

DIPLOMACY AND SURVIVAL IN NINETEENTH-  
CENTURY WEST AFRICA

by

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SURVIVAL IN WEST AFRICA: KETOU AND ITS  
NEIGHBOURS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT.

Historians have recognised that the nineteenth century was the most troublesome period for the Yoruba states and the Fon nation of Dahomey. What provoked this was a series of economic changes that began with the abolition of the slave-trade, at the opening of the nineteenth century. The growth of the slave-trade had bound these states inextricably to European trade practices. When the Europeans began changing their trade bases from 1800 onward, some states vied for positions of advantage militarily, while others had to manoeuvre diplomatically to survive.

The Kingdom of Ketou, a Yoruba state of the Guinea forest, played no part in determining the extent of nineteenth-century trade demands. But, because of its geographic location, Ketou had to reckon single-handedly with events. For up to the nineteenth century it was tied to the powerful economic state of Oyo, by cultural, political and economic links. The demise of Oyo in the nineteenth century created a dilemma, for Ketou, for without the protective influence of Oyo it had to face change alone.

Internal disruptions became general in Yorubaland. Muslim involvement in the states became more pronounced. Opposing trade-bases emerged, and the state of Dahomey sought to achieve greater power at the expense of its neighbours. Ketou's predicament was to deal peacefully with an ambitious Dahomey while maintaining cordial relations with the major European trading outlets. In the end the diplomatic tightrope

collapsed, bringing down on Ketou, first, an invasion by Dahomey, and second, definitive conquest by the French.

The defeat of one of the smallest states in Yorubaland was hardly an astonishment. What is of some interest was the ability of Ketou to sustain itself for so long.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Les historiens reconnaissent en général que le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle fut la période la plus troublée pour les Etats Yoruba et les Fons du Dahomey. C'est une suite de changements économiques qui en fut la cause, changements qui ont commencé avec l'abolition de l'esclavage au tout début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le développement de la traite des esclaves dans ces états les avait inextricablement liés aux pratiques commerciales européennes. Quand les Européens commencèrent à changer les bases de leur commerce à partir de 1800 certains états cherchèrent à accaparer tous les avantages économiques possibles, tandis que d'autres s'aggrandissaient militairement, et que d'autres encore manoeuvraient diplomatiquement pour survivre.

Le Royaume de Kétou, un état Yoruba dans la forêt guinéenne, n'a joué aucun rôle dans l'évolution du commerce au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mais à cause de sa position géographique, il a dû se défendre lui-même devant les événements. Car, jusqu'au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle le Kétou fut lié culturellement, politiquement et économiquement à l'Oyo. La chute de l'Oyo au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle a donc créé un problème pour le Kétou: privé de l'influence de l'Oyo Kétou a dû faire face aux changements tout seule.

Des troubles internes se généralisent dans la région des Yorubas. Les musulmans s'impliquèrent de plus en plus dans les affaires des états. Des régimes économiques opposés s'instaurèrent et le Dahomey chercha à devenir plus puissant aux dépens des états voisins.

Le problème de Kétou fut d'entretenir des rapports pacifiques avec un Dahomey ambitieux tout en conservant des relations cordiales avec les principaux centres de commerce européens. Mais finalement ce jeu diplomatique ne put pas se maintenir et il s'ensuivit d'abord l'invasion par le Dahomey et ensuite la conquête définitive par les Français.

La défaite d'un des plus petits états des Yorubas ne surprit personne mais l'intérêt reside dans le fait que le Kétou fut capable de tenir aussi longtemps et seul.

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## INTRODUCTION

It has generally been accepted by historians that from the eighteenth century on into the nineteenth century the kingdoms of Oyo and Dahomey were the two major economic powers in the Guinea forest. In the first place Oyo proved its strength by a series of conquests that led Oyo to dominate the slave trade on the fringe of the Guinea forest, and extending to the coast. In the second place Dahomey, in its rise to power, had to reckon with Oyo's strength in the eighteenth and on into the nineteenth centuries. Both of these powers represented conflict and compromise in their historical development, suggesting continuous harassment and bargaining, each having incompatible interests and goals.<sup>1</sup>

Wedged between these two major forces was a lesser kingdom, named Ketou. This kingdom has been listed as representative of the historical past of Oyo and is studied in conjunction with other Yoruba kingdoms. Because of its size it was continuously overshadowed by Oyo and Dahomey.<sup>2</sup>

It is not my intention to place Ketou in a different historical process; however, it seems logical that when looking at the basic motives of both Oyo and Dahomey, that a small state such as Ketou had to reckon with its larger, more powerful neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup>P.C. Lloyd, Africa in Social Change (London, 1967), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup>E.G. Parrinder, The Story of Ketou, An Ancient Yoruba Kingdom (Ibadan, 1956), p. 9.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the development of Ketou, taking into account some of the standard methods that historians apply to African institutions; and to pursue the answers to several questions. The first question is: what was the origin of Ketou, its relation to other Yoruba institutions as a separate state? The second question asks: what was Ketou's relation to emerging forces in the Guinea forest?

Most historians write of the forces, both internal and external, that changed the political and economic order in the nineteenth century. If this is so, several other questions come to mind. How did Ketou react to the new order and what moves did she initiate in order to accommodate it? And when the external forces became increasingly apparent, how did Ketou respond?

The answers are many. Conditions prevalent in the Guinea forest up to the first quarter of the nineteenth century were a result of the slave-trade. This was at a time when Oyo and Dahomey vied for positions of advantage vis-à-vis the slave-trade. When the slave-trade was suppressed in the mid-nineteenth century all states experienced a profound change economically. Up to 1800 Ketou maintained much of its income as an exchange centre for slaves, and as a thriving agricultural country. In the second half of the nineteenth century it was forced to accommodate itself to the new economic order.

From the period when abolitionist activity became intensified and legitimate trade in agricultural products increased, groups developed

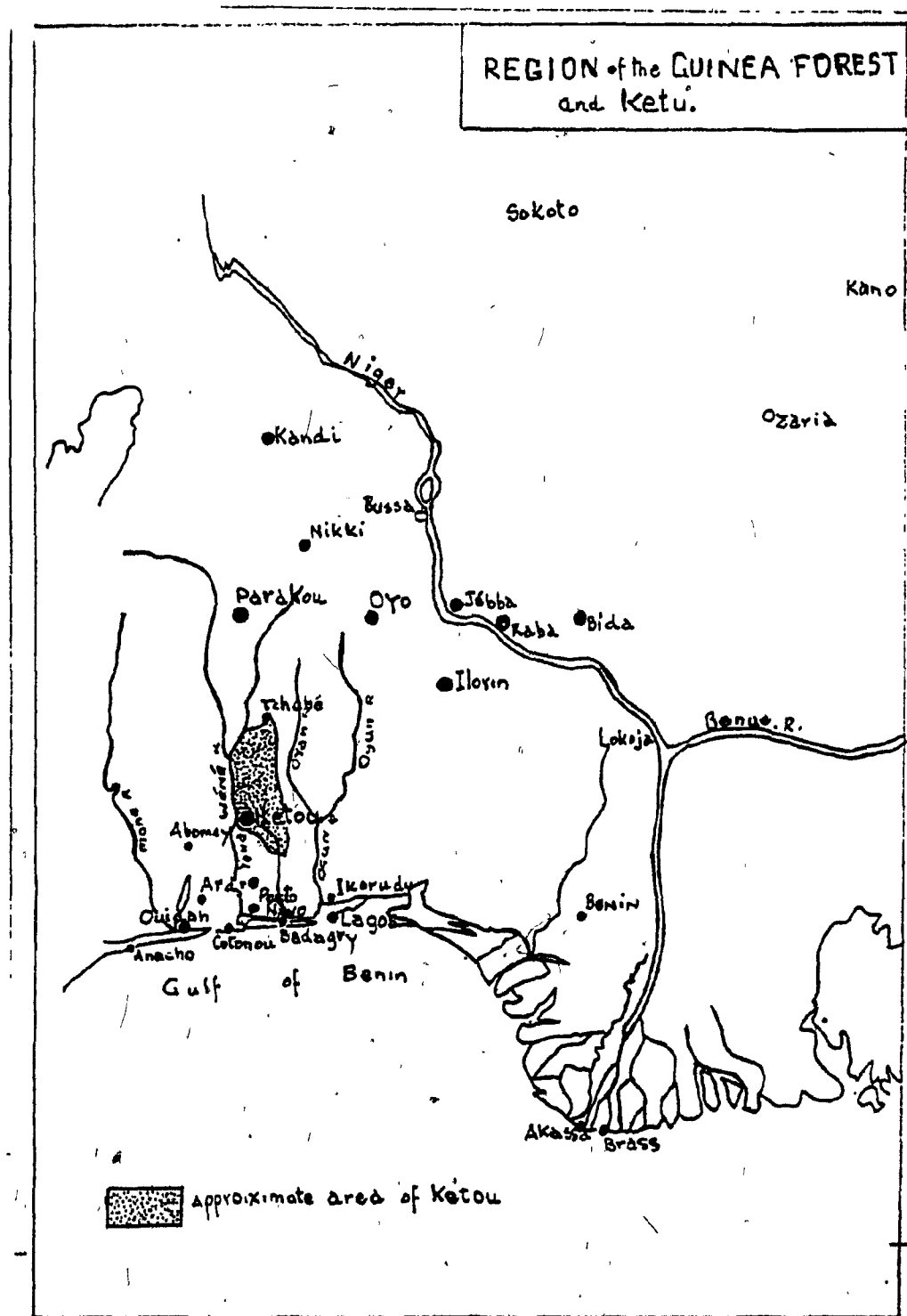
that challenged traditional forces, aggravating the position of smaller states, because there were those who survived the new economic order and did so because of their ability to acquire those factors that guaranteed survival. At the same time there were those who also attempted to accommodate, but fell victim to the conflicting force, itself reckoning with disruption of the economic order.

Up to the year 1800 there is sufficient information to document both Oyo and Dahomey. Ketou, as a minor element in the great Yoruba enterprise, is given little treatment. I have obtained information from E.G. Parrinder's book, The Story of Ketou, An Ancient Yoruba Kingdom. This work proved a valuable source of information concerning Ketou history but does not deal with Ketou's diplomatic history. I have also selected the work of Edouard Dunglas, a French colonial administrator who wrote Contributions à l'Histoire du Moyen-Dahomey, Royaumes d'Abomey, de Kétou et de Ouidah. This history of the Lower Dahomey was published in 1957, by l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, in its publication Etudes Dahoméennes. Other information was obtained from articles available in the Institute of Applied Research in the city of Porto-Novo, Dahomey; in addition research was conducted in the National Archives at Porto-Novo. Added to these were regular visits to the town of Ketou and interviews with elderly members of the community, during the years from January 1972 to June 1973.

After 1850 when external forces became more intensified, information concerning Ketou became better known to Western contemporaries, traders, officials with direct, vested interests. Prior to the conquest

of Dahomey in 1893 archival information became quite specific and more so in the post-conquest period. This was because of Ketou's incorporation into a greater enterprise, as a victim of a force it unwittingly attempted to clarify. This suggests the last question. What was Ketou's reaction to French activity, as the greatest single factor in Ketou's demise? A kingdom to the foreigner was comparable to those that existed in Europe; breaking down the kingdom and replacing the heads with non-hereditary chiefs was often thought to be equivalent to the elimination of traditional authority, thus making it easy for the substitution of a foreign authority.

Map 1:\* Region of the Guinea Forest and Ketu.



\*This map is an adaptation of a map drawn by Segla Benjamin, of the Institut de la Recherche Appliquée de Dahomey.

## CHAPTER I

### KETOU AND ITS NEIGHBOURS TO 1818

#### i. The Origins and Foundations of Ketou

The Yoruba occupy an extensive territory, embracing southwestern Nigeria and adjacent areas of Dahomey and Togo. They comprise several distinct sub-groups. The most important was Oyo in the north and, of lesser importance, the Egba of the south, Ekiti in the east, and Ketou in the west. The name Yoruba is a recent development which does not predate the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The name originally referred to the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo, for there is no evidence to support the thesis that all sub-groups made reference to this name.

In spite of contradictory versions the Yoruba kingdoms agree in claiming common origin from Ile-Ife. The ruling families of each kingdom, according to Yoruba tradition, are supposedly descended from a single ancestor, the first king of Ile-Ife, who is named Odudua. The Yoruba accept the tradition that Ile-Ife is the centre of the world.<sup>2</sup> It was here that the children of the high god Olorun came down from Heaven on a chain, carrying a five-toed chicken and a bowl of sand. The chicken scattered the sand across the ocean and left a little of the ocean which became the sacred pool. Then the pool silted over and was built up to form the home of the Yoruba people. The senior

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. Law, "The heritage of Odudua, Traditional History and Political propaganda amongst the Yoruba," Journal of African History (hereinafter J.A.H.), Vol. XV, No. 2 (1973), pp. 207-222.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



of these descendants was Odudua who became the first ruler of Ile-Ife. In due course, he presented his sons with beadwork crowns and sent them out to found kingdoms of their own.<sup>3</sup>

Another tradition represents Odudua as having migrated to Ile-Ife sometime during the first millennium and having settled there. By oral tradition we have learned of the ancient city of Ile-Ife whose inhabitants are said to have originated from Arabia, and specifically from Yemen. Upon their migration westwards, they settled in the Nile valley for an undetermined length of time and then continued their migration westwards towards the Wémé river. Here a schism took place. One group settled on the lower banks of the Niger river and established cities there, one of which became the city of Ile-Ife. The others established themselves in the region inhabited by the Songhai.<sup>4</sup>

Some traditions represent the incorporation of the creation and migration versions; according to these, the ancestors migrated from another territory and came to a vast expanse of water across which they set out and created land in the centre of it.

Odudua, son of the high god, and founder of Ile-Ife, had several children from his principal wife. Various sources give the list of sons as varying from six to sixteen. The most acceptable is seven.

These became the seven crowned rulers of Yorubaland, who were the

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Johnson, History of the Yoruba (London, 1921), pp. 3-14.

<sup>4</sup>Edouard Dunglas, Contributions à l'Histoire du Moyen-Dahomey. (Royaumes d'Abomey, de Ketou et de Ouidah), Etudes Dahoméennes, Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Porto-Novo (Dahomey, 1957), p. 21.

Oluwa of Owu, the Onitschabé of Tschabé, the Olupopo of Popo, the Oba of Benin, the chief of Ila, the Alaketou of Ketou and the youngest son, Oranmiyan, who became the Alafin of Oyo. All versions agree in including Oyo and Ketou among the original kingdoms.<sup>5</sup>

According to tradition widespread in Ketou today, Itcha Ikpatchan (Choïkpachan) was prince of Ife. He, his wife Tolou-Dakpaka-Odu and members of his clan, left Ile-Ife. Reasons given for their exodus were, first, because of the growth of the families; and second, because of the growing independence of their clan. The clan ventured westward and founded the village of Oké-Oyan on the Ogun river. This village was abandoned after a few years and they continued their migration westwards. The choice of direction was determined by one of the sons who, in turn, succeeded his father as leader of a new settlement at Aro. From the founding royal families, a king was named. All succeeding kings were chosen from the nine royal families. A prince Edé became the seventh succeeding king. According to local tradition, because of great adversity, Edé left Aro and, with selected subjects and the nine royal families, moved westwards.<sup>6</sup> Edé had three sons who were consulted as to the direction to follow. A son, Allaloumon, was chosen for he had found a region well-protected for extensive living.<sup>6</sup>

Allaloumon had on several occasions encountered members of the Bossou family in the village of Kpankou, situated close to the pro-

<sup>5</sup>Law, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-222.

<sup>6</sup>From oral evidence taken in Ketou in June of 1972 from conversations with the Bossou family in Kpankou, west of Ketou. Some of the descendants of the founding families of the village still maintain a house there.

jected site of the establishment. King Edé followed Allaloumon with the nine royal families and one hundred and twenty other members as heads of families, and founded the site at Ketou.

Versions claiming the heritage of Odudua for the king of Ketou have been stated by court historians at Ketou and by other written sources. It is not certain as to the date of the foundation of Ketou, but approximations have determined its foundation towards 1110 A.D., this date set as a follow up to the creation of Ile-Ife and to the beginning of movement westwards by migrants from Ile-Ife.<sup>7</sup>

As to written sources for the foundation of Ketou, there is none that describes a continuous and permanent settlement. It may be established that the original settlement was temporary and was rejected because of conflicts between the autochthones and the migrating Yoruba clan. Oral evidence supports this, and is re-enforced by local historian Abbé Moulero who states that the settlement was disrupted and re-established between Edé, the seventh reigning Alaketou and the fourteenth Alaketou. The building of the town's fortifications coincides with the reign of the fourteenth Alaketou. Evidence supports the construction of the walls at about the latter part of the fifteenth century.

As opposed to the date of 1110 A.D. for the founding of the kingdom Robert Smith, by "averaging the averages" of king lists, suggests the date at about 1300 for the establishment of the kingdom at Ketou.

It has also been said that, by conquest or by conciliation, particularly because of greater familiarity with cavalry and superior technical

<sup>7</sup>Robert Smith, The Kingdoms of the Yoruba (London, 1969), p. 104.

skills, the migrating clans of the Yoruba were to exert a domination over the original inhabitants, who in turn allowed them to live among them.<sup>8</sup>

It may be concluded that Yoruba expansion was a parcelling out system. This was a method whereby hereditary nobles were installed to rule over conquered domains. Under it, the autochthones became subservient to ruling families who, in order to secure recognition of their status and to legitimize their rule, claimed divine lineage to the royal families at Ile-Ife. Of particular importance to the ruling families was that, in order to adapt to new political and social changes, it was necessary to alter the traditions to fit new conditions. This practice became important by the fifteenth century.

In accepting any legend of dispersal of the sons of Odudua as an explanation for the foundation of the Yoruba states, of which Ketou is one, several elements must be satisfied. Firstly, there is the widespread acceptance and support of the parent city of Ile-Ife. Secondly, a king list of sufficient length is necessary, that is, about thirty-five names or more; and last of all, Ketou's position of seniority among other kingdoms of Ife origin. Ketou most nearly satisfied these three cases.

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<sup>8</sup> According to tradition in Ketou today the Fon emigrated from Adankpodji, Idonfin and from Ife, and had settled in Ketou before the arrival of king Edé. The growth of the Yoruba clan forced the Fon to move westwards towards Kpankou; this was when the intruding Yoruba made demands on Fon land for cultivation. A conflict ensued between the Fon and the Yoruba and conciliation was made when a member of the Bossou family was enlisted into the Ketou hierarchy.

Ile-Ife's position as the acknowledged cradle of all royal dynasties of the surrounding kingdoms would imply a particular status to the leader of Ile-Ife, the Oni of Ife, who accepted a paternalistic, almost autocratic authority over all dynasties of the surrounding kingdoms. This tradition is contested by some kingdoms which deny the paramount status of the Oni of Ife. A more positive claim was put forward by the Alaketou, but the most energetic and systematic claim was made by Oyo and the Alafin, its leader.<sup>9</sup>

## ii. Ketou Culture and Society

The physical emplacement of Ketou with its fortified walls is typical of most Yoruba towns. The political power of the Ketou hierarchy was manifest by the flight of the subservient Fon population westwards, who feared the power of a growing Yoruba population. In addition to this protective influence other reasons are suggested for the dominance of the Yoruba in Ketou. First, is the idea of Yoruba conquest of the autochthones. Parrinder in his Story of Ketou speaks of conquest.<sup>10</sup> A second explanation is that the Yoruba may have been associated with some technical innovation, bringing in new weaponry. Of equal importance, they may have introduced new ideas of government and kingship. Whatever the means of conquest, the newly arrived Yoruba were skilled farmers and men of wealth who came to dominate a local population of poor farmers.

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<sup>9</sup>Law, op. cit., pp. 207-222.

<sup>10</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 15.

As the Guinea forest dictates, the pursuits of the autochthones were subsistence farming and hunting. The main crops were yam, maize and cotton, and the game was gouti, antelope and elephant. It would seem, then, that the highly sophisticated Yoruba culture, composed of a hierarchy, skilled tradesmen and craftsmen, would occupy the upper levels of a feudal order. At the base of the system would be the cultivators or peasant farmers whose prime interest was subsistence farming, trade and the protection of these interests. The hunters would be inevitably incorporated into the militia of the kingdom.

Most Yoruba villages or communities formed this social arrangement within an "urban context".<sup>11</sup> A stratification existed within an area which would involve a conglomeration of 10,000 or more persons crowding in all their needs.<sup>12</sup> Thus craftsmen, shopkeepers, members of an extended clan, as well as cooperative farmers, lived and worshipped in an urban environment. Many needs were interwoven in a detailed pattern. Farming was usually conducted outside of the confines of the town or villages at distances of up to ten kilometers. The farmer would build his house close to his farm and live in it during the period of cultivation and harvest. At the same time, he would maintain another home in the urban or city complex.

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<sup>11</sup>William Bascom, The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria (New York, 1964), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Daryl Forde, The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria (London, 1951).

The political organisation of Ketou was by most accounts stable. This assured the growth of the town and of its hundreds of compounds into a political community.<sup>13</sup> Leadership was provided by an Oba. In Ketou, he was referred to as the "Ala-Ketou," the possessor of Ketou. The Alaketou, as member of the royal family and descendant of the progenitor Odudua, was the symbol of power and its continuity. Biobaku states that,

... he was the high priest and was more the symbol of authority than the instrument of its exercise.<sup>14</sup>

He was responsible for the welfare of the town, but had little to do with the delegation of power. Power was said to be diffused through the office of the Alaketou, but was tempered by a council of elders. The Alaketou could be deposed by a decision of the council.

If all the chiefs should agree, they have the right by the law of the land to assemble, and say to the king, 'you have reigned long enough', whereupon he must retire into his house and take poison, to avoid a violent death.<sup>15</sup>

The Essaba was the chief-officer or prime minister on the council of elders. In greater Yorubaland, he was called the Basorun. He was the most powerful person next to the king and acted as regent. In the period of transition during the selection of, and the enthronement of a succeeding Alaketou, it was the Essaba who held office and directed the

<sup>13</sup>G. J. Afolabi Ojo, Yoruba Culture (Ife, Nigeria, University of Ife, 1967), p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>S. O. Biobaku, The Egba and their Neighbours (Oxford, 1957), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>T. J. Bowen, Missionary Journals Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856 (Charleston, 1857), pp. 145-7.

affairs of the kingdom. This office, as with other important members of the council, was hereditary and was not financially dependent on favours from the Alaketou. Office-holders were supported by their own clan and lineage groups.<sup>16</sup>

The council of elders helped select ascendants to the throne of Ketou. As a powerful cabinet it also regulated different aspects of government and restrained the Alaketou by constitutional procedure. Members of the council could create powerful oligarchies of interest and thereby challenge the authority of the Alaketou. The economic growth of clans sometimes led to conflicts of interest and power blocs within the council. Leaders of the powerful clans as "longlife ministers", could use the advantage of their wealth to create still other avenues of power.<sup>17</sup>

A lower council composed of regional chiefs, called Balés, was also hereditary within extended families.<sup>18</sup> The Balés were given parcels of farm territory, and with the virtual growth of the territory and its population, the Balé was given right to representation on the regional council. All the descendants were in turn given that hereditary right. Individual Balés managed all community affairs, arbitrated disputes, distributed job responsibility and played a judicious role in serious quarrels. Thus, both the members of the council of elders and the regional chiefs, as well as being officials of the king and kingdom,

<sup>16</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 90.



were representatives of their family groups.

Other restraining influences existed to create more power in favour of the Ketou hierarchy. Of particular consequence was the Oloyé society in Ketou. This was similar to the Ogboni society in greater Yorubaland.<sup>19</sup> This organisation was a persuasive force in Ketou society, spreading fear through its secrecy. The Oloyé society became prominent because of its hereditary membership, which traced its origins back to Ile-Ife. Its control extended into every element of Ketou society, constituting a tribunal which penetrated individual and domestic life. It, as a council could direct the disputes and performances of the council of elders, controlling the legislative body of the council and extending control into the executive and judicial activities of the kingdom. Their power was reinforced by the fact that they constituted, along with the elders, an electoral college which chose the king from the nine ruling families.

Even though political structures may have differed to some degree from the central power to lesser states of the Yoruba, the fundamental, traditional political system was composed of the authorities of lineages, associations and the state. This sophisticated system, peculiar to the Yoruba, was built up to ensure a rural economy, giving it a geographical basis providing for the growth of a more centralised "city context."<sup>20</sup>

An urban context supported the nature of Yoruba political power. It aided the oligarchic nature of all the Yoruba, who were organised in

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<sup>19</sup>Forde, op. cit., pp. 42-47.

<sup>20</sup>Ojo, op. cit., p. 120.

coöperative systems. All transactions were based on a guild system. The concentration of the population within the walls of the town gave the ruling clan effective protection and time to devote themselves to the intrigues of the palace and its politics.

This elaborate organization prevented easy association between the king and his subjects. The Alaketou is described as being a sacred or divine king who was more dreaded than the gods.<sup>21</sup> Old customs forbade the Alaketou from going outside the fortifications of the town. When the king was visiting a chief within the town, he was not to enter the home of his host.

The head of the king must be under no roof than the king's own palace.<sup>22</sup>

The Alaketou was never to be seen alone nor was he to leave his palace but on officially designated days or on official ceremonies. Robert Smith mentions:

He was not only the head of the town, but their personification, reincarnating all his ancestors back to the origin of the dynasty.<sup>23</sup>

At no time could he be without the members of his council or ministry. His symbol of authority was the "beaded crown."<sup>24</sup> The wearing of the beaded crown was particular to the descendants of Odudua, as rightful heirs to the throne of Ketou. Obviously, the aura about the king was

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<sup>21</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>A.K. Ajisafe, History of Abeokuta (Abeokuta, 1964), p. 155.

<sup>23</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>24</sup>Law, op. cit., pp. 207-222.

to maintain his attachment to the divine elements of Yoruba dynasties. Ayandele writes of the Awujale of Ijebuland that it was more his office that was revered than his person.<sup>25</sup>

There is no subject to which Yoruba peasants were more sensitive than their land. Most land was dealt out by the king to individual clans. The land might be "leased" out or cultivated by heirs of the original owner.<sup>26</sup> Violence erupted easily when any attempt was directed towards the deprivation of this land.<sup>27</sup>

Ogun, god of hunters, was the most powerful deity in Yoruba society, and in Ketou the major religious influence. The lands and forests were under the guardianship of the "Keeper of the Cult," the Oritcha of Ogun. Any laws or rules relating to the forest or to land, had to recognise the rights, privileges and services of the cult of Ogun. Only members of the cult could effect laws pertaining to the land.<sup>28</sup>

### iii. The Rise of Neighbouring States; the Rise of Oyo

The kingdom of Oyo, on the outer edge of Yoruba country, was founded by Oranmiyan, the youngest son of Odudua. Snelgrave mentions that:

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<sup>25</sup>E. A. Ayandele, "The Changing Position of the Awujales of Ijebuland under Colonial Rule," pp. 231-254, in M. Crowder and O. Ikime, eds., West African Chiefs, Their changing status under colonial rule and independence (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1970).

<sup>26</sup>Forde, op. cit., pp. 42-47.

<sup>27</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>Forde, op. cit., p. 47.

Oyo lies towards the north-east, many days journey off, beyond a great river and a famous lake, which is the fountain of several large rivers, that empty themselves into the Bay of Guinea.<sup>29</sup>

This statement corroborates the strategic importance of Oyo and the control of access to the southern rivers. More important was its position on the margin of the savannah, whereby lateral mobility made it the focal point of communications. Oyo was able to maintain close relations with its northerly non-Yoruba neighbours, the Hausa, and the Bariba of Borgu. The former, who were the most northerly, were in turn in touch with the distant Arab and Berber, across the Sahara. This was both a stimulus and a danger to Oyo, for both trade and warfare served to bring the political, military and technical ideas of the Sudan to Oyo and to the Yoruba of the southern region.

Oyo came to be established as a power in Yorubaland in the fourteenth century.<sup>30</sup> This was the beginning of the extension of Oyo's influence and frontiers to regions one hundred miles southward. Through aggressive external relations, Oyo was able to challenge its most ambitious neighbours and was able to hold out against them, in the meantime establishing an empire from the bend of the Niger River to the coast. A series of strong rulers built up the state in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. In the sixteenth century, Oyo was menaced by the northern city of Nupe and was destroyed. The horse was introduced

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<sup>29</sup>W. Snelgrave, A new account of some parts of the Guinea and slave coast (London, 1734), pp. 55-56.

<sup>30</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 103.

into Yorubaland in the seventeenth century, and became a major element in the emergence of Oyo as a power on the fringe of the Guinea forest.<sup>31</sup>

Oyo developed a cavalry and became a dominant force in the savannah region and on the fringe of the Guinea forest. Its proximity to the Bariba horsemen of Borgu gave Oyo the necessary techniques of horsemanship. The partly rocky, seasonally dry grassland provided the terrain and the environment in which to breed and develop a stock of horses. John Bosman, a noted Dutch explorer at the turn of the seventeenth century, wrote of the

... Eyoës as a nation that was all horsed and struck terror into all the circumjacent negroes.<sup>32</sup>

Norris speaks of them as a "very populous and warlike nation."<sup>33</sup>

The cavalry was a great factor in Oyo's rise to power and its hegemony over other states. Oyo extended its influence over other Yoruba kingdoms. To determine the extent to which they were successful is difficult in the absence of oral tradition elaborating the process of this period of Oyo imperialism. Tradition corroborates the expansion and subordination of the Egba in the Guinea forest southwards and the subjection of the Fon on the southwestern frontier, thus providing a link to the growing European trade on the coast, stretching from Whydah to Badagry.

<sup>31</sup>K. Madhu Panikkar, The serpent and the crescent, A history of Negro Empires of Western Africa (London, 1963), p. 144.

<sup>32</sup>William Bosman, A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Letter xx (London, 1705), pp. 397-98.

<sup>33</sup>William Norris, Voyage au Pays Dahomé (Paris, 1790), p. 26.

Although an Oyo army was sent into Bussa in the northwest, it was in the southwest that Oyo's expansion was most marked. Several small settlements were destroyed on the east bank of the Wémé River in a region south of Ketou.<sup>34</sup> This was at the close of the seventeenth century. This supports the thesis that Ketou must have, previous to this date, become an extension of Oyo's sovereignty prior to the end of the seventeenth century. In 1689, the kingdoms of Allada and Porto-Novo were overrun by Oyo. The first half of the eighteenth century is often described as Oyo's "golden age of imperialism". Oyo had succeeded in imposing its authority over the states on the east bank and on the west bank of the Wémé River, continuing sixty miles to the coast. These states of the west bank were Savalou, Ketou and Wémé.<sup>35</sup>

From 1712 to 1730, Oyo invaded the neighbouring state of Dahomey. In 1730, the Fon monarch agreed to pay an annual tribute to Oyo.<sup>36</sup> This was of particular consequence to the smaller states. The agreement stipulated that all lesser states on the periphery of Dahomey were to keep their independence. This provided for periods of continuous growth for these states and, more specifically, Ketou.

Oyo's military strength explains its predominance over its neighbours. The geographical position of Oyo provided the basis for its growth

<sup>34</sup>Oral research in June 1972 reinforces the creation of an outpost on the Wémé river, at a time which coincides with the destruction of Wémé. This town fits all descriptions of Yoruba political and administrative systems. The name given to the town is Fanvie. The people refer to themselves as Ifénon (people of Ifé), and are physically different to other Fon, Gûn and Ewé of the region.

<sup>35</sup>Panikkar, op. cit., pp. 145-50.

<sup>36</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 146.

as a commercial centre. Oyo was situated in such a way that it was linked to the trade on the coast, where Europeans were active and to those major states of the western Sudan. Of particular importance to the Atlantic trade was the growth by the seventeenth century of slave-exporting on a large scale. In exchange, Oyo received iron, salt, cutlasses and other luxury goods such as textiles and mirrors.

Ketou was a link in the network of Oyo's southwesterly trade route which proceeded through the southerly swamps of the Allada plateau to the town of Allada and on to the coast. Ketou provided a break in the forest belt, enabling the Oyo cavalry to gain protection for its caravans as far as the coast. Ketou is situated on a high plateau of extensive flat base rock and short trees. This plateau runs laterally from Egbaland to the Wémé River.<sup>37</sup> The city-state and seaport of Whydah provided the Oyos with European markets as with Porto-Novo, the more southeasterly outlet to the sea. Allada became the refuge of Whydah traders, and the Alafin placed it under his immediate protection in 1730.<sup>38</sup>

Oyo represented a powerful political and economic empire. This force provided the leadership on the coast and the Guinea forest for centuries and was representative of a phase in Yoruba history in which effective power and supremacy passed from Ile-Ife to Oyo under the leader-

<sup>37</sup>From a visit to the region.

<sup>38</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 146; Capt. L. Adams, Sketches taken during ten voyages to Africa between the years 1786 and 1800 (London, 1861), p. 23.

ship of the Alafin.<sup>39</sup>

A widely accepted tradition states that Oranmiyan, as founder of Oyo, was the youngest of Odudua's children, thus giving him inferior status to rulers of other kingdoms deriving from Ile-Ife. After the rise of Oyo, the Alafin claimed primary status amongst the rulers. Reasons have been offered as to how the Alafin came to justify this status. Firstly, the founder Oranmiyan had secured ownership of all the land, this when Odudua's property was divided amongst his children. Secondly, it was Oranmiyan, rather than Odudua, who created the land causing the dry land to appear.<sup>40</sup>

Another explanation suggests that it was Oranmiyan who succeeded Odudua as king of Ile-Ife, and when he founded Oyo, it represented a transfer of the seat of government from Ile-Ife to Oyo, thus giving the Alafin primacy and also because of his becoming a lineal descendant of the founder of the nation. This primacy was further established by virtue of his courage, excelling in all manners. The Alafin's claim of authority over all the kingdoms deriving from Ile-Ife was established between 1720 and 1730. During this period, the Alafin of Oyo was to demonstrate "his undisputed authority by sending an expedition out to the lesser kingdoms."<sup>41</sup>

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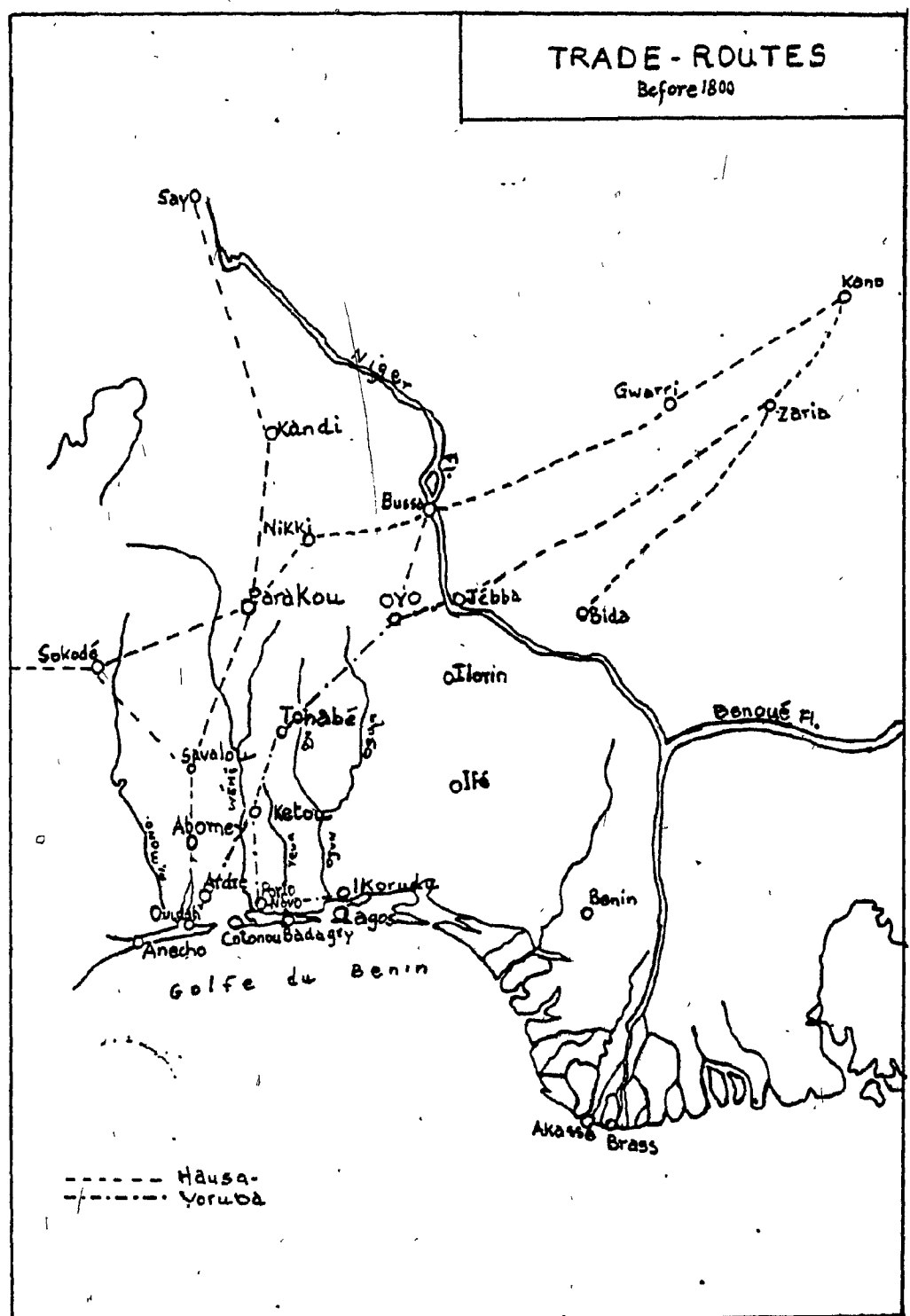
<sup>39</sup> J. F. Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria. The making of an elite (London, 1965), p. 193.

<sup>40</sup> Law, op. cit., pp. 207-22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



Map 2: Trade-Routes before 1800.



#### iv. The Rise of Dahomey

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Yoruba and the Adja peoples both lived under a similar form of government. The dominant cultural influence in the area were the Yoruba who, judging from the large area of land they occupied, were obviously the far more numerous and imposing of the two groups. With Odudua, the progenitor of the Yoruba, the Adja kings of Allada, Abomey and Savi were descendants of a prince Nouatcha who, according to tradition, had unsuccessfully contested the throne at Tado, on the Mono River, and then fled to Allada, further south. The most successful factor consolidating both dynasties was the "Ebi-Social System."

According to Akinjogbin, who proposed the "Ebi theory, the person occupying the throne of the original ancestor was regarded as the father of all the other kings and all the other kings were regarded as brothers".<sup>42</sup> This formed a kind of natural allegiance to other related dynasties and bound the people to the king. This was the basis of the original constitution of the Adja people. The proposed harmony amongst the states was to create a "family relationship". This theory or pact was to preserve the political unity among the Adja people and the Yoruba, and was to serve as a guideline for the behaviour of the lesser kings.

At the close of the seventeenth century, the city states of Allada, Abomey, Tori and Savi, all founded on the Western plateau of the Wémé

<sup>42</sup>I. A. Akinjogbin, Dahomey and Its Neighbours, 1708-1818 (Cambridge, 1907), pp. 176-77.

River, were bound to each other by this "natural allegiance," with each state accepting special duties within a "commonwealth relationship."<sup>43</sup> These states had developed with European enterprise, particularly the slave-trade, with the seaport of Whydah becoming the principal point of contact with the Atlantic trade. The Hoéda of Savi, through their seaport of Whydah, maintained the most prominent position with respect to European commerce. By the seventeenth century they had begun to monopolize all commerce and to exercise rigid control over the type of goods directed into the interior states at Allada and Abomey.<sup>44</sup>

In 1708, a crisis provoked by the slave-trade began to disrupt the traditional political systems. Houffon, the king of Savi-Whydah, and Agadja, the King of Dahomey, both ascended simultaneously to the throne of their respective kingdoms. They were to become the protagonists in a conflict that led to the creation of imperial Dahomey.

One theory has it that the Fon, as an interior state, was suffering from the heavy taxes and customs duties imposed and controlled by Houffon at Whydah.<sup>45</sup> The Fon situated on the western bank of the Wémé River were ambitious. From early indications, they had consolidated an enviable position on the plateau above Allada, this by a preoccupation with a militia and by a highly centralized administration.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Karl Polanyi, Dahomey and the Slave Trade (London, 1966), p. 56.

Always subservient to Oyo, Agadja of Abomey was determined to protect his interests, believing a free access to the sea would enhance the economic stature of his kingdom. To him, this seemed sufficient enough to warrant conquest and expansion.

A more acceptable basis for the foundation of Dahomey, would be that, with the growth of foreign trade, and the recognition of the commercial advantages of slave-trading, a breakdown of traditional influences was taking place.<sup>47</sup> Clashes ensued between conservatives and those who wished to challenge the outdated forms of union. King Agadja was considered as a king "in tune with the times."<sup>48</sup> He foresaw that, if a re-orientation of trading practices could take place and a security based on organized force could be established, a more substantial base could be made to counteract foreign influences. Dahomey's emergence was based upon the principle that, if it could control all divisive elements, monopolize all trade in arms and control the slave-trade, its power and sovereignty would be guaranteed.

The Adja rulers jealously guarded the established order. They were being aided by foreign influences that were wishing to maintain their status on the coast and to continue the old order of the trade relations. These two forces were instrumental in weakening the binding force of traditional beliefs and began causing its eventual destruction.

The struggle for Whydah became a three-way battle, a conflict that continued for several years. Firstly, there were the Europeans

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<sup>47</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., pp. 39-45.

<sup>48</sup>Panikkar, op. cit., p. 160.

who wanted to guard their respective positions of advantage; secondly, the Hoéda, having become familiar with European trading practices, were not ready to give up their privileges, as protagonists of the more traditional allegiance and trading practices.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the Fon of Abomey, seizing the opportunity afforded by the divisions amongst the coastal states, began challenging and re-organizing the old political systems.<sup>50</sup> Added to this, was the traditional might of Oyo, the scourge of the Guinea states and the terror of the Adja people. Oyo was concerned about the disruption of its trade routes.<sup>51</sup> The established trade route from Oyo to the port of Whydah was through Ketou, on to Zagnanado and to Cové, then on to Porto-Novo and Whydah. This route was used during the rainy season when the Wémé River swelled. The rising status of Dahomey on the western plateau would be a menace to Oyo hegemony. The more seasonal route of the Oyo through Allada would have been broken if Dahomey had succeeded in gaining a foothold. This was further aggravated by Abomey's increased centralization and tax system.

Oyo attacked Abomey in 1712. It was agreed, at that time, to accommodate the Fon by affording them control of the western plateau. This afforded King Agadjá a great opportunity. By the year 1724, he had gained control of the inland and brother state of Allada and their seaport at Jakin. In the year 1726, he moved against the Houéda capital

<sup>49</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., pp. 39-51.

<sup>50</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

at Savi. As a result, he succeeded in controlling the commerce of all Europeans in 1731, and had become political master of the Adja people.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Abomey became one of the tributaries of Oyo, on the same level, as far as Oyo was concerned, with other coastal states, such as Badagry, Wémé and Porto-Novo.<sup>53</sup>

The Oyos, with the help of the vassal state of Ketou, continued to harass Dahomey until the Alafin of Oyo contented himself with accommodation to Dahomey. This gave the monarchs at Dahomey an opportunity for internal reassessment.

The monarchs at Dahomey showed their shrewdness in attempting to recover from divisions, and in recognizing the need to adapt to changing patterns and trade demands. An increasing dependency on international trade marked the direction Dahomey's commerce was to take. In spite of moves towards less destructive practices, slave-trading became the basis of its economy.

Dahomey's economic imperialism began in earnest in 1733. This expansion was directed northward to the region inhabited by the Mahi at Dassa-Zouné, and westwards towards Atakpamé and the Popos.<sup>54</sup> This ambitious plan was rejected by Oyo, this being an infringement on Oyo's sovereignty. In the year 1738, the reigning monarch, Tegbessu, negotiated with the Alafin of Oyo, offering to continue to pay tribute. In 1747, according to Norris, an ambassador was sent to Oyo, the capital,

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Panikkar, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>54</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 161.

on behalf of Tegbessu, the king of Dahomey.<sup>55</sup>

For several decades, Dahomey kings tried to break the hold of Oyo but did not succeed. Under Tegbessu, from 1739 to 1775, Dahomey suffered setbacks by the neighbouring peoples. From 1775 to 1789, King Kpengla again tried to consolidate his position on the coast and ward off the Alafin and his cavalry.<sup>56</sup>

Dahomey maintained a military preparedness and initiative with the design of procuring slaves to the detriment of all other forms of commerce. Towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, internal conditions in Dahomey and the international conditions governing the slave-trade had begun to change, depressing Dahomey's economy.

Dahomey responded to changing influences and began filling a leadership vacuum on the coast. The commercial changes taking place by 1800 brought the conservatives and the protagonists for change into open conflict with the conservatives gaining a decided edge. It became increasingly obvious that the emergence of Dahomey and its continuous involvement in the slave-trade was the result of the logic of economic efficiency, and basically would be an attempt to operate within the growing sphere of international commerce and its influences.

In 1800 Dahomey had emerged as the strongest coastal power, with the wealth provided by the slave-trade. Dahomey continued to challenge Oyo, but Oyo's pending collapse would give her the opportunity to replace Oyo as the dominant power in the Guinea forest.

#### v. The Decline of Oyo

In the late eighteenth century the security and economy of the kingdom of Oyo weakened. The northern trade-routes were overrun

<sup>55</sup>Norris, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>56</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., pp. 172-73.

by Borgu horsemen and in the south, a delicate balance was shifting in favour of the provincial leaders. To explain what was inevitably the decay and decline of Oyo, four reasons seem clear.

First of all, internal politics were going through a crisis. The "Ebi theory" proposed by Akinjogbin described the "father son relationship" that existed between the Alafin and the provincial chiefs.<sup>57</sup> This unwritten law guaranteed that no vassal would threaten the power of the Alafin, the overlord. This relationship was challenged in 1724, by the Adja king Agadja who, in spite of the Alafin's insistence against it, conquered Allada. This revolutionary attitude weakened the traditional allegiance and became the example for many other subordinates to follow.<sup>58</sup> Later on, the Basoruns, as regents and prime ministers to the Alafin, had gained great power. The immensity of the Empire gave the Basoruns effective leadership over the northern periphery towards the Niger river. They, along with military commanders, became the real rulers of the Empire. The Basoruns challenged the Alafin's readiness to maintain a constitutional balance, the Alafin responded by weakening the effectiveness of the military chiefs. This was to no avail.

The second reason was the oligarchic nature of the Yoruba hierarchy. Slave-trading and its profits provided a strong economic base for the militia and its leaders. They, as a result, did not have to wait for the normal tribute from the Alafin. The Alafin himself was no longer the benefactor of the revenue gained from customs exactions on

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-77.

<sup>58</sup>K. Jennings, "War and Diplomacy in Eighteenth Century Ajaland," unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University (March 1974), p. 50.



the northern periphery of the kingdom; these factors aggravated the imbalance between the Alafin and the Basorun and gave impetus to the eventual dislocation of normal elective and constitutional procedures, transferring the power to the more economically powerful military oligarchies and to the Basorun.

The third reason was the weakening of Oyo's expansionist leaders. Wars were no longer undertaken and important provinces escaped Oyo control. Of particular consequence, were Borgu and Nupe, on the northern edge of the empire. They had closed off the access routes to the north, at the same time denying Oyo horses for its cavalry. The result was an increased cost to the Oyo, for better horses were not available elsewhere.

The fourth reason was the overland flow of slaves, and the resultant increase in the price of the commodity. Akinjogbin claims that slave-trading tended to weaken any exporting country, since it drove away any other activity and sapped the productivity of labour.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the importing of gunpowder increased, combined with a fluctuating international economy, depressing the slave trade, resulting in a shift in the economic and political balance southwards.

The military buildup in the south forced the slave trade to take another direction. This was attended by serious consequences, not so much from the preoccupation with the trade, as from the rivalry amongst the "middlemen states" and the coastal states. The coastal region determined the price of slaves and the extent of the trade. The result was

<sup>59</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., p. 223.

that the states lying on the margin of the forest vied for positions of advantage seeking, in some cases, to change their political allegiance in order to guarantee some degree of independence and a trade advantage, at the same time, trying to maintain a monopoly of the trade in gunpowder.

The Alafin recognized this new shift in favour of the chiefs and attempted to recover by altering the traditional machinery of provincial authority, this by increasing the autonomy of the provinces and maintaining some semblance of the normal monetary tribute. This, he felt, would strengthen his accessibility and guarantee trade routes free of restrictive duties and taxes.

It was obvious that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, those factors that were coming to bear on Oyo became the reasons for its demise. This demise was to coincide with a time of international change in trade demands, on a scale never known before.

To these reasons, others may be added. By 1809 large Muslim communities that developed in the north with sympathisers in the south, began threatening Oyo. The disarray of the Muslim communities on the northern boundary of Oyo, caught in the throes of changing trade routes, provided the reason for the resurgence of a religious movement, whose religious philosophy gave rise to the arrogance of otherwise tranquil Muslim trading factions, cutting off Oyo from the important areas of the kingdom. The intrigue and innovativeness of the Muslim factions gave them a commanding role militarily within the kingdoms on the periphery, which were already threatened by the recently inde-

pendent states of Nupe and Borgu. To further aggravate a rapid decline, King Guézo of Dahomey began, by 1819, cutting away at Oyo's southwestern frontier and began a determined expansionist policy into the rich and arable Yorubaland southwards.

Oyo domination was at its end. There were attempts by the Alafin to regain some semblance of its sovereignty. Faced with anarchy in the south, the resurgence of the Islamic faith in the north, and an arrogant military despot on its western flank, the political authority of Oyo no longer had a reasonable base. With the absence of traditional support from Ile-Ife, several other elements were to emerge to replace Oyo with what seemed momentarily a more acceptable basis for control over new influences.

#### vi. The Re-emergence of Dahomey in the Nineteenth Century

The decline of the sovereign power of Oyo, at the close of the eighteenth century, was a factor contributing to the emergence of Dahomey as an economic and political power. The refusal to accept a semi-independent status forced the Fon monarch at Abomey to seek and acquire the elements that would provide greater economic viability and complete independence from Oyo. Dahomey's subservience to Oyo was a financial burden and impaired her economic expansion. She had suffered from the effects of the international depression from 1789 to 1816. This period provided for some internal re-assessment and more aggressive diplomatic overtures to re-vitalize an apparent decline in the economic status of the slave ports at Whydah and Porto-Novo.

Agonglo was the reigning monarch from 1789 to 1797.<sup>60</sup> He attempted to elicit help from European trading establishments to enhance a declining position at the port of Whydah. In addition he attempted to encourage other non-Dahomean traders to trade at local markets.<sup>61</sup> Of considerable importance was his insistence upon continuing a military preparedness and slave raiding, which were to have a temporary effect on Dahomey's trade position. Most traders reacted negatively to Agonglo's aggressive manoeuvres by moving further eastwards well beyond his reach. The result was the liquidation of most European forts by their respective owners.

King Adandozan succeeded Agonglo in 1797 and continued to maintain his independence until 1818 during which time Dahomey's sovereignty extended northwards to Mahi country, westwards to Ashanti, dominating the western plateau of the Wémé river and extending along the coast from Badagry to Jaquin. Adandozan's reign was interrupted because of the growing influence of a strong commercial bloc at Whydah headed by Francisco Da Souza.<sup>62</sup> He had enough influence to support the removal of Adandozan, replacing him with his half-brother Guézo.<sup>63</sup> From this year the power of the king and the emphasis on the slave-trade became key factors in Dahomey's re-emergence.

<sup>60</sup>J.A. Skertchly, Dahomey As It Is; being a Narrative of Eight months' Residence in that country (London, 1874), p. 451.

<sup>61</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>62</sup>Panikkar, op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>63</sup>Francisco Travassos Valdes, Six Years of a Traveller's Life in Western Africa, vol. I (London, 1861), p. 327.

The absolutism of the Dahomey monarch became an outstanding symbol of the period. The king became the father and master of the world:

Aucune loi ne le lie, son vouloir a force de loi;  
il ne permet pas que l'on discute ses caprices.<sup>64</sup>

The king became the sole owner of Dahomean soil, for the ground as with power was in his hands. The whole organisation of the Empire was centered in the army. Most observers are in agreement in acknowledging the Dahomeans' outstanding efficiency in civil and military affairs.<sup>65</sup> Le Hérissé mentioned that,

Les rois dont l'autorité justement redoutée, ne s'employaient pas quoi qu'on pense, a une arbitraire brutale et irraisonnée, avaient su lui donner une administration fortement hiérarchisée.<sup>66</sup>

Dahomey society was divided into three distinct classes. Those belonging to the first class were the princes, who enjoyed preferred positions in the Dahomey hierarchy, but took no part in the actual administration.<sup>67</sup> In the lesser class, there was a ministerial council composed of several offices, which were: the Cabocères, the Yévogan and the viceroy.

This group as the second class provided the organisational framework of Dahomey. The kingdom was divided into various provinces each

<sup>64</sup>Abbé Bouché, Sept Ans en Afrique Occidentale; La côte des esclaves et le Dahomey (Paris, 1895), p. 124.

<sup>65</sup>Polanyi, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>66</sup>A. Le Hérissé, L'Ancien Royaume de Dahomey (Paris, 1911), p. 330.

<sup>67</sup>Gouverneur Reste, Rapport Sur le Commandement Indigène, Colonie du Dahomey (Porto-Novo, 1930).

of which was placed under a governor. The Cabocére, as these governors were known, were the chief magistrates and wielded considerable power. As delegates of the king, they were responsible for the raising of taxes and tariffs, subject to the king's wishes.<sup>68</sup> Any resistance was unnecessary, for it was considered that the fortunes of the subjects as well as their lives belonged to the King. The Cabocéres were sent wherever there was industry, and were permitted to collect premiums on all produce, and were responsible for customs stations on the boundary of conquered territory.<sup>69</sup>

The Yévogan set the pace of the centralized organisation and was considered as the "white man's viceroy" and head of the civic administration. He presided over regions of trade activity and commerce. In the sea-port of Whydah and Cotonou, he was responsible for the relations between the King and European traders and private commercial houses. He was to administer police and establish those customs and tariffs that were thought of as being necessary, and was to see that all important goods were controlled by Dahomey.<sup>70</sup>

The office of vicéroy controlled the sale of slaves who were captured by the King on his excursions and which were used in exchange for merchandise or currency. Towards 1845 he began to supervise the servicing of land for palm-oil cultivation and was allowed to keep part of the captured slaves for use on plantations.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 174 and Valdes, op. cit., p. 339.

By 1819 Dahomey had become the classic example of a military state. An economy based on the slave-trade could survive only as long as the need for African manpower continued, consequently large scale slave-trading was necessary, supported by a well-disciplined army.

The Migan as commander-in-chief was considered:

... premier chef de guerre, il exerçait son commandement sur tous les Dahoméens, mais ne faisait pas partie de la famille royale.<sup>71</sup>

Many writers extolled the merits of the Dahomean militia:

... there is not a more extraordinary army in the known world than that of the military nation of Dahomey. The nucleus of the national power, the throne, is occupied at the pleasure of the militant people.<sup>72</sup>

All valid men were called into the army. At royal call, all governors of villages were required to bring a contingent. As a result, the permanent army was augmented considerably. In addition, the recruited army was reinforced by the personal body guard of the king. This was in order to maintain a grip over the country and dissident members of the hierarchy. To every male official a royal wife was appointed. These women were said to have equalled and sometimes surpassed their male partners. The women became prominent as Amazons and as members of the council. Le Hérissé writes in "Histoire de l'Ancien Royaume de Dahomey" that the Amazons were:

... regie par une severe discipline et morale. Elles ont etonné par leur intrépidité les étrangers qui ont

<sup>71</sup>Reste, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>72</sup>Forbes, op. cit., p. 133.

assisté a leurs simulacres de combat. Elles foulaient de leurs pieds nus des tas d'épines.<sup>73</sup>

This well-trained corps was well disposed to spy on any dissident members of the council for, with the ensuing changes and the incorporation of new elements, there would be some members who were not in agreement with the conservative stance of an absolute monarchy.

Dahomey's domination of external trade became quite pronounced. The chief representative of the Dahomean government at Whydah was Francisco Da Souza, a half-caste Brazilian who came to Whydah in 1788 as commander of the Portuguese fort. Other métis of part African descent had arrived at Whydah in 1750.<sup>74</sup> Several writers speak of the existence of these traders with sufficient influence to be able to intervene in the affairs of the kingdom.

Of these, Francisco Da Souza was the most influential. Versions conflict as to his origin. According to Pierre Verger, Mr. Da Souza was fired from his post and began slave-trading.<sup>75</sup> In 1818 he established permanent residence at Anécho west of Whydah and immediately became involved, along with other Brazilian créole traders, in intrigues with the Dahomean hierarchy.<sup>76</sup> This was ostensibly to maintain a favoured position vis-à-vis commercial activity along the coast of Dahomey.

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<sup>73</sup>Le Hérissé, op. cit., p. 330.

<sup>74</sup>Valdes, op. cit., p. 327.

<sup>75</sup>Pierre Verger, Flux et Réflux de la Traité des Nègres entre le Golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos (Paris, 1968), pp. 460-61.

<sup>76</sup>Skertchly, op. cit., p. 65.



With the help of other traders Da Souza was able to help Guézo to the throne of Dahomey in 1819.<sup>77</sup> For this he was named governor, or viceroy, and Yévogan for the port of Whydah, and was responsible for the relinquishing of forts by other nations and for creating a monopoly of the slave trade. He laid down prices subject to his whims and was responsible for the development of the palm-oil trade and the incorporation of captured slaves into the plantation economy. Verger writes of Da Souza as being the initiator of all wars that were conducted in the territory.<sup>78</sup>

Much evidence supports the claim that Brazilians were responsible for the development of the Dahomean militia. Authors speak of the ability of the Dahomeans, of their well-armed and well-disciplined army, that was officered by intelligent men in the manner of Europeans.<sup>79</sup>

Thus we see the emergence of a complex and institutionalised political process as a response to the needs of Dahomey in every part of the country. These administrative and military innovations merged with economic transformations that were affecting all of the West African states in the early half of the nineteenth century. This highly organised entity was not without internal friction. Compared with the seventeenth century these transformations provoked political differences within Dahomey and forced coalitions and realignments by other neighbouring states.

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<sup>77</sup>W.J. Argyle, The Fon of Abomey (Oxford, 1966), p. 37.

<sup>78</sup>Verger, op. cit., pp. 460-61.

<sup>79</sup>Panikkar, op. cit., p. 229 and Valdes, op. cit., p. 339.

Internally Dahomey, locked in a constant state of military preparedness, suffered from divisions in the hierarchy. Factions within the council attempted to seek accommodations with new trade influences. Inevitably those trading factions on the coast, concerned about the perpetuation of profits, would attempt to influence policy and undermine any tactics by more accommodating factions that wished to change the existing trade practices.

vii. The History of Ketou up to 1818

Throughout its history Ketou was a dependency of Oyo. Oyo's power and prestige were able to settle any crisis which could not be settled by the common Yoruba leadership. Of particular consequence to Ketou was the effort made by Oyo to develop trade in Ketou, which in turn stimulated its growth. Evidence points to the expansion of the kingdom, extending into the regions southwards towards the Ahorri swamps and to the east as far as Idofa, Ilikimon and Idigny. These, as former farmlands, became the hereditary property of the royal families, lands which were divided amongst senior members of the Magbo family. Towards the latter half of the eighteenth century, Méko on the eastern extension of Ketou beyond Ilikimon and Idigny also became part of the kingdom. It was originally founded by a farmer.

Méko grew into a prosperous town and was incorporated into the council of elders. When the hereditary owner gained the status of Balé, he began contesting Ketou's sovereignty.

The Alaketou Andé reigned from 1760 to 1780. Being secure as a vassal to Oyo, and able to count on Oyo's protection and support, the Alaketou Andé began to dominate Ketou society. He was able to challenge the power of the council of elders and became increasingly despotic. This was evident on several occasions. First of all, he defied the traditional constitutional process by firing a shot and killing a dissenting member of the council.<sup>79</sup> On another occasion he contested the Balé of Meko's demand for the wearing of the "beaded crown" which would guarantee separate status for the emerging Oba of Meko. The Alaketou Andé answered the Balé with this remark:

The chief of Méko is too important to wear an old crown let him send me his father's crown and I will give him a new one in its place.<sup>80</sup>

This statement corroborates the degree to which Andé hoped to preserve the right of the ruling families, and to upset any effort by the council of elders to gain some measure of power in the kingdom. To behave in such a fashion could increasingly dignify his office and maintain the balance that had shifted in his direction.

Finally the move that was to strengthen his position vis-à-vis the council was his taunting of the Fon warriors and their defeat at his hands in 1780. It was the practice of the Fon to send an armed expedition to the fertile regions west of Ketou, this ostensibly to procure farm products.

<sup>79</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

Andé replied "that they should cultivate yams and maize instead of being busy with war."<sup>81</sup> This militant stand was in spite of the existing Yoruba minority. Events towards the nineteenth century were to change the arrogance of the Alaketou and the council of elders.

At the end of the eighteenth century several problems beset Ketou. Ketou, wedged between the Adja people on the west and the Egbà and Egbado groupings on the east, began to feel the effects of her geographical position. Ketou had no direct access to the sea to the south. It was harassed by other "middleman states" and coastal states such as Wémé and Porto-Novo. Access to the sea from the northerly state of Tschabé was through Ketou. This was an integral part of the heavily-used Hausa-Wangara trade routes that extended through Abomey from Parakou and Borgu in the north, linking up Ketou. Kano, the major trading centre of the Sudan, was linked to the coastal states of Whydah, Porto-Novo and Lagos by way of Savalou north of Ketou.<sup>82</sup>

The Dahomeans were quick to recognize Ketou's predicament by conducting raids on the periphery of the kingdom. Ketou responded by assuming a prominent military role. According to Johnson, there was no standing army amongst the Yoruba. This is not to suggest that Ketou was defenseless up to the period of 1790. In this year, a re-organisation took place with Alaketou Akébiou taking on the responsibility for organising the militia. An attempt was made to conciliate Abomey by sending a delegation to seek an accommodation with the Fon monarch. King Kpengla

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Nehemia Levtzion, Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa (Oxford, 1968), pp. 23-24.

of Dahomey refused the mission and raided Iwoyé in Ketou territory in 1789.

Ketou's trade position was enhanced when a shift took place from the port of Whydah to the more easterly ports of Porto-Novo, Badagry and Lagos. If Kpengla could destroy Ketou, as a link in the easterly trade route, it would be to his advantage.

Ketou's advantage as a trade and exchange centre was recognized by itinerant Muslim traders, who were bringing goods and slaves from the north to Ketou to exchange these for other items that were brought to Ketou by the coastal traders. Most trade was conducted in Ketou by those merchants using the north-south route. In addition to this former route there was an east-west route. Abomey was within twenty seven kilometers from Ketou and formed a link in a route that was established by the Dioula.<sup>83</sup> Ketou became accessible from Abomey during the dry season when traders were able to cross the Wémé river on foot.<sup>84</sup>

In the eighteenth century writers speak of the existence of a Muslim community in Abomey which had constructed a mosque. This group was said to have formed a trade alliance with the monarch at Abomey, much to the dismay of another group in the administrative hierarchy of Dahomey.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Paul Marty, Etudes sur l'Islam au Dahomey (Paris, 1926), p. 12.

<sup>84</sup>From actual crossing of the river by the author.

<sup>85</sup>Cmdr. Forbes, Dahomey and the Dahomans (London, 1885), Archibald Dalziel, A History of Dahomey, an Inland Kingdom (London, 1793), pp. 94-95.

It was the practice of Muslim traders to establish themselves outside the confines of strange communities.<sup>86</sup> In Ketou they were quartered in Massafé, that part of Ketou outside the town's fortifications, adjacent to the open market. Massafé gave Muslims a physical proximity to the non-Muslim peoples of Ketou. Thus, commercial and cultural intercourse became significant, for even though they resided in their own ward, there were actually few restrictions on their movement.

It is claimed that early Muslim traders submitted to the established order for, beginning in 1790, with the increasing militarism in Ketou, the Muslim quarter provided recruits for the Ketou militia.<sup>87</sup> This manoeuvre by the Muslims was accepted on the premise that they would contribute to the protection of their trade facilities and not attempt to disrupt any of the traditional forms of government.

The organization of the Ketou militia was strengthened by the creation of the office of "General" or "war Chief". Balogun was the name given to this office. It is believed that the term Balogun is Yoruba, but the office corresponds to "military chief of the Muslims". The term used in Arabic is Haidara, meaning commander of military expeditions.<sup>88</sup> The title of Balogun was bestowed on the strongest of the kingdom's professional soldiers. These men had built up a small fighting force dependent on themselves alone and had been quite independent of the

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<sup>86</sup>Levtzion, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>87</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>88</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 120.

military organization of the kingdom. Their careers often had begun with marauding and slave-raiding. Some of the slaves were sold for guns and powder and others were to serve as soldiers.<sup>89</sup> The superior office of Baba-Balogun was created, as commander-in-chief over representative Baloguns from each quarter in Ketou.

The Muslim quarter at Massafé provided two Baloguns out of a total of sixteen. This Muslim representation on the Ketou militia at this time is symbolic. Considering this as a relatively new Islamic intrusion, and as a strong representation on the Ketou hierarchy, it would appear that the Muslim trade had a strong economic base to protect, and had obviously wished to affect decisions by the Ketou hierarchy.

This again is a crucial development in Ketou history. The incorporation of Muslims represents the creation of a new oligarchy of interest, which would contest any alteration in trading practices, sought by the more traditional factions, that would seem to jeopardize the Muslim trade position. Each element was ready to support their contentions by representative militia.

Adjibolou was the Alaketou from 1795 to 1816. His reign was significant because it represented a period of calm. The calm was because of a dependence, up to 1795, on the slave-trade and the changing status of the ports of Porto-Novo and Whydah, whose European forts were neglected by an international economic depression.

Of particular consequence was the new attitude by England and France towards the slave-trade. At the close of the eighteenth century,

<sup>89</sup>P. Lloyd, The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1971), p. 25.

Britain was by far the principal exporter. By 1800, she was in the throes of a changing economy and had advanced from a slave-trading nation to an industrial state, and discovered that the displacement of African manpower was no longer compatible with her advanced industrial state. Highly competitive goods began flooding overseas markets. English textile manufacturers made greater demands for cotton and palm oil. Henceforth, the desire for slave labour decreased and the need for more stable West African communities increased. English industry needed palm oil for lubricants and for soap production. As long as the illicit trade continued, African production in palm oil and cotton would suffer. Therefore, British interest to curb slavery was obvious and she began encouraging the abolition of slavery and started to make this point of view felt. The first step was the abandonment of British forts at Whydah, thus depressing the slave-trade there.

Revolutionary political changes in France from 1789 forward altered its trade position on the slave coast. The French Republican parliament closed off Whydah to slave-ships belonging to her, and prevented them from carrying on their normal trade at Whydah. Not only were the French compelled to relinquish their trade in slaves, but France also declared war on other European countries who continued to indulge in it.<sup>90</sup> In 1793, "La Loi Pluviôse" was voted upon by the French Republican parliament, abolishing slavery temporarily as it turned out. As a consequence, French forts at Whydah, Godomey and Abomey Calavi were abandoned.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>91</sup>Ed. Foa, Le Dahomey; Histoire, Géographie, Moeurs, Coutumes, Commerce, Industrie (Paris, 1895), p. 264.



Ketou, in 1789, had suffered the effects of the slave-trade when two thousand persons from the village of Iwoyé were captured and sold at Whydah. From 1795 until 1816 Parrinder and Dunglas have described Ketou as being in a state of calm and of introspect.<sup>92</sup> Ketou's link with Whydah had forced her to become prey to the fluctuations of international trade.

To Ketou and to other states of the Guinea forest, this "commerce" and its growth became the greatest single dilemma and, no fundamental progress had been made towards its solution. Ketou could not solve the problem by itself, for its role had been an exchange centre up to the point of abolition of slavery.<sup>93</sup>

To Ketou, this meant that after 1816, it would have to make several accommodations. First of all was the important Muslim trading bloc that had taken a conservative stance vis-à-vis the slave-trade. Secondly, Ketou's own economic status had to be considered for, by every indication, it was traditionally an agricultural society and was a gateway to the sea for the very important cotton-producing regions northwards. Thirdly, was the growing belligerence of Dahomey. How the Ketou hierarchy was to deal with its aggressive military policy was the greatest challenge that had to be met.

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<sup>92</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>93</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 43.

## CHAPTER II

### NEW NEIGHBOURS IN THE GUINEA FOREST, 1818-1850

#### i. The Changing Economic Order

The nineteenth century proved to be a troublesome period for the states of Yorubaland. Civil war became the preoccupation of the majority of the states. Reasons vary as to the cause of this state of affairs. Three reasons became increasingly apparent as the century progressed. Firstly, there remained African entrepreneurs who were dependent upon the slave trade and formed trading blocs doing everything in their power to maintain the activity, while refusing to accommodate any suggestion to change.<sup>1</sup> Brazilian créole merchants became active partners in the slave-trade along with wealthy officials in the Guinea forest and those Europeans established at the seaport of Whydah.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, there were the commercial groups who were beginning to make the transition from slaves as a commodity to African natural products, such as palm oil and cotton. Trade in palm oil was practised to a great extent in the Guinea forest. Europeans familiar with the trade recognized that this industry could be conducted with a minimum

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<sup>1</sup>A. G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (London, 1973), p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 86.

of investment on their part. To those interested in the trade, it meant that they had to increase the availability of land and develop a reserve of manpower.<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, arable land became an important element. Emerging states recognized that to maintain a viable economic base, land was needed for cultivation. Considering the geography of the Guinea forest and the location of rich land, the regions on the southern fringe of the forest would be the obvious prizes. Consequently, the southern region bordering on the Atlantic coast enveloped both the contestants and the prize.

These rapid changes became demanding to all states and each had to respond to the crisis. The Yoruba of Ketou were in a more delicate position for they had to try to maintain a neutral stance.<sup>4</sup>

It may be appropriate at this time to mention that the regions north of Ketou, particularly at Tschabé, and the area south of Ketou of the Ahorri, were regions where cotton cultivation was practised for exportation.<sup>5</sup> The Ahorri region was the richest land for palm oil cultivation. This region would ostensibly be a prize to the Egbe, to

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<sup>3</sup>J. F. Ajayi and Robert Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1964), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 12 and from visits to region.

the Lagos protectorate, and more so to the French who began by 1841 to send commercial missions into the region.<sup>6</sup>

To the slave dealers, non-industrialized Europe and the Americas were still trading partners. France, Portugal and the independent states of America maintained trade contacts at Lagos and at Whydah. These contacts were maintained by Muslim and Brazilian métis expatriates. The major portion of the illicit activity switched from Whydah to Porto-Novo and southeastwards towards Badagry and Lagos. From 1807 to 1846, the yearly movement of slaves was about 77,000 of which 22,000 were transferred to Brazil which continued to demand the major portion of the slaves up until 1850.<sup>7</sup> These increased demands were due to changes in the "International Sugar Policy" and the sugar act of 1846, which encouraged the production of slave-grown sugar for British markets.

Thus economic considerations became the feature of the nineteenth century with the basic ingredients becoming manpower and arable land. The immediate goals of each group was first to win control over as many towns as possible, in order to create a tax base, the other to

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<sup>6</sup>By the year 1840 French commercial houses had begun using this region of Dahomey for palm oil cultivation. The company of Régis et Frères had already gained territorial rights, thanks to the King of Porto Novo. This area became the point of contention between English traders and French traders in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

<sup>7</sup>P. Manning, The Slave Trade in Southern Dahomey, MSSB symposium on the economic history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. August 20-22, 1975, Colby College, Waterville, Maine, p. 13. This is an unpublished paper.

provide arable land. In addition to these was the crucial factor of trying to maintain open lines of communication as life lines for the individual states, or to secure a link to those export bases on the coast.

ii. The Challenge of Growth, 1818 to 1850

Ketou's dilemma was threefold after 1818. First, she had to deal with the consequences of the dismemberment of Oyo, having to accept and respond to internal disruptions particular to her. In the second place, Ketou had to accommodate the Muslim faction that had obviously polarized the Ketou hierarchy. In the third place, the survival of the population was of utmost importance, for Ketou had to keep in mind the ever-present military power of Dahomey. These conditions created intense political competition and realignment in Ketou. In the past there had been the great armies of Oyo to keep Dahomey in check.

a) The threat to Ketou sovereignty

The break-up of the Oyo Empire had posed several problems;<sup>8</sup> it meant the dislocation of Ketou's authority, for small villages began by accepting the new order and took steps to adjust to the change. The villages of Idigny, Issélou and Illékimon formed a confederation and demanded secession from Ketou. These villages, as units of local hereditary governments, attempted initially to form monarchic struc-

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<sup>8</sup>Ajayi and Smith, op. cit., p. 65.

tures by bringing smaller units under the control of the larger. The growing prominence of the Balé as a member of the royal family and the council of elders provided the basis upon which the demand was made for the wearing of the "beaded crown". This request was refused by the Ketou hierarchy, but with the growing commercialization of these villages, the title of Oba was awarded to the Balés of both Idigny and Illékimon.<sup>9</sup> The granting of this status was in part due to an attempt by Oyo to reaffirm its power and influence after 1830.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this Ketou managed to maintain its sovereignty over these small villages.<sup>11</sup>

The dismemberment of Oyo also meant that Ketou had to reassess its economic and political ties in order to survive in the new order. Ketou's location on the western flank of Yorubaland gave her close proximity to the Egba people. These had formed small villages located in the Guinea forest, living in scattered settlements close to the Ogun river. They were mostly farmers and were concerned with the development of peaceful trade. They formed three societies of mutual interest. The first was the Egbe-Adjufere-Kounti society whose main concern was

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<sup>9</sup>This has been established from oral research taken in both villages. By using Robert Smith's "averaging of the averages," the first Oba may be assigned to the period of 1830.

<sup>10</sup>Ajayi and Smith, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>11</sup>I have assumed that because of the protective influence of Ketou, these villages saw the advantages of remaining vassals to her. For, the growth of the Ketou militia would warrant such an attitude, also several persons from these villages were incorporated into the Ketou militia.

the development of commerce. The second was the Egbe-Mayehum society which was organised for the purposes of cooperative farming. The last, the Egbe-Olor-Ogun society was to create a strong society for the mutual protection of its members. The Ajufere-Kounti society was supported by the more urban and wealthy group of the Ketou commercial class, and the Egbe-Mayehum society sought its membership amongst the farmers who maintained seasonal residence in Ketou.<sup>12</sup> This became the basis for internal conflict, which was aggravated by the events that were occurring in the Guinea forest.

Up to this period the strongest representation on the Ketou hierarchy was the commercial society. A conflict developed which became difficult for the Alaketou to mediate. As representative of the central power his role was greatly undermined by two factors. One weakening factor was the conservatism of the commercial groups, who were concerned with the rudimentary exchange economy and its development. A second element which weakened the Alaketou's power was the growth of the strong commercial and progressive blocs. The Alaketou had to become more restrained in spite of his family associations. This led to the creation of a new political order and its incorporation as an element of power. This created new divisions of power which made it difficult for the Alaketou to manipulate those groups that would safeguard his position, hoping at the same time to become less dependent on his own family group. He was unable to act arbitrarily and unilaterally in dictating

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<sup>12</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 97 ; Parrinder, op. cit., p. 47.

the actions of the council of elders.

In spite of this new arrangement, power, as dictated by tradition, was still diffused through the office of the Alaketou. Consequently, divisions, as groups representing the conservative and the progressive attitudes, were continuously trying to transfer the power of the Alaketou in their favour to gain the upper hand. The Alaketou became a victim of three elements. The first one was his own changing financial position. Secondly, his own clan or lineage group was no longer a supportive element because of the growth of new commercial blocs. Finally, he had to conciliate with neighbours such as Dahomey, despite his own opposition to such a manoeuvre.

Ketou was untouched, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by the wars in Yorubaland. It was, however, a witness to the widespread dislocation and resettlement of many townships and villages elsewhere. Ketou became a haven for numerous groups that were disrupted by the civil wars, as the manpower needs of both the aggressive slave dealers and the more accommodating group tended to increase. The state of civil war continued and Ketou became more directly affected in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

b) The challenge of the growing Muslim trading group

An increased Muslim population in Ketou was marked by their representation in the Ketou hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> In the development of the Muslim trading group some form of political organisation took place.<sup>14</sup> Most

<sup>13</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>14</sup>Levtzion, op. cit., pp. 23-24.



units require a spiritual leader who is referred to as the Imam. It is his duty to protect the trading community and to secure the possible extension of its influences by strengthening contacts in other areas of town. This prominence was attained by three steps. The first step was the installation of a Muslim soothsayer, an Islamic adept, skilled in the fabrication of various talismans, versed in Arabic and having the faculty of divine consultation.<sup>15</sup> The second step involved the formation of a congregation; and the final step was the selection of the Imam.<sup>16</sup>

Muslim membership in local trading societies was a part of the process of development of the states of the Guinea forest. In Ketou their membership in the Adjufere-Kounti society created a powerful bloc which profited from the slave-trade and opposed any establishment of legitimate commerce. The Muslim group was able to influence Ketou's trade policy and showed its hostility towards any direct involvement with European commerce. The continued generation of the slave-trade and the resulting profits satisfied the prosperity of Ketou.

Muslims were also represented in the "Elephant party" in Abomey.<sup>17</sup> This political party was composed of several groups which included Brazilian créole traders and Dahomey officials, who were concerned with continuing the slave-trade. Ketou's survival was determined by its diplomacy and its ability to manoeuvre and accept the Muslim trading

<sup>15</sup> Parrinder, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Levzion, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>17</sup> John C. Yoder, "Fly and Elephant Parties, Political polarization in Dahomey, 1840-1870," *J.A.H.*, XV, 3(1974), pp. 417-432.

group. This awareness was due to Muslim successes in other established communities. This success was, in part, due to their management of business transactions providing a more sophisticated degree of organisation. Because of the growth of the Dahomey militia it became necessary for Ketou to be more organised militarily, accepting Muslim members, who, in turn, were protecting their own trade interests. As long as the slave-trade existed it was necessary for Ketou to accommodate Muslim trading groups and Dahomey traders.

c) Ketou reaction to its powerful neighbour Dahomey

Conditions suggest that Ketou became the accomplice of Dahomey, for Ketou was the centre where the Fon warriors sought provisions.<sup>18</sup> According to Forbes:

... the people wished and the king agreed to war, but the people declared that, if war was made on Ketou, the King would be killed; the King sent large presents to the chiefs and Ketou voluntarily submitted.<sup>19</sup>

Ketou was an industrious and thriving agricultural centre. Its link with Lagos prompted the Dahomey king to seek a trade agreement with Ketou. It was an established fact that King Guézo was an ally of King Kosoko of Lagos who, with Guézo, was deeply involved with slave-trading. Thus the agreement called for the unrestricted flow of slaves through Ketou and, at the same time, a steady flow of agricultural products from Ketou to Lagos.

Dahomey's vigorous trade-policy forced Ketou to accommodate its powerful neighbour. The Alaketou had, on several occasions, sent

<sup>18</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>19</sup>Forbes, op. cit., p. 20.

missions to Abomey. It appears that there was an agreement signed between the Alaketou Adébia and Guézo, the Fon monarch, encouraged by Muslim pressure and a pro-Dahomey faction in Ketou. The Muslim bloc had gained prominence in Abomey and had secured the favour of King Guézo after 1818.<sup>20</sup>

What was Ketou to do with a powerful neighbour as Dahomey on her western frontier? Ketou's prominence had risen due to the increasing number of Yoruba there at the opening of the nineteenth century. Abbé Mouléro, in his Histoire de Kétou describes Ketou, at the turn of the nineteenth century, as experiencing a period of increased Yoruba presence and of Fon disenchantment.<sup>21</sup> The Fon, as original inhabitants, began moving westwards to the region of Adja-Wéré and Zagnanado. Ketou grew conscious of this new power and began forcing the migration of the subservient Fon.<sup>22</sup> This created a division in the hierarchy. Members of the original Fon family were given special status on the council of elders and, consequently, challenged this move.

In addition to making concessions to appease the divisive elements of the hierarchy, the Alaketou and the council were determined to survive. Trade had shifted after 1818 from Whydah to Lagos. Instead of routes being directed towards Whydah, most transactions were made in Ketou by the Fon and then trade was conducted on the route from Ketou, then

<sup>20</sup>John C. Yoder, op. cit., pp. 417-432, states that Muslims were in complicity with Dahomey traders at Whydah coinciding with the emergence of the Da Souza family and the continuance of the slave-trade.

<sup>21</sup>Abbé Mouléro, La Ville de Kétou, La Reconnaissance Africaine, Organe de l'Enseignement Religieux et d'Etudes historiques; l'Histoire de Ketou, Janvier 1, 1926, Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Dahomey, 1926.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

on to Porto-Novo and eventually to Lagos. Dahomey needed this link with Lagos and, while refusing to stop slave raiding, did not want to have Ketou at her back when she conducted her raids into hostile Yoruba territory. According to Edouard Dunglas, the Essaba, as prime minister of the council of elders, was in conciliation with Dahomey.<sup>23</sup>

Other facts speak of the Alaketou Adébia being unsuccessful in deterring Guézo from his slave-raiding activities. Adébia was obviously opposed to Guézo's trade policies and had, on several occasions, advised him of his objections. This conciliatory posture was reinforced by a form of "Blood Pact" between the Alaketou Adébia and King Guézo of Dahomey. "Le Pacte du Sang" provided Ketou with a period of freedom to trade, allowing for economic growth.<sup>24</sup> This pact imposed between the signees great sacrifices of kin, clan and ethnic solidarity for the benefit of the partners. Each vowed unlimited confidence and solidarity.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, a form of interdependence existed between Ketou and Dahomey allowing for its protective influences. According to Commander Forbes: "Ketou acceded to Dahomey not by conquest but by conciliation."<sup>26</sup>

The "Blood Pact" was of particular consequence, during this period, to trade. The elephant party's membership was outstanding by the

<sup>23</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Hazoumé, Le Pacte du Sang au Dahomey, Institut d'ethnologie, I.F.A.N., 1956.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Forbes, op. cit., p. 20.

presence of Francisco Da Souza and Domingo Martines, who were the most prominent slave-traders at the port of Whydah.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the position that Ketou took vis-à-vis Dahomey was obviously designed first as a conservative stance economically, in the second place it was an obvious consequence of a strong faction in Ketou that was concerned about its trade position. Third and of primary importance was a move to offset any tendency by Dahomey to use Ketou as a reservoir of available manpower.

Ketou had accommodated both contending groups on the hierarchy, being able to continue a profitable trade relation with Lagos and at the same time not upsetting the aggressive nature of Dahomey. As long as Dahomey did not face any serious threats to her economic position Ketou would not be in jeopardy. Any element hostile to Dahomey's trade position would have to be dealt with. Thus conciliation with Dahomey provided Ketou with a degree of prosperity between 1818 and 1850. Ketou had met the challenge created by the destruction of Oyo. During this same period other states reckoned with the changes in the Guinea forest.

### iii. The Dilemma Facing the States of the Guinea Forest: The Rise of Ibadan and Abeokuta

The dilemma facing most of the Yoruba states was the void that had been created by the loss of Oyo's leadership. Ile-Ife still maintained its traditional hold over the states, but it became increasingly apparent that the same strength that was Oyo's up to the nineteenth century was

<sup>27</sup> Hazoumé, op. cit.

the goal that several states among the Yoruba tried to duplicate. Two major problems emerged. First, there was a question of providing an effective military check. Secondly, there was the necessity of having a state which could step into Oyo's shoes and, in turn, guarantee some degree of stability. The military factor became an important element in the distribution of power and influence. In the older states, military leadership began to take precedence over traditional leadership.<sup>28</sup> The changes that ensued brought about significant changes in Yoruba social and economic life.

Military units under renegade Baloguns began to regroup to form new settlements.<sup>29</sup> They, as war leaders of the Alafin of Oyo, withdrew southwards and settled in Ibadan.<sup>30</sup> This new settlement became the base from which they inaugurated an era of territorial expansion and economic growth. Alliances were formed with other military states and with slave-trading states. The military state of Ibadan, situated approximately one hundred and fifty miles from the coast, became the case which most exemplified the state of affairs after the decline of Oyo.

The presence of the military units of Ibadan began dictating the pace and nature of Yoruba settlements. It became an antagonistic force, upsetting peaceful settlements in some places and creating a new kind of

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<sup>28</sup>Bolanle Awé, "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example," J.A.H., XIV, 1 (1973), pp. 65-77.

<sup>29</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 453.

<sup>30</sup>Ajayi and Smith, op. cit., p. 126.

social stratification. In Ibadan, farming, as a general pursuit, was left to the traditional classes and these, in turn, were left out of any role in determining any significant shift in policy. For the first half of the nineteenth century, the military became the most persuasive element politically, opposing any accommodation to change trade policy. Consequently, analogous to a slowly altering trade policy amongst other states, was the rising status of Ibadan and its continuous policy of warfare.

Thus Ibadan attempted to replace Oyo as the principal military and trading power. Commercially, it was an important link in the trans-Saharan routes to the coast. To the east of Ibadan, lay a vast arable region suitable for expansive cultivation. This became the source of food supply and eventually a prize to those international agencies attempting to accommodate their new trade demands.<sup>31</sup>

Politically, Ibadan made diplomatic overtures to Lagos and to Dahomey and succeeded in forming alliances with each of these powers.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Ibadan had, by a succession of manoeuvres, proclaimed the suzerainty of the Alafin of Oyo and, as a result, gained the favour of several other smaller states.<sup>33</sup> But its sovereignty was short-lived, because of the geography of Yorubaland, for with communication lines becoming increasingly important towards the coast, Ibadan's hold as a military power was tenuous. The monopoly of trade in arms and am-

<sup>31</sup>T.F. Buxton, African Slave Coast and Its Remedy (London, 1968), pp. 328-341.

<sup>32</sup>S. Tucker, Sunrise in the Tropics (London, 1854), p. 99.

<sup>33</sup>Ajayi and Smith, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

munition shifted southwards and came under the control of the southern states of Ijebu-Ode, Badagry and Lagos.

By 1855, land was the obvious prize in Yoruba conflicts. Ibadan had acquired an extensive tract of land, with which to provide sustenance for a growing population.<sup>34</sup> Increased needs in the latter half of the nineteenth century demanded the further acquisition of land southwards, directing Ibadan and its renegade Baloguns into the regions of Ketou and onto its periphery.

People in the Egba provinces were the major victims of the state of affairs in Yorubaland. These were basically a peaceful and agricultural people, prominent for their skill in maize and cotton cultivation. Subservient to Oyo up to the nineteenth century, they began feeling the full impact of the devastation of Oyo around 1825. Refugees from various townships created new settlements under the natural protective influence of the forest and its rocky pallisades.<sup>35</sup> The individual groups were the Egba-Oké-Ona and the Egba-Oluwa.<sup>36</sup> The political organization of the individual townships was maintained, with each group having its own council of elders, its own society of war chiefs and trade chiefs.<sup>37</sup>

In 1830, the town of Abeokuta was created out of these individual settlements.<sup>38</sup> The most important priority of the administra-

<sup>34</sup>Awé, op. cit., pp. 65-67.

<sup>35</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Agneta Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa? The Case of Abeokuta," J. A. H., XV, 1 (1974), pp. 65-82.

<sup>38</sup>Ajisafe, op. cit., pp. 61-62.



tion became the defence and expansion of the area under its control. This expansion took place southwards to include trade routes to the coast towards Badagry, eventually using the Ogun River towards the port of Lagos. This water-route incorporated Abeokuta into the existing trade patterns whereby new influences could easily penetrate the city.

Western influences in the form of literacy, new technological skills and Christianity reached Abeokuta by 1842.<sup>39</sup> The flow of repatriated slaves from Sierra Leone became the vanguard of British missionary influence. These, supported by a strong British parliamentary lobby, demanded the abolition of slavery and the encouragement of cotton cultivation; British traders recognized the importance of the Saro,<sup>40</sup> when British entrepreneurs mentioned that:

The abolition of the slave trade could be effected by means of treaties with native powers, by engaging them to lend their assistance, by their rooting the slave trader from his usual field of occupation . . . by the influence of legitimate commerce.<sup>41</sup>

This new force, as a group hoping to alter trade-policy, would seek alliances with others who were hoping to make the transition towards legitimate commerce. This element would produce a deep polarization

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, A Preface to Modern Nigeria (Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1965), p. 86. Saro is the name given to Yoruba slaves returning to Yorubaland from the free colony of Sierra Leone.

<sup>41</sup>Buxton, op. cit., p. 401.

amongst the states, on the one hand a group of confronting traders and on the other one of accommodation.

Again the question of arable land arose, with the regions in the Guinea forest southwards and eastwards becoming targets for the purposes of both cotton and palm cultivation.

Abeokuta became the base from which Christians were to penetrate the region of Ketou.<sup>42</sup> For it would seem that, with the increasing European demands for cotton, the regions of Ketou at Aba and Ghanigon, as centres of the Ahorri region, would be sought after by the cotton lobbyists. To the north at Tschabé, more extensive cotton cultivation was practised. Tschabé, as vassal to Ketou, shipped its cotton through to the sea, by way of Ketou.<sup>43</sup> In 1858, it was suggested by Gollmer, a German missionary, that:

Ketou, with more speed, should become a part of our missionary network to the sea.<sup>44</sup>

It is well to understand that the changes in direction of trade demands, in the southern portion of Yorubaland towards the coast, were induced by Abeokuta and Ibadan and were to involve Ketou. By 1850, two facts became important to the states of Yorubaland. Palm oil and cotton provided a new set of interests along with liberated slaves from Sierra Leone. These two facts raised a new question to Ketou and to other states bordering it. The availability of manpower, with the anticipated

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<sup>42</sup>Christian Missionary Intelligencer, no. 11, vol. IV, Nov. 1853.

<sup>43</sup>Tucker, op. cit., p. 272.

<sup>44</sup>Gollmer, cited in Tucker, op. cit.

depression of the price of slaves, would mean the incorporation of these into the farm economy. Advocates of legitimate trade became more vocal. Ketou had to face the consequences of this concerted effort by more progressive elements of the Guinea forest.

## CHAPTER III

### PRELUDE TO CONQUEST, 1850-1886

#### i. Ketou's Response to Legitimate Commerce

Most historians write of the mid-nineteenth century as one of transition and experimentation, and also speak of this period as the era of legitimate trade. This chapter will try to show that when changes towards legitimate commerce became more pronounced and when luxury goods began moving at a very slow rate, farm products became the most competitive commodity. When some traders refused to make the transition to legitimate trade, small farmers became committed to an overseas market, giving them a greater stake in the new political order.

An assessment will be made as to how Ketou responded internally to this commercial change, and finally when Dahomey itself was going through the strains of transition, what were the effects on Ketou?

Up to the year 1850 Ketou was tied diplomatically to Dahomey by "le Pact du Sang".<sup>1</sup> In 1851, the Alaketou Adébia, recognising the changing fortunes of the slave-trade caused by the concerted efforts of both Abeokuta and the British to destroy the trade, sent for the missionaries Crowther and Bowen.<sup>2</sup> This was a step towards an accommodation of British trade, accepting a role in the British missionary

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<sup>1</sup>Hazoumé, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Church Missionary Intelligencer, no. 11, Vol. IV, Nov. 1853.

enterprise. In 1853 a mission was established in Ketou. In the same year, Ketou had completed a successful cotton season and cotton abounded there.<sup>3</sup>

The Alaketou's action was representative of a marked change in attitude of the Ketou hierarchy. This response was not without conflict. The trading group representing the Egbe-Mayehum society became the leading protagonist of this new move, and was headed by Asai, who was prime minister on the council of elders. This change was also indicative of the transfer of power favourable to the Alaketou.<sup>4</sup> Asai was obviously siding with the Egba at Abeokuta and wanted to reap the benefits from a cotton outlet, which by 1853 was flowing steadily.<sup>5</sup> Cotton exportation had grown to a degree which prompted the missionary Venn to write:

Cotton is flowing to England in a stream widening every day, and the British Abeokuta enterprise is growing rapidly in every branch.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the party of accommodation was challenging the aggressive slave-trading group, based in Dahomey, who had their associates in Ketou. Ketou's first move was to force all Dahomean traders out of the town and vicinity.<sup>7</sup> This move supported the growing sense of legitimacy and, as

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>When the decision to accommodate British trade became more open, it would be an obvious conclusion that Adébiá, who had made trade agreements with Abeokuta, would feel that more than ethnic solidarity was necessary for economic survival. There is a tradition in Ketou which states that a limb from a tree was taken by the Alaké of Abeokuta. This was essentially to legitimize the installation of the new King after 1850.

<sup>5</sup>Church Missionary Intelligencer, no. 11, vol. IV, Nov. 1853.

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Biobaku, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>7</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 86.

a result, disturbed King Guézo at Abomey and the Muslim trading group in Ketou. The Muslim bloc in Ketou reacted by burning part of the town to the ground.<sup>8</sup> It was obvious that they could not alter the decision taken by the Alaketou and the more accommodating group on the council of elders.

Le Hérissé, in his Histoire de l'ancien Royaume du Dahomey writes of the rising confidence of the people of Ketou, and of their sending a challenge to Abomey.<sup>9</sup> Evidence to support this was found in the villages of Idigny, Illara and Illékimon. While increasing their population with refugees from Ife, Oyo and Owu, these villages also contained repatriated elements from Sierra Leone.<sup>10</sup> Also, Ketou technicians, skilled in the duplication of arms and its attachment to the British gunpowder supply at Abeokuta, would ostensibly reinforce this state of confidence.

The Alaketou Adébia died in 1853.<sup>11</sup> This brought a temporary halt to the efforts of Ketou to become more closely associated with the improving British enterprise at Abeokuta and its missionary faction.

Opposition to an accommodation became quite aggressive. The new Alaketou, Adegbédé, who was elected in 1853, originally opposed conciliation with Dahomey. He, like his predecessor, had to mediate

<sup>8</sup>Christian Missionary Intelligencer, no. 11, vol. IV, Nov. 1853.

<sup>9</sup>Le Hérissé, op. cit., p. 333.

<sup>10</sup>I am making this statement here based on evidence revealed during my stay in Idigny and Illékimon. Members of the Balé's family of Idigny were repatriated from Sierra Leone. Also the grandmother of the Oba was from Sierra Leone. Illékimon is situated close to Méko. By virtue of this proximity I have assumed that with the earlier installation of a Mission at Méko, Illékimon would undoubtedly be in some way influenced by Méko.

<sup>11</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 36; Dunlas, op. cit., p. 95.

with Dahomey, aggravating the divisions amongst other townships of the kingdom. Those that were left to make their own decision inevitably became prey to the Dahomey monarch Guézo and his slave-raiding activities. Ekpo, as vassal to Ketou, was in opposition to Ketou's decision and was destroyed in 1858.<sup>12</sup> This precipitated conflict in Ketou and was expressed by the traditional bloc in Ketou. They believed that the Alaketou Adegbédé was acting in opposition to the council of elders and was responsible for the destruction of Ekpo. It was discovered that a certain Arèpa was responsible for this disaster. He, as a member of the council, had signed "le Pacte du Sang" with Guézo and had secretly carried the decision of the council to Abomey and to his blood brother Guézo. This was discovered after the council had demanded the death of the Aleketou Adegbédé.<sup>13</sup>

A new Alaketou was chosen in 1858.<sup>14</sup> He, Adiro, was a farmer and a member of the Magbo family, who had been given hereditary right to Idigny, east of Ketou. He favoured the Egbe-Mayehum society and he was elected at a time when Christian influence had made an impact on the town. In this same year, another missionary was invited to Ketou.<sup>15</sup> Gollmer, a German missionary, was well received by both the Alaketou and the council of elders.<sup>16</sup> This encounter was recognised

<sup>12</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>15</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>Stated in Parrinder, op. cit., p. 45, from Charles Andrew Gollmer, His Life and Missionary Labours in West Africa, by his eldest son, 1889, pp. 145-150.

as a very important step towards the maintenance of Ketou in the British missionary enterprise. This move towards legitimacy was not without obstacles. The greatest obstacle to the legitimate faction in Ketou would be Dahomey.

Whatever agreements that had been made by King Guézo were annulled by his son Gléglé, when he succeeded to the throne in 1859. He had not made any accommodation with Ketou but it became important to him to deal with the Alaketou, when Gléglé began making raids into Ketou territory. It is claimed that again this was due to the pro-Dahomey element in Ketou, who recognized that a continuance of the slave-trade was advantageous to them.<sup>17</sup> This group made up the Egbe-Adjufere-Kounti society. They were the group who had originally refused to make any accommodation with British missionary enterprise and were in open confrontation with the Egbe-Mayehum society.<sup>18</sup>

This was partly due to the negative response towards legitimate trade. Up to this period Ketou was neutral and has been shown as a broad region of cotton and palm-kernel cultivation. Slave-traders were unwilling to turn to this new trade, because the slow rate of return could not provide for the maintenance of a militia, nor continued political power. Therefore in Ketou, if the agricultural co-operative was to make any gains, it would deny the pro-Dahomey group a decided political and trade advantage. Thus, when in 1867 the Egbe-Mayehum society gained prominence, there was open conflict, resulting in a state of civil war.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



This conflict may also be seen as a state of tension between the Alaketou and the council of elders. The increased wealth brought new power to the council, obviously creating an imbalance. The Alaketou could no longer offer favours to members of the council. He now had to wait for these from the members of his family. Thus he was not able to conciliate any disagreement on behalf of any group on the Ketou hierarchy. He, coming from Idigny, was not ready to show any disfavour amongst the pro-Christian element; thus, these differences as to the direction trade was taking were left to the individual blocs to settle. Hence, the civil war.

Prospects for the future were based on three elements. First, was the continued acceptance of the new trade policy. Second, was the increased trafficking in slaves by Dahomey. And finally, the degree to which a traditional authority could continue to accommodate such strong influences within a hierarchy that had obviously been polarized.

## ii. Dahomey's Impact on Ketou

It has been shown that Dahomey's militia was of utmost importance in its rise to power and, we have also spoken of its administration. An attempt will be made to point out the far-reaching effects of the declining position of Dahomey's economy, its administrative changes and the relationship of these to the internal development of Ketou.

The Dahomey trade representative at Whydah was called the Yévogan. The Da Souza family, headed by Francisco Da Souza, dominated this administrative post from 1818 to 1850. Francisco Da Souza had been instrumental in placing the Dahomey monarch, Guézo, on the throne in

1818, and together had signed "le Pacte du Sang." This gave Francisco certain political and economic advantages.<sup>20</sup> He controlled all commercial transactions at Whydah and was made responsible for the development of palm plantations in Dahomey.<sup>21</sup> The family fell victim to the new economic order along with Dahomey. In spite of an extensive palm oil industry, the family was not able to develop an overseas market, and this commerce was considered by Dahomey as a slow way of making money and brought a small return.<sup>22</sup> Traffic in slaves was restrained by British naval squadrons. Between 1850 and 1860 the overseas slave-trade was reduced to a trickle. Responding to the new trade by trying to perpetuate the old was no longer possible.<sup>23</sup>

Dahomey reacted by replacing the Da Souza family by a more accommodating trade representative. It may be seen that these créole traders attempted to limit Dahomean exports to slaves, the one product that they alone could purchase. Dahomey then attempted to develop an alternative commodity for foreign markets, and to restore commercial relations with England.<sup>24</sup>

By 1870 the créoles had suffered great economic reverses. In 1883 the third son, Julian Da Sousa, recognised that some control over

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<sup>20</sup>Hazoumé, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Verger, op. cit., pp. 460-467.

<sup>22</sup>Hopkins, op. cit., p. 143.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Yoder, op. cit., pp. 417-432.

the political future of Dahomey had to be made in order to improve the family's economic position. He solicited the Portuguese consulate and negotiated a treaty of Protectorate in the same year.<sup>25</sup> This, he felt, would guarantee him an economic safety-valve, for the Portuguese wished to recruit labour for their plantations on the island of San Thomé.<sup>26</sup> King Gléglé, who came to the Dahomey throne in 1859, reacted violently to this encroachment on his sovereignty, denying the validity of the treaty with the Portuguese consulate. Gléglé himself attempted to revitalize the slave-trade by signing trade agreements with the Portuguese, Germans and Belgians.<sup>27</sup> The last two were seeking workmen for road and railway building in their respective colonies. Obviously Ketou was bound to be affected by this deep-polarization caused by the shift towards legitimate trade on the one hand, and the determination of the slave-traders in spite of increasing difficulties on the other.

Relations between Ketou and Dahomey had begun changing after 1867. The civil war in Ketou was an obvious manifestation of the new economic direction that Ketou had taken. The success of the agricultural coöperative in the conflict made it clear. By 1872 antagonism towards Dahomey was not sufficient to warrant a breaking off of diplomatic relations. But it became evident that by virtue of Dahomey's continuing isolation and Ketou's legitimacy, that there would be conflict.

<sup>25</sup> Archives Nationales du Ministère de l'Education Nationale (A.N.M.E.N.), Porto-Novo, Dahomey, D.L.I., Série B, 1883-1885, lettre no 70, juillet 1883.

<sup>26</sup> According to Edouard Foa, Julian had negotiated with the Portuguese consulate. See Foa, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> A.N.M.E.N., D.L.I., Série B, I.E.-Z., op. cit.

In 1876 Dahomey recognised the frailty of Ketou's position, for in early 1876 the town and farmlands were raided by both the Egba and Ibadan raiders, suggesting that a deep polarization existed in Ketou, that also it was still wavering as to its intentions politically. Dahomey attacked the villages of Idigny, Illara, and Illékimon in the kingdom of Ketou.<sup>28</sup> These were farming villages which had dissented from positions that the Ketou hierarchy had taken.

In 1882 Dahomey suffered from a crop failure.<sup>29</sup> Dahomey traders sought farm produce in Ketou, but were repulsed. Ketou had obviously come off the diplomatic tight-rope. Dahomey raided Ketou in 1882 and captured slaves, who were sold at Whydah to the Portuguese.<sup>30</sup> The transactions initiated by Julian Da Souza had begun to affect the internal development of Ketou. This had other repercussions on Ketou.

This setback was important, because of three facts. The first was that the Essaba, as prime minister, emerged as the strongest political leader.<sup>31</sup> The second was that the supreme military commander, the Baba Balogun, was appointed to the office of prime minister.<sup>32</sup> The last was that the strongest political bloc that evolved was the Muslim

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<sup>28</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>From a letter written on behalf of a returned slave from Matadi, and others from San Thomé, indicating numbers of slaves as labourers who were sold at Whydah to the Belgians and Portuguese.

<sup>31</sup>Dunglas, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

faction. The development of the Ketou militia was a response to the state of affairs in West Africa. The prominence of the office of Baba-Balogun was analogous to the delicate power balance on the Ketou hierarchy. The appeasement of this office became necessary after the raids by Ibadan, Abeokuta and Dahomey. Force had become the obvious base for the maintenance of authority, creating an arrogance among the Ketou militia.

This confidence was also due to Muslim representation in the militia and their strong economic base. During the raids in 1882,<sup>33</sup> a Muslim war chief was elected because of their commanding representations. While retaliating against the Ibadan raiders the Alaketou Ojékou was killed.<sup>34</sup> The Imam Séidou was left in charge of the Ketou hierarchy and the defence of the town. He became prime minister and was able to use his influence to suspend the election of a new Alaketou, the motive being to gain political power in order to effect a change in the economic base. Thus a strong Muslim power emerged in Ketou. To Dahomey this was an antagonistic force. In Dahomey, according to Paul Marty:

Les rois dahoméens se défiaient tellement des musulmanes qu'ils leur avaient interdit l'accès du royaume même pour commercer.<sup>35</sup>

Compounded with this antagonism was Dahomey's need for slaves for export. Four years after its last attack on Ketou, Dahomey laid siege to Ketou in 1886 and destroyed it in the same year.

All factors necessary for development and destruction were present in the Guinea forest. First there was labour, available land, and an

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>From information obtained in Ketou in June 1972, and Parrinder, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>35</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 120.

increased need by Europe for African raw materials. The factor that impaired development was the inability of those groups to adapt to the new economic order.

Internally Ketou reacted to the new trade trends by her diplomatic and trade relations with British commercial establishments at Lagos.<sup>36</sup> From 1854 Ketou had established diplomatic relations with Abeokuta. This alliance was prompted by the growth of the cotton trade and the successful use of the cotton gin. The signing of the Lagos protectorate in 1861 was realized in order to reorganize the disrupted trade routes caused by the Yoruba civil wars and the failure of the Abeokuta federation. Ketou, as a result, had to seek a more direct trade relation with Lagos and British trade, at the same time maintaining a neutral posture. The decision, taken internally, to allow continued and peaceful development ultimately challenged her powerful neighbour Dahomey.

When that decision was made in 1871 the whole process of economic survival became difficult. There was an obvious interaction between Dahomey's and Ketou's trade bases. For Dahomey, trade alliances that had made the slave-trade possible were almost completely dissolved. Ketou's new commercialism emerged outside the constraints of traditional rulers and traders creating a deep polarization, obviously Ketou itself slipped beyond the traditional restraints; Dahomey did not. Thus Ketou, in spite of measures that would guarantee survival, fell victim to Dahomey, which had recognised the need to change but could not accept the consequences of the new economic order.

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<sup>36</sup> Biobaku, op. cit., Chapter VIII.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONQUEST OF DAHOMEY

#### i. French Interests Since 1850

Several elements converged that absorbed Dahomey and, indirectly, Ketou into the French West African enterprise. Conquest suggested extenuating circumstances. To abolitionists it meant the "ridding" of West Africa of its last slave-trading nation, by military intervention and ending with the permanent establishment of legitimate trade. What were those real motives that precipitated armed intervention, the demise of Dahomey, and the establishment of a French presence? The objective of this chapter is to show the growth of French enterprise and to expose the relationship of this commerce to French conquest. In contrast with other areas of French expansionism where "trade followed the flag," in Dahomey the "flag followed trade."

The French, since the eighteenth century, had recognised the importance of the sea-port of Whydah and the inland port of Porto-Novo. They established themselves more securely at these ports after 1850 because of interrupted economic links with the Americas and the changing of important trade agreements. The basis for choosing these two ports was threefold. First, Victor Régis and Company had, since 1841, encouraged the development of the palm-oil industry on the periphery of both ports and had ingratiated themselves with the monarchs at Porto-Novo and at Abomey. By 1843 Victor Régis had secured a treaty of protectorate in the region about Porto-Novo. At the same time rights were given to

the French to the regions of Abomey Calavi, Godomey and Cotonou. The second reason was because of the pre-existence of the slave-trade. This guaranteed a reserve of manpower for transportation abroad and for local plantations.<sup>1</sup> France had already negotiated with the monarch Guézo prior to 1850 for the recruitment of labour for plantations in Martinique, Guadeloupe and La Réunion.<sup>2</sup> The third reason was because of Dahomey's hierarchy and sophisticated organisation. This provided a relationship with which the French could deal more advantageously. Credit was used and therefore trade was guaranteed. By 1855 this relationship had grown considerably and most French traders began to consider those elements that would guard their trade against other foreign intrusions. The English were the strongest power to contest this relationship.

English interests along the coast were oriented to interior trade and in broader terms to controlling the trade of the whole West African coastline. After 1851 the fertile regions above the Lagos-Badagry coastline were available for cotton growing, palm cultivation, and the much-needed hard woods of the Guinea forest. The British acquired "gunboat rights" to Lagos in 1851, this port having previously been a "free port."<sup>3</sup>

This improved British position, and the geographical barriers of the inland port of Porto-Novo jeopardised the French position. For the

<sup>1</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo. Colonie du Dahomey. Rapport sur le Commandement Indigène. D.N., le 10-8-1930. Lieutenant-Gouverneur Reste.

<sup>2</sup>Christian Schefer, ed., Instructions générales données de 1793 à 1870 aux gouvernements et ordonnateurs des Etablissements Français en Afrique Occidentale (Paris, 1921), p. 488.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Smith, "The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861; An Outline," J.A.H., XV, 3 (1974), pp. 393-416.



English, now firmly established at Lagos, began embarking on a policy of interference. In addition, the low tides of the Porto-Novo lagoon created seasonal difficulties.

Victor Régis and Co. demanded territorial intervention. The company secured by treaty the beach at Cotonou in 1851.<sup>4</sup> In 1858, it secured a permanent treaty with the King of Porto-Novo; this treaty was acknowledged by the French in 1863. To further enhance their position on the littoral, France appointed an honorary consular officer, who doubled as agent for the House of Victor Régis. The French residents at Porto-Novo wished to guard their position more firmly against British enterprise, and they complained bitterly that the tariffs imposed at Lagos were prohibitive to French use of that port.<sup>5</sup>

In order to maintain a more profitable position a free port was necessary to the French. This impending manoeuvre required a concerted effort by metropolitan interests, and local French establishments, in order to duplicate, or diminish the more aggressive British enterprise at Lagos.<sup>6</sup>

## ii. Germanophobia and German Ingenuity

An active German presence on the West African coast became the catalyst for more determined French initiatives. In 1882 Chancellor

<sup>4</sup>See copy of treaty, Appendix II.

<sup>5</sup>C.W. Newbury, "The Tariff Factor in Anglo-French West African Partition," France and Britain in Africa, eds. Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (Yale University, 1971), pp. 221-258.

<sup>6</sup>Alexandre d'Albéca, Les Etablissements Français de Golfe de Benin (Paris, 1889), p. 95.

Bismarck issued a decree which stated that German commercial agents should seek protectorates wherever extensive German commerce had been established.<sup>7</sup> At this point French phobia reached its peak, stimulated by rumours of German activity that had extended into the Dahomey hinterland, and, of the eventual declaration of a German protectorate, at Abomey.<sup>8</sup>

The French discovered that German ingenuity and enterprise were difficult to overcome.<sup>9</sup> Their agents were prominent in the "Popos," at Whydah. In order to stave off German aggressiveness, the French "negotiated" a treaty of protectorate with the titular chief of the "Popos."<sup>10</sup> Their industry in the region had reached a volume of 6,700 gallons in palm oil in 1884, and increased to 1,884,700 gallons in 1888. Palm-kernel production was 2,000 tons in 1884, and rose to 15,315 tons in 1888.<sup>11</sup> Loss of this trade would clearly have adversely affected French firms trading in the region.

A great part of German ingenuity was related ultimately to the currency question. After a modest decrease in slave-trading, cowrie shells were used as a form of exchange. This precipitated an inflow of

<sup>7</sup>Jean d'Arcy, L'Equilibre Africain au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, la Conquête de l'Afrique (Paris, 1900), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. Letter written by Victor Ballot 1886.

<sup>9</sup>d'Albéca, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>10</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey (Copy of Treaty), Appendix II.

<sup>11</sup>From unpublished thesis of Lyn Richard Allioza, professeur d'histoire et géographie au Lycée Behanzin. Porto-Novo, Dahomey. "Le commerce entre Marseilles et le Dahomey de 1866 à 1900," Aix-en-Provence, 1970, p. 90.

cowries that was inflationary, diminishing their value considerably.<sup>12</sup>

This was injurious to French trade, and to the local economy, for French agents had to procure cowries at tremendous costs. In addition, the rising prices of palm oil, and of other competitive raw materials in Europe, minimized the French profit margin.<sup>13</sup>

Cowries as currency had been introduced in 1845,<sup>14</sup> but their use became unpopular after 1850. Hoarding by local merchants created a flood of cowries in the money market when silver dollars were introduced.<sup>15</sup> This provoked increased demands for revenge by local officials to offset the loss. Dahomey increased its customs taxes and tariffs, which were supported by British sterling. This aggravated French commerce, which was continuously degraded by non-competitive goods brought to the coast by French importing facilities.

Since 1866, the position of Victor Régis and Co. had changed. Other French houses emerged as competitors. Messieurs Bérard, Daumais and Lartigues organised Fabres et Frères, and the company of Mante and Borélli. Victor Régis made an attempt to restrain the expansion of the newly formed French houses, but eventually became resigned to a common front, backed by the Marseilles chamber of com-

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<sup>12</sup>Allioza, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup>Bernard Schnapper, *La Politique et le Commerce Français dans le Golfe de Benin de 1838 à 1871* (Paris, 1961), p. 224.

<sup>14</sup>Marion Johnson, "Cowrie Currencies of West Africa," Part II, *J.A.H.*, XI, 3 (1970), pp. 331-353.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

merce and the Ministry of the Marine.<sup>16</sup>

The improved status altered French official policy and local merchants began exerting pressure on the French National Assembly in order to establish a monopoly position. In contrast, the German firms of G.L. Gaiser, Witt and Busch, Voight and Co., and Völber and Bröhn were geared towards an effective control of every possible local demand by establishing commercial houses further inland, and stimulating trade by conditioning local buying trends.

The Germans built a wharf, a slight distance from the French protectorate at Grand Popo, and this had immediate consequences, when the Germans allowed for the free passage of goods from the Dahomey hinterland into the German protectorate.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of aggressive German activity, the French commercial houses had almost doubled their own economic base. By 1887 it was valued at 8,886,580,25 francs and increased to 19,138,320,48 francs in 1893. It had been expressed that in 1887 Dahomey had imported a value of 3,991,703 francs of merchandise representing 44% of French manufactured products. In 1889, the imports were up to 12,348,970. francs, with French commercial houses gaining 20% of the total commerce.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>16</sup>John D. Hargreaves, Prelude to the Partition of West Africa (New York, 1966), p. 181.

<sup>17</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. D.L.C. Divers, letter written by Victor Ballot, 1891, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. After World War I, a French administrator wrote an article concerning German activity on the Western flank of Dahomey, reporting on their commercial activity up to 1914. Confidentielle, Cabinet A.D. 107, "Activité Allemande au Dahomey."

difference was obviously due to German competition.

French apprehension was again expressed in 1888. Germany had, by 1885, absorbed a major part of French commerce, and was about to take hold of the richest areas of Dahomey. Force was suggested to oppose German expansion.

On 29 April 1891, a letter was written by the French resident at Porto-Novo, R. De Beckman. He reiterated the importance of re-defining the French position on the littoral, for he believed that the German consul at Whydah had attempted to persuade the King of Dahomey to place his country under the protection of Germany. De Beckman remarked that:

... les allemands seront forcément au côté des mécontents et il est bien difficile avec nos petits moyens, dans cette colonie de lutter contre l'organisation de volonté et une suite dans les idées que nous ne pouvons pas opposer à nos voisins.<sup>19</sup>

This remark was the beginning of a series that expressed French apprehension.

### iii. Continued French Pressures and African Response

France continued to show an urgency towards the Dahomey coastline and the hinterland.<sup>20</sup> This was in response to British complacency that left this part of the west coast unattended. The British earlier had made attempts to force the Dahomey monarch, Gléglé, who reigned from

<sup>19</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Rapport Politique. This was written by R. De Beckman, August 11, 1891 to Victor Ballot, Directeur des Affaires Politiques.

<sup>20</sup>Boniface Obichere, West African States and European Expansion: The Dahomey-Niger Hinterland, 1885-1898 (London, 1971), p. 132.

1858 to 1889, to alter his trade activity, but were unsuccessful. Gléglé hoped that by accepting a French protectorate his economic position would change. In 1889 his son Béhanzin came to the throne and began resisting encroachments to his sovereignty. His first move, as sovereign was to force all foreign entrepreneurs to pay increased customs, tariffs and anchoring rights. His second move was to renegotiate with the French the earlier treaties signed by his predecessor, and suggested that France recognise the indefinite occupation of the beach at Cotonou by Dahomey.<sup>21</sup>

Régis and Co. complained about the new tax burdens and increased operating costs. French profits began decreasing from 300% in 1883 to 76% in 1886 and were continuing to do so in 1892.<sup>22</sup> French agents insisted that local customs systems had to be eliminated and a protected market established. The most bitter remark was by resident "directeur des affaires politiques", who said:

La chute du Dahomey s'impose; c'est une question de vie et mort pour nos établissements. Il faut monsieur le Gouverneur, que vous obteniez au commandant supérieur de la Marine des troupes qui monteraient que nous commandons réellement le Royaume.<sup>23</sup>

The undeniable consequence of French failure to act would be the abandonment of her trading position. Dr. Tontain, the new "directeur"

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<sup>21</sup> A. N. M. E. N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, D. L. C. 1891-1893. Divers III.

<sup>22</sup> Allioza, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> A. N. M. E. N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. B. D. L. B. 1889.

des Affaires politiques," arrived at Porto-Novo in 1889. He began complaining bitterly about French ineffectiveness. He insisted that the fall of Dahomey was inevitable, that with the prodding by other European powers, Dahomey would eventually fall. He reiterated the necessity of France's position when he said:

Mieux vaut que ça soit nous et à notre profit . . . .  
 Nous sommes ici pour faire le commerce avant  
 tout.<sup>24</sup>

The expansion into the Sudan and Niger Basin had begun in earnest by 1888. The thought of being denied access to the Gulf of Benin disturbed French economic expansionists.

Edouard Viard, a French explorer, was sent by the under-secretary to investigate the interior of Porto-Novo, to determine the feasibility of extending French influence into the hinterland. Viard was encouraged to seek "treaties" establishing a French presence. He stressed the advantages of access to the north by way of Porto-Novo, and succeeded in procuring a treaty with the Alaké of Abeokuta. The treaty was negated by the French National Assembly particularly because the French saw fit not to disturb British influence there.<sup>25</sup>

In 1890, pressure groups developed in France, with the goal of influencing French policy on the Gulf of Benin. The chief spokesmen of these groups were Eugène Etienne, a deputy in the French National Assembly, and Félix Faure, under-secretary of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. These men became responsible for the formation of La Comité

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Obichere, op. cit., p. 44.

de l'Afrique Française.<sup>26</sup> This committee incorporated politicians, economists, and military officers, whose concern became an improved French position on the Gulf of Benin, and in Africa generally, Félix Faure reiterated that it would be "Une Afrique Française de la Méditerranée au Golfe de Guinée . . . en un ensemble cohérent tout l'Afrique occidentale."

Faure's position as under-secretary was reinforced by the detachment of his office from the ministry of Foreign Affairs. This gave him a free hand in the dictating and implementing of French policy.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore Dahomey was the last obstacle to French economic expansion. The new "Directeur des Affaires Politiques," Victor Ballot, established the state of relations with the new King Béhanzin, of Dahomey, when he said:

Le Dahomey à nos portes est une menace perpétuelle un obstacle à, tout ce que nous voudrions faire, et si nous le brisons pas c'est alors nous qui serons brisés. Le roi de Dahomey se fait des illusions par sa puissance et considère les Européens comme très heureux de vivre sur la terre dans des conditions pénible au commerce Français.<sup>28</sup>

Béhanzin declared that all treaties signed with the French were null and void.<sup>29</sup> He altered his agreement, when he recognised

<sup>26</sup>Cited in Obichere, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>27</sup>W.B. Cohen, Rulers of Empire (Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, I.E. -2, Correspondance Divers, Victor Ballot.

<sup>29</sup>Alexandre d'Albéca, La France et le Dahomey (Paris, 1895), pp. 28-31.



the extremely delicate position of Dahomey commerce, and eventually reconfirmed the French territorial rights to the beach at Cotonou. The agent of Victor Régis lobbied against the acceptance of the treaty, claiming that its acceptance would be a sign of French weakness. This position was confirmed by the commander of French troops, Major Audéoud, in the month of March 1891:

... qu'il y a lieu de détruire le Dahomey pour rétablir le calme à la côte, et permettre la reprise des transactions commerciales absolument interrompues.<sup>30</sup>

The French Assembly's prevailing attitude was governed by the refusal to disturb French public opinion, by avoiding a military expedition, and it made a formal pronouncement against any such overtures. Therefore a military adventure had to be disguised.

In 1892 the French Colonial Union was formed, as an outgrowth of "la comité de l'Afrique Française." This was a consolidated effort by bankers and merchants with mutual interests. Their design was to camouflage French motives, and their military intervention. They began by discrediting the activities of the Dahomey monarch, Béhanzin, by propagandising the increased sophistication of Dahomey fire-power. They expressed objection to Béhanzin's infringement on French territorial rights, those rights guaranteed by Article 5 of the Berlin Act and Brussels Conference.

These moves were to safeguard a volume of trade that exceeded thirteen million francs, and a projected increase in customs revenues,

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

which was anticipated when customs facilities came under French control.<sup>31</sup> Victor Ballot, the "Directeur des Affaires Politiques," became the force behind local initiatives and was given full powers to negotiate with Dahomey. His intention was to confirm France's right to the littoral and to be sure that all commercial agents, who had suffered a loss in commerce, be indemnified.<sup>32</sup>

Under the guise of a geographic and reconnaissance mission, French ships made a blockade of the eastern flank of Dahomey, by stretching the territorial limits of their protectorate at Porto-Novo. Ballot insisted that Dahomey be broken and continued to harass the Dahomey monarch, Béhanzin.<sup>33</sup>

French anxiety continued when Béhanzin sent a message to the English Governor Maloney at Lagos. Governor Maloney, concerned about the possible increase in the British trade position, told the delegates of the Dahomey king, Béhanzin, that aid would be forthcoming if all Dahomey trade was directed towards Lagos. French agents, seeing the risks involved, were forced to block the river that straddled the eastern flank of Dahomey.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Allioza, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. *Dépêches Ministérielles*, 1890, Porto-Novo, U-8-1890.

<sup>33</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. *Divers III, D.L.C.*, 1890-1893.

<sup>34</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. *Correspondances Générales avec le sous-secrétaire d'état*, 1891.

In 1892 a proposition was submitted to the Ministry of the Navy, suggesting that a Colonel Dodds be named Commander of Military operations. Dodds, a métis from Sénégal, was a part of the overall plan to disguise French expansion into Dahomey. On the twenty-third of October, 1892, Dahomey sued for peace. Dodds refused the Dahomey plea.<sup>35</sup> Then he began the plan to break the power of Dahomey, and to continue French designs for the extension of their influence into the interior. Dahomey fell the following year after a succession of failures and blockades by the French. French expansion continued northwards into the Dahomey hinterland and in its path lay a devastated Ketou.

Ketu had been attacked by Dahomey in 1883 and again in 1886. On the second occasion it was destroyed and abandoned. Ketou, from 1886 up until conquest in 1893, was without a king. The members of the royal family had fled to Lagos, some of its members were imprisoned in Abomey, and others fled to British Abeokuta and Ibadan.<sup>36</sup> In 1893 refugees were able to return and start rebuilding the town. The Yoruba of Ketou had come first under Dahomeyan rule, victim of conflicting interests and inter-group rivalry. Later on French conquest had been motivated by international rivalry and interaction between industrialized Europe and West Africa since 1850.

With the conquest of Dahomey a vast area lay waste about Ketou and region. This would be contested by both French and English. All trade routes originally passing through Ketou were now directed east-

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<sup>35</sup>Obichere, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>36</sup>Parrinder, op. cit., p. 59.

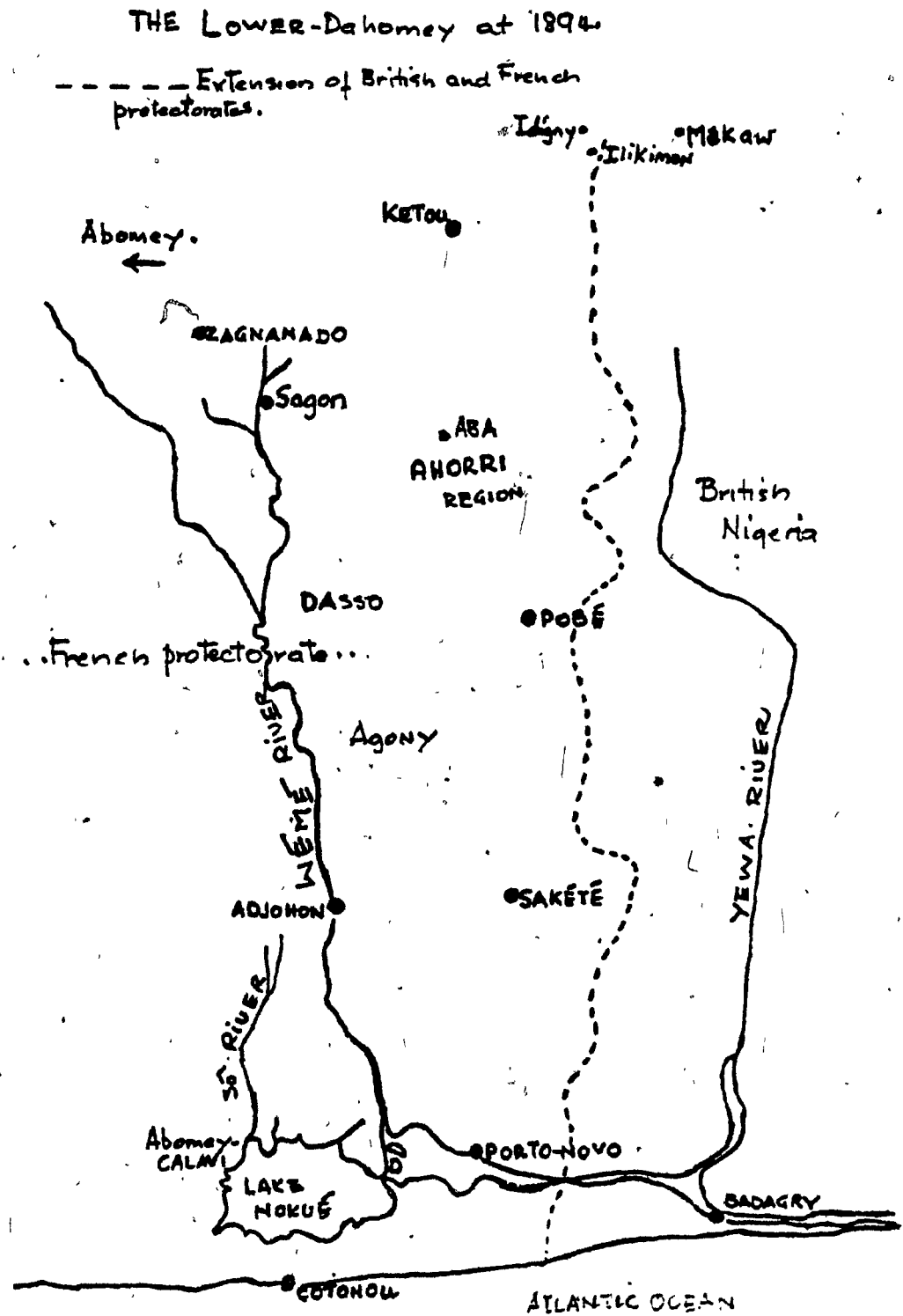
wards with towns on the eastern flank of Ketou becoming the major links in trade northeast of Ketou on to Badagry and Lagos. The devastation of Ketou, a former link in the trade route, became a challenge to French enterprise. If it could be re-established as a town this could divert much of the hinterland trade away from the British sphere of influence. The whole region south on the lower extension of Ketou territory had, since 1852, become a French protectorate, Victor Régis and Co. maintaining the controlling influence in palm-oil cultivation. Ketou had attempted in 1852 to stem the tide of this expansion when English missionary influence was strongest in Ketou.<sup>37</sup>

When the territory of Ketou was incorporated into the colony of Dahomey, the French recognised that in order to obtain the greatest possible economic advantage Ketou had to be restored as a trading centre. Since 1886 Ketou lay in waste also during this period, the Royal family was in exile in Lagos, and the members of the hierarchy were imprisoned in Abomey. If Ketou was to regain some of its former prominence, the Ketou hierarchy had to be reconstituted. This follows the logic of the economic exploitation of the region. For with limited French administrative personnel it was necessary that Ketou be re-established as a political unit.

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<sup>37</sup>It should be pointed out that in 1852 a confederation was formed by Ketou, the Ahorri, along with other chiefdoms south of Ketou. This was a manoeuvre which was designed to deter French influence that was increasing in the region about Pobé.

Map 3: The Lower-Dahomey at 1894.



## CHAPTER V

### EARLY FRENCH RULE, 1894-1911

#### i. The Administrative Features of French Colonial Policy

In this chapter an attempt will be made to evaluate some aspects of the impact of French colonialism on Dahomey. The framework will first consider the incorporation of Ketou territory and the peculiarities of French administration. Secondly, there will be a focus on the economic reasons behind France's motives. Thirdly, an examination will be made of the increased European presence, particularly how it affected Yoruba institutions; their response to an increased foreign presence, and how those institutions were absorbed into a bureaucracy.

On the surface France seemed prepared to develop a flourishing and peaceful trade, working through indigenous authorities wherever possible. At conquest, General Dodds, as commandant militaire, made a proclamation, which set the tone of French administrative policy.

Rien ne sera changé dans les coutumes et les institutions du pays, dont les moeurs seront respectées. Les chefs qui se soumettront immédiatement et de bonne foi à notre protectorat resteront en fonction; ils conserveront leur dignité et les honneurs qui en sont la conséquence. En revanche, ceux qui ne répondront pas à mon appel et qui essaieraient de fomenter dans un pays qui doit désormais être heureux et pacifié, seront impitoyablement châtiés.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>d'Albéca, La France et le Dahomey, op. cit., p. 106.

More specifically, because he was aware of the plight of Ketou, Dodds remarked:

Il convient de ne pas trop marcher dans ce pays afin de ne pas être obligé de mêler trop près à sa vie quotidienne afin d'avoir aussi des chefs responsables et suffisamment puissants pour exercer une véritable action sur la population.<sup>2</sup>

This suggested a form of indirect rule, a policy whereby some of the institutions could be revitalized and generally be made more effective. On the 13th of February, 1894, an agreement was made between the members of the Ketou Federation, of which the Alaketou was the overlord, and the new resident, Governor Victor Ballot. The Alaketou named Oyégué and the members of the Federation accepted the sovereignty of France and agreed to place themselves under its protection. In exchange, France undertook to guarantee the authority of the Alaketou and that of his descendants over his people.<sup>3</sup>

The reorganization of a vast territory was of utmost importance to accelerate the exploitation and expedition of its resources. By a decree on June 2, 1894, the administration of Dahomey was placed under the orders of the Governor-General.<sup>4</sup> The essential element of this administration was its regional organization. The resident Governor was to be the regional authority. He was responsible for the organization and direction of all services. By the same decree Dahomey was divided

<sup>2</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série D-45, from a letter written by Commander Dodds.

<sup>3</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série D-45, from a letter written in 1894.

<sup>4</sup>d'Albéca, La France et Dahomey, op. cit., p. 204.

into three distinct sectors. These sectors were referred to as, firstly, annexed territories; secondly, those under the French protectorate system, that is, those regions remaining under the nominal authority of traditional chiefs; thirdly, there were those areas assigned as territories of political action. These distinctions had been established in function with the old organization of ethnic groups, by the nature of the colonial occupation, and by its geographical position.<sup>5</sup> The two latter distinctions were relative to the nature of the region and the ability to transform the "native" community and its agricultural make-up.

Completing the organisational scheme was the creation of cercles, as subdivisions of both Annexed and Protected Territories, the last major division as the territory of political action was administered directly by the governor-general. Ketou, as a part of the Agony-Wéré-Ketou cercle was under the authority of a résident or commandant du cercle.<sup>6</sup> Through the encouragement of the Queen mother Ida, Ketou felt obligated to the French, and consequently acceded in February of 1894, with the office

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<sup>5</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey. Série 2D-45, 1894.

<sup>6</sup> R. Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey (Paris, XI<sup>e</sup>, 1962), p. 415.



of the Alaketou being recognised by the French.<sup>7</sup> The Alaketou was allowed to rule under traditional restraints, with the resident authority issuing directives which were limited to the reconstruction of Ketou and the re-opening of access roads. The delegation of the Alaketou to a bureaucratic role as Chef du Canton was not a necessary consequence of the initial period. The confusion of his role may be due to the indifference amongst French officials towards traditional authority, this in spite of directives to the contrary.

The following attitude vis-à-vis "chiefs" was prevalent:

Avec des égards, et sous ce vocable il convient d'entendre, en Nigritie, les larges et fréquentes distributions de tafia, de tissue et le cérémonial, l'étiquette, on peut facilement tenir en mains les indigènes et éviter tout incident de nature à troubler la tranquillité des habitants et la sécurité des transactions commerciales.<sup>8</sup>

This was clearly the basis of the relationship that existed between the European officer and African chiefs, which set the pace for the eventual disappearance of traditional political units.

This attitude was linked to a systematic exploitation of the colony and particularly to that region originally under the suzerainty of the Alaketou. Ketou, as a part of the Agony-Wéré-Ketou cercle, had the town of Sagon as its administrative centre.<sup>9</sup> Sagon is situated southwest

<sup>7</sup> Oral research in June 1972 revealed a Yoruba expression which when translated states "that because of the French and Queen Ida, the people of Ketou are free. Also the reconstitution of Ketou was because of the will of the people." A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-45, 1894.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in d'Albéca, La France et Dahomey, op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-45, 18-1-94.

of Ketou at the headwaters of the Wémé River. The Aubé reconnaissance mission of 1894 set the scheme according to the following statement:

En accordant quelques avantages aux commerçants influents, celui en outre prendra place sur nos canonnières, ils seraient frappés par la rapidité avec laquelle ils peuvent se rendre à Porto-Novo.<sup>10</sup>

Since the destruction of Ketou in 1886 regional exchanges had been altered, and trade was rerouted towards Lagos and then proceeded towards Porto-Novo and Cotonou. The re-establishment of Ketou would create a western extension, directing goods away from British Nigeria. A French administrator reiterated the importance of the French commercial position on the eastern extension of the colony when he said:

Cette partie de la colonie est très riche en palmiers et une quantité considérable en huile et amandes de palmes récoltées assez loin de la capitale en territoire Français prend au détriment du commerce de Porto-Novo, le chemin de la ville Anglaise de Badagry.<sup>11</sup>

The French were interested in diverting trade from British Nigeria. They began by encouraging markets at Ifonyin, Gbowojo and Modogan, towns south of Ketou. A road eight feet wide on the Dahomey side was sited at the principal direction of trade to the Porto-Novo-Ketou section and the road northwards toward Tschabé. The portion of the Ketou and Porto-Novo section was linked by the Wémé River. In order to facilitate the movement of goods Sagon became the main post of the Agony-Wéré-Ketou cercle, which had, as its eastern limits, the British possession, and on the west the Wémé River. Thus the reason for the incorporation and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-45, 1894.

organisation of the territory was economic.

ii. Economic Reasons Behind the French Motives

Economic reasons were obvious, and the guarding of these were necessary, therefore, French commercial establishments had to provide the necessary means to redirect trade away from Lagos in British colonial territory and direct it towards Porto-Novo. The construction of a road from Ketou south towards Pobé would doubly enhance the French trade position, providing for convenient all year round access to Ketou and its surrounding region.<sup>12</sup>

In 1898 it was apparent that a more accentuated effort was necessary. French apprehension about the British was represented by the following remarks of a French administrator. "Les Anglais visitaient la région, il envoyaient le drapeau Anglais à Ketou l'arborient." <sup>13</sup> Although the relationship between the British administrators and the Yoruba protectorates was less close than that of the French in Ketou, the British had a decided advantage. The protection of the colony was not burdened by large amounts of direct taxes through local authorities. Therefore most Yoruba elected to settle in British territory or to solicit British protection.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the commercial agreements signed in 1872 and again in 1888 would suggest a prior attachment to British commerce. The extensive use of British currency would corroborate the degree to

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Dépêches ministérielles, D.L.C., 1898.

<sup>14</sup>Newbury, op. cit., p. 106.

which most traders had been conditioned by British goods. It was necessary for the French administration to secure every possible French attachment and to deter every suggestion of British influence.

The second factor impairing the flow of goods to and from Ketou was the strong Muslim oligarchy and its tradesmen. Muslim traders were busy trafficking in the region oblivious to French design. This movement of goods was prejudicing the French financial position.<sup>15</sup> Muslim traders were using the villages of Illaro, Idigny and Illékimon to circulate goods into the region of Ketou and southwards.

From the signing of the treaty of protectorate in 1894 Islamic influence was more open and defined. The Imam Mangadgi had signed the treaty of protectorate along with other notables.<sup>16</sup> In 1897, of 2,000 inhabitants in the town of Ketou 800 were Muslim.<sup>17</sup> The Muslim oligarchy was represented on the Ketou hierarchy by the Olou-malé.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear as to his responsibility, but there is some evidence that points to the power of Maioki. This man, a Muslim and chief war officer, had taken an anti-French position and was using his influence to restrain the Alaketou from soliciting the French.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série-E, lettre no 27, 1898.

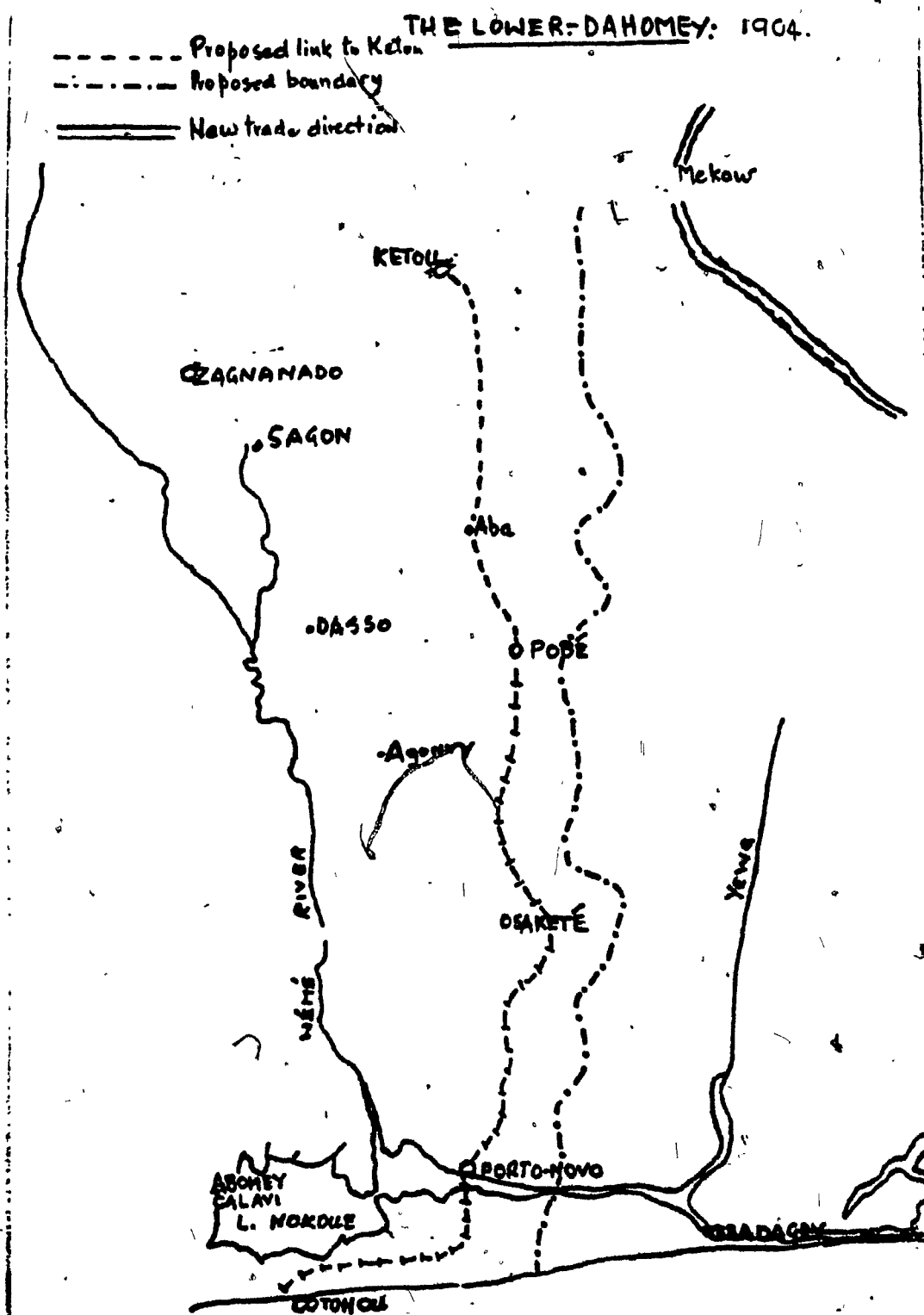
<sup>16</sup> See copy of treaty, Appendix II.

<sup>17</sup> A.N.M. E.N., Porto Novo, Dahomey, Série-E, 1897, no. 138. This may be considered to be the population in the reconstructed part of town.

<sup>18</sup> Parrinder, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série-E, 18-3-1897.

Map 4: The Lower-Dahomey: 1904.



In order to stimulate commerce in French goods and currency, restraints had to be placed on the Muslim trading oligarchy. The geographical limits of French territory had not been established. This encouraged open-trafficking by Muslim traders. The most obvious measure to restrain such activity would be to place customs facilities on the eastern periphery of Ketou, at a point about two kilometers from Ketou.<sup>20</sup>

The Muslim faction reacted in 1898, and attacked and murdered the imposed customs officers and destroyed the post. In order to understand the event some attention must be given to the Muslim oligarchy and its relation to the Alaketou. Maioki, the chief Muslim officer had made demands on the Alaketou and installed a customs post outside the fortifications of the town. Both Maioki and the Alaketou shared the proceeds from this post. The installation of the "new" customs diminished the revenue of the Muslim community.<sup>21</sup>

The French administrator took a more direct stand and replaced Maioki with a more amenable war officer, tempering Muslim influence and diminishing the accessibility of English goods.<sup>22</sup>

### iii. The Increased French Presence and African Reaction

The turning point in French colonial administration was in 1904, when several administrative changes were made. Chiefs were substituted for kings in several cercles, and some subdivisions were made into cantons,

<sup>20</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série-E, lettre no 256, 1898.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1-E, lettre no 42, juin, 1905.

as small units of cercles. These changes were carried out to facilitate the administration of French authority and resulted in a shift from indirect rule to direct rule. Ketou was incorporated into a new cercle, that of Holli-Ketou after 1904, with the southerly town of Pobé being made the administrative centre. This new cercle was created as a consequence of the proposed extension of the railway between Porto-Novo and Pobé, which would divert trade away from the Wémé River and Sagon and, at the same time, control production on the eastern frontier of the colony.

In addition to the direct exploitation of the rich land south of Ketou, Ketou itself became more accessible from Pobé and to the direct involvement of the French administrator.

In 1904 the Governor-General of the Federation of French West Africa announced that all administrative costs of the colony, including salaries, were to be borne by the colony itself. In the same year a separate budget was instituted for Dahomey, with all customs revenues paid to Dakar, in return for subsidies and loans to the colony. Dahomey gained its own administrative and financial autonomy, limited by contributions from Dakar.<sup>23</sup> The budgetary restraints imposed additional burdens on individual cercles and cantons. Ketou, as a subdivision of the cercle de Holli-Ketou, had to absorb the cost of all police actions that took place.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, D.L.C. 1904.

<sup>24</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, cablegramme, copie lettre 7a, Dakar, 1e 2-2-1904.

In order to fulfill budget commitments and the expense of military expeditions, an increased tax was necessary. It became the general consensus amongst the commandants du cercle that:

Faire rentrer l'impôt, n'est ce pas la tâche principale, essentielle, la condition même de l'avancement de tout l'administration.<sup>25</sup>

The head tax when introduced in 1898, was at the rate of 2 francs 25 centimes for adults and for children 1 franc 25 centimes.<sup>26</sup> In 1911 that tax increased to 3.75 francs per adult person and 2 francs 50 centimes for children over ten. In addition a license had been imposed on market stalls and a tax was placed on all produce based on a hundred pound weight.<sup>27</sup> Taxation was considered "La pierre touchée de la situation politique." Whenever collection was poor or slow most officials felt that their positions were in jeopardy.

A tense atmosphere developed in Ketou, aggravated by the despotic nature of the French administrator. This attitude was pitted against the rebellious nature of the people of Ketou. The increased use of force was inevitable. In Ketou the French administrator, Ducorps, said that:

... me semble qu'il sera utile de mettre fin à l'insolence et à l'arrogance et aux prétentions de ces indigènes. Cependant il ne sera pas possible

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<sup>25</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série-B, 155c, lettre à M. l'inspecteur des colonies Montguillot.

<sup>26</sup> Newbury, op. cit., pp. 163-4.

<sup>27</sup> A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, D-45, November 1899.



d'assouplir ces gens là lorsque on aura les moyens de répression immédiate c'est à dire lorsque on possèdera une prison et de nombreux gardes.<sup>28</sup>

Increased taxes became a part of the overall burden of forced labour, military conscription and portage. Open confrontation was inevitable.

It may be appropriate to consider that prior to open resistance, most political reports were of an optimistic nature from 1905 forward. Each administrator interpreted events as he saw them, this according to his own temperament and to his relation with the lieutenant-governor. The lieutenant-governor in turn gave his own version to the Governor-General, so as to give a proper impression for obvious reasons.<sup>29</sup> A clear divergence existed between the local administrator and that of the Governor-General at Dakar. Most commandants du cercle were of the opinion that a show of force was necessary for pacification.<sup>30</sup> This attitude was in striking contrast with the tempering tone of the Governor-General, who suggested that local administrators were to use force as a last resort.<sup>31</sup>

These divergent views were complicated by an administrative decree initiated by Governor-General William Ponty in 1909, which sought to reorganize ethnic groups so as to provide a more liberal approach towards native political systems.

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<sup>28</sup>A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, 20, 27-10-1910.

<sup>29</sup>A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1E-31, 1G, 3-1-1911.

<sup>30</sup>A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1E-31, lettre no 102, 30-5-1911.

<sup>31</sup>A.N.M. E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1E-31-1G, 3-1-1911.

From 1904 there was a growing resistance to French administrative restraints. Ketou and the region southwards occupied the French military for several years. The Ahorri of Hollidje refused to submit to French demands for labour or the evacuation of their villages. The suppression of the Ahorri revolt in the south diverted attention away from Ketou temporarily. At the same time the oppressive nature of French administration was to take effect in Ketou.

The most oppressive element was the collection of taxes. First of all, taxes had to be paid in French currency, which had to be earned in a new way. Secondly, the chiefs who were made responsible for the collection of taxes often felt that it was demeaning as a ritual leader to do so. This led the French to insert individuals more favourable to them, replacing the traditional authority, creating a delicate relationship between the French authority, the inserted chief and the general population. Reaction was rapid.

On 11 April, 1911, a French agent was killed.<sup>32</sup> The death, according to French officials, was due to increased demands for "forced labour" for the construction of the Porto-Novo to Pobé railroad. A conclusion that was drawn upon the questioning of Fagbété, the assassin, was that the people of the cercle were not happy with conditions.<sup>33</sup> Most labourers were taken from traditional pursuits, becoming wage-earners and thus escaping the normal obligations of their paternal villages.

<sup>32</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série i-E, 1911, "Affaire Mensah."

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

The assassination may be seen thus. The role of the Alaketou as a traditional ruler was in obvious decline. The dead native-agent, as an auxiliary of French administration, had become important. His injection into the bureaucratic make-up was ostensibly to carry out the orders of the chief French administrative officer. This new administrative role and its importance represented the changed status of consensus and the diffusion of power in the kingdom.

A military detachment was sent to Ketou in May of 1911, and was considered a permanent force to ensure calm and subservience to a continued French presence.<sup>34</sup>

During this period which ends in 1911, traditional sentiment was still profound, in spite of elements of French colonial policy, which tended to dissociate "chiefs" from the population. The increased demands by European officials encouraged the rapprochement of divisions between a traditional authority and the population. Whatever insurrections existed were because of the burden of tax, military recruitment and seasonal disruptions such as census taking. The greatest result was a more direct association between the European official and the population.<sup>35</sup>

After Ketou's incorporation into the cercle Holli-Ketou it was evident that an authoritarian contact was inevitable. The relation between the Alaketou and the "commandant du cercle" was to be contentious.

<sup>34</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1E, lettre 22, 1911.

<sup>35</sup>Jacques Lombard, Autorités traditionnelles et pouvoirs européens en Afrique noire (Paris, v<sup>e</sup>, 1967), p. 114.

The characters of the French commandants were integral elements of this relationship. The average age of the administrative officer was 25 years.<sup>36</sup> Born in a crisis period in France they became united with the desire to radicalize and strengthen their position against French aristocratic values, having a disdain for feudalism or monarchism.<sup>37</sup> An arrogance was rampant, stimulated by a "man on the spot attitude", implementing orders contrary to ministerial decrees.

The central authority at Dakar, Senegal, had initiated a process of ministerial decrees, which was designed to make traditional authority more amenable to French colonial policy. In spite of measures that seemed acceptable, by virtue of the local relationship this process was ignored.

Local administrators were free to manoeuvre, being aware of geographical distances and the infrequency of communication between the regional governor and his post. Whenever he was in doubt as to procedure, or if a lack of insight stifled his contact, the administrator would seek the only avenue open to him, that of duplicating the more authoritarian and central metropolitan bureaucracy. This resulted in a large extension of his power over traditional systems.

His arrogance and despotism was obvious. In 1894 the "resident" Sagon had visited the Alaketou Oyégué. Virtually unaware of his nature, or oblivious to, the Alaketou's role, with respect to tradition, he com-

<sup>36</sup>Moulin et Cabraux, Annuaire et Livre d'Or des Administrateurs Coloniaux en 1905 (Paris, 1905).

<sup>37</sup>W. B. Cohen, Rulers of Empire (Stanford University, Calif., Hoover Institute Press, 1971), p. 74.

plained about the way he was greeted by the King. The administrator's reaction was:

Que sa façon de me recevoir incitant une leçon que j'allait répartie à instant ramener les gardes-civiles lui avec pour aller rendre compte à Porto-Novo de la conduite qu'il avait cru devoir tenir vis-à-vis de votre représentant.<sup>38</sup>

A French presence was demeaning. When the Alaketou was integrated into the French administration in 1904, he continued to exercise his function as a traditional leader. But, through the demands of the "commandant", he was asked to make regular visits to the resident at Zagnanado, a distance requiring eight hours of travel by foot. Contrary to Yoruba tradition, the Alaketou emerged from ritual seclusion and ceased to be a revered figure.

The Alaketou's role was one of a God-like chief, serving as the link between the living society and that of the ancestors. A youthful vitality was necessary in order to correspond with the supernatural and to guarantee some degree of growth and eventual maturity.<sup>39</sup>

In 1905 the Alaketou was 60 years of age and had developed a blindness in one eye. Anarchy was rampant, and it became evident that the office of the Alaketou was still revered but the person himself was only a symbol.<sup>40</sup> It was also evident at this time that the burden of his

<sup>38</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-45, lettre no 8, 17-11-1894. Administrateur à M. le Gouverneur à Porto-Novo.

<sup>39</sup>Peter C. Lloyd, Political Development in Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (London, 1921), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-92, 1905.

new administrative role was too much to bear. A transfer of power was inevitable to the first minister, the Balogun Oloulo. Oloulo had originally been inserted by the French into the Ketou hierarchy.<sup>41</sup>

According to Yoruba tradition the Ida, as the Alaketou's first wife or official mother, usually yields the greatest power in the palace and is considered the feudal head of the Regent, representing the Prime Minister, or Essaba.<sup>42</sup> The queen or Ida indirectly accepted the mantle of power in Ketou.

The closeness of Ketou to British Nigeria was antagonistic to the maintenance of the traditional suzerainty of the Alaketouship, when the Ida emerged. There were obvious contrasts between a French affinity and British colonialism. In spite of the paternalistic approach of British administrators towards traditional authority, the population of the eastern portion of Dahomey looked upon British administration as being less restraining. In addition to the continuance of a great measure of traditional authority was the absence of forced labour, of "head tax," and the accessibility to a greater variety of goods. This was a striking contrast to the repressive nature of French administration.

In 1911 several villages of the kingdom were deserting Ketou for the British, suggesting that the British system was more favourable.<sup>43</sup> Queen Ida of Ketou began to show her faithfulness to the French cause by encouraging Ida's of other villages to follow her.<sup>44</sup> This attitude was

<sup>41</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 2D-92, Rapport, 1898.

<sup>42</sup>Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>43</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1-E-31, 1911.

<sup>44</sup>A.N.M.E.N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1-E-31, lettre no 2, 30-5-1911.

motivated by monetary considerations, for the French administrator had offered her a reward and a regular payment of 500 francs when she succeeded in regrouping the dissenters.<sup>45</sup> In spite of a measurable success, the villages of Issélou, Illaro, and Iwoyé, were displaced and reconstituted in English territory in 1912.<sup>46</sup> The major villages that remained as vassals to Ketou were: Idigny, Illékimon, Ekpo and Edé.

Up to 1904 the traditional judicial system had remained intact and was visited on occasion by the French administrative officer.<sup>47</sup> In the same year a form of tribunal was instituted. This was held every Saturday morning with the Alaketou Oyégué as "chef de tribunal."<sup>48</sup> The openness of such a form of judiciary was spiteful of the normal secrecy associated with traditional justice. Fines were imposed with varying periods of imprisonment. The Alaketou's role became official in 1904, as overseer to the tribunal, coinciding with the extension of his jurisdiction to civil, domestic and criminal cases with his appointment as "chef du Canton."<sup>49</sup> This judicial innovation was instituted in Ketou against the background of the traditional judicial system of the council of elders and the Oloyé society.

<sup>45</sup> A. N. M. E. N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1-E-31, lettre no 9, 30-9-1911.

<sup>46</sup> A. N. M. E. N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série 1-E-31, lettre de l'administrateur Du Bosque à Zagnanado à M. le Gouverneur à Porto-Novo.

<sup>47</sup> A. N. M. E. N., Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Série E, Rapport Politique 1904.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Newbury, op. cit., pp. 185-86.

Henceforth the power of the traditional authority and the Oloyé society as a judicial organization was eliminated. The incorporation of pro-French elements in 1904 had created the basis for a strong authority but it was non-traditional. The element that terminated the Alaketou as the true symbol of traditional power in 1911, was the Queen Ida, and the creation of a military post with direct military action. The termination of this role ensured the propagation of entirely new influences that would assure Ketou's role as a very minor and vulnerable cog in the French colonial wheel.

From the point of view of indirect rule, instituted by the French in 1894 and which continued until 1904, and of their more practical administration from 1904 to 1911, it was clear that the people were prepared to reinstall and reconstruct Ketou in spite of changes in administrative tactics. Although Ketou's political organization was a duplication of Oyo's central government it would appear on the surface that the reorganization of Ketou would not present any problem. The readiness of the people to reestablish in the town was a reflection of the nature of the political organization which was linked to past traditions and pursuits.

Past traditions have had a great impact on the population, and we have seen that the population was conscious of the necessity to adapt their institutions and traditions to the needs of the new economic order. For throughout Ketou history we have seen that the fundamental truth underlying Ketou diplomacy, as the condition for survival, was to adapt to changing conditions.



## CONCLUSION

Today the most striking feature of Ketou is its fortifications, which hide a neglected town. This is in contrast to Abomey and other major towns and villages of the western banks of the Wémé River. Ketou's decline is full of irony for the historian. In spite of Ketou's more pragmatic outlook after 1800, Abomey, the Fon capital, appears to have profited more so, in spite of Dahomey's resistance to change.

In the first centuries of Ketou's existence its history was uneventful. Oral traditions weaken beyond the normal revelations of Yoruba institutions. It is quite possible that in the early period of discussion when geographical barriers were more restricting, that Ketou, as a small city state, would have been able to protect itself and expand without much fear of being disturbed by external influences. By the seventeenth century this was not at all possible, particularly because of the development of exportable commodities such as slaves and agricultural products. This began making an impact on the states of the Guinea forest and particularly Ketou, which itself was a productive agricultural centre. Ketou, as it reckoned with these new influences, looked to those factors that would guarantee its survival through the complexities of a changing economy.

Oyo, which by the eighteenth century had grown to a stature unrivalled by other states, had sought Ketou as a link in its expansion towards the coast of West Africa. As a result, Ketou submitted and

Oyo legitimized this acceptance by making payment of tribute a consequence of this relationship.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this subservience was the reinforcing of traditional solidarity by acknowledging the divinity of the Alaketou. Oyo's dominance was due to its success in resolving the dilemma that faced most other states of the Guinea forest, that of consolidating the economic opportunities, which had been open to the states, particularly the trade in slaves. Ketou became a part of Oyo's scheme and was established as a trade centre in the conduct of the trade.

Prior to Oyo's dominance European trade had begun making its presence felt on the West African coast. The encouragement of the slave trade brought substantial gains to individuals and to certain regions. African entrepreneurs attempted to gain control of the trade, and did so successfully. While it may be contested that this profit-base had negative aspects, demands for slaves continued to be strong up to the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Once the European powers had decided to abolish the external trade, the states of the Guinea forest were faced with the problem of developing alternate exports.<sup>3</sup> Oyo was the first to suffer the effects.

The major reasons for the decline of Oyo have been treated within limited space. It may be contested by several historians, but a declining slave-trade and the increasing need for agricultural products will not be disputed as to the economic reasons for Oyo's decline.

<sup>1</sup>Smith, Kingdoms of the Yoruba, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>Hopkins, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

Ketou obviously reacted to this disruptive force by making some political and economic accommodations to Dahomey, which, in the nineteenth century, emerged as the most powerful state. While Oyo had been concerned with its internal problems Dahomey was consolidating its position vis-à-vis European establishments and the availability of sophisticated European weaponry. This force Ketou acknowledged from 1818 to 1850 when the respective monarchs signed "le Pacte du Sang"; the normal Yoruba institutions which were used to legitimize Oyo's sovereignty over Ketou were no longer practical. Ketou had to accept the hegemony of Dahomey as a military power, as a means of survival, at the same time attempting to diversify its economic base which had become important.

Ketou recognized that the forces developing in the Guinea forest and on the coast warranted conciliation and accommodation. Conciliation was necessary towards Dahomey and towards Ibadan and Abeokuta because of the demise of Oyo as an economic power. The changing economic emphasis meant that Ketou had to make some accommodation towards the new trade trends that had developed on the coast. It was an acceptable fact that kinship was no longer a necessary element of Ketou's relationship with Yorubaland. With Ibadan and Abeokuta vying for positions of advantages politically and economically, what might have held the Yoruba enterprise together in the eighteenth century was no longer valid nor sought after in the nineteenth century. Each state had recognized this fact and sought alliances to secure its position politically and economically. Ketou's geographical location had dictated this fact.

Ketou's earlier incorporation in the trade-routes to the coast made it accessible to Muslim traders. The emergence of a Muslim élite represented their success in protecting their trade: this to the point of encouraging Ketou's relationship with Dahomey up to 1850. Therefore the Muslim trading group in Ketou who, in concert with Dahomey, was opposed to any accommodation by the traditional farming group.

By 1850 traditional farmers increased their wealth, primarily because of the inroads made by legitimate trade and more specifically because of the success of the British in suppressing the slave-trade from the major ports of Dahomey. Ketou, because of the growing economic prominence of the traditional group had to reconsider the concessions made to Dahomey and begin a more practical relationship with the British commercial outlet at Lagos. This was seen as an opportunity for Ketou to move her raw material products into the export market. Therefore Ketou's negotiations with the British missionary enterprise was a matter of economic expediency as opposed to antagonizing Dahomey.

Dahomey in turn attempted to play both sides of the economic balance. Although Dahomey refused to give up the slave-trade, it continued its trade relations with the British. This afforded Ketou a short period of uninterrupted economic growth. The conclusion that may be drawn from this is that Dahomey itself was suffering from some internal adjustments politically and economically. By 1880 Dahomey suffered economic reverses and began resisting encroachments on its sovereignty. By 1880 when most alliances that had made the slave-trade possible dis-

solved, Dahomey was left with a restricted market at Whydah. Most Europeans considered the port of Whydah a great risk for legitimate trade. By 1882 Dahomey's insistence on its continued involvement in the slave-trade evoked an obvious polarization between its trade base and that of Ketou. For Ketou had slipped beyond the restraints of a divided hierarchy, and was encouraged by its powerful traditional bloc. Dahomey in turn destroyed Ketou.

This antagonism was tied to the process of interaction between European powers and their demands for African man-power and raw-material products. By 1893 it became clear that the growth of European commerce warranted direct involvement in the economy and the politics of the states of the Guinea forest.

The prelude to the conquest of Dahomey confined France, Great Britain, and Germany to the states of the Guinea forest. France's conquest of Dahomey was ultimately tied to defending a commercial position that would not be outranked by other European powers. Britain, essentially through her advanced marine and industrial development, dominated trade and tried to frustrate France's ambitions. Germany created some apprehension up to 1888 with its rapidly expanding share of trade into the Dahomey hinterland. France had feared that any forward move by Germany would have easily resulted in the exclusion of French establishments from the untapped areas of Dahomey. Although economic factors did not constitute a complete motive for conquest, considerable evidence

has been presented to justify these, showing their prevalence over other political and diplomatic considerations. For trade first brought the Europeans to the West African coast in the fifteenth century and trade remained the basis of their relationship with the continent from then on.

The expansion of France into the hinterland of Dahomey meant the complete transformation of the agricultural production of the Kingdom of Ketou, and its incorporation into the French industrial economy. Therefore in order to convert the economy France needed native administrative units. By 1894 when France had consolidated the region under study, it had begun by ruling through re-instituted traditional political units. This was accomplished through a form of indirect rule. Difficulties arose because of the inability of the traditional ruler to make concessions. Therefore most traditional systems were not able to adapt quickly. By 1904 when the native economy did not respond, the region was placed under direct rule. This was considered as a move to increase agricultural activity and to exert more pressure on traditional rulers. The fear was that the native economy would become a high risk venture. Therefore it became necessary for the French to assume a greater responsibility in the administration of Ketou.

By 1911 efforts towards increased productivity failed and a more direct military force had to be used to repress recalcitrant chiefs and to encourage the population towards greater productivity. Reaction was

quick when the population recognized that, with the decrease in revenue from local transactions, there was an increase in taxation, a restriction of movement and the loss of political independence. Therefore Ketou resisted to a degree in spite of the lack of adequate military resources.

Originally at conquest the basis of an indigenous political administration eluded the French administrators. Later they were confused by the everyday requirements of the central administration. Therefore the population of Ketou gained tremendous latitude, which in turn brought increased pressure, and loss of independence.

The loss of independence was typical of most West African states in the nineteenth century, but for a state such as Ketou to have survived as long as it did has indeed warranted analysis.

## GLOSSARY

- Adja - The people living in the general area of the southern half of modern Dahomey.
- Alafin - The King of the Oyo empire.
- Alaketou - The King of Ketou.
- Balé - Mayor of individual town, i.e., father of the land.
- Balogun - Chief of the militia, from Oba-Olor-Ogun, Lord in War.
- Baba-Balogun - Supreme commander-in-chief of the militia.  
(Baba meaning father.)
- Basorun - Head of the Oyo-Mese (Oyo's parliament) and, next to the Alafin the most powerful man in Oyo.
- Cabocères - Provincial chiefs of Dahomey.
- Ebi - The Ebi social system is an unwritten convention prevailing in Yoruba-Adjaland among different states related to the other states within the group, being either a brother state, or, in the case of the oldest, a father state. The states so related were expected to respect each other's independence, and to come to the assistance of brother states as need demanded.
- Egbe - The Yoruba word for group.
- Migàn - A Dahomean military officer who, next to the king, was the most powerful man in the country.
- Ogun - The Yoruba deity of the hunter and warrior.
- Oritcha - Keeper of the cult of Ogun.
- Yévogan - The Dahomean official who was entrusted with trade relations with Europeans at Dahomey's major ports, such as Porto-Novo and Whydah.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

Contemporary "King Lists" of Ketou

	<u>Date (approximate)</u>
36. Oniyi	?
37. Adiri	?
38. Odjè	1748-1760
39. Andé	1760-1780
40. Akebiohou	1780-1795
41. Adjibolou	1795-1816
42. Adébiya	1816-1853
43. Adégbédé	1853-1858
44. Adiro	1858-1867 (exiled)
45. Odjéku	1867-1883 (killed)
46. Oyégué	1894-1911
47. Queen Ida	1911-1918 (removed)
48. Adékambi	1918-1936
49. Adégbité	1936-1963
50. Adélou	1963- <sup>1</sup>

Contemporary "King Lists" of Dahomey

Tegbessu	1740-1774
Kpengla	1774-1789
Agonglo	1789-1797
Adandozan	1797-1818
Guézo	1818-1858
Gléglé	1858-1891
Béhanzin	1889-1894 <sup>2</sup>
Agoliagbo	1894-1900

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<sup>1</sup>From personal research and Parrinder, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Akinjogbin, op. cit., p. 220.

Colonie du  
Dahomey  
et P  
Depenses

Republique Française  
Copie Traité 1894

Au nom de la République Française  
Entre Victor Ballot, Gouverneur  
du Dahomey et Dépendances, Commandeur  
de la Légion d'Honneur, représenté par  
M<sup>r</sup> R. Gerreux, Inspecteur de la garde Indigène,  
Résident d'Agony-Ouéré Kétou

D'une part:

Et Gidou, roi de Kétou et Ouéré, assurant  
roi de Ouéré

D'autre part:

Il a été conclu le traité suivant:

Art. 1<sup>er</sup> La Confédération, des Nagots de Ouéré-Kétou  
formée en 1852 pour résister aux incursions  
du roi du Dahomey, se compose des deux  
royaumes de Kétou et de Ouéré; ou pays  
des Adjas et Holis. Elle a pour limites à l'Est  
la frontière des possessions anglaises de Lagos;  
à l'Ouest la rivière Ouémé; au Sud le  
royaume de Porto-Novo - au Nord le pays des  
Mehes.

Art. 2<sup>e</sup> — Chacun de ces royaumes est indépendant l'un  
de l'autre; mais le roi des Adjas et Holis  
reconnait comme chef religieux et chef de guerre  
le roi Kétou.

Art. 3 — Les chefs souverains de la Confédération de  
Ouéré-Kétou reconnaissent que le pays

Le présent traité, fait en triple expédition  
et est donné en présence des témoins soussignés.  
Fait à Agaña le dix-huitième jour  
mil huit cent quatre-vingt-dix-neuf.

Le présent traité, fait en triple expédition  
et est donné en présence des témoins soussignés.  
Fait à Agaña le dix-huitième jour  
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### A. PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Archival Works

During the years 1971-1973, the National Archives of Dahomey were a part of the Ministry of Education, located in the capital at Porto-Novo. Due to lack of personnel the office and services of the archives lacked organisation. As a result a limited amount of information was available concerning Ketou. Many sources of information were catalogued under D-45 and D-46. This was in addition to other scattered pieces of information concerning decrees and other correspondence that I found with the help of the director, Mr. D'Almeida. I am grateful for his assistance.

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