the Slave Trade (London), 1734, New Impression, F. Cass and Co., 1971.
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CHAPTER 2THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DAHOMEYTHE RISE OF DAHOMEY

Dahomey's emergence as a major West African power took place against the backcloth of increasing contact and economic co-operation between the states of the West African coast and European traders. In particular, her military and territorial development coincided with the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade along this section of the West African coast.

The Portuguese probably first explored the Bight of Benin in 1472.¹ The first commercial contact with the Ewe/Aja peoples was perhaps a Portuguese voyage to "Popo" (Great Popo) in 1553,² and Allada itself appears on Portuguese maps from 1570.³ Trade with Allada included both slaves and palm oil,⁴ and although the total volume of trade does not appear to have been substantial, slaves were the normal and principal commodity, mainly for the inter-African coastline trade. Otherwise little interest was shown in the area between the Volta and Lagos.

The real take-off in slave exports from Allada probably occurred with the Dutch entry into the Trade in the 1630's and 40's,⁵ and later in the 1650's with the spread of sugar cultivation in the Caribbean. The Dutch were followed by the English from the 1660's and the French from the 1670's. From 1671, the main focus of the slave trade shifted from Allada to Whydah⁶ and by the end of the 17th century the area of coast between the mouth of the Volta and Lagos was already characterised as the Slave Coast on European maps.⁷

It was within this context that the Kingdom of Dahomey emerged as a major power on the West African coast. According to tradition, the founders of the Dahomean state can be traced back to Tado, near the present Togo border. Internal dynastic disputes forced their emigration from there, and later from Allada, the dominant kingdom in the area prior to the rise of Dahomey itself. The Fon were eventually forced to settle in the Igede area under the sufferance of the indigeneous people and chiefs. Strengthened by further immigration from Allada, the Fon rose against the original inhabitants, conquered them and established the nucleus of the later Kingdom of Dahomey. From the 1620's the Fon, under their leader Dako, founded the basis of the kingdom whose existence was first attested to in the 1680's,⁸ but whose expansion was to continue territorially and militarily for over two centuries.⁹

From the beginning the embryonic state expanded, as it had been founded, by military conquest, extending outwards from Abomey, subduing other local peoples and consolidating the area under its control. This crucible of conquest in which the beginnings of the Kingdom were first forged was crucial to its political economy as it later developed under Gezo.

For the Fon, conquest had more than a territorial dimension; it also provided for the incorporation of people into the new state.¹⁰ They were incorporated 'en masse' when the conquest of large areas allowed their inclusion as citizens of Dahomey. But the domestic labour force was also increased through the use of captives as slaves within the Kingdom. A proportion of the captives taken in military expeditions were sacrificed, others were sold, and some remained within the expanding

state as slaves, with their descendants acquiring rights of limited citizenship insofar as they could not be sacrificed or sold into external slavery other than for criminal acts.¹¹

The initial dynamic of the Dahomean state - the military conquest of people - was supremely important in shaping the political and ideological direction of future generations of Dahomeans and in moulding a state formation well suited to incorporation into the supply side of the expanding Atlantic slave trade.¹²

Militarism was further incorporated into the Dahomean state structure by Wegbaja, whose reign (1650-80) is particularly noted for his martial reforms. During this period the Fon military system was overhauled with the introduction of new war techniques including night fighting and the reorganisation of the warrior bands.¹³ It is around this period also that firearms were introduced.¹⁴ Largely as a result of this increased military efficiency, the Fon were able to establish military control over the Western Abomey plateau.

Simultaneously, the position of the warrior leader was strengthened, both by the formal militarisation of the state - including the establishment of a royal monopoly over the sale of firearms - and also by the centralisation of law, order and the administration of justice.¹⁵

The incorporation of firearms into Dahomean military techniques necessitated a reliable source of such weapons. It required also a means of exchange acceptable to the arms suppliers - the European traders on the coast. It is significant that Dahomean traditions recall both the extensive trade carried out between Wegbaja and the Europeans, and the fact that it was Wegbaja who first introduced the tactics of

night-fighting - with their potential for an enhanced return of captives - to the Dahomean army.¹⁶ The taking of captives had been an integral part of Dahomean military conquest from the earliest stage,¹⁷ and the historical conjuncture of aggressive Dahomean military expansion and European demand for the product of such activity afforded extensive opportunities for mutual co-operation and benefit.

Slave raiding and the Atlantic Trade offered unparalleled opportunities for the warrior elite to increase their power; it enabled them to enhance their status within Dahomey via an economic mechanism which was completely compatible with the ethos and practice which had given rise to their initial pre-eminence. The slave trade did not give birth to a political elite within Dahomey, but it acted as foster parent in their transformation from primus-inter-pares to a distinct social class by virtue of their monopolisation of scarce and prestigious western trade goods.

Throughout the latter half of the 17th century the coastal states to the south of Dahomey furnished a high level of slave exports to the Europeans. The small state of Whydah provided many thousands annually. Other coastal ports like Jakin, which was controlled by Allada, sold similar numbers,¹⁸ and this was probably also the case with Offra which was Allada's main port until its destruction in 1692. The bulk of these slave exports were obtained by the coastal states through trade rather than direct conquest; Allada, for instance, was an important 'middleman' in slaves taken down to the coast.¹⁹ Under Wegbaja, Dahomey was heavily involved in trade with the Europeans, and his successors were certainly involved in the slave trade.²⁰

Dahomey's position as a hinterland supplier of slaves left it vulnerable to disruptions of trade, both from the point of view of the sale of captives and the procurement of arms.²¹ As long as trade continued uninterrupted and flourishing this mattered little. But when trade declined from around 1712 because of war and competition among the coastal states and between themselves and Europeans,²² the need for direct Dahomean access to coastal trade came on to the agenda. Between 1724 and 1727 Dahomey, under Agaja, extended southwards conquering Allada, Jakin and finally Whydah itself, securing for the first time direct access to the Atlantic Trade.²³

The administrative and military reforms continued apace during Dahomey's drive south. In Allada the old administrative divisions were retained, but the former rulers now acted as officials of the Dahomean monarchy.²⁴ The political and commercial organisation of Whydah was centralised under the "White Man's Captain", the Yevogan. Royal control over the slave trade was strengthened,²⁵ the royal monopoly over certain goods such as gold, corals and arms was retained,²⁶ and the monarch continued to participate in slave raiding.²⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the Fon takeover slave exports remained high.²⁸ But even at this stage there were signs that all was not well with the Whydah slave trade. In particular, continued harassment by the Whydahs against the Dahomean conquerors affected the orderly conduct of trade.²⁹ European traders were frightened by the fighting and by the initial reception of the conquerors.³⁰ The initial appointment of separate chiefs to oversee the trade of the French, English and Portuguese forts appears to have created discord rather than

co-ordination, although the matter was resolved by the appointment of a the Yevogan as the "chief" for all white men in 1733.³¹ Dahomey's territorial expansion brought her into conflict with Oyo, and invasions into Dahomey in 1726-30 culminated in Dahomey's acceptance of tributary status to Oyo.³²

The wars which provided the rich harvest of slaves during the immediate post-conquest period were ultimately self-defeating, for orderly trade at Whydah had been dependent upon slave raiding being carried out further into the hinterland of the actual exporting states.³³

The decline in the Trade continued into the second half of the 18th century.³⁴ Oyo's conquest of Dahomey in 1748 brought the resumption of Dahomey's middleman role, but the Trade was driven east again by Kpengla's attempts to monopolise it and by Oyo's redirection of commerce through Porto Novo instead of Whydah.³⁵ From the 1750's the Portuguese shifted their commerce from Whydah as a result of new, strictly enforced regulations prohibiting the loading of more than one ship at a time,³⁶ a move that was accelerated by the Portuguese policy of diversifying outlets and by the extended horizons presented to the Portuguese as a result of the crisis in the Dutch West Indies Company.³⁷

Other external factors also intervened. The interruptions to trade as a result of the Seven Years War were followed later in the century by the removal of English traders to Old Calabar and by the antagonism shown towards the Trade by the New French Revolutionary Government. The dramatic decline in the lucrative trade prompted political instability.³⁸ The monarchy responded by increasing internal

exploitation and tyranny,³⁹ an increased role for the Gau in suppressing internal dissent and the extension of internal mechanisms of surveillance.⁴⁰ Several attempts were made to sustain the economic power of the monarchy. As early as 1746, Tegbesu had reorganised the sale of slaves at the coast by introducing a small number of "king's traders" who sold slaves on the king's account.⁴¹ Later, Kpengla unsuccessfully attempted to impose a royal monopoly on the trade.⁴² However, throughout this period the monarch and his leading ministers played an insignificant part in the diminishing Trade.⁴³

This decline in the export trade was linked to a deprioritisation of militarism.⁴⁴ During Kpengla's final years, one report suggests that the Dahomean army had declined to little more than 3000 in number.⁴⁵ And, with a declining slave trade and diminishing military strength went a decline in monarchical power,⁴⁶ culminating in the assassination of King Agonglo in 1797.

Under Adandozan, his successor, the situation deteriorated rather than improved. In 1797 the French gave up their fort at Whydah⁴⁷ and French export of slaves from the Bight of Benin decreased dramatically thereafter - particularly in the first decade of the 19th century.⁴⁸ Three directors of the Portuguese fort at Whydah were expelled at the turn of the century, and by 1804 Adandozan was desperately dispatching emissaries to Portugal in an attempt to foster trade.⁴⁹ Bereft of a thriving export sector, Adandozan directed his antagonism towards Porto Novo, carrying out raids on the beach, disrupting trade and taking what recompense he could including that from the ransoming of prisoners to the French and English.⁵⁰ Despite this, trade continued to develop there

rather than at Whydah.⁵¹ As matters became more desperate - for Adandozan's behaviour was hardly calculated to encourage a European presence on the coast⁵² - likewise did the Dahomean response. In 1816 a Mr Sewett, ex-purser of a Royal Navy ship and now trading in his own right, was detained at Whydah against his will and "installed" as commander of the British fort there by the Dahomeans.⁵³

Not unnaturally, the monarch's personal position came under increasing domestic pressure.⁵⁴ According to one tradition, Adandozan was regarded as "unworthy to carry the title of warrior", and in others he was remembered for his failure to sacrifice for deceased monarchs,⁵⁵ both damning indictments in view of the martial traditions of the monarchy. His personal life style, his internal tyranny and his disregard for military affairs came under attack.⁵⁶ Significantly, during his reign there is some evidence that the Dahomeans were trading in slaves,⁵⁷ but there is no evidence that Adandozan presided over successful slave raiding.

Thus, in the period immediately prior to the accession of Gezo to the stool of Dahomey circumstances stood in marked contrast to those which had prevailed during the period of Dahomey's emergence as a major power and - just as important - to the inherited and idealised perception of Dahomey's strength during that period held by Dahomeans themselves. Political instability and internal dynastic quarrels had undermined the pre-eminent position of the monarchy. The King himself no longer epitomised the inherited warrior ethos in his priorities or in his practice. The slave trade through Whydah had been undergoing long-term decline for around half a century, and economic slump heightened political instability.⁵⁸

THE ACCESSION OF GEZO

As is often the case, a serious disjunction between the contemporary reality and the inherited ideal gave rise to dramatic political change. Around 1818, Gezo, with the support of some sections of the aristocracy and the intimate assistance of the slave trader Francisco Felix da Souza, came to power through a coup d'état in Dahomey.⁵⁹ Through a combination of circumstance and conscious decision, his reign was to see the re-establishment of four features which had been central to the success of Dahomey and that of his own predecessors during the Kingdom's emergence as a major power on the West African coast. Under Gezo, both these features and his Kingdom were to be elevated to a pre-eminence far greater than hitherto achieved by any Dahomean monarch.

DAHOMEAN MILITARISM

The primary feature re-established by Gezo was the military nature of the Dahomean state. Under his rule the Dahomean state was to be permeated with militarism in both its structure and its ideology. Few states fitted better Smith's assertion that:

". . . war was itself a force, and probably the greatest force, in the creation of statehood, so that the attainment of statehood - that intangible concept - was fostered as well as characterised by the development of means by which the interests of the state could be forwarded".⁶⁰

Military success had been crucial to the origin and establishment of the Dahomean state. It was by military means that the Fon had gained their autonomy, taken their capital city, expanded their territory and extended their political influence.⁶¹ War was the means by which

tribute was raised and Dahomey was populated. But war was also the means by which the economic produce and political esteem of Europe was garnered to the prestige of the Dahomean leadership and the glory of the Nation.

Thus, militarism, as might be expected, was embodied within the state structure. By the 18th century Dahomey had already developed a standing army,⁶² a female corps of Amazons⁶³ and an impressive armoury of military manoeuvres.⁶⁴ In Dahomey, as one French observer put it "tout homme est né soldat, et son metier est la guerre".⁶⁵

Gezo re-established Dahomey as the military state sans pareil, a process reflected even in the coup d'état which brought him to power with the assistance of Francisco Felix da Souza. Da Souza may well have had personal reasons for seeking the overthrow of Adandozan, having suffered imprisonment and humiliation by that monarch at an earlier stage. But it is also certain that he was stimulated by the prospects of the potentially lucrative slave exports which might be expected from a sympathetic monarch.⁶⁶ In return for such an opportunity, da Souza undertook to supply Gezo with the necessary firearms and finance in order to achieve his coup d'état and to facilitate slave raiding thereafter.⁶⁷

From Gezo's point of view, da Souza's material assistance provided him with the means of attaining power. Slave raiding thereafter provided him with the means of procuring, by exchange, the elements necessary to ensure the maintenance and consolidation of his domestic power - firearms, prestigious western goods, cowries and military victory. By the early stages of Gezo's reign, slave raiding had become institutionalised in the Dahomean annual calendar.⁶⁸

Of necessity, Gezo's military ambition went further than an annual campaign. Internally, in order to secure his power, he reformed the Amazon guard; they were recruited anew, extended in numbers and raised in status.⁶⁹ This formation, utterly loyal to the king personally, provided a check against internal treachery⁷⁰ and, with a command structure duplicating the standing army, acted as a counterbalance against the latter.⁷¹ The Amazons also came to play a prominent part in the annual campaign which, as we shall see, became a crucial facet of political and economic life in 19th century Dahomey.

The standing army itself was increased in size and, initially with the assistance of da Souza, rendered more efficient in weapons and training.⁷² Though estimates of the size of Dahomey's armed forces in the 19th century vary, most appear to indicate a substantial increase in numbers compared to the second half of the 18th century, at least up until the major defeat at Abeokuta in 1851. Dahomey's military strength can reasonably be estimated at around 5000 Amazons, 10,000 regulars in the standing army, and a possible additional strength of upwards of 10,000 conscripts from levies during major campaigns or emergencies.⁷³

The majority of the recruits for the standing army appear to have been derived from free farmers or artisans. While there is some evidence that young captives were occasionally put into the conscript militia, it is unclear whether this happened automatically or whether the practice applied to the regular army.⁷⁴

In his re-establishment of militarism, Gezo was able to build on the foundations laid by his predecessor Agaja a century before. Campaigns were preceded by an elaborate system of spying,⁷⁵ the destination of

the army was shrouded in secrecy until the last possible moment⁷⁶ and daybreak chosen for attack as the most opportune time to achieve both surprise and captives.⁷⁷ Royal control had been exercised over the sale and purchase of firearms since the time of Agaja,⁷⁸ and almost all of the powder and firearms for the standing army and Amazons was provided by the monarch.⁷⁹ The necessity to supply a considerable number of Dahomean soldiers with firearms underlay the obligatory dues - in the form of firearms and ammunitions - which were taken on third party transactions by the king's agents in European factories.⁸⁰ The provision of arms was the greatest single outlay for the monarch since the regular army received no formal pay, and although reserve provisions might have to be supplied at the beginning of a campaign to supplement their "living off the land",⁸¹ these could be provided by a general agricultural levy. Similar obligations of supplying arms fell upon the leading men of the kingdom who were expected to raise levies of soldiers for the campaign. Other arms were provided by Dahomean artisans, particularly the smiths who, in later years, were also obliged to provide shot for firearms.⁸²

The Dahomean armed forces had an elaborate command structure, and were divided on the basis of sex, regular and conscript, as well as into territorial, 'status' and assignment corps at lower levels.⁸³ But at the higher levels, political and military power were completely interwoven in a hierarchical structure with the monarch at the apex as the supreme head of both.⁸⁴

Thus, the nature of Gezo's accession to power - by a military coup d'état - inevitably meant the restoration of militarism as the essence of

his holding and consolidating power. And the military reorganisation necessarily meant, in turn, a restoration of the monarch's pre-eminent position in Dahomean politics.

What such organisational descriptions cannot convey, however, is the potency and all-pervasive nature of the military ethos which permeated Dahomean life in the wake of Gezo's accession. The spirit of the warrior covered every aspect of society and was fostered and encouraged by the ruling elite. War was an ideological as well as a practical question in Gezo's Dahomey.

In a society where courage and martial valour were paramount, cowardice was the cardinal sin:

"If a soldier acts as a coward, or, which is considered tantamount, does not take either prisoners or head, the king will offer him a present at the customs; those who have acted well accuse him, and, if their accusation is proved, claim the present, while the charge thus substantiated, is acted upon at once."⁸⁵

But, while the loss of royal bounty might be the reward for failure to take a prisoner or head in battle, actual cowardice was penalized with loss of life.⁸⁶ Failure to fulfill military obligations of even the meanest kind was treated with public reprimand and abuse.⁸⁷ Acts of supreme stamina or physical endurance were lauded whether in war or in peace-time.⁸⁸ Aggression and argumentation in the form of public debate were as important as the content of the topic under discussion; aggressive palaver was more a part of the ceremonial manifestation of the warrior spirit than a means of reaching a satisfactory conclusion.⁸⁹ Group challenged group, women challenged men, and each vied with the other to display their superior courage and martial worthiness.⁹⁰

Thus, while most 19th century observers remarked upon the great military displays which took place at the Abomey Customs,⁹¹ the military ethos went much further than the formal parades. Every single ceremonial feature revolved around the values of the warrior state. Dancing became an exhibition of bravery and a tale of conquered foes;⁹² ostentatious apparel proclaimed heroic deeds of the past;⁹³ and even the ceremonial distribution of cowries by the monarch to the assembled throng was the occasion for physical struggle and the winning of spoils.⁹⁴

The potency of militarism was reinforced early in Gezo's reign by two developments. The first of these was of a practical political nature. His military reorganisation and the re-awakening of the martial spirit provided the basis of a new Dahomean military machine capable of restoring Dahomey's prestige, aggression and military expansion. The culmination of this occurred early in his reign when in 1823 the overlordship of Oyo was overthrown by the might of Dahomean arms.⁹⁵ This victory was linked with the second development, the extension and scale of human sacrifice.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

While Agaja is reputed to have established the Annual Customs,⁹⁶ the tradition of human sacrifice itself can be traced back to the very origins of the Dahomean state. Tradition records that the very name Dahomey derives from the ritual slaughter of and display of the body of Da - the former ruler of the city of Abomey - following a vow to that effect taken during the seige of the city by Dako.⁹⁷ This ritual

killing in thanksgiving for victory was the first recorded case of human sacrifice in the Dahomean traditions, but one which was repeated and extended thereafter.

While the incidence and importance of the human sacrifice throughout Dahomean history is not in question, the extent of the practice is more problematical. Prior to the emergence of Dahomey as a coastal power with the conquest of Whydah in the 1720s, there is little information on the scale of sacrifices in the Dahomean kingdom.⁹⁸ There are a number of indications in the 18th century, starting from the period immediately following the conquest, but these have to be viewed in the context of the debate surrounding the moral implications of the trade in slaves.⁹⁹

Snelgrave, for instance, claimed to have been informed by his interpreter at the Dahomean camp that 4,000 Whydahs had been sacrificed to the Dahomean gods as a result of their victory,¹⁰⁰ and the same visitor reported that the sacrifices of the Tuffoe people had resulted in the display of 400 bodies.¹⁰¹ As mentioned, however, Snelgrave's accounts must be seen in the context of the utility of human sacrifice as a major prop in the arguments of apologists for the slave trade.¹⁰²

Later in the 18th century, Norris, from whom Dalzel drew much of his information, anticipated that the annual customs would produce a demand for from 200 to 300 of the recently procured prisoners.¹⁰³ However, his own account of the Customs of 1772 appears to yield only around 80 victims,¹⁰⁴ although there may have been other victims of which he had no ocular evidence.

Isert, indicated that 40 to 50 was the number retained for sacrifice annually throughout the 1780s.¹⁰⁵ And a reliable source is available

for the Customs for the King's mother in 1789; the event, which lasted from the 8th until the 19th of January 1789, involved 18 sacrifices, although Gaury, the French Director who attended and reported, also referred to an unspecified number of sacrifices carried out 'behind the walls'.¹⁰⁶

Dalzel reported 9-10 sacrifices from the 2000 prisoners taken in the Ketu campaign in the same year,¹⁰⁷ but reported that 595 of the king's wives were killed in the anarchic slaughter immediately after the king's death in 1789.¹⁰⁸ The scale of these sacrifices receives some, admittedly hearsay, confirmation from a Captain Crow who was informed in 1790 that on the death of the last Dahomean monarch, 700 of his wives had subsequently been sacrificed.¹⁰⁹ Elsewhere Dalzel reported that not less than 500 victims were killed at the Grand Customs in 1791.¹¹⁰

The pattern established by these 18th century reports, despite their bias, may be correct; considerable blood letting on the occasion of the Grand Customs following the death of a monarch, particularly through the sacrifice of royal wives, but a much more modest scale of sacrifice in the normal Annual Customs. This relatively low number of victims in the 18th century Annual Customs is confirmed by M'Leod who visited Dahomey in the early years of the 19th century. M'Leod pointed to the exaggerated reports of the numbers involved, and dismissed the reports of 'hundreds' of victims at the Customs of 1803, the year he himself visited the coast. Such exaggerated reports were encouraged, he believed, by a Dahomean desire to increase the grandeur of the Dahomean monarch and state.¹¹¹

Mr James, acting governor of the British Fort at Whydah at the time of M'Leod's visit was equally sceptical of exaggerated reports, and he took the trouble to count the victims in three different years, never reckoning more than 65 on any one occasion.¹¹²

Human sacrifice had a number of facets. At one level it was performed in honour of the ancestors - the "watering of the graves" in blood. At another, it was both symbolic of martial Dahomey victorious and an assurance of future military success.¹¹³ But it was also highly functional in a military, slave raiding state. Firstly as a means of disposing of particularly dangerous political enemies. Secondly, in avoiding the burden of those captives - the old, the sick or the wounded, for instance - who had neither the capacity to contribute directly as plantation slaves to the domestic economy nor the potential for exchange in the Atlantic slave trade.¹¹⁴

As such, human sacrifice fulfilled important ideological, political and economic functions. Institutionalised in the Customs, "sanctioned by the immemorial practice of past ages", human sacrifice was also a central facet of past military glories and the dynamic of the warrior ethos of early 18th century Dahomey.¹¹⁵

As one 19th century observer put it:

"The king of Dahomey has no more power to prevent human sacrifice than the Prince of Wales has to forbid morning service on a Sunday".¹¹⁶

Far from curtailing the custom, Gezo initially raised it in scale and importance to a hitherto unprecedented level, because human sacrifice was not merely a religious phenomenon, it was inextricably linked with Dahomean martial values. Under Gezo, the extension of human sacrifice

was similarly linked with the restoration of military values and with success on the field of battle. The earliest manifestation of this was the commemoration of the military victory over Oyo by the institution of a new victorious Custom to the ancestors - the human sacrifice at the Kana Customs.¹¹⁷

The power and prerogative to dispense with human life was symbolic not only of the greatness of Dahomey in general, but of the monarch in particular. Human sacrifice was the supreme symbol of royal autocracy.¹¹⁸ It was precisely its central ideological role which was to have such important political and ideological implications later in Gezo's reign when economic developments compelled a radical reappraisal and redirection of Dahomean strategy.

If human sacrifice was the ideological lynchpin around which the Dahomean warrior ethos revolved, then the annual campaign became the ultimate expression of the military state. Along with human sacrifice and the military reforms already mentioned, the annual campaign became a further vehicle which restored the prestige and the centralised power of the monarchy.

ROYAL POWER

Like the other two features of traditional Dahomey so far outlined, the highly centralised powers of the Dahomean monarch have their origins in the beginnings of, and the nature of, Dahomey's development as a state. This general phenomenon has also been remarked upon by Smith:

"In the maintenance of states, as in their formation, war and diplomacy retained their importance and continued to be agents of change. The need to raise an army of the size beyond the capacity of a single man to control led to the creation of war chieftains . . . the chiefs soon extended their role into civil government . . . War not only created chiefs; it also strengthened monarchies as the crises undergone in the state called for the greater coercion of citizens and an intensification of the national's military and economic efforts . . ."119

So it was that a group of powerful military leaders developed out of the Dahomean military machine. And so it was that the monarch, the most prominent and powerful among the military leaders, grew into a position of dominance with few equals in Africa. As the supreme warrior, the King embodied the state itself. Just as in battle a Dahomean's "head belongs to the king",¹²⁰ so too this was reflected in domestic political life.¹²¹ It was the monarch who dispensed justice, as he dispensed heads and cowries to the crowds in Abomey. At the Customs it was the King who "heard complaints, punished delinquents and rewarded merit".¹²² Before the monarch, even the highest minister had to scrape in the dust.¹²³

Of course, the power of the monarch was not absolute. In practical terms he was forced to balance conflicting political and economic forces, opinions and factions. But in public he was the supreme sovereign,¹²⁴ and in practice power was further centralised in the person of the monarch by the appointment of close relatives as "shadows" to the leading men of the kingdom.¹²⁵ And in his personal capacity a militarily successful monarch had immense power. The centralisation of administration, authority and justice further bolstered the authority of

the king, and every social or public occasion provided the opportunity for further enhancing the mystique and personal hegemony of the monarch. Traditionally the king did not eat, nor did he sleep, for he was not as other mortals.¹²⁶ Every military success, every ostentatious display of wealth, and every captive dispatched to the ancestors testified to the greatness and glory of the monarch as well as of the Dahomean state. But, above all, the militarisation of the state placed great power in the hands of a successful warrior king. In the 17th and 18th centuries Dahomey had achieved her power and her reputation on the battlefield. But never was war so institutionalised, so systematic as it became under Gezo. Prior to his accession sporadic reports of Dahomean wars appear in the records and in the traditions. From Gezo's reign the military activity of the Fon came to be regarded as an "annual campaign".¹²⁷

This was Dahomey's period of greatest military achievement and expansion. Following the defeat of Oyo in 1823¹²⁸ Gezo expanded his Kingdom's influence to the North and East throughout the 1820's and 1830's. Mahi was invaded,¹²⁹ Save to the north of Ketu was destroyed,¹³⁰ and by the 1840's Ketu had joined Porto Novo as tributary to Dahomey.¹³¹ To the west, the Dahomean armies reached as far as Atakpame, 130 kms. north west of Abomey.¹³²

The campaign became a time of maximum mobilisation affecting every part of the kingdom, with town and village contingents supplementing the Amazons and the regular army.¹³³ The constant recourse to military mobilisation against an external enemy and the aura of successful raiding immeasurably strengthened the domestic position of the new monarch. The

annual campaign waged by Dahomey throughout the 19th century was also the vehicle which allowed the political and military ascendancy of the warrior aristocracy inside Dahomey to be converted into the material means of enhanced political power. Since it was functional in an economic as well as a political and military sense, the role of the annual campaign within 19th century Dahomey has to be seen in the context of the Atlantic slave trade and of Dahomey's social structure.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The King stood at the apex of both the military and social structure. The basic social and political formation over which he presided has been comprehensively described both by contemporary observers and by later writers.¹³⁴ Dahomean society was rigidly structured, and the relative absence of institutions such as the secret societies which existed in other parts of Africa has earned it the reputation of a highly organised or "regimented" society.¹³⁵

Generally speaking, conventional historiography and anthropology has identified four basic social groupings within Dahomey.¹³⁶

Firstly, the royal family or clan, which was composed of the descendants of founding leaders of the kingdom and succeeding monarchs. It was from within this grouping that the monarch was chosen, but the remainder of the family were traditionally debarred from high office.¹³⁷

Secondly, ranking beneath the royal family in the social hierarchy, was a group consisting of appointed aristocrats, whose titles and positions were conferred by the monarch, and whose offices, though not formally hereditary, commonly remained within their family subject to royal ratification.¹³⁸

Thirdly, Dahomey contained a group of common agricultural workers, artisans and their families, working on the land whose ownership was theoretically vested in the monarch, but whose usufruct was traditionally retained within the Xenu or clan.¹³⁹

Finally, there was a slave class, composed of both domestic and plantation slaves. The stock of slaves was regularly refurbished by both external purchase and by raiding. Second generation slave status included enhanced rights, the most important of which was a prohibition on their sale for export.¹⁴⁰ These classifications do not, of course, include captives procured in Dahomean campaigns and directed towards the Atlantic export trade in slaves; in terms of Dahomey and the coastal merchants, such captives were regarded as mere commodities.

This then was the basic Dahomean social hierarchy according to social status as perceived by 19th century observers and later writers. Care has to be taken, however, that sociological analysis does not obscure rather than clarify the real dynamics of power within 19th century Dahomey. Much previous writing on Dahomey has concentrated on the elite. Apart from the monarch and the Royal Family, considerable attention has been given to the documentation of Dahomey's leading ministers.¹⁴¹ First among these was the Migan, generally regarded as the prime minister under the monarch. The Migan acted as the chief adviser to the monarch, the supervisor of non-royal chiefs, head of the army in peace time, overall head of internal security and chief executioner. Directly under him on the purely military organisation came the Gau, who acted as the effective head of the military during campaigns.

The Meu acted essentially as the commercial minister of Dahomey. As such he supervised the activities of the Yevogan, who was responsible for the good government and conduct of trade at Whydah. The Meu also oversaw the collection of revenues, taxes and tribute, and affectively acted as foreign ambassador in relation to the western nations with whom Dahomey had commercial dealings. The Meu in his military capacity was overall head of the left wing of the army in peacetime, and his military adjutant, the Possu, was in effective charge of the left during campaigns.

Under the Meu and Migan ranged a number of subordinate but important officials including the Yevogan who has already been mentioned; the Tokpo, minister of agriculture, markets and internal taxation; and the Ajaho, who controlled the 'secret police' as well as the palace servants. Finally visitors to Abomey recorded details of palace officials who, though less senior in status to these ministers, nevertheless were perceived as politically important because their duties involved them in close and constant contact with the monarch. Such officials included the Tonunon who as head eunuch was effectively in charge of the palace interior, and the Cambodee, the court chamberlain.

Although there are occasional differences in the precise ranking of these officials under the monarch by contemporary observers and later writers,¹⁴² such differences are less important than those features which they held in common. Firstly, all were members of a conferred nobility and all, with the exception of the Yevogan, resided at Abomey. All were non-royals - although Gezo later adopted the practice of appointing royal second-in-commands to them - and all held life appointments, subject to early retirement by the king. Such

appointments were not automatically inherited within the family, although this was normal in practice. Nevertheless, the constitutional necessity of a new royal appointment on the death or retirement of an outgoing official or minister reinforced both the political and economic control of the monarch. Finally, such officials received no salary, although from time to time they were the recipients of the monarch's generosity in terms of grants of land, slaves or certain status 'rights of apparel'.¹⁴³

Despite the highly structured nature of Dahomean society there was some scope for upward social mobility. But the road to the top did not lie through industry or agriculture; indeed, quite the opposite. "Should a man inherit industrious habits" wrote Forbes, "he must be very cautious in developing them . . . If he brings more soil under cultivation, or in any manner advances his family in riches, without the licence of the king, he not only endangers his future, but his own life, and the life of his family".¹⁴⁴

The licence and favour of the king were seldom granted on grounds other than as a reward for valour. To his favoured warriors the monarch displayed his generosity in gifts of slaves, women and land.¹⁴⁵ Within the military structure and in accordance with the military ethos, limited social advancement was possible on individual merit, but beyond that, upward social mobility largely depended upon the ability to put an army in the field.¹⁴⁶ Just as bravery was the criteria by which social respect was earned, so too military rank was the indication of social status.¹⁴⁷

At the head of the political elite stood the monarch himself. The king of Dahomey was the repository of considerable political power. As monarch he was head of both the political hierarchy and the armed forces. Justice and punishment were his prerogative and while local chiefs or officials wielded delegated authority over minor offences, all major crimes were tried in Abomey - the most serious of them, like treason, being tried by the monarch in person. The king was also the source of all major political offices and those commercial appointments relating to long distance trade. He was, par excellence, the controller of people including the royal wives, the Amazon corps, the standing army and the royal clan. Above all, perhaps, the monarch was the living embodiment of Dahomey's past, a role which was enhanced by the dependence of the official historians on his beneficence. He was the direct link with the founders of the state, and the personification of Dahomean military ideology - the warrior king.¹⁴⁸

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF POLITICAL POWER

Taken together, this grouping formed the military aristocracy of Dahomey. The establishment and growth of a class of professional warrior leaders with a state apparatus - ministers, officials, administrators and a standing army - by its very nature meant the existence in Dahomey of a considerable body of people who were not directly involved in the production of their own means of subsistence. They therefore required to appropriate the production of others. But their political position required that they maintain a lifestyle above the ordinary, rather than merely maintain the means of subsisting life;

for reasons of status and clientage their pattern of consumption was, of necessity well above the average,¹⁴⁹ and necessarily required the virtual monopoly of scarce or prestigious goods.

The material basis of the political power of the 19th century Dahomean aristocracy, therefore, involved an extensive range of mechanisms by which the product of others was appropriated. Of these, three means predominated. Firstly by direct appropriation of domestic produce, either through the use of slave labour or by levies on Dahomean producers. Secondly, by indirect appropriation through taxes on trade, both internal and external. And finally, through the direct appropriation of the produce of peoples outside Dahomey's borders - including the procurement of human beings who could be converted into exchange commodities through the Atlantic Trade. Each of these categories provided essential economic sustenance for the Dahomean leadership, although some had greater political significance than others.

DIRECT DOMESTIC APPROPRIATION

The economic product of the vast majority of the population of Dahomey in the 19th century was derived from agriculture. In theory, all land belonged to the monarch, who granted it to clans or to his leading men.¹⁵⁰ Much agricultural production revolved around the plantation system where a wide variety of crops - including corn, beans, yams, ground nuts, maize, cassava and oil palms - were cultivated.¹⁵¹ Many such plantations were maintained by slaves owned by Dahomey's leading chiefs or, in some instances, by slave traders residing in the coastal areas.¹⁵² A range of livestock was also raised.¹⁵³

But the enshrinement of the warrior ethos meant, in turn, the downgrading of the status of agricultural pursuits in aristocratic eyes. Industry and agriculture, while necessary for the substance of daily life, were not encouraged lest they detracted from the channelling of national effort towards military campaigning.¹⁵⁴

More generally, agriculture was despised as being the work of slaves,¹⁵⁵ as Gezo emphasised to Beecroft by scornfully asking him if he had seen any farms between Abomey and the swamp.¹⁵⁶

As the leading slave owner in Dahomey, the monarch was a plantation producer on a grand scale.¹⁵⁷ The produce of such plantations went to subsist not only the slaves who worked the plantations, but also the royal wives, palace officials, the Amazons and the standing army.¹⁵⁸

It is possible that during the early stages of Dahomey's emergence the division of labour meant that agriculture, including plantation agriculture, was primarily the work of women. Norris, for instance, noted that the royal plantations were worked by the royal wives.¹⁵⁹

But as martial Dahomey increased its internal stock of slaves agriculture, particularly on the plantations of the leading aristocrats, increasingly became the labour of captive slaves. This partly explains Forbes' comment that "in the neighbourhood of Abomey, unlike the rest of Africa, men labour in the fields, and the women are only employed in carrying water . . .".¹⁶⁰

But there was another reason. Within Dahomey water was a scarce commodity. At Allada, for instance, the source of fresh water lay some half-hour's walk from the town and the best water was monopolized by the King.¹⁶¹ At Abomey there was little or no fresh water for five miles

on either side,¹⁶² and the one fresh pond in the area was reserved to the monarch.¹⁶³ The local inhabitants made up for the lack of 'natural' water facilities by the entrapment of rainwater in a number of reservoirs or pits around the town or by direct collection of rainwater in earthenware vessels, a proportion being reserved for the dry season.¹⁶⁴

The relative scarcity of fresh water had important implications. Firstly, in an area like Abomey scarcity lent fresh water a luxury value, and water was sold as a commodity.¹⁶⁵ Secondly, and perhaps more important for developments in Dahomey in the second half of the nineteenth century, the collection of water was a labour intensive and time-consuming business for both royals and non-royals,¹⁶⁶ and its collection, particularly in the Abomey area, historically devolved upon women, while men were required to participate in agriculture.¹⁶⁷ Thus the conscription of the male labour force into the army at the time of the annual mobilisation for the annual raid had the effect of redirecting the basic, male, agricultural labour force into the military. This was to have important domestic consequences as the century progressed and the palm oil trade developed.

After a successful campaign a proportion of the captives taken would be allocated to work in the royal plantations and, if the campaign was particularly rewarding in terms of captives, new plantations - effectively commemorative villages of slaves taken during the campaign - were founded by the monarch.¹⁶⁸

Along the coastal area of Dahomey fishing and salt manufacture complemented agricultural production both for local consumption and for

carriage into the interior of the country.¹⁶⁹ Elsewhere cotton was collected and shea butter produced: coffee, sugar cane, rice and tobacco cultivation was attempted on a small scale.¹⁷⁰ But production of these latter items was curtailed by the monarch lest they diverted labour resources from the production of domestic requirements into export oriented crops.¹⁷¹ On occasions this was reflected in specific prohibitions. Gezo prohibited the production of ground nuts and shea butter for the export market, while Glele would not allow coffee, sugar cane, rice or tobacco production at Whydah.¹⁷²

Dahomean agriculture was accompanied by a wide range of craft production including weaving, ironmongery, silverwroughting, cloth making, dying and pottery manufacture.¹⁷³ There appears to have been some quarrying and some brick making, though the scale and purpose is unclear.¹⁷⁴ Not unnaturally Abomey afforded greater scope for specialisation, and silversmiths and blacksmiths abounded in the capital.¹⁷⁵

Cloth was manufactured by the royal wives inside the palace, using cotton brought from outlying areas,¹⁷⁶ and the royal wives were also involved in the dying of materials. Several domestically produced articles were subject to royal monopoly. Pottery, which was produced by the royal women at Abomey and in palaces throughout the Kingdom was one such item.¹⁷⁷ A related product, clay pipes, appears to have been similarly subject to royal monopoly.¹⁷⁸ The position regarding ivory is less clear; one European observer noted that the king prohibited the transit of ivory through Dahomey, but another recorded that small quantities were available for export at the coast. This apparent

contradiction may may be explained by the fact that while the transit trade in ivory through Dahomey may have been outlawed, the hunting of elephants and the production of ivory, including some for export, was retained as a royal monopoly by the Amazon Elephant Hunters.¹⁷⁹

Thus, both the monarch and his leading men were directly involved in production through the use of slave labour on plantations and, in the case of the monarch, through monopolies maintained on the manufacture of certain domestic products by his dependants. As will be seen later, both the king and his leading men also benefitted from domestic production through the use of taxes levied on internal produce.

MARKETS AND TRADE

The diverse nature of Dahomean domestic production necessitated a regular means of internal exchange, and the country was well served by a network of domestic markets through which the distribution of produce was effected. Dahomean markets were held according to the four day system¹⁸⁰ and were used basically for native Dahomean exchange, the wholesale trade on imported goods being carried out in the yards or factories of the various European merchants on the coast.¹⁸¹ The importance and diversity of agricultural and artisan production necessitated periodic markets in the interior of the country and there were major markets at towns such as Whydah, Allada, Tori, and Cana as well as at Abomey itself where four main markets were housed.¹⁸² A comprehensive range of produce was normally offered for sale, including eggs, fruit, vegetables, poultry, meat and fish; palm oil and tobacco were also often on offer.¹⁸³ Whydah's markets offered a range of

European goods, while those at Abomey offered a wider range of produce than elsewhere in the kingdom.¹⁸⁴ In addition to such general markets, specialised markets for specific products, such as ground nuts at Tori, flourished.¹⁸⁵ Virtually all transactions in both general and specialised markets were carried out through the medium of cowrie shells, the main Dahomean currency.¹⁸⁶

It has been suggested that in Dahomey local, domestic markets and overseas trade were institutionally separated, and that commerce was regulated not through price competition but by Administrative Acts.¹⁸⁷ This distinction between extra-Dahomean and domestic trade was maintained in the 19th century. Long-distance trade was monopolized by the Axisinon,¹⁸⁸ while the trans-Atlantic trade was closely supervised by the monarch's officials at Whydah or channelled through his appointed agents at outlying ports.¹⁸⁹

However, it is doubtful if the distinction was ever absolute in practice. In mid-century, for instance, the trade in tobacco was restricted to 12 named merchants, but some of the stocks did filter through to supplement domestic produce in Dahomean markets.¹⁹⁰ Whydah market in particular was well stocked with luxury goods and foreign imports. Nevertheless, in the main local markets were merely used for the exchange of domestic produce.¹⁹¹

The question of the administration of prices is more complex. There is evidence for price fixing in local markets by the king's agent in Whydah in 1704, prior to the Dahomean conquest,¹⁹² and for the period after the French conquest in the Dahomean Kingdom itself.¹⁹³ This continuity on its own would be sufficient to suggest that the mechanism

was maintained throughout the reigns of Gezo and Glele, but there is also specific, contemporary testimony on the point.

Forbes recorded that:

"The cha-cha is the principal agent to the king in all matters of trade; and to him must be subjected all commerce, whether in slaves or palm oil, that he may have the refusal. The price is laid down by law, subject to alteration if concurred in by the viceroy and six traders or superintendants of trade appointed by the king . . . One or other of these must be present at all sales to take the royal duty, which on palm oil is about a gallon in a measure of eighteen."¹⁹⁴

This does not imply uniform prices on every commodity throughout the kingdom. The price of even staple items varied from day to day and from location to location.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, the main export commodities did vary in price from time to time, as noted by European observers. Slave prices, for instance, were stated to have increased by some 20% between 1847 and 1848 to \$80 a head.¹⁹⁶ However, Forbes' testimony is supported by the remarkable stability shown in export prices over considerable periods of time, indicating that prices in external trade, particularly in the trans-Atlantic sector, were administratively fixed. The "present price" of slaves, noted in 1848 by Cruickshank at \$80 a head, was exactly the same as that given by Freeman 14 years later in 1862.¹⁹⁷

Similarly, the selling price of palm oil on the coast appears to have been fixed by decree or convention, from at least around the mid-century. Throughout the late 1840's the price of palm oil appears to have increased considerably,¹⁹⁸ but the evidence relating to the selling price of oil thereafter shows a remarkable consistency over the next quarter of a century, at £22.50 (\$100) a ton.¹⁹⁹ The recurrence

of these standard prices over a prolonged period strongly supports Forbes' testimony that prices in the import-export sector were administratively set.

The tenacity with which the Dahomeans held on to the conventional price was illustrated in the second half of the century when Régis' agent managed to negotiate a lower slave price, presumably in view of the dearth of other outlets. In the event, however, when the time for actual shipment occurred and other purchasers were available, the Dahomean hierarchy insisted on the conventional price of \$80 per slave.²⁰⁰ The incident suggests that market influences were not entirely absent from administered prices, but the general pattern was one of a negotiated, political price.

Markets were of considerable religious and political significance as well as being important centres of distribution.²⁰¹ More importantly, they were also economically vital as centres of taxation, as we shall see later. Political authorities looked after the organisation and good functioning of the market, and the overseer had the triple function of manager, priest and fiscal agent, assisting the Houmekponto in the collection of dues and taxes.²⁰² The political importance of the Dahomean markets was reflected in their allocation as a responsibility to a senior Dahomean minister, the Tokpo or minister of agriculture.²⁰³

In terms of external trading, Dahomey's operations were channelled in two basic directions. Firstly, Dahomey was directly involved in inter-African trade. Under the direction of the commercial chief, the Meu,²⁰⁴ Dahomean merchants were involved in trade with neighbouring African states like Ketu and the Mahi country.²⁰⁵ She also had weaker

trade linkages with the nearby long-distance axis from Hausa country to Asante and lateral trade with Yorubaland.²⁰⁶ From an early stage Dahomey had purchased slaves from Oyo and the Mahi²⁰⁷ and traded with the Mahi in the 1840's.²⁰⁸ Dahomey also developed direct trading links with Kaiama in Borgu,²⁰⁹ and elsewhere in Borgu Dahomean imported western goods were exchanged for commodities which included slaves and beads.²¹⁰ This commercial linkage with the north in particular had a history long pre-dating the 19th century; Islamic traders were reputed to have first arrived at Whydah in 1704, prior to the Dahomean conquest²¹¹ and two decades later were being warmly received in Abomey itself.²¹² By the 19th century Hausa traders were regular visitors to Porto Novo and Whydah.²¹³ The Islamic presence at Abomey is also testified to by consecutive visitors throughout the reigns of Gezo and Glele.²¹⁴

Despite the penetration by Islamic - probably Hausa - merchants into Abomey itself and at Whydah, generally speaking merchandise was not allowed to pass through Dahomey other than through the medium of the Dahomean traders appointed by the monarch.²¹⁵ Trade routes were regarded with some jealousy and proved an important source of rivalry between Dahomey and neighbouring states, as in the disputes between Dahomey and the emerging power of Abeokuta in the 1840's.²¹⁶

Dahomean commercial organisation was conducted at three levels, with a range of status, rank and powers according to which particular level the trader occupied.

Firstly, there were a number of small, general and domestic traders, known as the Axihouan who were authorised to act as traders. Most often

these particular traders were retired soldiers or veterans to whom the monarch had shown favour by permitting them to transact trade in their own right.²¹⁷ Secondly, and ranking above this group, were the Axinon. The Axinon were appointed by the king and each member had a number of Axihouan under his control and authority. In this position they were vested with considerable authority, and were expected to specify to the Axihouan under their control the nature of the commerce in which they should engage and the manner in which it was to be carried out.²¹⁸

The final and highest rank of traders were the Axisinon, whose commercial power extended to every field of commerce and who were expected to contribute advice to the monarch on the present commercial situation and future prospects.²¹⁹ More importantly, perhaps, the Axisinon were expected to pay duties to the monarch in return for the trading rights which he had bestowed upon them.²²⁰ The Axisinon had been "Captains of Trade" since at least the first decade of the 18th century,²²¹ and their mal-treatment by other states was regarded as a matter of grievous offence.²²² It was this group which was entrusted with long-distance trade, and although there is little contemporary evidence as to the exact nature of the produce exchanged, it is clear that they were entitled to purchase slaves outside of Dahomey for re-sale to the traders on the Atlantic coast.²²³

Relations between Dahomey and the Europeans involved in the Atlantic slave trade, the second aspect of Dahomey's external trading relations, were more highly regulated during the 19th century than ever before. In addition to the Yevogan, there were six "superintendents of trade"

appointed by the monarch to oversee commercial relations with Europeans on the coast.²²⁴ Initially, such agents had been the medium through which the monarch marketed his slaves, but after Gezo's successful coup d'état da Souza was rewarded with this right - succeeded by Domingo Martinez and others - and the king's agents appear to have been involved with the Yevogan in regulating the conduct of trade in general and in collecting the king's dues in particular.²²⁵ For such work they received an entitlement to trade in their own right at the preferential rates of exchange which applied to the monarch's account.²²⁶

In the Atlantic trade the commodities exchanged are much better documented than in the internal long-distance exchange. Exports from Dahomey were composed mainly of slaves, country cloth, peppers, corn, a little ivory and shea butter and, increasingly, of palm oil.²²⁷

Imports were composed mainly of gin, rum, cloths, muskets, powder, flints, cowries, handkerchiefs, hardware and glass, with smaller articles like perfume, cheap jewellery and ornaments particularly useful in the growing palm oil trade.²²⁸ A number of items, such as rum and tobacco were highly regarded as 'luxuries' and were much sought after;²²⁹ in the case of tobacco the trade was confined to a small number of merchants, including da Souza and later Domingo Martinez, appointed by the king.²³⁰

Such trade restrictions were paralleled elsewhere, and were calculated to give the leading men, and in particular the monarch, preferential trading terms. The monarch himself had retained a monopoly on firearms since the time of Agaja,²³¹ and, as mentioned, also had the entitlement to preferential exchange rates which were extended to a small

number of his agents; this preferential discount entitled the monarch to an advantage of about ten per cent in the terms of trade.²³² Moreover, the monarch exercised pre-emptive rights over any new items appearing on the coast and to certain luxury goods.²³³ These rights were reflected in a subordinate fashion by his leading men who were entitled to certain monopoly rights over European goods in the territories which their soldiers had conquered in the course of campaigns.²³⁴

Thus, in addition to direct involvement in production through the use of slave labour, the Dahomean monarch and members of the appointed aristocracy were entitled to trading benefits which ensured both preferential rates of exchange and rights of pre-emption or monopoly over certain imported goods. However, in both production and exchange, the aristocracy had one further lucrative source of income - taxation.

TAXATION

Taxation was an important source of income for the Dahomean leadership and for the monarch in particular. It derived from four basic sources. Firstly, from payments in kind rendered out of agricultural or other domestic production, and from a domestic 'head tax'. Secondly, from taxes on trade, internal and external. Thirdly, from tolls and tribute. And finally, from an inheritance tax. Responsibility for the payment of domestic taxes on production rested on the producers themselves. It was normally paid direct to the monarch and regarded as a contribution to the Annual Customs.²³⁵ In addition to basic agricultural taxes, taxes were levied in kind on cattle and

other animals such as pigs, goats and sheep,²³⁶ and on specific items such as peppers, salt and honey.²³⁷

Finally, there were specific taxes levied on particular groups of producers such as blacksmiths, who normally produced hoes and other agricultural implements, but whose skills allowed them to manufacture weapons, including, latterly, shot for the Dahomean forces.²³⁸ Supplies of meat were received from hunters,²³⁹ while even Dahomean women engaged in the "oldest profession" were not exempt from fiscal obligations on income.²⁴⁰ As the demand for palm oil grew in the coastal trade, so the tax on palm oil became increasingly important to the central exchequer.²⁴¹

Unfortunately, the written sources of the 19th century are particularly scant on information on this particular form of taxation, and reliance on later anthropological works is more than ever necessary on the point. It is difficult, therefore, to state with any degree of certainty just how organised and systematic the collection of taxes was in 19th century Dahomey. Herskovits, for instance, has suggested that a sophisticated census machinery was in use by the Dahomean leadership.²⁴² Such a mechanism would obviously have enhanced the collection of taxes, and in particular the effectiveness of a head tax, collected in cowries, which was levied on the head of every household.²⁴³ However, the passage of time, the absence of contemporary references and, above all, the secrecy in which such a system is alleged to have been shrouded make it impossible to verify. In any case, if such a system did exist, it is likely that it was effective only in the Abomey area.²⁴⁴

Although there is no evidence that the collection of taxes in kind from the general population was anything other than considerable, there were obvious limitations to the value of this form of income to the Dahomean leadership. Foodstuffs, by their very nature, became largely irrelevant above a certain level; and, in any case, the Dahomean aristocracy were in a position to extract subsistence for themselves and followers from the labour of their plantation slaves.

However, taxes in kind were particularly functional on goods whose production was geographically confined since ecological conditions meant that certain produce like fish or salt were localized in different parts of the Kingdom.

Considerable additional quantities of agricultural produce were required at certain times of the year, particularly prior to a campaign or during the Annual Customs, and it is likely that the bulk of the taxes were directed towards these events.²⁴⁵ The distributive nature of the customs, and the national importance of military campaigning also had the benefit of legitimising such levies within the general framework of national benefit. Given the slave-production already available to the monarch and aristocracy, it is thus likely that the economic and political importance of agricultural taxation largely revolved around these two main military aspects of the Dahomean calendar - the Annual Customs and the annual campaign. From the point of view of generally enhancing the material position of the aristocracy on a political level, it is likely that the head taxes and other payments received in cowries were more beneficial.

Similarly, taxation on trade, direct and indirect, was politically effective insofar as it could be levied in, or easily converted into, relatively scarce commodities. Dahomey's system of trade taxation was extensive and all-pervasive.²⁴⁶ At the coast in particular, it has been well documented. Royal agents were stationed in the factories of the various European traders who transacted business in the export trade,²⁴⁷ and taxes were levied on both the vendor and on the purchaser.

On the vendor, tax was charged during the actual act of exchange. On slaves, for instance, the king's agents received a rifle and powder - an obligatory part of the exchange goods - for every slave exchanged.²⁴⁸ Palm oil was taxed at 1/18th of the quantity exchanged,²⁴⁹ and converted into trade goods on the King's account. All vendors were expected to render taxation in this fashion irrespective of the produce which they were exchanging for export.

In addition, fiscal revenues were raised from the purchasers, the European traders on the coast, by means both formal and informal. Imported goods were taxed, prior to the commencement of trading; each visiting ship was subject to a tax of approximately 2 per cent of its cargo in return for the right to trade.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, there was a shipment tax on goods exported. On slaves, for instance, a per capita tax of 4 dollars per head was levied on each slave shipped,²⁵¹ while palm oil was eventually subjected to such a tax calculated on the number of barrels taken aboard.²⁵² Trade goods raised from such taxation were stored in the Yevogan's premises at Whydah for onward transmission to the monarch in Abomey.²⁵³

European merchants were also subject to an annual tax²⁵⁴ and expected to display generosity towards the monarch in the form of "gifts" in return for their rights to trade in Dahomey. One example of the liberality expected from such traders is the gift by Domingo Martinez of 30 puncheons of rum to the King and proportionate hospitality to the caboceers and natives of Whydah to an estimated cost of \$5000.²⁵⁶ Much of the levies derived by the monarch from the coastal traders were received at the Annual Customs, where generosity commensurate with the status of the trader and the importance of the occasion was expected. The form of such presents varied, but firearms and artillery were favourite for such martial occasions just prior to the annual campaign.²⁵⁷ Traders who operated outside the kingdom proper but within the territory regarded as being under the monarch's suzerainty were not exempt from such formal or informal taxation.²⁵⁸

Dahomean trade was not, of course, all confined to the Atlantic coast. Much of it was carried out by the Axisinon, the captains of trade already referred to. The royal exchequer benefited from the trade carried out by the Axisinon by means of taxes levied on them commensurate with the extent of their trade. Similarly, less senior chiefs or caboceers whose position merited advantageous internal trading rights were taxed in like fashion.²⁵⁹

Internal exchange was taxed as well as export orientated trade. Those who brought goods to market or exposed them for sale were liable for duties payable to the monarch. Local officials oversaw the collection of such taxes, while in Whydah the matter was handled by one of the Yevogan's assistants.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, the transportation of

goods within Dahomey was subject to regular road tolls for rights of passage,²⁶¹ often levied by chiefs to whom the right had been granted as a reward for their military contribution towards the conquest of the area in question. Local chiefs were, in turn, liable for remission of a proportion of the revenues thus raised to the monarch, though in some cases such tolls were paid directly to the King.²⁶²

Taxation on trade was supplemented by tribute payable by those territories which had been defeated militarily by Dahomey, but which were not subject to direct rule. Tribute was furnished annually, and an estimate of the sufficiency of such tribute as was rendered was calculated on the basis of reports from royal 'messengers' resident in the area in question.²⁶³

Finally, the royal exchequer benefitted from the proceeds of taxation on death. Problems of inheritance among free commoners were normally settled by a council of the clan elders.²⁶⁴ This was not, however, the case with leading ministers or officials. Appointment to office or aristocratic status afforded the recipient considerable opportunity for wealth accumulation throughout his life. In practice, such office normally passed to the deceased's heir within the family. Constitutionally, however, such appointments were the prerogative of the monarch and on death the wealth and property of the deceased aristocrat passed to the monarch prior to the appointment of his successor. Any part of the property which was subsequently passed to the new appointee, therefore, was a result of the monarch's benevolence rather than a hereditary right. Such a procedure normally resulted in a significant proportion of the deceased's wealth being retained by the monarch, with

the residue - usually including the deceased's wives - being passed to the succeeding appointee.²⁶⁵ Similar opportunities for taxation on accumulated wealth occurred on the retirement of a member of the appointed aristocracy prior to death.

THE ECONOMICS OF WARFARE

Apart from direct agricultural production direct taxation and the more indirect appropriation of material benefit from trade, the Dahomean aristocracy had one further, vital source of economic sustenance throughout the first half of the 19th century. For the Dahomean leadership the annual campaign was not merely a matter of territorial aggrandisement or valour. War for the aristocracy was more important as a means of appropriation than an instrument of destruction. It provided both the labour needed for domestic production and the commodities required to obtain foreign imports - slaves.²⁶⁶ In short, war was an economic activity.

The annual campaign is the key to an understanding of the relationship between the economics of the slave trade and the political ascendancy of the Dahomean leadership throughout the 19th century. The aim of the war, in practical terms, was the taking of captives. Some of these captives were detained for allocation to the plantations of the king or aristocracy to restock the supply of domestic slave labour. Some were required as replacements for manpower lost in the campaign itself, and a proportion would be sacrificed. However, the economics of annual warfare in the 19th century were such that considerable outlays were necessary in order to achieve victory and obtain the rewards of a

successful campaign. Such outlays could not have been sustained without the regular conversion of captives into commodities which could be exchanged for the means of future campaigns and captives - particularly firearms.

But a successful campaign rendered more than just the means of further wars. For it was through the medium of captives as commodities that the profit from the successful prosecution of the war was realised, to the benefit mainly of the monarch and the warrior aristocracy. It remains a matter of speculation whether the procurement of captives was a sufficient condition for annual campaigning; it was certainly a necessary one.

The first requirement of a successful campaign was a sufficient military force. Thus the Kingdom was put on a war footing internally leaving whole villages virtually deserted throughout the period of the campaign.²⁶⁷ This mass military corvée of the Dahomean population was, as shall be seen later, a vital mechanism in the means of appropriation of surplus product by the warrior aristocracy. The scale of the manpower necessary and the organisation needed was such that a force could be assembled only through the medium of those who controlled a large number of people. The chiefs and principal ministers supplied whole regiments for the annual campaign²⁶⁸ and slave traders, including a few non-Dahomean residents such as da Souza, who had both a retinue of followers or slaves and a vested interest in the humans spoils of the campaign also provided the personnel for the army.²⁶⁹ This placed an obligation on the leading men of the kingdom, on grounds of both status as warrior leaders and entitlement to a share of the rewards, to maintain

a sufficient force to participate in the annual campaign.²⁷⁰ In a sense, then, these followers or slaves became 'risk capital' in the course of the campaign since defeat, inadequate return in terms of captives, death or captivity with the prospect of ransom involved a prospective loss to the warrior leader.²⁷¹ To some extent this applied even to Amazons, one of whom stated publicly to Forbes that "For my part I am in debt for my provisions for last war, I must go again to get money".²⁷² For those responsible for sending scores of warriors to the annual campaign the risk of loss was multiplied many times. Such a loss had to be calculated against the original cost of purchase or captivity of the slave, the cost of subsistence throughout the year, and the cost of redistribution and ostentatious life style necessary in order to maintain the clientage of followers.

No-one bore a greater share of the cost of war than the monarch himself.²⁷³ Firstly, because he provided a disproportionate share of men and women for the army.²⁷⁴ Secondly, because he also provided a disproportionate share of the second requirement of a successful campaign - arms. In the month or so prior to the annual campaign the distribution of ammunition, powder and other armaments took place²⁷⁵ and, as has been noted, the purchase and provision of arms - particularly firearms - was a heavy responsibility of the monarch who exercised a monopoly over both imported arms and weapons manufactured within Dahomey.²⁷⁶

The third requirement of a successful campaign was organisation and leadership, a pre-requisite once again provided by the aristocracy whose status, qualifications - since one of the few ways of rising by merit in

Dahomean society was by martial performance²⁷⁷ - and control of followers entitled them to monopolise this role.

If the warrior aristocracy thus provided a disproportionate share of the resources necessary for a successful campaign, their share of the spoils was equally if not more disproportionate. "The road to riches", wrote Forbes, "has lain in the number of retainers the noble of chief could send to war."²⁷⁸ This was true in terms of tribute received - either directly by the monarch, or accruing indirectly to him as part of the rewards garnered in the first instance by those warrior chiefs whose soldiers had been prominent in the acquisition of a given area.²⁷⁹

Secondly, and more importantly, the aristocracy benefited from the captives taken in the campaign. As in the case of tribute, in principle the monarch retained the absolute right to commandeer the human spoils of war; such rights were always qualified by the need to distribute a share of the rewards to his chiefs and caboceers. However, theoretically he was the owner of all captives taken,²⁸⁰ and in practice was by far the greatest beneficiary in terms of captives.

He had an absolute right to the captives taken by the Amazons.²⁸¹ Since these formed a central and substantial part of the 19th century armies such rewards were significant. It can be reasonably assumed that the monarch was also entitled to much of the human spoils of the standing army. Although there is no specific contemporary evidence on this point, the ceremonial 'purchase' of captives from his soldiers by the king is well documented, and it is likely that this represents the transfer of captives from his soldiers to the king for a trifling sum which was more symbolic than real.²⁸² Finally, he probably also

exercised rights in respect of captives taken by the local or district contingents²⁸³ whose local chief or official benefitted throughout the year by virtue of royal appointment.²⁸⁴

In like manner, the captives taken by the soldiers raised by the main aristocrats and caboceers had to be sold to them by their soldiers for a fixed price.²⁸⁵ There is, therefore, a sense in which every participant in a Dahomean victory - from the village conscript to the monarch - stood to gain from a successful campaign. As Forbes commented, ". . . war in Dahomey is a trade, and each soldier is a trader".²⁸⁶ Gezo's comment to Duncan that he did not sell the greater part of the slaves from the country, but that the caboceers whose soldiers had captured them were always considered to be the owners of slaves taken in war should be seen in this context.²⁸⁷

But, although everyone benefited from a successful campaign, not everyone benefited to the same extent. The fixed price which the soldier was paid was only a small percentage of the market value of his captive.²⁸⁸ Freeman may have oversimplified the issue when he assumed that the monarch purchased every captive taken in the annual campaign for one dollar and sold each for 80 dollars,²⁸⁹ but the tenor of his remark was accurate.

The great chiefs of Dahomey benefitted in proportion to their rank, and rank and riches depended on the number of retainers they could send to war.²⁹⁰ The monarch stood highest in rank, greatest in riches and pre-eminent in his ability to put soldiers in the field. His rewards were thus commensurate. In addition to the captives taken by the amazons, standing army and district contingents, he was also entitled to

those captives unfit for the market, a proportion of whom were sent to the royal palaces to undertake duties,²⁹¹ and some at least who were dispatched by human sacrifice to undertake duties for the ancestors.²⁹²

The captives taken in the annual campaign were thus split into those distributed to the royal plantations or palaces, those taken by the monarch as concubines or export slaves, those distributed to the Dahomean aristocracy, and those sacrificed.²⁹³ Thus the King and his ministers were all major beneficiaries in terms of captives derived from the annual campaign, and were all major 'producers' or procurers of slaves bound for the export trade.²⁹⁴ Many of the great officers of state are recorded as major slave vendors,²⁹⁵ and it was estimated during the 19th century that around 40 per cent of the slaves exported from Whydah were supplied by the monarch himself.²⁹⁶ For da Souza, who initially backed and financed Gezo's coup and who was subsequently rewarded with the right to market the King's slaves, the coup provided rich rewards indeed. For the monarch and his leading men, annual slave raiding provided a mechanism of enhancing their status as warriors and providing the material benefits with which to bolster their domestic political power.

War, then, was for 19th century Dahomey a way of life.²⁹⁷ Forbes comments that "strange and contradictory though it may sound, this great nation is no nation but a Bandiiti"²⁹⁸ contained more than an element of truth despite its crudeness. And Burton's recognition that "The army, or, what is nearly synonomous, the nation of Dahomey . . ."²⁹⁹ reflected more than just the Dahomeans' obsession with military parades. It went to the heart of Dahomey's social and political structure. But it was also an important insight into Dahomey's economic

formation. For the aristocracy, war was far more than a mere extension of diplomacy by other means; it was "an industry in its own right . . . an economic activity by which both the labour needed for domestic purposes and the purchasing power needed to acquire foreign imports was mobilised".³⁰⁰

To some extent, of course, Dahomey had always been a slave raiding and a slave trading state. It serves little purpose here to become further embroiled in the debate over the motivations which inspired Dahomean wars in the 17th and early 18th centuries.³⁰¹ Motives may be quite different from causes, and the former need not be conceived in economic terms by those thus motivated.³⁰² It can, therefore, be accepted that the wars waged by Dahomean monarchs "were fought for many reasons, of which the sale of prisoners to the coast was only one".³⁰³

Nevertheless, from the time of their emergence as a major power Dahomey, or more specifically the Dahomean leadership, benefited enormously from slave sales. Firstly, the Dahomean state acted as a middleman, prohibiting the transportation of slaves bound for exports through its territory for sale to the Europeans on the coast other than through the medium of Dahomean merchant brokers.³⁰⁴ Thus Dahomean merchants benefitted, through Dahomean territorial and political control from the trans-Atlantic trade.

More importantly, Dahomey was a producer of slaves. Though the monarch did also benefit indirectly from the trade through the imposition of trade and customs dues on both European and Dahomean traders,³⁰⁵ the pure commercial transaction - the purchase and re-sale of slaves - was considered ignoble for the status of the warrior monarch.³⁰⁶ He and

the aristocracy were, however, heavily involved in the sale of captives taken in war by Dahomean soldiers to whom they were entitled as the supreme warriors, on payment of a token amount.³⁰⁷

The role which slave raiding played in 19th century Dahomey cannot be appreciated merely by comparing the estimated income from the slave trade with an assumed GNP,³⁰⁸ since the activity of slave raiding embodied the economic, political and ideological characteristics on which the Dahomean aristocracy's power rested. As such it is central to an understanding of the dynamics of political economy in the Kingdom.

Dahomey has already received a fair share of the considerable attention which has been devoted to African political economy.³⁰⁹ Karl Polanyi and the substantivist school have stressed the autonomy of the Dahomean social formation from capitalist influences. For them Dahomey has provided a model of an "archaic economy", where economic forces were completely subordinated to political decisions; where administered trade, governmental price fixing, the isolation of Whydah as a 'Port of Trade', and the redistributive role of leadership characterised a society which had remained largely immune from contact by the west and in which economics was subordinated to politics.³¹⁰

Others, drawing more extensively from empirical data have exposed the deficiencies in the substantivist interpretation.³¹¹ Much of this historiography has revolved around the Marxian terminology of a mode of production.

Jean Suret Canale has suggested that African societies can be incorporated within Marx's Asiatic mode of production,³¹² with appropriation occurring by a tax in kind on village production by the

privileged strata.³¹³ Coquery-Vidrovitch suggests a distinct African mode of production in which the African despot exploited his neighbours more than his subjects, and identifies long distance trade as the mechanism by which the major part of his economic sustenance was obtained.³¹⁴ Attention has been given to a "slave labour" mode of production as a feature of Dahomean society.³¹⁵ Manning, in the most recent major work on Dahomey, is more eclectic. Drawing on Marx and Walras, he argues that Southern Dahomey as a whole was characterised by the "commodity exchange mode of production".³¹⁶

Despite the problems involved in allocating the social formation in Dahomey into pre-ordained categories first formulated on the basis of empirical data which largely excluded African societies, this latter approach has provided valuable insights into the workings of both the economy and political power. However, it has its limitations.

Firstly because of the imprecise nature of the "mode of production" concept itself. Marx's own use of the term is ambiguous and at times apparently contradictory. On some occasions it is employed with reference to the economic - as distinct from social, political or ideological - relations within society,³¹⁷ and on others to the totality of economic, social, political and intellectual relations in society.³¹⁸

In addition, the concept of a mode of production does present peculiar problems because of the vital economic and political role played by slave raiding in Dahomey. Marx gave consideration to slaves as money³¹⁹ and as money-capital investment.³²⁰ He reviewed slaves as general producers,³²¹ as commodity producers,³²² as producers of

commodities directed towards the international capitalist market³²³ and he examined their role as a contributory element in the primitive accumulation of capital.³²⁴ But while he conceded the commodity nature of slaves themselves his references to this aspect are sparse and directed at the level of the exchange of slaves rather than the procurement of slaves.³²⁵ The actual method of slave procurement merits little attention in his deliberations and was treated as a secondary and peripheral aspect of his central concern, the importing nations of the west.³²⁶

At one level, of course, even if human beings are regarded merely as another natural resource, it is difficult to classify slave raiding as a productive process in which the value of the product bears any relation to the labour expended in producing it. Rather, it is a parasitical process akin to plunder, a redistributive rather than a productive system.

At another level, however, the Dahomean annual raid was indeed a production process. It was organised and systematic. The product of that organisation was for the most part, treated as commodity. The commodity was exchanged and its value was realised through the exchange process. Above all, it was a process through which the value realised in exchange was appropriated by the aristocracy through the differential distribution of the proceeds.

In fact, slave raiding for the Atlantic trade was a peculiar, hybrid process, forged on the anvil of a capitalist market by the hammer of the rapacious, militarism of a pre-capitalist society. Thus, the concept of a mode of production, based largely on data drawn from industrial societies will not suffice. Neither will a substantivist approach

concerned to illustrate the economic insulation of Dahomey from international capitalism. The role of slave raiding in the political economy of Dahomey was a product of both but the image of neither.³²⁷

As such, it can be described in terms of either, but can be most usefully explained in terms of the appropriation and distribution of surplus within the Kingdom. Here, the crucial nature of the process of slave raiding for the Dahomean aristocracy becomes clear.

The real question is not whether the political economy of Dahomey can be reconciled with one or more, previously formulated modes of production. It lies in an explanation of whether, and in what manner the surplus product of one section of the Dahomean population was appropriated by another. "The essential difference between the various economic forms of society . . . lies only in the mode in which this surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer."³²⁸

It is within this context that slave raiding and supply was crucial to the question of political and economic power within the Kingdom of Dahomey. Its importance centred on the appropriation and distribution of the products other than those needed for requirements of subsistence.

Appropriation of agricultural and related products was useless beyond a certain point. Moreover, the utility of food appropriation from the general population was lessened by the existence of the slave plantations of the aristocracy and by the labour of royal wives. Indeed the general levy on agricultural produce appears to have been of major importance only as regards the Annual Customs and the annual campaign. Otherwise it was limited to products like salt or fish whose production was

localised in certain areas.³²⁹ The limited benefits to be gained from the accumulation of the products of an agriculturally based society constrained the differentiation between social classes. The aperture of the Atlantic Trade, however, allowed the accumulation of scarce and prestigious resources which increased these divisions and reinforced both economic and social status, thus immeasurably increasing political control.

In terms of political power a system of slave raiding was the vehicle through which the social position of a warrior aristocracy was transformed from one of primus-inter-pares into one of a distinct social class standing over and against the great mass of the Dahomean population.

For the Kingdom of Dahomey as a whole, the product of annual raiding was largely surplus to the requirements of the domestic economy. That was precisely its value to the aristocracy who disproportionately benefited from their power to monopolise that product and the exchange goods realised through it.

For the Dahomean aristocracy, militarism was indispensable to the appropriation of the material basis of their political power. Their economic sustenance was drawn from various sources; direct production of foodstuffs by plantation slaves, levies on agricultural and craft production, taxation on trade and on people by means of a head tax, privileged trading rights and direct involvement in the supply of slaves for the Atlantic trade. The same essential feature underlay all these various forms of appropriation - the control of people. Militarism - internal coercive power, external aggression and an all-pervasive warrior ethos - provided both the means of popular control and the mechanism, for translating such control into the material basis of political power.

The militaristic aspect of the Dahomean monarch was by no means incompatible with his position as custodian of the nation's fortunes and the main vehicle through which the wealth of the nation was seen to be redistributed to the benefit of all. Far from detracting from the redistributive role of the monarch, it actually heightened it through the undertaking of national campaigns, the victorious spoils from which were ostentatiously distributed at the Annual Customs. Even the 'captive price' paid by the monarch to successful soldiers, though considerably less than the market value of a slave, was a further manifestation of the monarch's direct participation in, and identification with, the distribution of benefits garnered through the nation's martial prowess. The growth of annual raiding, therefore, did not negate but heightened the perception of the protective monarchy, redistributing the spoils of the Nation's efforts to the benefit of the whole Nation.³³⁰

Thus, militarism was economically functional to the 19th century Dahomean state and in particular to the domination of that state by the warrior aristocracy. The major vehicle by which militarism was translated into their material advantage and social status was the Atlantic slave trade.

The military corvée of Dahomeans during the annual campaign was also the mechanism through which surplus was extracted from the Dahomean population on a scale and in a form which maximised the benefits to the aristocracy. The agricultural levy, as we have seen, played an essentially supportive role in this process, providing the sustenance necessary for the Customs prior to the campaign, and the foodstuffs required during the campaign itself.

If slave raiding was the process by which the aristocracy appropriated the surplus product in a form most advantageous to themselves, the key to domination of this economic process was the control of labour. Exact details of the origins of such domination by a relatively small group of Dahomeans remains a matter of speculation, but it is likely that a crucial element was the emergence of a military caste as a necessary corollary of the Fon's early struggle for survival. The social formation which arose out of the militarisation of Fon society was dominated by a warrior aristocracy who were later uniquely placed to dominate the system of slave procurement by virtue of their control of people.

In Dahomey, which had a high ratio of fertile land to labour,³³¹ the conquest and control of people had, as elsewhere in Africa, long been a central feature of political power.³³² Such control might be exercised in a number of ways. But in a society in which the control of labour was of paramount importance, women were doubly valuable - as labour and as the producers of further labour.

This was particularly true in the exercise of influence through kinship, rendering the control or acquisition of women - as both people and the producer of further kinship linked people - an economic imperative.³³³ The levying of children by the monarch and his distribution of females as wives to his favoured men at the customs were two aspects of this phenomenon.³³⁴ Long before the 19th century Norris reported that "the people of rank engross the major part of the women",³³⁵ and from an early stage the monarchy apparently supplemented their control of labour by imposing a levy on the children of Dahomean

subjects.³³⁶ The origins of this tradition are unclear although it is possible that it was originally related to agricultural production,³³⁷ or perhaps to the desire to distribute rewards to those who had distinguished themselves in war.³³⁸

Later, however, it was this tradition that Gezo utilized in order initially to rebuild his Amazon corps by commandeering the female children of his subjects,³³⁹ and throughout his reign the levy remained an important method of renewing the fighting strength of the Amazons by the allocation of young females to each Amazon company.³⁴⁰

But the political value of women lay essentially in their value as the producers of further labour.³⁴¹ In this context the monarch's control of labour was further reinforced by a prerogative of the royal family to retain paternal power over the children of both male and female members.³⁴² And a marked tendency developed for the families of leading ministers to adopt similar marriage forms which ensured their maximum control of future off-spring.³⁴³

As with the achievement of status, so too the major mechanism for obtaining control of female labour in Dahomey lay in martial prowess. Women could be purchased, even from the monarch,³⁴⁴ and certain officials, particularly those in charge of prisons, benefited from the rights of offspring born to females in their charge.³⁴⁵ But in the 19th century, acts of bravery or valour appear to have constituted the major opportunity for both official and commoner, since the monarch 'dashed' female slaves, palace women or daughters to those who distinguished themselves in combat.³⁴⁶ But, significantly, the monarch reserved the rights to female offspring of certain female slaves given in marriage to his officials and ministers.³⁴⁷

The social tensions arising from the monopolisation of women by a relatively small number of Dahomeans were eased by the incidence of prostitution throughout the kingdom.³⁴⁸

Control of labour was also secured by clientage or the attraction of followers, which could best be achieved through a combination of personal status, wealth - itself measured in terms of control of people,³⁴⁹ - ostentatious consumption patterns and the distribution of prestigious or scarce resources.

Outright coercion, varying in the degree of severity from domestic slavery to plantation slavery could be employed. Finally control might be exercised by patronage and the bestowal of preferential of advantageous social, political or economic status on the recipient.

In this context, slave raiding and the Atlantic slave trade played a vital role in the pattern of economic and political control in 19th century Dahomey. On the one hand, since the 'production' or procurement of slaves could only be undertaken on the scale necessary by those in a position to monopolise the input of people, firearms and military leadership which were essential. And, on the other hand, because of the monopolisation of rewards consequent upon this ability to provide the necessary means of procurement. In practice this meant the direct appropriation of captives for use in internal production, which directly enhanced the aristocracy's control over people.³⁵⁰

And secondly it meant the virtual monopolisation of imported western goods by the aristocracy, through the import-export sector. These imported goods played a vital economic role insofar as they provided the firearms necessary for any future large scale acquisition of slaves.

But they also played a vital political role as means of domestic control, (firearms) and as means of obtaining highly prestigious and scarce 'luxury' goods which were indispensable in acquiring followers and clients. The primary reason for exerting administrative control over the slave export-import market was precisely its importance in bolstering the political power and social status of the aristocracy.

Thus the dominance of martial values in Dahomean society itself can be explained and understood with reference to the economic character of the Dahomean state.³⁵¹ The distinction between motives and underlying causes is one which is not merely applicable to Dahomey or, for that matter, to a pre-industrial society. The capitalist entrepreneur may have a considerable range of motives other than the realisation of personal profit - the creation of wealth for the community, the provision of badly needed jobs and charitable intent among them. One thing, however, is certain; should he cease to realise profits, then he will soon cease to be a capitalist entrepreneur, for solid economic reasons. So too, in martial Dahomey, a warrior aristocracy which ceased slave raiding and the conversion of captives into politically and economically important imported goods, would soon face social and political decline, as Gezo's immediate predecessors found to their cost.

Within Dahomey, then, the appropriation of surplus was not confined to one single mechanism. As has been indicated, surplus was extracted through levies in kind, direct and indirect taxation, the use of slave labour and domination of trade. But slave raiding and the products of raiding cannot be evaluated merely in quantitative terms as a proportion of all Dahomean economic activity, because the nature of the exchange

commodities thus obtained were of vital importance to the maintenance of political power.

As a corollary, the demise of the slave trade undermined this vital element of the aristocracy's dominance at the same time as their control of labour was being further weakened by the opportunities being opened up to the general population by a developing palm oil trade.

During the half century 1830-80 Dahomean politics can be seen largely in the context of the response of the Dahomean warrior aristocracy to these economic changes which threatened the very foundations of a Dahomean social formation which they had come to dominate with few parallels in West Africa. Although the pinnacle of monarchical and aristocratic power was reached under Gezo, the circumstances which gave rise to it were soon to change.

CHAPTER 2 FOOTNOTES

- 1 Cf. Ryder, A. F. C., Benin and the Europeans, p. 24.
- 2 Ibid., p. 74.
- 3 Law, Robin, "Trade and Politics behind the Slave Coast . . .", J.A.H. 24, 1983, p.78.
- 4 Castello Branco, cited in Verger, P., Trade Relations between the Bight of Benin and Bahia, from the 17th-19th century, Ibadan University Press, 1976, pp. 104 and 134 fn. 1.
- 5 Cf. Ernst van den Boogaart and Pieter C. Emmer, "The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596-1650" in Gemery and Hogendorn, eds., The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade.
- 6 Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 106.
- 7 Fage, J., A History of W. Africa, pp. 76-7. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., Chapt. 1. Bean, R., "A Note on the relative importance of Gold and Slave in W. African Exports", J.A.H., XV, 3, 1974, pp. 351-6.
- 8 Kea, R., Settlements, Trade and Polities on the 17th Century Gold Coast (Baltimore) 1982, p. 401 fn. 168.
- 9 Dalziel, A., The History of Dahomy, pp. 1-3. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey, 1911, pp. 276-9. Fage, J., A History of W. Africa, p. 102. Kola, Folayan, "Dahomey before the French Conquest", Tarikh, vol. 5. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey and Its Neighbours, 1708-1818, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 22.
- 10 Cf. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 51; Mercier, P., "The Fon of Dahomey" in African Worlds (ed. Forde, D.), p. 229; Argyle W. J., The Fon of Dahomey, p. 83.
- 11 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 51. Mercier, P., "The Fon of Dahomey" in African Worlds (ed. Forde, D.), Oxford Uni. Press, 1954, p. 229.
- 12 Forbes, F. Dahomey and the Dahomans, vol. 1, pp. 15, 20, 74; vol. 2, pp. 18, 133. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 241. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey as it is . . ., pp. 250, 359, 441, 447.
- 13 Kola, Folayan, "Dahomey before . . .", Tarikh, vol. 5.
- 14 Firearms, according to tradition, had reached Abomey by around 1680, but their general use is attributed to the reign of Agaja. Cf. Snelgrave W., A New Account of Guinea and the Slave Trade, 1734, New Imp. 1971 F. Cass and Co. pp. 27, 77-8; Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 60-1.

- 15 Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative, p. 362. By the time of Snelgrave's visit to Abomey, firearms were widely available to the Dahomean army; Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 21, 27, 32. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 14-15.
- 16 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . . pp. 24, 60-1, 84. Argyle, W. J., The Fon . . ., pp. 8, 10. Foà, E., Le Dahomey 1885 (Paris) pp. 4, 10, 12. Cf. also, Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 38, 125. Akinjogbin in his work appears to ignore these traditions, but see Ross, D., "European Models and West African History. Further Comments on the recent Historiography of Dahomey", History in Africa, 10, 1983, pp. 293-305. Wegbaja, in fact, prohibited the sale of people born in Dahomey; cf. Maroukis, T. C., "Warfare and Society . . .", Ph.D. pp. 40-1.
- 17 Forbes, F., Dahomey and the Dahomans, vol. 1 p. 6. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 105-7, 125. Again, this does not accord with the view taken by Akinjogbin, but see D. Ross in the article referred to above.
- 18 Snelgrave estimated, pre-1727, slave exports from Whydah and neighbouring ports at 20,000 p.a.; Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p.2. Cf. also Barbot, J., Déscription des Côtes d'Afrique depuis le Cap Bojador, jusques à Cap de Copo Gonzalves Ille Partie, p. 135. Journal of Capt. T. Phillips, in Churchill's Collection of Voyages, vol. VI. Bosman, W., A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, 1705, pp. 360-3. Labat, R. P., "Le Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée" (1731), extracts in Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. XVI, 1956, pp. 47 et seq. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 17.
- 19 Atkins, J., A Voyage to Guinea . . ., 1735, New Imp., 1970, F. Cass and Co., p. 111.
- 20 Deliberations de Conseil de Marine Colonies pendant 4 premiers mois, 1717, le Sieur Bouchel à Juda, 22/6/1717, Arch. Nat., Cl Marines B.119. I am grateful to Dr. R. Law for bringing this reference to my attention. Dahomey may have been as much concerned to control the supply of arms to its own hinterland as it was to secure its own supply of weapons; see Law, R., "Horses, Firearms and Political Power", Past and Present, no. 77, 1976, p. 123.
- 21 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 21. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 7-8. On firearms on the 18th century W. Africa coast in general see Inikori, J. E., "The Import of Firearms . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 3, 1977.
- 22 Journal of Fort William Whydah 10/10/1717 and 15/10/1717, in Donnan, E., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (1930), reprinted by Octagon Books (New York) 1965, vol. 11, pp. 213-4. W. Baillie to Company 30/4/1718, and several undated to the company in PRO.T70/1475. W. Baillie to Governor of Cape Coast Castle 10/5/1720, in PRO.T70/54.

- 23 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 7-11. Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 21. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 23. Law, R., "Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977. The view expressed by one contemporary observer, John Atkins, is at odds with the interpretation of events given here; specifically, Atkins believed that the Dahomean conquest of Whydah was undertaken in order to stop the slave trade. Atkins, J., A Voyage . . ., pp. 119-20. Cf. also Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 7-8. Akinjogbin, Dahomey and its Neighbours, pp. 73-7. But see also Law, R., "The Fall of Allada - an ideological Revolution?", J.Hist.Soc. of Nigeria, VI. Henige, D. and Johnson, M., "Agaja and the Slave Trade: another look at the evidence", History in Africa, 3, 1976, pp. 56-7. Johnson, M., "Bulfinch Lamb and the Emperor of Pawpaw: a footnote to Agaja and the slave trade", History in Africa, 5, 1978, pp. 345-50.

Akinjogbin and Peukert tend towards the same interpretation as Atkins. However, Atkins' view appears to be based on a misinterpretation of Bulfinch Lamb's conversation with the Dahomean monarch who stated that, if Europeans came "the natives would sell themselves to us, on condition of not being carried off - that we might settle plantations etc . . ."; Atkins, J., A Voyage . . ., pp. 119-122. It seems quite clear that, in this instance, the Dahomean monarch was referring to Dahomean natives or slaves being placed at the disposal of Europeans within Dahomey. Dahomean citizens or 2nd generation slaves could not be sold for export: Norris to Committee, 22/9/1787, PRO.T70/33/105. This tradition was started by Wegbaja: cf. Maroukis Ph.D., pp. 40-1 They could however, be sold internally, and the monarch was keen to encourage European plantation production which might add to the prosperity of the Dahomean state as well as provide extra income for the royal exchequer. This was envisaged as a possible supplement to the sale of slaves for export, as Lamb makes clear in other correspondence:

"King talks very much of settling a correspondence with the (African) company and of having white men come here, which you must encourage him and tell him the way to do it will be to send me away: for he says that he wants ships to come to some place only for his slaves, and bring such things as are fit only for a king such as he . . .":

Lamb to Governor Tinker (at Whydah) 27/11/1724, Quoted in Smith, A Voyage to Guinea . . ., p. 174.

Another observer, Snelgrave, was more specific still, indicating that Agadja was not only engaged in the sale of slaves, but also in slave raiding:

"his majesty had lately sent an army into the inland country, to take slaves: For . . . he drives no regular trade in slaves, but only sells such as he takes in war."

Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 125.

Snelgrave's comment is also a useful indication of the restraints placed on the warrior king from becoming involved directly in the purchase of slaves for re-sale, as we shall see later.

- 24 Kola, Folayan, "Dahomey before the French Conquest", Tarikh, vol. 5.
- 25 Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977, pp. 559-561. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., p. 103.
- 26 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 208. Law, R. "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 27 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 125-6.
- 28 Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 25.
- 29 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 80-1.
- 30 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 136. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 56-8.
- 31 Franciso Pereyra Mendes to Viceroy of Brazil, quoted in Verger, P., Flux et Reflux . . ., 1968, p. 44. Levet à Compagnie des Indes 26/8/1733, Arch. Nat. C6:25. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., pp. 102-3. Folayan, K., "Dahomey before the French Conquest", Tarikh, vol. 5.
- 32 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 12-15, 52-60, 71-4, 103, 208. According to tradition, Dahomey was eventually (after 1748) required to pay an annual tribute of 40 men, 40 virgins, 40 guns, 400 bags of cowries and 400 corals to Oyo; Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 319. For the most comprehensive summary of Oyo-Dahomey conflicts during the late 17th and 18th centuries see Law, R., The Oyo Empire, pp. 150-169. Cf. also Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., 1967, pp. 82-125.
- 33 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 56-8. Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., p. 147.
- 34 Denyau à Min. Des Colonies, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 27: Questions relatives à la Compagnie de Guinée, Arch. Nat., Col. C6, box 18. Gaury à Min. des Col. 17/4/1788, Montaguierre à Min. des Col. 30/10/1780, Directeur à Ouidah à Min. des Col. 1/9/1776, Minute de Ministre des Colonies 16/5/1777, all in Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. Verger, P., "Le Fort Portugaise de Ouidah" part III, Etudes Dahoméennes, no. 6-7, 1966, pp. 31-2. This general and continual decline occurred despite occasional boosts given to the Whydah trade because of the hostilities between neighbouring ports, as in 1783; Montaguierre à Min. des Col. 2/3/1783, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. Cf. also Law, R., The Oyo Empire, pp. 222-3.

- 35 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 207. Gaury à Min. des Colonies, 24/1/1788, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. Cf. also Law, R., "The Constitutional troubles of Oyo in the 18th century" in J.A.H., XII, 1, 1971.
- 36 Verger, P., "Le Tabac de Bahia et la Traite des Esclaves" in Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, no. 15. Verger, P., "Le Fort Portugais de Ouidah", Etudes Dahoméennes, new series, nos. 6-7m 1966. Klein, H. S., "The Trade in African Slaves to Rio de Janeiro", J.A.H., X, 4, 1969, citing Goulart, M., Escravidao Africana No Brasil (Sao Paulo, 1949).
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Norris estimated slave exports from Whydah at 5-6000 per annum in the 1770's, compared to Snelgraves estimate of four times that amount some 50 years earlier. Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., p. 62. Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 2.
- 39 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 214.
- 40 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 208-16.
- 41 Pruneau de Pommegorge, Description . . ., pp. 208-9.
- 42 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 213.
- 43 The general view of the involvement of the Dahomean authorities and aristocrats in the supply of slaves put forward in this thesis is at odds with that of Peukert who found an insignificant aristocratic input into the supply side, with a commensurately small economic return to the Dahomean leadership from the Atlantic trade. However, the period covered by Peukert's study was limited to the second half of the 18th century, a period during which the Whydah export trade was in decline. It is argued later in this thesis that Gezo's early reign reasserted central features of Dahomean life - including slave raiding - which had declined significantly in the second half of the 18th century. Unfortunately, Peukert's thesis, "Der Atlantische Sklavenhandel von Dahomey, 1740-97" Ph.D. (Wiesbaden 1978) is not available in English translation due to his tragic death. I am grateful to Marion Johnson and Robin Law for access to a preliminary summary of his work (translated by O. F. Raum) which had been prepared prior to Peukert's death. Cf. also Johnson, M., "Polanyi, Peukert and the Political Economy of Dahomey", J.A.H., 21, 1980, 3, p. 395. Additionally, it may be noted that the view expressed in this thesis does not accord with that of Akinjogbin in Dahomey and its Neighbours, but see Ross, D., "European Models . . .", History in Africa, 10, 1983, pp. 293-305
- 44 Gaury, an observer at the 1789 Customs, put the army at around 4000. Gaury's Journals, 10/1/1789, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26.

- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Agonglo, for instance, was later referred to by Forbes as a "weak monarch"; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 2, p. 89. Cf. also Montaguierre à Min. des Colonies, 39/10/1780, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. Also see later for Adandozan.
- 47 Serat à Min. de la Marine et des Colonies, 1800, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 27. Duplesin à Min. de Col. 14/3/1821, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42a.
- 48 See Anstey, R., "The Slave Trade of the Continental Powers, 1760-1810", E.H.R., 2nd Series, vol. XXX, no. 2, p. 265. Also Anstey, R., The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810.
- 49 Verger, P., "Le Tabac de Bahia et la Traite des Esclaves", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, no. 15. The expulsion of directors was a regular feature during this period. Two French directors were also expelled; "Rapports d'Amoukou et de Juda", June 1802, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 27.
- 50 Ibid. Torrane to Committee, 4/4/1806, 1/2/1807, in PRO.T70/34/320 and PRO.T70/35/117.
- 51 Verger, P., "Le Fort Portugais . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, nos. 6, 7, 1966.
- 52 Robertson (1819), reported that ships at Whydah had "ceased to buy slaves", Robertson, G. A., Notes On Africa, particularly those Parts which are situated between Cape Verde and the River Congo (1819), p.264 On the King's behaviour cf. also Torrane to Committee, 4/4/1806, PRO.T70/34/32. Torrane to Committee, 1/2/1807, PRO.T70/35/117. White to Committee, 26/7/1812, PRO.T70/35/312. Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:(b).
- 53 Lawson to Committee 14/8/1816, PRO.T70/36/168.
- 54 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 310-312. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., pp. 154, 199-200.
- 55 Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363. Forbes also reported that Adandozan's failure was related to his unwillingness to undertake military adventure: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 2, pp. 23-5. Also, Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 311-4.
- 56 Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363. Specifically, his military weakness was remembered in connection with his refusal to undertake a campaign against the Egbado town of Ijaama; Cf. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 23-5. Also Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., p. 201.

- 57 Hallet, R., Minutes of the Committee of the African Association, 1780-1831, p. 123.
- 58 A re-awakening of the export trade in slaves through Whydah does appear to have taken place towards the end of Adandozan's reign. Ross has drawn attention to the fact that in 1810-1811 at least 45 ships from Bahia were reported to have called at Whydah: Ross, D., Ph.D. p. 4, and several other reports from this period suggest a revival in the Trade. Cf. Evidence of F. P. Irby, minutes of evidence, p. 46; Irby to Croker, 4/3/1812, appendix 23(3), pp. 208-9; Irby to Croker, 9/7/1812, p. 212; Governor of Cape Coast Castle to committee, 8/11/1816; Sir James Yao to Admiralty, 7/11/1816, p. 57; All in Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa, vol. I. "Select Committee on Papers relative to the African Forts" Irby to White, 5/1/1812, PRO.T70/1594.
- 59 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 126. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 339. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 118-9. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 3112-2. Gezo was certainly in power by 1820; G. A. Robertson to Lord Bathurst, 2/9/1820, PRO C02/11.
- 60 Smith, R., Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial Africa, Methuen, pp. 187-8.
- 61 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 14, 19, 27, 65; vol. 2, pp. 86-7. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 159-170.
- 62 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. X. Accounts of the size of the army during the period vary; cf. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., p. 147; Smith, R., Warfare and Diplomacy . . ., p. 64. An observer at the 1789 customs estimated the army at 4000; Gaury's journal, 10/1/1789, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. For 19th century estimates, see later in this chapter.
- 63 In the introduction to Dalzel's The History . . ., J.F. puts the size at "some hundreds". Later in the same work, drawing on Abson, it is reported that in 1781 the king went to war at the head of 800 female warriors; Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. XI, 176. In the 19th century Guillevan put the Amazon numbers at around 3000, Beecroft at 3000 and Wilmott at 5000. "Notes sur le Dahomey, par Guillevan", Service Historique de la Marine, GG1:carton 45. Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192. Wilmot to Walker, 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col.:Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa General, "Visit to Dahomey . . . dispatches . . . 1863", (3179) vol. LXXIII. The female Amazon army was unparalleled in W. Africa; cf. Smith, R., Warfare and Diplomacy . . ., pp. 66-7.
- 64 Smith, R., Warfare and Diplomacy . . ., p.164.

- 65 Denyau à Min. des Colonies 25/Novise/year 7 Arch. Nat., Col. C6 27.
Cf. Also Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 218; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 21, 132-3, 138; Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346; Fraser's Journals (rough copy), 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 66 For the career of Da Souza see Ross, D., "The First Cha Cha of Whydah . . .", Odu, New Series, 11, 1969. Also, De Souza, N. F., "Contribution à l'histoire de la famille de Souza" in Etudes Dahoméennes, XVI, 1955, p. 17 et seq.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 15-17. Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue 2/5/1843, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42b. Abbe Th. Moulero, "Guezo ou Guedizo Massigbe", Etudes Dahoméennes, New Series, no. 4, May 1965, pp. 52-3.
- 69 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 454-5. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 58. According to Burton, Gezo claimed credit for the introduction of the Amazons. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 254. This is probably a misunderstanding on Burton's part, since Gezo and his contemporaries would have been well aware of previous companies of female soldiers. They were certainly recorded from as far back as 1727 by Snelgrave, and as late as 1789 by Gaury: Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 125-8: Gaury's Journal 9/1/1789, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. It is much more likely that Gezo claimed credit for having renewed the Amazons and for raising them to a more central and exalted position than hitherto. Cf. also Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 454 et seq; Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 58: Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . ." vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, pp.47-8. Ross differs from Burton over the manner in which the new Amazon corps was initially recruited by Gezo. The former believes that they were recruited from young female captives, the latter that they were commandeered from the leading men of the kingdom. Ross, D., Phd, p. 20 et seq. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 256. See also Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 454; Bouet A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey", L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 59-62.
- 70 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 256. Wilmot to Walker, 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col.:Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa General: Visit to Dahomey; dispatches . . . 1863 (3179) vol. LXXIII.
- 71 Bouet, A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey", L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 59-62. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 454. Maroukis, in his study of warfare in 19th century Dahomey has pointed out that up until the 1840's there is no mention of such a military structure; Maroukis, T. C., Ph.D., pp. 78-80.
- 72 Winniet to Walker, 29/1/1863, Parl. Papers, Col.:Africa, vol. 50 W. Africa General: Visit to Dahomey: dispatches, 1863 (3179), vol. LXXIII, p. 4.

- 73 This figure is not, in fact, too far removed from Forbes' estimate of 7000 regular and 5000 amazons, although he estimated that the Dahomeans were capable of putting approximately another 40,000 in militia and following personnel in the field; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 15-17. Bouet-Williams put the Dahomean army at 20-25000 in the 1840's; Internal Memo on Whydah, June 1858, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Beecroft estimated it at a similar figure; Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192. As late as 1890, one French estimate put the Dahomean strength at 12000 soldiers plus 2000 Amazons, with an additional capacity of 12000 from a general levy; "Note sur les affaires du Dahomey. Résumé . . . des operations . . .", entry for 3/7/1890, Service Historique de la Marine; "Rapport d'Aubrieres", February-March 1891, M.O.M., Dahomey 111:2. Cf. also Wilmot to Walker, 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa General: Visit to Dahomey: dispatches . . . 1863 (3179), vol. LXXIII. "Notes sur Dahomey" by Guillevin, Service Historique de la Marine, GG1, carton 45. Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/214. Garrand a Didelot, April 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 74 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 48. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 63.
- 75 The elaborate spy system was accredited to Agaja; Cf. Hazoumé, P., Le Pact du Sang à Dahomey (1937). Maroukis, T. C., Ph.D., pp. 119-20.
- 76 McCoskrey to Russell 8/4/1862, PRO.F084/1175/77. Bernasko to General Secs, 2/11/1864, M.M.S., box 263, 1863/4, art. 79. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 15-17.
- 77 Wilmot to Walker 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col.:Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa General: Visit to Dahomey: dispatches . . . 1863 (3179), vol. LXXXIII. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 15-17.
- 78 Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative, p. 362. For the wider discussion of royal controls, see Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 79 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 447. This monarchical provision of the means of war is enshrined in Dahomean traditions right up until the immediate pre-colonial period. It is recorded, for instance, that when King Behanzin wished to make war against Toffo of Port Novo, he "brought together all the people of Abomey and gave each a gun with which to make war"; Hersovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative, p. 382.
- 80 Fraser's Journals (rough copy) 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume (1911), pp. 61, 89. The prospect of abundant supplies of export slaves was also a stimulus to European traders and coastal merchants to supply the king with firearms; Campbell to Clarendon, 15/2/1855, PRO.F084/976/97.

- 81 Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, pp. 85-6.
- 82 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. XXV. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey, an Ancient West African Kingdom 1938, vol. 1, pp. 126-7, 132. Among others, Freeman gave a description of a typical Amazon armoury and Dahomean cannon, normally used for ceremonial purposes; Freeman, T. B., Journal of Various Visits . . ., 1968, entries for 12/3/1843 and 14/3/1843. See also Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, XX.
- 83 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 69-70.
- 84 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 137 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 444. Maroukis presents the most comprehensive, diagrammatic description of the military command structure; Maroukis, T. C., Ph.D., pp. 101 et seq.
- 85 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 22.
- 86 Ibid., p. 28.
- 87 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 404-5.
- 88 See, for example, Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 378.
- 89 Frasers Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Borghero à Planque, June 1862, in Annales de la Prop. de la Foi., vol. XXXV, 1863. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 393, 401.
- 90 Ibid. Indeed, several commentators remarked on the utility of a female army in this respect, since it was speculated that they would stimulate their male colleagues to acts of greater bravery and heroism. Cf. Wilmot to Walker, 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col.:Africa vol. 50, W. Africa General; Visit to Dahomey; dispatches . . . 1863 (3179) Vol. LXXIII. Cf. also Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 256.
- 91 See, for example, Duncan to Stanley 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/214. Coquery-Vidrovitch has noted that "The Customs were, above all, the great moment of military life"; Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "La Fête des Coutumes . . .", Annales E.S.C., XIX (1964), p. 705.
- 92 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 129. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 346.
- 93 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 195.
- 94 Lartigue, "Relation du Voyage à Abomey", entry for 18/7/1860, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 51. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 224-5.

- 95 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 2, pp. 41-2. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 326. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, pp. 319-322. Law, R., The Oyo Empire, pp. 271-2. Gezo's success was also due in part to the increasing weakness of Oyo themselves; cf. Law, R., The Oyo Empire, chapters 12 and 13.
- 96 The annual Customs were first introduced in Agaja's reign according to Burton; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 201.
- 97 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 2.
- 98 Human sacrifice was, however, noted in the Kingdoms of Allada and Whydah; Cf. Law. R., "Human sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa", African Affairs, 1, XXXIV, 334, 1985, p. 67.
- 99 Law, R., "Human Sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa", African Affairs, 1, XXXIV, 334, 1985, p. 53-4.
- 100 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 31-2.
- 101 Ibid., p. 49.
- 102 Law, R., "Human Sacrifice in pre-colonial West Africa", African Affairs 1, XXXIV, 334, 1985, pp. 53-87. Snelgrave, W. A New Account . . ., pp. 158-60.
- 103 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., pp. 135-6.
- 104 Ibid. pp. 93-125
- 105 Isert, P.E., Voyages en Guinee et dans les Iles Caraibes (Paris) p. 158.
- 106 Gaury à Min. des Col. Arch. Nat., Col. C6:26.
- 107 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 202.
- 108 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 205. Again, Dalzel's accounts have to be viewed with some circumspection; cf. Waldman, L. K., "An unnoticed aspect of Archibald Dalzel's The History of Dahomey", J.A.H., 6, 1965 pp. 185-232; Akinjogbin, I. A., "Archibald Dalzel: Slave Trader and Historian of Dahomey", J.A.H., 7, 1966, pp. 67-78.
- 109 Crow, H., Memoirs of the Late Capt. H. Crow of Liverpool . . . with Descriptive Sketches of the Western Coast of Africa, Longman, Rees, Orme and Green, 1830, p. 33.
- 110 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 229.
- 111 M'Leod, J., A Voyage to Africa . . ., p.60.

- 112 M'Leod, J., A Voyage to Africa . . ., p. 60. No doubt apopogists for the slave trade also played an important part in such exaggeration.
- 113 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 26-40.
- 114 Ibid., p. 40. Norris, R., A Journey to the Court of . . ., in Dalzel, p. 155.
- 115 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 36 et seq. Norris, R., A Journey to the Court of . . ., in Ibid, p. 121 et seq and 158. Also cf. Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "La Fete des Coutumes au Dahomey: Historique et Essai d'Interpretation", Annales E.S.C., XIX, 1964, pp. 696-716, esp. pp. 699, 705-6; Campion-Vincent, "Sacrifices Humaines au Dahomey", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 7, no. 1, 1967, pp. 32-3.
- 116 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 192.
- 117 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 126. For the most comprehensive review of the customs and relevant literature see Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "La Fete des Coutumes au Dahomey . . .", Annales E.S.C., XIX, 1964, pp. 696-716.
- 118 Coquery Vidrovitch, "La Fete des Coutumes . . .", Annales E.S.C. XIX, 1964, pp. 696-716.
- 119 Smith, R., Warfare and Diplomacy . . ., pp 188-9.
- 120 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 69.
- 121 For a brief summary of royal absolutism in Dahomey, see Lombard, J., "The Kingdom of Dahomey . . ." in West African Kingdoms, ed. Forde and Kaberry.
- 122 Norris, R., "A Journey . . ." in Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 147, 159.
- 123 Ibid., pp. 127 and 159.
- 124 The more sensationalised accounts of absolute monarchy given by the 18th century pro-slaving writers have to be treated with some scepticism. Cf Ross, D., "European Models . . .", History in Africa, 10, 1983, pp. 293-305.
- 125 Cf. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 63. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 20, 95, 291, 445.
- 126 Cf. for example, Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., p. 105. Fraser, Forbes and Burton also testified to the monarch's public abstention from alcohol.
- 127 Baudin à Min. des Colonies 3/4/1845, M.O.M, Afrique, IV:9(a). Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 2/5/1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b). Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 15-17. Abbe Th. Moulero, "Guezo ou Guedizo Massigbe", Etudes Dahoméennes, new series, no. 4, May 1965, pp. 52-3.

- 128 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. II, pp. 41-2, 56-7; Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 326. For a detailed discussion of the causes for the Dahomey-Oyo confrontation, see Law, R., The Oyo Empire, pp. 271-2.
- 129 The initial Campaign against the Mahi appears to have preceded the defeat of Oyo; Robertson, G. A., Notes on Africa . . ., p. 269; Ohoyo, J. R., "Les Marchés d'Abomey . . ." in Les Cahiers d'Outre Mer, vol. 28, 1975; Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", in Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 64
- 130 Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . ." in Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, pp. 64, 79; Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 21.
- 131 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 20; Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 21.
- 132 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 21.
- 133 Extraits de Journal de M . . . Brue, 2/5/1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b); Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 58-96.
- 134 See, for examples of contemporary descriptions, Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 30 et seq. Norris, R., A Journey to the Court of . . . in Dalzel, p. 120 et seq. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 138 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq. Vallon, "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363/ For more recent descriptions, see Ross, D., Ph.D., pp. especially 445-52. Manning, P., Ph.D., pp. 151 et seq. Katz, N., Ph.D., p. 69 et seq. Maroukis, T. C., Ph.D., pp. 93 et seq. Newbury, C. W. in the introduction to Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 30-31.
- 135 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 29.
- 136 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 138 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 5. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., Vol. I, p. 99.
- 137 This tradition was qualified to some extent during the 19th century by the appointment of members of the royal family to positions as 'shadows' or second in command to some of the leading ministers such as the Yevogan. Cf. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 63. However, the principle was never totally breached.
- 138 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 138 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 5. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 99.
- 139 The basic social unit of the "commoners" were the Hwe (Family), the Gbe (Extended Family) and the clan (Xenu). The basic territorial and political unit was the village for the purpose of levying taxation and the compulsory provision of recruits for the army during the annual campaign. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 114-116, 138. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 86-7.

- 140 Within the slave class there were a considerable number of sub-groupings, outlined in detail in Obichere, B. I., "Women and Slavery in the Kingdom of Dahomey", Revue Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, vol. LXV, 1978, p. 7. However, from our point of view a more useful classification of slavery is the division into domestic slaves, plantation slaves and exchange slaves for the slave trade; cf. Aguessy, H., "Le Danhome du XIXe siècle, etait-il une Societe Esclavagiste?", Revue Francaise d'Etudes Politiques Africaines, vol. 50, Feb. 1970, pp. 71-91. Children of slaves in the first and second categories who were born on Dahomean soil accrued enhanced rights prohibiting their exportation, while those in the first category - domestic slaves - due to their social and physical proximity to Dahomean families were often effectively incorporated into the family structure as free commoners. Aguessy, H., Ibid., pp. 76-7, 84-5. See also Grace, J., Domestic Slavery in West Africa, p. 7 et seq.
- 141 See, for example, Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 30 and Norris in Ibid, p. 120 et seq. Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M Senegal, IV:42b. Also Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 37; Bouet, A., "Le Royaume du Dahomey . . .", L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 72-4. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 137 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363.
- 142 Vallon, for instance, places the Meu above the Migan in terms of the Dahomean political hierarchy; Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tome 2-3, pp. 332-363. But see Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 137, footnote 29; Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq.
- 143 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 174. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 72-9. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 138. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 37.
- 144 Forbes, J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 36-7. The application of slaves to the soil for palm oil production was, however, an acceptable road to prosperity in later years; cf. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 193
- 145 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 214-6; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. IX; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 258; Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 53; Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 82 and vol. II, pp. 77-8.
- 146 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., p. 21.
- 147 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 444.
- 148 The monarch's control of official chronicles bolstered his legitimacy and authority. See Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative, pp. 20-1.

- 149 Law, R., "Slaves, trade and taxes: the Material Basis of Political power in Pre-Colonial West Africa", Research in Economic Anthropology, vol. I, pp. 37-52, 1978. Law draws attention to the fitting remark of Marion Johnston - "for enduring state formation, self sufficiency is probably not enough" in "The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy", J.A.H., 17, pp. 481-495, cited in Law, R., Ibid.
- 150 Aguessy, H., "Le Dan-Homé du XIXe siècle . . .", Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines, 1970, p. 74. Ahoyo, J. R., "Les Marchés d'Abomé . . .", Les Cahiers d'Outre Mer, vol. 28.
- 151 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 120. Régis Frères à Min. Secr. d'Etat de la Mar. et des Col. 4/4/1845 Cruickshanks report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Forbes, F. Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 30-1. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 76, 308. On oil plantations see later chapters.
- 152 De Monleon à Min. de la Mer et des Col. 12/11/1844, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:(b). Baudin, "aperçu de l'état des Comptoirs Français . . ." 3/4/1845, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b). Snelgrave, W. A New Account . . ., p.106. Forbes, F. Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 55, 113, 115, 123-6, 129. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 12, 25, 32-3, 406, 497. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., pp. 52, 90-6.
- 153 Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 3352/3.
- 154 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 21. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 168. Cf. also Duncan to Palmerston 24/6/1846, 1/7/1846, in PRO.C096/10.
- 155 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 330. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 30-1.
- 156 Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192.
- 157 Snelgrave, W. A New Account . . ., pp. 106-7. Bouet, A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey", L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 72-4. Aguessy, H., "Le Dan-Homé du XIXe siècle: . . .", Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaine, 1970, pp. 84-5.
- 158 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 447. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . . p. 90. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 115.
- 159 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., p. 86.
- 160 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 30-1.

- 161 Burton, R. F., A Mission . . ., p.111. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 112.
- 162 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1. p. 171.
- 163 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 175.
- 164 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol.1 pp.s 71-2. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 175.
- 165 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of.... p. 92. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol.1, pp. 71-2. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 198. Cf. also Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 111; Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 81. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., p. 71. Burton estimated the price of one gallon of water in the dry season as 40-160 cowries in the area between Whydah and Allada, increasing in value as one travelled north from the coast. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 95, 111.
- 166 Manning, P., Phd. p.82.
- 167 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 pp. 30-31.
- 168 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 77-8. Johnson, S., The History of the Yorubas, p. 228. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 68.
- 169 Foote to Herbert and enclosures, 15/5/1843, PRO.C096/3/9. Freeman to Graham, 17/6/1846, M.M.S., 1846, box 260. Extraits de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b. Frasers Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 45, fn. 1. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 8.
- 170 Rapport de Serval, annexe au lettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 117.
- 171 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 117.
- 172 Ibid.
- 173 Rouen Chambre de Commerce à Min. des Col., 4.9.1852, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:(d). Despin à Min. des Col. M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:(d). Dalzel, A., The History . . ., introduction, pp. XXIV, XXV. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 338. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, tomes 2-3, p. 355.
- 174 Freeman, T. B., Journal of Various Visits . . ., p. 272. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 355.

- 175 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 101, fn. 33. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 386. Many such craftsmen were slaves; cf. Obichere, B. I., "Women and Slavery in the Kingdom of Dahomey", Revue Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, vol. LXV, 1978, p. 8.
- 176 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 68-71. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 316.
- 177 Frasers Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48, and Frasers Commercial Report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 68-71. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 354. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 310. Elsewhere Skertchly refers to "a little crockery" being made at Whydah and to the great potteries just north of the Agrime swamp where customs were charged on the transit of their products. He does also, however, refer to the Abizeh at Abomey where a great deal of pottery was made by "amazons". Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 85, 397, 408. It may well be that pottery was a monopoly of the king's wives at Abomey, and also produced by them in palaces throughout the kingdom.
- 178 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 148. Skertchly refers to the production of pipes as having "formerly" been a monopoly of the Amazons. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 26.
- 179 Fraser's Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Fraser's Commercial Report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/2/1852, PRO.F02/7/95. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6. Cf. also Rapport par Comm. Mathieu, Sept. 1872, Service Historique de la Marine, BB4:1395:467. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 119. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 122-3. On the elephant hunters see Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 157-9; Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 345.2. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 257.
- 180 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 64-66. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 195-6.
- 181 Frasers Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/2/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 182 Ohoyo, J. R., "Les Marchés d'Abomey et Bohicon", Les Cahiers d'Outre Mer, vol. 28 (1975).
- 183 Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 2/5/1843, M.O.M. Senegal, IV:42:(b). Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 55, 58, 89-90. Fraser's Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Also see Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 310-11.

- 184 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 58-9. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 334.
- 185 Extrait de journal de M . . . Brue, 2/5/1843, M.O.M. Senegal, IV:42:(b). Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 80.
- 186 For an instance of prices at Whydah c.1850, see Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 110.
- 187 Polanyi, K., Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . ., (Chicago), 1966, pp. XX, XXI, XXIV, 49, 50, 87, 94, 99.
- 188 See later in this chapter.
- 189 Fraser's Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95
- 190 Ibid. Duncan, J. Travels . . ., vol. 1, pp. 94, 107.
- 191 Ibid.
- 192 Breard, C. (ed.), Journal du Corsaire Jean Doublet de Honfleur (Paris), 1883, p. 257
- 193 Polanyi states that prices in local markets were usually fixed by "local bodies", but that "it was the responsibility of the King to determine the general levels which were to prevail during his reign, and to make such changes as might be necessary in response to shortages or abundance of stocks": Polanyi, K. Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . ., pp. 49-50. By "local bodies" he means traders' associations (cf. ibid., p.87). His evidence for this assertion is drawn from Herskovits, from the period after the French conquest and it is not certain whether this applied to the period of the independent Kingdom. On the supposed role of the King, Polanyi cites Burton, A Mission . . . (ed. Newbury), p. 266, n.29: "It is said that Gelele resolved to grind the faces of his subjects for ten years, of which six are now elapsed (i.e. since his accession in 1858). After that time they will be applied to honest labour, and a man shall live on a cowrie a day." There is no obvious reason to suppose that this refers to price fixing; indeed, comparison with a later passage by Burton (ibid., p. 327), "Prices have quadrupled during the last six years, the effects of an ultra-military policy", would suggest that it alludes rather to Gelele's policy of pursuing military glory.
- 194 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p.111.

- 195 Fraser, for example noted the price of oranges at Abomey as approximately 700 the dollar, while Forbes in the same period noted them at Allada for 2000 the dollar. Burton mentioned that the price of water jars was much higher at Whydah than at Abomey, while the opposite was true of general provisions. Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/p.48. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., p.58. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 310, 327.
- 196 B. Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/279.
- 197 Parliamentary Papers, Colonies: Africa, vol. 50, (399) vol XXXIV, "Mission to the Kings of Ashanti and Dahomey", item 2 "Report by B. Cruickshank. Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade (3160) Vol. LXXI, "Corr. relative to the Slave Trade", 1863, item 21, Consul Freeman to Earl Russell, 1/7/1862. Reports from Whydah prior to the conquest of the coast by Dahomey suggest that the price was set by the monarch - he himself received a greater price than other traders - while negotiations took place with the traders over the mixture of trade goods which were to compose the agreed price. Phillips, T. in Churchill's Collection of Voyages, vol. VI: Bosman, W., A New and Accurate Description . . . 1705, p. 363. Van Dantzig, 1971, 81, Nic. 98, Provisional D.G. Pieter Auyts to Ass. of X, Elmina, 13/11/1704, encl. 4. I am grateful to Dr. R. Law for bringing this last reference to my attention. According to Dalzel, Kpengla enforced a limit on domestic slave prices at 32 cabess a head for a male slave and 26 for a female, in order that he might purchase at these prices and, presumably, profit himself from their export. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 213-5.
- 198 Fraser's Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95: Beecroft's Journals entry for 16th May, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148.
- 199 This is dealt with in more depth in later chapters. There is another explicit reference to the "statutory price" of oil set by the king during the abnormal circumstances of 1852 when Gezo doubled the price of oil by decree to £45 the ton in response to the British blockade of Dahomey. Stanfield to Fraser, 1/3/1852, PRO.F084/886/270.
- 200 Campbell to Clarendon, 10/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/235.
- 201 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 51-2.
- 202 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 89-90. Ahoyo, J. R., "Les Marchés d'Abomey et de Bohicon", Les Cahiers d'Outre Mer, vol. 28, 1875, pp. 170-1.
- 203 Ibid.

- 204 Gaury à Min. de Colonies 17/8/1878, 17/7/1789, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 26. Christophe Colombe to Min. of Commerce, 29/9/1849, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat. F12:7208.
- 205 Campbell to Clarendon, 16/7/1856, PRO.F084/1002/218. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 315. Parrinder, The Story of Ketu, p. 37 et seq.
- 206 Howerd, A. H., "The Relevance of spatial analysis for African economic history", J.A.H., XVII, 3, 1976.
- 207 Norris, R., Memoirs of the reign of . . ., pp. 137-8. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 53.
- 208 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, p. 245.
- 209 Clapperton, H., Journal of a 2nd Expedition into the Interior of Africa, 1829, New Impression F. Cass and Co., p. 73
- 210 Ibid., pp. 83-4, 123.
- 211 Labat, "Le Voyage du Chevalier . . .", extracts cited in Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. XVII, 1956, p. 51 et seq.
- 212 Lambe to Governor Tinker, 27/11/1724, in Smith, W., A Voyage . . ., p. 184.
- 213 Hope Smith to Committee 5/3/1817, T70/36/199. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 33, 176-7. One later source also notes the establishment of a muslim "Quartier" by returned slaves at Whydah in 1848. Gavoy, "Note Historique sur Ouidah" in Etudes Dahoméennes, XIII, 1955, p. 66. However, another writer places this well before Gezo's encouragement of the late 1840's and dates the establishment from 1812; Agbo, C., Histoire de Ouidah de XVI en XXe siècle (Avignon, les Presses Universitaires) 1959. See also Duncan to Colonial Office 17/8/1846, in PRO.C096/10.
- 214 Cf. for example, Extrait du journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42b: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 33, 176-7. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 283. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 247.
- 215 Fraser's Commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston 15/2/1852, PRO.F02/7/1895.
- 216 Gezo to Victoria 11/1/1852, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. For the 18th century dispute with the Mahis, see Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 76-7.
- 217 Quenum, M., Les Ancêtres de la Famille Quenum, ed. d. Gueniot, (Langres), c.1980, pp. 62-3.

- 218 Ibid.
- 219 Ibid. Forbes noted such great Dahomean merchants at Whydah, including Quenum; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 112-3.
- 220 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 140.
- 221 Lamb to Tinker, 27/11/1724, in Smith, A Voyage . . ., p. 172. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 111. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 140. Argyle, W.J., The Fon . . ., p. 103.
- 222 Gezo to Victoria, 11/1/1852, (French Copy) in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique, 51.
- 223 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 53.
- 224 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p.111.
- 225 Ibid. Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 226 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p.111.
- 227 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 122-3. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6.
- 228 Frasers Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95. Rapport par Lt. Armand, Nov. 1852, Service Historique de la Marine, BB4:1395:p.5. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6. Rapport par Capt. Mathieu, Sept. 1872, Service Historique de la Marine, BB4:1395:467. "Rapport sur Dahomey", annexed to a letter de la Marine, 5/7/1881, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 77.
- 229 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 298.
- 230 Fraser's Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 231 Herskovits, M. J. and F. S., Dahomean Narrative, p. 362. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 208-214.
- 232 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 89. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 111. This was, in effect, a royal discount on European goods, which was also accorded to specific officers of the King who acted as his superintendants of trade.
- 233 Didelot à Min. de la Marine, 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 89.
- 234 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 283.

- 235 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 113.
- 236 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 118-20.
- 237 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 123-5.
- 238 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 125-6.
- 239 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 90. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 121.
- 240 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., p. 99. Dalzel A., The History . . ., p. XLX
- 241 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 126-132. Also, see later chapters.
- 242 Ibid., vol. II, p. 78.
- 243 According to Duncan, "all persons who possess any income are taxed accordingly", and even one of da Souza's slaves was taxed to a considerable extent. Such "head money", according to Duncan, was payable in cowries. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 123. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, pp. 83-4.
- 244 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 78.
- 245 Where possible the Dahomean army lived "off the land" during campaigns, but reserve provisions were supplied; Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, pp. 85-6. Cf. also Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 286.
- 246 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 pp. 35-6.
- 247 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 pp. 35-6. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, pp. 61, 89. This subject is covered in greater detail in later chapters.
- 248 Ibid. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122.
- 249 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6.
- 250 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 251 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 123. Cruickshank put this at \$5 a slave shipped, making \$40,000 tax on 8000 slaves shipped; Cruickshank's Report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/279.
- 252 For shipment of oil in more detail see later chapters.
- 253 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 124.

- 254 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 256 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 90.
- 257 Régis à Min. des Colonies, 11/1/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:(b).
Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 258 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 11-12.
- 259 Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42(b). Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 282-3.
- 260 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 120-2. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6, 189-90.
- 261 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 282-3. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 349.
- 262 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 282-3.
- 263 Rev. Annear to Gen. Secs., 11/10/1845, M.M.S., 1845, Box 260. Repin noted palm oil, tusks and gold powder being presented as tribute in Abomey. Repin, M. le Dct., "Voyage au Dahomey", extracts in Tour de Monde, VII, p. 161, in Etudes Dahoméennes, 1950, vol. 3, p. 91.
- 264 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 90-2. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 253. Even in the case of "commoner" families, inherited property was in theory at the disposal of the monarch, since he had to ratify the appointment of the new family head: Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 158.
- 265 Cruickshank's Report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/279. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 213.
- 266 Law, R. "Horses, Firearms and political power in pre-colonial West Africa", Past and Present, no. 72, August 1976. Goody, J., Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa, p.43.
- 267 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 96. Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M. Senegal IV:42b. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p.63. In view of the importance of this annual conscription to the Dahomean aristocracy, it can reasonably be viewed as a military corvée. Burton may well have been correct in assuming that the important feature of the 'dokpwe' was in the recruitment of military personnel thus further reinforcing the case for regarding it as such; Cf. Newbury, in the introduction to Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 34. The military aspect certainly features prominently in the ceremony of installation of 'dokpwe' members; Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 69. Some estimate of the numerical importance of the town/village levee can be obtained from Skertchly's estimate that their officers alone formed nearly 20% of the procession he observed at Abomey; Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 446.

- 268 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 113.
- 269 Da Souza, for instance, provided 140 men: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 15.
- 270 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 135.
- 271 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 90-1. M. F. Borghero à M. A. Planque, August 1866, in Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, XXXIX, XL, 1867-8, pp. 112-3.
- 272 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 95.
- 273 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 380.
- 274 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-91. The food needs of the standing army was met throughout the year from the produce of the royal plantations: Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 115. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 447. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 90.
- 275 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 19.
- 276 Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, Tomes 2/3, p. 346.
- 277 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 21-2
- 278 Ibid.
- 279 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 282-3. The King received a proportion of this and other income by levy: Ibid.
- 280 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 52.
- 281 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 283.
- 282 Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 50, 1849 (399) vol. XXXIV: Mission to the Kings of Ashantee and Dahomey, item 2, Report by B. Cruickshank . . . 9/11/1848. Parl. Papers, Slave Trade 1863 (3160), vol. LXXI: Corr. rel. to the Slave Trade, 1863, item 21, Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862. Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. XI. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 261. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-1. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 317/8. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 448. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 52. According to Herskovits, a percentage of the captives brought back by the male military commanders was taken by the king: Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 78-82.
- 283 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-1.
- 284 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 282-3.

- 285 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 21-22.
- 286 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-1.
- 287 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 263-4.
- 288 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-1.
- 289 Freeman to Russell, July 1862, Parl. Papers Slave Trade , 1863 (3160), vol. LXXI (Cor. rel. to the Slave Trade, 1863), item 21.
- 290 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 21-2.
- 291 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. II, pp. 263-4.
- 292 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 40.
- 293 Cruickshank's Report, 9/11/1848, PRO.F096/13/279. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 52. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 77-8.
- 294 Guestart à Mine des Col. 16/6/1770, Arch. Nat., Col. C6 18. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 62.
- 295 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 62. Cf. also Law, R. "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 296 Parl. Papers Col. Africa Vol. 50., 1849 (399), vol. XXXIV: Mission to the Kings of Ashantee and Dahomey, Report by B. Cruickshank . . . 9/11/1848.
- 297 Gezo to Cruickshank as recorded in Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.F096/13/279.
- 298 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 19. Cf. also Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, tomes 2/3, 1861, p. 335.
- 299 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 137. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 444.
- 300 Law, R., "Horse, firearms and political power in pre-colonial West Africa", Past and Present, vol. 72, August 1976.
- 301 Once again, D. Ross's most recent article is a good guide to the contemporary evidence on this issue. Ross, D., "European Models . . .", History in Africa, 10, 1985, pp. 293-305.
- 302 Law, R., "Dahomey and the Slave Trade; Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey" J.A.H. (forthcoming).
- 303 Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 26.

- 304 According to Norris, Dahomey purchased slaves from Mahi and Oyo; Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., pp. 137-8. See also Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 305 Pruneau de Pommegorge, Description . . ., p. 206. "State of Customs which ships that make their whole trade at Whydah pay to the King of Dahomey" 1767, in Donnan, E., Documents Illustrative of . . ., 1969, II, s31.
- 306 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 213. The 'warrior-trader' tensions were to prove extremely important in 19th century Dahomean history and are discussed more fully in later chapters.
- 307 Ibid., p. XI. Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 125. Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., p. 96. Pruneau de Pommegorge, Description . . ., (1789), pp. 208-9. Lamb to Governor Tinkle 27/11/1724 in Smith, A Voyage M. Guestard à Min. des Colonies 16/6/ Arch. Nat., Col. C6 18. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 261. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 90-1. Freeman to Russell, July 1862, Parl. Papers Slave Trade, 1863 (3160) "Cor. rel. to the Slave Trade, 1863", item 21. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., pp. 27-8. Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 308 Peukert judges the income from the slave trade purely in terms of general domestic produce. Cf. "The Atlantic Slave Trade of Dahomey: 1740-97, (Translation by O. F. Raum) Peukert, Ph.D. He thus underestimates the internal political importance in an agricultural society of produce above the minimum subsistence, particularly produce of a non-agricultural nature. This is particularly so if the bulk of such produce was commandeered by a relatively small number of people.
- 309 Cf. for example, Aguessy, H., "Le Danhomé du XIXe siècle: Etait-il une société esclavagiste", Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines, pp. 71-91. Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Recherches sur un mode de production Africain", La Pensée, 144, 1969, pp. 61-78. Codelier, M., La Notion de Mode de Production Asiatique et les Schemes Marxistes d'évolution des sociétés, Paris, 1963. Kilkenny, R. W., "The Slave Mode of Production: Pre-Colonial Dahomey" in Modes of Production in Africa (ed. Crummey D. and Stewart C.), Sage Publications, 1981. Manning, P., "Slaves, Palm Oil and Political Power . . .", African Historical Studies. 11. 1969, and Slavery colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey Mosely, K. P., "The Political Economy in Dahomey", Research in Economic Anthropology, vol. 2, Dalton G., ed. JAI Press inc. (Greenwich, Connecticut) 1979. Suret-Canale, J., "Les sociétés traditionnelles en Afrique noir et le concept du mode de production asiatique", La Pensee, 177, 1964, pp. 19-42 Terray, E., Le Marxisme devant les Sociétés primitives, Paris 1968. Polanyi, K. Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . . Polanyi, K., et al., eds., Trade and Markets in the

- Early Empires (Chicago) 1971. For general descriptive work on the political structure, see Dalziel, A., The History . . ., p. 30 et seq. Norris, R., A Journey to the Court of . . . in Dalziel, p. 120 et seq. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 138 et seq. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 445 et seq. Vallon, "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, tomes 2-3, pp. 332-363. Ross, D., Ph.D., pp. 445-52. Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 151 et seq. Katz, N., Ph.D., p. 69 et seq. Maroukis, T. Ph.D., pp. 93 et seq. Newbury, C. W. in the introduction to Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 30-31.
- 310 Polanyi, K., Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An analysis of an Archaic Economy (Seattle), 1966. Arnold, R., "A Port of Trade: Whydah on the Guinea Coast" in Polanyi et al., eds., Trade and Markets in the Early Empires. See also Dalton, G., ed., Primitive Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi (Boston, 1971) and Manning, P., Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey . . ., p. 293.
- 311 Studies by Manning and Peukert have indicated that, at least in the second half of the 18th century, sales of slaves by small merchants and individuals accounted for 50% of those sold for export, while large merchants accounted for a further 20-30%. Manning, P., Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey . . ., p. 43. Peukert, Ph.D., p. 333-7. Cf. also on this Law, R., "Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise in the Atlantic Trade: the case of Dahomey", J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977, pp. 555-577.
- 312 Marx, K., Pre-capitalist Economic formations, (ed. Hobsbawm, E.).
- 313 Suret-Canale, J., "Les sociétés traditionnelles en Afrique tropicale et le concept de mode de production asiatique", Sur le mode de production Asiatique, Paris, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes, ed. pp. 101-3.
- 314 Cocquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Recherches sur un Mode de Production Africaines", La Pensée, 144, pp. 61-78.
- 315 Cf. e.g. Manning, P. Slavery Colonialism . . ., p. 48 et seq. Aguessy, H., "Le Danhomé du XIXe siècle: était-il une société escalavagiste", Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaine, 1970, vol. 50, pp. 71-91.
- 316 Manning, P., Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960, pp. 7-8, 45-50. Marx, K., Capital (3 vols., Moscow, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 15-20. Walras, Leon, Elements d'Economie Politique Pure, Paris 1977.
- 317 "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life", Marx, K., Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, pp. 20-1. Also, ". . . a certain mode of production or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage . . .". Marx, K. and Engels, F., The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p. 50.

- 318 "This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of these individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life (their emphasis) on their part." Marx, K. and Engels, F., The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p. 42.
- 319 Marx, K., Capital, vol. I, p. 92.
- 320 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 282-3.
- 321 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 191-2.
- 322 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 390, 483.
- 323 Ibid., vol. I, p. 226.
- 324 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 703 et seq.
- 325 Cf. for example Marx, K., Capital, vol. II, p. 32. "The purchase and sale of slaves is formally also a purchase and sale of commodities . . . if slavery exists, then money can be invested in the purchase of slaves."
- 326 "The slave market maintains its supply of the commodity labour-power by war, piracy, etc., and this rapine is not promoted by a process of accumulation, but by the actual appropriation of the labour-power of others by direct physical compulsion." Marx, K., Capital, vol. II, p. 483. Cf. also Capital, vol. I, p. 703-4.
- 327 This politico-economic distortion has received considerable attention as regards its ultimately debilitating effect; Cf. for example Amin, S., Unequal Development: an Essay on the social formation of Periphery Capitalism (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1976). Gunder, Frank A., "The Development of Underdevelopment" in R. Rhodes, ed., Imperialism and Underdevelopment (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1970). Both works, however, are primarily concerned with the exploitation of the periphery by the centre; this work is primarily concerned with the exploitative relations within what they would regard as the periphery itself, the Kingdom of Dahomey.
- 328 Marx, K., Capital, vol. I, p. 209.
- 329 Rouen Chambre de Commerce à Min. des Col., 4.9.1852, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:(d). Despin à Min. des Col. M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:(d). Dalzel, A., The History . . ., introduction, pp. XXIV, XXV. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 338. Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, tomes 2-3, p. 355. Cf. Law, R. C., "Slaves Trade and Taxes . . ." Research in Economic Anthropology, vol. 1, 1978, pp. 37-52. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 447. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 115. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 90.

- 330 Polanyi stresses the distributive feature of the Dahomean monarchy in Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . .
- 331 Burton, for instance remarked that "the population is . . . not a third of what the land could support", Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 322. Cf. also, Grace, J., Domestic Slavery in W. Africa, p. 11.
- 332 Hopkins A., An Economic History . . ., pp. 23-25, 39. Niebor, Slavery as an Industrial System (The Hague) 1910, p. 303. Grace, J., Domestic Slavery in W. Africa, p. 11. Paulme, D., "Structures Sociales Traditionnelles en Afrique Noire", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. I, no. 1, p. 17.
- 333 Aguessy, H., "Le Danhomé du XIXe siècle: était-il une société escalavagiste?", Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines, vol. 50, pp. 77-8. This, despite the fact that opportunities for the social advancement of women were far more extensive in Dahomey than in most other African states: Cf. Obichere, B. I., "Women and slavery in the Kingdom of Dahomey", Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, vol. LXV, 1978, pp. 5-20.
- 334 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., pp. 4, 88-9.
- 335 Ibid. pp. 98-9. Cf. also Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 137-8.
- 336 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., pp. 4, 88-9.
- 337 In Whydah pre-1727 it was used to supply royal wives. Norris's account shows that some of the girls thus acquired were distributed at the Customs as wives.
- 338 I am grateful to Anselme Gezo for confirming this suggestion from oral tradition. Cf. also footnote 337 above.
- 339 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 454.
- 340 Willmot to Walker 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa General, "Visit to Dahomey; dispatches . . ." 1863 (3179), vol. LXXIII. Cf. also Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume, p. 7. Herskovits, M. J. Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 215.
- 341 Herskovits has made the point that the 'bride-price' paid on marriage was not essentially paid for the women, but was paid as compensation to her family for the loss of offspring. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 86.
- 342 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 201. Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 38.
- 343 Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 201 et seq.

- 344 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., pp. 87-9.
- 345 Le Heriseé, L'Ancien Royaume, pp. 42, 71, 78.
- 346 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 258. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 455. Da Souza was one of the most liberally rewarded in this manner but for his earlier generosity rather than his personal bravery; cf. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, p. 113.
- 347 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 325.
- 348 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., pp. 98-9. Gaurey's Journal, 17/1/1789, Arch. Nat., col. C6 26. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 283. Cf. also, Beecham, J., Ashantee and the Gold Coast, p. 130.
- 349 Aguessy, H., "Le Danhomé du XIXe siècle: Etait-il une société esclavagiste", Revue Francais d'Etudes Politique Africaines, vol. 50, Feb. 1970, p. 77.
- 350 The capture of the female slaves also allowed the aristocracy to commandeer a source of internal reproduction; C. Obichere, B. I., "Women and Slavery in the Kingdom of Dahomey", Revue Francais d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, vol. LXV, 1978, p. 12.
- 351 Law, R. C. C., "The Marxist approach to Historical Explanation" Tarikh, 1978, 6, 1, pp. 40-50.

CHAPTER 3BEGINNINGSBackground and development of the early Dahomean palm oil trade,
c.1588-1840

The beginnings of the palm oil trade in Dahomey gave no indication of the contribution which it was eventually to make towards the undermining of established Dahomean economic relationships and political power. The tree and its fruits sprung not from alien imposition, as did so many plantation products elsewhere in the world, but from the fertile soil of the West Coast itself. The manufacturing skills associated with oil and other palm produce were indigenous to the West Coast rather than borrowed from abroad. And long before its properties and produce oiled the wheels and enriched the traders of the New World they had enriched the domestic lives of the Dahomean Kingdom.

TECHNICAL DATA ON PALM OIL AND PRODUCTION

There are practically only two types of oil palm in West Africa. The first of these, the King Palm, favours the sandy country bordering the sea shore; Elaeis Guineensis, var. Thompsoni.

The second, which provided by far the greatest proportion of the oil involved in the West Coast trade, and with which we are therefore mainly concerned here, bears the botanical name Elaeis Guineensis, and belongs to the order of plants known as Palmae, type Coccoineae.¹ It is hereafter referred to as the Oil Palm. It was the latter which provided the basic source of the domestic, and later export oil from the Kingdom of Dahomey.²

The Oil Palm grows to a height of about 30-60 feet, commences to bear fruit from about 4-6 years of age, achieves full bearing around 12, and continues to furnish fruit for between 50-60 years.³ On average, a single palm yields 5 bunches of fruit per annum, although they have been known to yield up to 11 in ideal conditions. In a wet year, the yield of the Dahomean oil palm appears to have been nearer 6-8 bunches.⁴

The optimum period for collection of the palm nut and the manufacture of palm oil in Dahomey appears to have been from around March until July or August,⁵ a fact which was to prove to be not without consequence as the palm oil trade developed in Dahomey.

It has already been mentioned that the Oil Palm commenced to produce the fruit from which the oil is extracted at around 4-6 years of age. But the trees themselves were not "farmed" in the ordinary sense. The normal method of cultivation involved "transplantation" rather than selective breeding from plantation stock; sprouts gathered in the bush from seedlings of wild palms were uprooted and replanted, a process which continued into the 20th century.⁶

The trees themselves required little attention once they began to bear fruit.⁷ However, their physical environment could enhance or curtail their longevity and yield, factors which were to some extent dependent upon the quantity and nature of the surrounding vegetation.⁸

Oil could be produced both from the kernel of the fruit, or from the soft pericarp which forms between the kernel and the outside shell of the nut. Large scale production of palm kernel oil, however, had to await the introduction of more sophisticated machinery and techniques onto the West Coast, and it is the pericarp oil which mainly concerns us in the following remarks.

Oil production methods varied all along the coast. Occasionally the technique employed involved the use of imported European thin cloth for pressing out the oil from the fruit.⁹ The more normal and widespread technique, however, involved a fairly straightforward combination of boiling and pressing, although the relative emphasis on, and sequence of these two aspects might vary considerably.¹⁰

Perhaps the best description which we have of the Dahomean method of manufacture in the period of the independent kingdom has been left to us by Forbes, in an account of his visit to Quenun's plantation.¹¹ The collected nuts were first stored in pits beaten out of the earth and surrounded by switch, until about two thirds full; this, apart from accumulating a suitable quantity for boiling and pressing would also allow some time for the fermentation of the nuts. The kernels were extracted from the nuts and the pericarp trodden out by foot. The resulting combination of husk, pulp and oil was then boiled in water, in earthen vessels, and the oil, separating from the husks and floating to the top, was skimmed off and stored.

TRADITIONAL USE OF PALM OIL

Few natural products exceeded in the breadth of their economic and social utility that of the palm tree in pre-colonial West Africa. Long before its emergence as a major export commodity, or its application to the industrial and urban development of western Europe, the palm tree furnished the peoples of the forest belt of the West Coast with a central element of their everyday life.¹² The area encompassed by the 19th century Kingdom of Dahomey was no exception.

Both the branches and the leaves of the tree itself could be used in the construction of houses,¹³ while palm kernels - left after the extraction of oil from the pericarp - were occasionally employed in the construction of floors in the more prestigious or sacred dwellings.¹⁴

The use of palm oil in cooking is well enough known to require no elucidation,¹⁵ but it is perhaps worth noting its particularly important application in a warrior state like Dahomey in furnishing provisions for the army during campaigns.¹⁶

The Oil Palm provided not only food, but also drink. Even after the prohibition of palm wine by Gezo, for instance, palm wine continued to be produced outside the metropolitan areas of the Kingdom, and imports from the "bush" ensured its availability in markets throughout Dahomey.¹⁷ Less often remarked upon, but probably just as important in an area of scarce water supplies, was the role of palm oil in the lagging of water pits constructed for the collection of rain water.¹⁸

Not only the oil extracted from the palm fruit, but also the residue from the extraction process was utilised, mainly as a form of fuel, both domestic fuel and as material for stoking the furnaces of blacksmiths and iron-workers around Abomey.¹⁹ Husks from the extraction process also served as a manure or fertilizer.

The oil itself, in a less well-refined variety than that required for cooking, when contained in an earthen jar and accompanied by a makeshift wick - often made of palm husks - provided the standard Dahomean means of illumination.²⁰

A proportion of the domestic consumption of palm oil was employed, like a proportion of the oil exported, in the manufacture of soap;²¹

it also served, when applied to the body, as an embrocation or beautification treatment, and was of particular importance during religious ceremonies. The religious uses of oil went further. Both the oil itself - usually mixed with corn - and the kernels of the fruit, were used as "fetish" in some areas of the kingdom.²² Indeed, the persistence of the religious and ceremonial connotations of palm produce into the 20th century offers testimony to its historic social importance in Dahomey.²³

The importance of the palm tree and palm oil in Dahomey in the period prior to the great expansion of the oil export trade had serious implications for later developments. The widespread access to the tree and its fruit, the fairly straightforward method of oil production, a widespread knowledge of the technique for extraction, rights of family ownership to what grew on the land including palm trees, the lack of any advanced technology in production and, above all, the centrally important role of the palm and its oil in the domestic social life, all combined to minimise the possibility of controlling its production, or limiting it to any great extent should this prove politically or economically useful to the central government.

THE EARLY EXPORT TRADE

But in the early stages of the palm oil export trade no serious incompatibility between domestic requirements and commercial interchange with the western powers was evident. Indeed the export trade had provided an incidental and welcome adjunct to the production of palm oil for domestic consumption for centuries prior to the major "take-off" in

exports to western Europe. Although European industrialisation and urbanisation undoubtedly provided a major stimulus to the export trade, smaller quantities had been exported from West African coastal regions for a considerable period preceeding the industrial revolution.

Palm oil imports to Britain, for instance, are recorded as early as 1588-90, when a Captain Welsh returned on two occasions with loads of palm oil (among other commodities) brought from Benin, although the amounts involved - 32 barrels on the second occasion - were negliglble compared to later 19th century imports.²⁴

Oil imports remained at these relatively insignificant figures, as far as the British example is concerned, throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. By 1790, total UK imports of oil from the West Coast did not exceed 130 tons.²⁵ Nevertheless, these figures do not tell the whole story; for, by the onset of the 19th century palm oil was a sufficiently well established secondary commodity in the West Coast trade to Britain to feature along with slaves and ivory on an inventory of commodities to be sought issued to a Captain bound for the Bight of Biafra.²⁶ By 1832, the area from the Gold Coast to the Bight of Benin inclusive, supplied Britain with 10,000 tons.²⁷

At least some of this early export trade in palm oil emanated from within the area constituted by the 18th century Kingdom of Dahomey, an export trade pre-dating by over two centuries that claimed by later French and British agents as the first "legal" trade in exports from the Dahomean coast.²⁸

In the first decades of the 17th century palm oil destined for use in the island of St. Thomé was exported along with yams, native cloth,

slaves and ivory from the kingdom of Allada.²⁹ This latter area furnished part of the oil flowing from the West Coast to Britain in the early 1770s,³⁰ and it may well be that production of oil for export at Allada had continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Allada was generously endowed with palm trees which furnished the local population with sufficient surplus above domestic requirements for purposes of trade, and a proportion of the oil was carried to Whydah market for shipping aboard European vessels, destined for the use of British wool-combers and soap manufacturers.³¹

The connection with the Portuguese and St. Thomé might also indicate that part of the outlet for palm oil exports was to Brazil, whose increasing slave population included in their diet considerable amounts of oil.³² Returning slave ships could employ the oil on the homeward journey in the knowledge that any surplus over and above the requirements of the passage could be disposed of on their arrival at the home port.

It has been suggested that cultivation of the oil palm and the coconut tree was commenced in Dahomey at the beginning of the 19th century, in the reign of Adandozan, but there is, unfortunately, no corroborative evidence on this point.³³

It seems clear, however that palm oil for exchange and possible export continued to arrive at Whydah throughout the late decades of the 18th century. This is confirmed not only by Norris,³⁴ but also by Denyau, who was an employee and later director of the French fort at Whydah for a period of 13 years during the 1780s and 1790s, and who reported that palm oil could be obtained there in abundance, and offered encouraging prospects for French traders.³⁵

This situation appears to have continued for some time after the turn of the century. M'Leod, who visited Whydah in 1803, included palm oil in the list of commodities which had attracted western traders to the country over the previous century.³⁶

Between 1803 and 1816 there is no available evidence to indicate the level of palm oil exports. There are some grounds for assuming that the export trade continued, small but unabated; although M'Leod's visit took place in 1803, the publication of his book did not appear until 1820, and some sections of it had obviously been revised in the light of events in the interim period. It might thus be assumed that a dramatic decline in the palm oil trade - or trade generally - would be mentioned had this occurred between his visit and the date of publication.

However, M'Leod is not the most specific or the most accurate of observers. Moreover, in 1816, four years prior to the publication of his work, the British Government Commissioners reporting to the Select Committee on (papers relative to) African Forts of Great Britain commented unequivocally that "the establishment of Whydah ought unquestionably to be given up.. it is totally useless, being without any trade and the ferocious king of Dahomey in whose territory it is situated, so tyrannizes over the governor and the few people about him, as to render such subjection utterly disgraceful to the British Flag."³⁷

It is probable that the export trade in oil through Whydah was in decline throughout this period, not because of factors relating to the palm oil trade per se, but rather as part of a more general decline of the export trade through that port. Palm oil had been a secondary export commodity alongside, and to some extent dependent upon, the export

trade in slaves. The establishment of Porto Novo and the re-routing of Oyo's trade through that port from the 1770s, the subsequent rise of Lagos in terms of export trade, the general interruption of shipping caused by the American War, and the abolition of the slave trade obviously all affected the trade at Whydah.³⁸

It does appear, however, that the export trade in palm oil underwent a temporary resurrection in the early years of Gezo's reign. A number of factors may have contributed towards its revitalisation. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously a change in the Dahomean leadership itself following the successful coup of 1818. Trade in general was given an intentional stimulus by the new regime; Gezo, within a short period of his successful takeover, rearranged the trading system at Whydah, encouraging Oyo, Nupe and Akan (or Gonja) traders to utilize Whydah as an embarkation port for slaves, and sent messengers as far as the Gold Coast to encourage the British to return and re-occupy the Fort at Whydah.³⁹

Secondly, Gezo's recently found political and economic ally, Francisco Felix da Souza, appears to have involved himself in the oil trade at least until such times as later developments ensured slave supplies and profits in such quantities as to render the comparatively marginal profits of the oil export trade unworthy of attention.⁴⁰

During the early 1820s, although the principal trade at Whydah was still in human cargoes,⁴¹ palm oil exports may have been rendered more attractive by the world prices for palm oil, particularly as reflected in the British market, where oil prices reached their century's peak around 1818. British palm oil prices which had been running at around £40 per ton between 1812 and 1817,⁴² peaked at £70 per ton in the last quarter

of 1818, having maintained a general price of £60 throughout that year.⁴³

Whether such increases in Britain were reflected proportionately on the West African Coast remains uncertain; however, it is likely that allowing for a time-lag such European increases would have the effect of increasing demand and prices on the West Coast, thus encouraging traders like da Souza to maintain an interest in the trade. Certainly, the oil trade was prominent at Whydah by 1821, according to the evidence of a visiting French Captain who stated that "The commerce of Whydah consists only of slaves and palm oil; there is found there very little ivory, and not an ounce of gold."⁴⁴

The European price escalation was, however, temporary. The price of oil in Britain, for instance, fell steadily throughout the next few years, stabilizing between £24 and £27 a ton from around 1822 onwards.⁴⁵ Assuming again that the effect of this fall was felt with some time-lag on the West Coast, this would probably have occurred in late 1822 or early 1823. The discarding of the trade by major traders like da Souza may well have been stimulated both by the relative unprofitability of palm oil trade as a result of the fall in prices, and by the increased access to supplies of slaves for export as a result of the disintegration of the Oyo Empire in the early 1820s.

Da Souza continued to participate intermittently in the oil trade in the following decade, mainly at times when "the slave trade was so bad."⁴⁶ He was also instrumental in the establishment of a British interest in the oil trade at Badagry by intercession with Gezo, but the venture was short-lived, allegedly because of Gezo's resentment that

native energies were being channelled into the collection of palm oil to the detriment of the collection of slaves.⁴⁷ Up until the late 1830s, therefore, the Dahomean export trade in palm oil remained small and circumscribed by obstacles to its growth. France imported virtually no palm oil at all from the West Coast prior to 1832,⁴⁸ and the total exports from Whydah were probably no more than around 100 tons.⁴⁹

OBSTACLES TO THE EARLY PALM OIL TRADE

The constraints on the growth of the legitimate commerce were numerous. The slave trade offered relatively higher returns for little outlay in labour so far as the traders were concerned - a complaint frequently voiced by European merchants on other parts of the coast besides Whydah.⁵⁰ According to the same parties, the thriving slave trade also limited the palm oil export trade by encouraging the sale of slaves rather than their retention for the collection of palm fruits and the production of palm oil.⁵¹

The slave trade, moreover, provided access not only to the products of South America - mainly tobacco - but also the means of procuring the manufactured products of Western Europe. The domestic demand for European products could be satisfied by means of doubloons, carried to Dahomey by Brazilian slave ships and paid in part exchange for slave cargoes.⁵²

In addition, physical trading facilities - necessary for any significant expansion of the oil trade - were lacking up until the end of the 1830s. It is true that some Whydah traders did continue to deal in palm oil on a small scale.⁵³ But while even da Souza might be counted

upon for the occasional cargo,⁵⁴ since he as the most prominent and influential trader at Whydah found it generally unattractive, the on-shore bases for the collection, storage and exchange of oil were limited to a small number of Spanish traders.⁵⁵

Even those of the smaller traders who had achieved some success in the oil trade and were prepared to offer an on-shore base, were themselves further limited by the lack of suitable means of storing the oil. Barrels were of little use since workmen with even rudimentary cooperage skills were entirely absent at this stage of the trade's development. The use of stronger, longer lasting cast-iron strengthened casks involved prohibitive costs. Even the use of domestically produced jars offered no solution to storage problems, because they were not manufactured in sufficiently large sizes to permit storage in any great quantity.⁵⁶

Thus, up until 1839, the bulk of the palm oil was collected by methods which were piecemeal and haphazard. Ships' captains acting for European firms like Régis, who had himself been sending ships from 1832, anchored in the Whydah Roads and awaited what oil they might be offered in greater or smaller bulk.⁵⁷

Whydah, of all places on the coast, was doubly unsuitable for such a trading scenario. It offered no outlet from the lagoon to the sea, no bay or river mouth, and with its reputation as one of the most physically arduous loading sites on a coastline full of them, it lacked the necessary facilities to maximise the potential growth of the oil trade. The sheer physical difficulties of embarkation at Whydah are sometimes overlooked. It was far from being an ideal port for the embarkation of

palm oil produce; particularly on account of the surf, which always rendered loading difficult and hazardous, and frequently made the beach inaccessible for long periods.⁵⁸

It was impossible to effect landing by boats, even under normal circumstances, and required the use of landing crews⁵⁹ normally recruited on the Gold Coast.⁶⁰ Accra canoes were employed for goods, and Kru canoes for messengers.⁶¹

Although canoes were necessary for the shipment of palm oil along most of the coast,⁶² Whydah was particularly disadvantaged. Campbell's assertion that a military landing might be effective at Whydah at any time from November to April - since during that period it was always smooth enough to land either in paddle-box boats, native canoes or canoe boats - was rather over-optimistic.⁶³ Numerous commentators remarked upon the effect of the weather upon the surf. Fraser reported that the weather stimulated the surf to its height during "several months" of the year, while Campbell, in July, remarked that the weather had been particularly bad for the last few months. Dow has suggested that April to July were the worst months, and it is worth noting that Skertchly - who arrived off Whydah in July - had to wait over a week before he could even get ashore.⁶⁴ It seems clear that conditions were at their worst during the Dahomean rainy season which also marked the main Dahomean palm oil season. The difficulties of embarkation at Whydah thus coincided critically with the period in which palm oil would be expected to be shipped from the coastal ports.

These difficulties were exacerbated at Whydah by the distance which the palm oil had to be rolled to the beach for shipment. This impeded

the physical trade flow and was, as Beechcroft pointed out, an obstacle "not to be easily surmounted".⁶⁵ This point was also remarked upon by Baudin.⁶⁶ Finally, the sea offered another hazard - sharks.⁶⁷

None of these problems were exclusive to Whydah, but they appear to have been greater in degree. In other coastal areas their solution was physically easier. Canoes were used elsewhere on the coast in the palm oil trade, but, particularly on the Oil Rivers, a relatively smooth loading bay was normally assured. Rope lines were employed for loading cargo at Porto Novo, Agoué and Cotonou,⁶⁸ but the nature of the surf at Whydah necessitated ships lying in the roads some considerable distance from the shore during the bulk of the palm oil season and thus rendered the use of such contrivances more hazardous.

These organisational and physical difficulties presented severe impediments to the palm oil trade of a nature that required an official, systematic encouragement of the trade if they were to be overcome. Not unnaturally, in the early stages the oil trade remained relatively small in volume.

Régis estimated that the total export from Whydah during the 1832-9 period did not exceed fifty barrels, probably about 20 tons.⁶⁹ Although Régis' figures have to be treated with caution in view of his incentive to underestimate the pre-existing export figures and thereby maximise his own subsequent commercial achievement, his estimate is probably accurate in indicating an extremely low level of palm oil exports during this period. Hutton, on his first visit to the port in 1838-9, had considerable difficulty in filling even half a small vessel.⁷⁰

THE START OF IMPROVED CONDITIONS c.1840

Low oil prices, a thriving slave trade, lack of adequate on-shore facilities, apathy or antipathy on the part of on-shore traders, a readily available and satisfactory means of access to European merchandise, all combined throughout the 1830s to prohibit any large scale growth of the trade. From the late 1830s and early 1840s, however, some of these aspects underwent changes which gave the impetus to a significant, if erratic, expansion of the oil trade.

For instance, the availability of a medium of exchange to which the Dahomeans had access, and which was acceptable to the suppliers of European manufactured commodities, became much more restricted. Up until 1841, slave ships, mainly from Brazil, exchanged doubloons or dollars against slaves from the factories. The factories in turn purchased slaves from Dahomean suppliers in return for a mixture of goods, including those of European manufacture. The slave factories acquired much of their stock of exchangeable goods from European ships, mainly in return for specie - although they did also employ for this purpose small amounts of gold dust, ivory or palm oil.⁷¹ After the decline of the importation of Brazilian specie, palm oil provided the most easily procured of these possible intermediary commodities which were acceptable to European shippers, and therefore allowed access to their products. Thus it was that European traders like Régis benefitted from the fall in the quantities of Brazilian specie arriving in Dahomey.⁷² By the end of the 1830s, factory goods like cloth, powder and other European merchandise were no longer being acquired exclusively by specie.⁷³

It was at this stage, in the second half of the 1830's, that the production of palm oil, which had for centuries occupied a central role in domestic Dahomean economic life but an almost incidental part in their commercial intercourse with the European powers, first began to shift from the periphery of economic and political affairs into a more central and determining role.

CHAPTER 3 FOOTNOTES

- 1 This and much of the technical information of a general nature in this chapter is taken from Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil and Kernels: An Exposition of the Palm Oil Industry, its Romantic Development and its Commercial Possibilities (Liverpool), 1913, pp. 13 and 14 in this instance.
- 2 Burton and Skertchly, for instance identified these as the trees on Quenun's plantation. Burton, R., A Mission to Glele (ed. Newbury), p. 91; Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey as it is . . ., p. 33.
- 3 Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 13. Adam gives 8 as the age at which they start to produce in large quantities. Adam, J., Le Palmier a Huile a Dahomey (Paris), 1910.
- 4 Burton, R., A mission . . ., pp. 91-2, Fn.14: Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 13
- 5 Rapport du Serval, annexed to a lettre du Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique, 76. Extrait du journal de M. Brue . . . May 1843, M.O.M. Senegal IV:42(b). Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 91-2, fn.14.; Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 75, 105:
- 6 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 38: Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., pp. 14-15. Marion Johnson confirms verbally that this was similar in Krobo where young palms were moved to clearings on the edge of the forest since they need a forest environment for early growth and thereafter transplantation to a more open environment to maximise growth and yield. Le Herissé has indicated that that the King, via his agriculture minister the Tokpo, directed which areas of the kingdom were to be planted with palm trees, but it is unclear to what extent this practice was carried out prior to the French conquest of Dahomey. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 43.
- 7 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 38: Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., pp. 14-15.
- 8 Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., pp. 14-15. This renders more significant the decrees of Gezo promulgated in the 1840's - see later chapters.
- 9 Barbot, J., "Account of Guinea" in Churchill's Voyages . . ., cited by Dow, G. F., Slave ships and Slaving, p. 9.
- 10 For West Africa generally see Forbes, Lt., 6 Months on the African Blockade, p. 17. For a description of a general production process towards the end of the 19th century, probably drawn from the Nigeria area, see Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 19. For Lagos, see Whitford, J., Trading Life in Central and Western

Africa. For the Bight of Biafra see Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 91-2. For Gabon, cf. Circulaire par Com. Superiore, Gabon 20/5/1880, M.O.M. Gabon XIII.2.9. Southern Dahomey generally is covered in Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 31, which appears to be drawn mainly from Adam, J., Le Palmier a Huile a Dahomey.

- 11 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., pp. 33-4.
- 12 The abundant provision of palm trees impressed a number of European visitors to the coast: see for instance Whitford, A Trading Life . . ., p. 334.
- 13 Both Forbes and Skertchly remarked particularly on the use of palm branches for house construction at Savi. Burton commented on the mat huts at the same place. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 55: Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 76: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 93. See also Whitford, J. A., A Trading Life . . ., p. 334.
- 14 Fraser noted their use in the snake fetish house at Whydah and Burton commented on a palm nut paved outhouse in the Yevogan's palace at Whydah. Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/57: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 77. It is possible that their use in this fashion was either an offshoot of the palm oil trade or possibly even - after palm kernels had become a generally marketable commodity in the export trade - a status symbol.
- 15 See Dalzel, A History of Dahomey, XXV and XXVI, where he refers to it as the "butter of the country". The enduring attraction of palm oil in cooking is manifested by the spread of it to areas like Brazil through the medium of the slave provisions. Rodriguez, J. G., "The influence of Africa on Brazil . . .", J.A.H., III, 1, 1962, pp. 49-67.
- 16 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 11, p. 127. Quenum, M., Les Ancêtres de la Famille Quenum (Langres), p. 63. Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, 2, 1957, pp. 85-6.
- 17 See section on palm wine prohibition.
- 18 Forbes commented on its use in the construction of pits in the Abomey area: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 71-2.
- 19 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p.386
- 20 Ibid., pp. 34, 78-79. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, p. 110.
- 21 Freeman, T. B., Journal of Various visits . . ., p. 266. In the Porto Novo area potassium salts from the charred trunk were boiled with palm oil to produce soap: Brasseur, G., La Palmerie du Porto Novo, cited in Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 53.
- 22 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 82.

- 23 On burial ceremonies see Herskovits, M. J. Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 356-7. He also points out the 'fetish' role of the palm tree.
- 24 Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa vol. 2, 1842, XI, "Memo on British Trade with West Africa, presented by McGregor Laird to the Select Committee on West Africa", p. 575. Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa, vol. 50 (vol. XLVI), "Palm Oil: Quantity imported into the U.K., 1790-1844". Hutchinson, T., Ten Years Wanderings among the Ethiopians, 1861, 2nd Impression, F. Cass and Co. 1967, p. 131.
- 25 Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa, vol. 50 (vol. XLVI), "Palm Oil: Quantity imported into the U.K., 1790-1844".
- 26 Cf. for example T. Leyland and Co. to Lawson, 18/7/1803: quoted in full in Dow, G. F., Slave Ships and Slaving, p. 107.
- 27 Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa vol. 50, (vol. XLVI), "Palm Oil: Quantities imported into the UK, 1790-1844"
- 28 Hutton and Régis, for instance, both claimed at different times to have been the first to export legitimate produce from Dahomey.
- 29 Palm oil is in fact mentioned in the earliest extant source referring to the Kingdom of Allada: (Luciano Cordeiro ed.), Viagens . . . 1574-1620. Da Mina ao Cabo Negro Segunde Garcia Mendee Castello Branco (Lisbon), 1881, cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 18, fn.1.
- 30 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, p. 71.
- 31 Ibid., p. 146.
- 32 Rodriguez, J. H., "The influence of Africa on Brazil", J.A.H., III, 1, 1962, p. 56.
- 33 Bernard, M., "Le cocotier dans le Golfe de Benin", Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 1, 1948.
- 34 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, p. 71.
- 35 Memoire de Denyau à Min. des Colonies: 25 Nivose, year 7, Arch. Nat. C6 27.
- 36 M'Leod, J., A Voyage to Africa, pp. 13, 15.
- 37 Report of the Government Commissioners, Parl. Papers, Colonies Africa vol. 1, Report from the Select Committee on Papers relating to the African Forts 12/6/1816, app. 22, p. 136.
- 38 See later chapters.

- 39 Robertson, G. A., to Lord Bathurst, 2/9/1820, PRO.CO/2/11.
- 40 Peronne à Min. des Colonies extract 18/4/1838, Ministère d'Outre Mer, Senegal IV:42a.
- 41 Robertson, G. A. to Lord Bathurst, 2/9/1820, PRO.CO/2/11.
- 42 Robertson, G. A., Notes on Africa . . ., London 1918, pp. 363-4.
- 43 Latham, A. J. H., "Price fluctuations in the early Palm Oil Trade", J.A.H., XIX, 2 (1978), p. 213-4.
- 44 Masuduit Duplesin à Min. des Col. 14/3/1821, Ministère d'Outre Mer, Senegal IV:42(a).
- 45 Liverpool Palm Oil prices 1817-1844 in Latham, A. J. H., "Price fluctuations in the early Palm Oil Trade", J.A.H., XIX, 2 (1978), p. 214.
- 46 Parl. Papers Col. Africa vols. 2-3, 1842 Select Committee, minutes of evidence, sections 2271-2277, evidence of Capt. Marmon (sic., correctly Marman) who was an agent of Hutton in the early 1840's.
- 47 Parl Papers Col. Africa vols. 2-3, 1842 Select Committee, minutes of evidence, section 2284, evidence of Capt Marmon.
- 48 De Peronne à Min. des Colonies (extract) 18/4/1838, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(a). Their interest was possibly stimulated by an increase in palm oil prices from c. 1832 which followed the longest period of depressed prices in the 19th century, from 1823-31; cf. Latham, A. J. H., "Price fluctuations in the early Palm Oil Trade", J.A.H., XIX, 2 (1978), p. 213-4.
- 49 Parl. Papers Slave Trade vol. 4, 1848 Committee, Evidence of Hutton, minutes of evidence section 3195.
- 50 Nichols to Stephens 14/3/1836, CO/267/128.
- 51 Extract (anon.) enclosed in the African Committee to Sir G. Gray 19/3/1836, PRO.CO/267, pp. 136, 140, et seq.
- 52 Régis Frères à Min. le Sec d'etat de la Marine et Des Colonies 4/1/1845. Arch. Nat. F12:7208.
- 53 De Peronne à Min. des Colonies (extract) 18/4/1838, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(a). Also see Esquisse Commerciale par Bouet 1838-9, Arch. Nat. F12:7208.
- 54 Lyon and Parkinson to Capt. Dambrill 14/1/1836, PRO.FO/13/141, quoted in Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 319.

- 55 Ibid. Even these Spanish traders appear to have been very much under the economic influence of da Souza. M. de Peronne à Min. des col (extract) 18/4/1838, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42(a).
- 56 Esquisse Commerciale par Bouet 1838-9, Arch Nat., F12:7208.
- 57 Régis Frères à Min. le Sec. d'etat de la Mar. et des Col, 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat. F12:7208.
- 58 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., pp. 61-2; Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p.3; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 pp. 127-8.
- 59 Campbell to Clarendon 30/7/1857, PRO.F02/20/177.
- 60 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., pp. 61-2; Hutton to Palmerston, 6/3/48, PRO.C096/14/55.
- 61 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp.127-8.
- 62 Hutton to Palmerston 6/3/1848, PRO.C096/14/55; Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 29.
- 63 Campbell to Clarendon 6/12/1858. PRO.F084/1061/409.
- 64 Fraser's journal, rough copy, PRO.F084/886/129; Campbell to Clarendon, 30/7/1857, PRO.F02/20/177; Dow, G., Slave Ships . . ., pp. 9-10; Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 3.
- 65 Beecroft's Journal, entry for 16/5/1850, in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.FO 84/816/148.
- 66 Baudin à Minister de la Marine et Colonies, 1/6/1843, MOM Afriques, 1:4:a
- 67 Dow, G., Slave Ships . . ., pp. 9-10.
- 68 Norris R., in Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 179. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 104-5; Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., p. 210.
- 69 Régis Frères à Min. le Sec. d'etat de la Mar. et des Col. 4/1/1845 Arch. Nat. F12:7208.
- 70 Hutton to Hawes 6/7/1847, PRO.C096/12/283.
- 71 Evidence of F. Swanzey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 2, Select Committee on West Africa, Minutes of Evidence, pp. 44-5. Also Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b); Régis à Min. de la Mar 8/1/1845, M.O.M., Senegal XIII, 15(a).

72 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b).

73 F.O. internal note, June 1858, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.

CHAPTER 4ENCOURAGEMENT:

The official sponsorship of the Dahomean palm oil trade
in response to the declining slave trade, c.1837-45

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PALM OIL AND SLAVE TRADES

The relationship between the rise of the palm oil trade and the slave trade has proved to be a point of some contention among historians, some suggesting that the initial stimulus for palm oil exports derived from the opportunity to "plug into" a thriving slave trade, while others argue that the take-off of the palm oil trade was related to the demise of the slave trade. David Northrup, for instance, stresses the compatibility of the two trades;¹ Bernard Schnapper, who takes a similar view as regards Dahomey is referred to more specifically later.²

Clarification of this relationship is hampered by the subterfuge in which the slave trade was, of necessity, wrapped after the abolition of the Trade by the main European nations in the opening decades of the 19th century. Secrecy could make the difference between the return of a lucrative cargo, or heavy losses following the capture of a slaver by the anti-slavery squadron.³ The lack of reliable statistics has led one historian to conclude that all that can be said with any certainty is that the trade "was not suppressed by naval action".⁴

Others have been less cautious. One recent work, relating specifically to the Dahomean Kingdom asserts that the trade at Whydah did go into decline during the late 1830s and early 1840s.⁵ Such an argument has led to an interpretation that the palm oil trade "waxed" as the slave trade "waned".⁶

Yet another, and even more recent historian on the French trade on the West Coast, basing his conclusions essentially on evidence from the "demand" side of the equation - Latin America - rather than on the Dahomean "supply" side has argued that the slave trade was in fact in full flight at the time that the first large scale palm oil traders, like Régis, established themselves on the Dahomean coast and the palm oil exports reached significant proportions.⁷

Case studies on Latin American shipping movements, with all their problems of interpretation and reliability as to the honesty of declared destinations, do suggest that there was little decline in the estimated departures and arrivals to and from the general area of the Slave Coast.⁸ But statistics from the demand side - even assuming their reliability - do not distinguish between different parts of the Slave Coast. They allow the possibility that, while the slave trade was maintaining the same level or even developing in the Bight of Benin in general, it may have been declining at Whydah itself. To ascertain trade movements such as this, information from the area of the coast itself is liable to be more reliable.

THE SLAVE TRADE IN DECLINE: LATE 1830'S EARLY 1840'S

Such information does exist, and although impressionistic rather than statistical, it clearly indicates that there was a marked disruption and decline of slave exports from the major port of the Dahomean kingdom through the period from around 1838-44, at precisely the time when the palm oil trade first emerged as a significant factor in Dahomean trade.

In the mid-1830's, the slave trade at Whydah was still being carried on with "great activity".⁹ By 1842, however, several observers testified before the British Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa that the export trade in slaves had diminished considerably,¹⁰ and by 1844 da Souza himself, while still continuing to export and receive income from the Trade,¹¹ was bemoaning the unprofitability of his formerly lucrative profession.¹²

Other, more specific, evidence from the coast supports these general statements. Bouet-Willaumez, who visited the port in 1838, reported that the operation of the slave trade was being perceptibly displaced at Whydah towards Lagos and areas to the east of Dahomey.¹³ Two years later, according to British trading authorities on the Gold Coast, Whydah was suffering along with the Oil Rivers from the general move of the slave trade towards more southerly ports.¹⁴

It was this trend which was confirmed by a number of observers presenting evidence to the British 1842 Select Committee, notably Clegg and Swanzey - both familiar with recent events on the Coast. They commented on the decline of the Whydah slave trade in recent years, from around 1837, and remarked upon both the small number of visiting ships and the fall in the price of slaves.¹⁵ It is worth pointing out, however, that one of them believed that while the actual export of slaves from Whydah had decreased, large numbers were still being brought to the port from the interior.¹⁶

Régis, the French Merchant, similarly commented on the decline of the slave trade, although placing the start of the decline a little later, around 1841.¹⁷ But Régis' chronology was probably influenced by his

own establishment of a permanent on-shore base for palm oil on the Dahomean coast in that year.

By 1844, another French visitor to Whydah could comment that despite the fact that the Trade continued unabated - indeed was developing in other parts of the West Coast - the Trade at Whydah itself was much reduced. He himself had seen the formerly full slave barracoons lying empty in testimony to its demise.¹⁸

Finally the following year, yet another observer again attributed the extension of the palm oil trade at Whydah to the vigorous blockade of that part of the Coast by Britain.¹⁹

Thus, the evidence from first hand reports from Dahomey itself and the testimony of those best qualified to estimate the general state of the slave trade from the kingdom seems sufficiently consistent to indicate that the slave trade at Whydah was severely disrupted and in decline during the period c.1837-1844.

DA SOUZA AND THE CAUSES OF THE DECLINE

David Ross has already gone as far as to indicate what he believes were the specific reasons for the fall in the Trade in the late 1830s and 1840s. According to Ross, bad financial management, incompetence, long delays and credit unworthiness of Francisco Felix da Souza had finally come home to roost.²⁰ He argues that "Whydah's difficulties were, in fact, almost solely due to da Souza's incompetence and over-optimism."²¹ As a result, da Souza was eventually demoted to the level of a Dahomean functionary, levying a tax at a rate of 1 doubloon per slave on those exported by other merchants.²² In fact, this

appears to be a misinterpretation on Ross's part. What Hutton appears to indicate is that da Souza stopped shipping slaves. A doubloon seems to be not a tax as such, but da Souza's profit on the slaves which he sold.²³

Moreover, the evidence relating to the causal relationship between the decline of da Souza and the decline of the slave trade at Whydah is at least open to a different interpretation.

For one thing, the recurrent testimony of visitors, even those opposed to da Souza's chosen profession - as to his politeness, correctness, civility and financial honesty, stands ill at ease with the characterisation of financial incompetence and unsavoury business reputation implied by the Ross thesis.²⁴

Secondly, his "demotion" is open to question. Such a move could just as well have been designed to compensate da Souza for a fall in income resulting from the decline of the slave trade for reasons outwith his control or as part of a general decentralisation of the export trade in slaves necessitated by the conditions of the late 1830s, or both. Indeed, in those conditions, such a move may have been designed to secure economic advantage, rather than to indicate social disgrace.

Furthermore, the fact - remarked upon by Ross himself - that it was the relatives and friends of da Souza to whom Gezo initially turned in an attempt - unsuccessful as it turned out - to revive the slave trade - is revealing. Given that these were the very people on whom da Souza himself could, and very probably did, call upon for support in his financial dealings, they would represent a peculiar choice for a monarch supposedly attempting to remedy a situation caused by da Souza himself.

In fact it is more likely that their geographical dispersion was the key to their entry into the slave trade, as a result of the enforced decentralisation of the trade through factors largely unrelated to da Souza.

It is also noteworthy that da Souza himself continued until the end of the period at present under consideration - c. 1844 - to receive slaves for export from Gezo. In late 1843 and early 1844, for instance, he was in receipt of 800 slaves from the king.²⁵ This is a much lower figure than formerly, perhaps, and certainly part of a by now increasingly less profitable Trade.²⁶ Nevertheless, he was still receiving large numbers of slaves from the king and exporting slaves to a far greater extent than other Whydah merchants. In the same year, 1844, Dos Santos, for instance, managed to export only a total of 27 slaves.²⁷ Additionally, da Souza's credit-worthiness was still sufficiently good around 1844 for him to be receiving dispatches of bullion from Latin America.²⁸

De Souza's fortunes were in decline. And no doubt his own financial and social style contributed towards his further decline. But it is unlikely that he was the major, "almost the sole" cause of the trade misfortunes which both he and the main Dahomean port suffered from the end of the 1830s for the next few years.

Rather, the reverse is true. Da Souza's ostentatious and free-spending lifestyle made political sense; indeed they were politically indispensable for him and were economically compatible with his position during the thriving years of the slave trade. It only amounted to incompetence thereafter, in so far as the decline of the

Trade - arising largely from factors outside da Souza's control - squeezed his income and profit margins. It was the decline of the export trade which ruined da Souza, rather than the reverse.

GENERAL CAUSES OF THE DECLINE

One of the main impediments to the health of the Whydah slave trade in the second half of the 1830s was the increased activity and aggression of the anti-slavery squadron, a point which was noted by contemporary commentators.²⁹ Perhaps the most ostentatious manifestation of the new anti-slavery drive was the destruction of the slave baraccons in the Gallinas.³⁰ Although direct naval action was taken against Whydah at least once,³¹ direct activity of this nature was largely inappropriate at Whydah and most other parts of the leeward section of the coast.³² But Whydah did not remain unaffected, and the consequences of the squadron's activity have sometimes been under-estimated.³³

The main demand for Whydah slaves came through the medium of the Latin American connection, from Cuba and Brazil, the Trade being carried out mainly by Portuguese, Spanish and Brazilians. Despite the actions of the squadron, such traffic had largely eluded their grasp up until the mid-1830s. In part, this stemmed from the unsuitable and cumbersome nature of the the squadron's vessels compared to those of the speed conscious slave merchants. But from around this period more effective ships, sometimes old slavers themselves, were put into service by the Royal Navy for the pursuit of slavers.³⁴

More importantly, however, the squadron had previously been hindered by the overpowering burden of proof placed upon them to justify the

retention of suspected shipping. In practice, non-British shipping could only be detained by the squadron where slaves were actually found on board.³⁵ Prior to the introduction of what has been termed an "equipment clause", a slaver could remain immune from the squadron by remaining empty in port until sunset, then loading with slaves and making off during the day. Thus, the slaver could circumvent the cruiser and make safely off with a cargo.³⁶

In the event of being sighted with slaves on board prior to leaving Whydah, the shippers could attempt to disembark them again onto Whydah beach, and sometimes did so with success.³⁷ Even in the period after 1816, when the Portuguese slave trade was outlawed north of the line, the opportunity for slave exports from Dahomey had continued largely unabated because of the difficulties in catching the slavers with slaves aboard.

The "equipment clause" was first incorporated in the 1835 British Treaty with Spain and from the mid-1830s it featured in all anti-slave treaties between Europeans and Americans. The range of items covered was comprehensive, and those specifically mentioned included hatches with open gratings, spare planks for the construction of slave decks, slave irons, coppers for mass cooking, any extraordinary number of water casks, or other receptacles for holding large amounts of liquid.³⁸ In short, the equipment necessary for the carriage and survival of their reluctant human cargoes.

Even more importantly, after repeated and largely unsuccessful pressure on the Portuguese authorities the British Parliament, in August 1839, unilaterally authorised its squadron to detain Portuguese ships

suspected of involvement in the Trade on the basis of the above clause, and it empowered its Vice-Admiralty Courts to condemn such vessels.³⁹ By the end of that year, the British authorities on the West Coast were being given orders to implement the new instructions.⁴⁰

While the lack of reliable statistics as to the total number of slave shipments make it difficult to estimate the precise effect of the new anti-slavery drive by the British, the steep escalation in insurance premiums for the Trade testified to the increasing hazards of shipping slaves.⁴¹

Much of the value of the enhanced efficiency of the anti-slavery drive lay in its deterrent effect. It is not the case, for instance, that large numbers of slave ships from Whydah were taken by the squadron during these years.⁴² However, in view of the new power given to the squadron against Portuguese vessels, Whydah, a port reputed above all others north of the line for its involvement in the Trade, was among the most hazardous from which to export, and one of the most closely watched.

Nevertheless, the increased effectiveness of the anti-slavery squadron does not, on its own, account for the differential shift in slave exports from Whydah to other coastal ports.

To some extent Whydah suffered from its reputation. Just as the prohibition of the Trade had helped push European traders to the eastern territories of the West Coast,⁴³ so too the increased capacity for intervention by the squadron pushed a proportion of the trade from Whydah and the other most infamous slave ports.⁴⁴ Prior to 1839 slave ships docking in double figures at Whydah had not been an uncommon sight.⁴⁵ From 1839 this was no longer practical or possible; it would have been

little more than an invitation to financial suicide on the part of the slave dealers.

The port's reputation was not its only disadvantage. The shipment of slaves from Whydah required the use of canoes which had to be procured from the Gold Coast with the commensurate risk of alerting the British authorities there. Within months of the passing of the 1839 legislation, the Gold Coast authorities were being instructed to detain vessels equipped for involvement in the Trade,⁴⁶ and despite their misgivings about the legality of the instructions and their reluctance to detain the ships, they were in an excellent position to inform the squadron of suspected slavers bound for Whydah.⁴⁷

To some extent also, Whydah suffered from a decline in demand from one of its traditional customers - Cuba - in the late 1830s and early 1840s.⁴⁸ The Cuban trade was undergoing a restriction for internal reasons. The excessive importation of slaves into Havannah in the previous few years had fuelled fears of a slave insurrection, and the local authorities had placed obstacles in the way of new expeditions.⁴⁹ Slave revolts in Haiti and in Bahia a few years previously⁵⁰ may have stiffened their resolve. In any case during this period Cuban imports declined markedly, falling from an estimated 25000 in 1839 to 1500 in 1847.⁵¹

To a certain extent also, the shift in emphasis by Brazilian ships from Whydah to Lagos was part of a longer term pattern which was accelerated by the conditions of the late 1830s. Brazilian trade with the Costa da Mina had reached a peak c.1770-75 and from then on had tended to drift to the east.⁵² At the end of the 1830s this trend

appears to have become more pronounced. In 1838-9, for instance, Bouet remarked on the stiff competition being offered to the Whydah Trade by Lagos and places to the east, and commented on the decline of the Whydah trade. Other sources indicate a shift southwards to the detriment of Whydah and other ports on the Bights.⁵³

There may have been one further reason for the decline of the Whydah trade in this period. In 1844 a French visitor, De Monleon, remarked upon the emptiness of the barracoons and the lack of ready slave stocks at Whydah,⁵⁴ a description which stands in marked contrast to reports of the situation prior to the late 30s.⁵⁵ This was partly the result of the decentralisation of the trade which occurred during this period,⁵⁶ but De Monleon's comments were confirmed the following year by Bouet who also remarked that slaves were in short supply at the port, much to the despair of both the Dahomeans and the traders. Bouet ascribed the shortage to the hostilities among the peoples of the interior.⁵⁷ In the absence of further contemporary details any conclusions must be tentative, but it seems possible that the hinterland supply difficulties may have been related to the war against the Anago people, between Mahi and Dahomey, reported by Duncan as having taken place around 1839.⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Duncan indicates that the conquest of Mahi itself was provoked by attacks on Dahomean traders.⁵⁹ It is possible therefore, that the Dahoméans were experiencing difficulties in obtaining slaves through trade because of interference with their hinterland supply routes.

Additionally, it may be that the Dahomeans experienced a diminished capacity to procure through raiding because of the decreased

vulnerability of their traditional raiding grounds, in particular the Egba who had in the past provided rich pickings for Dahomean slave raiding. Indeed the rise of the military and political power of Abeokuta might well have had the triple effect of reducing slave supplies to Dahomey from the north by offering an alternative commercial network, cutting off Dahomean raiding grounds including the Egba themselves and drawing slave ships away from a thus disrupted market towards one at Lagos through which the Egba slave trade - including part of the supplies formerly reaching Dahomey - was directed.

The Egba constituted a rising state in the proximity to a crumbling polity, Oyo; either of these characteristics has been suggested by Curtin as a commercial magnet to slave ships.⁶⁰ Both of them combined provided a double attraction to slavers to the detriment of nearby ports. The attraction of a ready and steady supply would have been powerful even under normal circumstances; in the hazardous conditions prevailing immediately after 1839, with a quick turnaround and an assured cargo essential, they were even more potent and stimulated the drift towards Lagos to the detriment of Whydah.

RESPONSE OF SLAVERS TO NEW CONDITIONS

Those involved in the Dahomean slave trade did not remain passive victims of the new situation in the late 1830s. The slave dealers and shippers attempted to adapt the Trade, and to overcome the new obstacles placed in front of them. West Coast slave traders had, of course, to some extent already done so since the outlawing of the Trade by the major European nations,⁶¹ but such adaptations were now more necessary than ever before.

At the time of the introduction of the Equipment Clause in the treaty with Spain, for instance, Spanish vessels engaged in the trade through Whydah could immediately render themselves immune to its worst effects by the simple expedient of calling at Princes Island and there obtaining Portuguese papers.⁶² If a Spanish vessel claiming to be Portuguese had the Bill of Sale on board, or even a Portuguese clearance without any Bill, she could not be seized, no matter if her crew and captain were Spanish, or even if her original papers were found on board.⁶³

For a period prior to the adoption of unilateral action by the British on Portuguese vessels, similar methods were employed by the Portuguese shippers, who tended to adopt Peruvian or other colours.⁶⁴ Along the coast as a whole, shackles, irons, extra water casks and other incriminating equipment would be dropped off on first arrival at the port whence the slaves were to be lifted;⁶⁵ the slaver might then cruise at leisure until the cargo had been assembled. Necessity bred ingenuity. Even palm oil was employed in subterfuge, since it floated on water and thus provided a camouflage for water casks.

These minor refinements, adopted all along the coast, had little effect on the essential nature of Whydah trade. This was not true, however, of every method of adaptation employed by the slave dealers. Some measures effected to ensure the survival of the Dahomean slave trade required changes in the structure of the trade which were incompatible with its previously centralised, monopolistic and geographically confined form. In this sense, they probably affected Whydah more than anywhere else on the Western Slave Coast, and provided a more difficult transition.

Perhaps the most important change forced on the structure of the Dahomean slave trade was the necessity of using the whole coastline, rather than just the main port of Whydah, for the shipment of slaves. Freeman has left us the best, brief description of the procedures involved in shipment in the early 1840s:

"When the dealers learn . . . that one of their vessels is at hand, and that a cruiser is also on any part of the coast . . . they watch for an opportunity . . . sometimes for several days . . . and when any point can be pronounced clear, slaves are hastened along the Lagoon, or down, or up the plain between the Lagoon and the beach, and several large canoes, well manned, glide down or up, inshore, just outside the breakers, to the point decided upon; signals are made; the vessel stands in for a few hours, takes in her cargo, and sets off in triumph."⁶⁶

As Freeman also pointed out, it was physically as easy to ship slaves from any point along the coast, miles distant from any of the major towns like Whydah or Lagos.⁶⁷ This was particularly necessary for Dahomey, whose main port was an infamous entrepot for the trade, and where there was a British presence in the person of Hutton. At Badagry, for instance, the mere sighting of a British flag was sufficient to send an arriving slave ship on her way again; but it is worth noting that although shipments of slaves at the latter port largely ceased, it too was still used as a base and a market for the Trade with slaves being dispatched from there to other points on the coast for shipment.⁶⁸

The increased vigilance of the squadron, and the consequent delays and uncertainties of shipping times had a further detrimental effect in rendering prohibitive the cost of retaining a large stock of slaves in the Whydah barracoons, particularly if the costs had to be borne by one person.⁶⁹ The alternative to such high costs was an increased

percentage loss through death in the barracoons. Such considerations may well partly account for the empty barracoons referred to earlier.⁷⁰

Though export shipments from Whydah decreased in this period, the port continued to play a central role in the Dahomean trade in another respect. The arrival of slave ships on the West Coast outside Dahomean territory generally entailed the disembarkation of only the slaver's equipment - for reasons referred to earlier - or at most the light cargo along with the Captain or the Supercargo who arranged the barter and shipping times.⁷¹ At Whydah alone, the whole cargo had to be landed along with the ships' representative who made the necessary arrangements while the slaver cruised out of the port to avoid detection by the squadron.⁷²

Indeed there is evidence that during this period at Whydah the ship carrying the cargo might even return home, to be followed, sometimes at several months interval depending on the availability and facility of shipping slaves, before a second ship - the slaver proper - returned for its human cargo.⁷³ This procedure minimised the possibility of detention by the squadron; it avoided the necessity to retain large numbers of slaves in the Whydah barracoons; and, when combined with the carriage of gold specie as a proportion of the cargo, it allowed a rapid turn-around by the slaver when she finally returned to the Dahomean coast to make the shipment. Without such adjustments to the Trade, shipment from ports like Whydah would have been extremely hazardous; with them the embarkation of up to 1000 slaves could be completed at the port in a day.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, it did have its disadvantages for the shipper, since at Whydah a cargo, once landed - and as we have seen the whole cargo had to be - it could not be removed.⁷⁵ To avoid the risk of detention by the squadron, therefore, the shipper had to forego the possibility of flexibility and incur the risk of delays or non-appearance of his expected slaves without the surety of the return of his own cargo. This can hardly have been the most attractive choice with which to have been faced for the privilege of trading at Whydah.

Nevertheless, occasional shipments - and large ones - were still made from the port. In April 1840 it was reported, admittedly on hearsay evidence, that 3000 slaves had been shipped over a period of eight days some time previously.⁷⁶ More reliably, Baudin, who visited the port in January 1843, indicated that 1500 slaves had been shipped from Whydah during that month, and two other vessels on their way to pick up more had been detained by the squadron.⁷⁷ It is significant that these two reports refer to large shipments from the port in the first quarter of the year, at the normal time of the King's return from the annual raid, and when stocks of captives at Abomey would have been at their highest, delivery assured and 'storage' subsistence costs minimised.

Thus it is clear that slave shipments from Whydah did not cease altogether. But in general, decentralisation of embarkation points was required if the trade was to survive. Such decentralisation not only entailed geographical diffusion, but also the involvement of greater numbers of personnel to maintain the Trade. Large numbers of canoes and canoemen were required to achieve flexibility of shipping locations via the lagoons, and the use of a body of 'spies' was needed to ascertain

movements of the cruisers along the coast and the arrival and position of the slavers themselves.⁷⁸

More importantly, the difficulties of shipment led to the increased use of agents along the coast of Dahomey and the area under its political control,⁷⁹ and to an expansion of the number of slave dealers at Whydah itself. The former were required to procure and hold slaves for shipment, and the need for the latter arose out of the increased risks and complexity of the trade.

Thus the available statistics may give a misleading impression as regards the trends in the Dahomean export economy in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Statistics on ship movements and prices on the Latin American side of the equation fail to distinguish between differences within the area of the Slave Coast as a whole. Statistics from the European side, relating to the capture and detention of slave ships, or the lack of them, can lead to an underestimation of the effect of the more aggressive British policy, and the consequent changes it wrought on the Dahomean trade. Throughout the period of the late 1830's and early 1840's the Dahomean slave trade was undergoing radical changes; changes which were all the more important and significant because of the extremely centralised slave export structure which had hitherto existed.⁸⁰

But the individuals involved were largely the victims of the decline of the slave trade at Whydah rather than the main causes. Physical dispersal, increased risk factors, greater storage costs of slaves awaiting shipping opportunities, increased direct costs - especially insurance and double shipping - were all inconsistent with the previous

virtual one-man monopoly which had prevailed in the export sector.⁸¹ Additionally, the increased activity of the squadron, a fall in demand from Cuba, the port's reputation, and possibly occasional interruptions to the supply or procurement of slaves from a neighbour rapidly growing in political and military might, and the more limited opportunities for large-scale shipments from Whydah, had their effect in a decline in the absolute number of slaves exported from the Kingdom. Cruickshank's estimate of 8000 slave exports per annum from the kingdom, made in the late 1840s and applied to the previous decade,⁸² may have been near the mark in the second half of the 'forties, but is almost certainly inaccurate for the late 1830s and early 1840s.

Such a decline had far reaching implications for the Dahomean economy. Quite apart from the fall in income to the main personnel involved in the slave trade, the Trade itself had been the main medium through which the domestic currency - the cowrie - was replenished. By 1844-5, the kingdom and neighbouring areas appear to have been suffering from a serious shortage of cowries.⁸³

This account of the period during which palm oil exports began to reach significant proportions at Whydah differs from the conclusions reached by Bernard Schnapper who regards the suppression attempts as of little consequence for the slave trade, and the take-off of palm oil occurring at a period when the slave trade was thriving, by plugging into the slave trade circuit.⁸⁴ Although there is some truth in the idea of plugging into the slave trade circuit, the evidence from the coast itself does not support Schnapper's general thesis.

This is mainly because he deals with the period 1838-48 as a whole. He points out that slave prices in Brazil and Cuba were high and increasing throughout this period, largely on account of the increased demand for tropical produce and, therefore, slave labour.⁸⁵ This may have been partly the reason, but the primary evidence from the West Coast suggests that it may also have been the result of demand outstripping supply, because of the difficulties of obtaining slave shipments. Moreover, slave imports into Cuba were actually falling around 1840 due to prohibition of the trade. Schnapper's conclusions are more applicable to the second half of the 1840's.

Schnapper is correct in suggesting that palm oil was used as a substitute for specie, though perhaps not for the reasons which he suggests.⁸⁶ From the Dahomean point of view, gold was undoubtedly important, not only in terms of its value, but also as a means of exchange for European manufactured produce.⁸⁷ But slave purchasers, on the other hand, preferred other, more profitable commodities.⁸⁸ In the less hazardous conditions of the early 1830s for instance, a South American slaver bound for Whydah carried along with tobacco, rum, musket powder and Manchester cottons.⁸⁹ Specie had been introduced primarily for the purposes of effecting a quicker turn-around in the increasingly difficult conditions of the decade from 1835.⁹⁰ While the percentage of any given cargo composed of specie should not be over-estimated,⁹¹ it played a disproportionately important role as a means of exchange acceptable to European merchants. From the late 1830's, however, palm oil was increasingly employed as a substitute exchange commodity for specie, partly, as will be argued later, because of its attraction to

hard pressed slave merchants. While this may not afford a complete explanation for the change, there seems little doubt that the imports of gold specie did decline.⁹² The resultant dearth of a commodity allowing access by the Dahomean rulers to socially prestigious western goods necessitated a substitute means of exchange acceptable to western merchants. The substitute was found in palm oil, unofficially at first, and later officially accorded royal approval and encouragement.

Equally important in the stimulus to palm oil was the absolute decline in the income of the Dahomean government and their main trading agent, da Souza, because of the decline in slave exports, low prices,⁹³ and the enforced decentralisation of the slave trade. In the first instance that income was to be gained through taxation of the oil produce exported rather than by direct involvement in production.

PALM OIL EXPORTS FROM c.1838-1850

It was thus during this period of decline in slave exports and deterioration in the prospects of the Trade that the first significant strides were taken in the palm export commerce.

Hutton established himself at Whydah in 1838.⁹⁴ Régis, probably more important for the early trade, did so a little later. Régis had been dispatching ships to Dahomey from about 1832; these had operated from the ship rather than an onshore base. As late as March 1840, in fact, Régis had rejected the idea of establishing an onshore base at Whydah as being too expensive for the expected returns.⁹⁵ But just over a year later, prompted by fears of threatened competition from the neighbouring Bordeaux mercantile class,⁹⁶ Régis applied for permission

to use the old French fort at Whydah as a factory for the palm oil trade.⁹⁷ He received conditional acceptance about three months later,⁹⁸ and dispatched his agent to the Dahomean coast.

While statistics are available for both prices and imports of palm oil from the west coast into some European countries, no series of reliable data is available as regards exports from Dahomey prior to the period of colonisation. It is necessary, therefore, to treat figures on prices and exports with some caution. Like the comments on prices later in this work, several caveats apply. The comments on exports are often of an extremely general nature, the method of computation was unreliable, often the figures for Dahomey are included along with other ports in the Bight of Benin and they were generally derived from enlightened 'guesstimates' by officials placed at Lagos or other places where a European administration was better established.

Even where estimates are available from European merchants actually stationed in Dahomey they have to be seen in the light of the latter's eagerness to impress or persuade their governments on the importance - or gravity - of the trade situation and thereby foster support for their own commercial ends.

Nevertheless some attempt can be made to estimate the general trends in the export of palm oil, especially from Whydah, in order to be able to establish the framework within which political developments were taking place. The same quantitative assumptions have been used in interpreting the data provided in the sources as is used in the later section on palm oil prices.⁹⁹

It has been indicated earlier that the Dahomean palm oil export trade, which reached significant proportions around the 1830's, was preceded by almost two centuries of external trade during which palm oil had featured, albeit as a secondary commodity.¹⁰⁰ But the first recorded figures of the specific volume exported from the kingdom derive from the period immediately prior to the establishment of permanent palm oil factories at Whydah by Western European merchants. In the five year period from 1832 until 1837 the French merchant Régis estimated that not more than a total of 20 tons (50 barriques) had been exported from the port.¹⁰¹

Cruickshank's estimate of 50 tons exported for 1838,¹⁰² one of the years encompassed by the above quinquennium, would suggest a five year figure higher than that of Régis, but nevertheless an annual total of the same fairly insignificant order. Cruickshank's estimate was made some years later, when the upsurge in palm oil exports from Whydah may, in retrospect, have tended to diminish the volume of the late 1830s exports in order to maximise the achievement and benefits of British commercial encroachment.

In the early 1840s palm oil exports from the port began to climb, slowly, but perceptibly. In 1841 Régis Frères managed to procure and ship 20 tons on their own account, claiming it as the first legal exports from Whydah.¹⁰³ While this was undoubtedly an exaggeration, Régis did play a major role in systematizing the collection and export of the product, and by the following year had expanded their shipments to around 100 tons.¹⁰⁴

It was at this stage that Gezo embarked upon a policy of open encouragement of the production of palm oil for export, and the early 1840s marked the first significant advance in the export trade.¹⁰⁵ By 1843 Hutton could dispatch six vessels fully laden with oil,¹⁰⁶ and Régis alone increased his exports from about 250 to about 400 tons of the product. (1100 futailles).¹⁰⁷ The success and sustained growth in the trade over the previous few years encouraged the latter merchant to confidently predict that his own factory could export over 1000 tons of oil within a year¹⁰⁸ (2000 pipes of 6 Hectolitres each). It is uncertain whether he actually attained his forecasts, but his exports were certainly sustained at hundreds of tons.¹⁰⁹

One of the results of the establishment of onshore facilities was a greater physical capacity for the collection and storage of oil. This reduced the turn around time for vessels and increased opportunity for obtaining full cargoes. By 1845 it was possible for a single visiting ship to embark with 80 tons of oil, equivalent to the annual output from the port a decade before.¹¹⁰ As the load per ship increased, so too did the range of visiting nationalities. By 1845 the range of national colours in the Whydah Roads included French American, English, Prussian and Sardinian.¹¹¹ By 1846, Hutton reported that his Whydah factory alone could supply 8 to 10 ships with palm oil.¹¹²

Part of the increased supply of oil emanated from the re-entry into the trade of the slave trader extraordinaire, da Souza; the latter, who had earlier dropped participation as economically unworthy of his attentions, was again heavily involved for a time in the mid-1840's; in 1846, for instance, he loaded five ships with palm oil at Whydah.¹¹³

The growth in the oil export trade was sustained in the second half of the 1840s, possibly quadrupling in size,¹¹⁴ and the number of ships calling at Whydah for palm oil at any one time might now run into double figures, a phenomenon unknown several years before.¹¹⁵ Hutton's estimate of 1000 tons by 1848 is probably too low, but indicates the general trend.¹¹⁶ Cruickshank's informants in 1848 put the quantity of oil exported from Whydah at in excess of 2000 tons (4000 puncheons).¹¹⁷

By 1850 Régis was shipping over 1200 tons of oil per annum through Whydah, and optimistically predicted further rapid expansion barring extraordinary circumstances.¹¹⁸ The European on-shore trading bases were by now well established, ensuring that an adequate flow of oil was available for consecutive ships.¹¹⁹

Exact coastal prices prior to the colonial period cannot be determined with any great degree of accuracy because of the lack of corroboration in all except very rare cases, and also because of the loose use of, and varying value attributed to, the quantitative terminology employed by coastal observers and traders.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, it is possible to obtain a general picture of palm oil prices in the Dahomey area throughout our period from primary sources on the coast.

The attempt to reach a common denominator in terms of weight and price for purposes of comparison is complicated by cowrie inflation. Fortunately, few of the prices quoted were indicated in cowrie values alone: they were given in pounds, dollars, marks etc. The general pattern as indicated by primary sources is as undernoted:

<u>Location.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Month</u>	<u>Price per ton.</u>	
Bonny	c1825		£1:17:6s-£2:5s	(121)
W. Coast	1837		£8:0:0	(122)
Bonny	c1842		£16:5s-£22:10s	(123)
Agoué	1843		£22:10s	(124)
Whydah	1846	April	£11:5s (\$50)	(125)
Whydah	1846	April	£26:6s (\$117)	(126)
Whydah	1850	May	£22:10s(\$100)	(127)
Whydah	1851		£22:10s(\$108)*	(128)
Whydah	1852		£29:18s(\$133)*	(129)
Whydah	1852	Jan	£29:18s(\$133)	(130)
Whydah	1852	Jan	£45:0:0(\$200)	(131)
Whydah	c1853-5		£22.10s	(132)
Porto Novo	1854	May	£50:0:0	(133)
Porto Novo	1854	Dec	£22:10s(\$100)	(134)
Porto Novo	1857		£42:0:0	(135)
Whydah	1857		£22:10s	(136)
Whydah	1858		£22:10s	(137)
Porto Novo	1865		£30:0:0	(138)
Whydah	1876		£22:10s	(139)
Whydah	1876/7		c.£24.(600francs)	(140)
Whydah	1878		c.£21.(540francs)	(141)

The striking and most obvious fact which arises from a compilation of the price of palm oil as reported by diverse nationalities in terms of various currencies is the stability of palm oil prices at Whydah, and in particular the re-occurrence of the specific palm oil price of £22:10s. per ton, sterling equivalent - or multiple of that figure - which is evident from the West Coast evidence. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the export price for palm oil was centrally regulated and not market determined in a direct or simple way. It therefore appears that, despite whatever deficiencies there may be in Polanyi's thesis of

Dahomey as an 'archaic economy', there is sufficient evidence to suggest the predominance of political regulation as regards prices in the export sector.¹⁴³

The relative benefits to the Dahomean producer of palm oil - particularly the large scale producer using slave labour - may, in fact, have been decreasing, since the rate of increase in the exchange of cowries against palm oil/western currencies appears to have been going up at a lower rate than the internal inflation rate as regards, say, subsistence. This is discussed more fully elsewhere in considering the costs of production and transportation from the interior.

OFFICIAL SPONSORSHIP OF THE OIL TRADE

Thus the take-off of the palm oil trade coincided with a particularly severe recession in the Dahomean slave trade in the decade 1835-1845. While the decline of the slave trade was largely outside the control of the Dahomean authorities, the tolerance and latterly the sponsorship of the growth of the palm oil trade was very much within their control. Indeed, prompted by the effect of the decline of the slave trade on their own income, the monarchy appeared to have played a prominent part in sustaining and encouraging the growth of the export trade in legitimate commerce.

Such sponsorship was necessary. Up until the early years of the 1840's the palm oil trade from Dahomey remained in its infancy. To some extent the establishment of shore bases by Régis, and Hutton before him, facilitated collection and helped to stimulate the trade. In July 1841, Régis asked, and was granted permission by the French Government, to use

the old French Fort at Whydah for the purpose of establishing a palm-oil factory on shore.¹⁴⁴ By 1843, when the French officer Baudin visited Whydah, palm oil could be found there in abundance.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless in terms of income, even by this date the growing oil trade did not approximate towards an adequate substitute for the badly disrupted slave trade. From the Dahomean point of view the latter still provided the only large scale access to western manufactured goods, via the slave dealers, while palm oil was mainly exchanged directly with the European traders for cowries.¹⁴⁶

These parallel channels of production for slaves and palm oil were, in themselves, an obstacle to the further growth of the trade, since up until the early 1840's palm oil - the means of commercial linkage between the export of slaves and the import of western goods - tended to be produced by parties outside the main slave producers, and exchanged directly with European firms.¹⁴⁷ The actual shipment of the oil was further hindered by the physical difficulties of transportation from the factories to the beach and from there aboard the ships.¹⁴⁸

So far as the central government was concerned, its leading constituents were constrained from direct involvement in the production of palm oil or other agricultural produce for export: farming for export was at odds with the enshrined warrior ideology.¹⁴⁹ And, the absence of any hitherto significant level of palm oil export up until the late 1830s had left the export produce free from any specific export dues to the central exchequer (as opposed to the more general import dues which were levied by negotiation on cargoes disembarked).

Up until 1843 then, the scale of oil exports, the constraints on aristocratic involvement in production, obstacles to the extent to which either the slave dealers or the European merchants could expand the trade, and the absence of fiscal regulation rendered the palm oil trade of relatively minor importance to the Dahomean monarchy.

But not of minor interest. For the potential of the trade must have been obvious to both the Dahomean authorities and the slave dealers, and certainly was to the palm oil merchants themselves. In the early 1840s, all three groups of these were involved in initiatives designed to harness that potential for their own economic ends.

None more so than the Dahomean monarchy. Gezo, faced with a declining and disrupted slave trade through the Kingdom's chief port, turned to the only available alternative means of income and access to prestigious western goods.

In the early 1840's he launched an initiative to encourage the cultivation of agriculture inside Dahomey.¹⁵⁰ The scale of this enterprise is unclear, although it is possible that it was part of the same package of measures which included the enticement to freed slaves to return to Dahomey and undertake agricultural production.¹⁵¹ But it is clear that the production of palm oil played a central role in these initiatives. In 1843 Gezo promulgated a series of decrees intended to increase the production of oil, to encourage and further facilitate the export trade, and to maximise, by fiscal means, the benefits therefrom to the central exchequer.

Although the public statement no doubt marked the culmination of internal discussion the official proclamation of the King's initiatives

resulted directly from his 1843 meeting with Régis' agent Brue, a meeting which was facilitated by da Souza.

The most significant aspect of the visit was that the official recognition extended to the trade by Gezo on behalf of the Dahomean authorities marked the culmination of the development of the organised oil trade in Dahomey from around 1832. Such recognition was no empty or abstract gesture. It had powerful implications for the oil trade and the position of the oil traders. Régis' agent was thereby entitled to use the old French fort. But, more importantly, Régis also obtained the rights - as well as duties - of the fort's former French inhabitants,¹⁵² thus gaining not only a more suitable on-shore establishment, but also rights over the old 'French' village in Whydah.¹⁵³ It thus overcame some of the previously daunting problems of oil transportation and shipment,¹⁵⁴ by allowing access to and control over the labour rights of the village inhabitants.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, official recognition by the sovereign provided safeguards for the new factory against the thefts and fire-raising from which it had hitherto suffered.¹⁵⁶

On the production side, the monarchy and central authorities still remained aloof from actual production of oil for export. Nevertheless, Gezo's proclamation was judiciously designed to maximise the yield of those who were so engaged. Apart from the general exhortation implicit in his recognition of the oil trade, several specific instructions were issued, decreeing that the Oil Palm be carefully tended.¹⁵⁷

In particular, the young trees were to be cleared of shrubs which surrounded them.¹⁵⁸ This apparently innocuous declaration was, in

fact, far more significant than it appears, for the procedure has considerable implications for the yield of the Oil Palm.

Firstly, by removing the parasitic plants around the young trees the soil nutrition - and therefore the growth of seedlings - was enhanced.¹⁵⁹ In addition, the clearing of undergrowth between the Oil Palms greatly enhanced their yield in terms of palm fruit, resulting in increased weight and numbers of bunches: to obtain the best results from Palm groves the prolific growth of creepers, weeds and useless vegetation had to be cleared away.¹⁶⁰

Secondly, clearing of the undergrowth surrounding the trees protected the Oil Palms from damage or destruction which might result from the periodical firing of fields which was part of the agricultural cycle.¹⁶¹

Such practices had long been known in Dahomey. But by underlining the agricultural utility of the methods themselves by giving them the status of royal proclamation, Gezo indicated his serious intent to extend the production of oil, and his willingness to employ legislation, backed by the authority of the Dahomean government towards that end.

Nor were the instructions limited to narrow 'economic' guidelines. The Oil Palm itself was declared 'Fetish', and as such, was to generally enjoy protection from destruction.¹⁶² The phenomenon of some species of Oil Palms being reserved to a class of Fetishers is not uncommon in West Africa.¹⁶³ But the Dahomean regulations went much further than this: it was a general regulation, applying to all species, and protecting all Oil Palms rather than reserving their usufruct to a priestly caste. The decrees were backed by the full force of Dahomean law: anyone destroying or felling the oil palm did so at the risk of

incurring the most severe penalties.¹⁶⁴ The object was to preserve the Palm and encourage the widespread use of its fruit, rather than curtail it to a certain group.

The use of the Oil Palm was, however, to be limited in one sense. The most widespread threat to the longevity of the Oil Palm in Dahomey derived from its function as provider of alcoholic beverage for the population. The Dahomean method of producing palm wine entailed the actual felling of the tree,¹⁶⁵ and, as such, the practice was a prime target for prohibition by anyone wishing to maximise the useful life of the plant.

It is arguably no coincidence that the first reports of the prohibition on Palm Wine arise from visitors at precisely this time. Observers do not agree on the motives behind the prohibition. According to Freeman palm wine making had been prohibited by the monarch because it had been used to excess by many of his subjects who had as a result the tendency to become riotous and noisy.¹⁶⁶ Forbes, some six or seven years later confirmed Freeman's version:

"Foreign liquors are scarce and expensive, and as palm wine is forbidden by the king, the chief drinks are a palatable malt called Pitto, and a sort of Burgoo called Ah-kah-sar. Drunkenness is not allowed, nor is there, except in Whydah, much opportunity for it. As a public example the King kept a drunkard and fed him rum, and exhibited him at the Customs, that his emaciated and disgusting appearance might stop his people from making fools of themselves."¹⁶⁷

Burton preferred the economic interpretation of Gezo's motives, explaining that that since the people "felled the trees like Krumen, they are forbidden by a paternal government, which encourages the growth for making oil, to make it (palm wine) except in the Bush."¹⁶⁸

Burton' remarks were oversimplified, for inordinate consumption of alcohol does appear to have been a source of concern and distaste to the central authorities. Several commentators remarked on the reluctance of the King and leading nobility to consume alcohol in public.¹⁶⁹ Forbes referred to the public display of the King's drunkard, and later Glele, like his father before him was to retain an official drunkard for similar purposes.¹⁷⁰ The same monarch was quick to scathingly criticise the missionary Bernasko for the example set by his drinking habits, remarking - with some substance - that "if the Whiteman's religion makes men drink it be no good."¹⁷¹ This personal attitude on the part of both monarchs may have been prompted or encouraged by the reputed character of Gezo's intended successor, who according to one source, lost his chance of the throne to Glele because of his love of alcohol.¹⁷²

It can be accepted, therefore, that Gezo's prohibition was at least partly inspired by social considerations. But it is difficult to accept that the move was prompted exclusively by a desire to curtail alcoholic consumption.¹⁷³ Alcohol itself continued to be widely available in other forms. Home brewed beer or Pitto, had been in widespread use for many years prior to the period dealt with here,¹⁷⁴ and continued to be so throughout Gezo's reign along with other domestic manufactures.¹⁷⁵ Foreign liquors, although relatively expensive and scarce at mid-century,¹⁷⁶ were becoming more widely consumed throughout Gezo's reign.¹⁷⁷

Palm wine itself continued to be widely available for consumption. In the late 1840's it was sold at Whydah, at around 1d a gallon,¹⁷⁸ and in the 1860's Burton remarked on the tolerable palm wine available at

Henvi, just south of the Agrime swamp.¹⁷⁹ A decade later Skertchly remarked on its sale and use from the southern frontiers of the Dahomean kingdom at Whydah¹⁸⁰ to the northernmost extent of the monarch's power in Mahi country.¹⁸¹ Indeed, so widely available was palm wine, that the Dahomeans declined to satisfy their demand for it by accepting any inferior substitute.¹⁸²

It's clear that the distribution of alcohol - particularly of imported rum - formed one of the main items of conspicuous generosity at the Dahomean Customs each year,¹⁸³ and it's perhaps not surprising that Gezo himself showed considerable interest in the potential for the manufacture of alcohol within Dahomey.¹⁸⁴ His successor displayed some discrimination in his choice of palm wine, favouring exclusively that produced in the area of Henvi-Dorah on the Allada-Abomey route.¹⁸⁵

The continuing availability of alcohol and chronological coincidence of the prohibition with the other measures introduced by Gezo to protect and foster palm oil production suggest that the economic element was not entirely missing from his calculations. Rather, it was merely one among a comprehensive package of measures designed to encourage palm oil production as a financial supplement to a Dahomean exchequer badly hit by disruptions to the Atlantic slave trade.

CURTAILMENT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

Gezo's innovatory adaptations to the economic circumstances of the early 1840s extended beyond measures designed to attract increased domestic production. He attempted also to influence and increase the demand factor as well as the supply, and as such proceeded in attempts to

encourage the establishment of not only factories but formal links with European powers as a means towards combatting competing ports and stabilizing his own export-import sector. Central to this attempt were limited concessions on 'non-economic' aspects of Dahomean society which stood in the way of increased trade with the European nations, and in particular the practice of 'human sacrifice'.

The economic innovations introduced by Gezo around 1843 were prompted primarily not by political considerations or the search for allies, but by economic considerations and the search for a replacement for the disrupted slave trade.

Da Souza, far from standing over and against Gezo and the central Dahomean authorities was similarly affected by the decline in slave trade and was instrumental in persuading the monarch to pursue a course of action beneficial to both the Dahomean ruling class and the slave traders at the Coast. The Dahomean monarch, desperate to revive trade at Whydah, courted England as well as France and Portugal - and no doubt would have acted in the same fashion to anyone else who would have appeared capable of assisting a trade revival, a supply of trade goods and consequent political prestige.

Certainly, the English, or some English, believed that a special relationship existed between themselves and the Dahomean monarch. After all, Gezo assured both Duncan and Cruickshank, for instance, of the special place of England in the heart of the Dahomean state.¹⁸⁶ But Gezo also expressed his special desire that the French come and share the industry and commerce - to the French of course,¹⁸⁷ and on occasions attempted to prompt them into action by pointing out that the English,

their rivals for the favours of Dahomey, had already sent ambassadors to the Dahomean court. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Portuguese also saw themselves - and probably with more justification than the other two - as the most favoured sons of the King.¹⁸⁸ The fact that the European powers regarded themselves in this fashion is more a testimony to Gezo's diplomatic skills than to any special status they merited. Gezo, like any monarch faced with a decreasing and politically important level of trade, attempted to woo diplomatically those whom he regarded of potential benefit economically.

Probably influenced by da Souza, who is known to have been opposed to human sacrifice,¹⁸⁹ and who was from the start in the centre of the new moves designed to stimulate the growth of commerce with the legitimate European traders, Gezo offered some concession on the other major issue which preoccupied the minds of his European visitors - human sacrifice.

The last reported large-scale sacrifice at the Annual Customs coincided with the Dahomean monarchy embarking on the course designed to offset the disruption to the slave trade. There is no evidence to suggest that Gezo ever seriously intended to abolish completely the practice of human sacrifice: what he did commit himself to, and implement, was a reduction in the scale of human sacrifice at Abomey, and limitations upon the practice of it throughout his kingdom.

Moreover, in many ways these limitations were in themselves in the interests of the central authority of the King. They were in general accord with a series of measures designed to ensure centralisation and stability in the Dahomean political structure - for instance, the institution of a standing army, and the creation of a large and

externally recruited Amazon brigade - which had been adopted throughout his reign.

The last large scale human sacrifices of Gezo's reign appear to have taken place at the 1843 Customs. Brue, who was in Abomey at the time, put the total of executions and sacrifices at 'more than one thousand'.¹⁹⁰ It is unfortunate that Brue appears to have based his figures on the numbers of heads or skulls exhibited in Abomey, and it is of course possible that some of these were not recently separated from their unfortunate victims' bodies. Nevertheless, some of them undoubtedly came from recent executions,¹⁹¹ and although Brue himself appears to have witnessed the dispatch of only two 'messengers' to the ancestors,¹⁹² we have to make the rather unpleasant assumption that he was capable of differentiating between recently severed heads and those used in ornamentation in the 1843 festival but derived from more chronologically distant sacrifices: as such, we can assume that, irrespective of the absolute accuracy of Brue's estimate, sacrifices took place on a considerable scale.

This assumption is verified by the testimony of da Souza, who reported in 1843 that apart from the 800 slaves which he had purchased from the King's war stock of 7000 captives, the others had been sacrificed.¹⁹³ Once again, however, extreme caution must be used in the acceptance of such massive figures. Certainly the Dahomeans may have been suffering from difficulties in ridding themselves of war captives through the traditional outlet of the slave trade, but the evidence provided by slave traders themselves, or defenders of the slave trade, had traditionally and systematically emphasised the scale of the

practice, since it afforded a philanthropic justification for the transportation of slaves, thus saving them from their 'inevitable' fate of death.¹⁹⁴

Nevertheless, the figures given by Brue and da Souza on this occasion appear to represent the highest total suggested throughout the 19th century for an Annual Customs - certainly higher than any other figure given even by da Souza throughout this period. The large scale of the human sacrifices of the early 1840s also received confirmation from the monarch himself when, in 1845, he claimed that until recently it was usual to kill many people at the customs.¹⁹⁵ Gezo did also proclaim his intention ultimately to abolish the same: but notably he qualified his avowed intention by remarking specifically that such a process had to be gradual, and that such curtailment was limited in its possible extent by the need to punish crimes.¹⁹⁶

The diminution promised by the monarch is testified to by contemporary observers and visitors to the Dahomean capital, starting with Duncan in 1845.¹⁹⁷ Forbes indicated that in 1848 the number sacrificed was 240, (a figure much more in keeping with 18th century figures for annual customs, and certainly much lower than that indicated for the 1843 custom), and that they had been reduced to 32 a year later.¹⁹⁸

Indeed, such a significant change appears to have taken place that Gezo disdained sacrifices at the capital in the Customs for his old friend and ally da Souza on the latter's death.¹⁹⁹ The absence of such sacrifices was related to the request of da Souza himself that the practice be omitted from his funeral customs, and a small number of

deaths - five - were in fact reported as having taken place at Whydah.²⁰⁰ But the incident suggests that the general trend was downwards. Forbes' opinion on the diminution of the scale of sacrifices by mid century is independently confirmed by a French source who had made several visits to the Capital between 1847 and 1850.²⁰¹ Indeed, by 1851 human sacrifice appears to have much diminished as a spectacle at the Abomey Customs.

Thus around 1843 the Dahomean monarchy did undertake a series of limited measures to encourage the palm oil trade and to create conditions conducive to better Fon-Western relationships. But the measures were limited and circumscribed both by prevailing ideology and political reality. The monarch introduced measures to stimulate palm oil production, without himself becoming overtly involved. He introduced a curtailment of the practice of human sacrifice, but declined to envisage its abolition. He held out the longer term prospect of an abandonment of the slave trade, but more as a diplomatic flourish than an agenda for action in the foreseeable future. As such, Gezo's response to a declining slave trade was skilfully measured to adapt to the prevailing economic conditions without incurring the need for a wholesale social transformation of Dahomean society.

ANTICIPATED INCOME FROM PALM OIL TRADE

Since in the early 1840s the intervention of the monarch was confined to the encouragement of the palm oil trade, and did not extend to direct involvement in production, direct compensation to replace that of the slave trade was to be gained from fiscal and tributary regulations.

Access to western goods thus obtained was to be further indirectly assisted through the intermediacy of the slave-dealers on the coast, who did become directly involved in producing oil for export.

The most immediate and direct benefits to the monarchy were derived from arrangements made with the French firm Régis and, to a lesser extent, Hutton. The assistance, encouragement, protection and labour facilities extended to the French firm were granted in return for an annual tribute which was represented by dues on any cargoes disembarked at Whydah or ships loading with palm oil there, and the customary annual presents at the Abomey festival. These, of course, were quite in keeping with previous Dahomean practice.

Though taxes on (export) trade could be more easily avoided than in the case of the slave trade,²⁰² the King also perceived the oil trade as a potentially lucrative source of taxation. In 1843 Duncan reported that:

"All goods sent out of the country pay a very heavy duty, such as palm oil or ivory . . . it is always levied on the sellers, who, of course, are subjects of the King of Dahomey. Any hesitation in paying would cost the individual his head."²⁰³

Régis's correspondence mentions the tax on oil, which was levied at the coast, by the King's agents, again on the sellers.²⁰⁴ The same tax on sellers of oil is confirmed - at a rate of about 10% - by French sources in the 1848-9 period,²⁰⁵ and around 1849-50 by Forbes, who is more specific, putting the rate of tax at one gallon in eighteen.²⁰⁶

This tax on oil traded may account for the traditions recorded by Le Herissé which place the introduction of a Kouzou tax on palm oil production as taking place under Gezo. There is no contemporary

confirmation of such a tax being introduced under Gezo and it is likely that this was introduced at a much later date, possibly after the French conquest.²⁰⁷ Le Herissé's recorded tradition that a Kouzou was instituted on palm oil exports by Gezo at the time of the wars with Abeokuta possibly refers to a tax on trade which was instituted in the 1840's or 1850s. In the early 1840's Dahomey suffered from an interruption of the slave supplies from the hinterland, possibly as a result of the Egba - Fon struggle for control of trade routes.²⁰⁸ The introduction of measures to increase oil production and the imposition of the tax on oil traded is first recorded from 1843 as a tax on palm oil vendors in the export sector, not on palm oil production.

However, the traditions recorded by Le Herissé may relate to a period later than 1845, to the era of growing Fon - Egba confrontation in the early 1850's. Once again, there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that any form of taxation was introduced on oil production at this stage by the Dahomeans. But a new tax was introduced in this period - in 1852 - a Kouzou on the white man, prompted as much by the temporary political moves of the British - the blockade - as by economic necessity, although this would obviously also have been increased by the blockade. In 1852 contemporary evidence indicates an increase in the price of oil to 12 dollars the 'measure', and, more importantly, the imposition of a 4 dollars a barell surcharge for rolling it off the beach.²⁰⁹ The 4 dollars was, in fact a tax on the purchasers, similar to that which had previously been levied only on the Dahomean sellers. It was not only similar in function: it was also similar in amount. The price of palm oil having been raised by the King to 12 dollars the 'measure' (of 18 or

19 gallons, probably the former), the price of a normal French puncheon of 120 gallons was thus approximately 80 dollars (or 78 dollars if measure of 19 taken). A 4 dollars tax on the shipment of this would represent a tax on 1:19.7 gallons, (or 1:18.9 if measure of 19 gallons taken).

THE ROLE OF SLAVE TRADERS IN PALM OIL TRADE

The role played by da Souza and the Portuguese slave dealers in Gezo's new found enthusiasm for the oil trade has been a moot point.²¹⁰ It has already been suggested that they probably encouraged the King to give his blessing and encouragement to the trade, particularly since da Souza lent his assistance and influence to enable first Hutton,²¹¹ and then Régis,²¹² to establish at Whydah, and that da Souza himself was certainly involved in the palm oil export trade by 1846.²¹³ The contemporary evidence from the West Coast, therefore, suggests that da Souza was more sympathetic and helpful towards the palm oil trade than has sometimes been allowed.²¹⁴

Indeed, this view can be taken slightly further, particularly in explaining why da Souza, and possibly some other Portuguese slave dealers found it in their own interests to thus encourage the trade, and why they should have done so in the late 1830s, early 1840s.

Portuguese traders had at least dabbled in the trade to some extent before this time. It has already been noted that da Souza had participated in the export in oil in the early years of Gezo's reign, and although by 1838 he had foregone any major intervention because of the relatively unfavourable returns when compared to a thriving slave trade

he was still in the mid-1830s sufficiently interested in the trade to provide a likely source of an occasional cargo or load of oil.²¹⁵

He was not alone in his involvement, for, from the early 1830s the arrival of Régis' ships off Whydah on the lookout for palm oil, allowed smaller and less well known traders to participate in the trade. One such trader was Joao Baptista Bellarra, who from 1832, precisely the period of Régis' first shipments from Whydah, began to speculate in the palm oil trade largely as a potential buffer against the decline of the slave trade.²¹⁶ Up until the mid 1830s the palm oil trade remained very much a sideline for the slave dealers, although as mentioned, at least some of them foresaw the potential need for its expansion in the future should their staple export decline. It was exactly those circumstances in the closing years of the 1830s which were sufficient to stimulate a trade which had already gained a foothold.

As already mentioned,²¹⁷ palm oil was used as a substitute for gold.²¹⁸ Not because of a disproportionately low level of gold imports vis-a-vis slave exports,²¹⁹ but rather from the positive preference of the slave dealers themselves to employ palm oil as an exchange commodity for western goods.

Partly, this resulted from the fact that during this period they became involved not only in the palm oil trade, but in the direct production of oil for export. The uncertainty of slave shipments, and the increasing costs of retaining large numbers of slaves in the Whydah barracoons awaiting shipment, prompted their productive use in order to offset costs. The initial impetus for large scale manufacture of palm oil in Dahomey in the 1840s was initiated not by the monarch and leading

Ministers in Abomey, but by the coastal slave dealers²²⁰ in an attempt to reduce the financial burdens of delayed shipment.

This practice had a spin-off for the slave dealers, in that it provided substantial quantities of a commodity both currently in demand and acceptable to European merchants. It thus providing access to prestigious western goods. And, unlike gold exchanges, it further held out the prospect of double profits - on the slave trade, and on the palm oil which was being produced by the slaves at the coast.

This helps to explain the preference of slave dealers in using palm oil rather than gold. It explains why, at the end of the 1830s and beginning of the 1840s da Souza, for instance, should have been so keen to assist European palm oil merchants to become established.

The Portuguese on the coast encouraged the establishment of the palm oil commerce not out of 'enlightenment', but out of 'enlightened self-interest'. The practice of using slaves destined for export as a means of producing palm oil while awaiting shipment no doubt encouraged the numerous optimistic forecasts by western observers about the palm oil trade eradicating the slave trade by displaying the economic advantages of a slave retained at home in the production of palm oil.²²¹ The observers may have been encouraged but they were nevertheless mistaken: by and large the slave-dealers were complementing the slave trade, not replacing it by palm oil plantations.

CONCLUSION

Thus the period c.1837-45 marked a turning point in the Dahomean palm oil trade. The period was characterised by a marked decline in the

slave trade and the search for means of maintaining a thriving export sector. At the beginning of the 1840s, specifically 1843, the Dahomean authorities and the Portuguese slave dealers, responded to the disruption and decline of the Whydah slave trade which had been occurring for the last few years, by encouragement of the palm oil trade.

The decline and disruption of the Whydah slave trade in the late 1830s and early 1840s seriously affected the income of the Dahomean authorities and their access to politically prestigious goods. These developments evoked a response from both the Dahomean slave dealers and the central government. The slave dealers, encouraged by the establishment of European factors on the coast, extended their participation in the palm oil trade, and themselves diversified into the production of palm oil for export. The latter process, carried out by slaves awaiting shipment, minimised production costs, offset costs of subsistence for slaves awaiting shipment, and at the same time allowed the slave dealers access to western manufactured goods through the medium of the palm oil so produced.

The slave dealers were also instrumental, da Souza in particular, in encouraging the monarch, to undertake a series of measures designed to permit the establishment of European factories on the coast, afford them protection and grant them control over a cheap, easily accessible labour force: to encourage Dahomeans themselves to provide palm oil for export: and to protect and stimulate increases in the production yield.

The monarch was susceptible to these suggestions, since he too was suffering from the effects of the decline in the slave trade. In turn the monarch intended to reap the benefit of the new measures through

taxes on the externally orientated palm oil trade, additional 'tributary' payments from the newly established factories, and renewed access to western goods through the medium of the coastal slave traders.

The monarch did not himself become directly involved in the production of oil for export, but did promulgate a number of decrees intended to maximise the growth of oil production for export. Regulations governing the clearing of palm groves and the protection of young trees, the declaration of the Oil Palm as 'fetish' and the prohibition of palm wine production in the metropolitan area were measures so designed.

The economic benefits to the central exchequer were to be gained mainly by the introduction of a tax on palm oil exports, levied at the rate of 1/18th on the sellers: ancillary benefits were to be expected from annual payments from the palm oil traders. But while the role of the monarch in the 1840's was confined to encouragement of the palm oil trade and the receipt of fiscal income, the numbers of those involved in the production of oil spread rapidly.

CHAPTER 4 FOOTNOTES

- 1 Northrup, D., "The compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil trades in the Bight of Biafra", J.A.H., XVII, 3, (1976) pp. 353-364.
- 2 Schnapper, B., La Politique et le Commerce Francais dans le Golfe de Guinee de 1838-1871, (The Hague), 1961. Cf. also A. G. Hopkins in his Economic History of West Africa, Longmans, 1973: cf. for example pp. 140-1.
- 3 For some indication of the subterfuge employed see Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., chapt. XI.
- 4 Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 39.
- 5 Ross D., Ph.D., pp. 56-9.
- 6 Marion Dusser de Baronne Kilson, "West African Society and the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1441-1865", in Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, ed. Huggins, Kilson and Fox, p. 47.
- 7 Schnapper, B., Le Politique et Le Commerce Francais . . ., p. 168, citing De Almeida Prata, "Les relations De Bahia avec Le Dahomey", in Revue d'Histoire des Colonies, 1954, p. 203.
- 8 See Verger, P., "Mouvements de Navires entre Bahia et le Golfe de Benin, XVIIe-XIXe siècle" in Revue Francais d'Histoire d'Outre Mer, tome LV, no. 198, Ier trimestre 1968, p. 16, where he draws his figures from British Consuls' estimates of arrivals/departures to/from Cota da Mina.
- 9 Nichols to Stephens, 14/3/1836, CO/267/136/128.
- 10 For example, Parl. Papers., Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Sel. C'tee, evidence of J. Clegg, Min. of Ev., p. 91: evidence of F. Swanzey in Ibid., p. 37.
- 11 The papers of a Slaver captured in 1844 revealed that she had carried a consignment of 1830 dollars gold for da Souza: The British and Foreign anti-slavery Reporter, VI, 14 (1845), cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 50, fn.5.
- 12 Hill to Stanley, 16/5/1844, PRO.C096.4.230.
- 13 A French Foreign Office memo referring to opinions expressed c.1838-9 by Capt. Bouet-Willlaumes. Memo June 1858, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. This refers to "Esquisse Commercial par Bouet" in 1939-9, Arch Nat., F12:7208.
- 14 Cape Coast Committee to Stephens, 3/2/1841, PRO.C0267/168/329.

- 15 Evidence of F. Swanzey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842
Evidence of J. A. Clegg in Ibid., p. 91.
- 16 Ibid., p. 37.
- 17 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal LV:42(b).
- 18 "Extrait de Rapport de Capt. Monleon, 12/11/1844" in Annales Maritime et Coloniale, 1845, vol. 3 p. 505.
- 19 Baudin, (extracts) "Aperçu de l'état des comptoirs français du Golfe de Guinée 3/4/1845, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42(b).
- 20 Ross D., Ph.D., pp. 51-2.
- 21 Ibid., p. 52, emphasis added.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 52-3. Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp.56-7.
- 23 Cf. Law, R. "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XV111, 4, 1977, p. 568.
- 24 Duncan in the mid-1840's, referred to him as a "kind and generous man". Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1 p. 102. Duncan's view was echoed by a number of contemporary visitors. Cf. also, Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 p. 107.
- 25 Hill to Stanley 16/5/1844, PRO.C096/4/230.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 From the Dos Santos letters, 6-83, Verger pp. 53-86, cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p.40.
- 28 The British and Foreign Anti-slavery Reporter VI, 14, 1845, p. 138, cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 40, fn.5.
- 29 For example, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 2, Ev. of Swanzey, 1842 Sel. C'tee, Min. of Ev. p. 46.
- 30 Cf. Lloyd, C. The Navy and the Slave Trade . . ., p. 94 et seq. Newbury, C., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 53.
- 31 Sometime after 1840 Da Souza's flag staff was fired upon by one of the cruisers: Parl Papers Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, evidence of Hutton, minutes of evidence 10255-60.
- 32 Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 41. See also later on the Whydah surf.
- 33 Cf. for instance, Colin Newbury in The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 41, where he inclines in this direction.

- 34 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 101-2.
- 35 Ibid. p. 46-7
- 36 Huntly, Sir H., Seven years Service on the Slave Coast, pp. 101-2.
Cf. also Laird M. and Oldfield R.A.K., Narrative . . ., vol. II, pp. 365 et seq.
- 37 Forbes, Lt., Six Months on the African Blockade, pp. 86-9.
- 38 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 46-7.
- 39 Bandinell, J., Some Account . . ., p. 224.
- 40 For example, Stephens to Cape Coast Committee, 22/12/1839, PRO.C0267/156/288.
- 41 c.1837 slave ship insurance premiums were about 10% of cargo value. By 1842, according to Bandinell the same premiums were running at 40% of cargo value in Cuba: Bandinell, J., Some Account . . ., p. 224. Cf also Laird, M. and Oldfield, R. A. K., Narrative . . ., vol. II, p. 366. Such rates contrast with the rate on legal trade - palm oil - where the 1837 rate was 2%: Laird, M. and Oldfield, R. A. K., Narrative . . ., Vol. II, p. 359.
- 42 "Only thirty of the vessels taken during the 1838-48 decade were bound for or had loaded at Lagos, Whydah or Anecho: half of these were captured in 1845 . . . there is no way of estimating those that eluded capture . . .": Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 40.
- 43 As well as Whydah, New Calabar and Bonny had been hosts to extensive slaving activity in the mid-1830's: Laird, M. and Oldfield, R. A. K., Narrative . . ., vol. II, p. 366. By early 1841 the Cape Coast Committee reported "Dahomey, the Rivers Benin, Calabar and Bonny are less frequented than they were by slavers": Cape Coast Committee to Stephens, 3/2/1841, PRO.C0267/168/329.
- 44 Extracts of anonymous observer who visited Whydah in March-April 1835, in Committee to Grey 19/3/1836, PRO.C0267/136/140 et seq: Nichols to Stephens, 14/3/1836, PRO.C0267/136/128.
- 45 Barnes to C.O., 23/4/1835, PRO.C0267/131.
- 46 Stephens to Cape Coast Committee, 22/12/1839, PRO.C0267/156/288.
- 47 For instance, in March 1835 an unnamed observer remarked on 9 Spanish vessels awaiting slave shipments at Whydah: on his return in August of the same year the number of ships had increased to thirteen, many of them flying Spanish or Portuguese colours: Extracts in Committee to Grey, 19/3/1836, PRO.C0267/136/140 et seq.

- 48 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 49 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 115-6.
- 50 Verger, P., "Retour des Bresiliens au Golfe de Benin au XIXe siècle", Etudes Dahoméennes, New Series, no. 8, 1966, pp. 51-9. Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 285-354.
- 51 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, p. 115. On the Brazilian Trade, see Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., pp. 314-354. For the fluctuations in the 19th century Trade as a whole, see Curtin, P. D., The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census, Madison (Wisconsin) 1969.
- 52 Verger, P., "Le Tabac de Bahia et la traite des esclaves", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, no. 15, p. 351.
- 53 Esquisse Commercial par Bouet, 1838-9: Arch Nat., F12:7208. M.A.E. Memo, June 1858, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Cape Coast Committee to Stephens, 3/2/1841, PRO.C0267/168/329, refers to movement of traffic to the South.
- 54 Extrait de Rapport de Capt. Monleon, 12/11/1844 in Annales Maritimes et Coloniale, 1845, vol. 3, p. 505.
- 55 Evidence of J. A. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, pp. 94-5.
- 56 See later in this chapter.
- 57 Esquisse Commercial par Bouet, 1838-9: Arch Nat., F12:7208. M.A.E. Memo, June 1858, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Cape Coast Committee to Stephens, 3/2/1841, PRO.C0267/168/329.
- 58 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1 p. 266.
- 59 Ibid., vol. 1 p.245.
- 60 Curtin, P. D., "The Slave Trade and the Atlantic Basin" in Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, ed. Huggins, Kilson and Fox, p. 42.
- 61 Lander, for instance, described measures to expedite the turnaround and avoid detection at Badagry in the second half of the 1820's: Lander, R., Clapperton's Last Expedition, vol. II, pp. 238-40.
- 62 Extracts in Committee to Grey 19/3/1836, PRO.C0267/136/140 et seq. Bandinel, J., Some Account . . ., (1842), p. 224.
- 63 Replies by McCauley, Commissary Judge of Mixed Commission Court, Sierra Leone, PRO.C0267/136/211.

- 64 Hutton to Grey, 23/6/1836, PRO.C0267/136/209.
- 65 Extracts in Committee to Grey 19/3/1838, PRO.C0267/136.140 et seq.
- 66 Feeman, Rev., "Slavery at the Bight of Benin", M.M.S., 1843, box 259.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 The Rev. S. Annear of Badagri mentioned that the raising of a British flag was sufficient to send slave ships off: Journal of the Rev. Annear, entry for 24/9/1844, M.M.S., box 260. Similar semaphores were employed at Whydah, but to warn approaching slavers of the presence of a cruiser: Ev. of Com. Broadhead, R.N., Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence p. 126. Freeman mentions Quittah, Little Popo and Badagri in the category of slave markets but not slave shipping ports: Rev. Freeman, "Slavery at the Bight of Benin", M.M.S., 1843, box 259. The Rev. Annear confirmed slave dealing at Badagri: Journal of the Rev. S. Annear, entry for 19/10/1844, M.M.S., Box 260.
- 69 Already by the late 1820's this problem was manifesting itself at some ports like Badagri: see Lander, R., Clapperton's Last Expedition, vol. II, p. 250.
- 70 F. Swanzey in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Ev. p. 37, comments that slaves were dying in the barracoons. But by 1844 the barracoons were being reported empty: Extrait de Capt. Monleon 12/11/1844 in Annales Maritimes et Coloniale, 1845, vol. 3.
- 71 Evidence of J. A. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, p. 95. Lander, R., A Record of Capt. Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa (London), 1830, vol. II, p. 238-9.
- 72 Evidence of J. A. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, p. 95.
- 73 Ev. of Capt. Broadhurst, R.N., in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, p. 127.
- 74 Freeman, Rev., "Slavery at the Bight of Benin", M.M.S., 1843, box 259. Swanzey refers to the use of gold to facilitate a quick turn around. Swanzey to Viscount Ingestrie M.P. (undated), in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 3, 1842 Select Committee, App. 41, pp. 514-516.
- 75 Evidence of J. A. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, p. 95.

- 76 R. Brooking to M.M.S. H.Q. 20/4/1840, M.M.S. 1840, box 258. Brooking, at British Accra, claimed to have been informed of this by one of H.M. cruiser Captains.
- 77 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 1/6/1843, M.O.M. Afrique, 1:4:a.
- 78 Freeman, Rev., "Slavery at the Bight of Benin", M.M.S., 1843, box 259.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 The decline in slave exports from the Bight of Benin during the late 1830's and early 1840's is noted by Eltis: cf. Eltis D. "The Export of Slaves from Africa, 1821-43, in J.E.H., XXXV11, 1977, pp. 409-433.
- 81 Thus, da Souza's "demotion" (Ross, Ph.D., p. 52) may in fact have been more of a shift from the shipment of slaves rather than anything else: it may, indeed, have been a financial prop in adjustment to the new conditions, rather than the social and economic disgrace which is implied by Ross.
- 82 Report of B. Cruickshank, p. 15. Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa: King's of Ashanti and Dahomey: dispatches, 1849, (399) vol. XXXII.
- 83 King of Dahomey to Queen of England in Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/1845. Journal of Rev. S. Annear, entry for 6/9/1844, M.M.S., box 260.
- 84 Schnapper, B., Le Politique et le Commerce Francais . . ., especially p. 168.
- 85 Ibid., p. 168.
- 86 Schnapper argues that this stemmed from a disproportion of imported gold specie over exported slaves caused by the activity of the squadron, the non-appearance of Spaniards, the fall in Cuban demand, and the increasing preference of merchants to deal in more profitable commodities - mainly rum and taffia. It is difficult to see how the first three factors mentioned by Schnapper could result in disproportionate falls in gold imports vis-a-vis slave exports: certainly they may have affected both in equal terms.
- 87 Schnapper, B., Le Politique et le Commerce Francais . . ., p. 170.
- 88 This point is confirmed in the evidence of J. A. Clegg in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, pp. 94-5.
- 89 Canot, R., Memoirs of a Slave Trader, p. 189.

- 90 Swanzey, F. to Viscount Ingestrie, undated, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 3, 1842 Select Committee, appendix 41, pp. 514-6.
- 91 Although Swanzey consistently referred to these gold imports in his interviews before the 1842 Committee, Broadhead pointed out that specie might make up about one third of the cargo only, the other two thirds being composed of various other commodities: Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, min of evidence, p. 127.
- 92 Régis à Min. de la Mar et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 93 Com. H. Broadhead and F. Swanzey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee, Min. of Evidence, pp. 130, 46.
- 94 W. Hutton to Hawes, 6/7/1847, PRO.C096/12/283.
- 95 Response de Régis au Rapport de Broquant 19/3/1840, M.O.M., Senegal III:5:b.
- 96 Régis changed his mind after the publication of the projects and plans of the Chamber of Commerce at Bordeaux. He saw Marseille, and his own, commerce threatened. Cf. Schnapper, B., Le Politique et le Commerce Francais . . ., p. 164.
- 97 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 25/6/1841, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 98 Min. de la Mar et des Col. à Régis, 8/9/1841, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 99 See computation assumptions for palm oil prices later in this chapter.
- 100 See earlier chapters.
- 101 Régis à Min. des Col. 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 102 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 103 Régis à Min. de la Mar. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 104 Régis à Min. des Col. 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 105 W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 106 Hutton and sons to Stanley, 20/12/1843, PRO.C096/2/348.
- 107 "Cotes d'Afrique: Faits Commercaux", p. 3., June July 1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208. Régis à Min. des Col. 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.

108 Ibid. According to Serval there were 3.8 litres to the Old Wine Gallon: Rapport de Serval annexe au lettre de Marin, 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.

Thus,
2000 x 6 hectalitres = 2000 x 600 litres

= $\frac{2000 \times 600}{3.8}$ wine gallons

= $\frac{2000 \times 600}{3.8}$ Tons
 $\frac{\quad}{300}$

= 1052 tons

109 De Monleon à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 12/11/1844, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.

110 Rapport de Capt. Baudin, March 1845, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.

111 Ibid.

112 W. Hutton to Hawes, 6/7/1847, PRO.C096/12/283.

113 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/12/1848, extracts in W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.

114 Duncan to Stanley, 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20.

115 Duncan to Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20/83. At the time of writing, Duncan reported 17 ships lying in Whydah Roads loading with palm oil.

116 Ev. of Hutton, Parl. Papers Slave Trade vol 4, 1848 committee, Min. of Ev., section 3195.

117 Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346: British puncheons are taken here at 160 gallons.

118 Régis à Min. des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.

119 Beecrofts Journal enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148.

120 On the west coast a puncheon, for example, might contain 120, 150, 160, 200, 240, or even greater quantities of palm oil: "Arkhurst's account of palm oil and property destroyed in Ahguay fire", 7/10/1843, PRO.C096/2/366: Campbell to Clarendon 14/5/1856, PRO.F084/1002/126: Burton to Earl Russell, 15/4/1864, PRO.F02/45/44: Hewett to Admiralty, 4/3/1876, PRO.F084/1464/4. This ambiguity was to a lesser extent reflected in other measures such as pipes etc.

121 The prices shown in the table have been computed from data provided in the following footnotes. The computations are based on the assumptions noted below:

- (a) That 1 ton of palm oil = 300 gallons: technically and correctly, 1 ton of oil = 327 Old Wine Gallons (computed from figures given in Billows and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 29, and New English Dictionary: see below for Old Wine Gallons). This coincides with the figure of 320 gallons to the ton cited by Woolfson, F., in "The Krobo Oil Boycott . . .", E.H.R., 2nd series, vol. VI, no. 1., 1953. There is evidence, however, that the figure of 300 Old Wine Gallons to the ton was the rough equivalent employed in the area of the Bight of Benin: (Campbell to Clarendon 14/5/1856, PRO.F084/1002/126.) It should also be noted that the use of this equivalent in computation tends to produce rounded dollar prices per ton (e.g. \$50, \$100, \$133, \$200) which suggest that this was indeed the equivalent employed in Dahomey. (Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 43, uses this figure for Whydah.)
- (b) That 'gallons', when used in the context of palm oil in English language sources, refers to the "Old Wine Gallons" or "Winchester gallons" - 231 cu. inches - as opposed to Imperial Gallon of 277.25 cu. inches, except where specifically stated otherwise.
- (c) The French Tonne has been taken as equivalent to 1 ton: it actually equals $\frac{2204}{2240}$ tons.
- (d) 1 dollar has been taken as equal to 4/6d.
- (e) The Dahomean 'measure' of palm oil has been taken as equal to 18 gallons.
- (f) 1 Old Wine Gallon has been taken as equal to 3.8 litres. (Rapport de Serval annexe au lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.)
- (g) The French puncheon in Dahomey is taken as equivalent to 120 gallons: the British as 160 gallons: ("Note sur l'indemnitie . . ." June 1877, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.) The French Puncheon has been taken as both "barrique" and "Futaille".

122 Ev. of J. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2 , 1842 Select Committe, Min. of Evidence, p. 92.

- 123 According to Laird and Oldfield, Narrative . . ., vol. II, p. 361, a slave was worth £4, but if retained internally for palm oil production, could produce 1 ton per annum, worth £8. There is some reason for caution here, because earlier in the same work it is stated that the price of a man and a ton of palm oil was "about the same": Laird and Oldfield, Narrative . . ., vol. I, p. 106. The latter reference, however, refers to the purchase price of palm oil in the interior at Abo on the River Nun (or Quorra): Ibid., vol. I, p. 341: And £8 was the coastal price. Most of the oil went through to Bonny (Ibid., vol. I, p. 103) but Oldfield reports a British brig obtaining palm oil at £7-9 a ton at the mouth of the River Nun (Ibid., vol. II, p. 312). This rate may well have been below the general West Coast Price. (Ibid., vol. II, p. 312.)
- 124 Evidence of J. Clegg, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, Report of the Select Committee on the West Coast, 1842, Min. of evidence, p. 92.
- 125 This account of property destroyed in Hutton's fire indicates the value of palm oil to be 3 galls of oil to \$1: "Akhurst's account of property destroyed in Agoué fire, 7/10/1843", PRO.C096/2/366.
- 126 Forbes to Fanshaw, 6/4/1850, PRO.F084/826.
- 127 Forbes to Fanshaw, 6/4/1850, PRO.F084/826.
- 128 Beecrofts Journal, entry for 16th May, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148. Beecroft refers to a "Measure of 19 gallons": he appears to have included the King's tax of 1 gallon per 18 in his measure: this was, in fact, paid by the seller.
- 129 Fraser's commercial report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95. Fraser's report refers to 1851, but was dispatched in 1852. His calculations value the ton at \$108, but this probably includes the \$4 (per puncheon) tax recently imposed by Gezo for rolling the casks off the beach. A deduction has therefore been made for two puncheons.
- 130 Fraser's commercial report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95. As mentioned above, Fraser's report refers to 1851, but was dispatched in 1852. His calculations value the ton at \$108, but this probably includes the \$4 (per puncheon) tax recently imposed by Gezo for rolling the casks off the beach. A deduction has therefore been made for two puncheons.
- 131 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155: also noted in Fraser's Journal of occurrences, 20/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/253. The later doubling of price of oil is directly related to the diplomatic and political situation concerning the blockade of the Dahomean coast by the British.

- 132 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155: also noted in Fraser's Journal of occurrences, 20/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/253. See the comments in the footnote above.
- 133 Valdez, T.F. Six Years of a Traveller's Life . . ., vol. 1 p. 325.
- 134 Campbell to Townsend, 12.5.1854, PRO.F084/950.
- 135 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/427.
- 136 Campbell to Malmesbury, 5/4/1859, PRO.F084/1088/112.
- 137 This value is indicated for Whydah 1857-8 in Johnson, M., "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa", part II, J.A.H., XI, 3, 1970, p. 350, based on data extracted from Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., and Burton, R., A Mission . . .
- 138 Ibid. The same remarks apply as in the footnote above.
- 139 Glover stated that the price of palm oil at Porto Novo Town was £1 sterling for a ten-gallon measure of oil: Glover to Russell, 8/7/1865, PRO.F084/1250/221. Elsewhere, he mentions that 70 puncheons of palm oil - a fine levied on the King of Porto Novo - are valued at £700: Glover to Russell, 7/9/1865, PRO.F084/1250/298. At the normal puncheon size of 160 gallons this would indicate a price of £18.50 a ton. However, in view of the specificity of the first comment above, we have to conclude that in the second passage cited he is referring to a puncheon of 100 gallons.
- 140 The demanded indemnity from the King of Dahomey was put at 80,000 gallons, approximately £6000 in current value by Hewett: Hewett to Sec. of the Admiralty, 4/3/1876, PRO.F084/1464/4.
- 141 "Note sur l'Indemnitie" (Dahomey), June 1877, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc., Afrique 76. For a total of 64,000 gallons, the approximate value was given as 128,000 Francs. Based on a conversion rate of 1.25 Francs = 1/- sterling, (Adam, J. Palmier . . ., p. 216), the ton of oil is valued at approximately £24. Dealing with such approximations, this figure is sufficiently within the margin of error to suggest a maintenance of the selling price of the order of £22.10s.
- 142 Rapport du Serval, annexe au l^ettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. The same comments apply as in the above footnote.
- 143 Polanyi, K., Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . .: Polanyi, K. et al., Trade and Markets in the Early Empires: "Ports of Trade in Ancient Societies", J.E.H., XXX111, 1973.

- 144 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Colonies, 25/6/1841, and Min. de la Mar. et des Col. à Régis, 8/9/1841, both in M.O.M. Senegal, 1V:42(b).
- 145 Baudin à Min. de la Marine et des col. 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Afrique 1:4:a.
- 146 Ibid.
- 147 See following chapter.
- 148 Baudin à Min. de la Marine et des col. 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Afrique 1:4:a.
- 149 See Chapter 2.
- 150 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1. p. 199: cf Ibid p. 310: vol. 11, pp. 268-9.
- 151 Duncan is contradictory on the date of this. According to him, Gezo claimed to have issued the order "long ago": Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol.11, pps 268-9. But Duncan states elsewhere that the Caboceer at Whydah in May 1845 had "just" issued the order: Ibid. vol. 1 p. 199. In any case the Sierra Leonians are described as "lately" arrived in 1845: Ibid. vol. 1 p. 139.
- 152 Régis Frères à Min. Sec. d'Etat de la Marine et des Colonies, 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 153 Ibid.
- 154 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Afrique, 1:4:a. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 127-8.
- 155 Régis à Min Sec. d'Etat de la Mar. et des Col. 4/1/1845, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 156 Régis Frères à Min. d'Agriculture, 31/3/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 157 Régis Frères à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 158 Ibid.
- 159 Ibid. Further elaboration regarding the technical aspects of this point can be found in Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil and Kernels . . . (Liverpool) 1913 . . ., and in Adam, J., Palmier a Huile . . .
- 160 Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., pp. 14-15.

- 161 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., Vol. I, pp. 38-9. Manning in his Phd, dealing with Southern Dahomey generally in a later period notes that the procedure is followed with a number of more valuable trees like the Oil Palm, Shea Butter, etc.: Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 21.
- 162 Régis à Min. des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 163 Cf. Adam, J., Palmier . . .
- 164 Régis à Min. de la Mar et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 165 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 91-2, fn.14.
- 166 Freeman, Rev., Journal of various visits . . ., p. 266. The move may also have been encouraged by the experience of Gezo's deposed brother who, according to reports drank to excess and ordered executions of innocent subjects when innebriated: Bouet, A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey", in L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 59-70.
- 167 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 30.
- 168 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 91-2, fn.14.
- 169 Cf., for example, Forbes, F. Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 p. 79.
- 170 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 145.
- 171 Ibid., p. 49. See also Ibid., p. 238 - Glele asked "does he set such an example to my people as I would like them to follow. Does he not drink, till he talks foolishly?".
- 172 Ibid., p. 443.
- 173 Palm wine was not the only indigenously manufactured alcohol to undergo changes in its use in Gezo's reign Herskovits was informed that millet beer was superceded by European liquors as a gift to prospective fathers-in-law during this period: Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 303. There is no indication that this was by Government regulation or the result of a government prohibition, and it may have been more related to easier access to imported liquors. Rum certainly appears to have been used as a gift in these proceedings by the 1870's: Cf. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 497-8.
- 174 For example, Denyau, the director of the French Fort at Whydah, on the coast mainly in the 1780's, remarked on its widespread use: Denyau à Min. des Col. 25e/ Nivuse/ year 7, Arch Nat. Colonies C6:27.
- 175 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 p. 30. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 91-2, fn. 14. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 494.

- 176 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 p. 30.
- 177 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., Vol. I, p. 303.
- 178 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 110.
- 179 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 111.
- 180 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 10, 58.
- 181 Ibid., p. 318.
- 182 Ibid., p. 78.
- 183 For example, see Skertchly's description of the 1871 Customs: Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 298, 67-9.
- 184 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 185 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p.96.
- 186 For example Gezo to the Queen of England, in Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/1845. Nor was Gezo above singling out individuals as his "best friend" - for example Freeman: Allen to Gen. Secs. 4/3/1844, M.M.S., 1844, box 260. This of course, flattered the ego of the recipient, and has possibly over-influenced later historians in their assessment of the role of the individual concerned.
- 187 For example Gezo à President de la Republique, 11/8/1850, M.O.M. Afrique IV:9:b: Christophe Colombe à Min. de la Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208: Régis Frères à Min. des Col. 11/1/1850, M.O.M., Afrique IV:42:b.
- 188 See, for example, Valdez, T. F., Six Years . . ., vol. 1. p.331.
- 189 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 107-8.
- 190 Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 191 Brue counted 64 heads, for instance, at one gate after the executions of the previous night. Ibid.
- 192 Ibid.
- 193 Hill to Stanley 16/5/1844, PRO.C096/4/230.
- 194 This is remarked upon in Davidson, B., "Slaves or captives . . .", Key Issues . . ., ed. Huggins, Kilson et al., p. 56.
- 195 King of Dahomey to Queen of England in Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/1845.

- 196 Ibid.
- 197 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 258.
- 198 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 32-3.
- 199 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce 2/2/1850. in Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 200 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 32-3. According to Dawson, one of the first Protestant missionaries at Whydah, it was Isidore, da Souza's son, who would not permit sacrifices on his father's death on the grounds that he was a white man. Arch. of the Church Missionary Society, CA/2016, cited in Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 412.
- 201 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 202 See for instance, Fraser's commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston 5/2/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 203 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122.
- 204 Régis Ainé à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 205 Christophe Colombe à Min. de la Commerce 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 206 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., Vol. I, pp. 35-6. I believe that the 4 dollars charged in the early 1852 was an additional 1:18th tax on the merchants: see later.
- 207 Although, as has been noted earlier in Chapter 2, the Kouzou had long existed as a tax on agricultural production.
- 208 The correspondence of Rev. S. Annear, M.M.S., box 260. Also, see earlier chapters.
- 209 Fraser's Commercial Report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 5/2/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 210 For a brief summary of the two main traditions see R. Law, "Royal Monopoly and Private Enterprise in the Atlantic Trade: the case of Dahomey", in J.A.H., XVIII, 1977.
- 211 Parl. Papers, Colonies: Africa, vol. 2, 1842, Report of the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa, Min. of Evidence of W. Hutton, sections 10260 and 10329.

- 212 Brue "Voyage fait en 1843, dans le Royaume de Dahomey", Revue Coloniale, VII, (1845), p. 56. He was also instrumental in obtaining Gezo's leave for a Captain Marmon to start a factory at Badagry: Evidence of Capt. H. Seward, Parl. Papers, col. Africa Vol. 2, Report of the Select Committee on the W. Coast of Africa, Min. of evidence, p. 118.
- 213 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/12/1846, PRO.C096/12. Peronne à Min. des Col. 18/4/1838, M.O.M. Senegal, IV:42(a). Parl. Papers, 1842, Select Committee, Minutes of Evidence, sections 2271-2277, evidence of Capt. 'Marmon'. Also see previous chapter.
- 214 Cf. Quenum, M. "Au Pays des Fons", Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'O.A.F., XVIII, 1935, p. 296. Both Yoder and Coquery-Vidrovitch share the view that da Souza and the Portuguese opposed the establishment and growth of legitimate commerce: Coquery-Vidrovitch, C. "De la Traite d'Esclaves a l'Exportation de l'Huile de Palme et des Palmistes au Dahomey", in Meillassoux, C. (ed.) The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa, p. 11; Yoder, J. "Fly and Elephant Parties: Political Polarisation in Dahomey, 1840-70" in J.A.H., XV, 1974, p. 429. Both rely on the testimony of John Duncan. But as Law has pointed out, the discouragement of shea-butter production which Duncan mentions (Travels . . ., vol.1, p.285-6) may well have been intended to protect the producers of palm oil nearer the coast; Law, R. "Royal Monopoly . . ." J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977, pp. 571-2. Indeed, since the first recording of such a ban was in the mid-1840's, it may well have been designed to accompany the package of measures which Gezo had by that time undertaken to encouragement the production of palm oil throughout the country. Duncan's testimony during his appearance before the Select Committee, did not clarify the issue any further. Cf. Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series vol. 4, Select Committee on the Slave Trade, 1847-8, 1st Report, evidence of J. Duncan, questions 3099-3112.
- 215 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/12/1846, PRO.C096/12. Cf. also Lyon and Parkinson to Capt. Dambriell, 14/1/1836, PRO.F0/13/141, cited in Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 319.
- 216 Valdez, T. F., Six Years of a Travellers life in West Africa, vol. 1, pp. 323-4.
- 217 See previous chapter.
- 218 Evidence of Swanzey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 2, 1842 Select Committee on the West African Coast, Minutes of evidence, p. 45. Régis à Min. d'Agriculture 31/3/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208: Régis à Min. des Col. 8.5.1850, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 219 This is essentially the view of of B. Schnapper. See elsewhere in this chapter for a discussion on Schnapper, B., La Politique et le Commerce Francais.

220 Valdez, T. F., Six Years . . ., - vol. 1, pp. 323-4. It is highly likely that such slaves may also have been used to provide slave subsistence, probably on plantations just on the outskirts of Whydah.

221 Cf., for example, Note interneale, M.A.E., June 1858, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.

CHAPTER 5PRODUCTION:The main sources of Dahomean palm oil in the 1840'sEARLY EUROPEAN TRADERS. c. 1840

The establishment of on-shore bases, and the encouragement and protection given to the new trade by the monarchy from the early years of the 1840s acted as a stimulus to the commerce in palm oil.

Centrally involved in this development was the French firm of Régis. Several factors contributed towards their success, but perhaps most important was the nature of their exchange goods. Although Régis made much of their skill in selecting a wide variety of trade goods suitable to Dahomean taste,¹ it was primarily their emphasis on cowrie shells which gave them the edge over their competitors by allowing them access to small scale producers and traders, while at the same time affording them a high rate of profit.²

The recently afforded labour rights and protection extended by the monarchy as part of their general strategy to encourage the new trade encouraged stability and ensured safety: by the mid-1840s commercial activity at Régis' factory proceeded with order and regularity, and the old French fort, under Brue's directorship, took on an air of prosperity, while the trade itself apparently offered scope for potentially unlimited expansion.³

Notwithstanding the low French estimate of their trading capabilities,⁴ even Hutton's appeared satisfied with the progress of their whole West Coast trading operations in the early 1840s.⁵ And

with some reason: for, having initially established themselves on the Coast in the 1830s they had by 1847 increased the number of their trading establishments to double figures, inclusive of their factory at Whydah.⁶

They had, it is true, fared less well than Régis in their relationship with the Dahomean government, perhaps partly because - as will be seen later - their very success in forming coastal operations outside Whydah did not coincide with the general aims of the Dahomean monarchy. Nevertheless, their continued presence at the latter port testified to the persistence of the new export trade.

In turn, this increased demand manifested by the varied shipping lying off Whydah,⁷ the success of Régis, and the official blessing of the monarchy, stimulated the participation of smaller traders in 'legitimate' commerce.⁸

The storage of small scale produce and arrangements for forward planning of bulk shipments was facilitated by the solution of one technical problem which had previously constrained the trade. Between the late 1830s and mid-1840s the shipment to the coast of pre-packed puncheon kits acted as a catalyst to the growth of the trade by affording the means of bulking and long term storing of the product.⁹

The trade expanded, too, among the Portuguese community. Some of them had previously dabbled in the oil trade as a hedge against the anticipated decline of the major export commodity - slaves - and had even to some extent gone into production of oil as a method of offsetting slave storage costs.¹⁰ But 1846 appears to mark the first large scale direct shipments of oil by the Portuguese slave dealers, with da Souza himself shipping five shiploads on his own account.¹¹

LARGE SCALE PRODUCERS: PORTUGUESE, BRAZILIANS AND SLAVERS

Against this background of the general growth of the oil trade, the general level of oil production in Dahomey was steadily increasing, but it is more difficult to delineate exactly who was producing the oil and in what quantities. A comprehensive and detailed description of the early production of oil c.1840-50 is absent from contemporary literature.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient information scattered throughout primary sources and contemporary publications to allow the construction of an outline of the main social classes involved in production, and of production methods themselves. Moreover, several characteristics of production methods, oil prices, and costs relative to geographical distribution allow the former information to be placed in the context of possible cost benefits to the monarchy. The constraining nature of ideological factors on the adoption of palm oil production by the monarch will be dealt with later in this work, but some of his political obligations may be touched upon here.

For the purposes of analysis, the production of export oil in the 1840s may be split into large and small scale enterprise. Large scale coastal production involved three main groups: Portuguese/Brazilian slave traders, Dahomean Merchants, and liberated slaves subsequently settled in the environs of Whydah, although the distinction between the groups was necessarily blurred in reality since a number of slave traders, like Joaquim d'Almeida at Agoue, were in origin liberated slaves.¹²

Small scale, petty production of oil, relates largely to (unidentified) households, possibly employing small numbers of domestic

slaves. Though the boundary lines between these large and small scale producers is often difficult to draw exactly, the necessarily impressionistic distinction is helpful in understanding the consequences of the new trade. The role of the monarchy will be dealt with finally and separately.

It was the Portuguese slave dealers who appear to have been the first to involve themselves in the production of export oil on a large scale, mainly with the motive of productively employing slave stocks whose retention in the Whydah area awaiting shipment constituted an increasing financial burden.¹³ The practice had initially occurred in the 1830s, partly as an attempt to diversify as a 'hedge' against the anticipated decline of the slave trade itself.¹⁴ But if production of oil was initially intended as a substitute for the ailing slave trade, it was also used to complement and facilitate the trade in the increasingly difficult conditions pertaining in the late 1830s and 1840s. Access to oil fulfilled several advantageous functions for the slave dealers quite apart from the productive use of slave stocks.

The actual loading of palm oil offered a useful 'blind' to the slave trader for the more hazardous and risky business of shipping slaves: while awaiting notification of opportunities for slave shipments, slave vessels might load with oil, and on notification of available slave exports, hasten to the embarkation point indicated, embark the slaves, disembark the palm oil, and make off. The slaves were canoed to, and the palm oil from, the embarkation point by the system of internal lagoons.¹⁵

Palm oil was also an attractive asset to slave dealers in so far as it attracted legitimate ships and cargoes: and both were so vital to them that the slavers were willing to run the oil side of their account at a loss to obtain them.¹⁶ The attraction of cargoes of western goods are perhaps obvious. Less often remarked upon is the attraction of the actual ships themselves. The hazardous nature of the slave trade, given the increasingly aggressive activities of the anti-slave squadron from the late 1830s, necessitated the maximum flexibility of response by the slave dealers. When the opportunity of making a slave shipment occurred, and cruisers were absent from the vicinity, the slave traders had learned to provide themselves with the most flexible shipping system imaginable. They were prepared, and could afford - such were the returns on a successful slave shipment - to purchase outright a visiting 'legitimate' vessel, load it with slaves and dispatch it, the former master and crew having been transferred with their recently acquired purchase price to another homeward bound vessel.¹⁷ This procedure enabled the slave dealers to respond quickly to shipping opportunities, while avoiding the danger of their ships being detected as slavers on the outward journey to the West Coast. Indeed, by the mid-1840s the procedure appears to have become widespread, and Sardinian, French and German as well as American vessels were purchased at Whydah and so used.¹⁸

The better known slave traders from the Americas might similarly counteract dangers consequent on their reputation by the employment of a number of their larger vessels in the embarkation of palm oil, thus acting as a decoy while their smaller and speedier vessels made off with slave cargoes.¹⁹

To the slave traders, then, palm oil acted as a potential substitute for the slave export decline, offered a means of employing slaves involved in delays in shipment, and also complemented the mechanisms of the slave trade in the increasingly difficult conditions of the late 1830s and 1840s. All three aspects encouraged the increasing involvement of slave traders in the production of the new export commodity. By the 1840s growing numbers of them had diversified into oil production, though this diversification, and the use of slave stocks in production was the consequence rather than the cause of declining slave exports, contrary to the assertions of some western commentators.²⁰

This is perhaps particularly obvious from the involvement of da Souza, the mainstay of Whydah trading operations. He had been intermittently involved in the palm oil trade from the time of Gezo's ascendancy,²¹ and was still a potential supplier of the occasional cargo in the mid-1830s.²² By this time, however, he had largely abandoned the trade as being relatively unprofitable compared to slave exports, and by 1838 was reported to have given up trade in the product completely.²³

But faced with shipment delays, and the attractions of the commodity as a complement to his slaving operations, da Souza turned to the palm oil trade to an increasing extent. There is no direct evidence of his own involvement in palm oil production, although a later historian has written of his ambitious plans to convert considerable areas into plantations for palm produce,²⁴ but his ability to ship considerable amounts of palm oil by 1846²⁵ suggests that he may have been already

involved by that time in using slave stocks to collect the fruits and manufacture palm produce from wild trees, and utilizing domestic slaves as independent traders/middlemen.²⁶

Other slave dealers were certainly involved on the production side of the new commerce. Dos Santos, for instance, was not only trading in both slaves and palm oil, but was supplementing his income from commerce by that gained from the production of oil. Dos Santos himself had at least one plantation whereon he maintained the collection and manufacture of the product.²⁷

Between 1846 and 1849 the involvement of the slave traders in the legitimate commerce accelerated rapidly,²⁸ and even the notorious Domingo Martinez was reported to be clearing land in preparation for large scale cultivation and production of oil for the export market.²⁹ Referred to in 1846/7 merely as a slave trader,³⁰ from at least 1849 Domingo was heavily involved in the shipment of oil.³¹

The chronology of their entry into the palm oil trade suggests that the necessary diffusion of the slave trade resulted in the establishment of 'monopoly' slave agents in outlying ports who coincidentally benefitted from their relationship with the monarch by dominating the local palm oil market. D'Almeida at Agoué and Domingo Martinez at Porto Novo were instances of this phenomenon. The decentralisation, necessary as a replacement for the hitherto existing da Souza monopoly at Whydah, was primarily intended to employ such local agents as a repository of the monarch's slave stocks, but the chronological coincidence of their entry into the large scale palm oil trade and production palm oil trade suggests that this alteration in the structure of the slave trade had spill-over effects in the new legitimate commerce.

LARGE SCALE PRODUCERS: DAHOMEAN MERCHANTS

The second group involved in the large scale production of oil for export by the end of the 1840s was the indigenous Dahomean merchant class residing at Whydah. Several secondary works, drawing mainly on the writings of Forbes and Burton, have already attempted to outline the nature of the Dahomean merchant class, the Axisinon.³² It is clear that they were licensed to trade by the monarch on his account and on his behalf or that of other Dahomean officials. It also seems clear that, to a greater or lesser extent, they controlled long distance trade routes, dealing among others with the Whites at Whydah under the supervision of the Yevogan and ultimately the Meu. Their position of privilege allowed them opportunities to profit themselves from their trading activities but it remains an open question as to the extent to which their role as agents of the monarch had been superceded by their role as private traders, trading on their own account, with the passing of time.³³

The granting of monopoly rights to such traders goes back to at least the reign of Agaja around the time of the conquest of Whydah,³⁴ and may indeed, if some traditional sources are to be relied upon, go back even further.³⁵ From time to time the Dahomean monarchs had tried to re-establish closer control over the activities of the Axisinon: in particular Kpengla, in the 1770s and 1780s is said to have tried to diminish their role in slave exports.³⁶ It is unlikely that the attempt was fully successful, since there is evidence that as late as 1789 Dahomean merchants were in a position to supply slaves to Europeans at a time when the monarch found himself bereft of supplies³⁷, and it

seems clear that Kpengla's monopoly was abandoned by his successor Agonglo who proclaimed "full liberty to trade".³⁸

Whatever their original position vis-a-vis the monarch, by the late 18th century the Dahomean merchant class were developing a relative autonomy from the King. Certainly, by the late 1840s, the Dahomean merchants stationed at Whydah were men of considerable wealth and influence, paying an annual tax on their commerce to the monarch.³⁹ Many of them owned large numbers of slaves in their own right, and were in a position to supply whole regiments to the annual campaign.⁴⁰ Being in a position to do so brought commensurate rewards at the conclusion of a successful foray for slaves.

Moreover, their official position under the monarch permitted wide scope for personal accumulation: while trading on the King's account they were also permitted to trade for themselves, gaining the benefits of the advantageous trade terms reserved to the monarch and his agents and the facility of extended credit.⁴¹ At the same time, the fact that their tribute to the monarch was based on an annual estimate of their commercial dealings, rather than on any systematic recording of the transactions, enhanced the opportunities for private accumulation.⁴²

Throughout the 1840s individual members of this class situated in the area of Whydah embarked in the production of oil for export.⁴³ To some extent this may have stemmed from the difficulties which they encountered in their private capacity as slave merchants - similar to those of the slave dealers - in offsetting the costs of holding slaves. The practice of employing slaves in the large scale production of oil may also have been encouraged by the monarch, who, in an attempt to employ

captives productively at a time when slave shipments were becoming more difficult, but constrained economically and ideologically from employing them directly in production of oil in the Abomey area, farmed slave stocks out to Dahomean merchants as well as to his appointed 'monopoly' agents in ports other than Whydah. This is in accord with the traditions recorded by Le Herissé that the monarch embarked on palm oil production through the use of plantations, but that the latter were managed by 'Axisinon', the Dahomean private traders established in the region of Whydah.⁴⁴

The monarch was able to reap what income he could from taxing the new trade via the Axisinon, without transgressing the inherited martial status of the monarchy, or involving himself in the high costs of production and oil transportation from the royal plantations proper in the vicinity of Abomey.

In either case, individual Dahomean merchants became involved in the production of oil for the export market, and Forbes, who visited Whydah in 1850 described one such venture, a plantation belonging to Ahjovee, one of several rich merchants residing in the port. According to Forbes, the plantation, lying to the east of Whydah, was an extensive undertaking, comprising several villages wherein was collected palm fruit, and the oil manufactured.⁴⁵

LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION: SAROS

Most of the so-called plantation production of oil appears to have taken place on the outskirts of Whydah, some miles distant from the town itself,⁴⁶ and it was here also that a third group of large scale producers were mainly situated.

As we have seen, in 1843 Gezo had embarked on a policy designed to encourage the growth of the palm oil trade through various political mechanisms and initiatives. As a corollary to these moves designed to stimulate internal production from existing producers, he had gone out of his way to welcome to the Whydah area liberated slaves from the Brazils and Sierra Leone, allocating them prime land within easy transportation distance from the coast.⁴⁷

Initially the newcomers to have devoted themselves largely to the production of agricultural crops such as cassava, which could be employed as subsistence for the slave stocks held on the coast.⁴⁸ But the slave traders appear to have offered them an extremely limited market for their produce, perhaps because of the downturn in the Trade during the first half of the 1840's.

It may also have been the result, as one report has it, of jealousy on the part of the slave merchants at the allocation of prime land by the monarch to the interlopers.⁴⁹ This, however, appears somewhat inconsistent with the attitude of the main slave dealer, da Souza, who encouraged the settlement of liberated slaves in the area, and whose family appears to have remained on good terms with those liberated slaves involved in legitimate production.⁵⁰ The liberated slaves had, in fact, for the most part stopped off at Whydah en route for their homelands, and had stayed on encouraged by the King of Dahomey,⁵¹ and also by da Souza.⁵² One such group were, according to tradition, Muslim Hausas who had been originally shipped from Whydah itself by da Souza, and who were, on their return, not only welcomed but offered land by him. They stayed on to establish the Maro quarter in Whydah around 1848.⁵³

It is more likely, therefore, that the use of slaves as palm oil producers which had been stimulated among the slave traders as a means of cost-cutting also encouraged their use as producers of their own subsistence.

The settled slaves were forced to diversify, and the Brazilians applied themselves to farming with considerable zeal.⁵⁴ Part of this diversification developed into an involvement in palm oil production for the export sector.⁵⁵

Their transition towards significant production of palm oil coincided chronologically with that of the slave traders in production for the new commerce. Duncan in the mid-1840s mentions the Saros mainly as general farmers, zealous but lacking in direction, cultivating land in the neighbourhood of Whydah.⁵⁶ Between 1846 and 1849, partly as a result of the 'push' of a shrinking market from the slave traders for their agricultural produce, and perhaps also partly as a result of the 'pull' of increasing prices being paid for Dahomean oil,⁵⁷ the area around Whydah, which had been previously used for the production of slave subsistence foodstuffs, was transformed in use towards legitimate produce.⁵⁸

Again it is Forbes who has left us the most specific evidence illustrating the involvement of liberated slaves in the production of export oil. During his stay at Whydah he visited the plantation of one such returned slave from the Brazils, a Mahi in origin, in the company of the da Souza family. The plantation, three miles to the west of the town, was, according to Forbes, of "the highest order", and was partially devoted to the collection of palm produce and the manufacture of

oil.⁵⁹ Though a number of such Saros were thus involved in relatively large scale production of oil, and their aggregate production contributed towards the take-off of oil exports, it is likely that the vast majority of them fell into the category of small producers which will merit later attention.

THE QUESTION OF PALM OIL PLANTATIONS

By the late 1840s then, returned liberated slaves had joined Dahomean merchants and slave traders as large scale producers of palm oil for the export market. But the categorisation of 'large scale' production, while a useful general distinction in outlining the main coastal groups heavily involved in export production, does have its limitations in describing the form of production. The term 'plantation', often employed in the literature to describe such enterprises, offers a convenient, descriptive label but can also be misleading.

"Plantation" was employed by visitors to Dahomey to describe several different phenomena, and the terminological ambiguities have carried on into the secondary literature. It has been used, for instance, to denote large scale enterprises manned by captive slaves,⁶⁰ small scale cereal cultivation probably worked by individual households,⁶¹ settled villages peopled by war captives,⁶² or as a more general synonym for farms⁶³ or palm groves.⁶⁴ More recently it has been used to indicate a system of privately held land furnishing profits to the owner through apparently conventional capitalist relations of production⁶⁵ as well as systems whereby the surplus production is extracted through pre-capitalist tributary mechanisms.⁶⁶ "Plantation" can probably be

justifiably employed to denote any or all of these phenomena, but because of the vague connotations of the word it is as well to qualify its use in relation to the Dahomean coastal palm oil 'plantations' of the 1840s.

Firstly, the word can be misleading in so far as it implies the systematic planting and resettlement of seedling trees, as happened later, for instance, in the Krobo Oil Plantations. There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that anything of this nature took place in in Dahomey in the 1840s.⁶⁷ Indeed, what references there are in the primary sources suggest that the palm trees which were utilized were 'wild' or naturally grown, and that the collection of fruit and the manufacture of oil was being carried out through the use of existing Oil Palm stocks which had hitherto been neglected.⁶⁸

Furthermore, 'palm oil plantations' were not devoted exclusively to the harvesting of palm trees, but were combined in the traditional fashion with other agricultural produce such as corn, cotton, and yams.⁶⁹

Neither does the introduction of 'plantation' production appear to have involved any innovation in production techniques. So far as the process carried out in plantations is concerned, it did not differ in any respect, except scale, from that hitherto employed in the manufacture of oil for domestic consumption.⁷⁰

There therefore seems to have been little alteration in the productive forces. The fruit and its growth, horticultural practice and the technique of extraction remained essentially the same as for domestic oil production. The essential differences between the 'plantation' production of oil in the 1840s and the previously existing oil production for the export sector were two-fold.

Firstly, the scale of the operation: it is this which distinguishes the 'plantations' of the literature from other sources of oil. Even here the demarcation line is difficult to fix precisely: Forbes, for instance, refers to Madiki having only ten slaves on a "plantation" in the interior.⁷¹ Indeed, Forbes referred to this as a "large" plantation.

The second change inherent in some, though not necessarily all, of the plantations referred to is the use of slaves destined for the export trade. There is no conclusive direct evidence to confirm whether such slaves were permanently retained as producers, or whether their employment constituted a temporary expedient until such times as a ship was available and free to embark the slaves.⁷² Nor is there any evidence to suggest that liberated slaves were purchasing or employing slaves or captives in either capacity.⁷³ Thus, despite the optimistic forecasts of Régis and various other French commentators to the effect that slaves were now being kept rather than exported by those who previously supplied the export trade it is not clear how transient their retention was. Nevertheless, whether permanent or temporary initially, the increasing difficulties of making slave shipments gradually entailed the further utilization by slave traders and Dahomean merchants of previously exported slaves in palm oil production and considerable numbers were retained in coastal towns and villages.⁷⁴ This, of course, involved a transition in the economic status of the slave from being merely a realizable commodity, to a productively employed creator of other commodities. As a corollary, it entailed the partial transition of slave merchants and Dahomean coastal merchants from traders

deriving profits largely through market transactions, to praedial slave owners extracting realizable surplus from their slave force in the form of saleable legitimate produce.

To complicate the analysis, it appears that they may also have developed a quasi-feudal relationship with some of their slaves, exacting monthly stipends while encouraging the slaves' participation in palm oil produce and commerce, a point which is referred to later.

But these developments should not be exaggerated, especially as early as the 1840s when the scale of export production of oil was much less than in later decades. From the beginning of the export trade commentators referred to the retention of domestic slaves by Dahomeans, rather than their sale to merchants, in order that that they could be employed in the collection of palm fruit and the manufacture of palm oil.⁷⁵ Such references continue throughout the 1840s.⁷⁶ Since they could refer to either small scale farmers, with perhaps one or two wives or domestic slaves, or to Dahomean merchants mentioned earlier - and on occasions appear to refer to both - the references are ambiguous on their own. Furthermore, if the supply of slaves for the export trade is assumed to have been largely derived from large scale merchants, then the retention of the same slaves for oil production would indicate their use by large scale operators rather than small scale petty production.

However, this does not necessarily imply a massive extension of a slave based mode of production for the export oil. It is possible that even the slaves thus retained by large scale slave owners were relatively independent, operating as independent, small-scale producers, while paying dues to their owners the rich merchants. Such a development

would have allowed the proliferation of small-scale production, with the large scale slave owners benefitting through a tributary system of payment. Nor was the transition as marked as it may first appear, since both the former classes were already 'producers' of slaves through their control and input of large amounts of labour. They were never, therefore, pure 'merchants', in so far as they 'produced' rather than purchased their exports (slaves) to some extent. But what is perhaps more significant, is that their officially sanctioned position as 'merchants' allowed them to enter into large scale agricultural production for the export sector much more easily than could the monarch, who, as a 'warrior', was constrained by an ideological inheritance deriving from slave 'production'.⁷⁷ In this lay the seeds of the 'crisis of transition' of the 1850s and 1860s onwards.

The use of slave labour on coastal plantations does not, of course, necessarily imply that their physical conditions deteriorated: indeed, compared to the barracoons, settled villages may have been considerably more comfortable.⁷⁸ The increased degree of exploitation of the slaves while in Dahomey was an economic rather than physical phenomena. In a sense the cruiser activity was transferring the economic mechanisms of South America to the African coastline.

Another limited and short lived change in economic relations should be noted even although it was an exceptional case, involving cotton rather than palm oil. Cotton, like palm produce, ranked among the naturally occurring agricultural produce of Dahomey, and was used locally in the manufacture of a Dahomean cloth impressive to even western eyes.⁷⁹ The cotton thus naturally produced was, however, too small in

scale to constitute a viable economic prospect.⁸⁰ Duncan, in an attempt to illustrate the viability of large scale Dahomean production of cotton as an export commodity, embarked, in 1849, on an experimental plantation.⁸¹ He himself provided the cotton seeds, imported from England,⁸² and drew his labour force mainly from the residents of English town at Whydah who had apparently been instructed by the monarch to work for Duncan at whatever remuneration the latter was willing to provide.⁸³

Duncan appears to have introduced a wages system, the novelty of which, according to the redoubtable North Briton himself, delighted and impressed his native labourers.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, there are no details of the numbers employed, rates of pay, or the status of those employed: indeed, it may well be that the labourers were, in fact, domestic slaves, 'hired out' to Duncan by their masters as happened on other parts of the coast where there was an English presence established.⁸⁵ This may explain Duncan's omission to furnish full information. But, even assuming that such a 'wage' system was introduced, the experiment was cut short by Duncan's death,⁸⁶ and although it can be speculated that some similar relationship existed between Régis and Whydah natives, there is no other specific evidence on the introduction of wage labour.

Coastal "palm oil plantations" in the 1840s then, were distinguished from previous oil production in their scale of manufacture, and in the new economic relationships between master and slave developed at this time, but such change as did occur must not be over-estimated.

SMALL SCALE PRODUCERS AND DOMESTIC SLAVES

By no means all of the oil exported derived from such large scale enterprises. While there are no quantitative data to indicate what share of export produce emanated from small scale production units in the early years of the trade there is sufficient impressionistic evidence to suggest that the proportion so produced was not insignificant.

In 1845, for instance, Duncan indicated petty production by the wives of Sierra Leone slaves who undertook collection of fruit from the bush and manufacture of the oil along with other part-time tasks such as laundrying.⁸⁷

The nature of the exchange goods employed in the palm oil trade also indicates extensive small scale transactions. In 1850 Forbes reported that apart from the normal exchange goods employed in the slave trade - which would obviously suffice for large scale transactions in palm oil - the conduct of the oil trade also required a range of smaller articles of less value: articles such as perfumery, inferior jewellery and ornaments.⁸⁸ Moreover, Forbes provides eye witness testimony as to the regular presence of small scale producers, some with as little as a gallon to sell, in the yards of the oil traders.⁸⁹

Perhaps most important of all in indicating the important role of small scale production, is the central role of the cowrie shell in the new commerce. Cowries had been in domestic use in Dahomey for a considerable period prior to the development of the oil export trade. Dapper, one of the earliest visitors to the area, noted that cowries were in use for internal market transactions on the Slave Coast and the Western Delta of the Niger from the beginning of the 17th Century.⁹⁰

A century later they constituted a valuable and essential part of any assortment in the exchange for slaves, both at Whydah,⁹¹ and in the interior of the country.⁹² They still formed an important part of a slave ship's cargo at the onset of the 19th century, although their central role appears to have diminished somewhat.⁹³

The palm oil trade brought the shells back into the fore of exchanges in the export sector, and by the 1840s it was, according to one French source, the cowrie shell rather than trade goods which formed the mainstay and the normal means of exchange for palm oil produce.⁹⁴ This report may have been influenced by the trading operations of Régis, whose importation of shells direct from the Indies did much to maintain his pre-eminent position in the Whydah oil trade.⁹⁵ But the central role of cowries in legitimate commerce is confirmed by Duncan as well as French sources.⁹⁶

To some extent the attraction of the shell - to both large and small scale producers - may have been enhanced by its apparent scarcity in Dahomean and neighbouring ports in the first half of the 1840s.⁹⁷ But both its central role and the extent of its use in relatively small transactions is confirmed by the eye witness account of Forbes at mid-century. At that time the wholesale trade in oil was largely carried out in yards attached to the establishments of the various European and Portuguese merchants.⁹⁸ As such their activity can be taken to represent the vast majority of oil trading. Forbes, visiting one such yard, that of Don José Dos Santos at Whydah reported that the yard was "filled with traders, some with only a gallon, others having slaves loaded with large calabashes of oil: while dozens of his own slaves were counting out cowries to pay for the produce."⁹⁹

Outside Whydah, too, there are indications that a significant proportion of export oil was being provided by small producers. In the late 1840s Domingo Martinez, for instance, still appears to have been receiving a substantial proportion of his oil from native Dahomeans: so much so that in 1849 a number of European merchants were considering a petition to the monarch in an attempt to have the King prevent his people selling their oil to Domingo.¹⁰⁰

Despite the absence of reliable statistics, the foregoing evidence is sufficient to warrant the conclusion that a significant amount of oil destined for the export market was being produced and traded in small quantities.

A proportion of this oil appears to have been produced through the use of domestic slaves, a fact which was repeatedly mentioned by European traders involved in the trade. But it is more difficult to ascertain precisely whether or not the new trade actually resulted in the significant transformation in the relationship between master and slave which was noted on other parts of the coast.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless there are some indications of a change in the status of slaves. Under the conditions of traditional large scale slave production, in which the slaves had little or no control over their produce, which would be appropriated and consumed or marketed by the owner, the slaves had no direct access to wealth with which to enhance their status. However, the phenomenon noted at Lagos¹⁰² whereby slaves were permitted -subject to tribute - to operate as independent small producers or traders, allowing them to accumulate wealth and, in some cases, purchase their freedom appears to have occurred to some extent within Dahomey.

As mentioned earlier, this may have been because slaves owned by large scale slave holders were allowed some relative autonomy in the economic sphere, thus giving rise to a pseudo-feudal relationship of production and tribute. This was happening to some extent, at least in the coastal areas. Cruickshank, for instance, commented on the employment pattern in the towns and villages along the coast;

"It appears to be the general practice with the masters of the slaves, to permit them to prosecute their own affairs, and receive in exchange for this concession of their time, a stipulated monthly sum derived from their labour, and owing to this arrangement an industrious slave is sometimes enabled to acquire his freedom by obtaining funds necessary for the purchase of two slaves, which will generally be accepted as the price of his redemption."¹⁰³

It would, of course have taken considerable time to accumulate the value of two slaves, especially allowing for expenses, subsistence and the monthly stipend to the master. But there is evidence that slaves were capable of acquiring a considerable amount of wealth: Duncan, for instance, pointed to the fact that some of da Souza's slaves were being taxed by the monarch at a rate which would suggest considerable earning capacity.¹⁰⁴

The general trend is confirmed by Fraser's mention of a category of "liberty slaves", who, like those referred to by Cruickshank, had permission from their "father" - the term master was not employed in the case of "liberty slaves" - to act independently in return for a stipulated repayment - calculated per diem, according to Fraser.¹⁰⁵

It appears, therefore, that significant changes were taking place in the traditional social role of at least some slaves and that the new trade was offering a number of slaves the chance of liberty.

On the other hand, the scale of the changes in the 1840s must be treated with caution. For one thing it is impossible to assess precisely the extent to which the liberating process encroached upon the traditional form of small-scale domestic slavery as opposed to those slaves owned by large scale slave holders. Moreover, it seems highly improbable that such a seasoned and experienced advocate of the benefits of the new commerce - and of his own economic interests - as Régis , for instance, would have missed the opportunity of using such a development in his own arguments, if it was occurring on an extensive scale: particularly since Régis , and other advocates of palm oil commerce, were wont to dwell on the subject of domestic slavery - specifically the retention of hitherto exported slaves for domestic production - as a central illustration of the new commerce's beneficial effects.

Moreover, it is clear that he was well aware of the potency of any argument which held out the possibility of liberation for domestic slaves, and he himself employed this very argument in his attempts to convince the French Government that he should be allowed to purchase labourers - who would eventually be liberated - from the monarch.¹⁰⁶

It may well be that the new opportunities were largely confined to domestic slaves belonging to large slave holders, men like da Souza, for instance, who wished to diversify into palm oil production and collection on a large scale, and who, prior to entry into plantation production, found it economically beneficial from their own point of view to

encourage the production of palm oil through the extension of economic incentives - and eventual liberty - to their own slaves. In the first instance it is likely that such procedures resulted from the collection of oil produced by others in the hinterland, an activity which involved large numbers of small trading agents working on behalf of the larger merchants and slave owners, but which, on account of the diffuse nature of the operation, would have been impossible to supervise adequately in any controlled fashion. The obvious mechanism for ensuring oil supplies while retaining control of the agents, was to introduce a vested economic interest on the part of the latter.¹⁰⁷

It appears, then that two main trends in domestic slavery accompanied, and resulted from, the declining slave trade and a growing palm oil export sector. These trends were alternatives, in the sense that a slave could not experience both at once. The first was an extension of internal slavery in terms of scale though not in terms of relationship between master and slave, as slaves hitherto exported were employed in the manufacture of oil and in its collection. In such cases the slave became part of a large scale production enterprise and was, incidentally, more exploited by the extended expropriation of economic surplus from the slave's labour owing to the commercial opportunities opened up by the increased demand for palm oil.

Secondly, however, there is some evidence to suggest that the nature of domestic slavery was undergoing change, with the potential liberation of domestic slaves from their masters appearing as a concrete reality, though one which was probably limited to a relatively small number of such slaves throughout the 1840s. In this case the slave was allowed to

operate as an independent producer - or in some cases petty trader - while surplus was appropriated by the master in the form of regular tribute.

These two categories of production existed alongside petty commodity production by free peasants, from whom surplus was extracted by the state by means of taxation, and by traders through their profits in exchange.

SUMMARY OF PRODUCERS

These, then, were the main sources of palm oil in the coastal region: by the end of the 1840s supplies of oil were being derived from both large and small scale producers. Petty production had existed throughout the 1820s and 1830s but developed considerably from 1839, encouraged firstly by the establishment of on-shore trading facilities, subsequently by the positive intervention of the monarch to encourage and protect the trade, and finally by the higher oil prices in the second half of the 1840s.

The larger production units had their roots in the 1830s, but developed largely towards the end of the 1840s. The oil trade, which acted as both a substitute for the declining slave trade, and a complementary mechanism in an attempt to ensure the slave trade's survival, held out attractive advantages to the slave traders and the coastal Dahomean merchants. Initially the slave traders enhanced supplies by the encouragement of petty production - under the auspices of the monarch - of Dahomean natives, by offering economic incentives to their own domestic slaves, and by encouraging the settlement of liberated slaves, particularly from Brazil. The continuing difficulties of slave

shipments, a declining income and costs of slave export stocks on the one hand, and ready supplies of labour and increased oil prices on the other, led them into the employment of hitherto exported slave stocks in palm oil production from the last years of the 1840s. Large scale entry into palm oil production led on the one hand to an extension of the scale of internal domestic slavery,¹⁰⁸ and on the other to changes in the relationship between master and slave which were limited in scale but extremely significant in their nature.

NON-INVOLVEMENT OF THE MONARCH IN LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION IN THE 1840's

The production of palm oil in the hinterland during the early stages of the palm oil trade has been a more open question than that of coastal production. In particular the role of the monarchy in the production of oil for the export sector has probably received more attention than any other aspect, though without agreed conclusions as to the extent of royal involvement, or the chronology of its development. Some authors have emphasized the innovatory role of Gezo's diversification into palm oil production from a relatively early date, with others disputing both the extent of innovation involved and the length of royal involvement in actual production.¹⁰⁹ In fact, some historians suggest that both the growth of the oil trade and royal encouragement of the commerce pre-date Gezo's accession to the Dahomean stool, placing it as early as the first decade of the 19th century, in the reign of Adandozan.¹¹⁰

For the most part, however, attention has concentrated on Gezo's reign, and in particular much of the discussion has centred on the

establishment of the plantation of Lefu-Lefu,¹¹¹ an enterprise producing oil through the employment of slave labour. Neither the fact of its establishment nor the date of its foundation is necessarily a definitive indication of the involvement of the monarch, or the timing of his entry into large scale production of oil for export but the date and the nature of the plantation do merit some attention.

The date of the foundation of Lefu-Lefu has remained elusive to a range of historians who have considered the question,¹¹² and in the absence of any additional information it's perhaps wise to adopt the correctly cautious approach of a recent historian who has placed the foundation of the plantation somewhere between 1833 and 1849.¹¹³

Royal plantations in and around Abomey long preceded the rise of the palm oil trade. The use of royal slaves in agriculture was noted by Snelgrave, c.1727.¹¹⁴ In the last decades of the 18th century, Norris noted that:

"Jahou is Master of the Horse: he has the care of criminals and is to see their punishment inflicted: he also has the superintendance of the plantations which supply the King's household with provisions: and to see that the women who are to cultivate them are not remiss in the discharge of their duty."¹¹⁵

Such plantations served to supply the needs of the royal household and the standing army,¹¹⁶ the conscript army supplying its own food during campaigns. And, given the important role of palm oil in Dahomean cuisine and in army stores, they were inevitably involved to some extent in the collection of palm produce and manufacture of oil for domestic consumption.¹¹⁷

Lefu-Lefu may have differed from previous plantations in the sense that both male and female captives were settled in that particular plantation. Dunglas specifically refers to captives of both sexes being temporarily allocated there to await shipment opportunities,¹¹⁸ while Forbes remarked in 1850 that "in the neighbourhood of Abomey, unlike the rest of Africa, men labour in the fields and the women are only employed in carrying water."¹¹⁹ If Forbes' remark includes plantations - which is not specifically indicated - then it does appear as though Lefu-Lefu was innovative in terms of sex employed - or at least that some change had taken place since Norris' visit.

Dunglas's date for the establishment of Lefu-Lefu, 1843,¹²⁰ is appealing since it suggests that the increased export demand for oil may have played some role in the plantations establishment. The date would suggest that the founding of the plantation coincided with the general promulgations by Gezo in encouragement of the oil trade. Moreover, Dunglas's assertion that out of the large number of captives the old and those with no market value were slain¹²¹ could explain the extremely high level of human sacrifice at the 1843 customs.¹²² Finally, his remark that the original town of Lefu-Lefu itself was taken with considerable number of captives, and that the able-bodied of both sexes were sent, provisionally, to the royal food plantations,¹²³ would help explain the difference between Norris' account of the sex of plantation labourers and Forbes' remarks on male agriculturalists.

But, notwithstanding the apparent diversion from the previous practice of employing only females on the royal plantations, Lefu-Lefu appears to have fallen into the traditional pattern of using royal

plantations for the provision of the monarch's household and others dependent upon him. It also appears to have been set in the traditional form of a mixed agricultural plantation. Like the plantations of the coastal merchants and slave dealers, it was not devoted to the exclusive production of palm oil. Forbes specifically referred to it as a "plantation of palms, corn, etc."¹²⁴ which seems in keeping with general food plantations outlined by Norris over half a century before, and by Forbes himself in his description of other Dahomean plantations.¹²⁵

David Ross accepts that the monarch began the systematic cultivation of palm oil soon after Freeman's visit to Gezo in 1843.¹²⁶ However, so far as Lefu-Lefu is concerned, it appears that the redirection of emphasis fell short of a radical or comprehensive attempt to enter into large scale production of export oil. Moreover, there is no suggestion in Forbes' account of his visit that the royal plantations were being used for the production of export oil.¹²⁷

It is therefore likely that there were other, more pressing reasons for the establishment of the plantation, and the involvement of labourers of both sexes perhaps provides a clue. The change may have occurred as a result of difficulties being experienced by the monarch in divesting himself of slave captives via the mechanism of the export trade. It is likely that from the late 1830s[~] the monarch, the main supplier of Dahomean war captives for the export trade, was hit even harder than the slave dealers at Whydah by the interruptions to the slave trade. Like them, he adapted to the new circumstances by employing slave stocks temporarily in a productive capacity - on the royal plantations - while

awaiting shipping opportunities. This is particularly likely to have happened whenever a Dahomean raid concluded in an overwhelming victory with a large number of captives. This would not, of itself, offer a rational explanation for the deployment of slave stocks unless the produce of the plantations were in demand either for internal consumption or for trade. There is, however, some indication that Dahomey was undergoing a food shortage around mid-century.¹²⁸ At the 1851 Customs, for instance, Forbes noted a discussion on "the agricultural condition of the country . . . the corn grounds were insufficient in extent to meet the demand".¹²⁹ Moreover, the same source indicates that Dahomey had previously been in the habit of importing corn from Aja.¹³⁰ Thus the combination of internal food demand and decline in export slave demand may have encouraged the deployment of slave captives into domestic food production.

But there is no suggestion in the contemporary literature that the monarch was developing specialized palm oil plantations in the 1840s. Certainly, the monarch himself went out of his way at the beginning of 1843, to stress, during Freeman's visit, that he had "no plantations in his country for coffee, cotton etc . . ." ¹³¹ Freeman was, in the spirit of the times, an enthusiastic advocate of the beneficial effects of legitimate agricultural production and its potential effect on the future of Dahomey.¹³² He had certainly raised the prospect of cotton cultivation during this first visit to Gezo, and possibly, carried away by his own enthusiasm for such a prospect, overestimated the willingness and capacity of the monarch to radically restructure his economic involvement in the export sector.¹³³

Gezo, for his part, was keen to woo the British diplomatically, and, holding temporary surplus labour in the form of unsaleable captives, was possibly prepared to carry out an experimental scheme of allocating the captives to agricultural production which would impress the British while at the same time productively employ his slave stocks for the time being.

But the move was a temporary economic and political expedient, rather than a firm redirection of policy. There are no reference whatsoever from the 1840s contemporary literature or primary sources regarding any significant direct involvement in palm oil production on the part of the monarch.¹³⁴ It seems hardly credible that such a development would have gone unremarked upon. Nor is there any references to the carriage of oil from the Abomey area - where most of the royal plantations were situated - until the 1870s.

There are, however, a number of scattered references which merit further attention. In 1851, just after Forbes' visit, Fraser on a visit to Abomey recorded some remarks on the vicinity. Among them he included reference to the area north of the town, which, was the road to Mahi territory, and was also the route which, according to Duncan during a visit to the capital some years earlier, was surrounded by "beautifully cultivated fields of corn (and) . . . ground beans".¹³⁵ Fraser's comments on the area are tantilizing: "Took Duncan's route, the North Road, there are more young palm trees in this direction than I have ever seen: the land is level, covered with coarse grass and numerous patches of cultivation."¹³⁶ While there is no indication that the area constituted a royal plantation, it does appear to have been an area surrounded by some prohibitions since Fraser apparently reconnoitred the

area unknown to the monarch and much to the latter's surprise.¹³⁷ However, although Duncan makes no reference in his published work to the development which so impressed Fraser some years later, he did in fact draw the attention of the Select Committee on the Slave Trade to the vast number of palm and "shea-butter" trees in the area between Dahomey and the "Kong Mountains". There was no suggestion from Duncan that these were other than naturally grown, or that they were the result of any systematic policy on the part of the monarch.¹³⁸

Dunglas also records another settlement of captives, established on the banks of the River Couffo about 15kms to the west of Abomey. Like Lefu-Lefu, he contends it was worked entirely by slave captives who were employed productively for the King's benefit, affording him at the same time further stocks of readily available slave exports.¹³⁹

There is, therefore, no evidence to substantiate the view that Gezo became directly involved on any scale in systematic production of palm oil for export through the use of royal plantations in the early years of the 1840s, although he may have allocated 'spare' war captives temporarily to agricultural production.

Gezo's own testimony bears this out. By 1845, two years after the Rev. Freeman's visit, the monarch was still apparently willing to consider such a course of action, although not to commit himself to it without more concrete proposals from his enthusiastic British visitors - proposals which had not so far been forthcoming.¹⁴⁰ As late as 1848 the monarch went out of his way to stress his non-involvement in commercial agricultural production;¹⁴¹ and, on the subject of the palm oil trade in particular, while he conceded that it was now engaging the

attention of some of his subjects, he referred to his own financial interest only in terms of duties on the trade.¹⁴² Even later, in 1851, the monarch was still being subjected to persuasion by Europeans to maintain his encouragement and protection to the trade in general.¹⁴³

The need for such consistent persuasion illustrates the misgivings which Gezo was having about even his limited commitment to the palm oil trade. By the last years of the decade he had dismissed both cotton and coffee cultivation as too long term an investment and too low an income yield.¹⁴⁴ And by that time, also, he was rapidly discarding attention to the supposed benefits of legitimate commerce by explicitly rejecting the whole notion of royal agricultural involvement in the export trade as a basis for his monarchical rule.¹⁴⁵

It is likely, in fact, that throughout this period the traditional relationship between the monarchy and agriculture had continued to prevail, with slaves on the royal plantations being overwhelmingly involved in the production of general foodstuffs - including palm oil for internal consumption.¹⁴⁶ The increased demand for palm oil on the coast may have been a contributory factor in the establishment of Lefu-Lefu, but there is little contemporary evidence to suggest that it was anything other than a marginal one.

As has been seen, when Forbes visited Lefu-Lefu in 1850, for instance, cultivation was not confined to palm trees but also to corn and other agricultural produce.¹⁴⁷ What attracted Forbes' attention was not so much the partial allocation to palm produce, but the orderliness and quality of its cultivation, and - a point which is sometimes forgotten - the very uniqueness of the enterprise: "an operation which"

as he put it "if carried out generally, would soon put an end to foreign slavery."¹⁴⁸

So far as the monarch's role in the palm oil trade was concerned, this was confined to the encouragement and protection of production by others - which did not preclude the possibility of supplying them with slave manpower for coastal plantations - and the protection, encouragement and extension of facilities to traders involved in the trade. Royal income was derived from the mechanisms of tax on oil traded, levies and gifts from European traders, and possibly increased tribute from the Axisinon.

Large scale production of oil throughout the 'forties lay substantially in the hands of the three main groups of coastal producers, the slave traders, the Axisinon and the liberated slaves settled around Whydah. In addition oil was derived in an unknown but probably significant proportion from small scale farmers, operating with their wives and possibly a small number of domestic slaves, and sometimes producing as little as a gallon at a time.

Though the monarch encouraged all of these producers, and was happy to take what he could get by way of taxation from the new trade, was prepared to use it as a temporary (via the Axisinon) and permanent outlet (via Europeans involved, like Régis)¹⁴⁹ for captives, and may even have been personally prepared to consider direct participation in the production of oil through the temporary use of slave stocks, there is no evidence that he actually became directly involved in production throughout the 1840s.

ECONOMIC REASONS FOR THE MONARCHS NON-INVOLVEMENT IN PRODUCTION

That he failed to become so involved in production springs not so much from the personal decision of the monarch as from existing socio-economic factors. His non-intervention in the sphere of production was determined on the one hand by the relatively unattractive economic prospects of doing so and by several technical characteristics of palm oil production itself: and on the other hand by political obligations and ideological constraints imposed by the inherited Dahomean social structure. Despite the growing strength of palm oil commerce, royal diversification into export production as a major means of offsetting the declining slave trade not only held out little prospect of adequately fulfilling the former's vital economic and political role, but moreover implied nothing less than a complete political and ideological revolution. Far from constituting the economic lifeline which Europeans suggested, a developing palm oil trade threatened to create a dangerous disjunction between contemporary economic reality and inherited political ideal.

Primary among the reasons for the failure of the monarch to diversify into palm oil production were the economic. The relatively high return from his production of and taxation on slaves over the previous two decades encouraged the hope that, despite a temporary dislocation of the slave trade, its decline might not be inevitable, and it reinforced his commitment to this traditional export sector as a steady and lucrative way of maintaining important western imports. On the other hand, the comparatively low return to the central exchequer from palm oil commerce throughout the forties held out little prospect of it ever serving as an

adequate substitute. Some indication of this can be obtained by assessing export levels of the legitimate commodity, and their associated income levels. Purely at the level of aggregate exports, even by the late 1840s, the total quantity of oil exported from Dahomey's main port each year appear to provide a total income figure far below the monarchy's traditional income.

Thus, if Cruickshank's figures are taken as reasonably accurate as regards palm oil,¹⁵⁰ the total export of oil from Whydah at the end of the 1840s were running at a level of around 2000 tons per annum.¹⁵¹ The price of oil does appear to have increased considerably in the second half of the 1840s, roughly doubling between 1846 and 1849,¹⁵² but even taking oil prices at their peak, and assuming the higher export totals of 2000 tons per annum, the total income to all sources in Dahomey could have been no higher than £45,000 per annum. (May 1850 prices). At the lower 1846 prices the total income to all sources would be in the region of £22,500.

Even allowing calculation on the higher prices and export quantities of the late 1840s then, the total income to all sources from the palm oil trade falls considerably short of Cruickshank's estimated income to the monarch from the slave trade (production and taxes) in the years prior to 1848, which was put at £67,500.¹⁵³

It is true, of course, that Whydah was not the only port through which oil could be exported: but it was the main one. Moreover, the figures for palm oil income grossly overestimate the income from the trade which was acquired by the monarch, since his role was confined largely to that of taxation on the trade. The monarch's actual share of

the new commerce was more likely in the region of £2,500, derived from a 1/18th tax on transactions recorded, and whatever else he might obtain by way of increased tribute from the Axisinon. The Whydah figures indicate the relatively paltry level of income implied by the new trade: a level which was hardly likely to reinforce convincingly the optimistic assertions of Gezo's various European visitors. The limited extent of the revenue is unlikely to have convinced the monarch of the benefits of an economic transition involving his diversification into export production.

Thus, even if the monarch had been able to compete on the same cost terms as every other producer, and to produce as much oil as that produced from every other source, it is likely that the level of his annual income through the export sector would nevertheless have fallen considerably.

But in fact, the monarch could not compete on equal terms with the coastal producers if royal plantations like Lefu-Lefu were to be utilized as a major production unit. The costs involved in the production, and particularly the transportation of oil from the interior were extremely heavy.¹⁵⁴ The startling difference in transport costs between slave and palm oil exports from the hinterland can be illustrated by making a few, not unreasonable, assumptions: viz: that the average journey from Abomey to coast took four days: that one slave export = one ton palm oil export = £20;¹⁵⁵ that one guard was needed for every ten slaves: that one carrier was needed for every five gallons of palm oil.

The subsistence costs involved by the monarch in transporting ten slaves, value £200, to the coast would then equal the subsistence costs

of 11 men (one guard and 10 slaves) for four days on the way to the coast, and one man (the guard) for four days on his return trip. A total of 48 man-days subsistence.

The subsistence costs in transporting an equal value of palm oil (10 tons) the same distance would involve, 600 men for four days on the way to the coast, and 600 men on the return trip for four days: a total of 4,800 man-days subsistence. Palm oil transportation was, then, around 100 times more costly than the transportation of slaves.

These figures illustrate why it is unlikely that palm oil production from plantations in the Abomey area would prove economically worthwhile in the conditions of the mid 19th century. They also indicate why the eventual establishment of plantations was effected near or on the rivers Coufo and Weme to facilitate carriage by waterway.

In some areas of Africa such heavy costs were offset by using caravans of export slaves en route to the coast in the carriage of legitimate produce.¹⁵⁶ These procedures were suitable when a market for the slaves at the coast was guaranteed, or could be arranged in advance. In the erratic and declining situation of the Dahomean slave trade, where speed and manoeuvrability were essential for the dispatch of slaves, such a cost cutting exercise was unworkable.

Both the level of income, then, and the necessary costs involved in transportation indicate how unlikely the palm oil trade must have seemed as an adequate substitute for the slave trade. And since Gezo's concern was primarily one of revenue,¹⁵⁷ it is not surprising that he was complaining at the end of the 1840s about the minimal amounts of money which the new commerce brought into his coffers.¹⁵⁸ Revenue in the

export sector was of primary importance since, although the proportion of income earned there may have been relatively small in comparison with the total gross domestic product of the Kingdom,¹⁵⁹ its social and political significance was out of all proportion to its share of the GNP so far as the Dahomean ruling class was concerned. The bulk of western imported goods was traditionally channelled in the first instance to only a small section of the Dahomean population,¹⁶⁰ but therein lay its very importance rather than its insignificance.

The import sector was the primary means of access by the ruling class, and particularly by the monarchy, to scarce luxury goods and to strategic imports - powder and cloth for the standing army, cowries for payment and distribution at the annual festivals, fine cloth and accoutrements for the monarch's wives in keeping with their social standing, spirits for distribution to 'clients' and commoners, and prestigiously scarce western goods for a conspicuous display of wealth at the Customs. It is worth quoting the Dahomean monarch himself at some length on the relationship between this sector, and domestic political and social power. Gezo's words were recorded by Cruickshank.

"The state which he maintained was great: his army was expensive, the customs and ceremonies to be observed annually, which had been handed down to him from his forefathers entailed upon him a vast outlay of money. These could not be abolished. . . . who would pay his troops and buy arms and clothing for them? Who would give him supplies of cowries, or rum, of powder, and of cloth to perform his annual customs?"¹⁶¹

The very nature of the traditional political structure upon which the power of the monarch rested demanded conspicuous exhibition of wealth, ostentatious distribution of relatively scarce commodities and cowries,

and provision for a standing army. All of these in turn depended on a high earnings capability in the export sector. The palm oil trade offered a low level of income through taxation, and compared to the slave trade a low level of profit through production.

Furthermore, the monarch required a sustained level of income. Even if palm oil production could be achieved on the vast scale necessary to produce an adequate income, transitional preparations would involve a time-lag incompatible with the maintenance of the monarch's political position in the interim. The procurement of slaves, the monarch's traditional means of access to the export-import sector, offered, subject to a successful campaign, not only a relatively high level of profit, but a relatively short-term return. The potential returns from ad-hoc production from oil trees in the hinterland were low per unit: the scale of production required to achieve tolerable income totals in the export sector would have necessitated a massive systematic cultivation and planting of trees. But, systematic planting was a very long-term investment.

Gezo was unable to suspend the Dahomean traditional political structure at will until such times as he managed to reap the uncertain and uninvitingly low potential of legitimate commerce. It was on these grounds that he rejected the systematic production of coffee and cotton: they constituted too long-term an investment to merit serious consideration as an answer to his present economic problems in the 1840s.¹⁶² Systematic palm oil planting would, in fact, have taken even longer to bear fruit, literally and metaphorically.¹⁶³ The utility of palm produce to the monarch was that existing palm stocks,

naturally grown, created a reservoir which could be tapped immediately as a partial offsetting influence to the declining slave trade, as opposed to the longer term cultivation which was required of, say, cotton and coffee.¹⁶⁴ But transportation costs from the central area of the kingdom rendered the profits per unit on palm oil so low that economic production in an area like Abomey which was not only far from the coast, but was also relatively scarce in wild palms, a very distant prospect.

From an economic point of view, then, palm oil production offered little potential solace to the monarch at a time when his major export commodity was suffering decline. High transport costs, low profit margins and high labour input per unit, and the length of investment required to achieve anything like a comparable export income to the slave trade all stood in stark contrast to the monarch's requirement of an immediate, sustained and high level of income from the export sector.

THE INHERENT DANGERS IN PALM OIL PRODUCTION

If palm oil production offered no positive attractions to the monarchy as a major source of access to the export-import sector, there were aspects of the production process which manifested an increasing threat to the traditional economic and political power of the central government. These features, some of which became apparent during the 1840s, stemmed essentially from four production characteristics of the new trade.

Firstly, the geographical location of the main producing areas was situated outside the main metropolitan area, Abomey, and lay mainly to the immediate hinterland of the coast between Abomey and the export

ports. Secondly, and to a certain extent related to this, the monarch was not involved to any extent in production himself.

Taken together, these two features rendered it extremely difficult for the monarch to carry out any bureaucratic or statistical checks on the actual amount of oil produced for export, and thus to obtain even the limited tax-income to which he was entitled.

The task was further compounded by a third characteristic of palm oil production: its widespread production for internal consumption made it extremely difficult to distinguish, at the point of production, between oil produced for internal use and that intended for the export market.

Finally, the sheer scale of a large number of small producers of oil, spread over time and space to a far greater extent than in slave procurement, made control and assessment of export oil at the point of production well nigh impossible.

Thus, the monarchs lack of real control over the production side of the new commerce in all likelihood rendered his income from taxation, and possibly tribute via Axisinon, even lower than might be suggested from calculating his tax entitlement from export figures.

The monarch could, and did, of course, attempt to effect accurate returns and to obtain his full tax entitlement by the stationing of his agents in markets, in the yards of merchants or wherever oil exchange took place,¹⁶⁵ but the vastly increased scale of unit transactions increased the opportunities for tax evasion. Even at Whydah, the most closely administered of the coastal ports under the sovereignty of the central government, oil was changing hands in a clandestine fashion from the inception of the trade, avoiding the attention of the King's men and

thus the tax impositions.¹⁶⁶ Tax evasion was neither new nor was it confined to the palm oil trade alone.¹⁶⁷ But the diffused nature of palm oil production and the scale of transactions rendered the practice potentially more widespread and effective.

In the coastal ports less effectively under direct control from Abomey, the task of ensuring effective collection of duties was even more difficult. This may have been the reason why some of the 'monopoly' agents appointed by the King in outlying ports consequent upon the necessary diffusion of the slave trade appear eventually to have commanded a near monopoly of the palm oil trade;¹⁶⁸ they may have been employed by the King in an attempt to ensure adequate income from the trade.

The avoidance of duties or tribute, the growing dispersal of the means of prosperity as a result of the trade, and acts of political defiance became increasingly associated with each other in the official Dahomean mind. This attitude is most clearly illustrated in the cases of Agoué and Badagry, coastal ports which had been under the suzerainty of, and paying tribute to, Dahomey for some time prior to the development of the palm oil trade. Cruickshank was the recipient of Gezo's views on the subject when he visited him in 1848. Having illustrated the avowed benefits of legitimate commerce to Gezo by reference to the advances in riches and 'comfort' attained by the Gold Coast natives, Cruickshanks advocacy elicited the following reply from the monarch:

"No riches for my people . . . Porto Novo, Ajudo, Badagry and other towns on the coast once belonged to me and paid their tribute as regularly as Whydah. Ships now go there and trade with them - factories are established there for the purchase of palm oil, and the result is, that these people are becoming rich, and set my authority at defiance. It is true that they still pay a nominal duty to prevent war, but I am cheated by them . . ."169

These sentiments pre-dated by some forty years the political crisis on the periphery of the kingdom, particularly around Porto Novo, which was to have such grave consequences for the Dahomean monarchy, but their expression indicated that even in the 1840's the potential consequences of the new commerce were not entirely hidden from the Dahomean authorities.

POLITICAL ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE PALM OIL TRADE

The concern to centralise the control of trade was not a new one for Dahomean monarchs. Royal concern to close rival ports or to divert their trade through Whydah was a long standing one which long pre-dated the oil trade.¹⁷⁰ But as Gezo's comments quite clearly illustrate, the Dahomean monarchy realised the potential threat to their own political power inherent in the new commerce: a threat first manifesting itself in the peripheral areas of the kingdom, but one which had a potential for spreading to the very heart of their polity.

Lack of control over production for the export sector demanded increasingly political action to control it at the level of trade. The general movement of trade was, of course, part of a continuing process, and one which had its roots in an era pre-dating large scale palm oil exports: but the process was accelerated by the nature of the new export commodity, and the first signs of the disjunction between inherited political power and the reality of the new economic developments was manifested in areas least susceptible to direct political control, but best placed to reap the advantages of the new commerce - the coastal ports on the fringes of the Dahomean Kingdom.

From the early 1840s the monarchy attempted to counteract this tendency by the use of non-economic mechanisms to try to stifle the trade at outlying ports and channel it through their most closely controlled port, Whydah. Diplomatic attempts to persuade European powers and merchants towards this end are numerous throughout the 1840s.¹⁷¹

But the monarchy did not rely solely on diplomatic persuasion, as is evident from the instance of a Captain Marmon who in the late 1830's had managed to establish a palm oil factory at Badagry, largely through the mediation of da Souza with the King. Initially the factory prospered, attracting considerable quantities of oil from the hinterland. By 1842, however, the Captain had been forced to leave his establishment, largely according to one report, on account of the jealousy of the Dahomean authorities.¹⁷²

Hutton's factory at Badagry, which was established subsequent to that of Marmon, was still starved of oil as late as 1844, and was barely in a position to cover its running expenses.¹⁷³ This stemmed in large part from the fact that the coastal road from Whydah to Badagry had been closed by Gezo against the factory since its inception.¹⁷⁴

Hutton's Badagry factory was subject to further harrasment. By 1844 the dispute between the Dahomean authorities and the Badagrian chiefs was reaching a climax,¹⁷⁵ which not only contributed towards the interruption to communications but on a number of occasions threatened the port with Dahomean invasions.¹⁷⁶ Early the following year the Dahomean army invaded the surrounding area, and Hutton himself was convinced that Gezo was bent on the destruction of the town.¹⁷⁷

In fact, Gezo was probably constrained precisely by the fact that the destruction of the town would have involved him in a direct confrontation with the British over the possible consequences for Hutton's factory.¹⁷⁸ But the Dahomean monarch did not drop the matter: later that year Dahomean soldiers returned to the town, demanding payment of a traditional tribute and the restationing there of a Dahomean agent.¹⁷⁹

Up until around 1847 the factory was the subject of harassment less directly attributable to the Dahomean authorities, but unlikely to have been carried out without at least their tacit approval. Domingo Martinez, for instance, was involved in attempting to persuade the Badagry chiefs to drive out the English merchants.¹⁸⁰ And Domingo was again involved in 1847 when remnants of his Dahomean army returning from an unsuccessful attack on Lagos harassed Hutton's men, and rendered puncheon kits useless by making off with the iron hoops essential for binding the storage vessels.¹⁸¹

Badagry was not the only port competing with Whydah, of course, and the monarch actively discouraged trade at any of the other ports.¹⁸² Hutton's fared little better there than they did at Badagry. In the early 1840s they had established a factory at Agoué to the west of Whydah,¹⁸³ and remained the sole European factors there for a number of years.¹⁸⁴ On at least two occasions the factory was badly damaged by fire,¹⁸⁵ and although there is no conclusive evidence to prove direct instigation by the Dahomean monarch, the suspicions of the factors themselves that the Portuguese community at Whydah lay behind the arson may have had some substance. Moreover, Agoué suffered in the same manner as Badagry, by having the roads from Whydah closed against it by the Dahomean authorities.¹⁸⁶

Though Hutton's appear to have believed that the initial Dahomean antagonism towards them was the result of an attempt to stifle the palm oil trade completely, this is, in fact, unlikely. After all, both the monarch and the Portuguese on the coast were involved in measures designed specifically to encourage production and commerce in palm oil. And both parties had something to gain from so doing: the Portuguese as traders and producers of oil, and the monarch in the more limited field of tax income. It is more likely that while the Dahomeans encouraged the trade, the very nature of palm oil production made it more important than ever to channel commerce through the port most directly under their political control. This maximised the commerce of the Portuguese and the tax income of the monarch. It may well have been Hutton's success in establishing factories at coastal situations other than Whydah, rather than their involvement in the palm oil trade per se, which merited them the antagonism of both Portuguese and the Dahomean authorities. Régis, whose other establishments on the West Coast were sufficiently distant to offer no obvious competition to Whydah, basked in the sunshine of the monarch's benevolence throughout the forties, in stark contrast to Hutton's factory even at Whydah.

Thus, so far as the new trade was concerned, the actual production characteristics limited the capacity for royal diversification into palm oil as an effective means of access to western imports, and eroded the returns in taxation income. Furthermore, the same characteristics encouraged a shift in economic power from the monarchy towards coastal merchants on the one hand, and from the centre of the Kingdom to the periphery on the other. Finally they permitted much wider access to the

export sector by small scale producers than had hitherto been the case, thus threatening the monarch's dominance of western imports, diffusing access to them among sections of the population whose access had previously been largely restricted to their distribution via major slave producers.

But if the economic and technical aspects of the new commerce constrained the monarchy and central authorities relative to these other groups, they were equally constrained by non-economic aspects of Dahomean life. In particular by an ideology compatible with, and reinforced by, an export sector based on the procurement of slaves. The legitimacy of the monarch depended to a large extent on his warrior ethos, and the Samurai could not lightly take to the plough.

In the 1840s the first indications of the threatening tendencies of the new commerce had become obvious. They were to be compounded throughout the fifties by conflicting pressure on the central government.. On one side by the continued interruptions to a declining slave trade and the growing strength of palm oil in the export sector. And, on the other, by two factors rendering production of this means of access to important import commodities a high risk venture for the central authorities: firstly, continued cowrie inflation, rendering the profit margins on oil produced even more precarious for an inland producer: and secondly the ideological crisis inherent in transition from warrior to farmer.

CHAPTER 5 FOOTNOTES

- 1 Rapport (extract) du P. Guillaunier, Marseille, 6/6/1845, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 2 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Senegal Afrique 1:4:a.
- 3 "Cotes d'Afrique Faits Commercaux", June-July 1845, p. 3, Arch. Nat., F12:7208. De Monleon (extract) à Min. des Col. 12/11/1844, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 4 Raport (extract) du P. Guillaunier, Marseille, 6/6/1845, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 5 W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 See Committee to Grey, 19/3/1836 and enclosures, PRO.C0267/136/140 et seq. La Presse, 6/9/1845, in Arch. Nat., F12:7208. Baudin (extracts) "Apercu de L'etat des comptoirs Francais de Golfe de Guinee", 3/4/1845, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 8 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/12/1846, extracts in W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 9 By 1846, some traders like Dos Santos were using the 'pipes' in which rum imports were contained to export Palm Oil: Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 42. The precise date of the introduction of "kits" is unclear, but they were certainly arriving on the coast near Whydah (Badagry) by 1847, whereas only 8 years previously the lack of suitable storage facilities was mentioned as one of the main constraining factors to the trade's growth: Hutton to Hawes and enclosures, 3/9/1847, PRO.C096/12/308: "Esquisse Commerciale par Bouet en 1838-9", Arch. Nat., F12:7208. By 1850 in his visit to the French Factory at Whydah, Beecroft could mention that it was well equipped for trading purposes, "with large vats for storing palm oil": Beecroft's Journals, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, entry for 15/5/1850, PRO.F084/816/148.
- 10 Ross appears to characterise the Portuguese position as one of opposition until 1846: Cf. Ross, D., "The career of Domingo . . .", J.A.H., Vol. I, 1965, pp. 81, citing Forbes to Fanshaw, 6/4/1850. This position appears incorrect: as indicated in the last chapter, they not only encouraged others to participate in the trade, but they also participated themselves to some extent in production from an earlier date. 1846 is, however, the first indication of large scale shipments by da Souza. It is possible that opposition to Hutton was taken as opposition to the palm oil trade per se - see later in this chapter.

- 11 T. Hutton to W. Hutton 7/12/1846, enclosed in W. Hutton to Hawes 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 12 This had always been the case: slave traders of slave origin from Brazil were already known in this area in the 18th century. For instance, Antonio Vaz Coelho, a free black from Brazil, was prominent at Porto Novo in the 1780's: Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 169. However, there was increased immigration of free blacks from Brazil to the Slave Coast after the Bahia slave revolts of the 1830's: Cf. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, p. 185
- 13 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 30-1.
- 14 Valdez, T .F., Six Years . . ., p. 324.
- 15 Hutton to Hawes and enclosures, 3/9/1847, PRO.C096/12/308.
- 16 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 17/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/278.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Thompson to Hutton, 15/6/1847, PRO.C096/12/272.
- 19 For example, J. A. Machado: Campbell to Wise, 16/11/1857, PRO.F084/1031/309.
- 20 Cf. for example, De Monleon à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 12/11/1844, and Baudin (extracts) "Aperçu de l'état . . .", in M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 21 See chapter 4.
- 22 Lyon and Parkinson to Capt. Dambrill, 14/1/1836, PRO.F013/141, cited in Verger, P., Trade relations . . ., p. 319.
- 23 Peronne à Min. des Col., (extracts), 18/4/1838. M.O.M. Senegal, IV:42(a) 17.
- 24 Bernard, M., "Le cocotier dans le Golfe de Benin . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 21: if this is accurate, it may well be that da Souza originally encouraged others in production and trade - e.g. liberated slaves or his own slaves. (See Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122), and later embarked on plans to enter production himself.
- 25 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/12/1846, in W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 26 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122. Though they may also have been involved in the slave trade.

- 27 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6.
- 28 Duncan to Palmerston, 17/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/43.
- 29 Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, Select Committee on Slave Trade, 1849, First Report (308, vol. XI) qs. 179, 232-4.
- 30 Martin's Journals (extracts) enclosed in Martin to Gen. Secs. 5/9/1846: Martin to Gen. Secs. 25/11/1846, both in M.M.S., 1846, box 260. T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 17/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/278.
- 31 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48: by 1849 Domingo appears to have cornered the market in oil at Porto Novo Beach. So much so that Duncan was entreated by Europeans to intercede with the King of Dahomey to ask the latter to prevent his subjects from selling their oil to Domingo: Duncan to Palmerston 22/9/1849 PRO.F084/775. It is suggested later that the King may, in fact, have been employing middle agents like Domingo to ensure reasonable returns on taxation income. By the turn of the decade Domingo claimed to have made \$80,000 per annum in the oil trade, and to have shipped 300 tons in one month on one ship: Forbes, J., Dahomey . . ., vol. II, pp. 83-5.
- 32 Cf. Argyle, W.J. The Fon . . ., p. 103, based on Burton, R., A Mission . . ., vol. I, p. 226: Quenum, M., "Au Pays des Fons", Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'O.A.F., XV111, 1935, pp. 24, 134: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 111: Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122. Also, Manning, P., Ph.D., pp. 36-7, 105-6, drawing on Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 446: D'Albecca, Les Etablisements Francais au Golfe de Benin, Paris 1899, p. 97: Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 89: Marty, P., Etudes sur L'Islam du Dahomey, Paris, 1926, pp. 15-19. Cf. also Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XV111, 4, 1977.
- 33 For instance, Polanyi K., Dahomey and the Slave Trade . . ., (p. 94) maintains that in foreign trade there were no private traders, but rather commercial diplomats. Argyle maintains that the traders had more freedom, although they were still a "restricted class, subject to the control of the King . . . had the right to . . . engage in trade with foreign peoples . . . subject to an annual tax to the King in return for their privileges": Argyle, W.J. The Fon . . ., p.103. Coquery-Vidrovitch and Law substantially support the relative autonomy position argued by Argyle. Coquery-Vidrovitch, C. "De La Traite...", in Meillassoux, C. (ed.), The Development of . . ., 1971, p. 109: Law, R. "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H. XV111, 4, 1977, p. 555.
- 34 Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey . . ., p. 103.
- 35 Guezo, A., "Commerce Exterieur et Evolution Economique aub Dahomey", unpublished M.M.D. thesis, Uni. Nationale du Benin, 1978

- 36 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 213-5.
- 37 Gaury à Min. des Col. 27/1/1789, Arch. Nat., Colonies, C6:26.
- 38 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 224. Agonglo also said that "all trading men should pay the duties to their respective masters, and not to him: for he wanted no presents but from his caboceers". Perhaps Kpengla had been asserting royal control over all the traders, and preventing them from trading for the other chiefs.
- 39 Extrait du Journal de M. Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 40 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1 p. 113.
- 41 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 111: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 140.
- 42 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., p. 87. Norris implies that the assesment was fairly informal: they "bring a quantity of cowries, proportioned to their circumstances: each of them endeavours to make his present (which is in fact a tax) as respectable as he can: and would be reprimanded, or perhaps punished, if he did not do so". However, the opportunities for private accumulation were inhibited in the long run by heavy death duties: cf. chapter 2. The assesment in the 19th century may not have been so lax. According to one 19th century source, they were "taxed proportionately to the extent of their commerce": Extrait de Journal de M. . . Brue", 1843, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b. And it must be remembered that the with higher ministers, King's agents were appointed to report direct. According to Forbes, a king's "daughter" and two "officials" were stationed in each "ministers" house: Forbes, J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6.
- 43 De Monleon à Min. de la Marine et des Colonies, 12/11/1844, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 44 Le Herissé, L'Ancien . . ., pp. 52, 87, 90. See also Fn.130. below. Although Le Herissé says that the plantations were, like royal plantations, exempt from the Kouzou tax, the monarch would benefit through the normal process of the Axisinon's annual 'gifts'.
- 45 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6.
- 46 Duncan to C.O. 17/8/1846, PRO.C096/10.
- 47 Ibid. There is some ambiguity over their date of arrival. John Duncan does not refer specifically to liberated slaves, but to orders given "long ago" to cultivate the neighbourhood of Whydah to avoid disease. This could refer (among numerous other things) to an unrelated phenomena, or indeed to the time of the 1843 decrees, two years before Duncan's arrival; Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. II, pp. 268-9. Duncan, Ibid., vol. I, pp. 199 and 139, may refer to the arrival of the group most recently settled, possibly since 1843, and the implementation of Gezo's previously announced policy by the authorities at Whydah.

- 48 Duncan does of course mention the participation of Sierra Leonians in palm oil production, but he appears to indicate a petty scale of production: the reference to the employment of their wives in palm oil, laundrying, etc., and the sending of the wives into the bush for palm fruits does not suggest large scale production of oil; Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 187. It is also noticeable elsewhere that Duncan draws a distinction between the praiseworthy (because of their agricultural zeal) slaves returned from the Brazils, and the indolent slaves returned from Sierra Leone: Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol.1, pp. 185-6.
- 49 Duncan to Palmerston, 17/8/1849, PRO.FO 84/775/43.
- 50 See Fn.56, for example.
- 51 Duncan to C.O. 17/8.1846, PRO.C096/10.
- 52 Although Duncan (Ibid.) states that the Portuguese were antagonistic towards the Sierra Leonians because of their jealousy, there is some suggestion, in fact, that da Souza encouraged some groups - specifically a group of Muslim Hausas - to settle at Whydah: Cf. Gavoy, "Note Historique sur Ouidah", Etudes Dahoméennes, XIII, 1965, p. 66. According to Gavoy, the Muslim Hausas established themselves in the Quartier Maro in Whydah in 1848, but Agbo places the founding of the Quartier at the much early date of 1812: Agbo, C., Histoire de Ouidah de XVI au XXe siècle, (Avignon), Les Presses Universitaires, 1959.
- 53 Ibid. In Lagos the name Amaro or Maro was given to the Brazilian quarter: See Smith R. "The Lagos Consulate . . .", p. 39. It is of course possible that da Souza related better, because of language, custom and previous connections, with slaves from the Brazils: See Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 185-7.
- 54 Ibid., and Duncan to Colonial Office 24/6/1846, 1/7/1846, 17/8/1846, all in PRO.C091/10.
- 55 Not all the energies of liberated slaves were directed towards palm oil, or indeed legitimate commerce. Some of them apparently became involved in the very trade to which they had earlier fallen victims. Don José Almeida, for instance, one of the richest slave merchants resident at Whydah, monopolized slave shipments from Little Popo whence he himself had previously been exported: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 151.
- 56 Duncan to C.O. 24/6/1846, 1/7/1846, 17/8/1846, in PRO.C096/10.
- 57 See previous chapter for details of palm oil prices.
- 58 Duncan to Palmerston 17/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/43.

- 59 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 123-6.
- 60 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., p. 86.
- 61 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 62 Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 9.
- 63 Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 64 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 54.
- 65 Amin, S., Neocolonialism in West Africa, pp. 99-100, re Togo from 1820-80.
- 66 Ibid., pp. 106-7, regarding Dahomey.
- 67 The nearest implied references to this are those above in relation to Domingo clearing away land ready for the cultivation of the palm tree, but this may have been clearing between wild palms rather than replanting. Also, see later, the young palms noted by Fraser during a visit to Abomey. There was, of course, experimental plantation of other crops by, or at the behest of Europeans like Duncan and Régis: Cf., for example, Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1858, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b: Duncan to Palmerston, 17/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/43.
- 68 See for example, M.A.E., internal note, June 1858, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Even Forbes, who dwells for some time on plantations and palm oil, does not mention replanting of trees - indeed he expressly remarks that the process involved the minimum labour, with little being "added to the gifts of God in producing this valuable and lucrative article of trade": Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6. See also Régis à Min. des Col., 1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:(b).
- 69 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 30-1, 123, 125-6.
- 70 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6.
- 71 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 129.
- 72 As late as the 1860's it appears that 'domestic slaves' might still be shipped if an opportunity suddenly arose and no other stocks were available: Evidence of McCoskrey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Committee, Min. of Evidence, q.s 1578-81, pp. 71-2.
- 73 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 187.
- 74 Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.

- 75 M.A.E., internal note, June 1858, in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. The note refers to information gathered c.1840.
- 76 For example, see The Ord Report and Appendix, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa General, 1865, (170), vol. XXXVII: De Monleon à Min. de la Marine et des Col. 12/11/1844 and Baudin, (extract) "Aperçu de l'état . . ." both in M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b: Régis à Min. d'agriculture et commerce 3/3/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 77 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 213.
- 78 Cruickshank refers to ". . . a very considerable share of liberty . . . necessaries of life in apparent comfort and abundance". Cruickshank's Report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 79 Freeman to Graham, 17/6/1846, M.M.S., 1846, box 260.
- 80 Extrait de Journal de M . . . Brue, 1843, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 81 Duncan to Palmerston, 17/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/43: Duncan to Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20/83.
- 82 Duncan to Palmerston, 17/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/43. Duncan also distributed seed to the Caboceers.
- 83 Ibid. Duncan to Manchester Chamber of Commerce 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20/83. Presumably a similar "wage system" would have operated in the various European forts in the 18th century.
- 84 Duncan to Stavely, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51.
- 85 Forbes speaks of labour from English town at Whydah, which is available for "hire" being procured by the head of the town: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 105.
- 86 Manchester Chamber of Commerce to C.O., undated, 1850, PRO.C096/20/83 et seq. Duncan's efforts came to nothing: a few years later Fraser reported that no cotton was exported from Whydah, that it was all at Little Popo and Agoué: Fraser's commercial report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 87 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 187.
- 88 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 115-6.
- 89 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp.s 115-6. Also see later in this chapter.
- 90 From Herskovits, M. J., The Human Factor in Changing Africa, pp. 95-6. Cf. also Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p.XII.

- 91 "Journal of Capt. T. Phillips", in Churchill's Collection of Voyages, vol. VI, London 1746.
- 92 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., p. 38.
- 93 See Johnson, M., "The Ounce in W. African Trade . . .", J.A.H., 2, 1966, especially pp. 208 et seq. Also, for general information, see "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa", Part 1, J.A.H., XII, 1, 1970, pp. 23-4.
- 94 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col., 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Afrique, 1:4:a.
- 95 Rapport de Capt. Guillaunier, 6/6/1845, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 96 Commenting on the success of the palm oil trade and suggesting the introduction of cotton production, Duncan asserted that the best and most suitable exchange goods would be cheap 'Manchester goods' and cowries. Duncan to Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20/83.
- 97 King of Dahomey to Queen of England, in Duncan to Stanley 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/1845: Journal of Rev. Annear, entry for 6/9/1844, M.M.S., box 260. The growth of the palm oil trade was subsequently related to cowrie inflation, because of the huge imports of cowries, which may have caused just as many problems for the monarchy: it may, indeed, be related to the need to tax the Axisinon in cowries - Argyle, W. J., The Fon . . ., p. 104.
- 98 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.C096/20/124.
- 99 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 115-6. Valon, who visited Whydah later, in 1856 and 1858, confirmed the paying out of cowries - by women and children according to him - at Régis ' premises; Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, p. 334 On the role of cowries in the palm oil trade on the Gold Coast see Cruickshank, B., Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa, 2 vols, (1853), 2nd Edition F. Cass and Co. 1966, vol. 1, p.42 et seq. Cf. also Parl. Papers 1865 Committee, evidence of Swanzey, minutes of evidence Para 4689.
- 100 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.C096/20/124.
- 101 Parl. Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 44, 1857-8, Campbell to Clarendon, 14/3/1857.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.

- 104 Although these slaves may have been involved in the slave trade. Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 122.
- 105 Fraser's Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 106 Permission was refused. Min. de la Commerce à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 18/6/1850., M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b. Min. de la Mar. et des Col. a Régis 24/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 107 There are conflicting accounts of exactly in what capacity domestic slaves were employed: sometimes they are described as collecting oil, sometimes manufacturing and transportation: Cf. Baudin "Aperçu de l'état . . .", M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b: Régis à Min. d'Agriculture, 3/3/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 108 A similar extension of domestic slavery as a result of legitimate commerce was indicated in other part of the coast, for example at Sierra Leone: See Forbes, Lt., Six Months on the African Blockade, p. 16.
- 109 Harrison Church, for instance, has royal plantations formed from unsaleable prisoners, on the advice of slave traders, from 1839: J.Harrison Church, West Africa, pp. 103, 430. Following him, Ross appears to date the establishment of the plantations, including Lefu-Lefu, in the early 1830's, with Gezo's systematic cultivation of palm oil from soon after Freeman's visit in 1843: Ross, D. Ph.D., pp. 45, 76, 159. In Forde and Kaberry it is suggested that it was about the 1830's when Abomey's kings began selling oil products: Forde and Kaberry, West African Kingdoms, p. 90. Amin has the initiative in founding plantations with the native born intermediate traders of mixed race: Amin, S., Neocolonialism in W. Africa, pp. 99-100. Forbes Munro has the Abomey kings involved in systematic planting in an unspecified period prior to 1870: Forbes Munro, Africa and the international economy, p. 48. Argyle does not mention royal production under the economic aspects of kingship, but refers only to the fiscal aspects of the new commerce: Argyle, W. J., The Fon . . ., Chap. VI. Manning states that the Fon government unquestionably encouraged the planting and care of oil palms: Manning, P., Ph.D., pp. 38, 155-6. He also refers to the Fon king's producing vast amounts of oil which were rolled from Abomey to the coast in casks: Manning, P., "Slaves, Palm oil and political power . . .", Journal of African Historical Studies, 11, 1969. But his chronology remains elusive. ~ Maroukis appears to place Royal intervention in production in the 1840's; Maroukis, T., Ph.D. Katz remains unclear about planting, but denies the innovative nature of the use of royal plantations: Katz, N., Ph.D., pp. 115-6. Law argues that, certainly pre-1850, it is unlikely that the monarch was involved in production, but that it was mainly undertaken - on a large scale - by coastal merchants, both Dahomean and Brazilian: Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XV111, 4, 1977, pp. 573-4. The primary evidence suggests that the interpretation of Katz and Law is probably a more accurate reflection of developments.

- 110 Bernard, M. " Le Cocotier . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 1, 1948.
- 111 Refu-Refu in Yoruba
- 112 Johnson placed the capture of Lefu-Lefu two years after the taking of Inoubi: Johnson, S., History of the Yoruba, p. 228. Dunglas follows him, but placed Inoubi in 1841, with Lefu-Lefu, therefore, being taken and the plantation village being founded in 1843: Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 1, 1948, p.9 and "Contribution . . .", vol. 11, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 77. Ross, disputing this, appears to place it in the 1830's: Ross, D., Ph.D., p. 45 and p. 46, fn.1, drawing on Forbes and Burton.
- 113 Cf. Law, R., The Oyo Empire, c. 1600 - c. 1836, 1977, pp. 276-7.
- 114 Snelgrave, W., A New Account . . ., pp. 106-7.
- 115 Norris, R., Memoirs of the reign of . . ., p. 86, cf. also Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. 121.
- 116 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 115. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 447. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume . . ., p. 90.
- 117 See chapter 3 on palm oil production and uses for an indication of the comprehensive role of the product in domestic consumption and for the army.
- 118 Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 9, and "Contribution . . .", Vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 77.
- 119 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 30-1.
- 120 Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 9, and "Contribution . . .", Vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 77.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 Brue put the sacrifices at the 1843 customs at more than 1000, as mentioned earlier: Extrait de Journal de M. Brue, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b. Gezo indicated that it was after Freeman's visit that he curtailed human sacrifice: King of Dahomey to Queen of England 1/7/1845, in Duncan to Stanley, PRO.C096/8/1845.
- 123 Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 9, and "Contribution . . .", Vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 77.

- 124 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 31. This is confirmed in Beecroft's description in his Journal, entry for 5th June, PRO.F084/816.
- 125 Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of . . ., p. 86. Forbes, J., Dahomey . . ., Vol. I, pp. 30-1.
- 126 Ross, D., Ph.D., p. 76.
- 127 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol.1, pp. 114-5, 123. Cf. Law, R., "Royal Monopoly . . .", J.A.H., XV111, 4, 1977, p. 573.
- 128 Ross puts this in 1849 - Ross, D., "The Autonomous kingdom . . .", Ph.D.
- 129 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., Vol.11, P. 102.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 King of Dahomey to Queen of England 13/3/1843, M.M.S., 1843, box 259. The letter was written by Freeman, and unsigned by Gezo: Freeman declared that in his excitement he had forgotten to obtain the signature of the monarch, but that he was prepared on oath to swear to the authenticity and "genuine character" of the letter: Freeman to MacLean, 11/5/1843, M.M.S., 1843, Box 259.
- 132 Freeman to Graham, 17/6/1846, M.M.S., box 260.
- 133 Freeman to MacLean, 11/5/1843, M.M.S., box 259.
- 134 For example, such commentators as Freeman, Duncan, Fraser, Cruickshank, Régis, De Monleon, Baudin, Brue, etc. One would surely expect that with their varied interests in legitimate commerce one of them would have mentioned such a remarkable phenomenon as the great African slave raider participating directly in legitimate production.
- 135 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, pp. 276-7.
- 136 Fraser's Journal, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 Parl. Papers. Slave Trade Series, Select Committee on the Slave Trade, 1848, 1st Report, evidence of J. Duncan, q. 3200.
- 139 Dunglas, E., "Attaque des Dahoméennes contre Abeokuta", part 1, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. I, 1948, p. 9, and "Contribution . . .", Vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 77.
- 140 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, p. 268.

- 141 His reference to lack of plantations in 1843 to Freeman has been noted in footnote 115: in 1848 he expressed similar sentiments to Cruickshanks: Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 142 Ibid.
- 143 Régis a M.A.E. 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 144 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. Duncan, as noted earlier, experimented with cotton plantations, but the experiment died with him.
- 145 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 146 This coincides with the view put forward by Law, R., in "Royal Monopoly . . ." J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977.
- 147 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 31.
- 148 Ibid., pp. 30-1.
- 149 Gezo was prepared to offer limitless supplies of labour to those who would come and undertake agricultural, legitimate production: Cf. for example Régis a M.A.E., 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51: Christophe Colombe à Min. de la Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 150 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. This estimate may have been too high: a leading exporter from Whydah put the total annual export at 1000 tons in 1848: Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, 1845, Select Committee, 1st Report, q.3195.
- 151 Taking British puncheons at 160 gallons.
- 152 See previous chapter, Fns.127 and 128.
- 153 Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa: "Kings of Ashantee and Dahome . . . dispatches, 1849" (399), Vol. XXXIC, p. 15: Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. Winniet, the year before, had put Gezo's profit from the slave trade lower than Cruickshank, but still "considerably more than \$50,000" (over £11,000): Winniet to Grey, 22/2/1847, and subsequent correspondence in PRO.C096/11/71 et seq. ~ Forbes appears to have estimated c.£3,000, per annum, but this was for the extremely depressed conditions of the 1850 slave trade: F.O. to C.O., 7/1/1850, PRO.C096/20/62.
- 154 See, for instance, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa General, Ord Report with Appendix, 1865, (170), vol. XXXCII. Ord specifically mentioned the difficulties of bringing palm oil any distance from the interior in the absence of water transport.

- 155 According to Cruickshank, the price of a slave was roughly \$80, which would convert to approximately £18: Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 156 For instance the carriage of camwood by slaves, from the interior in the 1840's was noted. Bridge, H., Journal of an African Cruiser, p. 53.
- 157 Gezo made it clear to Freeman and Winniet in 1847 that an adequate revenue substitute was a necessary, though not a sufficient condition for his abandonment of the slave trade: Winniet to Grey, 12/5/1847, PRO.C096/11/149: Gezo to Queen Victoria, 4/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/191.
- 158 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. Gezo dismissed other legitimate commerce such as cotton or coffee as slower still.
- 159 The point that the value of exports was small compared to the total GNP of Dahomey is made in Peukert. However, as stated, the political use value of the imported goods obtained through the export sector was out of all proportion to that suggested by a straightforward evaluation as a proportion of GNP.
- 160 Ibid.
- 161 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 162 Gezo, in 1847, asked for a year to consider the merits of diversifying into coffee and cotton production, but the following year rejected the option: Winniet to Grey, 12/5/1847, PRO.C096/11/149: Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 163 The oil palm takes about 6 years before it bears fruit, and reaches its height of fruit bearing about the 12th year: see chapter 3.
- 164 Gezo made it plain to Cruickshank that he was not at this stage willing to consider such a long term investment by a realistic substitute, since "he himself would probably be in his grave before he could reap any benefit from them", Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 165 Christophe-Colombe à Min. de Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat. F12:7208. Fraser's Commercial Report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/2/1852, PRO.C0277/95. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6.
- 166 Fraser's Commercial Report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/2/1852, PRO.C0277/95.
- 167 For example, for avoidance of tax on slave exports prior to the Dahomean conquest of Whydah: see Bosman, W., Description . . ., p. 262.

- 168 For example Domingo Martinez, José Almeida etc. This point springs from the decentralisation of the slave trade; cf. Chapter 4 of this thesis.
- 169 Gezo to Cruickshank as recorded in Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 170 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 166, 207. See Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey and Its Neighbours, p. 128.
- 171 For example, Gezo to Queen of England, 3/11/1848, in PRO.C096/13/302. According to Cruickshank, this letter was taken down by him verbatim: Cruickshank to Winniet, 18/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/342. These matters are dealt with at greater length in the course of remarks on the political aspects of Gezo's reign. Cf Chapter 6.
- 172 Evidence of Capt. H. Seward in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 2, Report of the Select Committee on the West Coast, 1842, Min. of Evidence, p. 116.
- 173 Journal of the Rev. Annear, entry for 29/10/1844, M.M.S., box 260. Hill to C.O. 6/3/1844, PRO.C096/4/95.
- 174 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 20/12/1840, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 175 Journal of the Rev. Annear, entry for 29/10/1844, M.M.S., box 260.
- 176 Ibid., entry for 25/2/1845.
- 177 Ibid.
- 178 Gezo himself subsequently claimed this to be the case: King of Dahomey to Queen of England, 3/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/302.
- 179 Annear to Gen. Secs., 11/10/1845, M.M.S., 1845, box 260.
- 180 Martin's Journals, extracts, enclosed in Martin to Gen. Secs., 5/9/1846, M.M.S., 1846, box 260.
- 181 Anon. to Hutton, enclosed in Hutton to Hawes, 3/9/1847, PRO.C096/12/308.
- 182 W. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259.
- 183 Hutton and Sons to Stanley, 20/12/1843, PRO.C096/2/348.
- 184 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 91-3.
- 185 Hutton and Sons to Stanley, 20/12/1843, PRO.C096/2/348. Middleton to Ward, 1/3/1848, in PRO.C096/14/27.
- 186 T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 20/12/1846, PRO.C096/12/259.

CHAPTER 6:PRELUDE TO CRISIS:Events leading up to the 1852 TreatyTHE PALM OIL TRADE c. 1850

Despite the progress which had been made in the development of palm oil exports, there is little doubt that there was a tendency among contemporary European observers to exaggerate the extent to which the new commerce had made inroads into the traditional Dahomean economic and political structures by mid-century.¹ Perhaps their optimism is understandable given that legitimate commerce had taken off at all in the most infamous of African slave trading states.² And they could underpin their arguments with 'enlightened' European self-interest, for by the beginning of the 1850s the new trade did appear to hold out potentially bright prospects for the major European powers.

This was particularly so in the case of France, a relatively late developer in palm oil imports compared to Britain. One Frenchman who made a number of trips to Dahomey in the late 1840s was convinced that commercial prospects could not have been better for his country;³ particularly since the Dahomean monarch - with an eye to developing industry and commerce - was willing to put any necessary labour force at the disposal of incoming merchants,⁴ and since the relative under-utilization of the product in France up to that time offered considerable scope for expansion.⁵

The British, of course, were not unaware of the commercial possibilities, and the appointment of Duncan as Vice-Consul to Dahomey in

1849 reflected their desire to protect and extend British trading opportunities with the Dahomean state.⁶

The trade had similarly attracted widespread commercial interest internally. Former slave traders like the da Souzas, Dos Santos at Whydah, and Domingo Martinez at Porto Novo Beach, were heavily involved in the new trade by the early 1850s.⁷ Indeed the palm oil trade of the latter alone was reported by his clerk to be in excess of 200,000 dollars annually by 1851.⁸ While da Souza's interest in the trade prior to this death appears to have been more limited, he nevertheless continued as a lynchpin of Dahomean trading operations up until his death, and to the Europeans he remained the best vehicle for ensuring good commercial relations, whether directly with the monarch or with the King's principal trading agents.⁹

The entry of the former slave traders into large scale palm oil operations had resulted in part from the depressed state of the slave export market in the final years of the 1840s. But it was also stimulated by the fairly dramatic rise in the coastal value of oil from two to six dollars the measure (of 19 gallons) by May 1850,¹⁰ and eight dollars the measure the following year.¹¹ The increased prices paid may have been the result of increased competition for oil,¹² enhanced c.1849 by a shortage of supply because of drought.¹³

FISCAL MECHANISMS ON THE PALM OIL TRADE

With the trade in palm oil increasing in both volume and unit value the central Dahomean exchequer reaped its share. Dahomean trade taxes were generally heavy;¹⁴ the tax on palm oil, one gallon on 18 changing

hands at the coast,¹⁵ was collected by the King's appointed agents under the direction of the *Meu* - the 'Decimeros', stationed at all transactions taking place in the yards of the coastal merchants.¹⁶ The oil thus collected was then exchanged for trade goods on the monarch's account.¹⁷

Nevertheless, despite its growth, the trade was still of fairly minor importance for the monarchy. As has been pointed out, the revenue derived by the Abomey exchequer from the new trade throughout the 1840s was of relatively insignificant proportions. And the monarch, despite the persistent entreaties of European visitors and the erratic nature of slave export demand, had hitherto obstinately refused to rely on the new commerce.

Gezo had, in fact, followed a flexible twin approach towards the export sector. On the one hand he had been willing to reap what benefits he could from the new trade short of direct production - by encouraging its growth, stimulating production, protecting merchants involved in the trade, and thereafter deriving his rewards through taxation. From his point of view the trade also served as a useful point of contact with Europe, whence derived important western manufactures. The 'legitimate' contact also had its diplomatic rewards. For, on the other hand, Gezo had been firmly committed throughout the 1840s to the retention of slave trading opportunities. The palm oil trade supplied him with a useful tool in his attempts to maintain slaving operations in the face of European moral indignation and in spite of European - especially British - diplomatic and naval pressure.

So far as the palm oil trade was concerned, Gezo's non participation in direct export production necessitated extra-market mechanisms in order to derive any benefit.

At the principal port of Whydah this was achieved through fiscal means, by the imposition of trade taxes at the point of exchange. To maximise trading the monarch did what he could to facilitate orderly collection and shipment of produce. Despite his efforts difficulties, not unnaturally perhaps, did remain. One, over which even the monarch had no control, was that arising from the difficulty in embarking palm oil through the Whydah surf. The operation demanded the services of skilled canoeists from outside Dahomey itself - mainly Minas - whose hiring costs were a frequent complaint of profit conscious European merchants.¹⁸

Other difficulties and abuses, however, over which the monarch had more control, had again arisen towards the end of the 1840s possibly as a result of the depressed state of slave exports; indeed they appear to have become so widespread at that particular time that they threatened to paralyse the trade.¹⁹ Principal among these were the frequent stoppages to trade caused by the interruptions of the Decimeros,²⁰ fraudulent practices,²¹ and simple robbery both by canoe men carrying palm oil produce and trade goods, and carriers between Whydah and the beach.²²

On these and related issues Gezo displayed an eagerness to negotiate,²³ and indeed they formed the basic ingredients - from the point of view of the French - of the discussions between Gezo and the French emissary Bouet when they met in Abomey in 1851. The meeting

successfully concluded agreements over trading and commercial matters and re-affirmed the monarch's commitment to protecting France's position in the new trade.²⁴

By such mechanisms Gezo encouraged the palm oil trade and maximised his economic benefits in the port under his direct political control. Outside Whydah, where his control was less directly enforceable, Gezo achieved his ends through different mechanisms.

Whydah was maintained effectively as the only port open to the general trader.²⁵ In ports outside of it, the monarch operated through the vehicle of favoured merchants whose activities involved both slave and palm oil commerce, and whose control over the slave trade at outlying ports amounted to a virtual monopoly. In fact, their economic relationship with the monarch derives initially from the necessary diffusion of slave exporting operations throughout the 1840s rather than a conscious attempt to ensure returns to the central exchequer from the palm oil trade.

At Little Popo one section of the town (Ajudo) operated under the direction of the Portuguese, including Isidoro da Souza who maintained a slave baracoon there.²⁶ Isidoro's own monopoly operated from Godomey, while that of his brother Antonio applied at Cotonou.²⁷ At Agoué slaving operations were a virtual monopoly of José Almeida.²⁸ All were increasingly involved in the new palm oil trade. Separate export figures for these ports are not available;²⁹ and even if they were, the tributary nature of the relationship between merchant and monarch would make it impossible to estimate the extent of his income. This is particularly so since not only the form of income - dashes, presents,

customs tribute to the monarch - but also the content of the tribute, which included payments derived from both slave and palm oil trades, differed from the position at Whydah.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the monarch did benefit from palm oil commerce at ports outside Whydah. In the case of Gezo's best known new trading partner, Domingo Martinez at Porto Novo Beach, such tribute could be substantial. Domingo's career has been the subject of previous historical study.³⁰ Suffice it to say that such a tribute as was paid to the Dahomean monarch was in no way a novel departure, other perhaps than in size, so far as Martinez was concerned. During his period at Badagry he had previously lavished gifts upon the Egba war chiefs at Abeokuta in order to foster his own trading interests.³¹ But, by mid-century he was so heavily involved in the oil trade that European merchants contemplated a direct approach to the monarch in a desperate attempt to direct commercial traffic away from Martinez's Porto Novo establishment.³² It is, therefore, legitimate to consider the tribute and presents given to the monarch by him and others - which in the case of Martinez were rewarded by the title of Caboceer of Dahomey³³ - as income derived partly at least from the new palm oil trade.

Furthermore, control of the lagoon system on either side of Whydah allowed the Dahomean authorities to operate a taxation system on goods or produce moved to the outlying embarkation points by way of the Lagoon,³⁴ thereby supplementing the income derived from tax on trade at Whydah itself.

RELATIVE INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE PALM OIL TRADE TO KING

Gezo, then, sought to reap what benefits he could from palm oil commerce through formal fiscal mechanisms at Whydah, and informal tributary mechanisms in the outlying ports less directly under his political control.

Despite this, and despite the optimistic assertions of western commentators, by 1850 the benefits to the monarchy from the new trade were still of relatively minor importance, particularly when compared to that derived from the previously flourishing slave export trade.³⁵ Even the French, who dominated palm oil exports from the main Dahomean port, were shipping no more than 800 tons of oil per annum from Whydah in the second half of the 1840s, a figure which rose perhaps to a maximum of around 1200 tons in the final year of the decade.³⁶ At the higher figure, and assuming all transactions were recorded, the monarch's share in taxation was limited to around the equivalent of 66 tons in trade goods, or 66 slaves.

The comparative insignificance of the palm oil trade in terms of revenue to the monarch is important firstly as a counterbalance to the over optimistic reports of westerners, and secondly as a context to political developments within Dahomey in the early 1850s.

THE 1852 TREATY: GEZO'S POLICY

In January 1852 King Gezo appended his signature to a treaty with the British, ending forever - at least in terms of the treaty - the export of slaves from his Dominions. The most recent detailed study of Dahomean 19th century politics lays considerable significance not only on the treaty itself, but also on the motivations of Gezo in signing.

In the view of David Ross, the signing of the 1852 treaty by Gezo marks a significant turning point in Dahomean history. It marks an attempt by the monarch, finally convinced of the need for a radical transformation of Dahomey's economy and in particular the role of the monarchy in it, to conspire with the British to effect what Ross himself has termed a "revolutionary gamble". Gezo conspired to restore the economic power of the monarchy, against, and at the expense of, the Dahomean chiefs, by monopolizing the new trade in palm oil. To achieve this end he was prepared, indeed eager, to employ the active backing of England (and the threat of a Egba attack) to overcome chiefly opposition to the abolition of the slave trade, making peace with Abeokuta, and royal monopolisation of the palm oil trade.³⁷ Accordingly he had set out, some time previous to 1852, to cultivate a special relationship with the English, primarily in an attempt to replace da Souza whose fortunes were ebbing.³⁸

According to this interpretation, Gezo assumed that his agreement on the slave trade would be sufficient to ensure the backing of the English; their ancillary demands incorporated in the treaty - specifically the freedom for missionary settlement, freedom of trade and the abolition of human sacrifice - were not 'touched upon' by Gezo in 1852, either because he did not consider them an important part of the British demands, or because he assumed that they had been dealt with and agreed at previous meetings.³⁹ Gezo, assuming that his agreement on the slave trade would be sufficient to meet English demands and ensure their active support - although it's never quite clear exactly what action was expected in the event of chiefly opposition - fully expected

them to establish a garrison at Whydah.⁴⁰ Accordingly he swiftly set about monopolizing the palm oil trade while the British officials were still in his dominions subsequent to the signing of the Treaty, in expectation of their immediate support.⁴¹

With the backing of the English, Ross believes, Gezo might have won through. But a failure on their part to understand Gezo's motives, and thus their dithering over how far he could be seen to have fulfilled their demands, badly weakened Gezo's attempted conspiracy and left him open to serious internal challenge when the Egba threat receded.⁴²

This interpretation is based the view that Gezo personally had for some time wished to transform Dahomean economy in an enlightened western fashion, but was prevented from doing so by his reactionary chiefs. In terms of future linkage, it assumes the eventual assassination of Gezo.

Ross's interpretation obviously has some merit. It is clear that the monarch was under considerable economic pressure even before the blockade. Gezo did attempt to monopolize the palm oil trade in January 1852. He did constantly assure the British both of his incapacity to act, prior to 1852, because of the reluctance of others, and of his desire for a special relationship with them.

But it appears also to have some obvious flaws. Abomey was well protected from military intervention by the West, particularly before the arrival of steamboats, by the Lama, the marsh between Whydah and Abomey which - as Gezo knew well - was a major geographical hurdle to any military expedition; quite apart from the climate, fever, and general lack of geographical knowledge.⁴³ It seems incredible that a warrior leader such as Gezo would have relied on English military support, even if he was prepared to face an open confrontation with his chiefs.

It seems just as unreasonable to suppose that Gezo would have assumed the practicality of British intervention on his side within a week of the signing of the treaty, when he 'monopolized' the palm oil trade. If Gezo's conspiracy was not founded on active British military support it is not clear what support he did expect, particularly of a nature sufficient to counteract a possible coup. In fact it's more probable that the official presence sought by Gezo stemmed from a traditional Dahomean belief that an official presence cements commercial intercourse.

In fairness to Ross's view it should be mentioned that there are scattered pieces of evidence which might be taken suggest a conspiratorial attitude on the part of the monarch. Fraser recorded for instance, that on his first visit to Abomey in 1851;

"I made some remark (to Gezo) by way of explanation respecting the shipment of slaves at Whydah; the difficulty of his finding a sale for his slaves; that his revenue must be affected thereby, and why not accede to the Queen of England's request, before he was compelled, for then it would be too late; the strong language of the letter, (from Palmerston) and the explanations I gave seemed rather to astonish him; for I saw the muscles of his face twitch, and soon after he gave me to understand, that all this must be kept secret, that another day when he was more alone, he would desire me to bring my pen and paper, to make book for the Queen."⁴⁴

Furthermore, after the signing of the treaty Gezo did apparently make a general statement which can be interpreted as a sign of his good faith. On 6 March orders came to Whydah from Abomey alerting the population of an intended attack on Badagry. Hitherto, said the King's messenger, the monarch had remained silent on the destination of his armies, since he wished to maximise the number of captives. But now surprise was no longer at a premium since he was not any longer

interested in taking slave captives; this being the case he would allow the name of the place to be known. The town would be destroyed and anyone who had not fled would be put to the sword.⁴⁵

These pieces of evidence appear superficially to support Ross's interpretations of events surrounding the 1852 Treaty. In fact, both of them are equally open to an alternative interpretation. In the first instance cited Gezo might well have been following his traditional diplomatic manoeuvre of presenting himself as honest broker between two irreconcilable sides in order to minimise his own concessions. More specifically, in this instance, he may have wished to discuss with Fraser approaches he had already, and was continuing to make to the British seeking special dispensation for a limited number of slave ships, in which he had a particular interest, to be given free passage.⁴⁶

In the second instance, it can be conceded that the monarch's aim was the destruction of Badagry rather than captives, without necessarily interpreting this as an act of good faith towards the British. A threat, within three months of the signature of the treaty, to destroy the town in which the main British palm oil factory was established, and whose exemption from the coastal blockade had permitted British business to continue while the monarch's was still stopped at all other ports, is more likely to have been an anti-British act.⁴⁷ Four years previously the British establishment there had been sufficient reason for his not attacking the town.⁴⁸

Gezo's requests for an official British presence at Whydah were inspired by the belief that such a presence cemented commercial and political ties, but this was a traditional Dahomean practice, not one

exclusive to Gezo. Nor does it denote an intention to use such a presence for the purposes of internal political struggle.⁴⁹ We have already seen that in 1816, for instance, during a time of trade depression and when the British had abandoned the fort at Whydah, the Dahomeans had gone so far as to forcibly detain a British naval officer at Whydah and deem him to be the overseer of the fort.⁵⁰

Ross, partly because of his assumption of Gezo's continuing commitment to establish a special relationship with the British and transform his economy in an enlightened fashion, and partly because he appears to have relied exclusively on English sources regarding the events surrounding the 1852 treaty, seriously overestimates the importance of the treaty. As a corollary, he underestimates Gezo's own appreciation that any transformation of the material basis of Kingship would involve a gradual economic and political change, and thereby fails to emphasise the crucial period of 1852-7.

The events surrounding the 1852 treaty suggest that Gezo's reaction to the British was one of hostility rather than viewing them as potential allies. Seen in the context of economic and political developments of the previous few years - in particular the trends in the slave export sector, Dahomey's relationship with her eastern neighbour Abeokuta, and the monarch's own diplomatic history - the treaty is open to an alternative and more convincing explanation.

Gezo, like his predecessors before him, had been keen from the beginning of his reign to encourage economic contact with western powers; he had shown himself particularly adept at maintaining this contact throughout the 1840s by skillful diplomatic manoeuvring despite

their attempts to suppress the slave trade. This is particularly manifest in his dealings with the most aggressive anti-slave western nation, the British.

As early as 1843, for instance, Gezo had expressed his willingness to consider abolition of the trade, as long as an adequate substitute income - whether through legitimate commerce or otherwise - could be provided.⁵¹ In 1846, to Duncan, the King had expressed his readiness to give up the slave trade provided his income was guaranteed and urged the British to occupy Whydah and police the abolition themselves.⁵² Gezo politely conceded the moral rectitude of the British over the issue but remarked that such enlightenment came only slowly to his people, as, he added - not without sarcasm - it had come to the British. There was also the difficult matter of revenue, but he would discuss the whole matter with his caboceers, and give his considered opinion the following year.⁵³

The following year he was prepared to sign a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the British, but not one committing himself to the abolition of the slave trade, the main aim of their visit. The latter subject, said the monarch, needed further consideration by himself and his ministers. He would consider it, however, he assured the British, and give his opinion on the matter the following year.⁵⁴ The 1847 discussions thus bound the parties in "true friendship, reciprocity and good understanding," guaranteed liberty and protection for British trade, and left Gezo totally uncommitted on the matter of the slave trade.⁵⁵

The following year, in 1848, the monarch outlined the difficulties involved in the abolition of the trade to Cruickshank, while lobbying at

the same time for an official British presence at Whydah. Confronted by Cruickshank with the stark choice between the slave trade or a British presence, Gezo chose the former. Nevertheless, he assured a sceptical Cruickshank that he would consider abolition if an adequate substitute income could be found.⁵⁶

Gezo's successful procrastination derives not only from his own capacity as a diplomat. Partly it lies in the high turnover of British emissaries with whom it must have been comparatively easy to cover the same ground. Partly it lies in the fact that despite repeated assurances the British never offered him concrete compensation which could be considered as adequate in terms of a slave trade substitute. The top British offer which was made was £3000 for three years which Beecroft was authorized to make in 1850;⁵⁷ small compensation when considered in comparison with British estimates made when the slave trade was flourishing. Since the palm oil trade never held out the prospect in the 1840s of topping up such offers to a level commensurate with a thriving slave trade, Gezo could continually return to the subject of adequate compensation, perhaps sincerely, as a prerequisite for abolition. Finally, Gezo's diplomatic success derived partly from an apparently infinite capacity on the part of British visitors and officialdom to convince themselves of both the self-evident rationality of their own case, and the delusion that 'progress was being made'.

In retrospect this delusion appears on occasions to have bordered on wilful self-deception by the British. For instance, following a request from Gezo that the slave trade should be suppressed in ports outside his own dominions prior to his own commitment - a request almost certainly

designed to maximise the Trade through Whydah rather than lead to abolition - Palmerston drafted in reply:

"The British government is glad to find that you wish the slave trade put an end to in all places beyond the limits of your territories, because that wish on your part shows that you are sensible of the bad nature of the trade."⁵⁸

By the start of the 1850s, however, the conspicuous lack of success in attaining their aims, and the continued procrastination of the Dahomean government, was beginning to wear thin the patience of some British officials on the coast. Despite the usual Dahomean blandishments and assurances on his visit to the Capital, Beecroft for one was convinced that Gezo "had not the slightest desire to abandon the abominable traffic."⁵⁹

Certainly, as mentioned above, Gezo had by this time offered consideration of an anti-slave trade treaty, provided that the British first blockaded the minor ports between Keta and Lagos.⁶⁰ But, such apparent willingness eventually to give up the export trade in slaves should be viewed with more circumspection than Palmerston evidently gave it, particularly in the context of Gezo's increasing 'special pleading' as the export trade ran into considerable decline at the end of the 1840s.⁶¹ He had previously made similar requests regarding the legitimate commerce in palm oil,⁶² and almost certainly such requests were dictated by a desire to channel trade through the more closely controlled Dahomean port of Whydah rather than any sincere wish for abolition of the slave trade.⁶³

Beecroft's more sceptical view of Gezo's real intentions was confirmed in 1851, when Fraser's first attempt to enter into a trade

palaver with the King was resisted by the King's ministers, who assured Fraser that - since both he and the King were busy - he could "leave tomorrow, and he (Gezo) will think the trade palaver over by the time the next messenger arrives from the Queen."⁶⁴ By this time the Dahomeans obviously believed, not without cause, that an annual change of emissaries was a conscious British policy. Fraser, in fact, remained, but with no success, and Beecroft later commented acidly that Fraser had found "that whatever he (Gezo) had to state relative to signing treaties was all twaddle."⁶⁵

The years of procrastination and frustration were beginning to tell, and resulted in a hardening of British attitudes. Following a request from Gezo for another ambassador - "a . . . soldier with a good head to hear some palaver from his mouth at the town of Abomey . . ." Beecroft rather discourteously suggested that Gezo should be ". . . peremptorily requested . . . to deliver his mouth to Her Majesty's representative at Whydah."⁶⁶

REASONS FOR GEZO'S DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE

Gezo's strategy of maximising commercial intercourse with the West, gaining what he could from the taxation revenues on the new trade, while still maintaining the export trade in slaves as much and for as long as possible, had rested to a large extent on his diplomatic capacity to convince the British of his own good faith and intentions. This he had managed to do with some success for eight years.

But by the beginning of the 1850s the scope for continued procrastination without effective commitment was running out. The

British were bent on effective naval action to stamp out the slave trade in the Bights and Lagos. Unfortunately for the Dahomean monarch, this coincided with two other important developments, one economic and one military, the conjunction of which left him effectively powerless to continue the strategy which he and the Dahomean government had pursued with such success throughout the 1840s. The first of these was the rapid and dramatic decline of the demand for slaves on the Dahomean coast in the 1849-51 period.

Assessment of the level of the slave export trade from Dahomey throughout the late 1840s is even more difficult than previously in view of the necessary diffusion of the Trade to outlying ports which resulted from the more aggressive action of the British naval squadron from the late 1830s onwards.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that by 1849 the export Trade had reached its lowest ever ebb since possibly 1815-17, and that the decline was causing acute difficulties for the monarch in particular.

Early in the 1840s there are indications that, despite the attentions of the naval squadron, large shipments could be effected from even Whydah itself, and slip through the British net. In January 1843, for instance, 1500 slaves appear were successfully embarked from the port, despite the attention of two British Navy who detained two other slavers.⁶⁷

The successful completion of one such shipload helped to compensate for the loss of others and rendered the trade economically worthwhile. Despite the avowed losses of da Souza - he claimed to have lost 22 ships

to the British by 1845⁶⁸ - he still appears to have been willing to take a considerable number from Gezo in the mid 1840s.⁶⁹

Thus, although disrupted and in decline, the slave trade was by no means dead in the mid-1840s and opportunities for occasional but profitable shipments offset the deterrent effect of the Navy. It is also probable that the Repeal of the British Sugar duties in mid-decade, with its stimulus to slave demand, acted as a temporary fillip to the west coast Trade.

But the opportunities for slave shipments were in decline again in the last years of the decade, during which period many of the slave dealers diversified into palm oil commerce or into production of palm produce.⁷⁰ Cruickshanks' estimate of export totals of 8000 slaves per annum is therefore likely to be an overestimate for the period to which it refers, 1836-48,⁷¹ possibly, as has been suggested, as a result of da Souza's influence in providing the figures. The reports of those like Duncan who spoke of the virtual extinction of the Dahomean slave trade in the final years of the 1840s are probably nearer the mark, though they require qualification in two ways.

Firstly, slave shipments never completely ceased, even from Whydah itself. In 1849, for instance, Duncan himself testified to the successful embarkation of 300 slaves from the port in August of that year.⁷² Occasional slave ships continued to arrive in Whydah Roads,⁷³ and the arrival of a slaver was still accompanied by the traditional pomp and ceremony bestowed on those lucrative benefactors of the Dahomeans, the slave captains.⁷⁴

Secondly, Duncan's remarks have to be qualified by a recognition that Whydah did not represent the sum total of Dahomean slave exports. The diffusion of the slave export trade had led to the employment of the whole coastline in an attempt to beat the cruisers. Slaves were channeled through Whydah to the outlying embarkation points whenever a suitable shipping opportunity occurred. This was particularly the case in the aftermath of the annual raid. The hazards of the trade had obliged joint shipments from various slave dealers to minimise the potential loss to any one trader, and such shipments continued to be made from ports like Little Popo, as in February 1850,⁷⁵ or Agoué as in March of the same year.⁷⁶ In shipments such as these, slaves were retained at Whydah until just prior to embarkation and marched along the coast to the embarkation point perhaps a few days before the anticipated arrival of the slave ship at the appointed place.⁷⁷

Whydah had thus become largely a distribution centre for the export trade. Despite the precautions taken to conceal the gangs of chained slaves from the prying eyes of British officials or sympathizers, the dealers were not always successful. Forbes, for instance, recorded coming across one such "chain gang", belonging, he believed, to José d'Almeida, during his stay at Whydah.⁷⁸

Despite these qualifications, there is little doubt that those involved in the slave trade were experiencing unprecedented financial difficulties by the onset of the 1850s. The activities of the squadron often necessitated the holding of slaves for considerable periods of time, sometimes for months on end, until a shipping opportunity could be obtained.⁷⁹

By 1850, many of the slave traders were facing impoverishment⁸⁰ and the most renowned of them all, da Souza, died in considerable debt, one estimate putting his indebtedness to the monarch alone as high as 80,000 dollars.⁸¹

The monarch was suffering to an even greater extent, since he was hit not only by the drop in the market for slaves directly produced by himself, but also reduced revenue from taxation on slaves produced and shipped by others in Dahomey. This problem was compounded by the diffusion of the trade to outlying and less directly controlled ports, for despite the use of monopoly agents and control of the lagoon on either side of Whydah, it is likely that taxation receipts on even the reduced numbers of slaves shipped were further reduced by the decentralisation of the export mechanisms.⁸²

By 1849 these developments were causing considerable financial difficulties for the monarch in the traditional export sector. To compound his problems, the level of exports in the new palm oil export sector - and thus his taxation income - was reduced in that year as a result of drought conditions the year previously.⁸³

It was perhaps partly for this reason that Gezo launched several diplomatic initiatives at this time in an attempt to have the trade suppressed at ports outside his own kingdom while attempting to gain concessions for Whydah.⁸⁴ (Gezo claimed suzerainty over Whydah, Porto Novo beach, Badagry and the Popoes).⁸⁵

He was sufficiently disturbed by his economic plight to admit openly to Duncan in 1849 that he now faced severe economic difficulties as a result of the much reduced market for slaves.⁸⁶ This was not mere

posturing by the monarch. The position was confirmed by several of the King's leading men who informed Duncan that over the last year the monarch had shipped slaves hardly or not at all.⁸⁷

It is significant also that the estimate placed by a British official on the income to the royal purse from the slave export trade in 1850 - £3,000 per annum - was not only small in absolute terms, but dramatically lower than Cruickshank's estimate some years earlier.⁸⁸ The disappointment expressed by Beecroft that year because of the anti-climactic experience of the wealth and splendour of Gezo's court and Abomey itself may have partly resulted from the monarch's contemporary financial difficulties.⁸⁹

By 1850-51 Gezo had been reduced to 'special pleading' with the British in an attempt to procure passage for a limited number of slave ships. The request varied - sometimes five ships, on other occasions two, or even one. But in each case the burden of his message was the same. The monarch was in such severe financial difficulties that he was prepared to attempt a negotiated curtailment which would provide himself or his appointed agents with at least some income from the slave trade.⁹⁰ Given the personalized benefits of this special pleading, this may well have been the substance of the matter which Gezo wished to discuss in private with Fraser; this appears more likely than a conspiracy to monopolize the palm oil trade.

All these requests met with a refusal from the British; da Souza had been making similar pleas prior to his death, promising to forego slave shipments for ever from that part of the coast if only the British would allow him to ship one profitable cargo of 2,000 slaves,⁹¹ and had met with a similar response.

The position of the monarch was thus reflected by the slave dealers on the coast. For some time prior to 1850 they had continued to operate by jointly organising slave shipments, the batches belonging to different merchants being branded like cattle prior to shipment in order to ensure their individual 'just rewards' from a successful venture. By 1851, however, the situation had become so desperate that all commercial caution was being thrown to the wind in an attempt to procure some return from the trade.

Slave merchants were prepared to send batches of slaves aboard visiting ships without prior advances or commitments, merely trusting in the captains of the ships concerned to provide in good faith what returns they saw fit. Uberrima Fides had never been a principle underlying the slave trade and the optimistic expectations of the slave traders of obtaining any form of return commensurate with their cargoes often proved unfounded; one report, perhaps apocryphal, mentions a dealer who eventually received the princely sum of one doubloon for his entire shipment of slaves.⁹²

The primary reason for the dramatic downturn in the export trade in slaves from Dahomean ports in the period 1849 lay, as Régis pointed out at the time, not so much in cruiser activity on the west coast, but more in developments on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly in Brazil.⁹³

The Repeal of the Sugar Duties by the British Parliament in the mid-1840s had brought about a revival of the languishing slave trade in Brazil. Throughout 1846 and 1847 Bahia had undergone the largest importation of slaves since the late 1830s,⁹⁴ an upturn in demand which

had allowed the trade to continue, if not thrive on the Dahomean coast despite the attention of the cruisers.

But the situation in Bahia did not continue for long. Following the Aberdeen Act of 1845, the British had extended their naval action against the slave trade into Brazilian territorial waters, and although comparatively mild at first, by the last years of the 1840s their policy was being carried out with increasing aggression.⁹⁵ Cruiser activity on the west coast was thus supplemented by activity at the source of demand in Bahia - where most of the major Dahomean slave traders like da Souza and Martinez had their basic commercial connections;⁹⁶ By 1849 the potential hazards and losses involved in shipping slaves were becoming intolerable for the slave dealers.

The following year their problems deepened yet again due to internal political developments in Bahia. In the final years of the 1840s those politicians inside Bahia who were committed to ending the bribery and corruption which had permitted the continuation of slave imports were in the ascendancy. Supported by the British and by the cruisers off their coast, they were committed to nothing less than the total abolition of the Bahia trade. The success of their movement culminated in 1850. In September of that year Euzebio de Quiroz Couthino Mattoso de Camara, minister of Justice in Bahia, oversaw the passage of a law which has come to be called after him, and which, supplemented by the actions of the British navy and stringent jail sentences inside Bahia, practically brought the slave trade to an end during the following year.⁹⁷

On the Dahomean Coast the effect was dramatic. Fraser wrote that "The Euzabio de Queiroz Law, passed in Brazil in 1850 put an end to the slave trade in this country."⁹⁸

The effect was particularly disastrous for Domingo Martinez. The uncertainties of the trade were now such that he contemplated returning to Bahia, but was deterred from doing so for fear of the judicial situation which might confront him when he arrived.⁹⁹ Martinez nevertheless put his Whydah house, grounds and beach sheds on the market for £1,500.¹⁰⁰

For the monarch, whose economic position in the export sector had become increasingly perilous during 1849 and 1850, the period following the passage of the Law in Bahia was ruinous. According to Madiki, occasionally employed as an interpreter by the British on their visits to Abomey, not one slave had been shipped from Whydah between Forbes' departure on 24 July 1850 and August of the following year.¹⁰¹

The situation outside the main Dahomean port was little better. The King himself confirmed the standstill in the slave export trade when he informed Fraser that apart from a limited number of Egba prisoners who had been sent to Domingo, he had not sold one slave in the year, 1851; ". . . the Portuguese come, they no buy."¹⁰² According to Fraser, not only the slave traders, but the monarch himself was in considerable debt to Hutton's and there was every chance of his remaining so.¹⁰³ Thus 1851 marked not only the turning point in the willingness of the British to deal with the question of abolition through normal diplomatic channels; it also marked the virtual ending - temporarily - of the slave export trade from the Dahomean coast.

These two factors alone might well have been sufficient to necessitate a radical attempt at transforming the material basis of the Dahomean monarchy's political power. In the event they were reinforced

by another development which rendered such a transition even more imperative. The destruction of the Dahomean army - and particularly the core of Gezo's Amazon's - before the walls of Abeokuta in 1851, marked not only a political and military blow of the first magnitude to the Fon, but effectively underlined the uneconomic nature of the annual campaign in the prevailing circumstances. For years Gezo had laboured under an erratic demand for slaves on the coast. In 1851 he was faced with a heavy loss in personnel in pursuit of a 'commodity' which he could no longer exchange.

The Fon-Egba clash had been predictable for some time previously. The effective foundation of Abeokuta can be taken to date from 1830 when the main body of Egba settled there. For the next few years the settlers were obliged to defend themselves against marauding armies of different Yoruba groups struggling to establish themselves in the wake of the decline and dispersal of the Old Oyo Empire, and particularly against the armies of Ijebu and Ibadan. The Egba defeat of the forces of Ibadan in 1835 established Abeokuta among the most powerful of the Yoruba states, and from 1836 onwards they had turned towards a more offensive posture in establishing their political hegemony in the area. Their military success swelled the ranks of the inhabitants by an influx of Yoruba refugees, and from 1839 onwards the town also acted as a magnet to growing numbers of liberated slaves returning to their homelands; by 1842 there were over 250 Saro's established at Abeokuta.¹⁰⁴

Having successfully established themselves vis-a-vis Yoruba competitors to the east, the Egba set about establishing themselves secure access to the south-eastern trade route to Lagos, a strategy

almost inevitably bound to bring them into competition and rivalry with their more powerful western neighbour Dahomey. The Egba had secured a port initially through their alliance with Adele, the King of Lagos then in exile in Badagry, in the early 1830's. They then helped to secure Adele's restoration to Lagos in 1835. The Egba fought off a challenge to their authority when the Ajano of Otta demanded what the Egba considered to be excessive tribute to preserve their access to the coast. They stormed and took the town, effectively annexing it to Abeokutan authority. Sodeke, the Egba leader, carefully avoided encroaching any further to the west in terms of outright military occupation, but the Egba did position a smaller contingent outside Ado, sufficient to put the town in a state of siege. The restoration of Adele followed the Egba capture of Ota. Eventually, the Egba were to lose their influence at Lagos with the expulsion of Akitoye in 1845, but were able to support Akitoye at Badagry thereafter.¹⁰⁵

Egba expansionism naturally fuelled the suspicions and fear of the Dahomeans who considered Ado under the protection of Porto Novo, and who viewed the Egba threat to their access to the coast on their eastern flank with increasing concern. Ado was considered the key to the eastern territories under Dahomean suzerainty.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, the Dahomeans attempted to relieve the town, but suffered their first reverse at the hands of the Egba when their army was driven back, and the Egba continued their siege despite the continued attentions of Dahomey and her allies.¹⁰⁷

The threat from Abeokuta appeared all the more menacing throughout the 1840s in view of the relative decline in the slave trade. While the

Dahomeans controlled Whydah and the ports to the East, the Trade there was becoming increasingly sparse as the decade wore on. The Egba were attempting to open a direct slaving connection with Lagos. In addition they were intent on obtaining access to coastal trade through the port of Badagry. Indeed the end of the first siege of Ado resulted directly from the prospect of established trade with that port. Domingo Martinez, at that time established as a trader at Badagry, lavished presents on the Abeokutan war chiefs, promising them rum, tobacco and rich cloth in return for slaves. In response to Domingo's overtures the Egba for a time opened the Ado route.¹⁰⁸

Apart from their military and political threat then, the Egba constituted a serious threat to the commercial prospects of Dahomean trade in the circumstances of the 1840s.

But the Egba were not merely slave traders. The Abeokutan divisions between civil and military chiefs which had remained relatively latent under the charismatic leadership of Sodeke expressed themselves more openly after his death in 1845. The association of war chiefs - the Ologun - increasingly involved themselves in slave raiding, exchanging the captives for arms at the markets of Okeodan and Porto Novo.¹⁰⁹ Biobaku explains one such raid, on Oke Ogun to the north of Abeokuta in 1846, as a consequence of the slaving connection which had been established with Domingo Martinez at Badagry.¹¹⁰ Other raids extensively encroached on the Dahomean frontier.¹¹¹

The dramatic fall in the demand for slaves, 1849-51 sharpened rivalries. At a time of declining effective demand for slaves on the coast, Dahomey was faced with an increasingly powerful rival producing

slaves in the interior, and attempting to establish direct supply routes to ports in competition with those under the jurisdiction of the Dahomeans, thus diminishing further Dahomean customs revenues and their capacity to market whatever slaves they themselves produced.¹¹²

In 1848 the Dahomeans destroyed the large market town of Okeodan,¹¹³ in the course of which they once again suffered from the military interference of the Egba who, Forbes was informed, made a sortie on the Dahomean Amazon army, capturing one of their generals.¹¹⁴

To add to Fon-Egba commercial and military rivalry, their general political antagonism was exacerbated by the British use of Abeokuta as an indigenous counterpoint to the political strength of the Dahomean Kingdom in their diplomatic overtures directed towards obtaining concessions over abolition of the slave trade.¹¹⁵

In the conditions of the late 1840s and early 1850s the rise of a powerful slave raiding state in proximity of the Dahomean kingdom, with direct access to rival ports on the coast, threatened economic disaster for what was left of the Dahomean export trade in slaves.

The matter came to a head in late 1850 when the Egba destroyed Igbeji, a town under Dahomean protection.¹¹⁶ In February of the following year the Dahomean army set out on the first expedition against Abeokuta,¹¹⁷ with an estimated 10,000 male soldiers and 6000 females.¹¹⁸ On 3 March 1851 the Fon launched their attack against the Egba, and in the following days were defeated with heavy losses.

The reason for the defeat is unclear, but it was at least partly related to the firepower of the enemy. A recent study of Dahomean warfare has concluded that;

"the most dramatically new factor that the Fon had to face was that the enemy was armed with firearms and large amounts of ammunition. The Fon not only had to face an enemy in a strong defensive position, but an enemy with massive fire power."¹¹⁹

Accounts of the Dahomean casualties vary, but Townsend, who was in Abeokuta at the time claimed to have counted over 1200 bodies and asserted that at least 1800¹²⁰ died on the first day alone. Other missionary accounts placed the total of Dahomean deaths for the whole campaign at around 3000, with a considerable additional number taken prisoner.¹²¹

After their crushing defeat at Abeokuta the Dahomean army fell upon and destroyed the town of Ishagga, an Egbado town about 12 miles from Abeokuta itself.¹²² But the victory offered them small compensation for their earlier defeat. The core of the Dahomean military forces, and particularly the central aspect of the monarch's own slave raiding capacity, the Amazons, had been destroyed at Abeokuta.¹²³ The Dahomean monarch, for so long the purveyor of other African groups to the slave merchants at the coast, was now in the ignominious position of having to ransom his own army, or what remained of it, from the victorious Egba.¹²⁴ It would take the Dahomean monarch's pride, and his slave raiding capacity, some considerable time before recovery.

By 1851 then, the Dahomean monarchy already faced crisis. The demand for slaves on the coast had diminished to almost nil. What demand did remain stood to be drawn to ports outside Dahomey's suzerainty by the rise of a powerful slave raiding neighbour, with direct access to coastal ports, and the capacity to withstand Dahomean military pressure. The King himself had seen the Dahomean army, and particularly

that section of it on which he relied for the 'production' of his own export slaves, destroyed by an enemy well equipped with firearms, and in a position to ensure further supplies through their European - particularly British missionary - connections.

Under the circumstances Gezo had little option to resort once more to the diplomatic overtures which had proved relatively successful in the past. In 1851, after his defeat at Abeokuta, he summoned the British Ambassador to Abomey.¹²⁵ He was, as Ross implies, eager to point out to the British the special nature of their relationship. But he had been just as concerned to ensure the French of the special nature of Franco-Dahomean relations which had hitherto existed.¹²⁶ Gezo was, in fact, attempting to employ the known European commercial rivalries for his own benefit.

Gezo's new initiatives appear to have had a threefold purpose. Firstly to re-affirm western alliances and ensure continued income from western contact. Secondly, to minimise his commitment to abolition of the slave trade, and to procure limited, and probably personal, advantage from particular dispensations over slave exports. Finally, as a direct result of his military disaster at Abeokuta, to refurbish his armed forces with European weapons.

TREATY WITH THE FRENCH 1851

So far as the French were concerned Gezo met with some success on all three counts. Augustin Bouet arrived in Dahomey on 10 May 1851,¹²⁷ and by July he could inform the French government of the terms of a Treaty of Amity and Commerce which he had concluded with Gezo on the 1st

of that month. In it Gezo re-affirmed freedom and protection for French trade, referring to the palm oil trade among other produce, in return for traditional custom rights to be paid to the monarch. Indeed, this time the monarch obtained guaranteed anchorage dues incorporated in the terms of the treaty. Under its terms, each ship unloading a full cargo paid as anchorage rights; 40 Piastres of white Cowries; 28 pieces of merchandise; five rifles; five barrels of powder and 60 gallons of 'eau-de-vie'. Loads of less than a full cargo were to be charged pro-rata.¹²⁸

Gezo then, assured himself not only of a continued income, but of a source of arms and powder, even as part of 'legitimate' commerce. Moreover, the Bouet mission to Abomey had been accompanied with a gift of military hardware at the suggestion of Régis,¹²⁹ and during his stay at Abomey Bouet was involved in advising the Dahomeans on the use of artillery and shell.¹³⁰ The treaty also agreed the freedom of missionaries in Dahomey and a most favoured nation clause. But it is significant for its omissions as for its inclusions.

For, despite the claims made by Régis, echoed later by Beecroft, regarding Gezo's final conversion to the abolition of human sacrifice as a result of Bouet's visit,¹³¹ there is no mention of the subject in the terms of the treaty. More significantly still, there was no mention, far less commitment, to the abolition or supression of the slave trade. The French no doubt realised that such demands were unlikely to reap any practical reward and merely constituted an obstacle to reaching agreement over their other commercial concerns.¹³²

Gezo, then, had every right to be pleased at the outcome of his approaches to the French. He had cemented political and commercial ties, ensured a continuation of legitimate trade, formalised and reaffirmed customs dues, obtained an immediate gift of artillery, shells and military advice as well as confirmation of a future direct supply (in the anchorage rights), while avoiding any concessions over the slave trade.

Gezo's eagerness to refurbish his army suggests that even at this stage, he had not abandoned the idea of pursuing the traditional course of annual military raids. He was not, of course, exclusively dependent upon direct European supply of arms, and had traditionally had access to guns and powder through coastal slave traders like Domingo Martinez.¹³³ But in the wake of his defeat at Abeokuta his needs were greater than ever.¹³⁴ To some extent this was reflected in the nature of the dashes brought by the slave traders to the 1851 Customs. Domingo Martinez alone dashed the monarch 800 muskets and 200 quarter barrels of powder,¹³⁵ while lesser merchants gave proportionately. Antonio da Souza, for instance, gave 200 muskets and 200 large kegs of powder.¹³⁶

NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE BRITISH 1851/2

These must have gone some way towards refurbishing Gezo's army, but his defeat had been heavy. Thus, part of the King's efforts throughout 1851 was directed towards procuring arms from the British. The matter was raised in his correspondence with them that year, through direct appeals to the new vice-consul Fraser, and through overtures to the captains of British men-of-war via the Yevogan at Whydah.¹³⁷

With the British, Gezo had much less success than with the French or the coastal slave merchants. Indeed, the British were actively trying to counteract Dahomean military power by supplying the Egba with arms.¹³⁸ Not unreasonably, the Fon suspected the British of being in league with the Egba, a suspicion which was strengthened when the luckless Fraser was found at Abomey to be in possession of a letter from the Bashorun of Abeokuta, the contents of which quickly became known to the Dahomean authorities.¹³⁹ The episode is in many ways symbolic. For, by late 1851 relations between the Dahomean monarch and British officials on the coast were strained to their utmost, and were hardly conducive to the cementing of an alliance between the two parties. Dahomey's request for arms had been rejected by the British, while the latter were supplying the enemy and were known to be in league with Abeokuta; they had also made it known to the Dahomean monarch that diplomatic initiatives to abolish the slave trade had now run their course and that stronger measures would now be forthcoming.

The personality of the newly arrived vice-consul Fraser hardly helped to ease diplomatic relationships. Fraser's incipient paranoia was apparent even before he left Britain, when he requested that accommodation on the coast be assured by the time of his arrival, since without it he would be prey to "poison and assassination".¹⁴⁰ His relationship with Dahomey had been dogged by ill-luck, or ill-judgement from the start. Having officially accepted his post on 27th December 1850 and set out for the coast, by mid-March he had progressed no further than Sierra Leone, where in an attempt to travel onwards to the Bights he had to transfer to a British Cruiser, The Gladiator. Unfortunately for

Fraser, his arrival coincided with the aftermath of the Dahomean defeat at Abeokuta, and Beecroft, fearing a Dahomean reaction, instructed him against landing at Whydah when he had finally arrived in the area. He was thus carried on to the Gladiator's destination at Fernando Po, whence he wrote complaining of his confinement to ship for over three months. Somewhat ironically, he was again forced to write to the Foreign Office some three months afterwards at the end of June, complaining that the lack of shipping for the area of Dahomey had ensured his enforced residence on the island.¹⁴¹

Fraser's initial encounter with the Dahomeans displayed little more judgement than the arrangements for his itinerary. He appears to have been particularly naive as regards the reality of Dahomean politics and its relationship to the slave trade and warfare. On his first visit to Abomey he assured the leading men that:

"I did not come to ask the King or his leading men for a single thing; all that was wanted them, in the name of the Queen of England, was to discontinue war, sacrifice and slave trading, and to substitute the making of palm oil, the growing of cotton and coffee, and to allow ivory to pass through their country."¹⁴²

The unfortunate vice consul, as mentioned, further exacerbated Anglo-Dahomean tensions, by being found in possession of a letter from the Bashorun of Abeokuta, recent victors over the Dahomeans, seeking advice on the state of affairs in Dahomey, and not unnaturally placing him under the suspicion of the Fon authorities as an Egba spy. The incident led to a situation in which the English on the coast were subjected to isolation and harassment by the Fon authorities.¹⁴³

By December 1851, Fon officials were actively involved in encouraging a Franco-Kosoko alliance against the British.¹⁴⁴ Matters came to a head later in December when the British, finally bent on imposing the abolition of the slave trade in the region of the Bights, imposed a naval blockade on the coast, including all the ports under the jurisdiction of the Dahomean monarch.

The Blockade was declared on 16 December 1851.¹⁴⁵ Ten days later Fraser was summoned to Abomey to meet with Gezo, a call which raised Forbes' hopes of a satisfactory outcome. Gezo subsequently dispatched another messenger, arriving on 27 December, requesting that ships be allowed to stay in port until Fraser's return. Forbes agreed, but forbade communication between shore and ships, and turned down a similar request from Domingo at Porto Novo beach. Communications between shore and ships was to cease after 1 January 1852, and if the King had not come to terms thereafter, they would be forced to put to sea.¹⁴⁶

The naval blockade was the final straw. In the wake of a drastically reduced slave trade and military defeat, the reality of British naval power and the potential stoppage of all Dahomean trade held out the prospect of final economic disaster for Gezo. But his conduct of the negotiations portray two characteristics. Firstly, a determination to make the minimum possible concessions in so far as they affected his own interests. And secondly, an intent to employ what bargaining power he had at his disposal - political or commercial - to inflict as much damage as possible on the British while the blockade lasted.

The negotiations between the monarch and the British were anything but amicable. As Ross has pointed out there was some difference between British officials over their assessment of the meeting and the degree of satisfaction which the conclusion of negotiations merited.¹⁴⁷ Ross appears to have drawn exclusively from English accounts of the meeting. The French sources, however, confirm the more pessimistic view of Fraser, and one thing appears certain - the description of Gezo's attitude and response to the British officials does nothing to suggest that he was attempting to court allies, however subtly.¹⁴⁸

Regarding the general atmosphere in which the negotiations took place, Fraser's account and the French report substantially agree on the general outline and tenor of the meeting. They could hardly be more incongruous with any characterisation of the meetings as amicable. Gezo denied every proposition of the British.

"He denies the treaty as being original, the wording of the Commodore's (Bruce's) letter as having authenticity; that any person has spoken to him about the slave trade or Abeokuta."¹⁴⁹ The King's malice was particularly directed towards Fraser, who he called a spy and an intriguer.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, he declared that he had not been involved in the export of slaves for the past three years,¹⁵¹ which, as has been seen, was near enough the truth, though the situation arose through a decline in effective demand rather than as a conscious decision of the monarch. He had, he argued, explained in the past to British visitors the reasons which obliged him to allow the slave trade to continue.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, Gezo agreed not to take any further part in the slave trade.¹⁵³ But it is crucial to clearly understand exactly what Gezo was prepared to concede and to commit himself to. For, as Fraser pointed out, the King refused to sign anything but a small section of the British Treaty.¹⁵⁴

French accounts of the proceedings also go into some detail over the manner in which Gezo conceded. He informed the French officials present that he now undertook not to permit the export of captives from his state, and that he would sign a treaty with the English having exclusively that aim. He further requested that French and Portuguese officials be officially sent in order that a similar agreement might be concluded.¹⁵⁵

However, according to the French account when the English treaty came to be signed on 13 January, several clauses had been added in pencil permitting the arrival of missionaries and the building of churches, agreeing to the abolition of human sacrifices and that war should not be made against Abeokuta.¹⁵⁶

Gezo and his ministers were outraged, and Gezo categorically refused to sign anything except a treaty exclusively devoted to the matter of the slave trade himself. He did not see why the English wished to be masters in his country, a situation to which he would never consent.¹⁵⁷ After discussions between the British and French, a treaty referring specifically to the slave trade was drawn up by Fraser the vice-consul, and signed by Gezo.¹⁵⁸

The articles which Gezo did not sign are worthy of some consideration, since it has been suggested by Ross that the

non-compliance of the monarch was derived from disinterest, and an assumption that they were unimportant, or had previously been conceded. The question of human sacrifice is dealt with in some detail later, but two other issues which caused particular anger among the Dahomeans and over which Gezo himself became annoyed and obstinate - Abeokuta and Freedom for missionaries - merit attention here.

On the protection and freedom of missionaries, Gezo had previously made it plain to the British, admittedly under the urging of the Migan, that while he was willing to provide aid and protection for a missionary teacher, he was not prepared to have him stationed at Abomey, and that he would have to remain at Whydah.¹⁵⁹ Certainly in Fraser's view, the King's answer was tantamount to refusal of protection for missionaries.¹⁶⁰

Regarding Abeokuta, it seems almost incredible in retrospect that the British officials expected Gezo to sign away his effective sovereignty over 'foreign affairs' and the right to make war. Gezo did however request that Egba ambassadors should be sent to Abomey that they might attempt to settle their differences.¹⁶¹ But British diplomatic blunders on this external aspect of the discussions mounted one upon the other. In attempting to persuade Gezo of the advisability of signing the whole treaty, they suggested that unless he did so he would find himself at odds with all his neighbours. Not surprisingly for the warrior monarch, "the talk of leagueing the other African chiefs against him nettled him rather", according to Fraser.¹⁶²

Gezo had further grounds for objecting to British self-righteousness over the question of the Egba. Badagry had been exempted from the

blockade partly as a source of supplies to the Egba,¹⁶³ and Gezo was aware, as he later revealed, that the British officer Forbes had been assisting the Egba with military advice on tactics.¹⁶⁴

So far as the actual treaty was concerned, then, the lack of agreement on clauses pertaining to issues other than the slave trade stemmed neither from disinterest nor an assumption of prior agreement but from a refusal on the part of the monarch to make anything other than the minimal concession of abandoning his own role as a slave exporter, and the banning of slave exports - which I will argue he took as referring only to Whydah. In the event, neither of these involved Gezo in any great concession in the prevailing circumstances. For some time slave exports from Whydah had dropped to almost zero as a result of the closing of the trade at the Bahia end; and his own capacity to provide slaves, which rested largely on the effectiveness of his army and in particular that section of it directly under his own control, had been severely reduced as a result of his defeat at Abeokuta. Any return to large scale slave raiding would have to await the return of demand and the restocking and re-equipping of his military forces.

But Gezo combined commercial pressure with his concession. He had been particularly annoyed by the exclusion of Badagry from the coastal blockade, an exemption which he took to indicate British pretensions over a coastal port which he considered under his own suzerainty.¹⁶⁵ And it was the exclusion of Badagry from the blockade which prompted Gezo to take prompt action to ensure that no Dahomean palm oil reached the British until the economic siege was lifted.

This exclusion rendered the consequences of the blockade even more serious from the point of view of the monarch than they otherwise might have been. The blockade in itself meant that any taxation revenues which the monarch might have expected from normal trading would be delayed until such times as it was lifted. The exclusion of Badagry meant a total loss of such revenues, since the palm oil previously directed through Whydah where the King's tax collectors were situated, was now being taken to Badagry. The British establishments at Badagry thus benefitted, while both the Dahomean monarch and French traders at Whydah suffered.¹⁶⁶

When it became clear from the meeting at Abomey that the limited treaty concessions which Gezo had made were insufficient to guarantee lifting of the blockade, the Dahomean monarch immediately launched a series of measures designed to ensure that the British, and if necessary Europeans in general, did not benefit economically while he was suffering financially.

Although the prospect of additional revenues would be welcome, Gezo's enforced monopolisation of the palm oil trade for a brief period after the signing of the treaty was more of a political move designed to counter-blockade the British, rather than a part of a long term economic strategy. On 17 January, four days after the signature of the treaty, Gezo decreed that all trade at ports other than Whydah was to be closed. Even Domingo was forbidden to return to Porto Novo beach where his establishment was situated. The King decreed that no one except himself should be permitted to buy or sell palm oil, and that henceforth the selling price would be increased by 50 per cent from eight to 12

dollars the measure, with an additional tax of four dollars per puncheon payable on shipping the oil. In any case, no more trade would be done until such times as he had heard from England.¹⁶⁷ (Gezo assumed that Commodore Beecroft had gone to England with his letter to Victoria.)¹⁶⁸ Gezo's decrees were confirmed to the whites at Whydah on 20 January.¹⁶⁹

Throughout February Dahomean antagonism against the British increased and was reflected on the coast. By 1 March the Whydah people had turned against the English, and one trader, Stanfield, was summarily fined 800 dollars for knocking a child over with his horse - without serious injury, he maintained. On incapacity to pay the fine he was thrown into prison until a considerable fine in trade goods was forthcoming.¹⁷⁰ With the exception of Forbes, who was given a dispensation, the British had already been prohibited from boarding ship from the time of Gezo's decrees on 17 January.¹⁷¹

On 14 February, Fraser received word that Bruce would allow legitimate trade to go on, and instructions to inform the Yevogan that this would last only until 1 March unless the whole treaty was signed.¹⁷² But, on 16 February, Gezo further reinforced his trade embargo by dispatching a considerable number of people from the capital to collect the palm nuts, from which the oil was made, nearer the coast.¹⁷³ Gezo thus effectively stopped the flow of oil from Dahomey to any of the ports outside his immediate control. But Gezo's restrictions applied not only to palm products; as a further step, following from a second meeting with British representatives at the end of February and beginning of March, he imposed currency control. Partly

in response to what he saw as an implicit British threat to starve the kingdom of currency, Gezo, on 6 March, issued an order that no cowries should leave Whydah, by lagoon or otherwise.¹⁷⁴

The manner in which the whole escapade had developed might well backfire against the aims of the British, complained the French traders. For, if the palm oil trade was effectively stifled, the Dahomeans would have little choice but to return to slave raiding.¹⁷⁵

Notwithstanding this, the British made yet another attempt to persuade Gezo to sign the standard treaty, Hutton, Forbes and Fraser leaving Whydah on 20 February on a visit which was to last until 4 March.¹⁷⁶ The meeting was, if anything, more acrimonious than the first. Gezo again refused to accept them as representing the true wishes of the British government. Moreover, he was insulted at being offered a treaty on the same terms and with the same conditions as lesser chiefs. The signing of the standard treaty by the King of Porto Novo and other smaller kingdoms enraged him.¹⁷⁷ He expressed anger and indignation that a British officer should have supplied the Egba with arms and training, and threatened to prevent any white men from gaining access to that town. He challenged the English to continue their attempt to starve him economically, or to try a military intervention. In either case he would overcome all they had at their disposal. Even if they prevented the inflow of cowries the Dahomeans would manufacture coins.¹⁷⁸

Most significantly for the purposes of the British, he once more refused to sign the standard treaty. It would, he said, echoing the sentiments of the Meu expressed in an earlier speech, be tantamount to selling his country.¹⁷⁹

Gezo's anger may have been exacerbated by bad news from Whydah, the Meu would have had Fraser believe.¹⁸⁰ Conflicting reports were arriving concerning the fate of the Dahomean army which had been dispatched under the Gau, and had been involved in combat at the town of G(sic), near Porto Novo.¹⁸¹ This may well refer to the town of Goary, (Gori) which a few years earlier had been referred to by a French observer as the market for the area east of Whydah, and which was a considerable interior oil market.¹⁸² If so the Dahomean failure would have constituted a serious setback to Gezo's plans to effectively put an embargo on oil from the interior arriving at any other port except Whydah. It is possible also that this was the immediate cause of Gezo's threat to destroy Badagry.¹⁸³ Indeed Gezo explicitly ordered Forbes to have white men removed from Badagry as he intended to "break the place".¹⁸⁴

But there's little doubt that for the most part Gezo's anger and frustration derived from the effectiveness of the British blockade. The dramatic decline of the slave trade in the last two to three years, the resounding defeat inflicted on his army at Abeokuta, and finally the effective power of the British navy when applied to a blockade of his coast, had fully exposed the weakness of the monarch's economic position. The prevailing circumstances - a stifling of demand and a much more vulnerable armed force ~ made slave raiding for the export sector uneconomic. The political tension between the Dahomeans and the British dragged on throughout most of 1852. In view of the failure of negotiations Fraser was instructed on 4 March to leave Whydah, and he did so shortly afterwards, remaining in Lagos.¹⁸⁵ The British blockade

was eventually lifted in June 1852 without having extracted any further concession from Gezo, and Fraser returned to his post on 23 September 1852.¹⁸⁶

But the lessons of 1849-51 had not been lost on the Dahomean King; over the next few years the Dahomean monarch was to attempt to diversify into palm oil production, effectively cease slave raiding, and in effect to attempt a revolutionary transformation of Dahomean society. Despite its merits then, Ross's interpretation of events surrounding the 1852 treaty require some revision.

Far from being an isolated enlightened advocate of economic advancement, Gezo held on to the erratic slave trade as long as it was humanly possible. In the end it deserted him rather than the other way round. And in the initial stages he was representative of a united Fon Polity.¹⁸⁷

The monarch was fully appreciative of the role which the slave trade and slave raiding played in not only the economic interests of the aristocracy, but in terms of ideological tradition and political legitimisation of the monarchy.

As such, any transformation in the economic sphere would necessitate changes in the ideological sphere, and political innovation. Such a transformation could only be attempted gradually, if at all, if the monarch were to retain his political hegemony and avoid the risk of further destabilising his own position.

Unfortunately for Gezo, economic and political developments largely outside his own control forced the pace. Political developments on the other side of the Atlantic robbed him of a market for captives. The

damage inflicted on his army in 1851 at Abeokuta destroyed a large section of his main slave producing vehicle, the Amazons. Economically, slave procurement was becoming increasingly costly in terms of outlay and less remunerative in terms of returns. On top of this, renewed aggression on the part of the anti-slave trade British who had become impatient with diplomacy as a means of achieving their ends in the Bights, finally exposed the extreme vulnerability of Gezo's control of the politically important export sector. And what the British could do in 1851, they could repeat again almost at will.

Gezo did what he could to extricate himself from the dilemma without injuring his internal political position. He conceded as little as possible over the treaty negotiations, but sufficient to allow the possibility of the blockade being lifted. He brought what economic pressure he could to bear on the British through a counterblockade - monopoly of the palm oil trade, cessation of trading and attempts to disrupt produce flows to Badagry. He attempted to safeguard the Dahomean currency through controls on the movement of cowries, controls which also impeded trade as long as the British blockade lasted.

In the short term Gezo conceded little more than had already been forced on him through the course of events prior to 1852. But the major problem was longer term. Given the uneconomic and erratic nature of the slave trade, and the political risks of incurring a further blockade which it involved, Gezo's domination of the traditional export sector in slaves had effectively been undermined.

CHAPTER 6 FOOTNOTES

- 1 In 1848, for instance, Duncan referred to Whydah as though it was one of the major palm oil ports in the Bights. Parl. Papers, Select Committee on the Slave Trade 1848, 1st report, Q. 3130: but see earlier remarks concerned with palm oil exports - it is unlikely that Whydah was exporting more than 1000 tons per annum; Cf. also Parl. Papers, Select Committee on the Slave Trade, 1848, 1st report, Q. 3195.
- 2 The exaggerated effects of the new trade were manifested in the prospectus for Duncan's forthcoming book which referred to Gezo as "the most enlightened Negro monarch in Africa", Prospectus in PRO.C096/12/139.
- 3 Christophe-Colombe à Min. de la Commerce, 29/9/1849, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 4 This offer did not relate exclusively to the French: Christophe-Colombe à Min. de la Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208; Duncan to Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 18/8/1849, PRO.C096/20/83.
- 5 Bulletin du Commerce, 5/8/1848, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 6 Palmerston to King of Dahomey, 19/5/1849, PRO.F084/775/15; Draft letter, Palmerston to Duncan, 29/5/1849, PRO.F084/775/3.
- 7 Beecroft to Palmerston, 4/5/1850, PRO.F084/816/143; Beecroft's Journals for 15th and 16th May 1850, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148: "Scraps from the Daily memo of Fraser", entry for 13th Nov. 1851, PRO.F084/886/305. Dos Santos had shipped oil to Bahia as early as 1846, Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 42.
- 8 This indication of Domingo's trade was given to Fraser by Domingo's own clerk: Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 9 Christophe-Colombe à Min. de la commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 10 Beecroft's Journals entry for 16th May, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148.
- 11 Fraser's commercial report, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 12 Beecroft's Journals, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148; Ev. of J. Smith, 4/4/1848, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 4, 1847-8, 1st Report from the Select Committee, Qs. 2196-2199.

- 13 Duncan to Stanley, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51.
- 14 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6.
- 15 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 35-6.
- 16 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 112-3: Fraser's commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95: Vallon, Lt. A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey", Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, tomes 2-3, pp. 232-263.
- 17 Fraser's commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 18 For example Régis Frères à Min. d'Agriculture et de Commerce 3/3/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 19 Régis Frères à Min. de Commerce Feb 1851, Arch. Nat., F12:7208.
- 20 Extract of Letter by Bouet, 15/7/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d: article 8 refers to the "decimeros".
- 21 Ibid.: article 7 refers to frauds. The same complaints were being made by English merchants; cf. Prior to Fraser, 9/8/1851, PRO.F084/886/142.
- 22 Prior to Fraser, 9/8/1851, PRO.F084/886/142.
- 23 Régis Frères à Min. de Colonies, 11/3/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:b.
- 24 Min. des Col. a Gezo, 8/2/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:c. Extract of letter by Bouet, 15/7/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d.
- 25 Fraser's commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95: Régis à Min. de la Mar. 1/7/1849, M.O.M., Gabon, i/1; Cf. also Parl. Papers, 1854, LXV, (296), cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . p. 43.
- 26 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. I, pp. 102-3.
- 27 Fraser's commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 28 Referred to as Joaquim D'Almeida by Verger. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . vol. I, p. 102.
- 29 Beecroft pointed out at the time both the difficulty in obtaining palm oil figures and the tendency towards exaggeration: Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192.

- 30 Ross, D., "The career of Domingo . . .", J.A.H., VI, 1965.
- 31 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 32 et seq.
- 32 See last Chapter.
- 33 Fraser to Golmer, 15/8/1851, PRO.F084/886/149.
- 34 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 35 See last chapter for an indication of the level of tax revenue from Palm oil exports.
- 36 Régis a min. de col., 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b. Régis a min. de la mar., 1/7/1849, M.O.M., Gabon i/1. Cf. also previous chapter, and Parl. Papers, 1854, LXV, (296), cited in Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 43.
- 37 Ross, D., Ph.D., pp. 120-30.
- 38 Ibid., p. 82.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 120-1.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 123-5.
- 41 Ibid., p. 124.
- 42 Ibid., p. 125
- 43 Gezo, in fact, laid on a military parade during negotiations which, in Fraser's view, was designed to show the English how ineffective their use of force would be: "Facts rel. to 2nd visit" entry for 3/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/245.
- 44 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 45 Fraser's Journal entry for 6/3/1852, in PRO.F084/886/263.
- 46 See later in this Chapter.
- 47 Again see later in this Chapter.
- 48 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/326.
- 49 Gezo had made the request several times, for example to Cruickshank and Beecroft. Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/326: Beecroft's Journal of 1850 visit, entry for 4/7/1850, PRO.F084/816.
- 50 Dawson to Committee, 14/8/1816, PRO.T70/36/168.

- 51 McLean to Committee, 20/5/1843, PRO.C096/2/7. Foote to King of Dahomey, 6/5/1843, M.M.S., 1843, box 259.
- 52 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., Vol. 11, pp. 267-9.
- 53 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.F084/775/64: Gezo to Palmerston, 7/9/1848, PRO.F084/775/75.
- 54 Winniet to Gray, 22/2/1847, PRO.C096/11/71, and other correspondence in the same volume. Stanley to Hawes, 22/12/1847, PRO.C096/12/8.
- 55 The Treaty was signed by Gezo at Abomey on 5/4/1847, and by Winniet at Cape Coast Castle, 8/3/1847, PRO.C096/11/176.
- 56 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 57 F.O. to Beecroft, 25/2/1850, PRO.F084/816/45. Cruickshank offered £400 per annum; Foote was authorized to offer £700 per annum in presents for 7 years: F.O. to Col. Off., 12/5/1845, PRO.C096/8/38.
- 58 Draft letter of Palmerston to King of Dahomey, 29/5/1849, PRO.F084/775/27.
- 59 Beecroft's Journals of mission to Abomey, PRO.F084/816: Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192. Though in Beecroft's opinion Gezo was under the "control and opinion" of his leading officers: Cf. Ibid.
- 60 Beecroft's Journals of visit to Abomey, entry for 4/7/1850, PRO.F084/816. Gezo to Queen Victoria, 4/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/191. Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192.
- 61 See later in this Chapter.
- 62 King of Dahomey to Queen of England, 3/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/302. Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 63 This had always been the most beneficial trading arrangement for the monarch, and had resulted in his discouragement of trade at outlying ports; Wm. Hutton to Hawes, 25/3/1847, PRO.C096/12/259; Cf. last chapter. Gezo was by no means the first Dahomean monarch to adopt a policy of channelling all trade through Whydah whenever possible: See for example Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 166, 207 and Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey and its Neighbours . . ., p. 128. But Gezo's problem was compounded by the necessary decentralisation of the slave trade as result of the attentions of the British Naval Squadron.
- 64 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, 29/8/1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 65 Beecroft to Palmerston, 4/10/1851, PRO.F084/858/291.

- 66 Gezo to Queen Victoria, PRO.F084/858/285.
- 67 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col., 1/6/1843, M.O.M., Afrique 1:4:-.
- 68 Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/214.
- 69 Hill to Stanley, 16/5/1844, PRO.C096/4/230.
- 70 Cf. last chapter.
- 71 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/13/279.
- 72 Duncan to Palmerston, 21/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/58.
- 73 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.C096/20/124.
- 74 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 101.
- 75 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 101-2.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 104-5.
- 78 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 117.
- 79 Those reported shipped by Duncan in August had been retained at Whydah for up to six months: Duncan to Palmerston, 21/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/58.
- 80 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.C096/20/124.
- 81 Ibid. In the late 1840's da Souza was listed in a Bahian will as a debtor to the extent of 1,732,000 Reis; Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 403. In 1851-2 appeals were being made to the French Government to recover 480,754 piastres owed to Hutzenbechers (Hamburg) by heritors of Antonio (sic) da Souza : M.A.E. à Min. des Col., 31/1/1852, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d. According to Forbes, Isadore was made responsible to the monarch for his father's debts: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 106. Just before he died, da Souza was said to have lost 34 ships; Joinville, Prince de Vieuz Souvenirs, 1818-48, Paris 1894, p. 343, cited in Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 407.
- 82 Parl. Papers, Slave Trade vol. 90, 1852 (1455), Vol. LIV, "Papers rel. to the Reduction of Lagos, 1852", item 3, encl. 3, Lt. Forbes to Com. Fanshaw, 5/11/1849. Also in Parl. Papers, Slave Trade vol. 37, 1850 (1291), Vol. LV, "Cor. rel to the Slave Trade", item 9, encl. 10.
- 83 Duncan to Stanley, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51. Dunglas refers to the drought c.1849-50; Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 80.

- 84 Duncan to Stanley, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51.
- 85 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 11-12.
- 86 Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.F084/775/64.
- 87 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 88 F.O. to C.O., 7/1/1859, PRO.C096/20/62.
- 89 Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192: Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Forbes had also expressed his disappointment at the lack of grandeur: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol.I, pp. 68-71.
- 90 Beecroft's journals of mission to Abomey, entry for 4/7/1850, PRO.F084/816; Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192: Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 91 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 92 Appendix to Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/128.
- 93 Régis à Turgot 24/1/1852, M.A.E, Afrique 51.
- 94 Porter to F.O., 1/4/1847, PRO.F084/1021. Porter to F.O., 18/10/1847, PRO.F084/1088.
- 95 Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., pp. 334-41.
- 96 Cf. Ibid., pp. 392-419.
- 97 Ibid., pp. 344-49, 381-86.
- 98 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 30/7/1851, PRO.F084/886/48 .
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851 PRO.F084/886/48.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 17-20.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Campbell to Clarendon, 15/2/1855, PRO.F084/967/97.

- 107 Annear to Gen. Secs. 2/6/1844 and July 1844. Also Journal of Rev. Annear 4th, 19th and 20th of March 1845; all in M.M.S. Box 260.
- 108 Townsend, cited in Biobaku, The Egba . . ., p. 33.
- 109 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 22-3.
- 110 Ibid., p. 54.
- 111 Campbell to Clarendon, 15/2/1855, PRO.F084/976/97.
- 112 To some extent, therefore, Egba and Dahomean campaigns of the 1840's can be seen as a struggle for control of the approaches to the coastal ports, similar to the wars between Abeokuta and Ijebu/Ibadan in the 1830s. For Aja-Egba rivalries in this area, see Kola Folayan, "International Politics in a Frontier Zone: Egbado 1833-63", in Odu, 8, 1972
- 113 Ibid. Forbes F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 16. Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, 68-79.
- 114 Forbes F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 21.
- 115 Cf. for example Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192; Palmerston to Gezo, 1850, undated PRO.C096/20/200.
- 116 Ross Phd., p. 102, citing English missionaries at Abeokuta to Commodore Fanshaw, 7/11/1850, PRO.F084/865.
- 117 Ross, D., Phd., p. 103.
- 118 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., p. 44.
- 119 Maroukis, T., Phd., pp. 185-6.
- 120 Townsend to Palmerston, 20/3/1851, PRO.F084/858/140.
- 121 Golmer to Beecroft, 18/3/1851, PRO.F084/858/144: Townsend to Palmerston, 20/3/1851, PRO.F084/858/140.
- 122 Townsend to Palmerston, 20/3/1851, PRO.F084/858/140: Burton, A Mission . . ., pp. 263-4. An analysis of the Dahomean attack on Abeokuta in 1851 can be found in Smith, R., Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century.
- 123 Although Bouet, who visited Abomey shortly afterwards, referred to 3-4000 of well armed women, he also reported that Gezo had lost 2000 Amazons at Abeokuta: Bouet, A., "La Royaume de Dahomey", L'Illustration, pp. 39-42. Fraser in late 1851 estimated about 1000: Fraser's journals, rough copy, entry for 4/9/1851, PRO.F084/886/. And Forbes and Fraser in 1852 put the Amazon numbers at less than 2000: "Facts relating to 2nd visit to Abomey" by Fraser, entry for 2/1/1852, 3.1.1852, PRO.F084/886/245.

- 124 Bowen, T. J., Adventures and Missionary Labours (Charleston, 1857), pp. 125-50.
- 125 King of Dahomey to Queen Victoria, undated, probably April-May 1851, PRO.F084/858/285.
- 126 Cf. for example, Gezo à President de la Republique, 11/8/1850, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:b. Régis Frères à Min. des Col. 11/1/1851 in Ibid. The French officials, like the British, were only too willing to believe in their 'special' relationship with the Dahomeans: Bouet, A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey" in L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 39-42.
- 127 Bouet, A., "La Royaume de Dahomey", L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 39-42.
- 128 Extract of letter from Bouet, 15/7/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d. But Fraser in his commercial report for 1851 wrote that "There are no import dues, unless \$50 per vessel anchorage money be considered as such: Frasers Commercial report annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 129 Bouet, A., "La Royaume de Dahomey", in L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 39-42. Min. des Colonies, 8/2/1851, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:c. Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. "Facts relating to 2nd visit to Abomey" by Fraser, entry for 2/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/245.
- 130 Bouet, A., "La Royaume de Dahomey", in L'Illustration, 1852, pp. 59-62. Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 131 Régis a M.A.E. 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51: Beecroft to Palmerston, 19/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/183. In fact, Régis himself later qualified his remarks in "Note sur Whydah", Feb. 1852, M.A.E., Afrique 51.
- 132 This point is made by Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX". For the French Government's equally pragmatic approach to the question of dealings with slave merchants, see Jennings, L. C., "French policy towards slave Merchants . . .", J.A.H., XVII, 4, 1976.
- 133 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 58.
- 134 Prior to the Treaty negotiations Fraser and Forbes were treated to speeches from Amazons demanding to know why they hadn't brought guns since "they could not go to war as they were without arms": "Facts relating to 2nd visit to Abomey" by Fraser, entry for 7/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/245.
- 135 Information given to Fraser by Madiki: Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.

- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Gezo to whom it may concern, 14/5/1851, PRO.F084/886/137: Yevogan, for Gezo, to Captains of British Naval Squadron, 14/5/1851 in Ibid., to Queen Victoria (undated - probably April-May 1851), PRO.F084/858/287; Beecroft to Bruce, 5/9/1851, PRO.F084/858/287; Beecroft to Palmerston, 4/10/1851, PRO.F084/858/291.
- 138 Beecroft to Palmerston, 13/8/1850, PRO.F084/816/244; Internal F.O. Memos dated 15/3/1851 and 25/3/1851, in PRO.F084/816/305-7; Beecroft to Palmerston, 3/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/28: F.O. to Beecroft, 28/3/1851 and 28/10/1851, in PRO.F084/858/38.
- 139 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 140 Fraser to F.O., 16/12/1850, PRO.F02/4/26.
- 141 Fraser to F.O., 31/3/1851, 15/4/1851, 30/6/1851, PRO.F02/5/32-6.
- 142 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 143 The unfortunate Fraser was informed of the blockade only after the Dahomeans had found out from ships captains, thus leading to his being accused of concealing the matter and intriguing against them; Fraser to Capt. of HMS 'Brig', 21/12/1851, PRO.F084/886/318. Fraser had already been 'sent to Coventry' at Whydah, most probably as the result of the finding of the letter from the Bashorun: Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, appendix PRO.F084/886/4124; Fraser to Beecroft 15/11/1851, PRO.F084/886/46. On his way to the treaty negotiations at Abomey, his horse was lamed, his hammock carriers deserted him and he had to walk a considerable part of the way; to cap it all, the wretched Fraser then caught a severe bout of dysentery; "Facts relating to . . ." by Fraser, PRO.F084/886/245.
- 144 Comm. d'Alectom à Min. de la Marine et des col. M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 145 Cf. Maroukis, T., Phd., p. 189.
- 146 Fraser to Forbes, 26/12/1851, 27/12/1851, 28/12/1851: Forbes to Fraser, 27/12/1851, 28/12/1851: all in PRO.F084/886/334-9.
- 147 Ross, D., Phd., pp. 121-3. Fraser certainly considered the negotiations as a failure: Fraser's Journal of occurrences, entry for 11/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/253.
- 148 Baudin à Min. de la Marine et des Col., 18/1/1852, M.A.E., Afrique 51.
- 149 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155: Gezo's scepticism at the authenticity of the Ambassadors and proposals was manifested in Gezo's letter to Queen Victoria, 13/1/1852, PRO.F084/886//157.

- 150 Ibid.
- 151 Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159 (See Appendix A), 9th point. Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155.
- 152 Baudin à Min. de la Marine et des Col. 18/1/1852, in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Cf. also Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159 (Appendix A.)
- 153 Gezo to Queen Victoria, French Copy, dated 11/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem et Doc. Afrique 51. Gezo to Queen Victoria, dated 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159 (see appendix A).
- 154 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, entry for 1/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/253 (See Appendix B).
- 155 Baudin à Min. de la Marine et des Col. 18/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 156 Ibid.
- 157 Ibid.
- 158 Ibid. cf. Appendix B.
- 159 Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/29/192. Ross appears to argue that the 1852 demand was not dwelt upon by Gezo because it had already been conceded.
- 160 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155.
- 161 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 162 Ibid.
- 163 Granville to Walewski, 20/2/1852: Baudin à Ducos, 27/3/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Parl. Papers, LIV (221), Bruce to Admiralty, 6/12/1851, p. 162.
- 164 Fraser's Memo on last mission to Abomey, Feb. 1852, PRO.F084/886/286.
- 165 Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159 (Appendix A), 10th point.
- 166 Régis à Turgot 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Chambre de Commerce du Havre à M.A.E. 7/2/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. And, quite apart from Badagry, as the French pointed out, the main British oil markets of Old and New Calabar were outside the blockade: Régis à M.A.E. 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 167 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155.

- 168 Fraser's memo on last mission to Abomey, Feb. 1853, PRO.F084/886/286.
- 169 Fraser's journal of occurrences, 20/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/253.
- 170 Stanfield to Fraser, 1/3/1852, PRO.F084/886/270.
- 171 Fraser to Beecroft, 17/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/155.
- 172 Forbes to Fraser, undated but received 14 Feb. 1852, PRO.F084/886/268.
- 173 Fraser's journal of occurrences, 16/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/253.
- 174 Fraser's journal of occurrences, 6/3/1852, PRO.F084/886/253.
- 175 Régis à M.A.E., 24/1/1852 M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 176 Fraser's memo of last mission to Abomey, February 1852, PRO.F084/886/286.
- 177 Ibid.
- 178 Ibid.
- 179 Ibid.
- 180 Ibid.
- 181 Fraser's journal of occurrences, 5th, 6th March 1852, PRO.F084/886/253: The full name of the town is omitted in the P.R.O. copy, only "G . . ." appearing.
- 182 Extrait de journal de M . . . Brue, 2/5/1843, M.O.M., Senegal, IV:42:b.
- 183 See fn. 45.
- 184 Memo on Fraser's last mission to Abomey, Feb. 1852, PRO.F084/886/286.
- 185 Bruce to Fraser, 4/3/1852, Fraser to Bruce 5/3/1852, both in PRO.F084/886/354.
- 186 Fraser to Beecroft, 22/11/1852, PRO.F084/886/354.
- 187 See chapters 7 and 8

CHAPTER 7THE CRISIS OF TRANSITION: DAHOMEY 1852-58

By 1852 the Dahomean ruling class had been forced to accommodate the new trade in palm oil. In the initial phase the trade had been accepted, and subsequently encouraged, as a potential means of providing additional income as a substitute for an ailing slave trade. But there is no indication that there was any genuine intention on the part of the monarch or the aristocracy to undertake any radical transformation of the Dahomean economy. For one thing the income from the new trade, especially compared to the costs involved in the production process, were insufficiently attractive to stimulate such an undertaking. This was particularly true when compared to the lucrative returns to be gained from the slave trade itself. Prior to 1852, therefore, the Dahomean response to the new commercial developments had been accommodating and tentative. Their diplomatic efforts had been largely directed towards minimising the effects of western political action, specifically as regards the demands for internal change concerning the slave trade and human sacrifice. This was equally true of their response to the British blockade.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SLAVE TRADE TO THE MONARCH IN ECONOMIC AND IDEOLOGICAL TERMS

In a very real sense the economic and ideological problems faced by Gezo were most clearly outlined in his own submissions to the various British ambassadors who prevailed upon him. The neatest encapsulation

of his quandary was set out in a letter from the monarch to Queen Victoria at the beginning of the decade:

"At present my people are a warlike people and unaccustomed to agricultural pursuits. I should not be enabled to keep up my revenue were I at once to stop the slave trade."¹

The transition was in fact forced upon the King by the fact that both the slave trade itself, and his capacity to produce slaves, had declined seriously in the period from 1849-52. The prevailing circumstances had forced not only Gezo but the whole Dahomean leadership to accept the economic and political necessity of abandoning - at least any overt connection with - the Trade, and of finding an alternative economic strategy. Even the minimum concessions which Gezo had agreed to in 1852 marked a dramatic concession for a ruling class whose political power up until that time had been bolstered and underpinned by domination of an export-oriented slave procurement system.²

Far from being an eager exponent of the transformation of Dahomean society, Gezo realized only too well the difficulties involved in such a transition, and accepted its necessity only reluctantly after decades of skilful 'holding operations'. The most comprehensive summary of the problems and potential difficulties it involved was set out by Gezo himself in conversations with Cruickshank, which the latter, fortunately, recorded in some detail. It is worth quoting from this record in some length, since it provides a considerable amount of useful, first hand, and contemporary analysis of the relationship between the economic, political and sociological aspects of power in 19th century Dahomey; and in particular, the central role of the slave trade in all

of these. It is, therefore, a useful antidote to suspicions of the imposition of alien, economic determinist notions on African data by later, European historians.

In explaining why he could not give up the slave trade, Gezo first pointed to the state structure which he was obliged to maintain, the ceremonies which he was obliged to finance, and the inherited traditions which he, as monarch, could not discard. This was not merely a matter of administration, but a crucial matter of maintaining the traditional legitimacy of the monarchy itself.

"He held his power by the observance of the time honoured customs of his forefathers and he would forfeit it and entail upon himself a life full of shame and death full of misery if he neglected them."³

For the maintenance of the state, then, and for the continuing legitimisation of the monarchy in the eyes of the Dahomean people, the slave trade played a central role in securing the revenue necessary to the royal exchequer; particularly in counterbalancing the vast expenditure and ostentatious liberality expected of the monarch. No other source of income promised adequate compensation for the trade in captives. Nor were the Dahomeans as keen to effect such a transition as was sometimes suggested by the Europeans:

"No other trade was known to his people. Palm oil, it was true, was now engaging the attention of some of them, but it was a slow~method of making money and brought only a small amount of duties into his coffers. The planting of Coffee and Cotton had been suggested to him, but this was slower still."⁴

The role of the slave trade went far beyond the formal generation of the monarch's income. Even had a suitable and economic substitute been

available in the agricultural sphere its adoption would have ramifications far beyond mere fiscal mechanisms. For, the production process for slaves permeated all aspects of Dahomean life. The ideology of the warrior was the traditional mode of life for the Dahomeans, and that ideology was enshrined in the monarchy. The King's hegemony depended not only on raising and dispensing sufficient revenue and prestigious goods, but on the form of so doing - on the very nature of the production process itself. To consider abandoning this was not to be undertaken lightly, because it was to envisage nothing less than a social revolution.

"The form of his government could not be changed without causing such a revolution as would deprive him of his throne, and precipitate his kingdom into a state of anarchy."⁵

In short, the mode of production involved in procuring captives for use and exchange, was the very basis of the mode of Dahomean life. It was the all-pervading thread which held together the fabric of the 19th century Dahomean social formation. Gezo puts it succinctly:

"It was the slave trade which made him terrible to his enemies and loved, honoured and respected by his people. it had been the ruling principle of action with himself and his subjects from their earliest childhood. Their thoughts, their habits, their discipline, their mode of life, had been formed with reference to this all engrossing occupation - even the very songs with which the mother stilled her crying infant told of triumph over foes reduced to slavery."⁶

The record of Gezo's conversations with Cruickshank has been quoted at some length since it illustrates unambiguously that the Dahomean monarch was under no illusions about the central role of slave production, and

the economic social and political consequences, both for monarch and people, of its abandonment. Gezo's acceptance of changing to an agricultural based export sector was both reluctant and consequential upon economic and political events largely outside his control. He entered the transition period as the embattled victim of social forces, rather than as the enthusiastic advocate of social progress.

Faced with this unenviable set of circumstances, the King was sufficiently foresighted to develop a strategy aimed at avoiding, as far as possible, a wholesale social revolution, but a strategy which was flexible enough to allow both himself and his people to adapt to the new situation with minimum repercussions to his power or to the Dahomean state.

His strategy for adaptation essentially involved continuation of the internal slave trade, and covertly, outside of Whydah, the export trade. But it did mean the abandonment of the annual war, or at least a curtailment of its scale in order to minimise costs incurred with little or no return.

He planned to extend his revenue by the substitution of annual grants from the Government of Great Britain, and, if possible, other European countries. In addition revenue would be increased by the imposition of a tax on oil at the point of embarkation (for rolling off the beach), and the positioning of functionaries at some of the outlying ports.

Further increases in revenue to the central exchequer could be obtained by the allocation of captives - and land - to caboceers, for the production of palm oil. This increased capacity for palm oil production could then be taxed through the Kouzou on palm oil.

The general strategy was intended to allow the possibility of a continued annual war, on a limited scale, with the captives being allocated to domestic production rather than export. It allowed the Dahomean ruling class the prospect of continued access to imported goods through palm oil exports and a share of European annuities, via the Monarch. But crucially, it avoided the necessity for the monarch to abandon his traditional role as the enshrinement of the Dahomean warrior, since he was not involved in direct export production of agricultural goods.

This strategy of adaptation was, therefore, a compromise, aimed at minimising the extent of social change in the new circumstances. If the 'historic compromise' envisaged by Gezo and the Dahomean ruling class failed, if revenue proved insufficient to allow the monarch and caboceers to maintain their traditional obligations, then the 'middle route' would prove increasingly difficult to maintain. Another strategy would have to be developed. The half decade from 1852 covered the years of experiment.

THE ABANDONMENT OF SLAVE RAIDING 1852-7

Since the import-export sector played such an important part in internal political power, the monarchy required to replace its lost influence in that sphere. It was over the next few years that Gezo embarked on this task; if it is important not to overestimate the events of 1852, it is also important not to mistake 1852-7 as merely a reversion to what went before. This was the period of Gezo's "revolutionary gamble".

Newbury has remarked that almost as soon as he had signed the treaty, Gezo allowed it to lapse and resumed the slave trade.⁷ There is an element of truth in this insofar as slave exports continued from the coastline which Gezo considered under his jurisdiction; from the opening at Grand Popo to Lagos.⁸ Nevertheless, the statement is an oversimplification which underestimates the underlying change in Dahomean export sector over the next few years, and possibly also underestimates the extent to which Gezo maintained his treaty commitments.

Gezo had signed only a one-articled treaty,⁹ and it is important to realise how limited were the written concessions which he had made.¹⁰

Firstly, the terms of the treaty applied only to the export trade in slaves. He gave no commitment either to stop the internal trade, or to expel slave traders from his dominions. This, in fact, permitted the continued internal workings of the slave trade, and slaves could be purchased quite openly by coastal traders who could do so under the pretext of purchasing domestic slaves.

Gezo, though it is not specified in the terms of the treaty in explicit terms, did commit himself to the abandonment of his personal role in the export slave trade.¹¹ But he was already claiming that this had been the position for a few years prior to signature.¹² It will be suggested later that the monarch did in fact make an attempt to curtail his traditional personal role in the export slave trade - that of the largest slave procurer through the medium of the annual raid.

The second effective commitment in the treaty appears to be one to which Gezo gave less real attention to implementing; that is the prohibition of the export of slaves from the territories of the King and

chiefs of Dahomey. Gezo's dominions extended, according to the monarch's own view, from the opening at Grand Popo to Lagos.¹³ Effectively, however his direct political control was limited to the Dahomean port of Whydah, and it was to this port alone to which Gezo conveniently appears to have considered the terms of the treaty as applying. This allowed ample scope for slave shipments from the outlying ports.

Moreover, both Gezo, and the chiefs of the outlying ports - who had also signed treaties - conveniently interpreted the treaty as prohibiting only those shipments which were made precisely from the ports themselves.¹⁴ Since the operations of the slave dealers had for some time past required the employment of the whole coastal beach in order to facilitate avoidance of detention by the naval squadrons, the commitment, if interpreted in this manner, did little to prohibit the trade.¹⁵

So far as the actual treaty was concerned then, the acceptance of a continuing internal slave trade allowed sufficient leeway to the slave dealers and Dahomean chiefs to circumvent the treaty obligations regarding the prohibition of the export trade. Interpreting the treaty as being applicable only to the main port under his control, and only in its immediate vicinity, allowed the monarch the opportunity to claim compliance with its terms, provided that he was seen to have outlawed the export of slaves from Whydah, and to have given up his own role in the export trade. In this way, Gezo could hope to avoid the threat of a further blockade, could anticipate the often promised British revenue in trade goods as a compensation for his having abandoned the export trade, could avoid any attempt at interference with the internal market in

slaves, and could retain both his tribute and duties from those who continued to be involved in the Trade.

Even these limited concessions marked a radical break with the past as regards the role of the monarch. But it was one which at the time was masked by the revival and continuation of the export trade from the Dahomean coast. By late 1852 the export of slaves from the ports around Whydah - which had declined so dramatically in the previous three years - was again on the increase.

Ironically, much of the impetus for the revival in Dahomean slave exports after 1852 stemmed from the expulsion of slave traders from Lagos to the east by the British, a move which had derived in part from the belief - fostered by Gezo himself - that the Dahomean monarch could not be expected to abandon the trade until such times as it had been stopped at minor ports outside his own dominions.¹⁶

McCoskry, resident at Lagos in 1852, later testified that in that year a considerable number of slaves shipped from the area of Porto Novo and Whydah had in fact derived from the Lagos area, being sent down the lagoons to the west.¹⁷

The trend continued throughout the following year. Many of the shipments must have gone unseen and unrecorded by British officials. But in March, Campbell could report the embarkation of approximately 300 slaves from the area of Agoué,¹⁸ and in the next few months recorded three more shipments from the area of the same port totalling approximately 1300 slaves.¹⁹

Agoué was not the only port concerned. The Trade was in the increase in the area of the Bight of Benin generally, and according to

Campbell, slaves had been shipped in 1853 from the ports of Blookoos, Porto Seguro, and Great Popo, as well as the more frequently employed ports of Little Popo and Agoué itself.²⁰

But Gezo was astute enough to avoid the threat of a further blockade; for some considerable time after the signing of the 1852 treaty, it appears that there were no shipments of slaves from Whydah itself. Certainly by late 1853 Campbell had not heard of any having been made from that port.²¹ Such activity would, of course, have left Gezo open to retaliation in the form of the recent blockade, since this port was directly under his control, and it is probably for this reason that he had attempted to comply with the terms of the treaty by explicitly and strictly forbidding exports of slaves from Whydah.²² Although slave exports may have continued from neighbouring ports, Gezo's own position was protected since these were assumed to be only nominally under his power.²³

This strategy probably involved some economic loss to the monarch since his taxation revenues would be less fully collected outside Whydah. Nevertheless, this was a necessary sacrifice in order to avoid the threat of blockade. And in any case, the extent of taxation loss is open to question, since slaves were often marched through Whydah on the way to more western embarkation points, and since Whydah itself continued to operate as one of several stocking centres for intended slave exports. Domingo Martinez, for instance, retained a slave barracoon at Whydah,²⁴ and both he and the Yevogan retained a considerable number of slaves in the port.²⁵

It is probable then, in the period immediately following the signing of the treaty, that the monarch prohibited slave exports from Whydah itself in order to maintain the terms of the treaty and thus protect himself from retaliatory action. In similar style Domingo avoided shipping slaves from Porto Novo beach, since his legitimate trade at that port meant a close connection with the British mercantile houses and visiting British ships only too ready to report any 'illegitimate' exports.²⁶

Almost inevitably, though, with the influx of slave traders and the revival of the Trade occasional shipments came to be made from the area of Whydah itself. In May 1854, for instance, it was reported on 'good information' that two shiploads of approximately 1000 slaves had been taken off Whydah beach,²⁷ and in the first half of the year an unseaworthy vessel, the Caesar, was known to have embarked some 400 slaves after its purchase by Whydah slave dealers.²⁸ Campbell, the new British consul at Lagos wrote to Gezo disapprovingly and asked him to ensure implementation of the treaty.²⁹

These particular shipments proved to be something of a disaster for the slave merchants, two of the ships being taken by the authorities in Cuba and the Caesar appearing to have been lost at sea.³⁰ Moreover the Whydah slave merchants were increasingly coming under financial pressure from another direction.~ Quite apart from losses of slave cargoes - at least one other vessel, the Spanish barque Fernando Po was taken a little later - they were being subjected to the demands of the monarch who was attempting to maintain a flow of income to the central Dahomean exchequer. Despite a redirection into the palm oil trade once

more, their income was deficient in the face of the King's exorbitant demands, and those who could do so were beginning once more by 1854 to move to outlying ports like Agoué, outside Whydah itself.³¹

If 1854 had proved a relatively unprosperous year for the Dahomean slave traders, the following year was the quietest in terms of slave exports since the dramatic decline of the period 1849-51. By the middle of the year not one single shipment of slaves had been notified from any source to British officials at Lagos.³² The moribund state of the Trade was amply illustrated later in the year by the incapacity of the Ibadans to divest themselves of captives which they had procured in a recent raid in the Efong country. They did manage to dispose of the children taken, as manageable domestic slaves who could be incorporated into the domestic economy; but despite both overtures to Kososko and an attempt to market the slaves at Whydah, the Ibadan were eventually forced to drop the selling price of the captives as low as 15/- per slave in an attempt to secure buyers.³³

For a brief spell at the beginning of 1856 the Trade revived at the ports neighbouring Whydah, inspired by Domingo Mustich at Whydah and Byetta at Agoué, and prompted by arrangements made on the other side of the Atlantic by Senor Machado of New York. But once again it was Little Popo and Agoué rather than Whydah which were the main embarkation points.³⁴

It was precisely at this time that Gezo claimed in a conversation with Freeman, that apart from his personal abandonment of the slave trade, he had recently also further extended his prohibitions to include a ban on Dahomeans taking any part in the foreign slave trade, and upon

any shipments being made from any part of his dominions.³⁵ This, of course, did not apply to the conduct of the internal slave trade. Gezo's assertions were later to be dismissed by British officials, particularly by Campbell, but the available evidence suggests that - whether through a decline in demand or through the direct intervention of the monarch - slave shipments from Dahomean ports all but ceased in the period immediately after his declaration to Freeman in early 1856.

Campbell himself could claim in mid-1856, for instance, that at Whydah and the small ports to the west and east, the slave trade was very nearly extinct.³⁶ And a Methodist missionary, who had arrived in Whydah at the beginning of the year, could attest some months later that he had never had the "least intimation" of slave shipments, actual or intended.³⁷ Indeed, as late as February 1857 the British Consul could optimistically report that he had heard of only two shipments in the months prior to his report,³⁸ and only one of these, from near Cotonou (Appi Vista) could be considered under the jurisdiction of the Dahomean monarch.

Within a few months, however, the slave trade was to be again flourishing on the Dahomean coastline. Early 1857 marked the turning point in the monarch's capacity to sustain the direction of his experimental development of an alternative economic basis for the Dahomean monarchy. To understand the nature of the experiment, and the reasons for the change of direction in 1857 we have to return to the operation of the Dahomean slave trade - its sources of supply in the period 1852-7. The important aspect of this period is not so much the fluctuating slave trade, as much as the fact that Gezo appears to have abandoned his role as Dahomey's main slave producer.

The actual coastal operation of slave exports from Dahomey between 1852 and 1857 altered little. The principal slave merchants remained those residing at Whydah and Agoué, apparently employing as their supercargo one Domingo Mustich,³⁹ a Spaniard who also operated as a considerable shipper of slaves in his own right, having establishments at both Little Popo and Agoué.⁴⁰

Among the Coastal merchants, Domingo had taken on the pre-eminent role in the trade which the late da Souza had enjoyed in the previous decades,⁴¹ and according to one report, was receiving by 1854 about 80 per cent of the rum and tobacco imported from Bahia.⁴² His slaving establishments were considerable and included barracoons at Appi Vista,⁴³ on the outskirts of Porto Novo, and a considerable capacity for slave storage at Whydah.⁴⁴ In addition, in 1853, he had come to an arrangement with the Mewu, a Badagrian chief who had come to power during an interregnum and civil war,⁴⁵ over the establishment of a further baracoon at Ajudo a little to the leeward of Badagry itself.⁴⁶

Despite the reluctance of some British officials and missionaries to accept Mewu's complicity in the continuing slave trade,⁴⁷ it seems clear that his arrangement with Domingo Martinez resulted in considerable economic advantage to himself. Martinez was reluctant to ship slaves from Porto Novo beach; his normal practice was to march slaves purchased or assembled at Porto Novo along to his barracoons or embarkation points to the windward. Mewu's coffers were swollen with a toll, usually paid in cowries, on all slaves marched along the coastal strip past Badagry.⁴⁸

This practice was not a novel one for Martinez. It has already been noted that by the mid-1840s he had developed an arrangement with the war chiefs at Abeokuta in order to secure supplies of captives. Nevertheless, the arrangement is significant since it supports other impressionistic evidence suggesting that the proportion of slaves exported from Dahomean ports which originated from non-Dahomean slave 'producers' increased significantly after 1852 until c.1857-8.

If Campbell is to be believed many of these in fact originated from Domingo's continued relationship with the Egba.⁴⁹ And there is no doubt that many of them were brought in by Domingo Martinez from the general area of Lagos.⁵⁰ Many more, though, were brought into the Dahomey area for shipment by Lagos traders who had moved to Whydah after their expulsion consequent upon the British intervention in 1851,⁵¹ and who appear to have retained their original supply sources, merely diverting to the area west of Lagos for embarkation purposes. Such traders retained agents in towns like Porto Novo to purchase slaves, often under the pretext of domestic use.⁵²

Slaves were also being brought into Dahomey via Okeodan and Ado, and Campbell for one suspected that many of the slaves which ended up in Whydah emanated from Abeokuta, the Egba being the "greatest slave dealers throughout Yoruba."⁵³ Central to this Egba connection was the notorious madame Tinubu from Lagos.⁵⁴

A proportion of the slaves issuing from Abeokuta probably entered Dahomey via Ketu, a town with both pro-Egba and pro-Fon factions; the market there appears to have been in some sense a 'neutral' territory - intermittently, at least - for the Dahomeans and the Egba. Fon and Egba

traders met there, and it was Ketu which was chosen as the market to which the Dahomean prisoners were sent by the Egba for ransoming after their defeat of the Dahomeans in 1851.⁵⁵

Indeed, the increasing dependence of Fon traders on the Egba for slave supplies may have led them towards an expedient rapprochement in the years after 1852. Although hostility between the two groups was never far beneath the surface, there are a number of occasions - quite apart from trading contacts - when ambassadors of one of the protagonists were reported to be in the capital town of the other.⁵⁶

But, if slaves continued to come into Dahomey, there is little or no evidence to suggest in the five years from 1852 that they were being supplied on any scale by the King of Dahomey himself through his traditional mechanism of the annual raid. The Dahomean slave trade appears to have essentially changed not in terms of its actual export operations, but in terms of its supply situation. The bulk of slaves from 1852-7/8 appear to have been directed to Dahomean ports from interior markets or suppliers rather than as the products of the Dahomean army.

This marks a radical break with previous practice, in the light of which it appears that Gezo's original commitment to abandon his personal role in the slave trade, and his recurrent protestations that he had done so, merit more credulity than was given by many at the time.⁵⁷ It was, in fact, a revolutionary departure from the traditional role of the monarchy in the Dahomean slave trade. A role which, through the mechanism of the annual slave raid, had been developed and institutionalised especially during the three decades after Gezo's

accession to power.⁵⁸ This change was one aspect of an attempt to achieve a fundamental shift in the economic basis of monarchical power by Gezo.

The nature of this attempted transformation of the economic basis of the monarchy had been fashioned as much by the events of the 1849-51 period as by any pre-conceived scheme on the part of the monarch himself. The annual slave raid was dropped, being impractical as a result of the destruction of the flower of the Dahomean army in 1851, and economically unrewarding in the absence of effective demand at Dahomean ports.

The transformation envisaged by Gezo involved more than the abandonment of the mechanics of slave raiding and the diversification into agricultural production. For slave raiding and the military dimension of the Dahomean monarchy and aristocracy were completely enmeshed with the ideological aspects of the kingdom. A transformation of the economic sphere could not, therefore, be accomplished without a major ideological shift within Dahomey, hitherto avoided, and the monarch's strategy for adaptation manifested itself in two major ideological questions in particular; the further curtailment of human sacrifice and the transformation of the Warrior King into the Farmer King.

These aspects of Dahomean society articulated more than any other the ideological essence of martial Dahomey and the prior pre-eminence of the warrior aristocracy. Neither could be transformed easily, and the successful transformation of either depended upon the economic success of Gezo's strategy.

THE CURTAILMENT OF HUMAN SACRIFICE UNDER GEZO

Thus, as a corollary to his economic strategy Gezo embarked on a policy of further curtailing human sacrifice. This he hoped, would be a useful political indication to Europeans of his commitment to change. In fact, it followed naturally from the curtailment of slave raiding. The absence of a steady supply of captives - one section of which had traditionally gone to replace war casualties and plantation slaves - rendered slaves more valuable internally. More importantly, perhaps, any sacrifices at the Annual Customs would now have to be purchased at the full economic costs by the monarch himself.

The central role of human sacrifice in the political economy of Dahomey has already been outlined.⁵⁹ In the 1840's, however, Gezo had manifested his willingness to curtail the extent of the practice, partly as a gesture towards the western powers in the light of their commercial potential, and partly also because centralisation of control over human sacrifices enhanced his own political control. However, there is no indication at that time that he was prepared to countenance total abolition of human sacrifice.

Beecroft was wrongly informed by a French Merchant Captain, a Monsieur Couson of the brig Bey that Bouet, who visited Abomey in May of 1851 "succeeded in obtaining the King's signature to a treaty with the French government for the abolition of Human Sacrifice".⁶⁰

Sacrifices did continue, as Europeans were aware.⁶¹ But although claims that it was the Bouet Mission to Abomey which convinced the King of the economic viability of curtailing human sacrifice and the slave trade have to be treated with scepticism,⁶² there is evidence that

Gezo's efforts to reduce the scale of sacrifice continued throughout the 1850's.

Fraser, who attended the Customs in Abomey in 1851 refers in his report only to the intended sacrifice of three children along with the sheep and other animals to be slaughtered; in the event he commented that the King 'made excuse' over even these sacrifices and it was later reported that the children had escaped.⁶³

The comparatively recent diminution was sufficiently marked to cause speculation by the French that the British blockade of early 1852 might undo what progress had been made in this direction, and lead to a resurrection of large scale sacrifices.⁶⁴ In fact, there was some merit, though undoubtedly considerable economic self-interest, in the French argument. It does appear clear that the King, although prepared to sign an anti-slave trade treaty with British and French officials, refused completely to agree to a British addendum which included commitments to the abolition of human sacrifice.⁶⁵ Once again his antagonism may have been increased by the the almost absurdly undiplomatic approach of the British delegation in unilaterally inserting articles, committing Gezo to not only the abolition of Human Sacrifice but also to far reaching curtailments in his own control of foreign and domestic affairs.⁶⁶

Eventually, however, in 1853, Gezo did go so far as to announce that he would "give up the practice of human sacrifice altogether, according to the recommendation of the English."⁶⁷ British scepticism restrained them from responding. But again, despite British diplomatic aggression and their continued high-handedness throughout the 1850s,⁶⁸ Gezo proved

somewhat more consistent in his attitude than his European counterparts by the maintenance of the limitations imposed on executions and sacrifices.

In the late 1850s, the level of sacrifices at the Annual Customs appears to have been perhaps a little lower than those estimated by James at the end of the 18th century. One British official on the coast put the numbers of victims at 'tens' rather than 'hundreds' in 1857,⁶⁹ and the following year they were put a little more specifically at 'some 30 or 40'.⁷⁰ A missionary report conveyed just after Gezo's death spoke of him having reduced the number of victims to 'about one hundred . . . more or less'.⁷¹

Undoubtedly Gezo's aims in the sphere of human sacrifice were more limited than some European contemporaries would have liked to believe, but he did pursue them consistently throughout the last years of his life, and in a sense, even beyond the grave.

It has already been noted that Gezo refrained from having sacrifices made on the death of da Souza. Early in his reign he had also abolished the custom of sacrificing slaves on the death of caboceers, excepting the Migan and Meu, who were allowed one each.⁷² This constituted part of the general moves of 1843 and related to the curtailment of diffuse human sacrifices.

But, having limited the practice of providing caboceers with domestic slaves in the next world, Gezo also forewent the tradition of requiring his own caboceers to accompany him. An observer at the Grand Customs for Gezo at Abomey in 1860 testified that Gezo had obtained before his death a commitment from the heir-apparent that Dahomean caboceers would

not be required to follow him to his grave.⁷³ This request was, in fact, complied with by his successor who neatly managed to combine his father's wish with traditional practice by having a number of captives created Dahomean 'caboceers' and then dispatched.⁷⁴

Indeed it appears that Gezo went further than this, by abolishing the practice of mutual slaughter by the Royal wives.⁷⁵

There is thus considerable evidence that Gezo continued his curtailment of human sacrifice, begun in the 1840's, throughout the rest of his reign. The effect of the reforms which he introduced was not insignificant, particularly in view of the important role of the practice in Dahomean society. He imposed a reduction in the number of private sacrifices,⁷⁶ reduced the number of royal sacrifices both for penal offences and at the Annual Customs,⁷⁷ ordered the abolition of the mass slaughter traditionally following the king's death⁷⁸ and exempted at least certain officials from sacrifice or suicide at the Grand Customs itself.⁷⁹

Unfortunately for the Dahomean monarch and aristocracy, such compromises, however significant they were in terms of internal Dahomean politics, fell short of that demanded by the Europeans, and failed to result in any significant, sustained improvement in their economic position. The constant demand for further concessions without substantial and commensurate returns could not indefinitely be imposed upon the Dahomean ruling class without provoking a reaction. That reaction was not to be long in manifesting itself.

Up until 1857, however, that problem remained latent. There were other more immediate issues to be dealt with. The curtailment of slave

raiding, which had hitherto presented the monarch with his main export 'commodity' but which had now been curtailed as part of Gezo's strategy, obviously necessitated revenue sources from other directions if the monarch were to maintain his political obligations of conspicuous distribution at the Annual Customs, the equipping of his armed force, and the ostentatious upkeep of the royal household. That economic diversification had, in itself, considerable political and ideological implications.

THE 'BUSH KING' AND PALM OIL PRODUCTION

The increasing constraints on finance to the royal exchequer and the absence of a suitable substitute income for the slave trade in the years after 1852, placed considerable strains on the unity and stability of the Dahomean leadership. No one was more vulnerable than Gezo himself. Bereft of his slave trade, there was but one option left to him by the mid 1850s - to directly enter the palm oil export trade as a producer and exporter. But the Warrior could not become Farmer without revolutionising the ideology as well as the economics of kingship; a revolution that struck at the very core of Dahomean society.

Such a transformation, if it were to be accomplished without potentially disastrous social consequences for himself and the kingdom as a whole, would take time for his $\tilde{\text{people}}$ to become accustomed to. But time was not on the monarch's side; the decisive step had to be taken if relative impoverishment were not to overtake the King. What was required, in fact, was an institutional mechanism which bridged the apparent chasm between economic necessity and ideological constraint.

By the mid-1850s such a mechanism had been instituted, and a new aspect of kingship made its advent in the chronicles of visitors to the kingdom:- The Bush King.

The most recent comprehensive survey of the literature relating to the institution of the Bush King in Dahomey has been undertaken by Edna Bay.⁸⁰ Bay rejects the economic interpretation of the Bush King outlined in Burton and Skertchly, whose rationale for the mechanism was as an institution to allow the monarch to become involved in trade.⁸¹ She points out, correctly, that much evidence suggests that earlier Dahomean monarchs were regularly involved in the sale of slaves and were thus effectively traders.⁸²

To some extent, Bay's rejection of the two nineteenth century authors revolves around a question of interpretation. For it seems at least arguable that the implicit metamorphosis with which both were concerned was the transition from war-like monarch to not only trader but producer of agricultural goods. The institution of the Bush King was intended to deal with the transition from Warrior/slave trader to Farmer/agricultural producer-exporter.

Nevertheless, this interpretative difference is only partial, for Bay also rejects the work of several twentieth century historians making this very point. In a refinement of the Burton/Skertchly view, Law, Coquery-Vidrovitch, and Ross argue that the Bush King was created in order to deal with the monarch's participation in the palm oil trade specifically.

Bay's rejection of the 'refined' economic rationale for the Bush King appears to be based on two assertions. Firstly, that "in the nineteenth

century (the Kings' representatives), carried on an active trade in palm oil on their behalf".⁸³ Unfortunately, the chronological classification is here less than clear. If reference is being made to the second half of the nineteenth century, then this hardly undermines the argument for an economic determination for the Bush King, since the institution had by then been established with the intention, it is argued, of permitting just such activity. So far as the first half of the century is concerned, there is little or no evidence to substantiate the claim that, up until around 1852, the monarch was involved in any significant way in the palm oil export trade other than as a recipient of tax income which was then converted into trade goods.

Secondly, however, Bay notes that in mid-century, the King maintained various palaces throughout the kingdom, the female inhabitants of which were involved in the preparation and manufacture of certain goods including palm oil.⁸⁴ This, of course, is quite correct. A monarch obliged to maintain a large standing army, a mass entourage and a host of dependents and family, as was the King of Dahomey, was inevitably involved not only in the maintenance of a number of households, but in the production of subsistence, accoutrements and clothing. And palm oil was, of course, a staple item of cuisine not only for the royal households but for the army as well; its production does not of itself, therefore, indicate production for participation in the export market.⁸⁵

To miss this distinction between production of palm oil for domestic use, and the larger scale production by the monarch for participation in the export market, is to fail to perceive the crucial distinction between a Warrior King deriving economic sustenance and political legitimacy from

the procuration and exchange of slaves as a way of gaining both the respect and means of largesse necessary to his position, and a Farmer King, directly involved in the production of agricultural commodities for the export market as the material basis of his economic and political strength.

This 'economic' rationale for the institution of the Bush King in no way deprives the institution a due place within the ideological tradition of Dahomean society. Indeed quite the opposite is true. The 'economic' argument is essentially concerned with the ideological sphere; with the necessity to maintain, so far as possible, an inherited ideology, to legitimise radical economic change in terms of Dahomean perceptions. Paradoxically, much of the oral evidence collected by Bay herself, far from contradicting the interpretation outlined in this thesis, actually complements and reinforces it.⁸⁶

Why then, was the Bush King instituted in the 1850's? The answer lies in the strategy undertaken at that time by the Dahomean monarchy. In 1852, Gezo and the Dahomean leadership, forced by economic and political necessity, embarked on a strategy of adaptation. It is precisely from this period that the monarch himself became directly involved in the production and trading of palm oil for export. It is also around this period that the first references start to appear to the King's 'brother' Guerpay.⁸⁷

The English missionary, Thomas Birch Freeman, is commonly credited with the first recorded observations of Guerpay, later to be termed the Bush King by Burton.⁸⁸ At the 1856 Customs, Freeman recorded the existence of Guerpay but adds little to the record of Guerpay's name,

save that part of the Customs were devoted to him, "an imaginary person called the King's brother".⁸⁹

It seems likely, in fact, that the institution of the Bush King occurred between 1850 and 1856 when Freeman first recorded his existence. Evidence for this can be drawn from the comparison of the account of the Annual Customs left by the two most detailed records, that of Forbes and of Burton. Burton's descriptions of the ceremonies and sacrifices are in two parts; the King's So-Sin Custom, for which 23 people were sacrificed, and the Bush King's So-Sin Custom, in which another 16 died.⁹⁰ Forbes in 1850, on the other hand, makes no mention at all of the Bush King. There would therefore appear to be a chronological coincidence between the period of Gezo's attempts to divert the monarchy into direct involvement in agricultural export production and the first recorded appearance of the Bush King. But there is further contemporary evidence to directly link the two phenomena.

In the second half of November 1856, a Captain Fursier of the brig Columbine of Bristol was anchored at Accra, on the west coast, east of Dahomey. During their stay at Accra, he was invited by a Captain Addey to visit 'Prya Nova', a small port about seven miles to the west of Whydah itself, and was further informed that there was palm oil there in abundance.⁹¹ Both Fursier and his Supercargo, a Mr Williamson, were informed at Accra that this port belonged to 'a Prince Guerpay of Dahomey'.⁹² Indeed, it seems that letters from Prince Guerpay had been despatched to Accra soliciting trade with the Columbine and other vessels stopping there.⁹³ These letters were probably sent by the Yevogan under instructions from the King.

In the event, the Columbine landed at Prya Nova on 16th January 1857, and after several days they had set eyes on neither Prince Guerpay nor palm oil. They were, however, well supplied with the necessities of life by the Yevogan.⁹⁴ From the natives response to Fursier's eventual pleadings for assistance to leave, it would appear that Guerpay was more than merely a token name for the Yevogan. For, his requests elicited the response that "they dared not allow us to leave, for fear of Prince Guerpay and the Caboceer of Whydah."⁹⁵

Furthermore, that Prince Guerpay and the monarch were one and the same person is effectively made explicit by the Yevogan in a subsequent letter to Commander Day concerning the subsequent wreck of the Columbine on Prya Nova beach. Begging to advise Day against the advisability of threats, the letter (signed by the Yevogan) does concede that the Columbine was off the beach to "make trade with me", but concludes, "I am King of Dahomey".⁹⁶

It seems clear, then, that certain facts can be reasonably adduced regarding the Bush King from contemporary sources pre-dating Burton's economic interpretation by several years. Firstly, that from 1856 at least, Prince Guerpay's role was not confined merely to Abomey ceremonials but that his name was already known among trading ships on the coast. Secondly, that he was specifically and explicitly associated with soliciting trade in palm oil.~ Thirdly, that his name carried the authority and weight of the monarch himself. And, finally, that Guerpay was connected with the establishment of a new port, formed around the same time as his own first recorded 'appearance' to non-Dahomean observers; a port established to the west of Whydah, and entitled Prya Nova.

Reference to a Fon official named Gampé also appears in Portuguese sources of the 1850's as being connected with commercial transactions, although he is assumed to operate under the Yevogan.⁹⁷ And Commander Day of the British squadron was under no illusions as to the identity of Guerpay:

"Prince Guerpay . . . another name for the King of Dahomey, which he used in all the transactions that he does not wish his name to appear in . . ."⁹⁸

Other British Officials accepted a similar view.⁹⁹

The weight of contemporary evidence is, therefore, sufficient to conclude that the institution of the Bush King and the establishment of Prya Nova were intended as vehicles to facilitate Gezo's direct intervention in the palm oil trade. Prya Nova was a new port, apparently under the direct control of the monarch, to the west of the better known and longer established ports. More importantly, perhaps, it was unencumbered by any existing 'intermediary' traders. As such Prya Nova represented an attempt by the monarch to maximise trading opportunities for himself by intercepting shipping travelling along the coast from a westerly direction, thus pre-empting produce offered at ports to his east.¹⁰⁰

The port was situated on the beach 7/8 miles west of Whydah, at the approximate base of the River Couffo/Lake Aheme waterway. The spot was well chosen in order to facilitate transportation of produce from the interior of the kingdom, avoiding the Lama and expediting transportation. It is no less significant that the Bush King's palace was later recorded as being situated at Akpweho, "a village on the road to Aja, about six miles to the South-West of Agbome" which would place it very close to the River Couffo.¹⁰¹

Finally, it is possible that the Bush King, while intended initially as a vehicle to allow the re-orientation of the monarchy in a more agriculturally based direction, also eventually offered other opportunities. By 1856, Gezo's reluctant acceptance of the terms of the 1852 treaty was wearing thin, particularly in view of the non-arrival of British annuities or adequate alternative sources of income.¹⁰² Prince Guerpay, the Bush King, allowed the monarch to diversify into palm oil production and trading while minimising internal consequence. It also offered him an avenue to minimise external difficulties should opportunities arise for the shipment of slaves. The institution of the Bush King incidentally provided him with a subterfuge allowing the possibility of circumventing the Terms of the 1852 Treaty, particularly if operated through a newly established port. In July 1857, British cruisers intercepted an attempted embarkation of a large number of slaves from Prya Nova, an incident which drove the King to fury and led to the punitive curtailment of all trade through ports under his sovereignty until the demanded recompense for the loss had been obtained from coastal traders.¹⁰³

The operations at Prya Nova, then, disconcerted coastal traders in traditional ports in more ways than one, and it is not surprising that it was estimated by some European officials that the destruction of the Dahomean monarch's embryo port would be met with little grief among the coastal trading community.¹⁰⁴

SUBSTITUTE INCOME: PALM OIL TAXES AND TRADE: EUROPEAN ANNUITIES

The mechanism of the Bush King was initially and primarily intended to contribute towards this effort by enabling the monarch to participate in the direct production of palm oil for export, a decision which involved a serious challenge to the traditional ideological trappings of the Dahomean monarchy. But in addition, that strategy of adaptation contained several serious economic flaws, none of which could reasonably have been have been foreseen or anticipated.

Firstly, the strategy did not take into account the greatly reduced return for outlay of palm oil production compared to the procurement and sale of captives, and did not adequately allow for the decreasing profitability of palm oil production for export the further one went from the coast into the exterior.

Secondly, and particularly from the point of view of the monarch himself, it was dependent upon bolstering his income partly by increased fiscal income from the palm oil trade and by means of annuities from the European powers; the former was never to be adequate as a substitute for the slave trade, and the latter quite simply never arrived.

Thirdly, it did not envisage the increasing depreciation of the domestic Dahomean currency. And finally, it risked internal instability consequent upon the increased retention of captives internally.

Throughout the period 1852-7, these factors increasingly exposed the weakness of the new strategy, and initial unity within the Dahomean polity gave way to scepticism, consternation and the search for an alternative route to preservation.

ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY OF LARGE SCALE PRODUCTION/TRANSPORTATION OF OIL FROM
THE AREA OF ABOMEY

Several secondary works refer to the transportation of palm oil produce from as far inland as Abomey by the King of Dahomey.¹⁰⁵ According to these works, the King, because of his political power, was able to employ legions of slaves transporting huge amounts of palm oil produce from the king's plantations for sale on the coast to the king's benefit.

This undoubtedly occurred to some extent, but such accounts tend to underestimate the difficulties of such an exercise and little attention has been paid to the economic cost/benefits of an undertaking of this nature. Implicitly or explicitly, the assumption persists that the entry of the monarch into the sphere of export production rendered him considerable benefits to offset the decline of the slave trade. This is by no means obvious.

In Dahomey the normal oil load for a head carrier appears to have been five gallons, and to have remained roughly the same throughout our period. In the closing decades of the 18th century Norris indicated that palm oil was brought to the Whydah marked in calabashes of from five to ten or twelve gallons.¹⁰⁶ Later, in the mid-19th century, Forbes' female rum carriers were allocated five gallons each as their load on the way to Abomey.¹⁰⁷ Five gallon earthen jars appear to have been the normal size receptacles employed by Dahomeans for storage of newly produced oil prior to use, or carriage, in the 1870s¹⁰⁸ and later.¹⁰⁹ The normal carriage weight of a slave/porter, therefore, appears to have been around 35 lbs of oil,¹¹⁰ plus the weight of the container, probably around 50 pounds in total.¹¹¹

A return journey from Abomey to Whydah fully laden with palm oil on the first leg of the journey, and perhaps carrying manufactured goods, powder, guns, spirits or cowries on the return, could not have been completed in the 19th century in less than a week,¹¹² particularly bearing in mind the nature of the terrain on the route between Abomey and Whydah,¹¹³ and the fact that the transportation of the bulk of palm oil would have taken place during the rainy season.

Thus, the carriage of one ton of oil from Abomey for exchange at Whydah, would have involved a labour time of around at least 420 man-days.¹¹⁴

Calculations regarding the actual production of the pericarp oil are slightly more problematical in the absence of any precise data from the Dahomean coast. But one early 20th century estimate for West Africa generally suggests a potential oil yield (pericarp) of 18% of the fruit gathered,¹¹⁵ with about 30-50% of this potential being realized by traditional native methods of extraction.¹¹⁶ A contemporary report from Gabon in the early 1880s, referring to an extraction process similar to that generally employed in Dahomey, suggests that the actual yield of oil may have been higher, up to as much as 12.5% of the fruit weight.¹¹⁷ The estimate which has been made by early 20th century commentators on Dahomey, of 1 ton of palm oil (pericarp) from about 10 tons of fruit, seems, therefore, not unreasonable.¹¹⁸

What is clear, however, is that the process was time consuming and labour intensive.¹¹⁹ Apart from the labour involved in the actual production process, the preliminaries of gathering the fruit, water and wood necessary, involved considerable expenditure in terms of labour time.

Manning, basing his assertions on Rancoule and Adam, suggests 140 work days to harvest and transport the fruit; 90 work days for removal of the fruit from the bunches; 85 days for cooking the fruit, preparing and purifying the oil - including procuring and transporting the water and wood; a total of 315 man-days to produce 1 Ton of oil.¹²⁰ This figure confirms the suggestion by nineteenth century sources that a slave could produce 1 ton of palm oil a year.¹²¹

Thus, assuming relatively easy access to water and wood, the production of one ton of oil in the area of Abomey, and its transportation to the coast, for exchange would have involved a minimum labour input of 735 man-days.¹²²

Since the production season was confined to approximately half the year, the labour input required was doubled. Given this, the difficulties of producing and transporting oil in the Dahomean rainy season, and allowing for losses en route, it is likely that the process of production and transportation of a ton of oil from the Abomey region demanded the full time employment of four slaves in terms of direct labour. In addition, food production for the slaves thus employed would involve the allocation of additional labour. Thus the production of even 2000 tons of oil from the Abomey region would have involved directly and indirectly somewhere in the region of 10,000 slaves full time during the six months season.

In the light of these figures, some further comments can be made on relative profitability on figures supplied by Forbes around mid-century, and Burton in the 1860s. The figures are, by their nature, tentative, but may be illustrative.

According to both Forbes and Bouet, the daily payment for a carrier c.1850 was 120 cowries, out of which he (the carrier) paid his subsistence.¹²³ A slave, on the other hand, could be subsisted by his master at a cost of 20 cowries per day.¹²⁴ If these rates are reasonably accurate the costs of transporting one ton of oil from Abomey would lie between £1 and £5.13, probably nearer the former.¹²⁵ Basing the labour costs of production on the same scale, the production of one ton of oil would lie between 14s and £4.5s again, in the case of slave labour, nearer the former; a total production and transportation cost of between £1.14s and £9.18s.

At the former figure, the palm oil trade would have represented a profitable venture for Gezo, though probably relatively less so than profits obtained through slave raiding.; figures from Whydah on palm oil prices in the late 1840s and early 1850s suggest that such labour costs allowed large scope for realisation of surplus by means of exchange. Palm oil appears to have risen from £11.5s a ton in 1846 to £22.10s in May 1850, which level was maintained for a quarter of a century.¹²⁶

Throughout this period subsistence costs, on the other hand, appear to have risen considerably. By the mid-1860's Burton estimated the subsistence costs of a 'poor man' at 500 cowries a day, or a head of cowries every four days.¹²⁷ This cannot, of course be taken as a straightforward 2500% increase, even allowing that both estimates are accurate; for internal inflation has to be taken into account.

Up until the late 1840s the exchange rate of cowries against specie appears to have remained in practice roughly equivalent to its nominal exchange rate of 1 head, or 2000, to the dollar mentioned by Dalzel in

the 1790s.¹²⁸ By 1849, however, cowrie inflation was beginning to set in; while the nominal exchange rate remained at 2000 to the dollar (4/6), the actual exchange rate was nearer 2400 to 2600 to the dollar, or between 3/9 - 4/2 per head.¹²⁹ By 1863 the dollar exchanged at around 2 1/2 heads, or 5000 cowries; the head of cowries was now valued in terms of exchange between 1/9 and 2/-.¹³⁰

Thus, Burton's estimate of 500 cowries subsistence per day in 1863, was equivalent to around £9.2s.6d. per annum.¹³¹ At this rate, the labour costs necessary for the production and transport of 1 Ton of oil from Abomey would have required subsistence costs of 18.7s.6d. (735/4 x 2/-). A ton of oil, as has been remarked above, could command an exchange rate at Whydah, of £22.10s.

It is not suggested that the above figures portray an exact and accurate indication of the costs of producing palm oil in absolute terms. It is likely, however, that they do illustrate the general trend. From the foregoing figures, therefore, it seems that due to cowrie inflation and the relatively static price of oil the profitability of the palm oil trade fell consistently and considerably between the late 1840s and the mid 1860s.

THE PALM OIL TRADE 1852-7

A central source of income from which Gezo hoped to derive benefit was from fiscal returns on the palm oil trade. The trade did enter into a half decade of sustained growth from 1852. By the end of that year Gezo had received word of the lifting of the blockade by the British, and Fraser had been invited back to take up his official position in

Whydah.¹³² By the end of the same year, palm oil could be spoken of as Whydah's main export commodity.¹³³

The economic position must have appeared at least potentially lucrative for a Nation retaining connections with both the French and the British, whose demand for vegetable oils was steadily increasing. French imports of vegetable oils from the west coast had increased steadily since the 1830s - apart from a hiccup in 1853¹³⁴ - reaching a total of 2,670,000 kg (2622 Tons) in 1854.¹³⁵ The British, who had started earlier than the French, had increased their imports of palm oil alone to a total of approximately 31,500 tons the previous year.¹³⁶

And certainly, during the years 1853-7, Whydah and the neighbouring ports under the suzerainty of Dahomey contributed their fair share towards European imports. By 1856, Campbell estimated that exports from Whydah were at the level of approximately 2500 tons per annum, with the same figure in 1857-8; in addition a further 4000 to 4500 tons emanated from Porto Novo Beach and Appi Vista to the east of Whydah.¹³⁷ A west coast captain of some experience, who had been visiting the ports since the 1840s, later testified that the trade in palm oil had "wonderfully increased" from the mid-1850s.¹³⁸

No one appears to have taken a larger share in the increased export of palm oil than Domingo Martinez. His trade, which had been valued at 200,000 dollars in 1851,¹³⁹ (the equivalent of some 700 tons at the then prices), was estimated at nearer 5000 tons some three years later.¹⁴⁰ This particular report may have overestimated the exact extent of his increase, but there seems to be little doubt that his palm oil trade was flourishing. Martinez was benefiting in particular

because of the interruptions to the trade routes to Badagry,¹⁴¹ and had, since 1852, opened another embarkation point at Appi Vista as well as his established port at Porto Novo Beach. In May of 1854, he was reported to have a total of eight palm oil ships, with a carrying capacity of 3000 tons, loading at these two ports.¹⁴²

Indeed, so abundant do Martinez's sources appear to have been, that during the previous year he had been advertising among Bristol and Liverpool shippers, offering oil at four and a half gallons to the dollar, fifty per cent less than the prevailing price at neighbouring ports.¹⁴³ On the arrival of the ships, however, Martinez refused to trade except at three gallons to the dollar.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps his dominating position in the market encouraged him to hold out for a better price, or perhaps, as Campbell suggested, he changed the terms in view of the fact that the British ships had brought nothing but specie with which to trade, instead of the tobacco which was so much in demand by the producers.¹⁴⁵ In any case, he held to his position.

Small producers maintained a significant role in the production of export oil. Campbell remarked that:

". . . the natives who manufacture palm oil do not require specie, and but a very small quantity of tobacco in payment for it." In the absence of tobacco, he continued, "the supply of oil fell off".¹⁴⁶

Of course, there is evidence that a significant proportion of Domingo's palm oil emanated from the town of Porto Novo;¹⁴⁷ but the continued involvement of the small producer illustrated in his trade is probably equally applicable to Dahomey. Certainly, if the import goods in demand at Whydah are anything to go by - cheap clothes, tobacco and brandy -

small scale production was an important source of palm oil in the early years of the 1850s.¹⁴⁸

This seems to reflect the general trend along the coast within the proximity of the Dahomean Kingdom. Again it was Campbell who drew attention to the increasing capacity of small producers at Lagos to relieve themselves of their dependency upon their chiefs by means of the new trade.¹⁴⁹ Mistakenly, Campbell viewed this as a bonus for the chiefs who, he assumed, ought to be pleased at the burden of dependants being taken off their hands; he displayed a marked lack of appreciation of the role which such a dependency syndrome had to play in ensuring that the chiefs continued to hold economic and political sway through their domination of labour.

Thus the period between the signing of the 1852 treaty and 1857 was marked by a steady growth in the palm oil export trade from Dahomey. But the attempts by the King of Dahomey to capitalise on this growth met with mixed results.

FISCAL IMPOSITIONS ON PALM OIL TRADE

During the negotiations over the 1852 Treaty, Gezo had taken a number of steps in relation to the palm oil trade. Some of these, like the increase in price and the monopolisation of trading appear to have been short term measures designed as much to influence the British as to enhance his income.

One of the measures, however - the additional tax imposed on the rolling of casks off the beach - appears to have been a long term, sustained imposition, and one from which the monarch would have

maintained an increased tax revenue over the pre-1852 period. This may have been part of the 'exorbitant' exactions which, it was claimed, were reported to be causing Whydah traders, in the absence of a lucrative slave trade, to desert the port within a few years of the 1852 agreement.¹⁵⁰ Such traders did not normally leave the west coast, but moved to outlying ports.

But even here it is possible that they were subjected to more closely regulated tax impositions than previously had been the case. Gezo could not impose tax regulation in ports such as Grand Popo, which were under his suzerainty rather than his direct control. But the position was different in Porto Novo Beach, long considered to be under the control of the Dahomean monarch. After 1852, Gezo appears to have been receiving dues as well as tribute from Domingo Martines at that port.

It was also possible for the monarch to impose taxation on goods embarked from any new port which was established on the beach within his jurisdiction. This appears to have happened in at least one case, at Cotonou. Cotonou was re-established, according to its historian, around 1852.¹⁵¹ More significantly, although the port was under the control of Domingo Martinez, it is recorded as having been first established by Gezo himself, as an outpost. And the first inhabitants of the town, along with Martinez's slaves - who were part of a plantation scheme - were Dahomean functionaries.¹⁵² It may well be that these were later involved in the supervision of the actual production of palm oil, but in the first instance it is likely that they were placed there in order to ensure the orderly collection of the monarch's taxes.

Thus the monarch increased his tax revenue on palm oil from 1852 onwards. But this is unlikely to have been significant in absolute terms, since it was counterbalanced by the outward flow of traders, and since those who remained saw the price of oil drop from its brief 1852 peak of £45 the ton. That particular increase did not last long, perhaps not surprisingly; in the immediate aftermath of Gezo's decree doubling the price, the British trader Stanfield at Whydah was quick to complain that he could no longer afford to purchase oil at the statutory price,¹⁵³ and the result of maintaining the commodity at this price would undoubtedly have been merely to push ships seeking palm oil to ports outside the control of the Dahomean monarch.

The price dropped shortly after its imposition during the blockade, possibly in June 1852 when the blockade was lifted, but in any case, it is clear that by 1854 Domingo was once again selling oil at the pre-blockade price of £22.10s the ton.¹⁵⁴ As has already been noted, this price appears to have been maintained with remarkable stability, not only throughout the 1850s, but also the 1860s and '70s.¹⁵⁵ Its stability suggests that it was a 'fixed' or conventional price, rather than a market price in the true sense, and it appears that the standard Dahomean price was fixed at a rate of 100 dollars the ton (three gallons a dollar) from the effective end of the blockade in 1852, throughout the '50s, '60s and '70s.

INADEQUACY OF INCOME FROM THE PALM OIL TRADE

It has already been indicated that at the start of the 1850s, the comparative insignificance of the palm oil trade in terms of revenue to

the monarch is important to bear in mind. The growth in the palm oil trade throughout the 1850s altered this position to some extent, but never to a level where it would have provided adequate compensation for the income lost through the slave trade.

Although exact quantities of palm oil exported are hard to come by,¹⁵⁶ the increase in trade seems reasonably sustained throughout the first half of the 1850s despite the continuing nuisance of petty thefts and the costly necessity of hiring canoists from El Mina.¹⁵⁷ At the beginning of the decade Régis claimed that he himself was already exporting 3000 'barriques' a year,¹⁵⁸ and asserted the potential for great expansion. By 1856 Campbell could report exports from Whydah, Porto Novo and other ports under the sovereignty of the King of Dahomey as approximately 8300 tons, and an increase the following year from the same ports to around 9500 tons.¹⁵⁹ These figures appear conservative rather than exaggerated estimates.¹⁶⁰ Assuming a selling price of palm oil of £22:10s the ton, the turnover in palm oil from ports under Dahomean sovereignty would have been of the order of £210,000 per annum. From Whydah itself in 1857, the estimated exports were approximately 2500 tons,¹⁶¹ representing a current (aggregate) selling price of £56,350.

Gezo's share of this (1/18th) would have been of the order of £3000 from Whydah alone - c.130 tons in trade goods. This was certainly a significant increase since the beginning of the decade, marking perhaps more than a doubling of the monarch's income from this source alone.¹⁶³ In addition, of course, the monarch was in receipt of tribute income from those - mainly ex-slave dealers - to whom he had

granted monopolies on the trade at outlying ports. And such tribute could be substantial.

Prime among Gezo's sources of tribute was Domingo Martinez whose involvement in the palm oil trade had escalated rapidly throughout the 1850s. Martinez, who already by 1850 was said to be involved in the trade to an excess of \$200,000 dollars annually,¹⁶³ was reported to have doubled this once more by 1854. By the mid 1850s, he was certainly in a dominating trade position in the area just east of Whydah, particularly after Mewu took power in Badagri, (traditionally the beach for Porto Novo town).¹⁶⁴ Resultant rivalries between the latter and Alajogun, the young King of Porto Novo, resulted in stoppages of the flow of oil to Badagri thus reducing the oil income of the British mercantile establishment there.¹⁶⁵

Martinez's prominence in the trade was not achieved without liberality towards his overlord and protector Gezo. It was probably to Martinez that one west coast traveller referred when he mentioned one famous ex-slave dealer who paid the King of Dahomey "something near 10,000 dollars a year" for the monopoly of the palm oil trade at Appi Vista.¹⁶⁶ If his estimate was correct, and there seems to be no reason why it should not be realistic, then Gezo was receiving from Martinez almost as much as he was receiving from the total tax income from the palm oil trade at Whydah. ~

However, Martinez was far and away the most pre-eminent trader in Dahomey by the mid 1850s, dominating both palm oil and slave trades. It is unlikely that anyone else approached him in their liberality since the scale of his palm oil transactions far outstripped that of any other

trader in the Dahomey area.¹⁶⁷ It would, therefore, appear that Gezo's real income from the palm oil trade by the start of the second half of the 1850s, when it had reached a peak, would have been something below £10,000 in value. A significant increase since the end of the 1840s. But, still, and this is the telling point, the equivalent of a mere 500 slaves at prevailing coastal prices when the slave trade was to revive.

The growth of the trade throughout the period 1852-58/9 was insufficient to raise revenue from palm oil to the central exchequer to anything like the level required to compete with a thriving slave trade. As such it was incapable of providing an adequate income substitute on its own.

FAILURE TO OBTAIN EUROPEAN ANNUITIES

If the increase to the monarch's income from even a sustained increase in the level of palm oil exports was inadequate in relation to lost income from the slave trade, the expected income from another quarter - European annuities - proved even more disappointing.

The calculations of the Dahomean leadership in its plans for adaptation to the new circumstances of the early 1850s had been partially predicated upon the substitute revenue which was to be allowed by the British Government. Gezo, of course, had never presented Dahomean participation in wars and the slave trade merely as a matter of income. But he had made it unequivocally clear on every possible occasion to European ambassadors - particularly to the British - that though an alternative income to that derived from the slave trade was not a

sufficient condition for his abandonment of the Trade, it was certainly a necessary condition for so doing.¹⁶⁸

This was recognised by those Europeans on the coast who realised the extent to which the monarch's obligations could only be fulfilled if he was assured of a continuous, regular and reasonable level of trade goods from the import sector. In the absence of the slave trade any deficit would have to be made up, at least in part, by direct support from European powers. Thus, as early as 1843, Hutton had suggested that a substitute revenue might be paid in the form of guaranteed purchases by the British of Dahomean agricultural produce (in this case, cotton was suggested).¹⁶⁹ Hutton's suggestion was designed to fulfil Gezo's needs while holding out an attractive commercial proposition based on Britain's quest for alternative sources of cotton. But the British had never really gone any way towards offering a reasonable and sufficient level of compensation. Estimates of the annual worth of the slave trade itself to the monarchy varied: from £60,000 per annum (Cruickshank), over £22,000 (over 50,000 dollars, Winniet), to about £3,000 (Beecroft).¹⁷⁰

Compared with these estimates, the British offers of compensation were thoroughly inadequate. Foote was authorised to offer £700 per annum in presents for seven years, Cruickshank £400 per annum, and Beecroft, the highest offer, £3,000 per annum for three years.¹⁷¹ (Beecroft actually increased the offer to four years in the course of negotiations, in an attempt to gain a settlement.) Even this final and largest offer, made in 1850, was the equivalent of only 150 export slaves per annum at 1848 prices.¹⁷²

Of course, this somewhat underestimates the net effect of such a grant since it ignores the cost to Gezo of procuring the slaves in the first place. Nevertheless, it is significant that the highest offer to Gezo was equivalent to the lowest estimate of his income from the slave trade, and was insufficient to persuade the Dahomean leadership to contemplate abandonment under anything like normal circumstances. By the year following this offer, however, as we have seen, the slave trade had largely abandoned Dahomey, and economic decline had been accompanied by a complete economic blockade. Under the circumstances, the Dahomean monarchy and commercial leadership had reluctantly conceded the need for an alternative source of access to the import sector, and the need to sign the treaty with the British.

It seems almost certain that they did so on the understanding that the British would reciprocate by paying an annual income to the Dahomean exchequer in trade goods. This is probably also why Gezo was so keen to establish similar treaties with the French and the Portuguese, and why he invited ambassadors from these countries with that purpose - of multiplying his external sources of income - in mind.¹⁷³

For their part, the French were keen to avoid involvement in the complexities of the abolition issue.¹⁷⁴ As for the British, no trade goods ever arrived from the English Queen. In vain the Dahomean monarch remonstrated with British visitors, in person and by letter in the years following 1852. In 1854, and 1855 again he drew attention to the promises of Forbes and Beecroft and other British Officers who had visited him. The King complained bitterly that no revenue had ever been sent and stated specifically that he had agreed to stop the slave trade

in return for an income of 1880 doubloons per annum.¹⁷⁵ The following year, 1856, Gezo was again repeating his claims against the British, but with no more success than before.¹⁷⁶ Gezo's expectations of an annual income from European powers which might supplement any income from the palm oil trade thus proved more optimistic than any expectation of an adequate income from the palm oil trade itself. A further element in his strategy for transition had proved illusory.

COWRIE INFLATION

With taxation income from the palm oil trade proving a less than adequate substitute for the faltering slave trade, and bereft of an expected annual income from Europeans, the position of the royal exchequer would have been precarious enough; but a triumvirate of economic ills was completed by another factor beyond the control of the Dahomean authorities - cowrie inflation.

The use of cowries in Dahomey, for both domestic and export transactions, long pre-dated even the Fon conquest of Whydah,¹⁷⁷ and continued throughout the eighteenth century after the establishment of their direct access to coastal markets.¹⁷⁸

Cowries were initially exchanged by weight,¹⁷⁹ but computation of the coastal value presents some problems. Bosman (1000 for 2/6) and Smith (200 for 6d) indicate a coastal value of 2000 for 5/- in the last years of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century respectively. Marion Johnson, however, has pointed out that this refers to the 'prime cost' of cowries (in Europe),¹⁸⁰ as indicated by Atkins,¹⁸¹ and not the exchange value on the coast, which the latter

indicated in, 1721, as 4000 for 25/-.¹⁸² This is confirmed elsewhere.¹⁸³ However, a few years later, Smith was quoting cowrie values at 2000 for 10/-,¹⁸⁴ (£1 the Grand Cabess) which remained its nominal value for some years.

So far as Dahomey was concerned from around 1790 onwards, the rate of 5/- or one dollar which approximated to it - appears to have been the actual local exchange rate for 2000 cowries. Dalzel in the 1790s asserted that "one thousand are reckoned equal to half a crown",¹⁸⁵ M'Leod that "16,000 . . . are called an ounce trade, which is considered to be about 40 shillings sterling in value",¹⁸⁶ and Adams also gave 16,000 to the ounce trade at Whydah.¹⁸⁷ This nominal value appears to have been the actual exchange rate.

The period 1820-45 was a period of relative monetary stability throughout the Bights' cowrie-using areas, which may have reflected reduced cowrie collection in the Maldivé Islands.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, by the mid 1840s the shells appear to have been in short supply in the Dahomey area.¹⁸⁹ However, in response to the expanding potential of the palm oil trade in the area, European merchants turned to new sources of cowrie supply, particularly Zanzibar and East Africa.¹⁹⁰ The influx of cowries reached its peak between 1851 and 1869, during which period it is estimated that over 35,000 tons or 14,000 million shells were imported to and unloaded on the West African coast.¹⁹¹

So far as the Dahomean coast is concerned, the exchange rate for cowries appears to have held reasonably steady until the late 1840s and early 1850s. At this stage, however, indications of the devaluation of the cowrie currency start to set in. For instance, Forbes remarked in

1849 that the nominal rate of exchange was 1 dollar to 1 head of cowries (2000), but added that the actual exchange rate for 1 silver dollar was in fact 2400/2600.¹⁹²

By this time British merchants were operating a differential system, selling cowries at the nominal value of 5/- per head, but purchasing them only at 3/9d - 4/2d per head.¹⁹³ Fraser's reports confirm this trend; in 1851 he was indicating the head of cowries at 4/6 (1 dollar the head),¹⁹⁴ but the following year he was estimating their value at 4/-.¹⁹⁵

The extent of the debasement of the cowrie currency was fuelled from mid-century in Dahomey by competition in direct importation of the shells from East Africa, and from Zanzibar in particular. In the first half of the 1850s, shells were imported into Dahomey on Hamburg vessels,¹⁹⁶ prominent among which were the ships of the Hamburg firm of O'Swald, who appear to have held a virtual monopoly of direct imports from Zanzibar until 1856.¹⁹⁷ In 1856, Régis broke the West Coast monopoly of O'Swald, and, thereafter, both firms imported the shells directly from Zanzibar to the west coast.¹⁹⁸

This affected the Dahomey and Yoruba areas in particular, since the inferior Zanzibar shells were quite acceptable there,¹⁹⁹ and Whydah and Lagos became the main embarkation points for the East African shells. At Lagos, for instance, the importation of shells quadrupled between 1856 and 1860. Lagos also provides an example of the effects of the increased competition and level of cowrie importation. In 1851 a sack of cowries was worth about 48/- and purchased 36 gallons of oil. By 1858, a couple of years after Régis and O'Swald started competing, they

agreed to fix the rate for a sack of cowries at 18-19 gallons.²⁰⁰ But price fixing broke down, and by late 1859, the sack of cowries was worth only 18/-, and would procure no more than 14-15 gallons of oil.²⁰¹

This currency depreciation had its corollary in internal inflation. In Dahomey, internal prices appear to have risen steadily from the first years of the 1850s. By the time of Burton's visit in the early years of the 1860s, the cowrie exchange rate was running at 2 1/2 heads to the dollar in Dahomey, or around 1/9 a head.²⁰² There does not seem to have been a differential in the exchange rate in different parts of Dahomey - it was the same in Abomey as in Whydah.²⁰³

This currency depreciation also appears to have been reflected in internal prices. According to Burton, prices at Whydah doubled in the ten years from 1853,²⁰⁴ a phenomenon reflected not only in other parts of the Bights,²⁰⁵ but since found to have affected West Africa generally.²⁰⁶ But prices throughout the 1850s did not increase at the same rate universally. In the interior of the country, and particularly in the area of Abomey, the cost of general provisions rose faster than at the coast, and according to Burton had quadrupled from the early 1850s.²⁰⁷ Burton's explanation for this differential in price increases between the coast and Abomey - the recent policy of ultra-militarism - seems plausible since the diversion of labour from agricultural to military pursuits would have particularly affected the area of Abomey.²⁰⁸ But, whatever the reason, for the monarch and the Dahomean leadership, this general pattern of inflation must have had serious consequences. Certainly, since the taxes imposed by the monarch on the palm oil trade were levied at dollar rates, he would obtain some

compensation for internal price rises. But if Burton is correct, and the rate of price-inflation in the Abomey area was higher than both the rate of inflation on the coast and the proportionate devaluation of the cowrie, the monarch would be relatively disadvantaged since inflation normally hits hardest the richer sections of society. Cowrie inflation meant a continual depreciation of the stocks in the royal exchequer.

CONCLUSION

By the second half of the 1850s then, the alternative strategy of adaptation which had been embarked upon by the Dahomean leadership was running into serious economic trouble. A relatively low level of fiscal returns from palm oil, a complete absence of substitute income from the European powers, cowrie devaluation and internal inflation placed increasing strains on the economic basis of Dahomean political life. Not surprisingly, these economic troubles were reflected in the political sphere, for in the absence of an adequate alternative source of income to the slave trade, and in the face of the relative devaluation of their inherited wealth, the Dahomean leadership faced the increasing prospect of inability to fulfil its political obligations and maintain a standard of prestigious/ ostentatious living and distribution central to its political position.

The political crisis became most acute in the final years of Gezo's reign and was articulated most openly in the wake of the obvious failure of the strategy of adaptation and the revival of slave demand c.1860. But the seeds of the political divisions had been sown some years before that.

CHAPTER 7 FOOTNOTES.

- 1 Gezo to Queen Victoria, 4/7/1850, PRO.C096/20.191.
- 2 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 131-2.
- 3 Cruickshank's Report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Newbury, C. W., in introduction to Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 16.
- 8 For Gezo's avowed jurisdiction, see Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159, (appendix A).
- 9 Fraser's journal of occurrences, 11/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/253.
- 10 See appendix B for a comparison between the treaty proposed by the British and the treaty which Gezo eventually agreed to sign. It is also enlightening to draw a comparison between the latter and the treaty which was signed a quarter of a century later in Glele's name by the Yevogan and Prince Chudayton to end the 1876 blockade. Cf. also appendix B.
- 11 Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159 (Appendix A), 15th point.
- 12 Ibid. (Appendix A), 9th point.
- 13 Ibid. (Appendix A), 10th point.
- 14 Campbell to Clarendon, 12/8/1854, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 41, class B, Correspondence, p. 16.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Parl. Papers, 1852, LIV (221), p. 5, T. Hutton to W. Hutton, 7/8/1850, enclosure 8 in no. 4, p. 39. Beecroft to Palmerston, 27/7/1850 in Ibid. Cf. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 53.
- 17 Ev. of W. McCoskrey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Select Committee, Min. of Ev. p. 83.
- 18 Fraser to Hesaltine, 21/3/1853, PRO.F084/920/143.
- 19 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/7/1853, and 6/9/1853, both in PRO.F084/920/275, 322.

- 20 Campbell to Clarendon, 31/10/1853, PRO.F084/920/424.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 William to Campbell, 19/1/1854, PRO.F084/950/339.
- 25 Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell, 6/12/1854. PRO.F084/950/442.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/246.
- 28 Campbell to Clarendon, 12/8/1854 and 1/12/1854 both in PRO.F084/959/343, 387.
- 29 Campbell to Gezo, 13/4/1854, PRO.F084/950/224.
- 30 The Caeser had, in fact, been purchased by slave dealers after being certified unseaworthy by both British and French authorities; Campbell to Clarendon, 12/8/1854 and 1/12/1854 both in PRO.F084/959/343, 287.
- 31 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/387.
- 32 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/387.
- 33 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/10/1855 and 7/12/1855 both in Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 42, 1855, Correspondence class B, pp. 17, 23.
- 34 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/2/1856 and 18/8/1856, both in PRO.F084/1002/79, 228. Although it should be noted that Campbell reported at least one shipment from Appa Vista (Cotonou) at the beginning of 1857: Campbell to Clarendon, 4/2/1857, in Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series vol. 43, (1857), Correspondence, class B. p. 39.
- 35 Freeman to Ord, 2/4/1856, M.M.S., Box 262: Freeman had arrived in Abomey on 29/1/1856.
- 36 Campbell to Clarendon, 14/6/1856, PRO.F084/1002/190.
- 37 Laing to General Sec., 12/4/1856, M.M.S., box 252, 1856.
- 38 Campbell to Clarendon, 4/2/1857, PRO.F084/1031/100.
- 39 Campbell to Clarendon, 12/8/1857, PRO.F084/959/343.
- 40 Campbell to Clarendon, 28/8/1855, PRO.F084/976/196.

- 41 Ross, D., "The 1st Cha-Cha of Whydah . . .", Odu, new series, II, 1969; "The career of Domingo Martinez . . .", J.A.H., VI, I, 1965, pp. 79-90.
- 42 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1855, PRO.F084/959/427.
- 43 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1854, PRO.F084/959/246.
- 44 Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/427.
- 45 Campbell to Clarendon, 5/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/397. The Mewu was in origin a chief of Porto Novo who had joined Adele, ex-king of Lagos at Badagry in c. 1822, and remained there after Adele returned to Lagos. He was Akitoye's main supporter in Badagry - the indigenous chiefs being hostile - and after Akitoye's departure Mewu fought a successful war against the Badagry chiefs in June 1851. The Mewu was eventually expelled from Badagry in 1854.
- 46 Fraser to Clarendon, 30/5/1853, PRO.F084/920/143.
- 47 Campbell to Clarendon, 31/10/1853, PRO.F084/920/424. William to Campbell, 19/1/1854, PRO.F084/959/339.
- 48 Confidential Communication: Notes . . . (undated) in PRO.F084/920/412. William to Campbell, 19/1/1854, PRO.F084/959/339: Wright and Coker to Golmer, 13/10/1853, and consul's remarks 31/7/1854, both in PRO.F084/959/333.
- 49 Campbell to Townsend, 12/5/1854, PRO.F084/959/286. Campbell to Clarendon, 6/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/404. Marsh to Campbell, 19/12/1854, in Ibid., p. 468.
- 50 Campbell to Clarendon, 18/8/1856, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 43, 1857, Correspondence class B, p. 26.
- 51 Ev. of McCoskrey, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5. 1865 Select Committee, Minutes of Evidence, p. 83.
- 52 Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell, 6/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/442.
- 53 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/427. The supply by the Egba of slaves to Porto Novo was corroborated in Marsh to Campbell, 19/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/468.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Alake to Campbell, 18/6/1856, PRO.F084/1002/204; Campbell to Clarendon, 16/7/1856 in Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 43, 1857, Corr. Class B, p. 25. Bowen, T. J., Adventures . . ., Charleston 1857, pp. 148-9 is cited by Parrinder, The Story of Ketu, where he asserts that Ketu was not involved in the slave trade; what Bowen in fact says is that Ketu was not involved in slave raiding (i.e. "kidnapping").

- 56 For example, in late 1854, according to Campbell, Egba messengers had been some months at Abomey, and the King of Dahomey expressed his willingness to make peace; Campbell to Clarendon, 6/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/404. Gezo also requested ambassadors from Abeokuta to reconcile differences at the 1852 meeting and later; Fraser's journal and Dawson to Campbell, 29/8/1855, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 42. Also in 1854, 40-50 Dahomean messengers were reported to be in Abeokuta: Irvine to Campbell, 30/5/1854, 20/6/1854 both in PRO.F084/976/302-4.
- 57 Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12/1/1852, PRO.F084/886/159: Freeman to Lt. Gov. Hill, 10/10/1854, M.M.S., W. Africa box 3; Dawson to Campbell, 29/8/1855, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series vol. 42, Corr. Class B, p. 14: Freeman to Ord, 2/4/1856, M.M.S., box 262.
- 58 A list of annual military campaigns under Gezo has been provided by Moulero; cf. Moulero, Abbé Th., "Guézo ou Guedizo Massigbé", Etudes Dahoméennes, no.4, 1965, pp.52-3. Cf. also Maroukis, T., Ph.D., pp. 158-168. Moulero records campaigns throughout the 1850's from traditional sources, but there is absolutely no evidence of any large scale military activity by the Dahomeans, 1853-7 in the primary sources.
- 59 See Chapter 2.
- 60 Beecroft to Palmerston, 19/2/1852, PRO.F084/886/183.
- 61 Note sur Whydah, Feb 1852, M.A.E, Afrique 51.
- 62 Régis à Min. des Aff Etr. 24/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 63 Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 64 Régis a M.A.E. 24/1/1852 M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Régis, of course, was more interested in the direct and indirect effect on the palm oil trade, and thus on his own financial position.
- 65 Baudin à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 18/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 51.
- 66 Ibid. The additional clauses guaranteed, for instance, freedom of worship, practice and travel of European missionaries in Dahomey, freedom in the building of Churches, and a guarantee not to attack Abeokuta. But the first two were conceded already by Gezo to Bouet in his treaty (articles 9 and 10): Extrait d'une lettre de Whydah 15/7/1851, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d.
- 67 Bruce to Admiralty, 25/4/1853, Parl. Papers Slave Trade vol. 40, 1854 (0.6) LXX111 1853/4) Item 118.

- 68 Thus, despite a request for a meeting with a British ambassador in late 1855, Campbell refused in the absence of "a certain prospect that the King will sign and conclude the entire treaty, above all that part relating to the abolition of human sacrifice". Campbell to Dawson, 5/10/1855, PRO.F084/976/356. (The emphasis is Campbell's.)
- 69 "Tens" rather than "hundreds" according to Campbell in 1857. Campbell to Clarendon, 4/4/1857, PRO.F084/1031/129. In 1858 Campbell also indicated that the annual number of victims had "of late years . . . diminished to 30 or 40": Campbell to Clarendon, 3/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/437.
- 70 Campbell to Clarendon, 3/3/1858, Parl. Papers Slave Trade, vol. 45, 1859, 2569-1, vol. XXXIV, session 11, Corr. class B.
- 71 Borghero à Planque, 30/9/1861, Annales de la Prop, de la Foi, vol. XXXIV, pp. 218-221.
- 72 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 234. (But this appears to be taken straight from Duncan.)
- 73 Relation de voyage à Abomey, 1/7/1860, par Lartigue, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 74 Relation de voyage à Abomey, 1/7/1860, par Lartigue, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51 Glele or his ministers appear to have had a penchant for such vicarious sacrifices; the previous year they had executed two captives dressed as white men, and possibly not without a fine sense of irony, had extended to them the privilege of execution by hanging; Ibid., entry for 15th July.
- 75 The practice was reported by Dalzel, A., The History . . ., pp. 150-1, 204-5. On Gezo's abolition, see Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 232, footnote 48. Cf. also Burton to Russell, 23/3/1864, in Parl. Papers, 1865.
- 76 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, p. 258; vol. 11, p. 305; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 234.
- 77 Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 11, p. 305; Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 33.
- 78 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 232, fn. 48.
- 79 Lartigue, "Relation de Voyage à Abomey", M.A.E. Mem. et Doc., Afrique 51. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 141.
- 80 Bay, E., "On the Trail of the Bush King: A Dahomean Lesson in the use of Evidence", History in Africa, 6, 1979. See also Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 66, 268-9; Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . .,

- p. 272; Newbury, C. W., in the intro. to Burton's A Mission . . ., pp.36-7; Argyle, W. J., The Fon . . ., pp. 113-5; Polanyi, K., Dahomey . . ., p. 58. Law, R., 'Royal Monopoly . . .', J.A.H., XVIII, 4, 1977; Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "De la Traite des Esclaves . . .", in Meillassoux, C. (ed), The Development of Indigenous Trade. . .
- 81 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 66, 268-9. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 272.
- 82 Bay, E., "On the Trail of the Bush King: A Dahomean Lesson in the use of Evidence", History in Africa, 6, 1979, p. 5.
- 83 Ibid., p. 6.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid. It is perhaps significant that the only source cited by Bay which indicates large scale 'factory' production of palm oil, is Skertchly, from the 1870s, well after the first recorded observations on the Bush King.
- 86 For instance, the tradition collected by Bay which identifies 'Gaakpé' as the "king-as-prince" also identifies him as a farmer. This seems not inconsistent with seeking to explain the 'Bush King' phenomenon as a mechanism for releasing Gezo, the 'Warrior King' from the constraints placed upon his entry into farming and agricultural pursuits through the institution of an alternative persona for the king..
- 87 The name of the 'Bush King' varies in the literature.: Gezo's 'Bush King' was variously known as Guarpay (Freeman), Ga-kpwe (Burton), Gaupe (Valdez), Gahqpwey (Skertchly).
- 88 There is, in fact, a prior record of "Har-o-pay . . . the King's brother" who was noted at the Abomey Customs by Fraser who made a detailed note of the participants: Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48. Fraser gives no other material details regarding the King's brother, but Forbes also refers to "Ah-hoh-peh, the king's brother": Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., Vol. 11, p. 228. It would, however, be incautious to identify this figure positively with Freeman's "Guarpey" since according to Forbes' account "Ah-hoh-peh" appears to be a real person, who addresses the king, rather than a fictitious identity assumed for ceremonial purposes: Ibid., Vol. 11, p.149.
- 89 Freeman, T. B., untitled ms., Biog. W. Africa, M.M.S., Archives, p. 306
- 90 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 237, 276.

- 91 Statement of Capt. J. Fursier, of the brig Columbine of Bristol, fated 2/3/1857, PRO.F02/20/82.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Statement of J. Fursier, Master, and G. Williamson, Supercargo, of the brig Columbine, dated 16/2/1857, PRO.F02/20/71.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Ibid., emphasis added.
- 96 Yevogan to Day, 23/2/1857, PRO.F02/20/76.
- 97 Valdez, T. F., Six Years of a Traveller's Life . . ., vol. 1, pp. 322, 328.
- 98 This evidence, from PRO.F02/20, Day to Adams 24/2/1857, is cited by E. Bay. Curiously, in an article devoted to the use of evidence she does not appear to mention the much more explicit evidence suggesting a connection between Gezo and the palm oil trade cited in fns. 91-96 above.
- 99 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/3/1857, PRO.F02/20/63. The sheds on Porto Novo beach were also regarded as the monarchs; Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1857, PRO.F084/1031, 159.
- 100 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1857, PRO.F084/1031/159.
- 101 Burton, R., A Mission.... p. 268
- 102 See later in this chapter
- 103 Campbell to Clarendon, 27/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/197: Day to Burgess, 20/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/204.
- 104 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1857, PRO.F084/1031/159.
- 105 Cf., for example, Manning, P., "Slaves, Palm oil and Political power on the West African Coast", African Historical Studies, 11, 2, 1969. Cf. also Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 38.
- 106 Norris, R., Memoirs . . ., p. 71.
- 107 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, pp. 51-2.
- 108 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 34.

- 109 Manning remarks that in Southern Dahomey generally the oil was usually carried from inland in 20 litre vessels; Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 107. This would be approximately equal to 5.26 Old Wine Gallons. This appears to have been roughly similar on other parts of the coast. Cruickshank reports that on the Gold Coast palm oil was head loaded in pots of 5 or 6 gallons: Cruickshank, B., Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast . . ., vol.11, p 280. In the lower Niger, reports speak of oil being collected in " small gourds, each capable of containing from 2 to 4 gallons; Laird, M. and Oldfield, R. A. K., Narrative . . ., vol. 1, p. 103.
- 110 34.2. lbs. calculated on the basis of 327.4 (correct measure) Old Wine Gallons to the Ton of palm oil.
- 111 It seems that this was a normal head load for female carriers at least. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 51 states that 10 x 2000 cowries, for instance, was a female load. Johnson indicates around 400 cowries to the 1 lb. Johnson, M., "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa . . ., Part 11", J.A.H., X1, 3, 1970.

$$\frac{10 \times 2000}{400} = 50 \text{ lbs.}$$
- 112 Hill put the Abomey at 2 days travelling distance from Whydah: Hill to Stanley, 16/5/1844, PRO.C096/4/230. However, Burton remarked on the fatigue of unladen royal messengers who had made the journey from Abomey to Whydah in 3 days: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 86.
- 113 Particularly bearing in mind the Lama swamp and the fact that much of the oil was carried during the rains.
- 114 This refers to the 'country' ton of 300 gallons.
- 115 Billows, H. and Beckwith, H., Palm Oil . . ., p. 35.
- 116 Ibid., p. 33.
- 117 Circulaire par le Cmdte. Superieur . . . au Gabon, 20/5/1880, M.O.M. Gabon, X11, 2, 9.
- 118 Manning, P., Phd., pp. 52-3.
- 119 See chapter 3 on the actual production of pericarp oil. These calculations have been based on the manufacture of pericarp oil since this constituted the bulk of oil exported throughout this period. Palm kernel oil was manufactured but tended to be used domestically; Duncan, J., Travels . . ., vol. 1, p. 296. This may be accounted for by the differential in the export trade price which Campbell estimated at 20% lower in the case of Kernel Oil; Campbell to Clarendon, 14/5/1856, PRO.F084/1002/126.
- 120 Manning, P., Ph.D., pp. 203.

- 121 Laird, M. and Oldfield, R. A. K., Narrative . . ., vol. 11, p. 361.
- 122 This estimate does not take into account the spillage rate on the way to the coast.
- 123 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 22.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Assuming 2000 cowries the 'head' and \$1 = 4/6d.
- 126 See chapter 4 on palm oil prices.
- 127 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 225.
- 128 Dalzel, A., The History . . ., p. X11.
- 129 Duncan to Stavely, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51. Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 36. Frasers Journal, rough copy, 1851 PRO.F084/886/48. Frasers accounts for canoe crew, PRO.F084/886/139.
- 130 Burton, R. put the exchange rate at 2/- per 'head'. A Mission . . ., p. 225. However, he puts the actual exchange rate, apparently against specie, at 2 1/2 heads to the dollar, or 1/9 - 1/10 per 'head' of cowries. Ibid., p. 98, fn. 27.
- 131 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 225.
- 132 Fraser to Beecroft, 22/11/1852, PRO.F084/886/354.
- 133 Rapport par Lt. Armand, November 1852, Service Historique de la Marin, BB4:1395, p. 5.
- 134 Palm Oil Exports, 1831-54: The following table refers to imports of palm and coconut oil to France from the whole West Coast.

	<u>Francs</u>
Average 1831-6	596
Average 1837-46	314,000
1847	455,000
1848	450,000
1849	778,000
1850	683,000~
1851	502,000
1852	1148,000
1853	522,000
1854	1337,000

From "Commerce de la France . . .", Revue Coloniale, 2nd Series, tome 16, pp. 70-3.

135 Imports of palm oil and coconut oil to France from the whole west coast in 1854 amounted to 2,673,000 Kg., valued at 3,203,000 France; "Commerce de la France . . .", in Revue Coloniale, 1856, 2nd series, tome 16, p. 70. The apparent discrepancy between this figure and that quoted above can be accounted for by the difference between the coastal and European values of oil.. It is worth noting that the coastal value of 1,337,000 francs for 2,673,000 Kg. of oil represents a coastal price per ton of just less than the £22.10s a ton already indicated as the administered price which prevailed for at least the quarter century c.1854-79.

136 Palm Oil imported into U.K. from West Africa, 1800-1853.

	<u>Tons</u>		<u>Tons</u>		<u>Tons</u>
1800	223	1818	1465	1836	13831
1801	195	1819	3702	1837	11164
1802	386	1820	3702	1838	14068
1803	489	1821	5124	1839	17172
1804	316	1822	3188	1840	15273
1805	216	1823	3270	1841	19850
1806	361	1824	3699	1842	21008
1807	112	1825	4268	1843	20390
1808	552	1826	4953	1844	20728
1809	749	1827	4712	1845	25042
1810	1288	1828	6327	1846	18023
1811	1176	1829	8996	1847	23467
1812	581	1830	10673	1848	24986
1813	***	1831	8164	1849	23768
1814	967	1832	10890	1850	21723
1815	2063	1833	13345	1851	29224
1816	1191	1834	13495	1852	25394
1817	1485	1835	12817	1853	31457

*** Records for 1813 not available, destroyed by fire.

This table is based on the "Account of . . . Palm Oil annually imported into the U.K. from the Western Coast of Africa, 1790-1844", Parl. Papers, W. Africa General, vol. 50, 1845, XLVI (187), and the "return of . . . Palm oil imported into the U.K., 1844-53" specifying the quantities imported from each country, Parl. Papers, 1854, LXV (296), each of which gives the figures in cwts.

137 Campbell's report on the Trade of Lagos and the Bight of Benin for 1857, PRO.F02/24/206, and PRO.F084/1061/405. Freeman testified to the considerable stocks of oil held at Godomy and Porto Novo beach: Freeman to Ord, 2/4/1856, M.M.S., 1856, box 262.

138 Evidence of Capt. J. Croft, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1856 Committee, Qs. 5497-5501.

- 139 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 140 Campbell to Townsend, 12/5/1854, PRO.F084/959/286.
- 141 Ibid.
- 142 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/246.
- 143 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/427.
- 144 Ibid.
- 145 Ibid.
- 146 Ibid.
- 147 Campbell to Malmesbury, 5/4/1859, PRO.F084/1088/112.
- 148 Rapport par Lt. Armand, Nov. 1852, Service Historique de la Marin, BB4: 1395, p. 5. Forbes remarked on the use of "smaller articles" for the oil trade: Forbes, F., Dahomey and the Dahomans, Vol. 1, p. 115.
- 149 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/6/1854, PRO.F084/959/250.
- 150 Rapport par Lt. Armand, Nov. 1852, Service Historique de la Marin, BB4: 1395, p. 5.
- 151 Cotonou was already mentioned in the 1780's: cf. Akinjogbin, I., Dahomey and Its Neighbours . . ., p. 168, n. 5. Gezo re-established it as a trading centre.
- 152 Lombard, J., "Cotonou: Ville Africaine", Bulletin de l'IFAN, B, 22, 1960. Cf. also Brasseur-Marion, P., "Cotonou: Porte du Dahomey", Cahiers d'Outre Mer, vol. VI, 1963.
- 153 Stanfield to Fraser, 1/3/1852, PRO.F084/886/270. The combination of high prices and harassment during the blockade appears to have proved too much for Stanfield, who took to drink: Fraser to Beecroft, 22/11/1852, PRO.F084/886/354.
- 154 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/427. See previous tabulation of palm oil prices. The May 1854 figure given for Porto Novo Beach - £50 a ton - is misleading since it refers to Campbell's estimate of the market value of oil exported by Domingo at European prices: Campbell to Townsend, 12/5/1854, PRO.F084/950.
- 155 Again, see previous tabulation of palm oil prices.
- 156 Beecroft, for instance, complained in 1850 that he could obtain nothing but exaggerated accounts: Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192.

- 157 For example Régis Frères à Min. d'Agriculture et commerce, 3/3/1850, Nat. Arch., F12:7208. Régis also wrote the following February to complain of continued thefts.
- 158 Régis à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 8/5/1850, M.O.M., Senegal IV:42:b.
- 159 Reports of the trade of Lagos and the Bight of Benin for 1857, Campbell to Malmesbury, PRO.F084/1061/405. (Also in PRO.F0/24/206.) The French estimates, for Porto Novo, Whydah and Agoué put annual average exports 1856-8 at 7160 tons: M.O.M., Senegal and dependences, XIII/72.
- 160 Cf. Campbell to Malmesbury, 1/4/1859, PRO.F02/24/206.
- 161 Reports of the trade of Lagos and the Bight of Benin for 1857, Campbell to Malmesbury, PRO.F02/24/206.
- 162 See last chapter in this thesis.
- 163 Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 164 According to Campbell's estimate, Domingo Martinez's palm oil trade at Porto Novo was in the region of 5000 tons per annum: Campbell to Townsend, 2/5/1854, PRO.F084/950. On the face of it this seems something of an exaggeration, since it appears to exceed the figure for 1856 and 1857 given by Campbell for all trade in Porto Novo and Appi Vista together. However, there is no doubt that Domingo almost monopolised the trade at both embarkation points, and it is probably as reasonable reflection of the relative increase of his involvement in the trade.
- 165 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/6/1854, PRO.F084/950/265. Campbell to Townsend, 19/4/1854, PRO.F084/950/274. Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/427.
- 166 Hutchinson, T. J., Impressions . . ., pp. 71-2. Hutchinson wrongly places Appi Vista (near Cotonou) to the west of Whydah.
- 167 At one stage in May 1854, for instance, Domingo Martinez appears to have had 9 ships, of 3000 tons aggregate tonnage loading at his establishments at Porto Novo (Beach) and Appi Vista. Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/246.
- 168 Cf. for example, McLean to Committee PRO.C096/2/7: Foote to King of Dahomey 6/5/1843, M.M.S., 1843, Box 259: Winniet to Grey, 12/5/1847, PRO.C096/11/149: Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346. Cruickshank to Winniet, 18/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/342: Duncan to Palmerston, 22/9/1849, PRO.F084/775/64: Gezo to Palmerston, 7/9/1849, PRO.F084/775/75: Beecroft's Journals of Visits to Abomey 1850, PRO.F084/816: Gezo to Queen Victoria, 4/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/191.

- 169 Hutton to C.O., 23/3/1843, PRO.C096/2/173.
- 170 Cruickshank's Report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14. Winniet to Grey, 12/5/1847, PRO.C096/11/149.
- 171 F.O. to C.O., 12/5/1845, PRO.C096/8/38. Cruickshank's report 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14. Beecroft's Journals of Visit to Abomey, 4/7/1850, PRO.F084/816.
- 172 When slaves were selling, according to Cruickshanks, at \$80 a head: Cruickshanks Report 9/11/1848, C096/13/279.
- 173 Baudin à Min. des Mar. et des Col., 18/1/1852, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc., Afrique 51.
- 174 Ibid.
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- 183 In E. Donnan, Documents Relating to the Slave Trade, (Washington, 1930-1), vol. 2, p. 290.
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- 187 Adams, Capt. J., Remarks on the Country . . ., p. 108.
- 188 Lovejoy, P. E., "Inter-regional Monetary flows in the Pre-colonial trade of Nigeria", J.A.H., XV, 4, 1974.
- 189 King of Dahomey to Queen of England, in Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8/1845. Journal of the Rev. S. Annear, entry for 26/9/1844, M.M.S., Box 260.
- 190 Lovejoy, P. E., "Interregional Monetary flows . . .", J.A.H., XV, 4, 1974: Johnson, M., "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa", J.A.H., XI, 1, 1970, p. 24.
- 191 Johnson, M., "The Cowrie Currencies . . .", J.A.H., XI, 1, 1970, p. 24. The massive influx was facilitated by the acceptance of larger shells which had been refused during the period of the slave trade.
- 192 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 36, 51.
- 193 Cf. also Duncan to Stanley, 18/8/1849, PRO.F084/775/51.
- 194 For example, 4 heads = 18/- in Fraser's Journals (rough copy), 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 195 Fraser's expenditure in his accounts in PRO.F084/886/139, noted the cost of canoe crew for 1 year - "5 heads of cowries per week = £52.
- 196 Fraser's Commercial Report for 1851, annexed to Fraser to Palmerston, 15/5/1852, PRO.F02/7/95.
- 197 Hargreaves, J., Prelude to Partition, p. 317. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast
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- 199 Campbell's Report on the Trade in the Bight of Benin, 1856, enclosed in Campbell to Clarendon, 5/1/1857, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 43, 1857, Corr. Class B, p. 33 et seq.

- 200 Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 59, citing Lodder to Malmesbury, 30/5/1859, PRO.F02/28, Hieke, pp. 73, 132.
- 201 Campbell to Clarendon, 6/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/233.
- 202 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 98, Fn.27. Elsewhere, for example, p. 225, Burton approximated the head to 2/-.
- 203 Ibid., fn.27: though the Dahomean exchange rate differed from other areas in the Bights: Ibid.
- 204 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 66.
- 205 For example, at Lagos Campbell mentioned in 1856 that prices had doubled over the last period; Campbell to Clarendon, 14/5/1856, PRO.F084/1002/126.
- 206 Johnson, M., "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa", parts I and II in J.A.H., XI, 1970 and J.A.H., XI, 3, 1971.
- 207 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 327. Also see Ibid., p. 328.
- 208 Ibid., pp. 327-8. By the mid-1870's, this difference in prices may have been partly offset by a differential in the cowrie exchange rate; Skertchly was later to note that whereas 4 heads of cowries exchanged on the coast for 4/6d (\$1), in the interior they exchanged at 3 heads for 4/6d. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 28.

CHAPTER 8

REVERSION: The abandonment of the strategy of adaptation c.1858-65.

FROM POLITICAL UNITY TO DIVISION

The interpretation in this thesis differs somewhat from that previously put forward by David Ross. Ross argues that Gezo was intent on transforming Dahomean society from the early 1840's. But, having failed to obtain an active alliance or backing from England, he could neither monopolize the palm oil trade, nor could he carry out his revolutionary plan to transform Dahomey by substituting agriculture and palm oil in the place of slaves as the material basis of the Dahomean state.¹

In the political sphere, he failed to make peace with the Egba at Abeokuta,² and lost control of the internal political situation, a War Party arising and becoming vocal.³ As late as mid-1855, according to Ross, Gezo still entertained hopes that the British would give him backing and restore his crumbling political position; after 1855 - Campbell's refusal to treat unless prior assurances of the signing of the whole of the standard anti-slave treaty were given - that was a well nigh untenable hope.⁴

An uprising of slaves in the wake of this proved to be the turning point. The Chiefs attacked Gezo's policy. The Chiefs were traditional, reactionary and pro-human sacrifice,⁵ and the opposition to Gezo was led by Badahou (Glele), the heir apparent, himself heavily influenced by the priests.⁶ After the slave revolt, the policies of Badahou prevailed. The King was in a minority, and even the Meus sided

with Badahou. England and Portugal having proved useless, Gezo turned to France.⁷

The reasons for chiefly opposition to Gezo, which had flared as a direct result of the slave revolt went much deeper than that specific incident according to Ross. Although they were generally frightened by the slave revolts, a number of them had opposed the monarch throughout his reign, resenting his domination. Gezo, according to Ross, had "limited their freedom to manoeuvre for their own profit". Above all, they resented his seeking and obtaining external support for his power, particularly from da Souza. This section of Badahou's support wanted rid of not only Gezo, but any strong central monarchy. But between 1855-8 the Badahou-Gezo conflict reached stalemate.⁸

Although this work starts from a different conceptual framework from that of David Ross, the evidence suggests that his general outline of developments during this period is largely accurate. But it is perhaps too closely related to the various personalities involved, it tends to underestimate the initial political consensus which prevailed and it fails to perceive how the growth of internal opposition was fuelled by the course of economic developments.

Gezo's attempts to transform the ideological and political nature of the Dahomean aristocracy in order to accommodate his new economic strategy eventually met with opposition, but even many of those who were ultimately to reject the experiment initially remained quiescent .

In the first instance, the Dahomean leadership was relatively united around the plan to adapt in order to preserve their survival. This is perhaps not surprising, given the traditional unity which had cemented

the relationships between the foremost men in the kingdom - Gezo had come to power in 1818 with the backing of the Meu, Migan and Cambodee.⁹ And the monarch himself was only too well aware of the dangers of internal division.¹⁰

Like the King, The Meu had been eager to minimise the commitments imposed upon them in 1852, and, like Gezo, he had opposed the signing of the additional articles as being tantamount to selling their country to Britain.¹¹ At the level of state finances, the Meu preserved a tactful respect for the monarch and recognised the impropriety of anyone other than the monarch entering into negotiations with the British. Having raised the matter with Forbes and Beecroft in 1850, for instance, "he then immediately excused himself and said that he did not wish to talk that palaver, he would leave it for the King's mouth".¹² But there is little doubt that the Meu, as the state's premier commercial minister, had been deeply involved in the discussions as to the possible abandonment of the slave trade prior to 1852. He was not merely a state functionary; he had a personal commercial interest in the matter, and was eager to elicit details of how any potential compromise would affect his own economic interests. It is significant that in his conversations with the British envoys prior to 1852 his interest lay in finding out "how many cargoes the Queen of England would give him, for to give up the slave trade".¹³

The matter of subsidy from the British and other European powers was, therefore, of direct interest to the the Meu and other Dahomean officials. On another occasion, along with the Yevogan who shared a similar economic interest in the matter, the Meu took the opportunity to

put the matter in a more straightforward fashion. Both men made it clear to Forbes that if one slave ship arrived at Whydah the King claimed half the trade; if three then he monopolised two. The point of the conversation was not lost on Forbes:- "that whatever was offered in subsidy, one half became the property of the king, the other of the traders."¹⁴ The Meu and the Yevogan were not alone in their commercial interest in the matter. For, so far as the slave trade was concerned, the dichotomy between commercial and war officials was a false one. All the major Dahomean merchants were also slave producers. For instance, the five native merchants at Whydah mentioned by Forbes - Ahjovee, Narwhey, Quening and the others were said to own "thousands of slaves, and to have to supply whole regiments to the annual war."¹⁵

The Dahomean leadership as a whole, therefore, had a vested interest in the slave trade, both at the level of input and of income received from it. As such, they were collectively involved in the decisions taken in 1852. When the Meu and Yevogan signed the 1852 Treaty along with the monarch, their signatures testified to the acceptance of the prevailing economic reality by the whole Dahomean ruling class, political and commercial.

Similarly, Gezo carried with him the heir-apparent Badahou, later Glele.¹⁶ This was not merely a matter of tactful, temporary acquiescence by the future king. As late as 1855 the heir to the stool was still active in encouraging the growth of palm oil commerce and the establishment of British firms in Dahomey.¹⁷ The following year, in February 1856, Freeman's discussions in the capital included six hours of meetings with Badahou.¹⁸ Freeman, the arch-apostle of abolition and

economic transformation left no indication that his discussions with Badahou were any less friendly, or any less directed towards extension of the palm oil trade and British annuities than were his discussions with Gezo.

In the early stages of his economic innovations, therefore, Gezo managed to overcome any forces of resistance within the Dahomean polity and to carry the majority with him. This applies both to his economic strategy and to the political changes which manifested the new approach - particularly the run down of the annual raid, the curtailment of human sacrifice, and the development of the 'Bush King' as a political mechanism to achieve the transition from Warrior to Farmer.

And yet, even as the 'Bush King' was being introduced into Dahomean politics; even as adjustments were being made to the scale of human sacrifice; and even as the strategy of adaptation was being pursued by the Dahomean leadership, the very conditions on which it was predicated were being undermined by the flux of economic and political developments. As the decade progressed the failure of his economic strategy provided fertile ground for the voice of political opposition to flourish. Perhaps naturally, disenchantment with failed policies resulted in the courtship of the heir apparent by those who sought a return to more traditional policies on his accession.¹⁹

This process was undoubtedly assisted by Gezo's failing health. According to a French official who had spent two weeks in Abomey, by 1858 the King was no more than a shadow of his son and ministers. The reason was physical rather than political. Gezo was suffering from an illness described by the visitor as being akin to consumption.²⁰ The French

visitor ascribed the diminution of French and western influence to Gezo's incapacity and the intervention of the chiefs hostile to western influence. But, in fact, the reasons went deeper; a widespread internal debate was taking place in 1856-7. The earlier consensus on strategy was beginning to break down under the influence of continued economic failure and the voices of internal opposition grew stronger and more numerous. Gezo's personal identification with the strategy of adaptation and his failing health left the heir-apparent, Badahou, as the focal point for those domestic dissidents who wished to see the new approach abandoned and the traditional, warrior ethos reasserted.

By 1856-7 that internal opposition appears to have become sufficiently widespread to have convinced Badahou of the necessity of shifting his ground towards a more traditional stance, perhaps with a view to confirming his prospects of kingship. Repin noted that:

"Le fils aîné du roi, le prince Badahou, héritier présumptif, . . . m'a paru d'une intelligence bien inférieure à celle de son père, et beaucoup moins desirieux que lui de voir la civilisation et les usages des blancs pénétrer dans ses Etats." ²¹

Crucially, the opposition cause had gained another defector to their side by this time. Repin added:

"Il appartient, ainsi que le Meu, qui en est la tête, au parti de la résistance, à ce qu'on appellerait ailleurs, en Turquie par exemple, le vieux parti national . . ." ²²

Although there is no explicit indication of the date of Repin's observations in the text of his writings, it was probably 1857, when the forces of opposition against the strategy of adaptation were reaching a climax. ²³ It was precisely at this time that a coalescence of economic factors was calculated to provide the internal opposition with

their most powerful arguments. While his physical capacity made it difficult for Gezo to retain his political influence it is unlikely that this was the major factor in dissalusionment with the monarch's programme for change. A much more important aspect of the growing influence of those who wished to abandon Gezo's strategy was its failure to provide a satisfactory economic basis for the kingdom's prosperity.

ECONOMIC CHANGE

Those economic problems manifested themselves in the general decline of Abomey. Already in 1850 Beecroft had remarked upon the disappointing state of the capital, its surroundings and the dilapidated state of the royal palaces compared with previous reports.²⁴ A better judge was Freeman who by the mid-1850s had already made a number of visits to the capital over more than 10 years, and who specifically drew attention to the considerable deterioration of Abomey and the royal palaces.²⁵

Such economic deterioration held out the prospect of growing internal divisions over the compromise which had been initially accepted by the Dahomean polity. The unity which held together the Dahomean leadership at the time of the 1852 treaty was a fragile flower. It was dependent, above all on two factors; the conviction that the trade in slaves was in terminal decline as a viable export sector, and secondly, the prospect of an adequate economic substitute or substitutes. If either of these was proven to be illusory by future developments, then the apparent unity of the Dahomean leadership was liable to disappear. Furthermore, unity over the curtailment of the annual raid was easier to preserve in a situation where the core of the army had been all but destroyed, as was the case in 1852.

Gezo had embarked upon the strategy of adaptation in circumstances characterised by the 'push' of a dying slave trade and the 'pull' of adequate substitute resources of revenue. The latter had never lived up to expectations and in the final analysis proved illusory. On its own this was sufficient to throw the Dahomean leadership into consternation and frustration. However, in the absence of a thriving slave trade they had little alternative but to pursue their strategy doggedly and to persevere with diplomatic and commercial overtures to the western powers in pursuit of a significantly enhanced level of income from legitimate trade and direct subsidies. This approach had characterised Dahomean politics between 1852 and the end of 1856.

By early 1858, however, the Dahomean armies were once more on the march and involved in a major attack on Appo, near Ketu, from where they carried off some 1400-1500 captives.²⁶ This venture signalled the end of not only half a decade of curtailed military activity but also marked the conclusion of a shorter period of intense political debate which took place throughout late 1856 and 1857 and which coincided with rumours of Gezo's death which were prevalent on the coast throughout this 18 month period.²⁷

To contemporary observers it was appealing to view this debate in personalized and dynastic terms. On the one hand sat Gezo, progressive and pro-western, pitted against his would-be successor Glele, a reactionary backed by a clique of supporters favouring the slave trade, human sacrifice and opposed to the Whites and the Egba in equal terms.²⁸

Such a view has its limitations. Firstly, if some British sources on the coast are to be believed, Gezo himself was an eager advocate of an

anti-Egba alliance.²⁹ Secondly, the conceptualisation of the conflict in personalized terms does not assist in explaining why the 'forces of reaction' were increasingly successful at this particular time, in the course of late 1856 and 1857. This can only be adequately explained with reference to economic developments, in particular the inadequacy of the policy of adaptation and the revival of demand for slave exports. It was within this context that the debates and divisions which clearly manifested themselves to western observers took place.

The outcome of that debate is clear; the Dahomean aristocracy in 1857-8 abandoned the experiment which had represented their economic and political strategy for the previous half decade and the general thrust of Dahomean politics now reverted to a traditionalist conception and practice.

Speculation on the personal position of the monarch and his successor in this process can over emphasize their capacity to carry political consensus in the face of economic adversity. Whether or not Freeman's belief in Gezo's enthusiasm for western ideas, commercial and otherwise, was correct, or whether Cambell's scepticism regarding the monarch's real intentions was more accurate,³⁰ the fact remains that the monarch's capacity to influence events was constrained by the social and economic system which he had inherited. Borghero, despite his tendency towards personalisation and a natural predeliction towards the religious aspect of the matter, probably came closest to the truth when he commented that although Gezo may have been a "worthy man", he:

" . . . could not always rule according to his desires. He had against him the powerful hierarchy of Feteshists...who founded these atrocious laws that call for the sacrifice...of so many thousands of human victims . . ."31

We do not have to agree with the specific terms of Borghero's analysis in order to accept the general tenor of his remarks. Burton made the point more astutely:

"From . . . appearances, a stranger . . . is apt to conclude that the Dahomean King represents . . . a kind of God on earth . . . that is far from being the case . . . the ministers, war captains and Feteshists may be, and often are, individually punished by the King, collectively they are too strong for him and without their cordial co-operation he would soon cease to remain."³²

Though shaped by economic events, the debate itself was expressed in ideological terms. Undoubtedly throughout the whole of this period, and perhaps particularly at Gezo's death, the debate which Borghero mentions - on human sacrifices - took place. The transformation of Dahomean society - economic and political - could not but be argued out at an ideological level.³³ But the lapse back into 'conservatism' had its roots far deeper than political intrigues in Abomey. And, significantly, it occurred prior to either the death of Gezo or to the attack on Ketu. It took place, in fact, in early 1857, and was prompted by the changing economic conditions in which the Dahomean leadership once again found themselves.

By 1857 the search for an alternative, viable, material basis for the political power of the Dahomean monarchy and aristocracy had gone on, to a greater or lesser extent, for almost quarter of a century. The most radical steps taken towards transformation had occurred over the previous five years. Those steps had been taken only under the immense pressure of the then prevailing economic conditions at a time when the traditional economic order appeared incapable of sustaining their political and

social power. Defeat at Abeokuta had compounded the problems created by a fall in demand for slaves and military constraints on the trade; the prospects of an alternative material basis - palm oil and annuities - offered the only apparent prospect of salvation.

But, by 1857 the conditions in which the Dahomean leaders were operating had again altered dramatically. Gezo's hopes for an adequate alternative source of income had proved groundless; palm oil revenue, although growing, was inadequate; official western annuities were practically non-existent. If these two 'pull' factors encouraging acceptance of the strategy of adaptation had proved illusory, the two 'push' factors had diminished in their potency. So far as the Dahomean army was concerned, time was a healer. Only the dearth of a market for slave 'products' lingered on throughout the 1852-6 period, sustaining the persistent if frustrating adherence of the Dahomean leadership to the course on which they had embarked.

REVIVAL OF DEMAND FOR SLAVES 1856-7

Then, as had happened so often in the past, the unpredictable ebb and flow of the slave market was once again to effect a change in the direction of the Dahomean polity. It was not the victory of conservatism which gave a new lease of life to the Dahomean slave trade: rather it was the revival in demand for slaves on the Dahomean coast which ensured the temporary restoration of the status-quo-ante. By the early months of 1857 the slave trade was once again on the increase in the area of the Bights.

The actual operation of the Trade had not eased in any way for the dealers. Indeed, in some ways it had grown worse, since in their desperation to ship even an occasional cargo they were an easy prey for shippers on the other side of the Atlantic who often proved to be less than scrupulous in their commercial dealings.³⁴ This fact, added to the infrequency of shipments, had encouraged the spread of one further change in normal shipping operations. In pursuit of maximising profits from any cargoes which managed to run the anti-slave blockade and achieve their destination, the dealers at Whydah increasingly preferred to ship slaves 'on freight' on their own account rather than sell them to visiting ships. While this entailed a greater risk of losing the initial outlay on slaves, a successful voyage held out the prospect of profits some 5-10 times higher than a west coast transaction.³⁵

Although on the increase, this pattern was not universally adopted. One significant exception, for instance, was J.A.Machado of New York, who had dealt widely throughout the west coast and who operated in Whydah and neighbouring ports through the medium of a relative and long-time slave dealer, Samuel Da Coasta Soaris.³⁶ Involved in both legitimate and slave commerce, Machado's annual dispatch of a small fleet of vessels - brigs, barques and schooners - to the coast made it difficult for the squadron to effectively maintain a watch over all his ships at any given time.³⁷

Nevertheless, a general growth of distrust between slave dealers and shippers was one further hazard in a trade which had grown increasingly hazardous since the late 1840's.

Despite this, by the early months of 1857, the slave trade was once more taking off in Dahomey. And it appears that the monarch, disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of his strategy for adaptation, was sanctioning a return to the Trade. One aspect of this, remarked upon earlier, was the establishment of Pnya Nova, which offered not only the opportunity to pre-empt the trading potential of leeward bound trading vessels involved in legitimate commerce, but also a fresh and relatively unknown port from which to effect the embarkation of slaves.

Not surprisingly the new port featured several times in the early days of the Trade's revival. In July 1857, for instance, British cruisers intercepted the loading of slaves onto the Jupiter at Pnya Nova. The exact number of slave bound for export remains unclear, but it must have been considerable since despite warning's of the squadron's approach and hasty attempts to unload their human cargo the vessel was taken with almost 100 slaves still on board. The Jupiter, which features again later, was dispatched to Sierra Leone for adjudication.³⁸

Prior to this the squadron had already captured the Adam Grey, another slaver taking slaves off the Dahomean coast.³⁹ Nor were these isolated incidents. In the same month, July, a successful embarkation of slaves took place from a point on the coast near Whydah on the American brig W. D. Miller,⁴⁰ while other slave ships, the Abbot Deverieux, the barque Isle of Cuba, the Vesta out of New Orleans and the Virginia Pearce out of New York were reported hovering in the vicinity awaiting the opportunity to embark slaves.⁴¹ The exact destination and number of slaves taken from Dahomey remains unverifiable but it was certainly considerable. The Abbot Deverieux, for instance, was eventually taken

by the British along with 270 slaves which had been embarked from Whydah.⁴²

The slave trade continued with renewed vitality throughout 1857. In September an American schooner, the James Buchanan, embarked 300 slaves from Whydah and escaped despite a prolonged chase by the squadron.⁴³ Overnight on the 27th of the same month over 100 more slaves were successfully embarked on board a Spanish slaver.⁴⁴ The vitality of the trade and the renewed frequency of shipments lent credence to the prevailing rumour that a 'fast steamer' was en route destined to uplift 1400 slaves from the neighbourhood of Whydah.⁴⁵ Clearly, the Dahomean trade was undergoing a revival reminiscent of the heady days of the Trade.

There is little direct evidence to connect the monarch with any specific shipment. But a number of factors indicate not only his general support for the Trade's survival, but his actual involvement in it. Firstly, it is unlikely that such frequency and size of shipments could have taken place without - at the very least - the tacit approval of the monarch. Secondly, the incidence of shipments from the newly established Porya Nova port suggests that Gezo's involvement was more than mere acquiescence.

This view is supported by a contemporary incident. The failure of the much-vaunted (by western powers) legitimate road to prosperity had been a frustrating enough experience for the Dahomean leaders. But the persistent intervention of the British anti-slave trade squadron in the revived trade in the wake of their failure to deliver their promised annual subsidy must have been an embittering experience. Gezo eventually hit back. Following the capture of the Adam Grey and the

Jupiter, mentioned earlier, the monarch stopped all trade at the coastal ports until such times as the merchants paid him recompense for his alleged loss of \$20,000 - representing the currency equivalent of approximately 250 slaves at the then prevailing price. This marked the first occasion since 1852 on which Gezo had admitted - explicitly or implicitly - a current financial interest in the Trade.⁴⁶

This re-involvement of the monarch in the slave trade is significant. The absence of the Trade from the Dahomean ports had never, of course, been complete. Successful shipments, sometimes of a significant size, were occasionally made. In May 1854, for instance, it had been reported that a brig had embarked around 700 slaves from the Whydah Beach - Great Popo area; and a few days later further reports of a shipment half that size were also recorded.⁴⁷

And there is no doubt that throughout the period up to 1857 the slave dealers at Whydah and other ports under Dahomean sovereignty continued to purchase slaves and to ship them whenever possible. Domingo Martinez and other dealers were obtaining the slaves, often in small parcels, and assembling them in barracoons - some at Whydah - to await shipping opportunities. To minimise publicity regarding the export trade such slaves were often ostensibly purchased for 'domestic' purposes.

The purchase of domestic slaves with the intention of exporting them appears to have given rise to a number of problems. As early as January 1854, for instance, there were reports of Dahomean slaves escaping from Domingo at Whydah on learning of the true nature of their destination.⁴⁸ At a later period, from 1860 onwards a combination of Dahomean slave raiding and widespread warfare in the Yoruba interior was

to ensure adequate slave supplies. But in the immediate aftermath of the revival of slave demand in 1857-9 even a genuine domestic slave of several years standing was not immune from exportation; sometimes such slaves were embarked under the guise of passengers or seamen on ships under Portuguese colours⁴⁹ Ironically, many of these slaves appear to have originated as the domestic retinue of liberated Saro's.⁵⁰ Not unnaturally under these circumstances, desertions of domestic slaves were common whenever the opportunity arose.⁵¹

Domingo Martinez himself, however, probably derived more straightforward supplies from Egba raiding on the Porto Novians and from Mewu, installed as chief at Badagry after a virtual civil war. In turn, the latter not only benefitted from the supply and distribution facilities he accorded to Martinez, but derived financial reward from tolls on the caravans of slaves (normally in groups of 20-60) passing along the section of the beach under his immediate control.⁵²

In the plethora of charge and counter-charge it is almost impossible to state with any degree of certainty the sources of supply for the Dahomean slave dealers during this period. The King of Porto Novo laid the blame on Mewu of Badagry,⁵³ on Akitoye and on the Egba. In turn, the Egba chiefs counter-charged Alajogun, King of Porto Novo, and pointed to Okeodan rather than Abeokuta as the source of slaves. Campbell supported Alajogun's claims and the British Foreign Office strove in vain to ascertain the true state of affairs.⁵⁴

However, there is one consistent absence from any of the correspondence - the name of Gezo. Between 1852 and the 1857 incident referred to previously there are no accusations of slave supplying laid

against the Dahomean monarch. It seems, therefore, that despite occasional shipments from Dahomey, and despite evidence that slaves were being both purchased into and stored in Dahomey in considerable numbers,⁵⁵ that throughout this period the Dahomean monarch was not involved in slave exporting in any significant fashion.

And the slave dealers, out of deference to the decrees of Gezo, minimised the overt nature of their own trade as we have seen above. Domingo Martinez, for instance, refused to trade in slaves at Porto Novo Beach because of the proximity of British commercial houses.⁵⁶ The trade was never extinct. But it had been reduced to such an extent during the 1852-6 period that Campbell could remark in early 1857 that it had abandoned Dahomey.⁵⁷

Within a few months, however, he was forced once more to revise his views and to report the "active resumption of the trade at Whydah".⁵⁸ This revival was prompted as much by events beyond the frontiers of Dahomey as it was by internal developments. And it developed in two stages. The first occurred from the beginning of 1857 and was marked by the resumption of consistent and widespread exporting of slaves from the Dahomean coast. That development was prompted by three main events: firstly, on the negative side, it was encouraged by Dahomean disillusionment at the economic inadequacy of the strategy of adaption mentioned earlier. On the positive side, it was stimulated by the revival of large scale demand for slaves on the coast, particularly related to the French Free Emigration Scheme. Finally, it was facilitated by a reservoir of slave supplies in consequence of military events in the interior adjacent to Dahomey.

On 27th March 1857 the French Government contracted with Régis and the House of Maes of Nantes for the supply of emigrant labour from the west coast of Africa to the French colonies in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁹ The scheme itself was in effect a legalised form of slave exports, and following diplomatic pressure the French Government agreed to abandon the scheme in the period after July 1861.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in the intervening period it exercised a powerful influence on events on the west coast, and in Dahomey in particular. Even before the scheme had been finally sanctioned by the French Government the effects were beginning to be felt in Dahomey. Plans were already being laid by Régis' agent in Whydah, Vidal.⁶¹ By purchasing slaves prior to the increase in demand which might reasonably be anticipated as a consequence of the sanctioning of the scheme, and with the bargaining power of a considerable large-scale purchase, Vidal was able to negotiate a supply of slaves at the relatively moderate price of \$50 a head, some \$30 beneath the conventional price for slaves when actual shipments began in mid-1857.⁶²

Certainly, Régis must have felt himself to have been in a strong bargaining position, not only because of the doldrums in which the slave trade had languished for some years, but also because of the sheer size of his potential orders. Between 7th and 10th August 1857, for instance, one of Régis' ships, a screw vessel which was boarded by HMS Firefly, had no less than 1200 "free emigrants" aboard destined eventually for Martinique.⁶³

But Régis' advantage did not remain for long. For one thing, the French scheme became widely advertised in Bahia, attracting increased

numbers of Brazilian vessels to the coast.⁶⁴ Within months of the last mentioned shipment the demand for slaves at Whydah had ensured that the French were pre-empted in acquiring both numbers and quality of slaves by Spanish slave dealers who were prepared to pay the conventional price of \$80 a head, well above Régis' economic maximum.⁶⁵ The French factory had to make do with those rejected by the Spaniards, and at one point in October 1857 the Stella, a Régis vessel, was obliged to leave Whydah with only some 60 slaves aboard heading for the Congo in search of cheaper and larger human cargoes.⁶⁶

THE RESUMPTION OF SLAVE RAIDING 1858

The second stage of the return to the traditional Dahomean political economy was marked by the active resumption of slave raiding by the Dahomeans themselves from around the beginning of 1858. Undoubtedly this was influenced by the developments mentioned above and the general revival of export prospects. In addition, it may have been fuelled at a later stage by the death of Gezo, and the requirement of large scale procurement of captives for the Grand Customs. Gezo's death enhanced both the political opportunity for the full restoration of the traditional pattern and the necessary catalyst for doing so. But, just as the revival of slave-trading took place prior to the death of Gezo, so too did the practice of slave raiding. Gezo, the greatest of 19th century Dahomean warrior kings, died in the second half of 1858.⁶⁷ While the active resumption of slave-trading from Dahomean ports had taken place some the previous year, the resumption of slave-raiding predated his death by a few months, occurring in February 1858. In that

month the Dahomean army fell on the town of Appo, near Ketu, taking a reported 1400-1600 prisoners.⁶⁸

This raid marked the turning point and the effective abandonment of the strategy of adaptation in favour of a return to the traditional form of revenue raising for the Dahomean leadership - slave raiding. What was in the economic interests of the Dahomean monarchy was not, of course, automatically in the interests of purchasers of slaves. The effect of the French Emigration Scheme had been to bolster demand,⁶⁹ and the unfortunate French, who had hoped to gain price concessions as a result of their initiation of the revived Trade and their large scale purchases, were left to bemoan the evaporation of their prior agreement.

Thus the resumption of raiding brought little comfort for the French, and in May 1858 Régis had two screw vessels sitting idly at Whydah awaiting a cargoe for over a month. The testimony of the French official sent to Abomey to try to break the deadlock is illustrative. According to Protet, the official entrusted with the task, the French factor at Whydah - Vidal - had been in close contact with Gezo since 1856. Agreements - unspecified in actual detail by Protet - had been reached between the monarch and the French, regarding the supply of a certain number of "emigrants" at a specified price. But Gezo was either no longer able or no longer prepared to make good the promises which he had previously made to the French.⁷⁰

"No consideration of politics, or of self-respect", complained the French "can make a Black, whether chief or king, even greater yet than Gezo, forget his material interests."⁷¹ The French, like everyone else, would have to pay the conventional price or go empty-handed. In

vain they attempted, for a period of six months, to make Gezo and the chiefs reduce prices, but without success.⁷² For his part, Protet attributed Gezo's turn around partly to his failing health and partly to the jealousy of the chiefs at what they regarded as the undue influence of the French factor over the monarch.⁷³ In fact, the Dahomean hierarchy were doing no more than insisting on the conventional price for slave exports which had prevailed for at least a decade before.

In any event, Protet's comments do indicate that from the beginning the Dahomean monarch and leadership not only acquiesced in the exportation of slaves under the Free Emigrants Scheme, but were intimately involved in the operations and supply of the scheme. The attention of the squadron was more unwelcome than ever now that the slave trade was undergoing a revival, and the new king, Glele, took steps to ensure that vessels belonging to it received no supplies from Dahomean ports.⁷⁴

As mentioned, the reluctance of the Dahomeans to adhere to the renegotiated price derived from the availability of potential purchasers. The French, of course, faced competition from the Spanish-Americans who played as prominent a part in the revived trade as they had ever done. For instance, on 16 January 1859 the capture by the squadron of a slave vessel consigned to Signor Carvalho at Whydah and equipped to take 250 slaves, came too late to prevent a full cargo being embarked some days previously by Signor Baeta.⁷⁵ The North American connection also continued to play its part. In mid-1858, the Wanderer, a 260 ton yacht originally built for a member of the New York Yacht Club, and subsequently bought by a Mr Lamar, successfully embarked 600 slaves from Dahomey which were subsequently sold in Georgia.⁷⁶

But the French also faced competition from elsewhere. To some extent the demand for export slaves had been supplemented by domestic demand as a result of Gezo's death, and the consequent human sacrifices at the Grand Customs.

The funeral, quite apart from the demand for slaves which it provoked, also marked the first appropriate occasion for the new King to display not only his own ascendancy, but also the renewed ascendancy of traditional Dahomean values. Glele, it was stated publicly, would follow in the footsteps of his father - continuing slave raids and the slave trade.⁷⁷ The fact that active slave raiding had been resumed on a large scale prior to Gezo's death legitimised this position. But his late father's memory would be honoured, and Dahomean tradition fulfilled also by the grandiose scale of human sacrifice - that central ideological manifestation of the powers of the Dahomean leader. As befitted Gezo's Grand Customs, this was to be carried out on a lavish scale, and the slave traders were expected to furnish a quota of slaves for sacrifice as well as other appropriately ostentatious gifts for the funeral rites.⁷⁸

THE IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSION: HUMAN SACRIFICE UNDER GLELE

It was, above all this extensive nature of the human sacrifices at the funeral of Gezo which marked the third and most significant public proclamation of the Dahomean aristocracy's adherence to the traditional form of the Dahomean state. Human sacrifice was the ideological battlefield on which the prevailing undercurrents of economic orthodoxy and innovation were reflected, and its restoration to prominence at the Grand Customs for Gezo was the most obvious manifestation that the years of experiment with the strategy of adaptation had drawn to a close.

Glele ascended the stool of Dahomey pledged to restore the martial tradition of his nation, and to pursue the policies of his father.⁷⁹ This process of restoration had commenced, as we have seen, prior to his father's death; firstly with the renewed public commitment to slave exporting, and subsequently with the recommencement of slave raiding. Under Glele, the reassertion of martial values was to be carried from the economic into the ideological sphere over the question of human sacrifice. Glele's accession and Gezo's Customs were the first and most appropriate occasions since the abandonment of the strategy of adaptation on which the Dahomean martial tradition was to be re-asserted publicly; "War, Bloodshed and slave selling had been left to him by his father, he could not avoid them", proclaimed Glele.⁸⁰

The new sovereign's proclamation was the culmination of a process of considerable debate within the Dahomean polity, particularly around human sacrifice, which represented the central ideological facet of martial Dahomey.⁸¹ The outcome of the debate, as of that concerning slave raiding and the slave trade, was a reversion to traditional values, and the pre-eminence of those who supported a return to martial Dahomey.⁸²

The discontinuity on this issue can be overemphasized, since Gezo himself had not attempted or intended to abolish human sacrifice altogether, but rather to limit its extent and application.⁸³ Similarly Glele would never so commit himself to immediate or absolute abolition.⁸⁴ In this sense he was entirely consistent with his predecessor, and the policy outlined during the latter's reign as specifically outlined by Gezo himself.⁸⁵ Gezo had been prepared to reduce the number of sacrifices,⁸⁶ not abolish them, and much to the

chagrin of Europeans, the sacrifices, though diminished, continued throughout his reign.⁸⁷

Thus, on this issue Glele and his supporters were able to wrap themselves in the legitimacy of the dead monarch. Glele himself publicly proclaimed not the abandonment of his father's policies, but their continuation.⁸⁸

"Had my father put aside all the Customs before he died I could never resume them . . . if I do not carry on the customs as usual I am afraid that I shall be dethroned or hurt by the subjects . . ."89

Glele was bound to the practice of human sacrifice by the traditions of his father, and in a more central sense by the political role which they played in the Dahomean social formation. Gezo had left this untouched in all its essentials, despite the partial compromise entered into to curry the favour, and thus the economic advantages, of Europe. Abolition of human sacrifice would have rendered Glele, rather than Gezo, the innovator, and as such open to the potential repercussions.⁹⁰

The suggestion that Gezo himself played the role of innovator in ordering that no sacrifices be performed at his Grand Customs⁹¹ is a misinterpretation based on an inaccuracy, as is the assertion that Glele, by permitting sacrifice, failed to comply with his father's request. What was in fact requested by Gezo was that Dahomean Caboceers would not be required to follow him to his grave as per tradition.⁹² Glele technically complied with this - by having captives created 'caboceers' and then sacrificed - thus preserving tradition and avoiding a substantial innovation the nature of which Gezo himself had never undertaken.⁹³

Thus at Gezo's death the main argument was not whether his reforms should be abandoned or not, but whether the process of reform should be carried further or not, a division between those who wanted to end human sacrifice altogether at the Annual Customs and those who wished to maintain it in accordance with the practice inherited from Gezo's reign.⁹⁴

Strictly speaking, then, the course of events did not represent a victory for reaction, but the rejection of further reform and the maintenance of the status quo. Despite this caveat, the evidence does suggest that Gezo's anticipated reforms for the Grand Customs were not wholly implemented and that the level of sacrifice at the subsequent Annual Customs increased slightly above that of the latter half of Gezo's reign.

The view that the accession of Glele represented a considerable 'reaction' from the reign of Gezo was given credence in the eyes of contemporary observers by the fact that the period immediately following Gezo's death was marked by Grand, rather than Annual Customs, and the level of human sacrifice was, in keeping with tradition, considerably more extensive.

The Grand Customs for Gezo were extended over two festivals, 1859 and 1860. One report put the intended number of sacrifices to mark Gezo's death at 2000.⁹⁵ But, partly due to the unavailability of such large numbers,⁹⁶ and partly because Grand Customs demanded more expense and was customarily deferred by the successor,⁹⁷ the actual figures sacrificed in 1859 were probably in the region of 800,⁹⁸ with a similar amount the following year.⁹⁹ An English trader from Badagry who

attended the 1859 Customs, just after Gezo's death, reported that the number of human sacrifices approximated to that figure.¹⁰⁰

It was the following year which confirmed the worst fears of European commentators. One missionary source declared them "the most ferocious ever," and becoming so bad that they even disgusted the Whydah slave dealers.¹⁰¹ Another, Bernasko, based at Whydah, reported that the revitalisation and large scale of the sacrifices had even eased the qualms of those captives destined for export from the coast.¹⁰² This general picture of wholesale executions was confirmed by a third missionary source, the French Abbé Bouche, according to whom the sacrifices included prisoners taken in a campaign against Idigny waged with the specific purpose of securing victims for the Customs, wives of the deceased King and dignitaries; the latter two categories partaking in voluntary or suicidal sacrifice.¹⁰³

In addition to missionary sources, independent evidence is available from the Frenchman Lartigue, who placed the number of sacrifices even higher than those of the missionaries, at 800 sacrifices and an additional 600 voluntary deaths.¹⁰⁴

It thus seems that the Grand Customs for Gezo were marked by extensive human sacrifice and voluntary deaths. Moreover, it appears that the the categories of victims included those expressly forbidden by Gezo prior to his own demise. Gezo had extracted an oath from his chiefs that the custom of mass slaughter following the death of a monarch should be abandoned,¹⁰⁵ and yet, both Lartigue and Bouche claim that voluntary deaths were extensive.¹⁰⁶

Burton does indicate that a senior palace official, the Tononun who should have died at the death of Gezo was spared at Gezo's request, but the special case which was made out for the individual suggests that this was a specific request rather than part of a much more general stay of execution.¹⁰⁷

Thus the evidence surrounding the Grand Customs, though less conclusive than that for Gezo's reforms of human sacrifice, does suggest that the traditional level of sacrifice was maintained and that some, at least, of Gezo's requested reforms had been rejected. The evidence concerning human sacrifice at subsequent Annual Customs is more problematic, but, again, is sufficient to sustain the argument that the Dahomean monarch reverted to a scale of sacrifice rather more extensive than that associated with his father in the last decade and a half of his reign.

Reports on the 1862 Annual Customs indicate much lower numbers than those of the Grand Customs, but slightly higher than those occurring at the Annual Customs during the latter half of Gezo's reign. Bernasko, for instance, estimated 86 executions, - many of whom were reputed to have come from Ishagga.¹⁰⁸ Other missionary sources confirmed the considerable numbers of victims and the general picture portrayed by Bernasko,¹⁰⁹ though they are of doubtful reliability since the information appears to have been received in the first instance from Bernasko himself via Borghero.

However, there is an eye witness account which is far fuller and which is worth recounting at some length. On the 6 August 1862 Commander Perry reported to the Foreign Office information gleaned from a

Dutchman - Euschart - who had been summoned to Abomey by the King on the grounds that the latter had never previously made the acquaintance of a Dutchman. Perry, stressed the reliability of both his informant - of whom he had previous experience - and of the information which he (Perry) relayed, having himself taken detailed notes of his conversation with the Dutchman.¹¹⁰

Euschart arrived in Abomey on 28 June 1862. On the 15 July he was taken to the market place where he observed a crucified body, allegedly that of Docherty, a Sierra Leone liberated slave turned catechist, who it was claimed had been taken at Ishagga by the Dahomeans.¹¹¹ In front of the palace Euschart observed rows of human heads, "fresh and gory" and the palace itself saturated in blood: evidently Ishagga prisoners who had been killed during the previous few nights. On 10 July Abomey was hit by an earthquake, a phenomenon taken by the King as a sign that his father's spirit was warning that the Customs were not being made in a proper fashion. Three 'messengers', Ishagga chiefs, were summarily dispatched to console Gezo. Twenty four men were then brought out in baskets, thrown from the platform and beheaded by the crowd, each successful decapitation being rewarded by a head of cowries.

The following day Euschart was taken to another part of the town where "exactly similar horrors" were being perpetrated.¹¹² On 12 July all the platforms were taken down and there were no further public sacrifices for 10 days, although Euschart supposed that many took place during the night. On the 22 July, he was taken to see the "Grand Customs" at the King's palace. Two platforms had been erected at the gates: on each platform sixteen men and four horses were placed. Inside

the royal house was another platform in which was placed sixteen women, four horses and one alligator. Both the men and women were Sierra Leone captives and all were dressed in European clothes. Each group of sixteen was placed, bound in chains around a table on which glasses of rum were placed for each person. The King ascended the platform, and the right arm of the captives was loosened to allow them to drink the King's health. The goods of the late King Gezo were then paraded and the troops reviewed. After the review the prisoners, horses and alligators were beheaded, "particular care being taken that their blood should mingle." Euschart was then permitted to leave Abomey.¹¹³

Euschart, then, claimed to have witnessed three executed 'messengers', 24 victims from the normal Customs and 48 victims from what he referred to as the Grand Customs; a total of 75 deaths. However, if July 11th account - "exactly similar horrors" - is taken to refer to the Bush King's platform Customs and another 24 deaths, then the total number of victims was 99; 48 for the normal customs, and 48 for the Grand Customs, plus the three 'messengers'. At the normal customs the platforms had been increased to two, although on different days at different locations. Furthermore, at the Grand Customs, the two platforms were supplemented by a third, inside the palace walls.

If these figures are accurate, they sustain the argument that Glele increased the level of human sacrifice. At the normal Annual Customs Glele had doubled the number of victims (from 24 to 48) compared with Forbes' recollection.¹¹⁴ Since the institution of the 'Bush King' was established after Forbes' visit, but during Gezo's reign, this in itself did not represent an increase by Glele over Gezo. However, at the

'mini' Grand Customs - apparently a minor "Grand Customs" incorporated within the Annual Customs to commemorate Gezo - he introduced three platforms and three multiples of 16 - an additional 48.

Wilmot, who attended Abomey at the time of the 1862 Customs, reported an initial 8, and an additional 14 victims, 7 of which he believed to have been spared - a total of 15 sacrifices.¹¹⁵ Moreover, according to Wilmot, Glele, far from boasting of the restoration of the traditional practice of sacrifices, or the increased level of the numbers involved, actually went out of his way to dismiss the wild reports and speculations of Europeans on the subject.¹¹⁶ In late 1863, Bernasko's report that no sacrifices took place is of less value since he later makes clear that executions did take place, although he categorised them as being confined to the criminal class.¹¹⁷ Burton, in contrast reported that malignant war captives featured as well as criminals,¹¹⁸ although he was as sceptical as Glele of some of the exaggerated reports.¹¹⁹

Burton estimated that there had been little change over the previous 60 years in the scale of sacrifices at the Grand Customs. So far as the Annual customs were concerned, he himself estimated the total at the 1863 customs as "at most 80".¹²⁰ This figure represents an estimate of 39-40 victims in public, and an assumption that an equal number were similarly dispatched inside the walls.¹²¹

On balance, then, contemporary reports suggest that there was indeed an increase in the number of sacrifices under Glele, although less than the somewhat exaggerated claims of some westerners would suggest. Despite the problems of comparability between different forms of Annual Customs, between Grand and Annual Customs, and despite the impossibility

of ascertaining precise numbers of sacrifices at either, there is sufficient evidence to warrant the view that Gezo's death marked the end of progressive reform of human sacrifice and probably led to an increase in the number of victims. Along with the resumption of slave raiding and the slave trade, the restoration of human sacrifice marked a reversion to the social, economic and ideological values traditionally associated with the Dahomean aristocracy.

SLAVE TRADING AND RAIDING 1860-65

Thus by the early 1860's the Dahomean aristocracy had abandoned any attempt to proceed further with the economic and ideological innovations which had been the hallmark of Gezo's later years. The slave trade, slave raiding and human sacrifice were once again placed firmly at the economic and ideological core of Dahomean life.

Throughout the early 1860s the Dahomean slave export trade went through an unparalleled revival. The vigour with which the return to 'martial Dahomey' was pursued is reflected in a reassertion of central control over the export sector. At Whydah the Yevogan retained his position, despite reports of strained relations between him and the new monarch.¹²² Henceforth, however, he was to be accompanied by a direct appointee of Glele, one of the King's relations who supervised all proceedings in which the Yevogan was involved.¹²³

The French 'Free Emigration Scheme' - although short lived - gave a fillip to slave raiding up until its demise in July 1862 and, along with the demand for sacrifice victims, fuelled the Dahomean war machine. Finally, the demand for slaves on the coast was further heightened by the

urgency in need for supplies for Cuba and the Southern States of America in the early years of the '60s. At this time the demand in this area was stimulated by a pressing desire to ship the maximum number of slaves possible before the newly-elected President Lincoln could translate his anti-slavery views into practical action.¹²⁴

It is hardly surprising then, that in the early years of Glele's reign, the Dahomean armies seemed constantly on the march, to provide both slaves for the export sector and sacrifices for his father's customs.¹²⁵ As will be seen later, such constant warring activity could not but affect the palm oil trade - one French source estimated that during this period it was decimated by two thirds by slave raiding and Customs.¹²⁶ In the early months of 1860, literally thousands of slaves awaited shipment from the Whydah barracoons,¹²⁷ and in the course of that year legitimate ships ceased to use the port,¹²⁸ while legitimate traders on the coast itself were subject to persistent harassment.¹²⁹

But what was bad for the palm oil trade was an indication of the new found vitality of the slave trade. Relatively small shipments continued to be made, including the two made from Whydah in April-May 1860.¹³⁰ But the demand for slaves emboldened dealers, and reports of much larger shipments began to percolate through. In September 1860 almost 500 slaves were shipped on board the barque Buckyee.¹³¹ And it was also during the early '60s that 1100 slaves were successfully embarked from Dahomey to Panama on the Liverpool built steamer Cicéron.¹³² More impressive than anything which had gone before in terms of sheer volume, a reported embarkation of no less than 1600 slaves was made from Whydah

on the screw steamer Hoc Aquí on 25 March 1862.¹³³ In October a further shipment of more than 1000 slaves was successfully made at Agoué.¹³⁴

Almost certainly the bulk of these captives derived from the human spoils taken at Ishagga, which was taken by the Dahomean army with thousands of captives in early 1862.¹³⁵ This victory may also have been responsible for the supply of captives which went to make up a further large shipment of 1000 slaves some months later; though the actual shipment was made from Agoué, the slaves had been transported there from Whydah prior to embarkation.¹³⁶

And it was also during this period that one regular visitor to Whydah, the Nordagny, was reputed to have taken off 4000 slaves in five trips over the three years 1859-62.¹³⁷

The British anti-slave force was ill-prepared for a renaissance of this magnitude. At this point there were no more than two cruisers stationed on the Bight of Benin and hard-pressed British officials remonstrated at their lack of numbers.¹³⁸ The ineffectiveness of the British anti-slave activity was further increased by their lack of intervention on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly around Havannah.¹³⁹

Such large scale successful shipments must have provided not only welcome economic sustenance for the Dahomean exchequer, but a practical vindication of the new conservatism. Each successful shipment further encouraged widespread slave raiding.¹⁴⁰

The actual operation of the production of slaves for export during this period is relatively well documented. The bulk of the exported

slaves appear to have been derived directly from raids by the Dahomean army, in contrast to the position between 1852 and the late 1850s.¹⁴¹ In the case of slaves provided by the army and destined for export, the mechanics remained relatively straightforward. After a successful raid, the monarch and his leaders retired to Abomey to extol and debate their victory; there, the King laid claim to the captives, distributing prize money in return.¹⁴² Of the slaves claimed by the monarch, some were distributed to his favourites,¹⁴³ some set aside for sacrifice, and some sold to the coastal traders at the prevailing price in the early 1860s of 80 dollars a head.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the sale of 1000 slaves rendered a return to the monarch of almost 80,000 dollars, the equivalent of £20,000 or 1,000 tons of palm oil. Alternatively, 4,000 dollars would be payable to him as an export tax on 1,000 slaves sold by those other than himself.¹⁴⁵ The captives themselves would be barracooned at Whydah and shipped from there or other outlying ports when and if the opportunity afforded itself.

For slaves procured by Dahomean dealers other than through the monarch, the diffuse pattern established in the late 1840s persisted. Slaves purchased at markets such as Porto Novo Town and Badagry were often temporarily employed as domestic slaves in the trading establishments of the slave dealers in these towns.¹⁴⁶ Thereafter, they might be brought together in gangs and shipped from one of the smaller ports or shipping points on the coast.¹⁴⁷ Alternatively, they were often sent in small groups to Whydah to await shipment.¹⁴⁸

As ever, the system of lagoons and outlets provided excellent facilities, whether for gathering the dispersed slaves together, or for

moving them quickly to an outlying beach port for a sudden shipment.¹⁴⁹ This lagoon system allowed the use of large stretches of coast as potential collection and shipping points. The newly arrived Consul Foote,¹⁵⁰ gave a good indication of the decentralised and geographically dispersed nature of this side of the Trade soon after his arrival on the coast. In outlining the great benefit to the Trade of the lagoon system he echoed the points made by Freeman some two decades previously:

"The inhabitants of the towns of Badagry, Porto Novo, Appi, Jackin, Whydah, Great and Little Popoe, Ahguay etc are all more or less interested in the traffic for slaves." reported Foote.¹⁵¹

This geographical spread also allowed word of visiting Cruisers to be passed quickly along the coast. Foote's comments are worth quoting at some length.

"The slaves to be shipped are scattered in parties of five and six at the different agencies of the Brazilian factories. They are normally household slaves - the Brazilian merchant has houses of business at Lagos and other places. He sends for some more hands to work at his factories at Whydah etc. The Cruizer gets tired of waiting: although the commander sees a Brazilian Brigantine or two at anchor he sees nothing suspicious on board of her - she is probably loading a few casks of palm oil and he goes off the land - a few hours after the Brigantine can purchase from the Bristol trader alongside of him what stores he wants - the empty oil casks on shore in the compound of the Brazilian are filled with water, during the night the slaves scattered here and there (for nearly all slaves cargoes are joint stock concerns) are collected and shipped before daylight and the slaver is soon off and out of sight. The Cruizer is outside, but at this season, the Harmattan and hazy state of the atmosphere common to the coast and more dense than a London fog allows the slaver to get well off from the land."¹⁵²

It was for this reason that the Dahomean leadership, given the experiences of 1849-52, had little to fear from a limited British blockade. It was for this reason also, that British officials in the area had good reason to doubt if anything other than actual occupation of the beach from Cape St. Pauls right through to Lagos could effectively stop the export traffic.¹⁵³

In fact, British action when it did occur had a much more limited object. Unable to threaten Whydah from the sea with any reasonable prospect of coercing the Dahomeans, and considering an attack on Abomey by way of the lagoons unfeasible,¹⁵⁴ they launched their political and naval attack against a more vulnerable target - the King of Porto Novo.

Ostensibly, the dispute with Porto Novo arose on account of the seizure of palm oil by the King of that town. On 5 February 1861, Foote, Consul at Lagos, accused the King of seizing oil from English traders, of stifling their trade and favouring Brazilian slave dealers, all in contravention of the 1852 Treaty. The King denied the charge although he stated that he refused to allow English traders to establish factories at Porto Novo. On 24 February, Foote and the Royal Navy steamer Brune arrived at Porto Novo and demanded that the King board and comply with the British demands. On his refusal the British opened fire on the town on 25 February. As a direct result of this the chiefs of Badagry, acting as middlemen, arrived in Lagos with the King of Porto Novo's offer to comply. The British drew up additional articles to the 1852 Treaty, specifying the right of the English to buy houses and land, and the right of an English agent to live in Porto Novo with guards when this was deemed necessary.¹⁵⁵

In fact, although supposed infringements against British citizens no doubt played a part in these events, it seems clear that the object of the exercise was as much aimed at Dahomey as at Porto Novo. Firstly, as an attempt to restrict the Dahomean slave trade "on the flanks"; and, secondly, to create a diversion to deflect the King of Dahomey from a suspected further attack on Abeokuta.¹⁵⁶

A second bombardment of Porto Novo, in April 1861, assured the continued opening of trade and signalled British commitment towards this end to all the interior peoples. In pursuit of their by now openly interventionist stance, the British attempted to stop the interior war between the Yoruba nations, establish Abeokuta as an anti-Dahomean bulwark and check the "aggressive" spirit of the King of Dahomey by the annexation of Lagos.¹⁵⁷ By August of that year, after naval action, Dosunmi had ceded Lagos to the British, and within 18 months the French, in response, had established a Protectorate over Porto Novo.¹⁵⁸

Despite such attempts, and their heightened activity at Lagos, the British could have little effect on a Dahomean slave trade which was now fuelled to a greater extent than at any time since 1852 by the slave raiding of the Dahomeans themselves. Throughout 1861 and 1862 the raids and slave exports continued,¹⁵⁹ culminating in the attack on Ishagga. And, as a corollary, the lavish scale of human sacrifice at the Customs also continued.¹⁶⁰ The new lease of life which had been given to the slave trade was not to last long, but in the early years of the 1860s the Dahomean leadership must have felt vindicated in their decisions to reassert the martial spirit and the slave raiding practices on which their traditional greatness had been built.

DISRUPTION TO THE PALM OIL TRADE 1858-62

The revival of the most martial aspects of the Dahomean state could not but have an adverse effect on the palm oil trade. Up until around 1858 it had shown every sign of a flourishing and sustained growth for around half a decade. But the corollary of the upswing of the slave trade in the area of Dahomey in 1857-8 was a downturn in the palm oil commerce. This was true of the Bights as a whole but it was reported that "the greatest decrease in the (palm oil) trade in . . . 1858 as compared with . . . 1857 is in parts westward of Badagri - say Porto Novo, Whydah, Ahquay etc.," by 1858 this had dropped by an estimated 2500 tons to 6000 tons.¹⁶¹ The confident reports of the mid-1850s¹⁶² had given way to more sombre assessments.¹⁶³ Despite the occasional and optimistic accounts by some western observers over the next few years,¹⁶⁴ the reality was that the export trade in palm oil at Whydah remained static at around 2500/3000 tons per annum.¹⁶⁵

So far as the actual production of palm oil was concerned, during the period of commercial growth the use of plantation slaves continued to expand. Despite the predominance of the warrior ethos the monarch's entry into oil production, via the Bush King, had some success in overcoming the dishonour in the application of slaves to plantation production of oil.¹⁶⁶ This applied even after slave raiding had resumed. And since the monarch effectively controlled the distribution of war captives, he was thus in a position to control the flow of labour by distribution of slaves to his favourites.¹⁶⁷

Many such plantations owned by the King and his ministers,¹⁶⁸ were situated in the area of Abomey itself, and it is probably from around

this period that the palm oil plantations identified on later maps by the French originate. Following the tradition of his father, Glele in turn established villages of captives; villages such as Itako and Ishagga, conquests of Glele's reign, took their place alongside Lefu-Lefu.¹⁶⁹

The King's ministers too had farms and palm oil plantations on the outskirts of Abomey. The Yevogan, for instance, controlled the hereditary family village of Dokon, about two miles to the east of the Kana Gate of the capital, a village surrounded by fine palm plantations.¹⁷⁰ The growth of plantation production and the ease of access to small export transactions in oil, occasionally stolen oil, led to friction between plantation owners and slaves as noted a decade later by Laffitte.¹⁷¹

On the coast the revival of the slave trade meant that the agricultural development which had been hoped for and anticipated by European observers since the 1830s did not materialise. Indeed during this period it appears that agriculture regressed rather than progressed in the immediate hinterland of Whydah. The occasional palm orchard remained, but agriculture in general deteriorated and the well kept farms remarked upon by Duncan in the mid 1840s were by the early 1860s, reported gone.¹⁷²

This resulted partly from the adherence of the slave traders on the coast to their old trade. But it is also likely that the level of expansion which plantation slavery was capable of attaining was limited by factors related to domestic stability. An indefinite number of slaves could not be absorbed within Dahomey without the danger of creating internal social instability. This was particularly true in

relation to slaves allocated to plantation production, who were bereft of the hybrid characteristics of family member and slave enjoyed by traditional domestic slaves. On the contrary, under the conditions of plantation slavery solidarity is evoked with fellow slaves, rather than the master. If plantation slavery or plantation villages were to be developed on any scale, it was wiser to do so in areas which were situated close to the ultimate sanction of military force. To allow the unlimited expansion of internal slave holdings in areas far removed from the capital would be to court political and social instability. In fact, precisely one such scare had been reported in Dahomey in mid 1855. McCoskrey reported that:

"the whole kingdom of Dahomey is in a state of panic, having just discovered that the Egbas have an extensive conspiracy among the Anagoos, and other tribes of analogous origin, slaves to the Portuguese at Whydah, and to natives in other parts of the country; and that the Egbas are now ready to go on an expedition into Dahomey. Their friends or supposed friends have however been seized, sent to Abomey and the King is calling his people from all quarters to defend their territory; so great is the panic in Whydah, Godomey, and other places where white men are, that, to prevent all from taking flight, the King allows no egress."¹⁷³

Whatever the accuracy of reports of the Egba conspiracy, the threat of a slave revolt appears to have been taken sufficiently seriously to warrant dramatic action on the part of the King. The lessons could not have been lost on the monarch and his ministers. Development of internal slave numbers to the extent required in order to make plantation production of palm oil as financially lucrative as the slave trade involved a serious threat to the stability of the Dahomean state.

In general, despite the growth of large scale production of palm oil it remained relatively underdeveloped by the 1860s, and certainly did not represent the dominant feature of the Dahomean economy. By the 1860s those, like Régis, who had been predicting widespread plantation production for over 20 years could only continue to express their vague hopes.¹⁷⁴ His assertion that: ". . . It is a question of the large slave owners deciding to apply them to agricultural production: it is a question of time which can't have to wait much longer for resolution"¹⁷⁵ displayed a gross underestimation of the complex implications of such a move. By 1860 small producers continued to be the mainstay of palm oil export production, more often than not in return for a small portion of tobacco.¹⁷⁶ And the revival of the slave trade in Dahomey, in which Régis himself played no small part, was to delay for some time the resolution of his simple 'question'.

By 1859, the effects of a return to slave raiding were apparent and the increase and expansion of the palm oil trade had been well and truly halted in Dahomey. One story is illustrative. In the second half of 1859, a British ship, the David Cross (Capt. Johns), owned by Moon Adlan and Co., had twice called back at Godomey in pursuit of palm oil from José dos Santos in return for cargo landed there earlier in the year. Out of a total contracted amount of almost 17,000 gallons, dos Santos had been willing, or able, to deliver less than 7000 gallons. He eventually pleaded that his non-deliverance was on the orders of the King of Dahomey, but this was vehemently denied by the Yevogan who interceded to obtain settlement. Significantly, the settlement was subsequently made in dollars rather than palm oil.¹⁷⁷

This incident highlights the fall in production of palm oil in the area. But it is probably also illustrative of deeper problems related to the palm oil trade which were beginning to surface in kingdoms adjacent to Dahomey, and possibly to some extent inside the Kingdom itself.

At the beginning of the 1859 palm oil season, around February/March, the King of Porto Novo had stopped the palm oil trade for a full two months. Campbell, under pressure from British commercial interests in the area, particularly in Badagri, hastened to Porto Novo to investigate and bring the stoppage to a hasty conclusion. The British official was told:

" . . . that the British and other traders now gave the makers of the oil so extravagant a price for it that the chiefs who bought it from the makers to sell again could make no profit on it."¹⁷⁸

In effect, the chiefs' complaint was not so much related to the high prices being paid by the traders, as to the fact that the prices were being paid direct to the producers. The King and chiefs were demanding that:

" . . . a certain measure of oil for which the traders and super cargoes were willing to pay the price of ten heads of cowrie (23/-) should be sold by the makers of the oil (the inhabitants of the distant villages) - for five heads of cowries to the King's wives and chiefs who would then sell it to the traders and supercargoes at the higher price".¹⁷⁹

Faced with an undermining of their control of the new trade by the normal operation of the free market, the chiefs had resorted to political intervention in order to ensure themselves a significant share in the produce and returns. However, in turn the producers, faced with the

demands of the chiefs, and aware of the significant difference between the 'political price' and the 'market price' at the coast, refused to sell and had stopped bringing their oil to Porto Novo market. Campbell put it rather more bluntly:

"Against this gross injustice that the drones around the King's palace should derive so large a profit out of the industry of the laborious bees, the villagers naturally revolted; they refused to bring oil to the Porto Novo market and ceased manufacturing any more".¹⁸⁰

Effectively, they instituted an oil strike. Under this pressure, and the remonstrations and threats of the British, the King and chiefs relented and reluctantly proclaimed the annulment of their previous decree. The King of Porto Novo signed a mercantile treaty granting free commercial intercourse in return for an income from tax on palm oil. But this was achieved in the face of fierce opposition from a section of his chiefs.¹⁸¹ A treaty of similar intent was signed by the Badagrian chiefs and the flow of oil, via Porto Novo to Badagri greatly increased thereafter.¹⁸²

This incident at Porto Novo would be of passing interest were it not for the fact there is some evidence that the reaction of the Porto Novian chiefs was paralleled by events elsewhere. Already in March of that year there were reports reaching the coast of similar stoppages of the palm oil trade in the interior. According to one witness, who claimed to have spoken to the King of Ijebu on the subject of stoppages of trade, the King had informed him:

". . . that he was acting in this matter in concert with the chiefs of Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijaye and Illorin, who were all opposed to the palm oil trade as it yielded them no profit, and that their people occupied themselves too exclusively with this trade, neglecting their plantations and other work, by which the price of provisions had increased greatly".¹⁸³

According to this report, the King of Ijebu asserted his determination to put down the trade, remarking that he had already executed some persons for attempting to smuggle oil to the market. Campbell, who some years previously had remarked on the marvellously liberating aspects of the trade for both chiefs and natives,¹⁸⁴ was now adopting a more realistic assessment of the consequence of the trade:

"the present hostile movements against the palm oil trade is evidently a combination of slave trade chiefs, who are unfortunately, able to put into force the frightfully despotic powers they possess to put down a commerce which altho' it may bring them but little revenue, they evidently perceive is elevating the position of the masses of the population over whom they have hitherto exercised such despotic sway".¹⁸⁵

There is no direct evidence to suggest that either Gezo in his later years, or Glele who succeeded him were at this stage sufficiently concerned about the effects of the new trade to attempt political intervention to prohibit it. Stoppages had, of course, occurred and continued to do so, but up until the late 1850s early 1860s, the evidence suggests that these were related to specific disputes rather than a general opposition to the trade per se. However, Glele did prohibit, under pain of death, the cultivation of ground nuts, another commodity marketable to western dealers in the early years of his reign.¹⁸⁶

This suggests that the concern expressed by the King and chiefs of Ijebu Ode was not altogether lacking in the Dahomean monarch. Cultivation of

ground nuts, over and above the internal and domestic needs interfered with the warrior ethos of his people, as well as his mobilisation procedures. Glele had more fear of his nation losing their warrior outlook than their agricultural development.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, he continued to permit palm oil production for both internal use and with a view to export. The reason probably derives from four aspects of contemporary palm oil production.

Firstly, the domestic production of palm oil was enormous and its utility all pervasive. Secondly, the trade had not only been permitted, but actually encouraged and fostered under Gezo. Such a rapid disavowal of his father's ways would have been politically inconvenient for the new King whose expressed aim was to pursue Gezo's policies.

As a corollary of this, it was much simpler to prohibit or curtail the internal production of an embryonic commodity, like groundnuts, than one which had already established itself as marketable produce for over a quarter of a century by the early 1860s.

But there was one further factor which was of crucial importance in relation to the warrior practice and ethos of Dahomey; an important distinction could be made between the production process of palm oil and that of ground nuts. The answer is provided by a contemporary French source:

" . . . le commerce de huile de Palme est . . . permis, parce qu'il ne faut aucun soin, et, comme il n'est pas nécessaire que la récolte soit faite à époque précise, le Roi ne risque pas e'être gêné quand il veut faire partir tout son Monde en expédition . . ." ¹⁸⁸

In short, the production process for palm oil was such that it did not obviously interfere with the production process with slaves.¹⁸⁹ This

was not the case with ground nuts. Thus, from the Dahomean aristocracy's point of view, the production of palm oil was still permissible since it did not interfere with the annual raid. However, from the point of view of the potential producer of palm oil, the interference of the annual raid greatly limited both the quantity and quality of his palm produce, a curtailment which was to lead to growing discontent in the future.¹⁹⁰

Thus, the revival of slave demand on the Dahomean coast, the revival of Dahomean involvement in slave trading, and even later the re-start of Dahomean production of slaves for the coastal trade, could all be sustained, at least in the short term, without the prohibition of the palm oil trade. If the palm oil trade did not yet offer a more substantial material basis to the political power of the Dahomean leadership, it was not yet seen as a sufficient threat to warrant its curtailment. The two activities were not mutually exclusive.¹⁹¹

But, a resumption of slave trading, by its very nature, interrupted the operation of legitimate commerce inside Dahomey as well as in its hinterland raiding ground. This was particularly so in the early part of Glele's reign when tradition demanded that a prolonged and comprehensive Grand Customs for the death of his father accompany the resumption of slave trading.¹⁹² Not unnaturally, such a disruption to the previously prospering palm oil trade was bound to cause some discontent internally, particularly in the coastal area whence emanated reports that the ceremonies and war mobilisation had eroded two thirds of the oil trade.¹⁹³ This undercurrent of discontent was to continue throughout the early years of Glele's reign.¹⁹⁴

Such discontent as was reported may not have been confined merely to the western dealers at the coast. There is some evidence to suggest that the growth of the palm oil trade in the first three quarters of the 1850s had given rise to a class of native merchants, separate from both the coastal palm oil dealers and the Axisinon. These native dealers, traders and collectors of palm oil, would have been largely superfluous under the operations of even the, by now, more diffuse operations of the slave trade. But the palm oil trade demanded a far more numerous and dispersed network of collectors/traders.

Lartigue drew attention to this class of merchants, Mercaders, at the 1860 customs:

"Tous les marchands d'huile, appelés Mercaders, ont offert collectivement leur victimes; un grand nombre d'animaux, 23 captifs - fatigué à tuer, le roi a pardonné beaucoup de ces derniers".¹⁹⁵

Lartigue's comment suggests that by 1860 not only was the existence of such native, independent traders well enough established to be perceived as a distinct group, but that they were accorded such status by the monarch himself. However, as his quotation above also indicates, if they had misgivings about the direction of Dahomean policy they were - in public at least - keeping them to themselves.

Thus throughout the 1850s, the palm oil trade achieved a sustained, if limited growth. While the development of plantation-based production did not take place on such a widespread scale as anticipated by some European observers, there is evidence that it did develop to some extent, particularly around the capital of Abomey. In addition, there is evidence to suggest a sustained growth in the palm oil trade, both from

the point of view of the large dealers like Domingo Martinez and also as regards the proliferation of smaller traders involved in the collection and distribution network from the production source to the actual export of palm oil at the coast. However, by the turn of the decade, the period of growth was interrupted by several factors. While there was no outright prohibition placed on the trade or on the production for export, the renewed military activity which took place in the early years of Gezo's reign was not conducive to the growth of the trade. In addition, the commerce in palm oil around that time suffered from factors outside the control of the Dahomean polity. In particular, fluctuations in quantity and price in the supply side became increasingly common. While on the demand side, new competition from petrol and tallows combined with the interruptions of the American Civil War, further undermined the growth in the legitimate trade.¹⁹⁶

The late 1850s and early 1860s marked the institution of fiscal mechanisms on the west coast intended to formalise taxation income from palm oil for African leaders. The King of Porto Novo, for instance, received in 1858 a tax income of one head of cowries on every puncheon of palm oil shipped from Badagry beach, traditionally regarded as the port of Porto Novo Town.¹⁹⁷ On June 17, 1861 the King also signed a British treaty securing to himself an income from tax on palm oil.¹⁹⁸ Within Dahomey itself the monarch still maintained his tax on all palm oil commerce. On internal trade the King's agents, the Decimeros, were stationed in each village and levied a tax on all who passed in addition to the tax levied in the actual palm oil factories themselves.¹⁹⁹ Taxation on palm oil dealers and visiting ships was more complex.

Merchants on occasions paid an annual charge or tribute irrespective of the number of vessels calling at their factories,²⁰⁰ or occasionally by declaring a nominal volume of imports with samples of the trade goods being dispatched to Abomey for final arbitration as to what quality, quantity and selection of goods should constitute payment to the King.²⁰¹ The duty varied between that levied on the cargo of a barque (£75-£90) and that on a brig (around £50-£60) on the basis of the number of masts on the vessel.²⁰² Finally, duty might be paid in kind, about 2%, as the goods were landed.²⁰³ And, in keeping with the age-old Dahomean tradition, once the goods were landed on shore they could not be reshipped; it was a custom which European traders were obliged to accept, however reluctantly.²⁰⁴

But the extent of the monarch's fiscal income from the new commerce must have been curtailed by renewed raiding, since there is no doubt that from the late 1850s until mid-1865 the revitalised Dahomean slave raiding expeditions seriously hampered the palm oil trade. Firstly, mobilisation for war interfered with collection of the fruit and the actual production of oil as well as general trading.²⁰⁵ In addition, the prolonged Customs and festivities in which the people of Dahomey were called to take part in the early part of Glele's reign provided a further obstacle.²⁰⁶ Finally, the relatively lucrative returns from a regenerated slave trade and the stoppages of the road which that entailed did little to encourage export production or internal transportation of palm oil.²⁰⁷ These factors, supplemented by normal disruptions to trade through fires or local domestic disputes, seriously constrained the potential growth of the new commerce. It has already been noted that

one French observer estimated that the palm oil trade during this period fell by around two thirds of its previous level.²⁰⁸ The situation was exacerbated by the practice of ships allocating their whole cargo to one trader on shore, which undoubtedly resulted in at least a proportion of such cargo being used in the traffic of the revived slave trade and in the eventual non-payment of the expected oil.²⁰⁹

DOMESTIC POLITICS: CENTRALISATION AND DISCONTENT

If the restoration of traditional martial Dahomey adversely affected the palm oil interest, it was also accompanied domestically by the new monarch's assertion of his rule upon the kingdom. Glele centralised the judicial process, abolished the 'Brehon' Judges established by his father, and took by himself cases of alleged adultery involving Amazons.²¹⁰ To strengthen control over matters at Whydah he appointed one of his immediate relations, Prince Chuydaton, to work alongside and oversee the Yevogan.²¹¹ In due course this prince came to be regarded as particularly sympathetic by the western establishment,²¹² and both he and the Yevogan tended to be exonerated from 'the odium of acts which are dictated by the King himself' by British officials.²¹³ But there is no doubt that the prince was initially chosen as a particular ally of Glele's.²¹⁴ This 'twinning' of appointments was carried out in other major posts of state and the system of appointing members of the royal family to such positions represented a major innovation in Dahomean politics.²¹⁵

Glele's aggressive re-assertion of the military aspect of Dahomean life was not achieved without creating some internal animosity,

particularly among legitimate traders at Whydah.²¹⁶ This was perhaps to be expected. Glele did not directly intervene to prohibit trade - although he did decree against cultivation of sugar cane, coffee, rice or tobacco, particularly around the Whydah area, as his father had previously curtailed the production of ground nuts other than for domestic use.²¹⁷ The restrictions upon the growth of legitimate commerce stemmed more from the disruptions caused by slave raiding and temporary depopulation through mobilisation for the army.²¹⁸ The French in particular felt that they had suffered as a result of the change in monarch.²¹⁹

Similarly, the effective re-assertion of traditional Dahomean values marred the relationship between the Dahomean hierarchy and Christian Missionaries. The Methodists had originally been allowed to establish themselves at Whydah in the wake of Freeman's 1843 visit as part of Gezo's policy of encouraging commercial contact with the west. However, while the first Roman Catholic Missionaries were allowed to establish themselves in Dahomey in 1861, the attitude of the Dahomean authorities had cooled considerably. To the new King, the "tender hearts" which the missionaries sought to develop smacked of cowardice; their education implied a diversion from military training: and the missionaries did not even have the saving grace of being commercial catalysts, in order to compensate for their misleading doctrines.²²⁰ Thus, from the King's point of view, they were to be allowed to stay provided they understood their place and attended Abomey when ordered.²²¹ The missionaries, of course, attributed this turn of events more to the personal wickedness of the new monarch than to the changing economic situation.²²²

There is some evidence, however, that European interests were not the only ones who were feeling increasingly antagonistic towards the Dahomean ruling class. Contemporary reports suggest a state of domestic dissatisfaction with the new monarch sufficiently widespread as to hold out the threat of internal revolution.²²³ Inevitably, such reports were coloured by injured commercial prospects, but a return to economic decline would almost certainly involve an aggressive response by a hierarchy which had been afforded short term relief by the revival of the slave trade between 1857-63. By the end of that period the situation was once more in a state of flux.

THE FINAL DECLINE OF THE SLAVE TRADE

The upturn in the Dahomean Trade had coincided with that in Cuba, and it has been suggested earlier that, partly as a result of the French Free Emigration Scheme, the two were linked by more than chronology. The demand for slaves in Cuba, however, had received a stimulus from another quarter. Cuba had long been a supply medium for slaves for the southern states of North America, where the expansion of cotton production and the annexation of large areas of underdeveloped land like Texas had increased the demand for slaves far beyond the capacity of domestic breeding in North America. In the late 1850s demand for slaves and for the repeal of anti-slaving legislation reached a crescendo.²²⁴ Two additional factors had converted this demand into a boon for the Cuban slave trade.

Firstly, the virtual demise of any action by the British anti-slave Cruizers in the Havannah area occurred after a number of embarrassing and widely publicised incidents with North American vessels in 1858.²²⁵

Secondly, the late 1850s also saw the prospect of Lincoln coming to power in the North on an active anti-slavery platform²²⁶ A coalescence of these factors had ensured record imports of slaves into Cuba in 1859 - in which year alone it was estimated that over 30,000 slaves were imported - and in 1860 and 1861.²²⁷

There is no doubt, from the incidence of Spanish-American shipments that Dahomey had been among the chief beneficiaries of this upswing. A demand led boom in the slave trade, dictated by events well outwith the control of the Dahomeans themselves, was a twin-edged sword. Though lucrative in the short term, it could evaporate as quickly as it had arrived. And so it proved.

By July 1861, the French Government had effectively conceded that the Emigration Scheme would end by mid-1862. By a cruel coincidence, from the Dahomean point of view, 1862 also marked the virtual demise of the Cuban/North American trade. In March 1861, Lincoln assumed office in North America and within a month the country was on its way to Civil War. The Cuban slave trade, which had been at its height between 1859 and early 1861, had virtually ceased by the end of the following year, falling back to the low level of the mid-1850s.²²⁸ Though the Cuban trade lingered on until the mid-1860s, with occasional shipments thereafter, 1862 marked the beginning of the terminal decline of the South American slave trade.

DEFEAT AT ABEOKUTA: 1864

By the beginning of 1864 the demand side of the trade was already in serious decline, but the baracoons at Whydah were full.²²⁹ By

mid-1864, the Dahomean slave trade had not only lost its "demand factor", but had also lost its army - its most lucrative means of supplying slaves.²³⁰

In an uncanny echo of the 1850s, disaster struck on the 15th March 1864 when the Dahomeans led by Glele were routed in their attack on Abeokuta.²³¹

The details of the engagement have been sufficiently well covered in other works to need no repetition here.²³²

Suffice it to say that Dahomean casualties were numbered in thousands and they lost heavily not only in terms of men, but also in arms. Further, in addition to the loss of his initial outlay and any hope of a return on it, Glele also suffered subsequent loss involved in the ransom of his captured soldiers. The economic situation of King and country was deteriorating annually.

The defeat by the Egba was a severe blow for the Dahomeans. It was possible to ransom at least some Dahomeans who had been captured and to some extent this was done, either by individual Dahomeans in pursuit of relatives,²³³ or by the King through the payment of palm oil.²³⁴

But inevitably, the Dahomean army was severely reduced in both men and arms, and in addition the initial outlay costs for the annual raids remained unrecompensed in terms of captives.²³⁵ Under normal circumstances such losses would have been severe enough. In a situation where the monarch was already suffering from dramatic economic decline in his ailing export slave trade it was little short of a disaster. To recoup ammunitions took time; and time was not on the Warrior's side, for the slave trade was in its death throes.

From the mid-1860s onwards, despite references by occasional western officials to the wealth of the King of Dahomey being based on the slave

trade,²³⁶ the export trade from Dahomey had, to all intents and purposes, effectively ceased. 1865 marked the effective end of the Atlantic Trade with Cuba despite occasional shipments thereafter.²³⁷ By the beginning of the 1870s the slave barracoons at Whydah, for over two centuries the most notorious final embarkation point of Dahomean slaves destined for the Atlantic crossing, had been transformed into powder stores for a French commercial House.²³⁸

The demise of the Atlantic trade did not, of course, mark the end of the internal slave trade, nor of slave raiding. Abomey remained a stopping place on the circuit of Hausa caravans seeking slave purchases.²³⁹ In the west, along the Mono River, these Hausa merchants also included slaves among their dealings.²⁴⁰ But both the scale of such transactions, and the price at which slaves changed hands were well below the heady days of the thriving Atlantic Trade.²⁴¹ The consequent economic deterioration manifested itself most of all in Whydah which rapidly fell into physical ruin.²⁴² Unsubstantiated reports of slave shipments occasionally filtered through,²⁴³ but these were by far the exception rather than the rule. Each spring the King led his army on the annual raid, mainly for the supply of the internal slave trade. But the economic benefits deriving from a combination of this and the palm oil trade and other sources of available revenue were insufficient to maintain a monarch and state structure which had been built up and expanded on the basis of a lucrative and thriving Atlantic Trade.²⁴⁴ The results were apparent in both the palm oil trade and in the internal political developments within Dahomey itself.

BACK TO DIPLOMACY 1863

Even before the defeat at Abeokuta, the result of these events - the ending of the French scheme and the rapid decline of the Cuban trade - were, by 1863, having an effect on the attitude of the Dahomean leadership. Once again they responded to developments in the Atlantic trade with the same sense of 'realpolitik' which had marked the reign of Gezo.

To be sure, Glele, had no more intention than his father had had before him of abandoning the slave trade while demand for slaves continued. The experiences of 1852-7 had taught him and the rest of the Dahomean polity the political and economic difficulties of replacing the Trade. And the past three decades had also illustrated the resilience of a trade which, despite temporary slumps, obstinately refused to die. Thus, despite this latest decline in demand in the export sector, occasional shipments could still be expected: and the pattern of lavish Customs, restored by Glele on his father's death, could not suddenly be abandoned. Captives were still needed; the King of Dahomey was still the Warrior. Accordingly, Glele led his troops on the annual raid in 1863, as before.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, perceptible and significant changes in approach were already appearing by that year. Glele had initially come to power vowing adherence to the customs of his father in relation to the slave trade and annual sacrifice; but he was not to exhibit his father's diplomatic finesse in a re-enactment of the Dahomean-British negotiations of the late 1840s.

The opportunity for exercising such diplomacy arose out of various missions on the west coast by Commodore Wilmot in mid-1863. Wilmot had been dispatched as a conciliator by a British colonial office desperately trying to steer a path through a maze of conflicting British commercial, political and missionary interests which had sprouted as a corollary to the internecine wars which had been a feature of the Yoruba interior since 1859.²⁴⁶

However, tangential to this, Wilmot had, in December of the year before, gone to Abomey on a private visit to Glele with a view to discussing the slave trade and related issues. His record of private conversations with Glele could easily be taken for an account of any one of the numerous discussions which had previously taken place between Gezo and a long series of British ambassadors. On these visits by Wilmot, Glele started by complimenting the English and expressing his country's history of love and loyalty to them, while querying recent English hostility towards Dahomey. He re-iterated the view that the slave trade had been carried on in his country for centuries and it was his major means of surviving and paying his own people. If he gave up the slave trade, he asked, from where would he derive his revenue? He would sell palm oil if people came for it, but with his vast, obligatory outlay every year he could not live on it alone. In any case, he asserted, he did not ship slaves himself; it was the white men who came for them and he merely sold them.²⁴⁷

Despite Wilmot's protestations and warnings of an imminent decline in the Trade, Glele reminded him of the potential income - 80 dollars a head per slave and four dollars export tax on each slave shipped. And, quite

apart from the economic aspects of the case, Glele outlined - not for the first time to a British official - the political implications. The slave trade had become "an institution of his country . . . I cannot stop it all at once: what will my people do? and besides this, I should be in danger of losing my life."²⁴⁸

The oft-proclaimed exasperation of British officials at the supposed inconsistency in the views of the Dahomean polity appears inexplicable when gauged against the record of successive conversations between such officials and Dahomean monarchs. Once again, in Glele's conversations with Wilmot, a Dahomean monarch explicitly and categorically outlined to a British ambassador the central economic and political relevance of the slave trade in Dahomean life, and specifically, in the survival of the monarchy.

In refusing Wilmot's implicit offer of compensation, Glele once more adopted the position that it would be impossible to abandon the Trade "all at once." Similarly, while denying what he claimed were exaggerated accounts of the extent of his human sacrifices, he explained that these too were ancient customs which could not be abandoned "all at once".²⁴⁹ Such institutions could not be stopped in this fashion; "bye and bye, little by little, much may be done; softly, softly, not by threats. You see how I am placed."²⁵⁰ Glele was employing exactly the tactics which had previously been adopted by Gezo when faced with the decline in the slave trade in the late 1840s: implicit promises of the potential for gradual change; concessions amounting to little more than pleasantries, while seeking British support, or at least neutrality, regarding his general military adventures, and his specific designs on Abeokuta.

In the light of previous expositions of the Dahomean point of view such remarks cannot be regarded as merely the opinions of Glele himself. They amounted to part of a calculated, consistent and systematic diplomatic response to the threatened disruption of the slave trade. Within one month of Wilmot's visit to Abomey exactly the same message was being relayed to Britain through missionaries on the Dahomean coast. Bernasko was approached by the Yevogan and his "shadow", Glele's appointee at Whydah, and informed that the monarch could not give up the slave trade "all at once", because of his responsibility to and the anticipated reaction from, his subjects. However, the British were assured, the situation would have improved by the time of the Commodore's second visit.²⁵¹

The benefit of hindsight, of course, was available to some British officials as well as to the Dahomeans themselves. Not all the British representatives on the coast were as sympathetic as Wilmot. In particular, Freeman regarded Wilmot's visit as an open admission to Glele of British weakness, particularly if the former was again allowed to raise the matter of financial subsidies as compensation for abolition of the slave trade.²⁵²

However, from 1863 onwards the developments which had conditioned Glele's conciliatory tone continued to have effect on the Dahomean coast. Despite Glele's outward optimism, a dying slave trade once more cast a gloom over his slaving ports. Burton depicted well the decaying gloom of the main entrepot, Whydah, towards the end of 1863.

There is now no society in Whydah; the quondam millionaires retain their hospitality, but not the means of gratifying it. The old days of sporting picnics and processions, of dancing, loving, drinking and playing are gone, probably never to return. The place is temporarily ruined and dull as dull can be, except when the occasional breaking of the blockade gives it a kind of Talvanic life . . . All here is now in a transition state . . . they allow their houses to fall, their plantations to become bush, their streets to be half grown with rank grass, and their swamps to reek unrestrained . . ."253

Once more, the occupation of slave exporting had become akin to gambling.²⁵⁴ The pattern of shipping which had been established during previous slumps in the Trade as a result of cruizer activity was again in evidence. The prospects of loss inhibited any one trader risking a full cargo on his own account. The larger traders still dispatched slaves in hundreds, but the complement was made up by a large number of small traders who each dispatched a relatively small number of slaves.²⁵⁵ The dealers were generally paid half the agreed slave price on embarkation and the rest, subject to extremely heavy freight charges, upon successful arrival of the cargo at a safe port. Even allowing for the multiplicity of small dealers, the minimum number of slaves accepted for shipment was two; thus, if one died, the other served to cover the freight charges!²⁵⁶

The indications of the Trade's rapid decline was as apparent to purchasers as they were to producers. In March 1861 the slave ship Nordigny, a vessel prominent among those visiting the Dahomean coast over the previous three years, left without paying her dues - a sure sign that a return passage for further cargoes was not to be expected.²⁵⁷ Nor was this an isolated case. One major Dahomean slave dealer who had

still been active in exporting in the course of 1863,²⁵⁸ had, by early 1864, to seek asylum outside the territory under the King's jurisdiction on account of a similar offence.²⁵⁹ By 1864 the export slave trade had almost totally ceased in Dahomey. Slaves remained in barracoons at Whydah, Godomey and other places,²⁶⁰ but their prospective sellers waited in vain. In late 1863 the Dahomean army once more ventured out on campaign, taking Jabatan in the upper Weme area.²⁶¹ But the available evidence suggests that no more than one shipload of slaves was embarked from Dahomean ports throughout 1864.²⁶²

By this stage the context in which the Dahomean leaders were operating was beginning ominously to resemble the conditions of 1851/2 which had forced Gezo into his unsuccessful strategy of adaptation. On the one hand a slave export sector which was practically non-existent, and on the other hand a British government which, from 1861, had been displaying increasing signs of active intervention. Glele had already responded by diplomatic overtures in an attempt to mollify the British. This was, no doubt, something of a surprise to those Europeans who, in his first years of his reign, had contrasted his "politique très défavorable aux Européens . . ." with the toleration previously displayed by his father.²⁶³ Nevertheless, Glele pursued his diplomatic initiatives with the French, who in February 1863, had established a protectorate over Porto Novo.²⁶⁴ Daumas, an agent of Régis who had been appointed French Consul at Lagos and had been instrumental in obtaining the protectorate of Porto Novo, travelled to Abomey in July 1863. What transpired during this meeting is a matter of some contention which was to prove to be of considerable importance in the longer term - Daumas

maintaining that he obtained, verbally, a cession of Cotonou to the French by the Dahomeans.²⁶⁵ What is less in dispute, is that the French agreed, in return for Glele's ambiguous favours, an annual subsidy of 4,000 dollars to the King.²⁶⁶ In the face of the dying slave trade the Dahomean leaders were once more establishing alternative sources of revenue in the same fashion in which they had attempted to procure them in the early 1850s.

It was the economic pressure underlying these events which conditioned Glele's more conciliatory approach to the western powers from 1863 onwards and which led to the re-introduction of the policy of containment - promises, special pleading and, above all, procrastination - which had been rehearsed by his father in the late 1840s. Finding a satisfactory foil for his views in Wilmot, Glele proceeded cautiously but unmistakably. Wilmot was a 'good man' who fully understood the need to bring change about 'softly'.²⁶⁷ His presence was requested in the expected commission from Britain.²⁶⁸ According to the Dahomean leader, there were no more hindrances in the way between himself and England. He appealed to English merchants to come and settle at Whydah with a view to carrying out a proper commercial trade with him.²⁶⁹

At the Customs of late 1863 - early 1864, held in the presence of the British Commission, the incidence of human sacrifice had been much reduced from the scale of the years immediately preceding their visit to that of a par with the last years of Gezo's reign.²⁷⁰ Despite the fact that the British Commission, which included Burton, were less sympathetic to Glele's procrastination than he might have expected, and much less rapport was established than he might have anticipated,²⁷¹

the Dahomean monarch maintained his position. A warm welcome was extended to Croft, who had arrived at Abomey to extoll the values of legitimate commerce and the evils of human sacrifice.²⁷² Outwardly, of course, Glele's posture towards his domestic audience changed little, and the bellicose speeches, particularly directed towards Abeokuta, were maintained.²⁷³

It may be, of course, that Glele's diplomatic posture was to some extent dictated by a desire to neutralize the British in anticipation of an attack on that settlement. But, equally, his approach was fashioned by the necessity of expanding his relationship in 'proper commerce' with them, as witnessed by his reception of Croft.²⁷⁴ Faced by the same problems with which Gezo had been faced in the late 1840s - early 1850s, the Dahomean leadership responded in exactly the same fashion - diplomatic overtures aimed at curtailment of British pressure, preservation of the slave trade so far as possible, and expansion of legitimate commerce as a secondary supplement.

GROWING EUROPEAN RIVALRIES

But Glele faced a much more difficult task than his father, not least because the 1860's marked the beginning of open rivalry among the Europeans for political and commercial hegemony on the coast around Dahomey.

Following the death of the head chief at Badagry, in late 1860, the British officials, under pressure from commercial interests there, took it upon themselves to adjudicate between the various contenders of the throne, and to impose their own choice upon the Badagry chiefs - one

named Gokoon.²⁷⁵ On 1 March, Thomas Tickel, previously a merchant residing at Badagry, was appointed British Resident at Badagry and Porto Novo by Foote, subject to Foreign Office approval.²⁷⁶ Later that year the chiefs at Badagry eventually agreed to a Treaty of Commerce which had been initially imposed by the British. Within a year it was quite clear that the British regarded Badagry as an extension of their interests at Lagos, and two years later, on 7 July 1863, the Badagry chiefs ceded the town to the British by treaty, in return for a yearly stipend.²⁷⁷

The treaty with the Badagry chiefs followed the imposition of a similar treaty on the King of Porto Novo mentioned earlier. In February 1861 following a dispute over treatment of British traders at Porto Novo the British bombarded the town, forcing the King to agree to additional articles to the 1852 treaty - abolishing human sacrifice, expelling slave traders and effectively establishing extra-territorial rights for British residents there.²⁷⁸ The additional articles also included a commitment by the King of Porto Novo to foster trade with Dosunmu and Lagos.²⁷⁹

Alarmed by the political and commercial implications inherent in such agreements, Glele subsequently dispatched ambassadors to the King of Porto Novo, dissuading him from acquiescing in the British plans.²⁸⁰ Porto Novo, although never directly controlled by Dahomey had always been regarded by the Dahomean leadership as under their protection.²⁸¹

Indeed, so tense did matters become, that Glele was reported to have stationed around six thousand of his troops at Cotonou, just west of Porto Novo, presumably on alert to resist any threat to the integrity of Dahomean territory proper.²⁸² This combination of military and

diplomatic pressure was sufficient to cause the King of Porto Novo to have second thoughts - which considerations were once more resolved only by a further act of British 'gun-boat diplomacy', culminating in the destruction of Porto Novo with a death toll of hundreds. The King acquiesced to British demands and signed the additional articles on 16 May 1861.²⁸³

The cession of Lagos to Britain in 1861, and the establishment of the French Protectorate at Porto Novo in events which have already been covered in detail elsewhere, provided further evidence of western ambition.²⁸⁴ But encroaching western influence was not limited to the seaboard. Already, by 1861, the British were, through the agency of Thomas Tickel, their Resident at Badagry and Porto Novo, in contact with the chief of Okeodan, the large market town situated on the direct route from Porto Novo to the interior.²⁸⁵ By 1863, a British Protectorate had also been established there, initiating a chain reaction involving first the Egba - who took and established themselves at Ketu, to the north of Okeodan on the Niger route.²⁸⁶ Threatened with hostile domination on the eastern trade route to the Niger, Glele launched a ferocious attack, re-taking Ketu and maintaining it under Dahomean influence.²⁸⁷

In general, the Dahomean leadership was extremely suspicious of British collusion with the Egba.²⁸⁸ The new King himself regarded the British as having turned against his country.²⁸⁹ For their part, the British officials and residents at Abeokuta were obsessed with the continually expected Dahomean attack against the Egba.²⁹⁰

By the first half of the 1860s also, international relationships were becoming inextricably linked with commercial matters in general and the palm oil trade in particular. Régis's concern about the implementation of British customs dues on the trade lay behind the pressure to have their agent Daumas declared French Vice-Consul at Porto Novo and Whydah on 18 February 1862.²⁹¹ A year later, and not unconnected with the same considerations, a French Protectorate was established over Porto Novo, and Sodji's duties were guaranteed to remain at the same level for ten years. This move was viewed with disfavour by Glele,²⁹² and seen by him as an erosion of his traditional political influence in the area. It was seen by Domingo Martinez as the prelude to a breach of his commercial monopoly at Cotonou.²⁹³ Daumas' visit to Abomey managed to secure the verbal but ambiguous agreement regarding the use of Cotonou beach,²⁹⁴ but on Domingo's death in January 1864 Glele occupied the beach with his own soldiers.²⁹⁵

Commercial rivalries between the western powers on the coast meanwhile continued unabated in an attempt to commandeer the palm oil trade and the duties thereon. It was a process from which the Dahomeans could scarcely escape. French relations with Abomey became ever more strained as French commercial interests on the coast sought to maintain their position in the face of aggressive British political intervention. Following the confiscation of French goods by Dahomean soldiers, and disagreements between the Dahomean leadership over the French factory at Whydah, Captain Devaux of the French navy went to Abomey along with Régis' agent to see the monarch in October 1864.²⁹⁶ By this stage relations between Dahomey and France were at breaking

point; the delay in Deraux's reception (the King had gone to war) prompted him to demand that he be allowed to leave and to notify British as well as French shipping to this effect.²⁹⁷ The French had intended to establish a definitive boundary between Dahomean and Porto Novian territory at Cotonou Creek, and the fixing and rationalisation of Customs duties as well as redress for the confiscation of French liquer already referred to.²⁹⁸

Glele's reply was peremptory. The French could have rights of trade at Porto Novo beach, which he would continue to occupy and control. In addition, the French could have what was left of the confiscated goods.²⁹⁹ The beleaguered French, sufficiently put down by Glele's response, received a further blow to their pride and interests when Sodji of Porto Novo died, and was replaced by Mepon rather than the French-backed candidate.³⁰⁰ Even the threat of force could not retrieve the situation, and to the consternation of their commercial interests the French withdrew their protectorate of Porto Novo in December 1864.³⁰¹

The decisions of English officials on the coast met with little more immediate success. Throughout the following year Glover, Governor of Lagos, tried by every means - an internal pretender, gunboat diplomacy, fines on Mepon, blockading the channel from Porto Novo to Cotonou and Godomey - to further direct British control of the Porto Novo area. Ultimately, his request for annexation was rebuffed by a reluctant Colonial Office.³⁰² And, by the following year, the Dahomean leadership, apparently undeterred - at least publicly - by their defeat at Abeokuta, were congratulating Glover on his anti-Egba stance while

showering him with congratulations and gifts.³⁰³ A bemused Glover could do little but lamely warn Glele against attacking Abeokuta, and hope for the best.³⁰⁴

CHAPTER 8 FOOTNOTES

- 1 Ross, D., Ph.D., pp. 133-8.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 138-9.
- 3 Ibid., p. 139, citing Chiefs of Abeokuta to Campbell, 29 and 31/1/1855, PRO.F084/976 and Campbell to Clarendon, 15/2/1855, PRO.F084/976.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 141 et seq.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 144-5.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 144-5, citing Burton to Russell, 23/3/1864, F084/1221: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., vol. II, pp. 334, 143, fn.1.
- 7 Ibid., p. 149.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 147-8.
- 9 Bouet, A., "Le Royaume de Dahomey" in L'Illustration, 1852, pp.59-62. According to Bouet, in appreciation of their support Gezo had decided that nothing short of a capital offence should warrant their replacement, and at the time of Bouet's visit in 1851, the Meu had held the position for 35 years.
- 10 Which may have prompted Beecroft's appreciation of the influence which Gezo's ministers operated over him: Beecroft to Palmerston, 27/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/192.
- 11 Fraser's Memo. of Last Mission to Abomey, Feb. 1852, PRO.F084/886/286.
- 12 Beecroft's Journals of Abomey mission, 1850, entry for Monday, 1/7/1850, PRO.F084/816.
- 13 Ibid. Emphasis added.
- 14 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 184-5. The Yevogan's name was Dagbah: Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/481: Forbes, J., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, p. 127.
- 15 Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 112-3.
- 16 Gezo had several sons, only one or two of whom were recorded by name - for example, Ag-glab-ay and Nav-no-voh. The reason for the choice of Glele as heir is unclear. However, he appears to have played a prominent part in the Dahomean campaign of 1850. Ag-glab-ay, on the other hand, appears to have been afflicted by smallpox: Beecroft's Journals 1850, entries for 7/6/1850 and 18/6/1850, PRO.F084/816: Fraser's journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.

- 17 Dawson to Campbell, 29/8/1855, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade Series, vol. 42, Corr. Class B., p. 14.
- 18 Campbell to Clarendon, 3/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/433.
- 19 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1857, PRO.F084/1031/159.
- 20 Proter à Bureaux de Regime Pol. et de Commerce, 20/5/1858, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d). Also Vallon, A., "Le Dahomey . . .", Review Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, Tomes 2, 3, p. 341.
- 21 "Voyage au Dahomey" par M de Dr. Repin, extracts of Le Tour du Monde, VII, 161 Livraison, in Etudes Dahoméennes, 111, 1950, pp. 89-95.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Cf. Cornevin, R., Histoire du Dahomey, (Paris) 1962, p. 284.
- 24 Beecroft to Palmerston, 22/7/1850, PRO.C096/20/92. Beecroft's Journals, 22/5/1850, enclosed in Beecroft to Palmerston 22/7/1850, PRO.F084/816/148. The following year Fraser made similar remarks regarding the King's House in Allada: Fraser's Journals, rough copy, 1851, PRO.F084/886/48.
- 25 Freeman to Hill, 10/8/1854, M.M.S, W. Africa, Box 3.
- 26 Campbell to Clarendon, 3/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/433.
- 27 For example, in mid-1856: Campbell to Clarendon, 29/7/1856, PRO.F084/1002, 222.
- 28 Campbell to Clarendon, 26/6/1856, PRO.F084/1002, and 4/2/1857, PRO.F084/1031, and 7/4/1858, PRO.F084/1061.
- 29 Campbell to Clarendon, 6/9/1855, PRO.F084/976/248: Campbell to Clarendon, 26/6/1856, PRO.F084/1002/200: Campbell to Clarendon, 7/3/1857, PRO.F084/1031/102. Campbell to Foreign Office, 4/4/1857, PRO.F084/1031/129.
- 30 Campbell to Clarendon, 4/4/1857, PRO.F084/1031/129.
- 31 Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, Lyons, 1862.
- 32 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 159.

- 33 See later in this chapter.
- 34 Campbell to Clarendon, 11/5/1857, PRO.F084/1031/144.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Campbell to Clarendon, 27/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/197. Campbell to Wise, 16/11/1857, PRO.F084/1031/209.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Campbell to Clarendon, 27/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/197: Day to Burgess, 20/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/204.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Campbell to Clarendon, 27/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/197.
- 41 Ibid. Also Campbell to Clarendon, 5/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/230.
- 42 Campbell to Clarendon, 5/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/230.
- 43 Campbell to Clarendon, 3/11/1857, PRO.F084/1031/303.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid. Indeed, Campbell speculated that the ship might be the Pajaro de Oceano, reported to be bound for the African Coast from Cuba.
- 46 Day to Burgess, 20/7/1857, PRO.F084/1031/204.
- 47 Campbell to Clarendon, 30/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/246.
- 48 Willimas to Campbell, 19/1/1854, PRO.F084/959/339.
- 49 Campbell to Clarendon, 2/10/1857, PRO.F084/1031/288: Brand to Russell, 31/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/255: Campbell to Burgess 19/9/1857, PRO.F084/1031/290.
- 50 Hill to Campbell, 1/9/1857, PRO.F084/1031/286.
- 51 Brand to Russell, 31/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/253.
- 52 Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell, 19/1/1854, PRO.F084/950/339: Campbell to Townsend, 12/5/1854, PRO.F084/959/286: Campbell to Clarendon, 1/6/1854, PRO.F084/950/265: Wright and Coker (CMS) to Gilmer, 13/10/1853 and Consul's remarks in PRO.F084/959/333 et seq.
- 53 Technically this was Mewu of Porto Novo who had been exiled and settled - as an ally of Akitoye - at Badagry

- 54 Townsend to Campbell, 26/4/1854, PRO.F084/959/276: Campbell to Townsend, 12/5/1854, PRO.F084/959/286: F.O. to Campbell, 12/9/1854, PRO.F084/950/34.
- 55 According to one source, Domingo had up to 2000 slaves barracooned at Whydah, and a considerable number were also retained in the Yevogan's house: Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell, 6/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/443.
- 56 Jose Mundes Barretto to Campbell 6/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/442: Campbell to Morgan, 14/12/1854, PRO.F084/959/440: Campbell to Clarendon, 4/4/1857, PRO.F084/1031/144.
- 57 Campbell to Clarendon, 4/4/1857, PRO.F084/1031/129.
- 58 Campbell to Clarendon, 6/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/233.
- 59 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., p. 60.
- 60 Ibid., p. 61.
- 61 See later.
- 62 Campbell to Clarendon, 10/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/235.
- 63 Campbell to Clarendon, 10/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/235; "Names of Slave vessels . . . appearing in the Bights of Benin", from Campbell, dated 5/9/1857, PRO.F084/1031/268.
- 64 Campbell to Clarendon, 10/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/235. Cf. also Biobaku, The Egba . . ., p. 61.
- 65 Campbell to Clarendon, 2/10/1857, PRO.F084/1031/282.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Gezo had received Protet in May 1858. Campbell reported the King's funeral rites as taking place in late January 1859. Protet a bureaux de pol. et commerce 20/5/1858, M.O.M, IV:9(d). Campbell to Malmesbury 4/2/1859, PRO.F084/1088/81.
- 68 Campbell to Clarendon 3/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/433. Campbell to Clarendon 27/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/444. Cf. also Brand to Russell 31/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/255.
- 69 Campbell to Clarendon 8/3/1858, PRO.F084/1061/442.
- 70 Proter a Bureaux de Regime Pol. et de Commerce, 20/5/1858, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 71 Protet (from Whydah) a Bureaux de regime Pol. et Commerce 20/5/1858, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).

- 72 Ibid. Protet then proceeded to Palma to bargain with Kosoko from whom the French hoped to procure "emigrants": Campbell to Malmesbury 5/3/1859, PRO.F084/1088/95.
- 73 Proter a Bureaux de Regime Pol. et de Commerce, 20/5/1858, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 74 Bowden to Brand, 12/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/198.
- 75 Reports in the West African Herald, 10/2/1859. Newspaper reports are often more suspect than other material; but in this case the editor's brother was British resident at Quittah. Campbell certainly believed that such information was entitled to respect; Campbell to Malmesbury, 19/3/1859, PRO.F084/1088/105. Baeta himself was a Brazilian from Bahia province; Cf. Verger, P., Trade relations . . ., p. 522.
- 76 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, Cass and Co., 1968, pp. 172-3.
- 77 Campbell to Malmesbury 4/2/1859, PRO.F084/1088/81.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Bernasko to Gen. Secs. Oct. 1860 and 3/10/1860, in M.M.S., box 263.
- 80 Bernasko to Gen. Secs. Oct. 1860, M.M.S., box 263.
- 81 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 237. Cf. Hargreaves, S., "An ideological interpretation of Dahomean politics", Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Uni. of Birmingham, 1978.
- 82 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 215.
- 83 Cf. previous chapter.
- 84 Parl. Papers, Col. Africa no. 50, Wilmot's dispatch no. 1; also recorded in PRO.F084/1213, Jan-Dec 1863.
- 85 Gezo to Queen of England, in Duncan to Stanley, 1/7/1845, PRO.C096/8.1845.
- 86 Cruickshank's report, 9/11/1848, PRO.C096/14/346: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 32-3: Campbell to Clarendon, 4/4/1852, PRO.F084/103/129.
- 87 Christophe Colombe à Min. de Commerce, 2/2/1850, Arch. Nat., F12:7208: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. I, pp. 32-3.
- 88 Campbell to Malmesbury, 4/2/1859, PRO.F084/1088/81; Wilmot to Walker, 29/1/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa Vol. 50, "Visit to Dahomey: dispatches . . .", 1863 (3179) Vol. LXXIII.

- 89 Bernasko to Gen. Secs. 3/10/1862, M.M.S., Box 263, file 1862, art. 52.
- 90 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 363-4, 305: Skertchly also indicates that abolition by Glele would incur the "displeasure of his deceased predecessors", presumably including Gezo: Ibid., p. 237. It was probably Skertchly's opinion regarding the intentions or predelictions of Glele which was reflected in other writings indicating this view that Glele was "Personally opposed to these horrors". See, for instance, Swanzey, A., "On the Trade in Western Africa . . .", Journal of the Society of Arts, 17/4/1874. Such views echoed, almost word for word, those expressed by others in relation to the personal disposition of Gezo. See, for instance, Borghero a Planque, 30/9/1861, in Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, vol. XXXIC, pp. 218-221, which in turn appears to have been the source from which a number of other similar views were taken (e.g. Bouche).
- 91 Hargreaves, S., "An Ideological Interpretation . . .", unpublished M.A. thesis, Uni. of Birmingham, 1978, p. 49.
- 92 Lartigue, "Relation d'un Voyage . . .", July 1860, in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Burton to Russell, 23/3/1864, Parl. Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 49, 1865, 3503-1, vol. LVI. Gezo also abolished the custom of certain royal wives following the monarch to the grave. Ibid., and Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 232, fn. 48. Cf. chapter 7 of this thesis, and also footnotes 103/4 below.
- 93 Lartigue, "Relation d'un Voyage . . .", July 1860, in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc., Afrique 51.
- 94 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p.235.
- 95 Campbell to Malmesbury, 4/2/1859, PRO.F084/1088/81.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 200.
- 98 Lartigue, "Relations d'un Voyage . . .", July 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 99 Garraud à Didelot 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51: Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123.
- 100 Campbell to Malmesbury, 4/2/1859, PRO.F084/1088/81.
- 101 Townsend et al to Hand, 15/10/1860, PRO.F084/1115/395.
- 102 M.M.S., box 263, article 49. Bernasko put the number at about 1000: Bernasko to Wharton, 1/10/1860, in Ibid.

- 103 Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, par Bouche p. 371-4, cited in Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, 1957, pp. 103-7. This contribution by Bouche appears to be taken from Borghero a Planque, 30/9/1861, Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, pp. 218-221.
- 104 Lartigue estimated a total of between 700-800; in fact, from the description and information he himself supplies the total would be nearer 850. He also confirmed large scale voluntary suicide of Gezo's wives; "Relation d'un Voyage . . ., July 1860", by Lartigue, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51.
- 105 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 232, fn.48.
- 106 Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, par Bouche p. 371-4, cited in Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, pp. 103-7. Lartigue, "Relation d'un Voyage . . ., July 1860", M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Cf. also Planque à Min. des Col. 13/7/1862, M.O.M. Afrique, 1V:9:(d).
- 107 According to Burton Gezo had requested that he be spared because he was an expert on court ceremonial: Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p.141.
- 108 Planque à Min. des Col. 13/7/1862, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9:d.
- 109 Planque à Min. des Col. 17/8/1862 and 28/10/1862, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:d.
- 110 Perry to F.O., 6/8/1862, PRO.F084/1175/176.
- 111 Ibid. Euschart was presumably mistaken here - there are reports of Docherty later turning up alive.
- 112 Ibid.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 See earlier chapters.
- 115 Com. Wilmot to Rear Adm. Sir B. Walker, 19/1/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa Gen., "Visit to Dahomey: dispatches . . .", 1863, (3179), Vol. LXXIII. ~
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Bernasko to Gen. Secs, 30/1/1864, M.M.S., Box 263, File 1863-4, art. 49.
- 118 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 215.

- 119 Ibid., p. 68: Burton was particularly critical of Forbes' account.
- 120 Ibid., pp. 200-1.
- 121 Ibid., pp. 233-5.
- 122 Capt. of L'Africain to Com. in Chief, 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 123 Brand to Russell, 18/4/1860, PRO.F084/115/161.
- 124 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 179-80.
- 125 Bowden to Brand, 12/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/198; Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief, 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d). In 1858 the Dahomean army attacked Ketu; in 1860, Idanyi: Townsend to Brand, 27/2/1860, PRO.F084/115/83. In 1862 the target was Ishagga; Planque à Min. des Colonies 13/7/1862, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d). In 1863, Jabatan; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 317-8.
- 126 Capt. of L'Africaine a Com. in Chief, 17/10.1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d). Cf. also Brand to Russell, 9/4/1860, PRO.F084/115/127 and Freeman to Russell 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123.
- 127 Brand to Russell, 18/4/1860, PRO.F084/115/161.
- 128 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, M.M.S., box 263, article 49.
- 129 Brand to Russell, 9/4/1860, PRO.F084/115/127.
- 130 Brand to Russell, 4/5/1869, PRO.F084/115/230.
- 131 Brand to Russell, 9/10/1860, PRO.F084/115/389.
- 132 Wilmot to Walker, 22/11/1863, in Parl. Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 49 1865, vol. LVI.
- 133 Freeman to Russell, 9/5/1862, PRO.F084/1175/89.
- 134 Freeman to Russell, 26/10/1862, PRO.F084/1175/203.
- 135 Planque à Min. des Col. 13/7/1862, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:(d). Freeman to Russell, 8/4/1862, ~ PRO.F084/1175/77. Accounts of the number of captives taken at Ishagga vary from 5000 to 8000; Cf. Garraud à Didelot April 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 51 in addition to sources already cited. According to one source the captives were taken in chains to Whydah market and sold, apart from 7 leaders who were executed. Those who were not sold were dispatched to Abomey for human sacrifice; Rev. Pere Noel Baudin, Les Missions Catholiques, no. 243, 30/1/1874, p. 59, cited in Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", vol. II, Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 109. Also cited is the Rev. P. Courdioux, Les Missions Catholiques, no. 490, 25/10/78, pp. 514-5.

- 136 Freeman to Russell, 29/10/1862, PRO.F084/1175/203.
- 137 Didelot à Min de la Marine 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52.
- 138 Hand to Russell, 9/10/1860, PRO.F084/1115/389.
- 139 On this cf. Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 169-70.
- 140 As we have seen (fn.135 above), one French source put the number of Dahomean captives in 1862 as high as 8000: Garraud à Didelot, April 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 51.
- 141 Ev. of McCoskrey, Parl. Papers, col. Africa, vol. 5, 1865 Sel. C'tee, Min. of Ev. p. 83.
- 142 Freeman put the prize money at 1 dollar per head; Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123; also cf. Parl. Papers, 1863 (3160) vol. LXXI: cor. rel. to the Slave Trade 1863, item 21. Burton reported prize money of one head of cowries (2/-) for each skull, and from one head of cowries and 2 fathoms of cloth up to two and a half heads plus a large cloth for captives; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 317. Cf. also Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 47
- 143 Cf. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 197, 258.
- 144 Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123. The King distributed slaves to dealers outside as well as inside the territory of Dahomey proper; e.g. Poto Novo Town; Foote to King of Porto Novo, 24/2/1861; Foote to Wyles 10/3/1861; Foote to Russell, 8/3/1861, all in PRO.F084/1141/pp. 181, 206, 236.
- 145 Ibid., i.e. a rate of 4 dollars per head, similar to the tax imposed on a barrel of palm oil immediately after the imposition of the British blockade in the early 1850's.
- 146 Foote to Wratislaw, 6/2/1861, PRO.F084/1441/198.
- 147 Ibid. Also Foote to Russell, 8/3/1861, PRO.F084/1141/309.
- 148 McCoskrey to Russell, 30/5/1861, PRO.F084/1141/309.
- 149 Testimony of R. Burton, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5 1865 Sel. C'tee; for example this method was employed to transport slaves to Agoué for shipment on 10/10/1862, when Whydah was being so closely watched; Cf. Freeman to Russell, 29/20/1862, PRO.F084/1175/203.
- 150 Campbell had died of dysentery on 17/4/1859, to be succeeded by Brand, who died of dysentery on 16/6/1860. Foote arrived on 21/12/1860, and died of dysentery on 17/5/1861.

- 151 Foote to Russell 9/2/1861: PRO.F084/1141/135.
- 152 Ibid.
- 153 McCoskrey to Russell, 31/7/1861, PRO.F084/1141/348. Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123.
- 154 Ibid.
- 155 Foote to King of Porto Novo, 5/2/1861; Foote to Wratislaw, 6/2/1861; King of Porto Novo to Foote, 10/2/1861; Wratislaw to Foote, 17/2/1861; Foote of King of Porto Novo, 24/2/1861; Foote to Russell, 8/3/1861; all in PRO.F084/1141/pp. 181-213. A second bombardment of Porto Novo took place on 26/4/1861.
- 156 Foote to King of Porto Novo, 24/2/1861, PRO.F084/1141/206. Foote to Russell, 8/3/1861, PRO.F084/1141/pp. 181-213. Cf. also Palmerstone's comments quoted in Verger, P., Trade Relations . . ., p. 323.
- 157 Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 68-9. The primary reason for the annexation of Lagos was related to the solution of domestic problems of order and administration: Cf. Smith, R., The Lagos Consulate.
- 158 Dosunmu ceded Lagos to the British on 6/8/1861. Sodji at Porto Novo, partly on account of the implicit threat of British invasion, sought a French Protectorate, which was established on 25/2/1863. For a detailed account of these events see Newbury, The Western Slave Coast . . ., pp. 64-9 and Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 67 et seq.
- 159 McCoskrey to Russell, 6/1/1862, PRO.F084/1175/46.
- 160 Planque à Min. des Col. 13/7/1862, 28/10/1862 and Borghero to Planque (extract) 1/9/1862; all in M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 161 Campbell to Malmesbury, 1/4/1859, PRO.F02/28/149.
- 162 For example Campbell to Clarendon, 2/6/1855, PRO.F084/976/161; Campbell to Clarendon, 14/6/1856, PRO.F084/1002/190: Freeman to Ord, 2/4/1856, M.M.S., box 262.
- 163 Campbell to Malmesbury, 1/4/1858, PRO.F02/28/149.
- 164 Cf. Régis Ainé a M.A.E. 15/7/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52, Evidence of Capt. J. Croft, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Committee, Paras. 5497-5501.
- 165 Evidence of Capt. J. Croft, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Committee, para. 5541. Also evidence of R. F. Burton in Ibid., p.101.

- 166 Burton, R., A., Mission . . ., p. 193.
- 167 Ibid.
- 168 "Relation d'un Voyage . . .," par Lartigue, entry for 16/7/1860. M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Wilmot to Rear Adm. Sir B. Walker, 10/2/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa, vol. 50, W. Africa General, "A Visit to Dahomey: Dispatches . . . 1863 (3179), Vol. LXXIII. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 170-1. Similar developments were taking place around Porto Novo Town: French Consular Agent to M.A.E., 6/7/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51: Gele M. Report of 1864: Extracts in Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. IX (1953), pp. 15-26.
- 169 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 170-1.
- 170 Ibid., p. 132.
- 171 Laffitte, Abbé, Le Dahomey. Souvenirs de Voyage et de Mission (1874), p. 170.
- 172 Burton, R., A Mission . . . p. 58.
- 173 McCoskrey to Campbell, 19/8/1855: PRO.F084/976/216.
- 174 Régis Ainé a M.A.E., 15/7/1863: M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 175 Ibid.
- 176 Campbell to Clarendon, 7/12/1854, PRO.F084/950/427.
- 177 Johns to Brand, 8/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/190. Brand to Russell, 24/4/1860, PRO.F084/1115/169. F.O. to Brand, 23/1/1860, PRO.F02/35/1. Brand to Russell, 23/12/1859, PRO.F084/1088/186.
- 178 Campbell to Malmesbury, 5/4/1859, PRO.F084/1088/112; emphasis added.
- 179 Ibid.
- 180 Ibid.
- 181 McCoskrey to Russell, 2/7/1861, PRO.F084/1141/154.
- 182 McCoskrey to Russell, 27/5/1861; PRO.F084/1141/304.
- 183 Campbell, citing Lawson's report, in Campbell to Malmesbury, 5/3/1859, PRO.F084/1088/95.
- 184 Campbell to Clarendon, 1/6/1854, PRO.F084/959/260.
- 185 Ibid. McCoskrey's account of the stoppage differed from that of Lawson's, but even he maintained the determination of the Chiefs of Ijebu not to have any dealings with the palm oil trade: McCoskrey's report of Mission to Ijebu Ode, PRO.F084/1088/120.

- 186 Garraud à Didelot, April 1862, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc., Afrique 51. As noted in chapter 7, Gezo had also prohibited the export of shea-butter.
- 187 Ibid.
- 188 Ibid.
- 189 The prolonged high season for the palm oil trade was from February until August: Campbell to Clarendon, 4/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/218: Campbell to Clarendon, 6/8/1857, PRO.F084/1031/233.
- 190 See chapter 9.
- 191 As Newbury has previously pointed out: Cf. Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 58.
- 192 "Relation d'un Voyage . . .", par Lartigue, entry for 23/7/1860, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in chief, 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9(d).
- 193 Ibid. The Captain in question, presumably gleaning his information from French sources with a vested interest in the palm oil trade, went as far as to suggest that a popular internal revolt was in prospect. This is almost certainly an exaggeration. His assertion, however, that the Yevogan was out of favour with the new King may well have been accurate and related to growing internal political divisions covered in the next chapter
- 194 Cf. for example, . McCoskrey to Russell, 31/5/1861, PRO.F084/1141/312. Also Didelot à Chasseloup-Laubat, in Chasseloup à M.A.E., 25/6/1863, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc., Afrique 52. Further, complaints of Dos Santos regarding the shortage of oil as a result of its use in ransoming Dahomean prisoners from the Egba in 1865 is referred to in "Influence du Bresil au Golfe du Benin", in Les Afro-Américaines, Verger, P. (Dakar: IFAN, 1952).
- 195 "Relation d'un Voyage . . .", July 1860, par Lartigue, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. The words 'mercadent' or 'marcadant' were commonly used in French as a word for a trader who is not engaged in big business or who runs his business quite badly, or about a small trader who has ideas about his station although he is dealing in mere trifles (the word was originally taken from the Italian). It is thus possible that Lartigue's comments indicate a class of petty traders. However, it remains possible that he used the word in the context of coastal Portuguese. In Portuguese Mercador means Merchant. The word was certainly in use in Benin, apparently to refer to independent merchants as opposed to the "Fiadors" who were the king's officials: Cf. Ryder, Benin and the Europeans, p. 131.

- 196 Burton to F.O., 14/1/1862, PRO.F084/1176. Burton to Russell (private), 15/4/1864, PRO.F02/45/44. F.O. Confidential Print 8/8/1864.
- 197 Campbell to Clarendon, 20/4/1858, PRO.F084/1061/453.
- 198 McCoskrey to Russell, 2/7/1861, PRO.F084/1141/334. The 1861 Treaty allowed the King 2 heads of cowries on every puncheon of 150 gallons exported, and 2 strings of cowries for each pound of ivory exported: Treaty between Britain and Porto Novo, 17th June 1861, PRO.F084/1141/339.
- 199 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 200 Régis, for instance paid such a fixed annual custom, put by Didelot (surely wrongly) at "Quinze cent mille Francs". Didelot à Min. de la Mar. 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 201 Gov. Strachan to Earl of Carnarvon, 22/11/1875, PRO.F084/1465/11.
- 202 Ibid. See also Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 122.
- 203 Ibid. Decisions regarding duties on trade as well as other adjudications, were normally made at Whydah in the Yevogan's court - the Aguali or Agualez; Livingston to Carnarvon, 22/11/1875, PRO.F084/1465/11: Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 52-3.
- 204 Livingstone to Clarendon, 12/3/1870, PRO.F084/1326/102.
- 205 Didelot à Chasseloup-Labat, enclosed in Chasseloup à M.A.E., 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 206 Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 207 Cf Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 84-5.
- 208 Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d).
- 209 J. Roberts, Capt. of Chevy Chase, to Brand, 10/5/1860: Brand to Russell, 5/6/1860, both in PRO.F084/115/299.
- 210 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 166. The "Brehon" were an ancient Irish hereditary caste of judges. "Brehon Law" was the Irish code of laws abolished in the reign of James I.
- 211 Brand to Russell, 4/5/1860, PRO.F084/1115/230. Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief, 7/10.1861, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9(d). Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 76-7. This 'sub-viceroy' to the Yevogan was a cousin of the king; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p.77 f.38

- 212 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 76-7.
- 213 Brand to Russell, 4/5/1860, PRO.F084/1115/230.
- 214 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 76-7.
- 215 See later.
- 216 Brand to Russell, 8/4/1860, PRO.F084/1115/161.
- 217 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 211.
- 218 Brand to Russell, 9/4/1860, PRO.F084/115/127. Townsend et al to Hand, 15/10/1860, PRO.F084/1115/395. Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9(a). Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123.
- 219 Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9(a). Cf. also Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 82.
- 220 Glele to Bernasko, related in Bernasko to Gen. Secs. Oct. 1860, M.M.S., box 263. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p.49. Glele's lack of personal respect for Bernasko did nothing to improve his view of missionaries in general. For a summary of the missionary presence in Dahomey, cf. Ellingworth, P., "Christianity & Politics in Dahomey 1843-67", J.A.H., V, 2, 1964, pp. 209-20.
- 221 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, M.M.S., box 263, art. 49. This point is reinforced by the fact that the missionaries were not exempted from compulsory attendance at the witnessing of human sacrifices: Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 30/5/1860, Oct. 1860, 2/12/1860 all in M.M.S., box 263. Borghero a Planque, 1/9/1862, Planque à Min. des Colonies 28/10/1862, M.O.M., Afrique IV:9:(d).
- 222 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, M.M.S., box 263, art. 49.
- 223 Capt. of L'Africaine to Com. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M., Afrique, IV:9(a). Also Foote to Russell, 9/1/1861, PRO.F084/1141/104.
- 224 Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 166-9.
- 225 Ibid.
- 226 Ibid.
- 227 Lloyd gives these estimates from the mid 1850's:

1855	6,408	1860	24,895
1856	7,304	1861	23,964
1857	10,431	1862	11,254
1858	16,992	1863	7,507
1859	30,473	1864	6,807

- 228 This was partly the result of the Civil War in North America, and partly on account of the resumption of more aggressive British squadron activity around Cuba following the agreement between the British and New American administration, later ratified in the 1862 Washington Treaty. Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 174-5; Russell to Burton, 20/8/1863 in intro to Burton, R., A Mission . . ., ed. Newbury, p. 20. Cf. fn. 56 above.
- 229 Ev. of R. Burton, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Sel C'tee. Min. of Evidence, para. 2427.
- 230 Burton believed, I think wrongly, that it was purely this military disaster and the resultant inadequacy in the supply side which caused the fall off in the Dahomean slave trade; Ev. of R. Burton, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Sel C'tee. Min. of Evidence p. 93, paras. 2233-2237.
- 231 Marshall to Gen. Secs., 2/5/1864, M.M.S., box 263, art. 57.
- 232 Cf. for example, Biobaku, S. O., The Egba . . ., p. 74.
- 233 The missionary Borghero acted as intermediary in one such transaction; Borghero à Planque, August 1866, Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, XXXIX, XL, 1867-8, pp. 112-3.
- 234 Dos Santos complained about the shortage of palm oil which was being used to ransom prisoners from the Egba.
- 235 Since the initial outlay for arms or ammunition was borne by the monarch and chiefs. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 447.
- 236 Cf. for example, the Ord Report, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, West Africa, British Settlements, 1865 (170), vol. XXXVII, p. 29.
- 237 Verger, P., "Le Tabac de Bahia et la Traite des esclaves", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, no. 15, pp. 368-9. Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 181-2.
- 238 Skertchly, J. A. Dahomey . . ., p. 2.
- 239 Ibid., p. 346.
- 240 Manning, P., Ph.D., p. 106.
- 241 In the transactions witnessed by Skertchly in the capital, for instance, 94 slaves changed hands at around £12 per head, little more than 50% of 1862 prices in real terms; Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 346.
- 242 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 45.

- 243 Cf. for example F.O. to Hartley, 2/6/1874, Hartley to Derby, 21/9/1874 and 27/10/1874 all in PRO.F084/1401/pp. 22, 146, 158. Commander Hewitt to Sec. of the Admiralty, 14/3/1875, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 51, West Africa, British West African Possessions: papers 1875 (cl343) vol. LII, pp. 84-5.
- 244 Rapport de Serval, annexé au lettre de Marine 19/7/78, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 245 Didelot à M.A.E. 1/7/1863 in M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52.
- 246 For a fuller account of these wars see Biobaku, The Egba . . ., pp. 64-78.
- 247 Wilmot to Walker, 29/1/1863. Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, West Africa General "Visit to Dahomey: dispatches from Wilmot", 1863, (3179), vol. LXXIII.
- 248 Ibid.
- 249 Ibid.
- 250 Ibid.
- 251 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 3/2/1863, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4.
- 252 Freeman to Russell, 9/1/1863, PRO.F084/1201/62.
- 253 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 84-5.
- 254 Ibid.
- 255 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52.
- 256 Ibid.
- 257 Ibid.
- 258 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. 27/3/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 259 Senor Carvalho, a Brazilian who had connections at both Porto Novo and Whydah as well as Godomey. Freeman to Russell, 8/1/1864, PRO.F084/1221/33. This could~possibly refer to the same incident mentioned above. In any case, such was Carvalho's alienation from the Dahomean leaders by this time that he was already actively informing British officials of expected slave vessels; Ibid.
- 260 Testimony of Capt. L. Wildman, R. B., Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Sel. C'tee, Min of Evidence, p. 161.
- 261 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 315.

- 262 Testimony of Capt. L. Wilkman R.N., Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Sel. C'tee, Min. of Evidence p. 161. Cf. also ev. of W. Wylde in Ibid., p. 108; Ev. of Col. Ord in Ibid., p. 59. The successful ship was probably the Ciceron, owned by Zulicta the biggest of all Cuban importers, with approximately 700 slaves aboard; Neilman to Russell, 9/7/1864, PRO.F084/1121/107; Lloyd, C., The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp. 179-80.
- 263 Lartigue, "Relation d'un Voyage . . .", 9/8/1860, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 51. See also Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, PRO.F084/1115/161.
- 264 Treaties of 23 and 25 Feb. 1863, enclosed in Didelot à Chaseloup-Laubat, 24/2/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52.
- 265 Didelot à Min de la Marine 5/7/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52.
- 266 Ibid.
- 267 Glele to Bernasko, reported in Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 2/9/1863, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, article 30.
- 268 Ibid. and Bernasko to Gen. Secs, 2/11/1863, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 79.
- 269 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 2/9/1863, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 30.
- 270 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 30/1/1864, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 49.
- 271 Bernasko to Gen Secs., 4/3/1864, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 51. Freeman, as has already been noted, was from the outset suspicious of Glele's motives and the effect of Wilmot's visit; Freeman to Russell, 9/1/1863, PRO.F084/1201/62.
- 272 Croft visited Porto Novo, Godomey, Whydah and Abomey. He shared the view of those in Britain who believed that a combination of moral persuasion, Christianity and commerce had resulted in the abolition of human sacrifice at Old Calabar and was likely to yield results in Dahomey; Hon. Sec. of Dahomey C'tee to Editor of the Morning Star 20/6/1863, PRO.F02/45/141. Letter from Croft dated 29/4/1863 (from Whydah) in PRO.F02/45/142.
- 274 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 229.
- 274 Letter from Croft dated 29/4/1863 (from Whydah), PRO.F02/45/142. Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 4/3/1864, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4.
- 275 Badagry residents to Foote 28/12/1860. Foote to Stokes, 30.12.1860: Foote to Russell, 8/1/1861: Stokes to Foote, 24/1/11861: Foote to Russell, 8/2/1861, all in PRO.F084/1141/p. 94 et seq.

- 276 Foote to Russell, 6/3/1861, PRO.F084/1141/166.
- 277 Freeman to Newcastle, 9/10/1862, PRO.F084/1201/167.
- 278 Foote to King of Porto Novo, 5/2/1861: Foote to Wratishaw, 6/2/1861: King of Porto Novo to Foote, 10/2/1861; Foote to King of Porto Novo, 24/2/1861: Foote to Russell, 8/3/1861, all in PRO.F084/1141/pp. 181-213. Also in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50. West Africa General "Porto Novo" dispatches . . . 1861" (2904) vol. LXV.
- 279 Ibid.
- 280 Foote to Russell, 9/5/1861, PRO.F084/1141/278.
- 281 Traditionally, the King of Porto Novo was regarded as the "little brother" of the Dahomean monarch by the Dahomeans themselves.
- 282 Foote to Russell, 1/4/1861, PRO.F084/1141/243. Glele's fears were not without foundation. At this stage the British were actively considering the possibility of a full-scale attack on Dahomey: cf. for example Foote to Russell, 9/3/1861, PRO.F084/1141/214: Brand to Russell, 9/4/1860, PRO.F084/1115/127.
- 283 Ibid. McCoskrey to Russell, 31/5/1861, 2/7/1861 in PRO.F084/1141/pp. 304 et seq.
- 284 Newbury, The Western Slave Coast . . ., p. 64 et seq. Biobaku, The Egba . . ., p. 67 et seq. Smith, R., The Lagos Consulate . . .
- 285 Iffalola to Tickel, Dec. 1861, PRO.F084/1201/257.
- 286 Glover to Russell, 8/8/1863, PRO.F084/1201/277. The Anglo-African Times, 1/8/1863.
- 287 Glover to Russell, 8/8/1863, PRO.F084/1201/277.
- 288 Glover to Russell, 8/8/1863, PRO.F084/1201/277.
- 289 Gov. Strachan to Earl of Carnarvon, 22/11/1875, PRO.F084/1465/11.
- 290 Ibid. See also Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 122.
- 291 Hargreaves, J., Prelude to Partition, pp. 110-1.
- 292 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 159-60. Although even after the establishment of the protectorate, Porto Novean emissaries continued to attend the Customs at Abomey; Ibid.
- 293 Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 113-6, citing M.M.C. Gabon IV:3:(b), Brossard de Corbigny to Didelot 20/9/1863.

294 See earlier.

295 Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 113-6, citing M.M.C. IV:3:(b), Brossard de Corbigny to Didelot, 20/9/1863.

296 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 2/11/1864, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 79.

297 Ibid. Also Glover to Russell, 9/12/1864, PRO.F084/1221/159; De La Mark to Capt. of the "Speedwell", 3.11.1864, PRO.F084/1221/161. Cf. also Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 117-8 and footnotes.

298 Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 117-8 citing M.M.C. Gabon, 1/3/b, de Ladebat a MMC, 3/10/1864, 21/11/1864..

299 Ibid.

300 Marshall to General Secs., 2/5/1864, M.M.S., box 263, file 1863-4, art. 5.

301 De Ladebat to Glover, 21/12/1864, PRO.F084/1250.199.

302 Glover to F.O. 8/5/1865, PRO.F084/1221/161. Glover to Ladebat 27/5/1865, Glover to Russell 7/9/1865 and 6/9/1865, all in PRO.F084/1250/ pp. 210, 298, 283.

303 Glele to Glover, 5/8/1865, PRO.F084/1250/363.

304 Glele to Glover, 5/8/1865; Glover to Glele, 5/9/1865: Glover to Russell, 6/10/1865 all in PRO.F084/1250/pp. 361-9.

CHAPTER 9DENOUEMENT: THE FINAL CONTRADICTIONS, 1865-90

By the mid-1860's the Dahomean aristocracy were once again in the midst of an economic and political crisis. The revival of the demand for slaves between 1857 and 1863 had given a badly needed but short lived boost to the Trade, but the end of the French Emigration Scheme and the decline in demand from Cuba and the American States meant that the respite was short lived. The second defeat at Abeokuta only further decimated the Dahomean slave raiding capacity and inflicted heavy material losses on the warrior aristocrats. Glele's return to diplomacy held out much less chance of success than his father since the European powers were not only forearmed with the experiences of Dahomean procrastination throughout the 1840's and 1850's but, more importantly, were increasingly involved with their internal political and economic rivalries. The oil trade continued to grow but that growth in itself further exacerbated the inherent tensions within Dahomey, between the Dahomeans and the European powers, and among the Europeans themselves.

The quarter century following 1864 saw the working out of these tensions, crucially around the 1876 blockade, but the general pattern of developments was set from the second half of the 1860's.

The years immediately following Dahomey's second defeat at Abeokuta were, not surprisingly, bereft of any major military campaigns. Between 1864 and 1869 there is no evidence in contemporary literature of any large scale military undertaking. Under normal circumstances the absence of military adventure would have created the conditions for a

flowering of the oil trade, but the constant interruptions of legitimate commerce over the previous few years had left their legacy, and recovery was not immediate.

THE PALM OIL TRADE: 1863-80

The loss of the palm oil trade would not have worried Glele in the early years of his reign, since an active slave trade more than compensated for any decline in legitimate commerce. But the decline had longer reaching effects. After the British naval action at Porto Novo and the signing of a commercial treaty to protect legitimate trade, the latter town became a major market for the oil trade of the interior. Its relative attraction was enhanced by its cession to the French as a Protectorate and by July 1863 French, English and Portuguese factories were established there in addition to numerous petty traders.¹ The contempt with which the practitioners of legitimate commerce in Whydah had been treated by King and natives alike,² only served to increase the attraction of Porto Novo.³ The limits upon the expansion of the trade foreseen by some,⁴ were not immediately apparent to all, but revival of the oil trade proved slow. Even the exemption of duty on Whydah oil extended by the French government was effectively neutralised so far as the competition with Porto Novo was concerned since it applied also to produce from the latter town.⁵

However, the vulnerability of even a French protected Porto Novo was exposed when the British, jealous of the trade loss from Lagos to Porto Novo, blocked the mouth of the lagoon, effectively impeding traffic.⁶ With a long established British presence at Badagry, the best option

available to the French was to secure an alternative outlet on the beach. This was one of the matters which prompted the visit by Daumas, Régis's agent at Porto Novo to Abomey in mid-1863, since both Porto Novo beach and Cotonou - the nearest point of the lagoon to the sea - were under the suzerainty of the King of Dahomey. This visit resulted in the confusing 'cession' of Cotonou.⁷ What Glele clearly intended was to allow the use of the beach at Cotonou by the French in return for an annual tribute. The French wrongly, but perhaps understandably in the wake of the cession of a protectorate at Porto Novo, interpreted this as ceding them the same right over Cotonou beach. This initial interpretation was to provide a useful pretext for French claims in later years.

But there were more immediate difficulties facing the French palm oil commerce. In February 1864 the French factory at Whydah along with several hundred tons of palm oil was destroyed in a fire which consumed more than half the town.⁸ In June of the same year two pipes of Brazilian rum which had been landed on Porto Novo beach by an American ship for the French were seized by Dahomean soldiers.⁹ A few months later the Dahomean authorities at Whydah seized goods from the French factory there.¹⁰

The Dahomean leaders, hard pressed financially by the loss of the slave trade, and now by the growing attraction of Porto Novo in the palm oil trade, had resorted to increased exaction of tribute by force. Moreover, recognition by the Dahomeans of the French Protectorate at Porto Novo, which had apparently been granted during Daumas' visit the year before, was now withdrawn: Glele was reported to be threatening to

exact punishment from the King of Porto Novo at the earliest opportunity.¹¹

This series of events may not have been unconnected with a dispute arising within Porto Novo Town itself between a French officer and one of the local chiefs who ranked close behind the King in status. Significantly, in view of later developments, the dispute resulted in threats by the Chief to return to the bush and cut down all the palm trees.¹² Despite an estimated commerce at Porto Novo of around one and a half million Francs in 1864, the increasing problems were sufficient to stimulate some French officials to recommend the abandonment of the Protectorate.¹³

For the French 1865 was a relatively quiet year for visiting palm oil ships at both Whydah and Porto Novo, and the French commercial houses on the coast were left with almost half a million kilos of oil and 150,000 kilos of nuts - in total almost 2000 tons of palm oil produce - on their hands.¹⁴ French estimates placed the total annual trade at Porto Novo and Whydah at about 3500 tons in 1865, the bulk of this being trade carried out by the French themselves.¹⁵

Since the French dominated the Whydah trade, the annual report of the French Consul allows a reasonable insight into the export trade in palm produce at that port in the mid-1860s. During 1865, four French ships embarked cargo exclusively from Whydah, while a further seven called at Whydah and Porto Novo or Lagos. The tonnage of the vessels varied from 174-294 tons, and the aggregate tonnage of the eleven French ships visiting the port in the course of the year amounted to 2766 tons.¹⁶ The vessels remained in Whydah, or in the Whydah-Lagos area, for a period

varying from two weeks up to four months discharging cargoes of mainly rum and cloth - and taking aboard palm produce.¹⁷ The total extent of cargo embarked on the four vessels visiting Whydah alone was 1636 barrels of oil and almost 700,000 kilos of palm kernels.¹⁸

These figures indicate one growing feature of the trade - the dealing in palm kernels. While kernels held out little attraction to English traders who were wary of a slow British market which might inevitably oblige them to ship the kernels to the continent for sale, the French dealers were eager for the product which would find a quick and profitable market at Marseilles.¹⁹

Up until the mid-1860s, the French trade at Whydah had been dominated completely by Régis. Despite their problems at Porto Novo, the French Consular agent Beraud, looked forward with optimism and anticipated the arrival of other French firms.²⁰ Beraud had not long to wait until his prophecy was fulfilled, although his apparent foresight is somewhat lessened by the fact that he himself was among the partners of one of the new firms - Lasnier, Daumas et Cié - being stationed as their agent at Whydah. This move prompted a brief period of fierce price competition and commercial struggle between the new firm and Régis until 1868 when the arrival of a third French firm finally ensured the end of Régis's monopoly.²¹

Such competition between the French commercial houses gave rise to manoeuvring to control the rights of labour over the population of the appropriate 'towns' within Whydah,²² but by the 1870s this situation had resolved itself and labour allocation persisted in the traditional fashion.²³ By this stage the trade in general was again

flourishing. The English firm of Swanzy had been established there for several years,²⁴ and up to 60 vessels per annum were calling at Whydah and surrounding ports from France alone.²⁵ Glele, through the Yevogan, maintained the strict control over the conduct of the trade, particularly as regards thefts of trade goods by native Dahomeans.²⁶ The expansion of commerce was interrupted when, during 1874, the high prices of alcohol and the low prices being fetched for palm oil in France dealt a blow to the French trade and brought about a slackening of shipping to their factories.

However, during the second half of the 1870s the palm oil trade in the Dahomey area developed steadily, particularly for the French. Their factories proliferated. In the mid-70s Régis established a factory at Agoué which controlled the trade of the Popos, making use of the lagoon system to Whydah for transportation of merchandise and commercial communication.²⁷ At Godomey two French Houses - Régis and Fabre - shared the trade at a smaller outpost which nevertheless rendered some 100,000 gallons of oil and 600 tons of kernels per annum.²⁸ A similar quantity of produce was collected at the Régis factory at Abomey-Calavi, a trading position connected with Cotonou via the Denham Lake.²⁹

At Cotonou itself the French had three factories. So far as the palm oil trade was concerned, Cotonou's importance lay in its role as a landing place for spirits, tobacco and other articles of trade, and as a transit port for Porto Novo and Abomey-Calavi, and thence the interior.³⁰ Porto Novo was by now the mainstay of the palm oil trade in the area apart from Lagos, with three French, an English and a German factory as well as numerous smaller traders - Brazilians, Portuguese,

liberated slaves, and, by the mid-1870s, native Porto Noveans working on their own account or for the major factories.³¹ Between 1875 and 1879 Porto Novo's trade rose steadily. By the last years of the '70s estimates put the trade in palm produce of the three main French houses there at 670,000 gallons of palm oil and 2000 tons of palm kernels per annum, involving transactions valued at some five million Francs.³²

Commerce of this extent at Porto Novo put it on a par with Whydah itself. At Whydah, apart from the three French houses of Régis, Fabre, and Daumas, the English had a presence through Swanzey and Co. and the more recently arrived Walsh's who had been established in 1876. There was one further factory, a Portuguese establishment of secondary importance.³³ In an average year in the late 1870's some 500,000 gallons of palm oil, at around 1.80 - 2.0 Francs per gallon, and 2500 tons of kernels were exported from Whydah by the French.³⁴ Thus, French exports from the three Dahomean ports of Whydah, Godomey and Abomey-Calavi (Cotonou was largely a disembarkation and transit port) amounted to around 740,000 gallons of palm oil and 3700 tons of kernels.³⁵

By 1878 the rise in oil prices in France which had followed the slump of 1874 was encouraging European dealers on the coast to pursue business with zeal and the oil trade proceeded briskly.³⁶ Régis, despite the breach of their monopoly in the last decade, still dominated the business, but others increasingly contributed to the growing volume of the trade. By 1878 the French were importing almost 4,400 tons of palm oil and around 5700 tons of kernels from the Dahomean ports of Whydah, Cotonou, Godomey and Abomey-Calavi.³⁷

One distinction worth making between Régis and the other traders is that the former, with a long established trading connection in Dahomey, dealt mainly with large producers,³⁸ including the nobility. These large producers were increasingly playing a significant role in Dahomean palm oil exports.

OIL PRODUCTION AND TAXATION.

The revival of the slave trade had had a deleterious effect on legitimate commerce, but with its demise the oil trade gradually regained some of its former vitality. It also offered the hard-pressed royal exchequer a further means of supplementary income. The mid-1860's appear to mark the first contemporary recording of the systematic taxation on palm oil production. Burton noted that in certain areas of the Kingdom the palm trees were "numbered with a view to revenue".³⁹ It is not absolutely clear what he meant to convey by his comment. It is possible that he was referring merely to a systematic approach to production. However, it seems likely that he was referring to taxation revenue.

Such a tax would have furnished increasing amounts for the royal treasury, not only as a result of the regularisation of fiscal procedures, but also because of the revived growth of oil production.

Throughout the late 1860's and 1870's, plantation production expanded in scale. In 1863 the plantations around Whydah had been untended and overgrown.⁴⁰ After the demise of the slave trade agricultural development at Whydah revived and these plantations were better cared for. The house of Antonio da Souza at Whydah, for instance, was

surrounded by oil palms, and agents of the King like Quenum possessed oil plantations on the outskirts of the town.⁴¹ Here domestic slaves were lodged in huts surrounded by the palm oil trees. The domestic slaves were both gatherers of the fruit and manufacturers of the oil, producing it in the traditional fashion.⁴² The oil produced served as commodity for sale to Europeans and, purified, for domestic cooking purposes. The residue from the production process was employed as manure or fuel.⁴³

In the interior too, plantation production of palm oil flourished. Apart from the produce of the "commemorative villages" which had been added to during the reign of Glele,⁴⁴ the monarch himself and his main chiefs retained palm oil groves and plantations.⁴⁵ By his jurisdiction over the allocation of both land and slave labour,⁴⁶ the monarch effectively controlled the wealth and productive capacity of his chiefs.

In addition to his own plantations near Abomey, the monarch had scattered throughout the Kingdom royal houses peopled by Amazons.⁴⁷ Entry to such palaces was forbidden to strangers or subjects, and it is therefore difficult to state with any degree of certainty the extent to which systematic production of palm oil for export was carried out therein. It seems likely, however, that the inhabitants were heavily involved in the manufacture of palm oil, some of which at least, by the 1870s was destined for export. ~ Certainly by that period gangs of Amazons were being used to carry oil, presumably manufactured on the King's plantations or royal houses, to Whydah where apartments were set aside for the visitors in the Yevogan's palace.⁴⁸ This same palace had increasingly become a commercial centre, maintaining in its stores

those exchange goods received for oil prior to transmission to Abomey, while the largest section of the palace was set aside for the storage of palm oil awaiting exchange with the mercantile houses on the coast.⁴⁹ Apart from the production of his estates, of course, the monarch was also able to raise a certain amount of palm oil by way of tribute from outlying villages.⁵⁰

It was from large scale producers that Régis drew the bulk of his trade, delivering in return goods in bulk, and often credit, to either his native clients or to responsible "Mullatoe" intermediaries.⁵¹ Other French houses, like Daumas dealt in smaller amounts and in the main obtained their oil from different sources from Régis. The demise of the export trade in slaves, and the increase in competition at the coast, had encouraged a further proliferation of small intermediaries, often native Dahomeans who collected oil from the interior in small quantities. Daumas limited themselves mainly to this end of the market, allowing a few credit clients, but mainly carrying out transactions by direct exchanges for factory stock.⁵² By the end of the 1870's trade was sufficiently brisk to satisfy dealers at both ends of the market. Only the perennial hazard of sharks off Whydah and Cotonou blighted an otherwise sunny horizon.⁵³

THE 1876 BLOCKADE

And yet this placid picture was misleading. It was the second half of the 1870's which marked the final stage in the developing contradiction between the new commerce and the hitherto existing pattern of political power in Dahomey. The second half of the 1870's also

marked the beginning of the final phase of the Dahomean leadership's response towards the new economic forces which had been encroaching upon their kingdom for almost half a century.

Up until that point the ultimate direction of the leadership's response was uncertain. In the early stages of the palm oil commerce the indigenous aristocracy's response had shifted from acceptance to encouragement, culminating in Gezo's cautious attempts to adapt traditional political structures and ideology to the novel economic circumstances. The failure of that process and its inadequacy in providing an economic substitute for the slave trade had led to a reaction against the direction of Gezo's changes and a return to an uneasy equilibrium between acceptance of the palm oil trade and sporadic attempts to revive the flagging slave trade. The British blockade of the Dahomean coast from 1876 effectively marked the beginning of the end of this equilibrium.

In this sense the blockade of the Dahomean coast by the British in 1876 was the culmination of almost five decades of inherent tensions between a Dahomean military elite which was predominantly committed to the maintenance of both political sovereignty and the political status quo and, on the other hand, the vested interests - both European and Dahomean - in the new palm oil trade.

In another way the blockade was a watershed. It encapsulated the main strands of conflicting interests which were to dominate Dahomean politics for the next decade and a half, until the eventual victory of the new commercial interests through direct military intervention in the 1890's. It exhibited the growing rivalries between the European powers

for political and commercial advantage. It highlighted the growing and aggressive influence of the west's commercial interests within their own political bureaucracies. It displayed the increasing vulnerability of the African Kingdom to western military power and ambitions. And it illustrated the growing divergence of opinion and approach within the Dahomean polity, between those who sought an accommodation with European commercial expansion and those who finally set their face against any further compromise and strove to maintain their economic and political power in the traditional manner despite the new economic forces.

The causes and course of the 1876 blockade have been comprehensively detailed by modern historians.⁵⁴ The spark which ignited what had already been for some time a potential powder keg was the treatment of Turnbull, Swanzey's agent at Whydah. A trade dispute between the Whydah authorities and a merchant named da Costa resulted in the confiscation of goods which had been farmed out to him by Swanzey's agent. When the latter protested against the seizure of the goods he was ill-treated and punished by the Dahomean authorities.⁵⁵

Commodore Hewett, the British Naval representative on the spot, immediately demanded reparation of 500 puncheons (80,000 gallons) of palm oil, to the value of approximately £6000, and threatened military action against Whydah in the event of any re-occurrence of maltreatment. Despite misgivings inside the Admiralty in London regarding the scale of reparation demanded and the apparent impetuosity in imposing it, they had little option but to back Hewett.⁵⁶

In fact, Hewett's response to the Whydah incident was considerably less 'impetuous' than the Admiralty believed: it was typical of an

increasingly aggressive attitude being adopted by British officials on the coast, in contrast to the caution being displayed by their counterparts in London. On the coast officials were under increasing pressure from both commercial and missionary interests to bring Dahomey to heel, particularly in view of the perceived threat to Abeokuta, and Hewett himself had previously been actively encouraging the idea of a blockade.⁵⁷

DIVISIONS IN THE DAHOMEAN POLITY

The differing Dahomean responses to the British demands told as much about the divergence of opinion within the Dahomean polity as it did about tensions between the Europeans and the Dahomean leadership. Initially, the head men at Whydah wanted to pay the fine and began to seize palm oil from the coastal population in order to make good the demanded recompense. But these orders were countermanded by the monarch who set himself against payment and instructed that the oil be restored to its original owners.⁵⁸

Despite the king's steadfast refusal to countenance payment of the fine, equivocation on the part of others in the Dahomean leadership continued. By May 1876 Europeans on the coast were still convinced that the Yevogan and Dahomean authorities were about to pay. The Yevogan himself had requested casks for the oil and explained that it was being made ready.⁵⁹

Glele, however, stood firm. He refuted the British demands on grounds that would surely have withstood examination in any court of justice and which appear to have received sympathy from even the

occasional British observer.⁶⁰ The King argued that there was no precedent for such a demand. It was peremptory, arbitrary and unilaterally imposed. There had not been even the minimum of discussion on the matter. It impinged upon the right of Dahomeans to apply their own legal jurisdiction in their own territory. Glele could not bring himself to believe that the fine had in fact been imposed with the full authority of the Queen, on whose behalf the Commodore purported to speak. He appealed to the Commodore to make trade rather than war.⁶¹

There is some evidence to suggest that the Dahomean monarch did in fact take steps of his own to impose punishment on those responsible for the mal-treatment of Turnbull, partly because he suspected a malign intention on the part of the culprits to bring the English into direct conflict at Whydah.⁶² But in his defence of Dahomean sovereignty and their right to settle the matter internally the King was resolute, even when a compromise was available. Régis' agent, whose firm was suffering badly as a result of the blockade suggested that the monarch might write a conciliatory letter to the British suggesting a reduction of the fine; in these circumstances, he suggested, Régis themselves would discreetly provide the oil in payment of any reduced fine. To have done so, of course, would have been tantamount to conceding those points of principle and practice regarding Dahomean sovereignty which Glele was determined not to concede. He regarded the offer with scepticism, and although he did eventually agree to the preparation of a letter and its dispatch in his name it remains extremely unlikely that he was aware of the extent of compromise and concession which was being effected in his name.⁶³

Glele also remained aloof from the negotiations leading to the final settlement, which ended without the monarch making any concessions over the sovereignty of the Dahomean state.⁶⁴ A few weeks after the signing of the Treaty of Amnity and Trade which ended the blockade, Glele could write extending the hand of friendship to English traders, but making it plain that they, like everyone else were subject to the laws of Dahomey.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the equivocation and colaboration of some Fon officials was sufficient to indicate that the economic crisis was giving way to a growing political crisis as divisions within the leadership emerged as to the approach to be adopted.

At one level these divisions were a reflection of divided opinion over the great issues which had faced the Dahomean leadership for half a decade - how far to compromise their traditional military, raiding structure and the military ethos in order to accommodate the new economic and political forces which accompanied the commercialisation of the palm oil trade. Glele, who had had to face several internal insurrections before he was finally established on the Dahomean stool⁶⁶ and who was later destined to fend off a further attempted coup in 1883 in the wake of military defeat,⁶⁷ knew that the slave trade and human sacrifice could not be lightly abandoned without the possibility of a political threat to his own position,⁶⁸ a threat not to be taken lightly.

DUAL APPOINTEES.

Aware of the threat he had already tried to bolster his position by appointing close relatives or allies in important political positions.

The Chuydaton at Whydah, the second-in-command to the Yevogan, was one such close relative already mentioned.⁶⁹ In addition, the Matro, deputy to the Gau the military commander, was a half-brother to Glele. At Abomey a considerable number of officials like the Tometti, the Vodoh, the Nuage and the Nonpwento were brothers to the king, while outside the capital chiefs like Atakpeh, the caboceer of M'Henvi-Asinweh and the commercial chief at Cotonou were the king's relatives.⁷⁰

All or most of the appointed 'shadows' were of the royal lineage, and the move was almost certainly prompted partly in an attempt to strengthen royal power vis-a-vis the other chiefs in view of the factional infighting surrounding Gezo's death. It seems, however, that it was at least partly necessitated by the fact that Glele wished personally to appoint his own placemen alongside those he had inherited, perhaps reluctantly, as a result of his father's decree that there was to be no mass slaughter of caboceers or officials on his own death.⁷¹

The object of such double tenure was two-fold, firstly, to neutralise the worst effects, from the point of view of the new monarch, of defects in capacity or fidelity in the inherited ministers without openly subjecting them to mass dismissal or degradation.⁷² Such a mass dismissal would have been calculated to inspire simmering resentment against Glele, an unwelcome risk to any new monarch. Since the other alternative to dismissal - dispatch of the ministers in the company of their deceased monarch - was effectively foreclosed to Glele by agreement with his father prior to the latter's death, twinning of the ministers with others personally loyal to and patronised by the new monarch was the path of 'least resistance' in bolstering his personal power and position.

Secondly, the practice did have some beneficial practical effects. The new office holder appointed by the incoming monarch to directly represent his interests, was thus afforded immediate opportunity for direct intervention on all matters of state pertaining to his office, while maintaining a certain consistency and stability while the new appointee gained appropriate experience in office.⁷³ More leisurely diminution of the influence of 'inherited' ministers could be anticipated, whether by death or otherwise.

Finally, the practice was also a method of providing wealth to the princes, at no direct cost to the monarch, a practice which made particular sense since the royal finances were under considerable pressure. Effectively, the move redistributed the financial burden away from the royal family onto the shoulders of the tax-paying subjects.

PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS

However, Glele's plans in this direction were not entirely successful, particularly among those appointees who were involved in commercial intercourse with the western powers. The most prominent of these was Prince Chyudaton himself. From an early stage, Chuydaton appears to have cultivated and befriended his western contacts, initially perhaps as a normal part of commercial diplomacy. However, increasingly he came to be regarded as particularly sympathetic to western interests and a likely advocate of their cause. Burton wrote of him:

" Prince Chuydaton, a caboceer of note and influence, one of the king's many cousins, supposed to possess the ear of royalty, and lately appointed second Yevogan of Whydah . . . The English subjects speak highly of him; the French, whose 'landlord' he is,

declare him to be cunning and interested. He certainly knows the habits of white men, and it was long ago proposed that he should visit England, the principal advantage being that after return he might venture upon the truth, which a meaner man would not dare before royalty . . . I much regretted not seeing more of this young man . . . one so conversant with 'European Society'".⁷⁴

Clearly then, Chuydaton was regarded with some considerable respect by the European 'lobby', and was, moreover, regarded as a likely vehicle for the transmission of their version of "the truth" - the advocacy of commercial development, western style.

Although he was appointed as 'shadow' to the Yevogan at Whydah precisely because he was a close relation and ally of the new King,⁷⁵ a blood relationship proved no guarantee of continuing allegiance. The serious divisions which were by now appearing within the Dahomean polity were reflected by the autonomy with which he and other members of the Dahomean polity were by the 1870's operating in opposition to Glele's inflexible protection of Dahomean sovereignty against the encroachments of the western powers. Chuydaton's direct interest in the European trade and his intercourse with the European powers had eroded the warrior ethos and illustrated the opportunities for commercial advance. Along with the Yevogan he was the prime example of those forces working for compromise with the western powers. It was Chuydaton and the Yevogan who were involved in the deal which ended the 1876 blockade in terms which were unknown in detail to Glele himself.⁷⁶ It was again Chuydaton and the Yevogan who were signatories to the 1878 cession of Cotonou where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that Glele was unaware of the exact nature of what was being signed away in his name.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, Chuydaton was particularly well regarded by the French for his role in the encouragement of export commerce and his protection of French interests.⁷⁸ He remained a confirmed advocate of compromise with the western powers up until the years immediately preceding the French invasion of Dahomey. Significantly, he was part of a group striving for friendly relations with France and who were involved in an attempted coup against Behanzin in 1889.⁷⁹

Even within the circle of the royal family there were those who sought closer cooperation with the west and the new commerce. Prime amongst these was Topa, one of the younger sons of Glele, and Vissegan, Glele's senior wife. The later, like others among the 'progressive' grouping was later to come into open conflict with the monarch and was eventually imprisoned on a charge of treason.⁸⁰

However, although the political divisions were reflected within the royal circle, they were most apparent and widespread amongst those whose commercial contact with the west and geographical distance from Abomey was greatest. One French observer noted:

Loin du roi, administrant le territoire le plus important du royaume, les cabécères de Whydah ont pris à la longue une très grande initiative dans le règlement des affaires et, à ne parler que de prélèvement des impôts, ils savent, dit-*ons*, s'y tailler une bonne part.⁸¹

These growing divisions within the Dahomean polity between those who sought closer cooperation with the new western commercial interests and those who opposed it were graphically illustrated by the open breach which developed between Kpadonou Quenum (Houenou) and Glele. Quenum's own family had long been close associates and trusted servants of the

kings of Dahomey, and his father had been appointed by Gezo as an Ahissigan, or trade captain, at Whydah after a short but illustrious military career.⁸² Kpadonou Quenum succeeded to his father's position in 1866, and for a number of years acted as both Ahissigan and as counsellor to the king.⁸³ He grew convinced of the material benefits of the new commerce and was actively involved in soliciting the monarch's approval for the establishment of Fabre's factory at Abomey-Calavi.⁸⁴

However, the growing polarisation within the Dahomean hierarchy led to strained relations between Quenum and the da Souza family, and growing enmity between himself and Prince Kondo, the heir apparent and later King Behanzin. In the late 1870's Quenum's commercial contacts with merchants and monarch at Porto Novo were employed against him and - fuelled by Prince Kondo - were sufficient to merit his own imprisonment by Glele and the breaking of the Quenum family.⁸⁵ Despite an attempted reconciliation by Glele in 1881 the two remained at loggerheads and the Quenum family, like Chuydaton, eventually developed into bitter enemies of the monarch. The Quenum family supported the French against Behanzin in 1892.⁸⁶

The Yevogan too was counted upon as an advocate of closer commercial links with the west. The French believed that:

"Le Yevogan est tres devoué à notre cause et serait partisan de l'établissement du protectorat francais au Dahomey"⁸⁷

Friction also appears to have developed between the Brazilian traders on the coast and the Dahomean Government, particularly over the question of inherited wealth which the traders wished to leave to their offspring in traditional western practice but which reverted to the monarch under Dahomean custom.⁸⁸

TRADITIONALISTS

But not all the leadership were in such constant or close proximity to the west. And as political polarisation proceeded the traditionalists came to dominate, eschewing compromise with the new commercial interests and resorting to the means of their former glory. By the mid 1870's the Dahomean leadership had reverted to a system of annual raiding.⁸⁹

In May 1876 the Dahomeans destroyed the town of Idofa on the outskirts of Abeokuta.⁹⁰ Throughout 1878 and 1879 a war between Porto Novo and the people of Weme had already closed the roads for a year. Early in that year the Dahomeans sacked 6 villages and a second expedition was launched in April. Later still, in October 1878 they launched a surprise attack on Meko, to the North West of Abeokuta reportedly slaughtering 4000 people and taking 3000 prisoners.⁹¹

In 1881 when Toffo of Porto Novo was again at war with Okeodan with consequent serious disruption of trade the Dahomeans went further into Yoruba territory, destroying several villages under Oyo control.⁹² The following year they attacked several villages under Ketu control⁹³ and in 1883 the target became Ketu itself where the aged and infirm were slaughtered and the rest taken as prisoners to Abomey.⁹⁴ In July of that year the roads from Whydah to Great Popo were blocked by the Dahomeans. In that same year Dahomey's eastern neighbours, Yoruba, Oyo, Bariba and Save united against, and inflicted a defeat upon the Dahomeans.⁹⁵ Later that same year the German factories at Porto Novo were closed because of a dispute with Toffo over import and export dues.⁹⁶

ECONOMIC DECLINE, DOMESTIC DISCONTENT AND AUTHORITARIANISM

These developments were taking place against the backcloth of an increasing fragility in the position of Glele and the Dahomean leadership as a whole. On the one hand the export trade in slaves which had revived with relative suddenness, died away almost as quickly. The palm oil trade, which had been decimated, offered no means of a ready substitute.

On the other hand, the manner of Glele's accession, the return to regular raiding, the regularity and extent of Customs after Gezo's death and the lavish outlay involved, were sustainable in the short term only on the basis of a thriving slave trade. The pattern of political ostentation could not be altered as easily and abruptly as swings in the Atlantic slave trade.

Moreover, since Glele's accession the Dahomean state apparatus now had to bear a considerable additional burden compared to the last years of Gezo's reign - double tenure in office-holding, the appointment of newer ministers alongside those inherited from Gezo's reign.

The motivation for this move has been touched upon earlier, but set against its political advantages was the economic burden of doubling the number of ministers entitled to expect largesse and reimbursement from the royal exchequer and - indirectly - from the population as a whole. In effect, the increase in ministers and officers of royal lineage marked a transfer of the cost burden from the royal family themselves to the state apparatus. This was already heavily burdened since Gezo's prohibition on his Caboceers' sacrificing themselves on his death had ensured an inordinately high inheritance rate of ministers for the new monarch.

Of course, additional to the cost of extra personnel with a direct claim to Exchequer disbursement were the costs - direct and indirect - of consistent raiding and wars. The resumption of large-scale raiding involved indirect loss of revenue to the monarch resulting from the diversion of labour from the production of palm oil and disruption to the trade in oil. But, more directly, the resumption of a pattern of regular raiding involved direct costs in the supply of arms and powder.⁹⁷ The cost of such initial outlay could be met from the profits of a successful slave raid, provided such profit was realised from the sale of slave products. But if, due to decline in the export demand for slaves, this was not the case, the leadership faced increasing impoverishment in sustaining raiding.

To be sure, conquest involved the receipt of tribute. But this was small in scale relative to the immediate income which could be anticipated from a successful harvest of saleable captives. And the public manifestation of a successful policy of martial conquest was enshrined not only in lavish customs, but particularly in the display of the material benefits of such a policy and the liberality of the monarch. The old, heady days of the Atlantic trade, institutionalised in its effects by Gezo, had acquainted both the higher ranks and lower orders with a magnificence which could no easily be forgotten.⁹⁸ Glele's accession had promised a renaissance of such times, a promise justified up until 1862. But from then on the decline in the export sector for slaves had started to tarnish the early expectations.

By the mid-1860's it was already apparent that this was occurring. The condition of Whydah,⁹⁹ the Royal Palaces,¹⁰⁰ Royal

hospitality,¹⁰¹ and particularly of the Customs¹⁰² all indicated to visitors a decline in the fortunes of the Dahomean leadership. Burton, who visited the Customs in 1863 referred to the display of wealth as a display of poverty, and concluded that whereas Gezo attempted to keep up state, his son was either unable or unwilling to do so.¹⁰³ Dahomey had the aura of a declining power.

As the economic crisis accelerated, the monarch resorted to the solutions adopted by his predecessor Adandozan at the beginning of the century. Beset by economic difficulties, direct political coercion was employed in order to sustain the royal income and increasingly Glele was forced into arbitrary impositions on western mercantile interests.¹⁰⁴

By 1870 the African Company were complaining bitterly to the British authorities about the monarchs activity, accusing him of "demanding on credit what he likes" and "stopping trade if it be not given."¹⁰⁵ The King was in considerable debt largely because the major method of payment available to him remained the supply of slaves, a commodity no longer commercially attractive to the western powers.¹⁰⁶

By the mid 1870's the signs of decay proliferated. At Abomey the Cowrie House lapsed into decay and was no longer festooned by strings of cowries or decorated with dollars as in the prosperous days of the slave trade.¹⁰⁷

The increasing economic problems had their effect too upon the internal commercial and social situation. Arbitrary impositions on the roads or at the factories increased, forcing the domestic population into elaborate measures to avoid payment.¹⁰⁸ Economic impositions were accompanied by an increased severity in the treatment of offenders.

Anyone caught at avoidance of the impositions suffered confiscation of their goods and conscription into the army.¹⁰⁹ More than ever, it became incautious for Dahomeans to display signs of advances in wealth. At signs of enrichment heavy fines were imposed or confiscation undertaken on the least pretext.¹¹⁰

The expanding palm oil trade had, in fact, proved to be a two-edged sword as far as the aristocracy was concerned. Between 1865 and 1878 the growing trade in palm oil had brought immediate and direct material benefits to an increasing number of Dahomeans. It offered to families hitherto denied access to western imports the opportunity to produce oil over and above their domestic requirements and to reinvest part of the proceeds of such trade in slaves for the further production of oil. Thus, although the export-oriented commodity production remained numerically restricted within Dahomey it is not unnatural that those so involved - as well as others who had benefited from the spin-off effects on agriculture and pottery production - resented the disruption of their newly acquired economic opportunities which accompanied the revival of slave raiding.¹¹¹

The attraction of the oil trade had an undermining effect on the relationship between master and slave, and led to a breakdown in discipline which manifested itself particularly in the incidence of thefts which persisted despite warnings and beatings. Laffitte commented:

"Le roi et les dignitaires du gouvernement possèdent d'immenses plantations de palmiers, chaque nègre libre en possède quelques pieds; les esclaves grappillent un peu partout: le bambou propriétaire leur cingle les épaules de temps à l'autre pour leur inculquer la distinction du tien et du mien; mais ils n'attendent pas que les épaules soient gueries pour recommencer la maraude".¹¹²

The internal discontent manifested itself also in an outward flow of population from the Kingdom. Since the mid-1860's there had been some emigration to the Porto Novo area by families who wished to escape from the constraints on opportunities within Dahomey.¹¹³ Gradually, this growing social discontent penetrated even the Dahomean armies. By the 1880's the army could not be taken on expedition in the Porto Novo area without risking the loss of part of the troops through desertion to the outskirts of the British territories. By the mid-1880's there was a settlement of Dahomean refugees at Lagos and a further settlement of some 400 Dahomeans just behind Badagry.¹¹⁴

Glele continued to receive income from many of the traditional sources of royal finance. Tribute provided palm oil, cotton, cowries and foodstuffs such as Guinea corn and yams.¹¹⁵ Tolls on trade goods in transit by road or water or at markets provided western goods such as rum and domestic produce for the royal household.¹¹⁶ Further western produce was obtained from dues levied in kind on visiting ships.¹¹⁷

But the income from taxation and tolls was increasingly insufficient to maintain a court and state apparatus on the traditionally lavish Dahomean scale.¹¹⁸ The demise of the slave trade placed the royal exchequer under increasing pressure. The lack of an export market for slaves meant the absence of any means of recompense for the outlays incurred in raiding, particularly if heavy losses were sustained during the campaign.¹¹⁹ It also meant a dearth of imported western luxury goods which were so essential to the prestige of the aristocratic class.

ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE THE SLAVE TRADE

At this stage the traditionalists' hand was immeasurably strengthened by first the Portuguese and later the German commercial interests. The Portuguese connection at Whydah in the late 1870s and early 1880's was as strong as it had ever been. Seven out of the twenty-five major traders of Dahomey were Brazilian and over half the smaller 'Commercants' - seventy-eight out of one hundred and fifty-four - were of a similar background.¹²⁰

But by the mid-1880's the relationship between Dahomey and Portugal was being put on a far more formalised footing. Partly, this arose from a desire of the Dahomean leadership to "cover their backs" while raiding was in progress and partly, as we have seen, from their suspicions of British and French ambitions.¹²¹ Mainly, however, it stemmed from the Dahomean desire to resurrect the export trade in slaves. Early in 1884 Portuguese officers visited Dahomey from the 19th January until the 6th February.¹²² In mid-1884 Ambassadors were imminently expected to be dispatched from Dahomey to Lisbon.¹²³

The subject under discussion was two-fold. Firstly the establishment of Portuguese protection to counter the perceived threat from the French and the British. And secondly, the resurrection of the external slave trade under the guise of "indentured labourers" for St. Thomé.¹²⁴ By the middle of the following year rumours of the intended large scale shipment of "indentured labour" were by now widely circulating on the west coast.¹²⁵

In June 1885 the Portuguese Governor of St. Thomé visited Whydah to settle the final arrangements. In July or August 200 slaves were

reportedly shipped upon the Portuguese transport Africa as indentured labourers for 5 years.¹²⁶ On the 7th July 1885 a convoy of 300 slaves arrived at Whydah and were shipped upon the Portuguese gunboat Sado. The operation was shrouded in considerable secrecy, the slaves were equipped with tickets signifying that they had agreed to serve 5 years as indentured labourers, and they were reported to be heading for Angola. In August a further steamer arrived to pick up another 400 slaves¹²⁷ The following month, September, 1000 more slaves were reportedly exported coinciding with the placing of Dahomey under Portuguese protection.¹²⁸

Led by the Cha-Cha Julio Da Souza, several Portuguese officials from St Thomé, Portuguese colony coffee plantation owners, merchants and the Governor of the Portuguese fort at Whydah went to Abomey to treat with the King for a further convoy of several hundred slaves which were reportedly planned for later in the year, and 300 of whom were already stationed at Whydah.¹²⁹ In the course of negotiating these new export shipments, the monarch, in view of his precarious economic position, attempted to ensure his personal monopoly as slave supplier to the Portuguese. Others were, of course, keen to sell, and some did in fact supply a limited number of slaves, but the King fined the culprits heavily.¹³⁰

As is mentioned later, the Germans were eventually to follow the Portuguese in giving succour and support to the traditionalists during the brief reign of Glele's successor Behanzin, providing rifles and ammunition in return for slaves.¹³¹

EFFECT OF RAIDING ON PALM OIL PRODUCTION

For the western commercial interests and the Afro-Brazilians engaged in legitimate trade the resumption of systematic annual raiding was a serious curtailment on their potential trading profit. The period immediately after the lifting of the British blockade had been one of considerable commercial activity, with the establishment of several new trading houses along the Dahomean coast. Indeed, by the mid-1880's exports from Cotonou by Régis and Fabre alone were running at a level of 46,391 hectolitres of oil per annum and 2,158,363, kilos of kernels.¹³²

But the constant raiding of the Dahomean army seriously disrupted the potential supply of oil, acted as a brake to expansion and affected the orderly conduct of trade.. Even British trade, which was represented within Dahomean territory proper by only one firm, Swanzy's, was seriously curtailed in the Lagos area by Dahomean raids on the Egba hinterland.¹³³

1884 was perhaps the most disastrous year yet for western commercial interests. There was a disruption of trade from Abomey-Calavi because of the impositions and prohibitions of the local chiefs, and disruption through pillaging at Cotonou. Trade was once more seriously disrupted in the same year when the Dahomeans destroyed Okeodan, the strategically important town on the commercial trade routes.¹³⁴

In 1885 the Dahomean armies marched south east against Porto Novo territory destroying the large village of Laké and five other of the outlying villages and taking the survivors into captivity.¹³⁵ In July of that year the second seige of Ketu took place and after early reverses the Fon razed the city and took away the survivors as

prisoners. Almost certainly these provided the human cargoes for the shipments of "indentured labourers" aboard Portuguese vessels later that year.¹³⁶

Thus, the very regularity of raiding disrupted the orderly conduct of commerce. But the essential underlying problem lay in the restrictions which were placed on potential palm oil production by the system of military raiding. Both could co-exist while the palm oil trade was in its infancy, but if the new commerce was to fulfill its maximum potential the two were essentially incompatible. This was particularly so since raiding not only interrupted the trade in oil, but also limited the time which could be spent on the collection of the fruit and the production of oil, resulting in either a high proportion of the fruit rotting on the trees or the later collection of over-ripe fruit with the consequent production of an inferior quality product.¹³⁷

Contemporary evidence suggests that the bulk of 19th century Dahomean oil was produced during the period May-August. This is consistent with the experience of Régis's agent Brue in the 1840's. Passing through Allada in May 1843, the latter reported on the harvesting of the fruit and the intensive palm oil trade in that area. Returning in August of the same year he remarked upon the considerable increase in the amount of oil on sale at the Allada market, from around 10 'pipes' in early May to 30 in August.¹³⁸ In the 1870's, Skertchly commented on the carriage of oil to the coast during early August,¹³⁹ and dwelt on the difficulties of transporting the product during the rainy season.¹⁴⁰

In areas adjacent to Dahomey the intensive production of palm oil appears to have commenced somewhat earlier in the year. At Lagos, the

certainty of oil cargoes was guaranteed from as early as February,¹⁴¹ while at Abeokuta the palm oil season ran from February to July.¹⁴² It thus appears that the productive potential in Dahomey was curtailed by the military mobilisation and campaigning which normally occurred c. November to February/March.¹⁴³ This point is borne out by the fact that in 20th century Dahomey, after the demise of militarism, the main palm oil season came to be located in November-March,¹⁴⁴ precisely the period which was occupied with the military mobilisation throughout the 19th century.

This conflict between the timing of military mobilisation and the potential palm oil season was particularly acute in Dahomey. On the Abomey plateau, unlike many areas of Africa, men formed the mainstay of the agricultural labour force, largely because the severe shortage of water required the involvement of large numbers of women as water carriers.¹⁴⁵ Thus the military corvée which drew mainly Dahomean males into the army was particularly constraining on the full development of palm oil production.

In addition, the practice of annual raiding not only curtailed the commercial exploitation of Dahomean palm oil potential, but also discouraged effort in caring for the palm trees or the clearing of brushwood around them.¹⁴⁶ And, from the point of view of transport the difficulties of moving oil ~during the rainy season must have curtailed the ability of large producers to move significant amounts of oil from the central regions of the kingdom to Whydah, given the geographical conditions of Dahomey and in particular the Lama.

While the military calendar may have been a severe obstacle to those seeking to maximise oil production, from the monarch's point of view there was no reason why the palm oil trade should, in the first instance, prove incompatible with a Dahomey largely directed towards military raiding. Although there was an optimum period for preparation and production of the oil, it was a sufficiently flexible process to allow sub-optimum production to take place for a considerable period of the year. Indeed, this may well have been a central feature of its attraction to the Dahomean warrior aristocracy prior to its destabilising influence becoming apparent.

Thus the fact that the monarch and Dahomean leadership, despite their participation in the palm oil trade, were still committed to slave raiding and a martial life-style for Dahomey was ultimately a constraining factor on the oil trade. Moreover, from the point of view of the aristocracy the new trade still did not compensate in economic terms for the loss of the slave trade, and the final decline of the latter led to a serious shortage of revenue which had to be replaced from some quarter. Finally, developing commercial and political rivalry between the western powers on the coast inexorably drew the Dahomean leadership into the arena of territorial conflict. Just as the slave trade at its height had become integrally related to Dahomean-Western relations, so now the flourishing palm oil trade began to permeate Glele's political relationships with the western powers.

In the earlier part of his reign, Glele had adopted the same confident posture in his dealings with Europeans in general. All Europeans without exception had to attend the Customs.¹⁴⁷ Letters

from distant ambassadors would no longer suffice; the King required personal communication.¹⁴⁸ Renewed threats of British suppression of the slave trade were, during this period, met with renewed Dahomean confidence. There was, according to the Dahomean leadership, plenty of opportunity to sell, at good prices.¹⁴⁹ In any case, if the British suppressed the export trade, they would continue to raid, and to sacrifice the captives.¹⁵⁰

To a great extent this confident and aggressive tone - in contrast to the conciliatory posture adopted by Gezo in the decade from 1850 - derived directly from the revival of the slave trade around the time of Glele's accession. A thriving trade provided the spur to a re-invigorated military drive, and the economic strength to support renewed confidence vis-a-vis the western powers. To some extent also, it derived from a perceived failure of the western powers, particularly Britain, to fulfill their promises from Cruickshank onwards,¹⁵¹ and an apparent incapacity on their part to suppress the slave trade. Glele's slave raiding was more likely to be constrained by a shortage of demand than by British naval might. But in the meantime, the growing polarisation of opinion within Dahomey and the increasing tension between Europeans and the African kingdom was paralleled by developing divisions among the European powers themselves, none of whom had yet established territorial dominance.

GROWING EUROPEAN RIVALRY. FRANCO-BRITISH RIVALRY

These divisions between western commercial concerns became sharper and more pronounced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

partly, as Hopkins has pointed out, because of the adverse movement in the terms of trade during this period.¹⁵² More immediately, on the Dahomean coast the divisions were strengthened by the commercial sufferings imposed on other Europeans - particularly the French - as a result of the British blockade. The French at Whydah, already suffering disproportionately compared with English merchants based at Lagos and areas to the East, were now additionally hampered by the restrictions on merchants correspondence and movement imposed as a result of the blockade.¹⁵³

But the rivalries had deeper roots. Dahomey had become a centre-piece of Franco-British rivalries which had been heightening on the coast since the 1860's. Under Glover the British had been attempting to channel trade through Lagos, while the French, urged on by Régis, tried to combat this by building up their commercial interests and political influence at Cotonou.

The French claimed that Glele had ceded Cotonou to Desrauz in 1864, and on the 19th May 1868 Régis' agent Bonnaud, acting as French Vice-Consul, signed a Treaty with the Yevogan confirming the cession to France of an area of some 6 Kilometres at Cotonou. According to this alleged agreement this area was to remain under Dahomean occupation until such time as France wished to occupy it.¹⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, some French officials remained sceptical that Glele personally had assented to the terms of the Cotonou Treaty as understood by the French, but in the absence of any likely, immediate commitments the French Government eventually decided to confirm the Treaty.¹⁵⁵ They were encouraged to do so by a feeling of increasing vulnerability to British

encroachments. That feeling was strengthened early in 1875 when the chiefs of Grand Popo requested admission to the British Protectorate.¹⁵⁶ But it was the blockade the following year which really brought home to the French just how important Cotonou was to their own commercial interests, and in particular how important it was as a thoroughfare to Porto-Novo trade.¹⁵⁷

There was some relief among the French that the Anglo-Dahomean Treaty which concluded the blockade involved no extension of British territory in the area of the Bights which would have strengthened Britain's leverage in the anticipated Gambia negotiations and enhanced their local commercial position.¹⁵⁸ But despite their faith in the good intentions of the Yevogan,¹⁵⁹ the French remained concerned about some aspects of the Treaty.

Firstly, article (11) gave the British rights to "hire, occupy and possess any houses and warehouses for the purpose of commerce." Although the French did not believe that the King would place the same construction on this article as the British they were aware that if the British followed it in its entirety it would create an entirely new precedent. Secondly, article (111) called for the protection of the British, not only from native Dahomeans, but also from other foreigners in the country.¹⁶⁰

Accordingly, the French responded to the perceived threat to their interests by appointing Régis' agent in the area as Vice-Consul for France in 1876 and by negotiating a new Franco-Dahomean Treaty confirming yet again the French rights at Cotonou which the British had refused to recognise during the blockade.¹⁶¹ The Treaty, dated 19/4/1878 and

signed by the Yevogan and Chuydaton was similar to the 1877 Anglo-Dahomean Treaty. But in Article 7 it once again gave further confirmation to the cession of Cotonou.¹⁶²

In view of Glele's attitude towards the European powers, his obvious commitment to maintaining Dahomey's integrity and his steadfastness throughout the period of the blockade, it seems inconceivable that the monarch was fully cognisant of the terms of the Treaty signed on his behalf by the Yevogan and Chuydaton. It seems far more likely that what he was agreeing to was the concession of the rights of trade at Cotonou.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, to enforce their own legitimacy the French appointed Ardin D'Elteil as resident at Cotonou and salaried Vice-Consul at Whydah.¹⁶⁴

Immediately after the cession of Cotonou by the Treaty of 1878, Great Britain responded by planting their flag at Ketonou, sustaining the claims of Hungbo, a rival claimant to Toffo at Porto Novo, and declaring Ketonou autonomous from the latter. Ketonou was strategically vital, for it was by Ketonou that the Lagoon of Porto Novo communicated with Cotonou. Thus a British occupation isolated Porto Novo and rendered it dependent on the English customs at Lagos. The same European power struggle was conducted by proxy among the Aguegné in the hinterland of Porto Novo on the lower Oueme where the chief, Aide, passed in turn between Britain's man and France's man.¹⁶⁵

Throughout the 1880's the Franco-British competition heightened in the Dahomey area, fuelled by rumour, speculation and mutual suspicion. France responded to Toffo's fears of the British by placing the kingdom of Porto Novo under their protection in 1883. But internal divisions

over succession allowed the British to foster instability. In the same year rumours abounded concerning plans to place Great Popo under French protection,¹⁶⁶ while it was reported that King Toffo of Porto Novo was trying to persuade the natives of Ketonou to withdraw from British protection.¹⁶⁷

Early the next year French missionaries reported the eagerness of the people of Okparo, to the east of Porto Novo, to seek French protection, and at the same time French officials were turning their minds to the strategic value of the length and navigability of the River Addo which by-passed Okeodan.¹⁶⁸

French suspicions of British intentions in Dahomey and the possibility of military intervention were strengthened by the establishment of a further British firm, Walsh Brothers in Dahomey in the late 1870's.¹⁶⁹

EUROPEAN RIVALRIES INCREASED BY PORTUGUESE AND GERMANS

In the late 1870's and 1880's European rivalry on the coast was complicated further by the re-emergence of the Portuguese as political suitors and commercial benefactors of the Dahomean leadership. French and British paranoia swung hither and thither at the re-emergence of a third European force.

In late 1878 and early 1879 Portuguese officers and merchants were detained at Abomey for a considerable time in discussion with the Dahomean leaders.¹⁷⁰ French speculation in early 1883 that the Portuguese intended to cede their rights at Whydah to the British¹⁷¹ were quashed later the same year by Portuguese visits to Abomey and by

reports early in April 1884 that 2 envoys from the King of Dahomey had been dispatched to Lisbon.¹⁷² Their purpose became clearer when within two months the then Cha-Cha, Julio da Souza, was entertained at the Dahomean capital along with Portuguese officials offering protection and seeking from the Dahomeans the 'hire' of "indentured labour", a euphemism for a revived slave trade.¹⁷³ The following month it was announced that all debates concerning European trading disputes must take place at the house of the Cha-Cha.¹⁷⁴

This new found Portuguese influence only served to increase their rivalry with the French, particularly over Cotonou. As we have already seen, Cotonou had been a source of friction between the French and the Fon for some time. The French Resident at Porto Novo complained bitterly that despite the 1878 Treaty the Chief at Cotonou had continued to charge customs dues on the factories on the beach in the name of the King of Dahomey, and to insist on ruling on disputes between the European factories and the natives whom they employed.¹⁷⁵ The situation was further exacerbated when in September 1885 the Portuguese announced that all Dahomean territories including Whydah, Godomey, Abomey-Calavi and the beach at Cotonou were being placed under their protection. The Portuguese flag was hoisted at Whydah on the 10th September and at Cotonou on the 13th. The French immediately protested and their Agent proceeded to Cotonou with an armed escort, refusing Portuguese entreaties to discuss the matter at Whydah. When the Portuguese themselves proceeded to Whydah the French pulled down the Portuguese flag and thereafter effectively occupied Cotonou.¹⁷⁶

When Fabre's agent at Cotonou constructed a channel with a view to establishing a direct access to the sea on the 21st August 1885 the Fon and French faced open conflict. Quite apart from the breach of Dahomean sovereignty which this entailed, the channelling caused considerable flood damage to native dwellings, and consequent appeals to the King of Dahomey by the local chiefs.¹⁷⁷

The Fon demanded reparation, dispatched troops and closed the roads stopping trade at the French factories at Whydah and Cotonou. But they effectively left the Portuguese to handle the matter on the spot. The French brought up 2 warships and both French and Portuguese dispatched troops to Cotonou, but the latter eventually withdrew, once again leaving the beach to the French. This second rebuff to the Portuguese by the French inevitably undermined Fon confidence in the capacity of the Portuguese to act effectively as military allies, but the Dahomean desire to maintain a slave export sector was sufficient to stop an open breach with the Portuguese.¹⁷⁸

Undeterred, the Portuguese continued their overtures to establish their protectorate. In February 1886 the French Agent at Whydah reported that the Portuguese intended to establish customs dues at Whydah.¹⁷⁹ Two months later a Portuguese major, Cortez da Sylva Curado, left for another mission to Abomey in an attempt to settle the terms of a Portuguese protectorate.¹⁸⁰

But the Portuguese were increasingly proving of little value to the Fon, and their loyalty was in doubt. After the announcement of a Portuguese protectorate at Cotonou in 1885, when the Portuguese flag was raised alongside the French one, French protests to their superiors at

home resulted in a French Emissary, Victor Ballot, being sent to undertake negotiations with Julio da Souza and the Governor of St. Thomé. At that stage Glele summoned Julio to Abomey, from where he never returned.¹⁸¹

These inter-European rivalries were further complicated in the late 1880's when German commercial houses began trading arms to the Fon in return for slaves. The demand for 'indentured labourers' to accompany the more active colonial policy of the government of Cameroon provided a new stimulus to German entrepreneurs, and in July 1890 Barth, a Hamburg merchant met the new King Behanzin - Glele had died on the 28th December 1889¹⁸² - to negotiate the exchange of slaves for arms.¹⁸³ The main German firms involved were Wolber and Brohm, Frangoff and Goedelt,¹⁸⁴ and training instructors were also supplied.¹⁸⁵ The exact quantity of arms delivered is uncertain, although it was reported that Wolber and Brohm supplied the new monarch with 800 rifles, while Barth had contracted to supply a further 3000.¹⁸⁶ Between 1889-91, at least 5 shipments of slaves left Whydah on German vessels bound for the Congo, Cameroon and San Thomé.¹⁸⁷ This German activity had for some time been perceived by the French as a threat to their commercial interest and led to calls for France to put the Popos, Dahomey and Porto Novo under one French protectorate.¹⁸⁸

THE FINAL SOLUTION. PHYSICAL DESTRUCTION OF PALM TREES

European territorial aggression might well have been enough in itself to ensure an inevitable confrontation with the Dahomean authorities. But it was matched within the Dahomean hierarchy itself by a growing

antipathy towards the consequences of the new commerce. After five decades of experiment, adaptation, conciliation and compromise the Dahomean leadership were increasingly pushed towards total resistance to the external threat posed by the western powers and the internal destabilisation resulting from legitimate trade.

Increasingly, as the traditionalists within the Dahomean hierarchy reacted to the commercial and political threat from the new trade, Dahomean raiding took on another aspect, more directly and consciously aimed at damaging the palm oil trade. The Dahomean leadership, who had attempted for so long at least to live with the new palm oil commerce were finally pushed into a position of downright opposition to those areas of the trade which they could not control. Dahomean raiding became as much directed towards the destruction of palm trees - the main source of attraction to western commercial interests and the new found source of wealth for Dahomean subjects and peripheral peoples. This development marked the final, desperate reponse of a political aristocracy whose economic and social position had been more and more undermined by changing commercial forces. Not surprisingly, the focus of attention for Dahomean wrath was the Porto Novo area, one central to the political struggle between the Fon and the French, but just as importantly, an area abundant in palm trees and the potential riches of the palm oil trade.¹⁸⁹

In late 1889 reports from Dahomey suggested that Glele was preparing a huge expedition against the Porto Novo outskirts as they had done earlier that year. But the reports went further. On Glele's instructions the forges of Dahomey had been directed towards the

production of ten thousand axes with which to equip his army for the cutting down of the lucrative palm trees.¹⁹⁰ That the monarch's explicit aim was the disruption of western trade and the destruction of the palm trees which formed the basis of the lucrative oil trade was made abundantly clear in a communication from himself to western officials on the coast.¹⁹¹

Between May and August of the following year the Dahomean army ravaged and pillaged their way through the outlying villages of Porto Novo, burning the villages to the ground and cutting down the palm trees.¹⁹² The constant menaces of the Fon Against Porto Novo in general and the palm oil trade in particular now represented a threat to French commerce and customs which could not be ignored.¹⁹³ For the French, the final act of intervention was by now inevitable. The government of Dahomey represented an obstacle to their ambitions to develop Cotonou and a menace to their commercial interests at Porto Novo. Moreover, they now constituted a threat to the potentially lucrative Oueme valley and an unreliable partner in the protection of the palm oil commerce in Dahomey itself.¹⁹⁴ The growing frustration of the French was encapsulated in the sentiments of one official who wrote that:

"La question de Kotonou se réglèra facilement; il ne s'agit que d'imposer notre volonté au Roi Glele sans entrer en pourparlers . . ." ¹⁹⁵

In December 1889 the French emissary Bayol failed to get Prince Condo (later King Behanzin) to budge over the sovereignty of Cotonou,¹⁹⁶ and early in the new year French officials on the coast were actively urging a military attack on Abomey.¹⁹⁷ In February 1890 Bayol declared that henceforth Cotonou would be French territory.

Despite intermittent negotiations thereafter the die was cast and French intervention was eventually sparked off by the Dahomean raid into Dekamé in the Oueme valley in March of the following year. French military reinforcements arrived in May of that year, had crossed the Oueme en route for Abomey by 2nd October and deposed Behanzin on 3 December.¹⁹⁸

For the Fon, the wheel had turned full circle. The central Dahomean authorities had tried to accept the new commercial ventures and the palm oil trade in the early 1830's. From the late 1830's they had even tried to encourage it as a supplement to the slave trade. Throughout the 1850's Gezo had attempted to introduce a strategy for adaptation aimed at achieving the gradual replacement of an inherited socio-economic structure by a commercially oriented economic basis for political power. Failure and disillusionment led initially to a reaction in the late 1850's and early 1860's, a return to raiding and attempts to revive the increasingly beleaguered slave trade.

Between the second defeat at Abeokuta in 1864 and the mid-1870's an uneasy equilibrium had been maintained between Dahomean and the west, and within Dahomey itself. But the 1876 blockade had illustrated just how fragile that equilibrium was. Increasingly from then onwards an embattled Dahomean leadership abandoned compromise with the west and resorted to military force as the means of maintaining the old ways and suppressing the new, corrosive economic trends. From the mid-1870's Dahomey returned to her classical annual raiding system developed under Gezo with predictable effects on the flow of trade to the west. And from the late 1880's all hope of compromise with the new trade had been abandoned by the majority of the Dahomean leadership. They had finally

recognised the incompatibility of the new commercial trends with the hitherto economic existing basis of their political power.

But the Dahomean polity itself was seriously split. It included within it those who wished to bow to what they perceived as the inevitable - and potentially beneficial - outcome of the new economic trends. This opposition, and the growth of internal discontent which it reflected, was insufficiently strong to achieve any radical change in the Dahomean state or economic system. Indeed, its very existence accentuated the trend towards reaction. Thus, if economic factors prompted a resort to arbitrary government, political paranoia heightened the determination with which it was applied. Both dimensions pointed towards the new palm oil commerce as a threat which had to be removed.

As a corollary, the western powers moved towards a perception of the existing Dahomean government and state structure as the major impediment to economic progress. "Dahomey" wrote Foà in the 1890's:

" a passé sa vie a faire la guerre;....ruiné surtout par son gouvernement despotique qui s'oppose au progres." 199

And elsewhere he commented:

"Au Dahomey . . . il ne fallait compter sur aucune amelioration, tant que le régime gouvernemental n'avait pas ete modifié." 200

Foà's comments are illustrative of the growing consensus among the western powers as regards their perception of Dahomey. Undoubtedly they were Eurocentric. No doubt such sentiments were also useful as an apology for colonial adventure. But, despite the preconceptions and prejudice which underlay them, they also displayed a recognition of temporary reality. The west correctly perceived the Dahomean state and

social formation as a major obstacle to economic expansion, just as the Dahomean authorities came to regard the 'economic progress' of the west as a dire threat to their political position. It was this twin conflict, internal as well as external, which led to the eventual colonial occupation of Dahomey.

The seriousness of the burgeoning contradictions within Dahomey itself has not always been appreciated by modern historians. Indeed, one of the foremost scholars of 19th century Dahomey has explicitly rejected the notion of internal dislocation and disruption. On the contrary, Dahomey is characterised as a relatively stable country, with the government firmly in control and a well integrated, internal market economy flourishing.²⁰¹

In fact, by the last quarter of the 19th century the evidence suggests a very different Dahomey. Attempts at political and economic adjustment had been made, but the corrosive influence of economic developments on the inherited social formation required the eventual resistance of the Dahomean hierarchy. Dahomey's integration into the world economy was, quite simply, incompatible with the material basis on which her social hierarchy and state structure rested.

It is this essential contradiction which has previously been identified by Hopkins:

"African rulers attempted to bolster their fortunes by means which were familiar to pre-industrial governments throughout the world, namely by employing armed strength to plunder and to exact tribute from their neighbours . . . the kings of Dahomey made annual incursions into Yoruba country . . . Military operations, and, perhaps more important, the constant threat of them, led to the abandonment of fertile land, and to the creation of broad areas of neutral

territory between hostile states. They perpetuated conditions which were inimical to the growth of the petty capitalism that had been fostered by legitimate commerce. They dramatised what may be called the crisis of the aristocracy in nineteenth-century West Africa, a social and political crisis stemming from a contradiction between past and present relations of production. They were a last resort, and, as such, represented the ultimate failure of the ancien régime to adapt peacefully and efficiently to the demands of the industrial world."²⁰²

From that point it was inevitable that the conflict between the two would have to involve one side losing out. That conflict was eventually resolved by the force of French arms, when military conquest imposed commercial free trade on a reluctant Dahomean leadership.

CHAPTER 9 FOOTNOTES

- 1 Marshall to Gen. Secs., 31/7/1863, MMS, box 263, 1863-4, art. 28.
Didelot à Min. des Mar. et Col. 25/2/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 2 J. Roberts, master of the Chevy Chase, to Brand 10/5/1860, in Brand to Russell 5/6/1860, PRO.F084/115/259. Cf. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 84-5.
- 3 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 25/2/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 52. French Consular Agent à Min. des Aff. Etrangères, M.A.E., Mem et Doc. Afrique 52. Régis Ainée à M.A.E. 26/8/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 4 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 25/2/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 5 Min. d'Agriculture et Commerce à Min. de la Mar et des Col. 8/7/1863, M.O.M., Gabon XIII:6:(a). Min. d'Agriculture et Commerce à Min. de la Mar. et des Col. 2/3/1867, M.O.M., Gabon XIII:6:(a).
- 6 In 1867 the lagoons were initially blocked by the British and the road to Okeodan was blockaded at the request of the British as a measure against Egba hostility to the British Government: Freeman to Russell, 2/3/1863: Didelot to Freeman, 1/3/1863, 3/3/1863, 4/3/1863: Freeman to Didelot, 3/3/1863, all in PRO.F084/1201/71 et seq. The following year the British justified blockading the creeks as an attempt to ameliorate the excessive taxation of the King of Porto Novo and as an attempt to cut off the slave trade between the Yoruba country and Whydah. This was, to say the least, a dubious justification. In any case, it is clear from correspondence that commercial benefits to Lagos "incidental" to the blockades was not entirely absent from British considerations: Cf., for example, Glover to F.O., 8/5/1865, PRO.F084/1221/161: Glover to de Ledebat, 27/5/1865, PRO.F084/1250/210: Glover to Russell, 6/9/1865, PRO.F084/1250/283, and Glover to Russell, 7/9/1865 in PRO.F084/1250/298. Régis Ainée a M.A.E. 26/8/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 7 Didelot à Min. de la Mar. 5/7/1863, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 8 Borghero a Planque, August 1866; Annales de la Prop. de la Foi, vol. XXXIX, XL, 1867-8, p. 110. Régis alone was estimated to have lost 1 million francs: De Ledebat à Min. des Col. 9/3/1864, M.O.M., III:9:(d).
- 9 Glover to Russell, 9/8/1864, PRO.F084/1221/113.
- 10 Glover to Russell, 10/10/1864, PRO.F084/1221/136.

- 11 Glover to Russell, 9/8/1864, PRO.F084/1221/113.
- 12 Glover to Russell, 10/10/1864, PRO.F084/1221/136.
- 13 Information included in "Note par le Ministre, 28/12/1879, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. 47, p. 152. Cf. also remarks of French admiral in Sept. 1864 as reported by Glover in Glover to Russell, 10/10/1864, PRO.F084/1221/136.
- 14 Beraud, Consulate agent Dahomey and Porto Novo à M.A.E. 3/2/1866, Arch. Nat., f12:2060.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Statement of French shipping 1865, from Consular agent Dahomey and Porto Novo, annexed to Beraud à M.A.E. 3/2/1866, Arch. Nat., F12:2060. See Appendix C.
- 17 Ibid. Powder, guns, cowries and tobacco also featured in the trade goods: "Rapport par Com. Mathieu", Sept. 1872, Service Historique de la Mar, BB4:1395:467. See also "Rapport sur Dahomey" 1872, annexed to lettre de la Marine 5/7/1881, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 77. Didelot à Min. de la Marine, 27/3/1863, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 52.
- 18 Statement of French shipping, 1865, from Consular Agent Dahomey and Porto Novo, annexed to Beraud à M.A.E. 3/2/1866, Archives Nat., F12:2060. (See Appendix C.)
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Beraud à M.A.E. 3/2/1866, Arch. Nat., F12:2060.
- 21 De Langle à Min. des Colonies 8/8/1866, M.O.M., IV:10:(d). Min. de la Mar. et des Col. à Min. Des Aff. Etr. 11/7/1867, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 53. Cf. also Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., p. 180.
- 22 De Langle à Min. des Colonies 8/8/1866, M.O.M., IV:10:(d).
- 23 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 46.
- 24 Livingstone to Clarendon, 12/3/1870, PRO.F084/1326/102.
- 25 "Rapport sur Dahomey, 1872" annexed to a Lettre de la Marine 5/7/1881, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 77. Flaudrin, p.p. Vice Consul Porto Novo a Adm. Com. la station Francaise dans le Golfe du Benin, 1/12/1874, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 54.
- 26 Livingston to Carnarvon, 22/11/1875, PRO.F084/1465/11. The Yevogan's palace at Whydah contained a room set aside for the custody of felons: Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 53-3.

- 27 Com. de Le Diamant à Adm Com . . . au Gabon 14/8/1875, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 54.
- 28 Rapport du Serval, annexed to a lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid. Political factors also impinged insofar as the French hoped to use Cotonou to strengthen their hand in the forthcoming negotiations in the Gambia; Note par Le Ministre 28/12/1864, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 47, p. 152. Cf. also Ross, Ph.D., pp. 225-6, citing M.A.E. to M.M.A. 16/7/1877 in M.A.E. Afrique 76 and other correspondence. Cf. also Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 208-9.
- 31 Com. du Diamant a Adm. Com . . . au Gabon, 14/8/1875, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 54.
- 32 Rapport du Serval annexed to a lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. Com. d'Eclaireur le Segond à . . . Com. en Chef la division de l'Atlantique Sud 7/7/1882 (figs. for 1879) annexed to a lettre de la Marine 14/7/1882, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 77.
- 33 Rapport du Serval, annexed to a lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 34 Ibid. For current price also see "Note sur l'indemnitie (Dahomey)" June 1877, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 35 Rapport du Serval annexed to a Lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 36 Rapport du Serval annexed to a Lettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. Vice Adm. Min de la Marine à Min. des Aff. Etr. 13/3/1879, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 37 In that year the exports were as follows:
- | <u>Port</u> | <u>Palm oil</u> | <u>Kernels.</u> |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Cotonou | 2233 Tons (670,000 gals) | 2000 Tonnes |
| Whydah | 1666 Tons (500,000 gals) | 2500 Tonnes |
| Godomey | 333 Tons (100,000 gals) | 600 Tonnes |
| Abomey-Calavi | 133 Tons (40,000 gals) | 600 Tonnes |
- Source: "Rapport du . . . Serval, 22/4/1878.." in Min. de la Mar. et des Col., BB4, 1091, cited in Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Le Blocus . . .", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, VII, 1962, p. 381.
- 38 Rapport du Serval annexed to a Lettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.

- 39 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 91.
- 40 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 84-5. Paradoxically, between September and December 1867, Croft, Hutton's agent, tried to promote cotton plantations worked by slaves purchased by the king. (Croft himself was a former slave on a Georgia cotton plantation.) Nothing came of this. Livingston to Clarendon, 12/3/1870, PRO.F084/1326/102.
- 41 Skertchly remarked upon thickets of oil palms surrounding the country seat of Antonio da Souza at Whydah: Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 12, 25, 27, 52-3, 33-4.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 170. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 156-7.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 406-7, 497. Laffitte, Abbe., Le Dahomey. Souvenirs de Voyage et de Mission (1874), p. 170.
- 46 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 141.
- 47 Such palaces, for instance, were situated at Alladah, Henvi and various other towns between Alladah and Abomey. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 105, 106, 111.
- 48 Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p.52. Cf. also Ibid p.89.
- 49 Ibid., pp.52-3.
- 50 For instance, Skertchly noted palm oil among the tribute sent to Abomey from Kangro, an outlying village to the north, outside Dahomey's absolute control but under her suzerainty; Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., p. 329.
- 51 Rapport du Serval, annexed to a Lettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid. This particular infestation occurred from May 1878 until March 1879, off Whydah. A considerable number of canoists were killed and shipments held up with a subsequent loss of trade to Lagos.
- 54 Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Le Blocus de Whydah . . .", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, 1960, 373-419. Dunglas, E., "Contribution a l'histoire du Moyen Dahomey . . . III", Etudes Dahoméennes, XXI, p. 12 et seq.

- 55 Hewett to Sec. of the Admiralty 4/3/1876, PRO.F084/1464/4. Dunglas, "Contribution . . .", Etudes Dahoméennes, XXI, p.12.
- 56 Hewett to Sec. of the Admiralty, 4/3/1876, PRO.F084/1464/4. Admiralty Memo, 6/4/1876 in ibid. Carnarvon had previously shown the same misgivings about the attitude being taken by other British officials regarding their posture over the Dahomean threat to Abeokuta: Carnarvon to Strachan, 23/3/1867, PRO.F084/1464/51.
- 57 Hutchinson to Col. Office 2/12/1875: Turnbull to Lyall 24/1/1876: Lyall to Acting Col. 7/2/1786: Strachan to Carnarvon 19/2/1876 and 23/2/1876: Strachan to Lees 19/2/1876: Strachan to the King of Dahomey 19/2/1876: All in PRO.F084/1464/35 et seq.
- 58 Extract of letter from Captain Hodden of The Mohican, dated 16/5/1876, quoted in R. and W. King to Derby, 2/8/1876, PRO.F084/1465/149. Turnbull to Churchill, 26/5/76, Powell to Admiralty, 1/6/1876, Admiralty to F.O., 4/7/1876, all in PRO.F084/1464/p. 26 et seq.
- 59 Yevogan to Hewett, 4/5/1876 and Churchill to Hewett, 18/5/1876 both in PRO.F084/1464/287 et seq.
- 60 Turnbull to Churchill, 26/5/76, Powell to Admiralty, 1/6/1876, Admiralty to F.O., 4/7/1876, all in PRO.F084/1464/p. 26 et seq.
- 61 Stafford to Hewett, 13/3/1876, PRO.F084/1464/89.
- 62 Powlett to Admiralty, 21/11/1876, PRO.F084/1467/4.
- 63 Régis to Bourée 21/12/1876, 6/3/1877 in M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. Ribourt to Mon. de Mar. et Col. 30/12/1876 in ibid. Foà, E., Le Dahomey, Paris 1895, p. 35. On differences and the deception of Yevogan in an attempt to pay the fine and settle the dispute, see Coquery Vidrovitch, C. "Le Blocus . . ." Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, 1960 and Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 206/7. On the power struggle inside Dahomey and the differing response to British demands, see also Ross, D. Ph.D., p. 213 et seq.
- 64 The dispute was finally settled in May 1877 by a reduction in the fine from 500 to 400 puncheons of oil. Cf. Article 6 of Treaty of 4th June 1877 in Appendix B. Half the fine was to be paid immediately and the remainder one year later. In the event, half the first instalment was paid by the French traders Régis and Fabre rather than by the Dahomeans. The second instalment was never received by the British. Cf. Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Le Blocus . . .", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, VII, 1962, pp. 409-414.
- 65 Glele wrote: " I am ready to receive any English traders in my country to trade with also they may come to repair their fort and keep Factory in it. My Caboceere Avoga will attend them well at Whydah and they also may (sic) obey the laws in my country." King Glele to Commodore Sullevin, 28/5/1877, C0147/34.

- 66 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 443.
- 67 Ross, D., Ph.D., p. 250.
- 68 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 305.
- 69 Ibid., p. 20.
- 70 Ibid., pp. 445, 291, 95. De Beckman à . . . Gouv. du Senegal et Dependances, 6/3/1889, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, 1953, p. 92.
- 71 See chapters 7 and 8.
- 72 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 54.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 132.
- 75 Capt. of l'Africain to Comm. in Chief 17/10/1861, M.O.M. Afrique, IV:9:d. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 132.
- 76 Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., "Le Blocus . . .", Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 4, 1960.
- 77 Traitée entre le France et le Dahomey 19/4/1878. M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 78 Rapport par Capt. de "Serval", M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 79 Beraud à Residant Francaise, 12/3/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey 111:2.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 "Rapport politique presente par M. Hocquait . . .", 2/4/1891, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, 1953, p. 129.
- 82 Quenum, M., Les Ancêtres de la Famille Quenum, (ed. D. Gueniot) (Langres), undated but probably c.1980, pp. 57-9. Forbes referred to him as Quenung and described him as the richest merchant in Whydah.
- 83 Ibid., pp. 73-7. Skertchly reported on ". . . the king's agent agent, Quinun . . ."; Cf. Skertchly, J. A., Dahomey . . ., pp. 7, 14, 24-35, 45, 52.
- 84 Quenum, M., Les Ancêtres . . ., pp. 73-4. His father had previously performed a similar role in securing the French establishments at Cotonou and Godomey; Ibid.
- 85 Ibid., pp. 73, 78-80.

- 86 Ibid., pp. 78-89.
- 87 De Beckman à . . . Gouv. du Senegal et Dependences, 6/3/1889, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 1X, 1953, pp. 91-5.
- 88 I am grateful to Anselme Gezo for this information from oral tradition. An example of such western practice can be seen in "The Will of Antonio de Almeida," in Verger P. "Les Afro-Américaines.." Memoirs de l'IFAN, 1952, pp. 21-3.
- 89 An extremely biased article in the French press nevertheless gives some indication of the scale of Dahomean raiding during the 1878-89 period; Cf. Le Temps, 3/2/1890, article dated 20/10/1889.
- 90 Dumeresque to Lees, 31/5/1876, PRO.F084/1465/p. 55, citing extracts from Pall to Sec. of CMS Lagos 13/5/1876.
- 91 Rapport de Serval 23/4/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76. Ardin d'Elteil a M.A.E. 3/3/1879 and 14/8/1879, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 92 Lagos Times, 9/11/1881 and 28/12/1881. Johnson, S., History of the Yoruba, p. 463.
- 93 Dunglas, E., "Contribution . . .", in Etudes Dahoméennes, XX, p. 131.
- 94 Ellis, The Ewe speaking people of the Slave Coast, London 1890, pp. 327-8.
- 95 Periero to Rowe 25/7/1883, PRO.F084/1634/26. Ross, D. Ph.D., pp. 243-5.
- 96 Gesma à Bareste, 15/11/1883, M.O.M. Afrique IV:11:(a).
- 97 Freeman to Russell, 1/7/1862, PRO.F084/1175/123. In late 1860, for instance, the Yevogan was complaining that Glele was short of powder for his forthcoming annual raid: Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, M.M.S., box 263, art. 49.
- 98 Cf. Burton, R., A Mission . . ., pp. 191-2.
- 99 Ibid., p. 84.
- 100 Ibid., p. 111.
- 101 Ibid., pp. 120-1.
- 102 Ibid., p. 208.
- 103 Ibid., pp. 120-1, 237. Cf. also page 230 and Evidence of R. F. Burton, in Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 5, 1865 Sel. C'tee, ev. of R. F. Burton, para. 2435: Ev. of W. Wylde, para. 2754: ev. of Lord Stanley, para. 3109.

- 104 Strachan to Carnarvon, 22/11/1875, PRO.F084/1465.
- 105 Livingston to Clarendon, 12/3/1870, PRO.F084/1326/102.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 385.
- 108 Rapport du Serval annexe au lettre de Marine 19/7/78, M.A.E. Mem et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Ibid. Abbé Bouche, La Cote d'Esclaves et le Dahomey: Sept Ans en Afrique Occidentale, (Paris) 1885, p. 350.
- 111 Guezo, A., "Commerce Exterieur et évolution économique au Dahomey", unpublished M.M.D.thesis, Université Nationale du Benin, 1978, pp. 141/2.
- 112 Laffitte, Abbé, Le Dahomey. Souvenirs de Voyage et de Mission (1874), p. 170.
- 113 Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 266, fn.29. Cf. also, "Reconnaissance Hydrographique de la Riviere Mono, par Clargeau", June 1894
- 114 Extraits des notes par Père Baudin, in Planque à M.A.E., 20/1/1884, M.A.E. Mem. ét Doc. Afriques 79.
- 115 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 329.
- 116 Ibid., pp. 7-9, 59.
- 117 Comm. de l'Eclaireur le Segonde a . . . Comm. en Chef la division l'Atlantique sud, 7/7/1882, annexe au lettre de la Marine de 14/7/1882. M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 77. Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 22.
- 118 Rapport du serval, annexe au lettre de Marine 19/7/78, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 119 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., p. 380.
- 120 "La Lecture du Journal Officiel des etablissement Francaise du Golfe du Benin, 1888: cited in Etudes Dahoméennes, New Series, no. 8, Oct. 1966, pp. 12-13.
- 121 Montaigne à Baresté, Janvier et Fevrier, in M.O.M. Afrique IV:11(a) and (b).

- 122 Ibid.
- 123 Montaigne à Baresté 6/5/1884, 14/7/1884 and other correspondence in M.O.M. Afrique IV:11:(a) and (b).
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Franklin to Lt. Gov. 28/7/1885: Brandford Griffith to Salisbury, 7/8/1885. T.B.C. to Comm. of Quittah Fort, 5/8/1885: Deputy Governor Lagos to Brandford Griffith, 28/8/1885: Marshall to Evans, 1/9/1885, all in PRO.F084/1702/17 et seq.
- 126 Craigie to Griffith, 26/9/1885, PRO.F084/1702/73.
- 127 Extrait de let. de M. Siciliano, 15/7/1885, Serv. Hist. de la Marine BB4/1416/138. Roget à Min de la Mer et Des Col. 28/7/1885, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 81. Taglia à Min de la Marine, Service historique de la Marine, BB4/1416/143.
- 128 The Lagos Observer, 17/9/1885.
- 129 Extrait du lettre de M. Siciliano, 10/7/1885, Service Historique de la Marine BB4/1416/137. Craigie to Griffith, 26/9/1885, PRO.F084/1702/73.
- 130 Craigie to Griffith, 26/9/1885, PRO.F084/1702/73. Brandford Griffith to Salisbury, 15/10/1885, PRO.F084/1702/78.
- 131 Beraud à Fr. Resident 12/3/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey III:2. Audeoud à Min. de la Mar. 8/7/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey III:2. Cf. also Cons. Gen. France a Hamburg à Min. des Aff. Etr. 12/10/1892, M.O.M. Dahomey XIII:3:c and other corr. in same file; Olivier à Resident Conakri 1/5/1891 and Le Soleil 7/1/1891, both in M.O.M. Dahomey XIII:3:c: Rapport de Comm. Audeoud in Etudes Dahoméennes, IX, 1953, pp. 115 et seq; French Resident, Conakri to Gov. Ballay, 8/5/1891, in Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. IX, 1953, pp. 1135-146. German demand for slaves, or 'indentured labourers' as they were classified, had initially been prompted by the need for labour gangs in the Congo Free State, but was given a further stimulus in the government of Cameroon's desire for carriers, soldiers and labourer's to support a more active colonial policy. Cf. Hargreaves, J. D., West Africa Partitioned: Vol. 11" The Elephants and the Grass, pp. 151, 191 et seq.
- 132) Rapport du Lt. Roget, 5/8/85, Archives Nationales, series E.
- 133 Webster and Boahan, eds., The Growth of African Civilisation, the Revolutionary Years. West Africa since 1800 (Longmans 1967, p. 115).
- 134 Dorat à King of Dahomey, August 1884; Dorat à Com. Supérieur du Golfe de Guinée 26/7/1884, M.O.M. Afriques IV:11:(a).

- 135 Agent Consulaire à Lagos à M. Le Directeur, Janvier 1885. M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 81. Dorat à Comm. Supérieur, 10/4/1885. Roget à Comm. Sup. 5/5/1885, 6/6/1885 and 1/7/1885, all in Arch. Nat. de Dahomey, Porto Novo, Correspondence Generale, no. 1, cited in Maroukis, T. C., Ph.D., p. 229.
- 136 M.A.E. à Min. de la Marine 29/9/1885, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 81. Min de la Marine a M.A.E. 8/9/1885 in M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 81. Lagos Observer, 17/9/1885. Moulero, R. P., "Histoire et Legende de Chabe" in Etudes Dahoméennes, New Series, no. 2, June 1964, pp. 67-8.
- 137 Rapport du Serval, annexe au lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 138 Extrait du journal de M. Brue . . . May 1843, M.O.M. Senegal IV:42(b). A 'pipe' can be taken as about 105-120 gallons.
- 139 Skertchly, J., Dahomey . . ., pp. 75, 105
- 140 Ibid., pp. 75, 105.
- 141 Campbell to Clarendon, 4/5/1854, PRO.F084/950/218.
- 142 Campbell to Clarendon, 14/5/1854, PRO.F084/1002/126.
- 143 For example in 1843 the commencement of the annual war was put in October; Extrait du journal d M . . . Brue 2/5/1843, M.O.M. Senegal IV:42(b). In 1849 Forbes referred to the fact that the King returned from war in January: Forbes, F., Dahomey . . ., vol. 1, p. 17. However, Burton placed the start of the annual raid in February, with the return in March or April; Burton, R., A Mission . . ., p. 201. In 1875 the timing of war was placed in January: Com. du Diamante à Adm Com . . . au Gabon 14/8/1875, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 54. And in 1878, Serval put the beginning of the annual raid at the beginning of Spring (presumably mid-March): Raport du Serval annexed to lettre du Marin 9/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 144 Herskovits, M. J., Dahomey: an Ancient West African Kingdom, vol. 1 pp. 38-9. Manning, P., Ph.D., pp. 24-5.
- 145 See Chapter 2.
- 146 Rapport du Serval, annexe au lettre de Marine, 19/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 147 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 30/5/1860, Oct. 1860, M.M.S., box 263.
- 148 Bernasko to Gen Secs., 1/2/1862, M.M.S., box 263, file 1862.

- 149 Glele to Wilmot, reported in Wilmot to Walker, 29/1/1863, Parl. Papers, Col. Africa vol. 50, W. Africa general "Visit to Dahomey: dispatches . . ." 1863, vol. LXXIII.
- 150 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., Oct. 1860, 3/10/1862, M.M.S., box 263 and file 1862, art. 52, box 263.
- 151 Bernasko to Gen. Secs., 31/12/1860, M.M.S., box 263, art. 49.
- 152 Hopkins, A. G., An Economic History . . ., pp. 154 et seq.
- 153 Extraits du Rapport du Com. en Chef l'Atlantique Sud, 27/10/1876, M.O.M., IV:10:(c).
- 154 Beraud à Min. des Aff. Etr. 1/5/1865, 2/9/1865, M.A.E. Mem et Doc. Afrique 53. Min. de la Mar. et des Col à Min. des Aff. Etr. 11/7/1867, 16/8/1867, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 53.
- 155 Hargreaves, J., Prelude to Partition, pp. 119-120.
- 156 Commanding Officer H.M.S. Foam to Sec. of the Admiralty, 15/1/1875: Carnarvon to Strachan, 1/3/1875: Parl papers Col. Africa. Vol. 51, W. Africa General: British West African Possessions: Papers 1875 (C. 1343) vol. LII.
- 157 Rapport du Serval annexe au lettre de Marine 19/7/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 158 Hargreaves, J., Prelude to Partition, pp. 207-8.
- 159 Chaigneau à Contre-Amiral Comm. ed Chef 6/6/1877: M.O.M. IV:10:(c).
- 160 Note: Observations au la traite du 12/5/1877. M.O.M., Afrique, IV:10:(c).
- 161 Powlett to the Admiralty, 1/6/1876: PRO.F084/1464/28. Rapport du Serval annexe au lettre De Marine 19/4/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 162 Traité avec Les Dahoméennes, 19/4/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 163 Cf. e.g. Ross, D., Ph.D., pp. 226-7. Maroukis, T., Ph.D., pp. 220-223. Hargreaves, J., Prelude . . ., pp. 208-9.
- 164 Min. des Aff. Etr. à Min. de la Mar. et des Col., 27/11/1878, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 76.
- 165 Rapport sur la situation politique, économique, administrative de Porto Novo. Piece no. 41, Porto Novo 26/7/1884, Archives Nationales de Dahomey, cited in Guezo, A., unpublished MMD thesis, p. 167.

- 166 Rowe to Grenville, 16/6/1883, PRO.F084/1634/12.
- 167 Lagos Observer, 6/12/1883.
- 168 Planque à M.A.E. 20/11/1884, M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 79.
"Memoire . . . Okpara", M.A.E. Mem. et Doc. Afrique 79.
- 169 D'Elteil a M.A.E. 14/8/1879. M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 170 Vice-Am. Min de la Marine a M.A.E. 13/3/1879. M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afriques 76.
- 171 African Times, 1/2/1883; The Gold Coast Times, 17/3/1883.
- 172 O'Neill à Min. de la Mar. 11/5/1884. M.A.E., Mem. et Doc. Afrique 80.
- 173 Montaigne à Baresté 14/7/1884. M.O.M., Afrique IV:11:(a). Lagos Times, 10/10/83.
- 174 Montaigne à Baresté 2/8/1883. M.O.M., Afrique IV:11:(a).
- 175 Dorat à Comm. Supérieur du Golfe de Guinée, 20/7/1884. M.O.M. Afrique, IV:11:(a).
- 176 Del Grande to Evans, 15/9/1885, PRO.F084/1702/56. Evans to Griffith, 18/9/85, PRO.F084/1702/55; Griffith to Salisbury, 25/9/1885, PRO.F084/1702/53; Craigie to Griffith, 26/9/85, PRO.F084/1702/73.
- 177 Colley Green to Deputy Governor, 9/10/1885 and enclosures, PRO.F084/1702/78. Brandforth Griffith to Marquis of Salisbury, 15/10/1885; Heldbeck to Lt. Governor, 26/10/1885; Green to Deputy Governor, 9/10/1885; all in PRO.F084/1702/78.
- 178 Green to Deputy Governor, 9/10/1885; Brandforth Griffith to Marquis of Salisbury, 15/10/1885, Heldbeck to Lt. Governor, 26/10/1885, all in PRO.F084/1702/78.
- 179 Galliat à Bourste 18/2/1886, M.O.M. Afrique IV:11:(b).
- 180 French Consular Agent à Baresté 5/4/1886 and Com . . . de l'Atlantique sud à Min. de la Mar. et Col. 15/4/1886, both in M.O.M. Afrique IV:60:(c).
- 181 Dunglas, E., "Contribution a l'histoire du Moyen-Dahomey . . . vol. III", Etudes Dahoméennes, XXI, p. 18.
- 182 Bayal à Min. des Col. 1/1/1890, M.O.M. Dahomey, I:1:B.

- 183 Moloney to Knutsford, 27/8/1890, 22/9/1890, C0147/76. Beraud à Fr. Resident, 12/3/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, 111, 2. Olivier à Resident, Conakry, 1/5/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C. "Rapport du Com. Audeoud," 1891, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, 1953, p.115 et seq.
- 184 Audeoud à Min. de la Mar. 8/7/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, 111, 2. Olivier à Resident, Conakry, 1/5/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C. Resident, Conakri à Gouv. Ballay, 8/5/1891, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, pp. 135-146. Le Soliel, 7/1/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C.
- 185 Olivier à Resident, Conakry, 1/5/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C. Dr. R. Law confirms that the graves of the instructors, who were later executed by the French, still remain on the outskirts of Abomey.
- 186 Olivier à Resident, Conakry, 1/5/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C. This appears to have been an exaggeration. Accounts of Wolber and Brohm, for instance, taken after the conquest by the French, indicate that only 430 rifles were ever supplied; "Relevé d'après les livres de . . . maison Volber et Brohm . . .", M.O.M. Dahomey, X111, 3, C.
- 187 Renseignements; 6/10/1893, Service Historique de la Marine, BB4:1364:p. 54: Ibid, vol. 1368 p. 102. Dodds, "Rapport sur les opérations, 1892", Archives Historique de l'Armee (Vincennes) A.O.F. Dahomey, folder 3, , page 1, and telegram, Lt. Gov. Cotonou a Sous-sec de la Col. 3/4/1890, folder 3, both cited in Maroukis, T., Ph.D., p. 114. Cf Newbury, C. W., The Western Slave Coast . . . , p. 130, fn. 4.
- 188 Guichard à M.A.E., 29/9/1884. M.O.M. Afrique IV:11:(a). Fr. Resident Ehrman (Conakry) à Gouv. Ballay, 8/5/1891, Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 1X, 1953, pp. 135-146.
- 189 Augat à Lt. Gov. du Senegal 1/11/1889, M.O.M Dahomey III:1. Bayal à Sous. Sec. d'Etat des Colonies, 4/11/1889, M.O.M. Dahomey, I:1:b.
- 190 Bayal à M. le Sec. d'etat des Colonies. M.O.M. Dahomey I:1:B. Dahomean sorties had been launched against Porto Novian farms from at least 1885; Cf. Lagos Observer, 4/9/1886. But 1889 is the first documented evidence that such attacks were specifically aimed at palm trees.
- 191 King of Dahomey to German Imperial Commissioner Zimmerer, Sebbe" (Togo), 12/5/1889, in Kalous M. "Some Correspondence Between the German Empire and Dahomey, 1882-92." in Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, vol. 8, no. 32, 1968, p. 637. The French were also informed of Glele's intentions on the same date; M.O.M. Senegal, 1V:124:b.
- 192 "Note sur les affaires du Dahomey III: Resume . . . des opérations, 11/10/1890", Service Historique de la Marine BB4/1988.
- 193 Bayol à M. le Sous-sec d'Etat, 20/3/1890, M.O.M., Senegal, Dahomey I:1:b.

- 194 Ballot à Com. en Chef, 12/11/1890, M.O.M. Dahomey, III:1. Bayal à M. le Sous Sec. d'Etat, 20/3/1890, M.O.M. Dahomey, I:1;B.
- 195 L'Administrateur particulier du Benin à M. Le Gouverneur du Senegal et Dependances, 5/4/1889, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, 1953, p. 95-7.
- 196 Beraud à Fr. Resident, 12/3/1891, M.O.M. Dahomey III:2. Bayal à Min. des Colonies, 1/1/1890, M.O.M. Dahomey, I:1:B
- 197 Bayal à Etienne, 4/1/1890, M.O.M. 1/1/b. Bayal à Min. des Col. 13/1/1890, M.O.M. Dahomey, I:1:B. Glele's refusal to cede the French absolute rights over Cotonou is hardly surprising. Quite apart from the question of sovereignty involved, the Dahomean monarch was estimated to be in receipt of approximately £1700 per annum in custom dues from trade at Cotonou; De Beckman à . . . Gouv. du Senegal et Dependances, 6/3/1889, Etudes Dahoméennes, 1X, 1953, p.91.
- 198 For the most comprehensive and detailed account of the events leading up to the French conquest of Abomey, see Hargreaves, J. D., West Africa Partitioned: Vol. 11: The Elephants and the Grass, pp. 140-189.
- 199 Foà, E., Le Dahomey, (Paris) 1985, p. 263.
- 200 Ibid., p. 313. Cf. also the comments by E. Levasseur in the preface to Ibid., p. X, XI.
- 201 Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., " De la Traite . . ." in Meillassoux, C. (ed.), The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets . . ., (1971) p. 120. Cf. also p. 121. A similar view is presented by John Lonsdale in the recently published volume 6 of the Cambridge History of Africa; cf. pp. 715-6.
- 202 Hopkins, A. G., An Economic History of West Africa, p. 143.

APPENDIX A

DAHOMY, CANNAH
JANUARY 12, 1852.

Madam,

In answer to a letter addressed to King Gezo from Commodore Bruce, dated December 17th 1851, he sends the following reply to Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria.

1st. This letter was not written by the Queen of England.

2nd. If two persons at a distance are seen laughing together they must have something to amuse them.

3rd. It is necessary when two parties dispute a fight, that a third should intercede.

4th. He has had no palaver with the Queen of England.

5th. The three Forts at Whydah, the former King made arrangements with the English, French and Portuguese governments for building them, and a Roman Catholic Chapel was built in the Portuguese Fort. He appointed the Yer-vo-gan to take care of these Forts and the Portuguese sent a priest to take care of the King.

6th. The reason he mentions these particulars, is, when there is any correspondence between white and blackman, the white man cannot forget the transaction, the black man may forget it, for he cannot read or write.

7th. The reason he says so, he wishes to call the attention of all white men present, that not one of them is his equal, because he is the King, and the Queen of England's friend; for all that, whenever he sees a white man come to his place, he gives him his hand, for he remembers the treaty that was made by his ancestors. For instance, he shakes hands with Mr Hutton and his son, without making any distinction. He gives his hand to all white men who come here to see him because the Kings and Queens of Europe cannot come here, therefore he gives his hand out of respect to their sovereign.

8th. It is nine years ago since he had the first message from the Queen of England, about the suppression of the Slave Trade; since which time he has received one or two messengers, said to come from the Queen of England, he gave his answers and expected that they would return, which they have not done. To prevent mistakes between himself and the Queen

of England, he sent two boys and two girls to be educated in England and he has not heard of them since.

9th. He has not shipped slaves from Whydah for three years, which is previous to Mr Beecroft's and Lieut. Forbes' mission from the Queen of England to see his Customs and report the cost, but they went away in the middle of them and have not returned.

10th. He does not know why all of his country should be blockaded, except Badagry. That his dominations extend from the opening at Grand Popoe to Lagos, therefore he does not think the Queen of England sent this palaver.

11th. Now about War and Sacrifices

The reason, he says, this message is not from the Queen of England, because if the Queen makes a Law and any breaks (sic) that law or causes revolution, they will be punished, on that account the Queen sends out Her Ships of War.

That is the reason he makes laws and when they break them he makes war .

When two princes are fighting and the weakest runs to him for protection, then he assists or makes peace.

When any of his traders are sent, with goods to any place in the interior, they are seized and killed or beaten, that is the reason he attacks the place. As in the case with the Attahpams, they seized one of his subjects, killed and gibbeted him, therefore he made war with them, and sent his people to bring those parties, to serve them the same as was done to his subjects.

12th In answer to the letter brought by Comm. T.G. Forbes, he will send a messenger to accompany Cap. Forbes to deliver him, to the Commodore, to be sent to England, with this letter, and return with the Queen's answer.

13th The reason he makes war

For example; Kosoko and Attakoy, both living in the same country, and they make war, Accatoy (sic) finding he has not sufficient force applies to the Queen of England for assistance; He says the Queen of England did not send the messages for him not to make war.

14th Respecting Abeokuta

When two kings are fighting the third will mediate; Abbeokuta sent a message to the Queen of England, which has been answered by a messenger from England. Previous to the Queen sending a messenger to the Chiefs of Abbeokuta, it would have been well to enquire the cause of his making war with that nation and to have sent a messenger by sea, to Whydah, to hear the causes of this war. It is necessary that the Queen of England and the President of France, send each a messenger to speak about this, because he does not live on the sea side, and if anything takes place at Whydah he is not there.

15th. The King says if white man does not come to buy slaves, he cannot sell; but since the Queen of England and other nations prohibit the Slave trade, he distinctly declares that the Slave trade is ended and he will not sell any more. And, as the Queen of England made this law, he will not break it and states that his line of coast extends from the opening at Grand Popoe to Lagos.

APPENDIX BTreaty to be Proposed to the King of Dahomey

HER Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the King of Dahomey, being desirous of concluding a Treaty for the abolition of the barbarous practice of transporting natives of Africa across the sea for the purpose of consigning them to Slavery in foreign countries, Her Majesty has for this purpose named as her Plenipotentiaries, John Beecroft, Esquire, her Consul to the native Chiefs of Africa whose territories lie between Cape St Paul and Cape St John, and Frederick Edwin Forbes, a Lieutenant in Her Majesty's Naval Service, and the Commander of her ship of war the "Bonetta".

And they, Her Majesty's Plenipotentiaries, for and on behalf of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors, and His Majesty Guezo, King of Dahomey, for himself, his heirs and successors, have agreed upon and concluded the following Articles and Conditions:-

ARTICLE I

The exportation of slaves to foreign countries is for ever abolished in the territories of the King of Dahomey, and the King of Dahomey engages to make and to proclaim a law prohibiting any of his subjects or any person within his jurisdiction from selling or assisting in the sale of any slave for transportation to a foreign country; and the King of Dahomey promises to inflict a severe punishment on any person who shall break this law.

ARTICLE II

No European or other person whatever shall be permitted to reside within the territory of the King of Dahomey for the purpose of carrying on in any way the Traffic in Slaves; and no houses, stores, barracoons, or other buildings of any kind whatever shall be erected for the purposes of Slave Trade within the territory of the King of Dahomey; and if any such houses, stores, barracoons, or other buildings shall at any future time be erected within the territory of Dahomey, and the King of Dahomey shall fail or be unable to destroy them, they may be destroyed by any British officers employed for the suppression of the Slave Trade.

ARTICLE III

If at any time it shall appear that Slave Trade has been carried on through or from the territory of the King of Dahomey, such Slave Trade may be put down in that territory by Great Britain by force, and British officers may seize any boats of Dahomey found anywhere carrying on the Slave Trade.

ARTICLE IV

The slaves now held for exportation in Dahomey shall be delivered up at Whydah to the senior officer of Her Britannic Majesty's Naval Forces in the Bight of Benin, for the purpose of being carried to a British colony, to be there set free; and all the implements of the Slave Trade and the barracoons or buildings exclusively used in the Slave Trade shall be forthwith destroyed.

ARTICLE V

Europeans or other persons who may be found to be engaged in the Slave Trade in the territory of Dahomey, are to be expelled from the country; the houses, stores or buildings hitherto employed as slave factories, if not converted to lawful purposes within three months from the conclusion of this Treaty, are to be destroyed.

ARTICLE VI

The subjects of Her Britannic Majesty may always trade freely with the people of Dahomey in every article which they may wish to buy or sell in all the places and ports and rivers within the territories of the King of Dahomey, and throughout the whole of his dominions; and the King of Dahomey pledges himself to show no favour and to give no privilege to the ships and traders of other countries, which he does not or will not show to those of England.

ARTICLE VII

In consideration of the above-mentioned concessions on the part of the King of Dahomey, and in full compensation for the temporary loss of revenue to which His Majesty may be subject therefrom, Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland engages to make to the King of Dahomey yearly for three years, a present of either of £ sterling, or of goods to that value, at the option of the King. But this annual present is to cease if Slave Trade should again be carried on within the territory of Dahomey.

ARTICLE VIII

This Treaty shall have full force and effect from the day
of 1850.

In faith whereof the above-names Plenipotentiaries of Her Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Dahomey have signed the same, and have affixed thereto their respective seals.

Done at Abomey, the day of , 1850.

Source: Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 90, 1845-59, "Papers relative to the Reduction of Lagos", item 3, enclosure no. 20.

Treaty Signed By the King of Dahomey, January 1852.

Engagement between Her Majesty the Queen of England and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey, for the Abolition of the traffic in Slaves.

signed at Cannah

I, Thomas George Forbes, of Her Majesty's ship Philomel on the part of Her Majesty the Queen of England and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey and the neighbourhood on the part of themselves and their country, have agreed to the following article and condition.

Article 1

The export of Slaves to foreign countries is for ever abolished in the territories of the King and Chiefs of Dahomey; and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey engage to make and proclaim a Law, prohibiting any of their subjects, or any person within their jurisdiction, from selling or assisting in the sale of any Slaves for transportation to a foreign country; and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey promise to inflict a severe punishment on any person who shall break this law.

Dated January 13 1852.

In faith of which we have here set our hands and seals.

Witnesses

Isidore Fellix da Souza
Ignatio Fellix da Souza
Antonio Fellix da Souza
Thomas Hutton.

syned

Gezo, King of Dahomey

X

his mark.

Tho. Geo. Forbes, Com. HMS Philomel
Lious Fraser, ...V.C. King. of Dahomey
Mayhoo X his mark
Yer-vo-gan X his mark

Source: F084/886/158.

Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and for the Suppression of the
Slave Trade, between Her Majesty and the King of Dahomey.

Signed at Whydah, May 12, 1877.

Treaty between Captain George Lydiard Sullivan, of the Royal Navy, commanding Her Majesty's ship "Sirius", on behalf of Her Most Gracious Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India, and the Avogah of Dahomey, Sahcloca, the second Avogah of Dahomey, Chodatong, on behalf of Glele, King of Dahomey.

ARTICLE I

IT is agreed that there shall be henceforth peace and friendship between Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria and His Majesty Gelele, of Dahomey, in Africa, and their heirs and successors.

ARTICLE II

There shall be to the subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India, complete liberty of commerce, and they shall have entire right and liberty to come with their ships and cargoes to all places and ports in the dominions of His Majesty Gelele, to reside and trade in any part of the said dominions, to hire, occupy, and possess any houses or warehouses for the purpose of commerce, and enjoy the most complete protection and security from His Majesty the King of Dahomey, the Governors and people of his dominions.

ARTICLE III

The subjects of Her Britannic Majesty being or residing or trading in the country of Dahomey shall receive special protection from all annoyance and inconvenience in their various occupations or trades from any and all of the subjects of His Majesty Gelele, and from foreigners residing in that country, and they shall be permitted to hoist on their houses and factories a flag of the Kingdom of Dahomey alone, or in concert with the flag of England; and the King Gelele engages herewith to issue a proclamation to His Majesty's subjects, and to all foreigners in his dominions, never again to molest, interfere with, or threaten the lives of persons of British subjects, on pain of severe punishment.

ARTICLE IV

The export of slaves to foreign countries is for ever abolished in the territories of the King of Dahomey, and the law made and proclaimed in accordance with a former Treaty between Her Majesty the Queen of England and King Gezo of Dahomey, dated January 13, 1852, shall continue in force for ever.

ARTICLE V

No British subject shall henceforth be compelled to attend any of the customs of the country of Dahomey where any human sacrifices are held.

ARTICLE VI

Whereas, in consequence of insult and violence towards one of Her Majesty's subjects in the country of Dahomey, a fine has been imposed of 500 puncheons of oil on that Kingdom, and a blockade established to enforce payment of the same, it is herein agreed, on the part of Her Most Gracious Majesty, that the fine shall be reduced to 500 puncheons of oil and the blockade immediately raised, under the following conditions: that 200 puncheons of oil are paid at once, and the remainder within twelve months from this date; and His Majesty King Gelele agrees to these conditions, and promises herewith to complete the payment of the 400 puncheons of oil by the time given.

Signed at the Pacooteh Whydah, at Whydah, this 12th day of May, 1877.

(Signed)

GEORGE LYDIARD SULIVAN, Captain and Senior Officer, West Coast of Africa.

SACHLOCA, the Avogah of Dahomey.

CHODATONG, the Second Avogah of Dahomey.

KING GELELE, his X mark.

Witnesses to Treaty:

(Signed)

ARTHUR H. ALINGTON,
Commander, H.M.S. "Boxer".
FRÉDERICK MAXWELL HERON,
Commander, H.M.S. "Seagull".

Source: Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade, vol. 93, 1876-88, "Treaty between Great Britain and the King of Dahomey 1878" (c.1902), Vol. LXVII.

APPENDIX CExtracts from French Shipping, 1865

Date of Arrival/Leaving	Tonnage	Destination	Trade Goods	Cargo	Value in Francs
19/2/65-30/3/65	300	Whydah	Ballast	866 Barrels oil	268,000
13/4/65-30/4/65	174	Whydah	Rum and Provisions	212,000 kilo nuts	700,000
6/5/65-2/8/65	269	Whydah	Ballast	770 Barrels oil	220,000
19/5/65-13/9/65	224	Whydah/ Porto Novo/ Lagos	Rum, Cloth + ?	998,000 kilo nuts	105,000
3/7/65-5/8/65	298	Whydah/ Lagos	?	396,000 kilo nuts	144,000
14/8/65-30/8/65	269	Whydah/ Porto Novo	Rum, Cloth + ?	Ballast [sic]	144,000
20/8/65-6/10/65	201	Whydah/ Porto Novo/ Lagos	Rum, Cloth, Liquers, + ?	500 Barrels oil	175,000
9/9/65-12/1/66	249	Whydah	Rum	362,000 kilo nuts	125,000
18/9/65-2/12/65	276	Whydah/ Porto Novo	Rum & Cloth	839 Barrels oil	160,000
20/9/65-16/12/65	294	Whydah/ Porto Novo	Rum, Cloth, Liquers + ?	806 Barrels oil	160,000
23/10/65-18/1/66	212	Whydah/ Porto Novo	?	312,000 kilo nuts	112,000
<u>TOTAL 11 Vessels - 2766 tons - 3781 Barrells oil -</u>					
<u>2,280,000 kilo nuts - value 1,539,000 francs.</u>					

Source: Annexed in Beraud à'M.A.E., 3/2/1866, NA F12:2060.

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F02: Vols. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 14, 25, 28, 29, 35, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47.

C096 (Gold Coast - From 1843).

<u>VOL</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>VOL</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>
2	1843	Dispatches	11	1847	Dispatches
3	1843	Individuals/Offices	12	1847	Individuals/Offices
4	1844	Dispatches	13	1848	Dispatches
5	1844	Individuals/Offices	14	1848	Individuals/Offices
6	1845	Dispatches	15	1849	Dispatches
7	1845	Dispatches	16	1849	Dispatches
8	1845	Individuals/Offices	17	1849	Individuals/Offices
9	1846	Dispatches	18	1850	Dispatches
10	1846	Individuals/Offices	19	1850	Dispatches

Vol. 21 and 22 completed.

C098 (Minutes Cape Coast Council)

1.A. Minutes Cape Coast Council 1829-44.

C0147 (Lagos Original Cor., 1861-94).C0267: (Sierra Leone)

<u>VOL</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>
54	1821	African Co.
55	1821	Offices/Individuals
57	1822	Offices/Individuals/Dispatches
105	1830	Dispatches S.L.
117	1834	Individuals/Gold Coast Merchants
126	1834	Individuals/Gold Coast Merchants
131	1835	Individuals/Gold Coast Merchants
136	1836	Gold Coast Merchants
144	1837	Gold Coast Merchants
145	1837	Gold Coast Merchants
150	1838	Gold Coast Merchants
156	1839	Treasury & Gold Coast Committee
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Tropical Agriculturalist.

Zaire.

AYCES
EYES
to make people

KINGDOM OF DAHOMY

Whose King Guadjá Trudo, Conquered the Kingdoms of Arrrah and Wiydah in 1727.

Zassá 3 Abomey 3 the Capital of Dahomy

Dawey

Columina

where the King often resides

Arroyo

Wiydah

Wiydah

Wiydah

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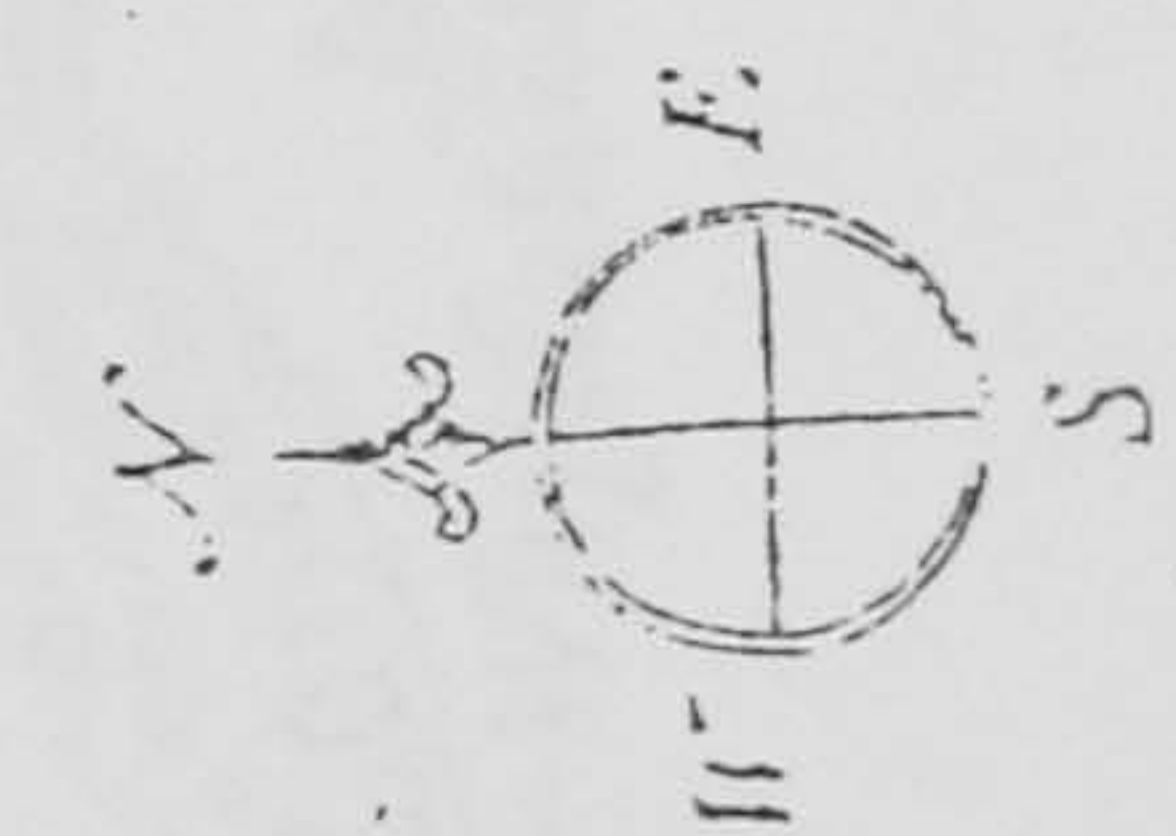
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Subject to Dahomy

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POPOE
with a few strong top
figures
Acquand
Cape St. Pauls
Lat. 5.52. S.



Degree of Longitude East from Greenwich

Scale of 60 Miles to a Degree

SLAV
compre
RIVER
with

JABOO

571.

Kingdom of Lagos
which is tributary to
Benin. Cradbo

BIGHT of BENIN

THE WEST AFRICAN COAST IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, R. NORRIS, MEMOIRS OF THE REIGN OF BOSSA AHADÉE.

Text cut off in original

• Sarrachee

Abomey (the Capital of Dahomey)

• Dawhee (the Capital of Fof)

Calmina

(where the King often resides)

Agrimey

• APOY

• Whybow

Little Havre

• Ardrah or Alladah

(a great town with a Palace)

• AJIRAH

• AZOWAY

Toree

WHYDAH

POPOE

Little Popoe

Grand Popoe

Xavier or Sabre

Memey

Wassa

Porto

Novo

Afsem or Great Ardrah (the Capital of Ardrah)

and a place of Great Trade (Ardoo)

Badagry

Lagos R.

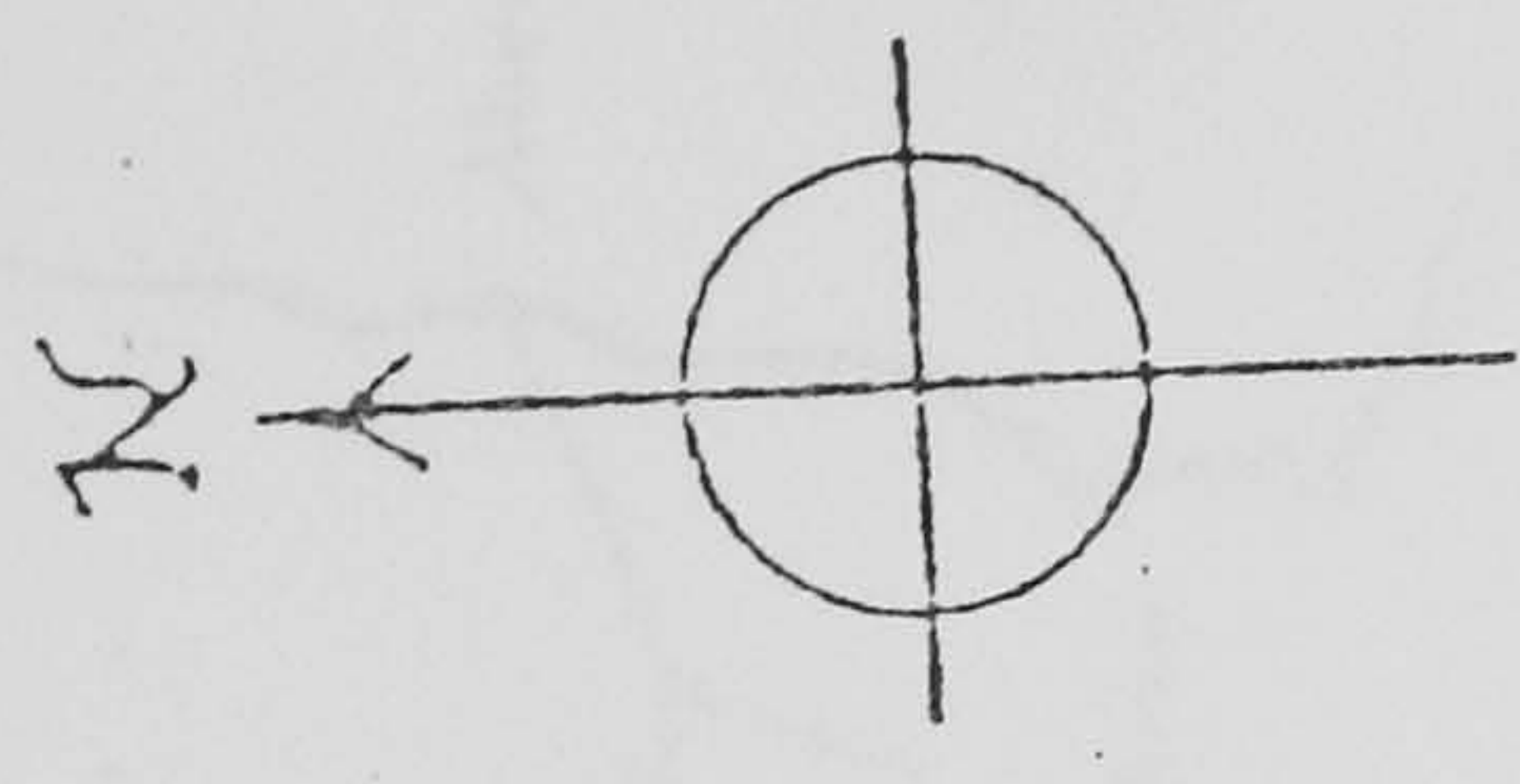
Alagos

River Lagos

Door R. Trade

R. Falmer

Quassee



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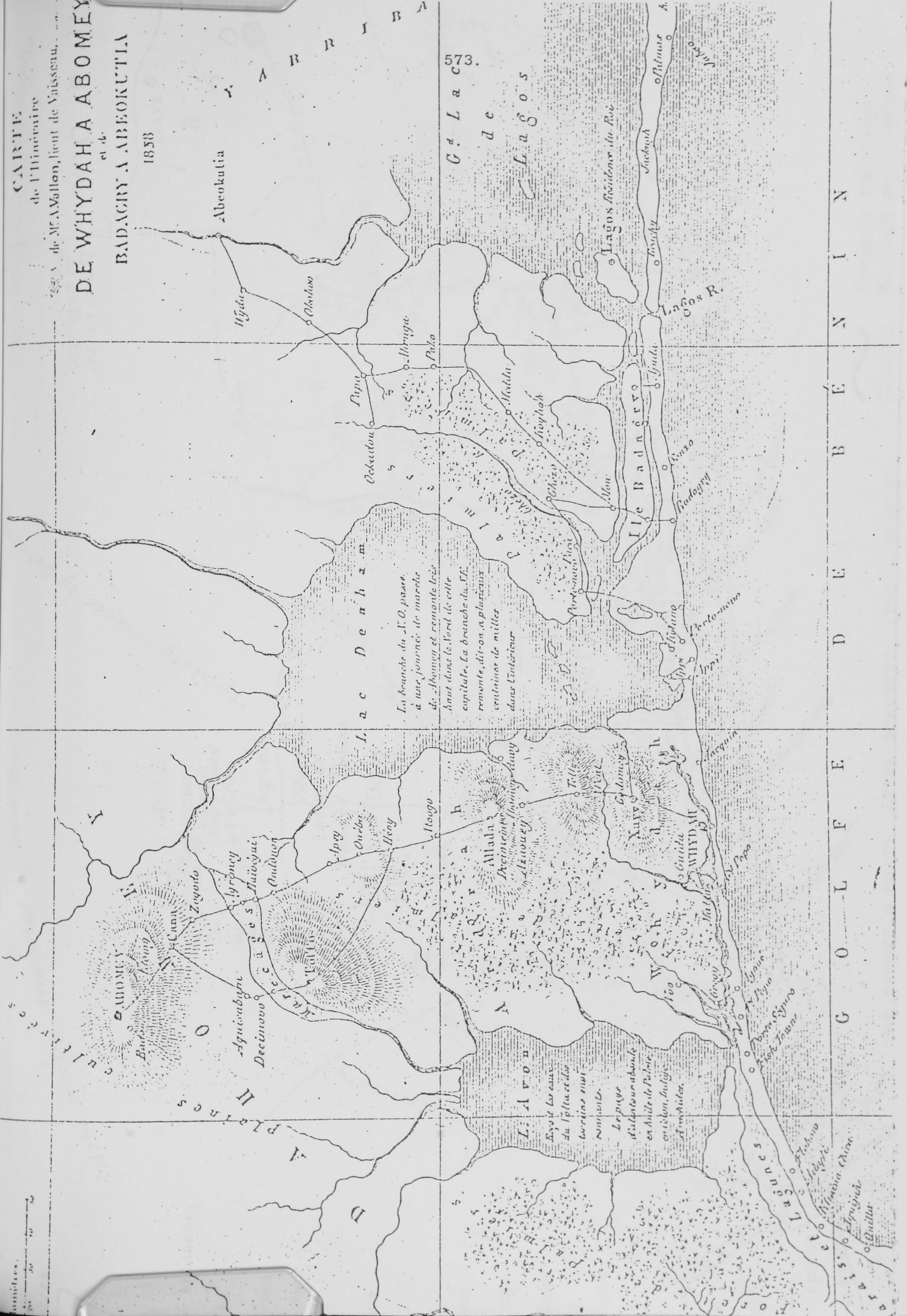
Bight of Benin

DE WHYDAH A ABOMEY

et de

BADAGRY A ABEOKUTIA

1858



La branche du S.O. passe à une journée de marche de Abomey et remonte très haut dans le Nord de cette capitale. La branche du N.E. remonte, dit-on, à plusieurs centaines de milles dans l'intérieur

Le pays d'alentour abonde en huile de palme orlon, bulgic et méditer.

G O L F E D E B E N I N

G L A C 573.

L A G O S

A P L A I N E S

L A C D E N H A M

L A V O N

W O R H

L A C U N E S

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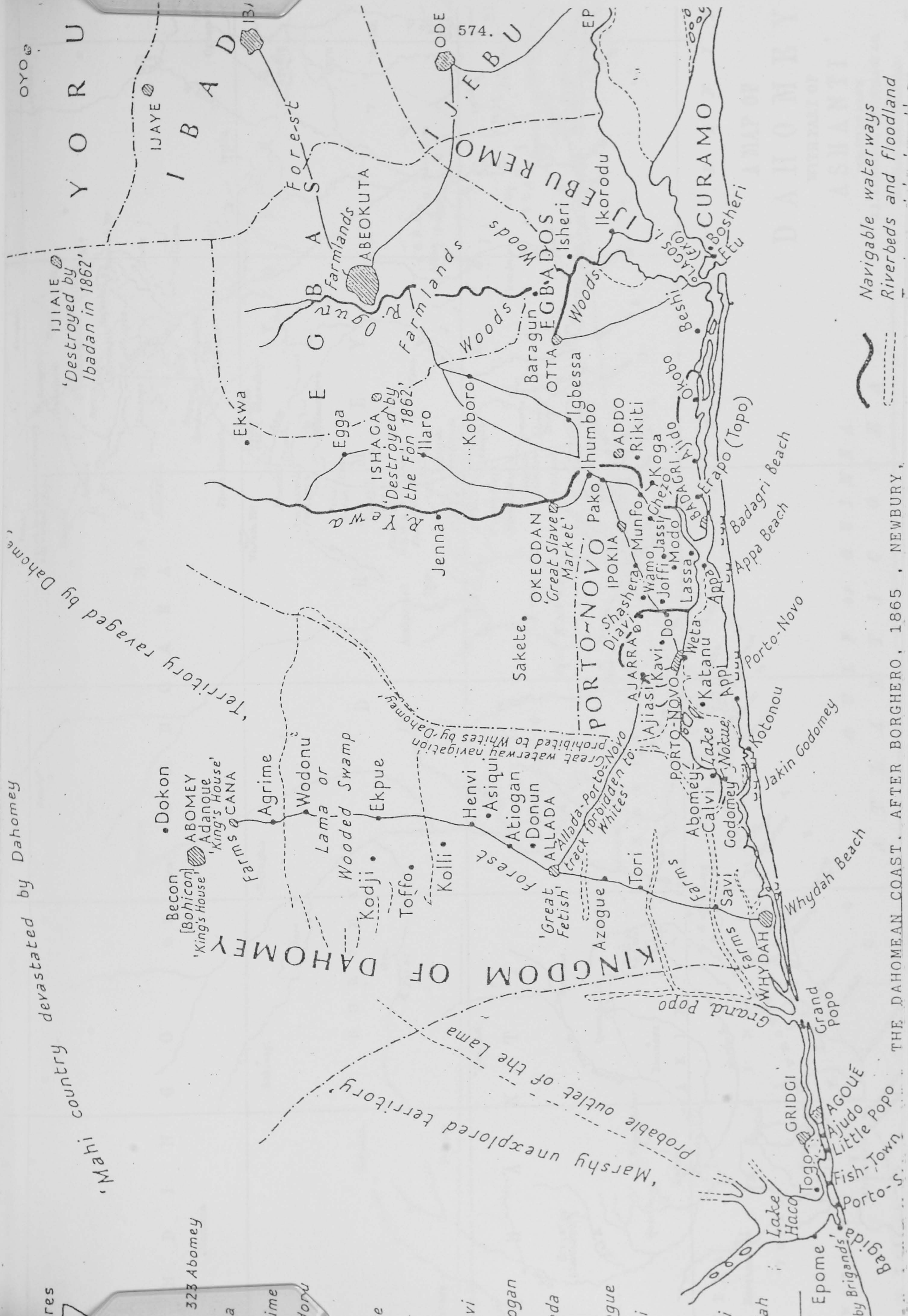
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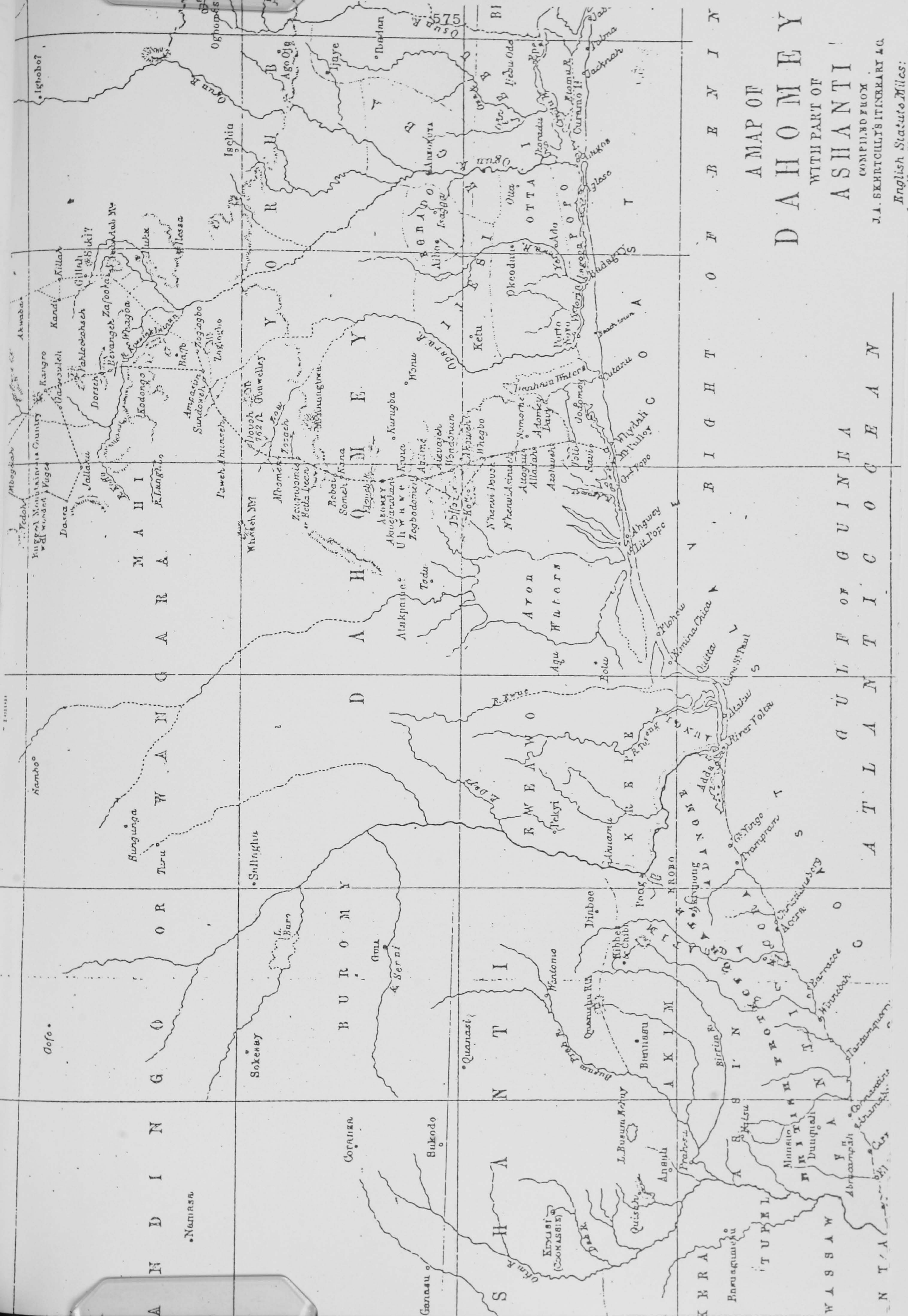
L A C U N E S

L A C U N E S

L A C U N E S



THE DAHOMEAN COAST. AFTER BORGHERO, 1865. NEWBURY.



A MAP OF
DAHOMEY
 WITH PART OF
ASHANTI

COMPILED FROM
 J.A. SKERTCHULLY'S ITINERARY &C.
 English Statute Miles:

A N D I N G O R T R U A R E M A H I Y O R B I T O F G U I N E A A T L A N T I C O C E A N