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THE AUTONOMOUS KINGDOM OF DAHOMEY

1818-94

by

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of Ph. D. at the University of
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study has been to provide, as far as possible, an accurate outline of developments in Dahoman political society during the course of the nineteenth century. The findings of this, the major part of the work, have then been used as a check against descriptions of the Fon state based on anthropological evidence. In this way it has been attempted to place the institutions of Dahoman corporate life in the context of their historical development and at the same time to cast some light on how they actually functioned in the nineteenth century.

Eighteen eighteen provides a useful starting point for an investigation into latter Dahoman history since the revolution which took place in that year represented both the high water mark of chiefly factionalism and the beginning of a vigorous attempt to establish a strong monarchy. The conflict between those trying to build a centralised government and those determined to preserve the powers of the feuding ruling class dominated the politics of Dahomey from the Revolution until the French invasion.

Other issues, above all those of foreign and economic policy, of course, also influenced the course of Dahoman history in these years. Disputes over policy, however, merely aggravated an already existing crisis; they did not create the tensions in Fon society. It was the continual internecine struggle indulged in by the various sections of the Dahoman ruling class which dominated political life, shaped the institutions of Dahoman government and gave nineteenth century Fon history its peculiar character.

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MAPS

Fig. I - Dahomey according to the French Administrator
A. L. D'Albeca, April 1892.

Fig. II - Dahomey. Map produced by the Expeditionary
Force. 2nd Edition, July 1893.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.M.	Admiralty.
C.O.	Colonial Office.
D.N.A.	Dahoman National Archives.
E.D.	Etudes Dahoméennes.
G.G.A.	Government General Archives, Dakar.
M.A.E.	Archives of the "Ministère des Affaires Etrangères.
M.M.C.	Archives of the "Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies" in the custody of the Ministère de la France D'Outre-Mer.
M.M.S.	Methodist Missionary Society Archives.
S.M.A.	Society of African Missions Archives.

Errata:

For Cambell read Campbell throughout.

For REGIS read RÉGIS

For. PORGERÉ read PORGÈRE

C H A P T E R I

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STABILITY

1818-1835

A revolution which took place in the Kingdom of Dahomey in 1818 drove the ruling monarch, King Adanzan, from his throne. He was succeeded by a distant relative, Prince Gankpe, who on his accession adopted the name of Gezo. Both men were descendants of Agadga, the greatest of Dahomey's eighteenth century rulers. Adanzan traced his ancestry through Tegbesou who, though a younger son, had succeeded his father as King of Dahomey. Gezo was descended from one of Agadga's elder sons.¹

The overthrow of the reigning monarch was the culmination of a period of near-anarchy brought about

¹ For a guide to Dahomey in the nineteenth century see I.Akinjobin, Dahomey and Its Neighbours, 17/ -1818. Ph.D. London 1963.

by the decay of the vigorous monarchical system created by Agadga. It was an event which had far-reaching consequences for the future of the Fon state. Three themes, whose interweaving gave later Fon history its distinctive pattern, had their origins in this revolution. It marked the coming to power of a regime committed to the winning and maintenance of Fon independence of the Yoruba; it saw the beginning of an imaginative new attempt to establish the monarchy as the motivating force in Dahoman politics; it was at that date that Europeans, or Afro-Europeans, had their first opportunity of playing a major part in the internal affairs of the Fon state. The changes to which these new departures led, and the reactions to these changes were the forces dominating nineteenth century Fon history.

The historian of eighteenth century Dahomey¹ argues that the fall of Adanzan was brought about by widespread dissatisfaction at the failure of the ruling

¹ *ibid.*

line to end the long term slump in Dahoman external trade. While there can be little doubt that this recession weakened the position of Adanzan's branch of the royal family vis-a-vis rival claimants to the throne, it seems unlikely that it led directly to the unseating of the King. It is certainly true that Adanzan's early attempt to find an economic alternative to the slave trade in large-scale agricultural production was an absolute failure.¹ The decline of the Whydah slave trade was, however, halted long before the coup of 1818. The ending of the British slave trade during the Napoleonic wars brought Portuguese and Spanish slavers flocking to those areas of the coast not dominated by England. Whydah was amongst these places. In 1811 and 1812 no less than forty-five ships from the great Brazilian slave-importing port of Bahia traded at Whydah.² Spanish vessels

1 *ibid.*, p.285

2 F 70/1594 F.B.Irby to W.E.White 5.1.1812: Admin. I/1996, F.P.Irby to J.W.Croker 9.1. and 4 & 10.3.1812. Quoted in Akinjobin op.cit., p.287.

flying the American flag probably also traded there. The increase in Whydah's trade may have been set off by the fact that an 1810 Anglo-Portuguese anti-slave trade treaty included Whydah amongst the ports from which the Portuguese were permitted to continue the trade. It seems more likely that Whydah's trade had already revived and that the Portuguese, knowing Whydah's value, deliberately had the port excluded from the prohibited sections of the coast. Whether the treaty's provisions were simply a reflection of the existing state of affairs or whether they actually promoted a revival of trade in Whydah, it is certainly true that after 1810, if not before, the slave trade flourished there as never before.

It can be argued that this revival came too late to save Adanzan's position; that his branch of the royal family was already too discredited by the slump to benefit from an increase in prestige arising from expanding trade. However, the coup which unseated Adanzan did not come until 1818—at the very least seven years after the slave trade had begun to flourish

again in Whydah. This suggests that the revolution came about not as a consequence of the slump, but as a result of increasing prosperity. Additional weight is given to this view by the fact that it was only as a result of the revival in trade that the enemies of Adanzan were able to find a wealthy ally whose financial backing made their attempt to overthrow the established monarch successful.

The outsider whose financial weight tipped the scales against Adanzin was a Brazilian, Francisco Felix De Souza,¹ who had for some time been operating as a slave trader at various points along the coast of

1 De Souza's early career has already been fairly clearly delineated: see I.Akinjobin, op.cit., pp.291-2. This account is broadly confirmed by two nineteenth century commentators: F.O. 84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast 7.8.1850 & A.L.D'Albeca 'Au Pays des Eoues', Tour Du Monde 1895, p.98. See also J.F.Almeida Prado, 'Les Relations de Bahia avec Dahomey', Revue d'Histoire des Colonies, XLI, 1954, and N.F.De Souza, 'Contributions a l'Histoire de la Famille De Souza', E.D. XIII. Some authors who met De Souza describe him as a European: others state that he was a mulatto.

the Bight of Benin. He had come first to Whydah in the last decade of the eighteenth century as an employee of the Portuguese slaving fort. Later he had begun trading for himself, and had, at various times, establishments at both Badagry and Little Popo. He was in fact the man-on-the-spot who benefited from the revival of the slave trade.

As De Souza's wealth accumulated he of course became a man of importance on the coast. He seems, however, to have over-estimated this newly acquired importance and to have conducted himself in a manner offensive to the traditional authorities. His later activities indicate that he was an exceedingly vain man anxious to cut a dash in the society in which he found himself. The subordinate position in which Dahoman monarchs traditionally kept foreign traders could not have been at all to his liking. He felt himself, it seems, entitled to a position of power and influence commensurate with his new-found wealth. Such feelings could not have led him to cherish an affection for the established Fon monarchy. At any

rate he quarrelled with Adanzan—ostensibly over some trading dispute. He was even brought to Abomey, tried, and imprisoned. Although this disgrace finally made him Adanzan's implacable enemy, his confinement did not last for long. Through the assistance of a group of Adanzan's Dahoman enemies he succeeded in making his escape from Abomey. In order to ensure that he would in future be able to enjoy unmolested the fruits of his prosperity, he then formed a close alliance with Prince Gankpe, the leader of a group of dissidents within the Fon royal family.¹ De Souza's wealth was now made freely available to aid Gankpe in an attempt to dethrone Adanzan.

It is difficult to assess the exact nature of the political situation which existed in Abomey at the period when Gankpe formed his alliance with De Souza. The only two really useful accounts of Adanzan's deposition give different and often conflicting accounts of the political background. They are, moreover, based on local tradition, and such accounts have to be used with care when they

¹ I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.292: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.42: F.O.84/819 T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast, 7.8.1850.

describe politico-religious events of such importance. There is no doubt that oral tradition was manipulated after Gankpe's accession in order to present that Prince's activities in the most favourable light possible. As a result the tales of Adanzan's cruelties, in which both abound, may be safely ignored. When these are neglected the first account is found to outline a situation in which Gankpe, described as the King's brother, was not Adanzan's only rival. A plot against the King was first of all hatched by one Djossevo—said to be a descendant of one of Tegbesou's former wives and not therefore a member of the royal family. Although Djossevo offered Prince Gankpe both a large bribe and the position of heir to the throne, Gankpe would have nothing to do with this conspiracy. In a short time Djossevo's support dwindled away to nothing. According to this version, general hatred of Adanzan eventually became so great that the King himself asked Gankpe to take the throne.¹

1 A. Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey.
pp. 313-4.

The second account describes Gankpe as the brother of the King, and Djossevo again appears with a non-royal pedigree. In this version, however, Djossevo features as a favourite of Adanzan who gave him his daughter in marriage and even intended to make him his heir. This, much fuller account, differs entirely from the first in that it relates that Gankpe's coming to the throne was the result, not of a request made by Adanzan, but of a conspiracy between the Prince and De Souza.¹

Since the story of Gankpe's ancestry has been tampered with,² it seems reasonable to suppose that Djossevo's has also been altered. He was in fact

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp. 43-4.

2 I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.292.
Akinjobin has shown clearly that Gankpe was a descendant of one of the elder sons of Agadga. Oral tradition probably presents Gankpe as Adanzan's brother in an attempt to minimise the sacriligious nature of Gankpe's usurpation of the throne. The politics of the period are sometimes complicated by the fact that Gankpe's brothers and sisters are often presented as being also Adanzan's close relatives.

probably descended from a younger son of King Tegbesou. He too must have had followers who wished to see him become King. This competition, for the throne, makes it very unlikely that Gankpe gained the throne peacefully. Monarchical power, as had already been shown by the murder of King Agonglo, Adanzan's father, was dangerously near to breaking down.¹ By 1818 the monarchy had evidently become so weak that the direct line of Tegbesou had to struggle more or less openly with other branches of the royal family for possession of the throne. The divisions in the Fon aristocracy seem to have been perpetuated by the fact that no one group could ever gain the

1 Agonglo was murdered in 1797.
I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.273,
considers that Adanzan succeeded
as a very young child. This seems
unlikely since, in 1818, according
to tradition related by Dunglas,
the King had a number of grown-up
sons, one of whom was Vi-Daho or
heir apparent. His powers at the
beginning of his reign may have been
very limited not because of his age,
but because of the increasing powers
of the great Chiefs.

upper hand. When one seemed to be becoming too powerful the others united against it. This is presumably why Djossevo first conspired against Adanzan but, later, in the face of Gankpe's increasing power, he allied with the King. The importance of De Souza's alliance with Gankpe was that the backing of the wealthy trader gave Gankpe the edge over even the combined forces of the others. It gave him the wherewithal to rally waverers to his side and it enabled him to provide his followers with sufficient arms to be fairly confident of victory in a showdown.

His friendship with De Souza therefore gave Gankpe his chance to break the deadlock in Dahoman politics. The alliance itself was designed to bring great benefits to both men. In return for his financial assistance, De Souza, upon the successful outcome of the coup, was to be rewarded—if his later position is a reliable guide to the terms of the alliance—by being given the designation of King's most trusted Councillor. He was to be created a

Dahoman Caboceer,¹ to be given full control of all Dahoman relations with the Europeans and, in order to buttress the fortune that made all this possible, he was to be given the monopoly of the export of slaves from Whydah. Basically, the arrangement was that Gankpe was to gain the throne while De Souza was to have his trading position safeguarded and his social aspirations satisfied.

Gankpe himself, before the actual coup, seems to have been, if not in hiding, at least in exile from the Court at Abomey.² His mother, Agossi-Eve, had already been sold into slavery by the King.³ De Souza, after his escape from Abomey, prudently stationed himself out of reach at Little Popo,⁴ where he awaited

1 A Portuguese term used in contemporary literature to describe an extremely important Fon dignitary.

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.38. Gankpe was at this time a hunter in the Cana area.

3 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.38

4 I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.292

developments. The chief organiser of the conspiracy was Gankpe's brother, Tometin. His other brothers, Adoukonou, Linkinehoun and Topa, and his sisters Sinloutin and Negban were also closely involved.¹ These five, along with Gankpe himself, were sometimes said to have even made a blood pact with De Souza.² Whether this was or was not the case, they certainly all worked together against Adanzan.

Apart from Gankpe, his family, and De Souza, the two most important men in the conspiracy were the Migan Atindebakou and the Mehou Atakin-So-Nou. The available evidence does not indicate clearly why these men and, indeed, many lesser Chiefs lent themselves to forwarding

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- 1 These men & women are sometimes presented as close relatives of Adanzan. In fact they were distant cousins of the King. See I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.5.
 - 2 P.Hazoume, Le Pacte de Souza au Dahomey, p.28: P.Canot, Memoirs of a Slave Trader, p.165: E.Dunghlas, E.D.XX, pp.46-7. Authorities differ as to who, besides De Souza and Gankpe, actually made the pact.

Gankpe's ambitions.¹ Possibly they inherited family feuds either with Adanzan's or Djossevo's branch of the royal family; possibly, too, they were attracted to Gankpe by his promising a more vigorous expression² of Fon anti-Yoruba feeling. Gankpe may have indicated that if he became King the payment of tribute to Oyo³ would stop. There are, however, indications that one of the issues which sparked off the coup was Adanzan's

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- 1 A.Le Herissé, L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey, p.315: Oral tradition relates only that Adanzan did not treat these Ministers of State with the respect and courtesy which was their due.
 - 2 The Fon may have been discontent with Adanzan's subserviance to Oyo. During his reign it is possible that the Oyo placed a garrison in the Fon city of Cana. See below, p.26.
 - 3 I.Akinjobin, op.cit., pp.277. E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.38-39: A.Le Herissé, op.cit. p.313. Oral tradition gives Gezo the credit of having first withheld the payment of tribute.

refusal to attack a vulnerable Yoruba town.¹ These indications are however so vague and contradictory that they cannot be considered reliable evidence.

The actual coup d'etat took place in 1818,^{probably} when all the Chiefs were gathered together in Abomey for the great festivals of July—August.² Adanzan was seized by the leading officers of state and then

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- 1 F. Forbes, Dahomey and the Dahomans, Vol. I., pp. 31 & 38: Vol. II., pp. 24-7: R. Burton, A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey (1862 Ed.) Vol. II., p. 401. Forbes writes that Adanzan's refusal to aid the dispossessed heir to the King of Jena led to Adanzan's overthrow. The name of the heir was Dekun. This name seems to link Jena with another Fon conquest, Inoubi (see below, p. 46) The tale does not in any other respect resemble the story of the conquest of Inoubi. Probably Forbes confused two traditions which were superficially similar in that they both centre around treachery and betrayal. Burton repeats Forbes story but adds that Jena was otherwise known as Lefou-Lefou, the name of another town sacked by the Dahomans. Since Forbes twice mentions Lefou-Lefou this seems unlikely. All in all the story is too confused for any major deduction to be based upon it.
- 2 Political action in Dahomey frequently took place at this time, when all the great men of the state were assembled. For an outline of these festivals see Chap. VI. p. 478-88

deprived of his sandals, the symbols of royalty. Gankpe, who took the 'strong' name of Gezo, was immediately acclaimed King in his place.¹ It was a sacriligious act and Gezo was expected by some to die within three days. The gods failed to intervene, however, and Gezo continued to enjoy the consolations of the unrighteous. Adanzan himself took his deposition philosophically and, indeed, settled down to live to a ripe old age in honourable confinement. It was his sons who put up a stiff resistance. Daapo, the Vi-Daho,² fought fiercely in Abomey where the Agrigone palace was destroyed before his aunt, Nagban,³ shot him and thus put an end to his intransigence. A number of Adanzan's other sons were killed in a struggle with a body of pro-Gezo troops under the command of the Migan. Still others fled to the Allada

1 E. Dunglas, E.D.XX., pp.44-8.

2 The Vi-Daho—the literal meaning of the word is grandson—was the Crown Prince. For an analysis of the role of the Vi-Daho in Fon politics, see Chap. VI. p. 434-40

3 This lady, whose name is sometimes written Na-Bekonsi had no reason to love Adanzan's family since the King had recently taken a swing at her with a sword. Le. Herisse, op.cit. p.315

area, where they long remained in hiding. Gezo's rival, Djossevo, was seized and killed.¹ Presumably his family either found safety in flight or were also murdered. A company of Amazons, perhaps the whole Amazon body, refused to recognise the usurper.² These Amazons, one and all, fought to the death for their legitimate sovereign.³ Opposition to Gezo's seizure was not therefore confined only to the royal family.

Oral tradition, in order to present Gezo's usurpation^a as a popular movement, tends to minimise the resistance encountered by the new regime. However,

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- 1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.47. Djossevo was arrested and was never heard of again.
 - 2 Dr.Repin, 'Voyage to Dahomey', Tour du Monde 1863: A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.66. Writing in the 1850s, Dr.Repin states that Gezo was brought to power by an Amazon revolt. This seems to be a misinterpretation of the fact that Gezo, after his accession, recreated the Amazon Corps. Le Herisse states that Gezo built the Amazon forces. This suggested that the whole existing Amazon body was destroyed at his accession.
 - 3 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.42-9. The above description of the events following Adanzan's deposition is based on Dunglas.

it is fairly obvious that Gezo only triumphed after a hard struggle. Moreover, even after his success in seizing the throne, the new King's position was by no means secure. What had been done could be undone. In the shifting sands of Fon political life the position of a usurper was bound to be even more difficult than that of a legitimate monarch. To secure his own safety he had to bring the turbulent ruling class under control and to re-establish the monarchy as the dominant force in Fon politics. It was to this end that Gezo devoted his long reign.

Immediately after the successful outcome of the coup De Souza gained his agreed reward: he became Chacha of Whydah. in origin the title was a purely personal one; it may have referred to De Souza's way of walking, to his physique, or to the manner in which he made his escape from Adanzan's Abomey.¹ The term soon became institutionalised and can be taken to describe De Souza's position as the high Fon dignitary who monopolised the

¹ A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.237:
E. Dunglas, E.D. XX, p.43.

Whydah slave trade and who controlled Dahoman relations with the Europeans. The Chacha's tenure of office was of course dependent upon Gezo's continuing as King.

The Chacha therefore continued to aid the King by providing both the wherewithal necessary to keep the great Chiefs happy and the weapons of war to control dissidents. The two men were still dependent on each other and as a result set about creating conditions which would give the regime security of tenure. The monarch's dependence on an outsider was of course a new development in Fon politics: it was, indeed, the factor that gave Gezo the opportunity of organising his realm so as to gather power into his own hands. Probably some of those very Chiefs who had supported the new King's bid for the throne would have hesitated if they had realised that Gezo, with De Souza's assistance, was intent on curbing their powers.

In the disturbed conditions prevailing at the time of his accession, Gezo's most urgent requirement was to have a reliable armed force at his immediate disposal. Accordingly, the King set about reorganising

the army. He seized the opportunity provided by the annihilation of the Amazons, or at least a section of the Amazons, to create a new body of female warriors¹ absolutely loyal to himself. This he did by building up a new corps composed entirely of young female captives who, because they were not of the Fon nation, would be loyal to the King alone. Although this was a long-term policy—the girls had to be trained from childhood—he ensured that the Amazon regiments, whom he made his own private bodyguard, would never be involved in Fon internal strife. In the meantime, on De Souza's advice, he built up a new body of Dahoman fighting men. These were formed into a trained regular or standing² army. They were probably equipped, at De Souza's expense, with the best available weapons of

1 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.66. Le Herissé, considers that the Amazon regiments were Gezo's original creation. This was not of course the case. The view is, however, no doubt a reflection of the fact that he completely reorganised the corps.

2 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.58.

war. Unlike the personal followers of the various Chiefs, or the forces raised by a general levy, this new body was always at the ready and owed allegiance directly to the King.¹ The regular army was evidently designed to deal as much with internal insurrection as external attack.

Perhaps the most difficult of Gezo's early problems was the question of how to reward his followers without weakening the monarchy. Many of these supporters were his own closest relatives; most of them probably expected to gain positions of great influence and importance. In the past it had been the policy of the Dahoman kings to exclude close relatives from any position of power. Members of the royal family might well use the powers of office to forward their own claims to the throne. Gezo must have been well aware that even those of his relatives who in the past had served him loyally might in the future be tempted to advance their own interests at the expense of those of the King. Nevertheless, he dared not slight

¹ For the organisation of the army see Chapter VI p.464-73

and thus alienate his royal followers. A way out of his dilemma was found by creating for those relatives high-ranking, but powerless positions of second-in-command to all the great civil and military factionaries.¹ Presumably De Souza also saw to it that these Princes did not lack material wealth. The aspirations of the royal family were thus satisfied without essentially weakening the King's position.

Although Gezo was able to avoid giving power in the bureaucracy to his relatives, he could not, at his accession, have had full control over the by that time largely hereditary officers of state. No doubt a number of officials had opposed the new King: it is possible that Gezo replaced these men. There is, however, no record of any such change and it is doubtful if Gezo was able to bring about a major reshuffle. Moreover, the most important bureaucrats, the Migan and the Mehoun, certainly remained in office. If the King could not change his Ministers he had to

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., pp. 33 and 44

see to it that a climate of opinion was created in which the majority of them would willingly co-operate with him.

As a result of the fact that his position at home was weak, Gezo, during the first few years of his reign, evidently avoided being involved in any foreign conflict. Peace at home and a rebuilding of the army were both essential preliminaries to a foreign war. Nevertheless, he did set about preparing for a break with Dahomey's overlord, Oyo.

Since it was necessary to prevent foreign meddling when Dahomey went to war with Oyo, Gezo's first move in foreign affairs was to win the friendship of Dahomey's most powerful neighbour, Ashanti.¹ This did not prove too

1 A.Boahen, 'Asante-Dahoman Contacts', Ghana Notes and Queries No.7, January 1965: J.Duncan, Travels in West Africa, Vol.II, p.274: R.Burton, op.cit., (1862 Ed.), Vol.I p.196, fn. Vol.II, p.402: J.Dupuis, Journal of a Residence in Ashantee, Vol.I.pp.244-5 and p.249: Vol.II pp.23-40. Gezo built a palace at Abomey, called Kumasi; various reasons have been given for this. The evidence has been studied by A.Boahen who concludes that the palace was so named to commemorate the friendly relations existing between the two states.

difficult. The two states had long maintained amicable relations and the advent of a new regime in Dahomey was not allowed to interfere with the long-standing friendship: a friendship which was, indeed, to endure until the coming of the Europeans. Gezo probably at about the same time, established good relations with the states of Borgou, to the north of Dahomey. Indeed, by 1820 he seems to have won general recognition for his new regime both within and without Dahomey. In that year he was able to play a major role in the election of a new King of Savalou. This state was traditionally a vassal of Dahomey but had a completely separate political organisation.¹ That Gezo could assert his power in an outlying area like Savalou certainly indicates that Gezo was everywhere recognised as at least de facto King of Dahomey.

It seems likely, however, that Gezo waited for a suitable opportunity before rushing into a war with

¹ J. Berge, 'Etude sur le pays Mahi', Bulletin de Commite Historique et Scientifique, A.O.F., Oct.-Dec. 1928, p.743.

Oyo. If Oyo delegates were demanding tribute he no doubt simply delayed giving an answer.¹ Probably the period of waiting came to an end in 1822 when the outbreak of the Owu wars must have made it nearly certain that Oyo was, at least for a time, quite unable to take any decisive action against Dahomey. Gezo then seems to have announced his determination never to pay tribute to Oyo. Indeed, two nineteenth century writers state that the King went further and destroyed an Oyo garrison which was at that time occupying Cana.² Although there is no other evidence either of the existence of such a garrison, or of a Fon attack upon it, this may well be merely a reflection of the fact that the Dahoman^rs were very unwilling to admit that they were ever so closely

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.319: E. Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.277. Both writers talk of Gezo's refusal to pay tribute. Even if Adanzan had already declined to pay, the Oyo would have resumed their demands when a new King came to the throne.

2 R. Burton, op.cit., pp.125-6: J. Skertchley, Dahomey As It Is, pp.118-9.

subjected to Oyo. If there was such an Oyo stronghold it could not have been long in existence, otherwise it was almost bound to have been mentioned in the relatively plentiful literature of the nineteenth century. Possibly, then, the Oyo placed a garrison in Cana during Adanzan's reign at a time when the Fon central government was at its weakest.¹ At any rate, whether or not Cana features in the story, the Fon, soon after their refusal to pay tribute, learned that the Oyo were assembling a hostile army at Gommbo on the left bank of the River Oueme. Rather than wait to be attacked, Gezo, with a force of 199 hand-picked men, fell upon and destroyed the invaders at Paouignan—a village to which the Oyo had been lured by a ruse.²

1 P.Morton-Williams, 'The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade, 1670-1830', Journal of the Hist.Soc. of Nigeria, Vol. III, No.I, Dec. 1964. This could fit in with the policy of colonisation towards the sea which Oyo was planning around this time.

2 A.Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.319-320
E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p
Dunglas incorporated many of the traditions Herisse associated with this battle into what would clearly appear to be a later campaign against a General called Adjinakou. See below, pp.37-41.

Since the victorious Fon army was so small and since the attacking force had formed so quickly it seems unlikely that the Yoruba force came directly from Oyo. The invading army may have been made up of the remnants of the Cana garrison. More likely it was made up, primarily, from various Yoruba units brought together by surviving Oyo consuls in neighbouring territories. Although the details of the campaign remain unclear it is certain that Gezo at this time put an end to Oyo claims to sovereignty over Dahomey.

The success of this move against the long-hated Yoruba oppressors must have greatly strengthened the new King's position. He made the most of this by instituting what became known as the Oyo customs—a yearly celebration at Cana to commemorate Dahoman independence—the highlight of which was the sacrifice¹ of a number of men dressed in the style of the Oyo. The Fon were obviously not going to be permitted to forget quickly the triumphs of the new regime.

1 J. Skertchly, op.cit., pp. 118-19:
R. Burton, op.cit., pp. 125-6.

Whatever military prestige Gezo had gained, he remained for at least the first decade of his reign heavily dependent on the Chacha, who was at the time reaping the benefits of his intervention in politics. His monopoly of Whydah's slave trade had given De Souza extraordinary opportunities to accumulate vast wealth. His control of Whydah gave him exclusive rights over the only port north of the line from which the Portuguese claimed to be able to trade freely in slaves. Even though no Anglo-Portuguese anti-slaving treaty, after that of 1810, mentioned Whydah, Portugal certainly seems to have considered that the slave trade there was legal for some time.¹ In spite of the fact that officers of the British Anti-Slave Squadron refused to acknowledge that Whydah was entitled to receive special treatment, De Souza was still issuing Portuguese licences permitting vessels to take on slaves at that port in 1821.²

1 This can be deduced from the fact that upon the dissolution of the Portuguese-Brazilian connection, the two powers had a long dispute as to which one inherited claims to Whydah.

2 F.O. 84/19, G.R. Collier to Admiralty, Lisbon 27.12.1821.

Doubtful though their value may have been, the Chacha's licences certainly appear to have fostered confidence in his reliability as a slave factor, and during the 1820s, at least, his trading operations were highly successful. In 1821 the Commodore of the British Anti-Slave Squadron estimated that 100 slaving vessels anchored annually off Whydah and Lagos.¹ In 1826 another British officer reported having seen 9 slaving vessels at one time lying off Whydah,² and in that same year 30 to 40 ships were said to have been seen at Whydah, waiting for the Chacha to supply them with slaves.³ In July 1828 De Souza even had an agent, in Freetown, buying up condemned slaving vessels for re-use⁴ and in July 1830 9 slaving ships were again seen together at Whydah.⁵ The officers of the British

1 F.O.84/19, G.R.Collier to Admiralty, Lisbon 27.12.1821.

2 F.O. 84/3 Commodore Bullen to Admiralty, Bight of Benin, 12.11.1826

3 F.O. 84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast 7.8.1850.

4 Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, p.196.

5 F.O.84/114, A.Gordon to Admiralty, 1.7.1830

Anti-Slave Squadron were well aware that De Souza's trading operations were extensive, but legal wrangles with Portugal prevented their being able to do much¹ to limit his activities.

Although even in the 1820s no longer a young man,² Francisco Felix remained active and vigorous, thoroughly enjoying his newly achieved status. As the King's ally he was of course powerful throughout Dahomey. In Whydah itself he ruled as an uncrowned king. Although³ the Yeovogun retained the right to deal with the internal affairs of Whydah province, politically and socially, the new King's ally was by far the most important man in the town.

De Souza's way of life was that of an

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- 1 C.Lloyd, The Navy and the Slave Trade, pp.39-60.
 - 2 F.O.84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast 7.8.1850. De Souza was reported, in 1849, to have been aged 81 when he died: he would therefore have been 52 in 1820.
 - 3 The Yeovogun was the Governor of Whydah province. See Chap.VI. pp. 448-449.

oriental potentate. At his death he left innumerable progeny. All his personal effects, his food, his clothing, his furniture, were of the best: all were imported from abroad. He intended to be spectacular even in death, his main provision for the hereafter being the possession of a silver coffin.¹ When in the company of Africans, he played, to the full, the role of a great Dahoman dignitary. He observed their customs, spoke their language, entered fully into their debates and seldom moved without an attendant host of praise singers and armed followers.

When with Europeans he switched immediately to the role of a great Brazilian gentleman. His hospitality was legendary, his manners exquisite: indeed, he carried this affectation further by attempting, where he could, to exert something of a humanitarian influence in Dahoman society.² This humanitarianism, of course, stopped short, of giving offence to those with

1 F.O. 84/775. Duncan to Palmerston 22.9.1849.

2 F.E.Forbes, op.cit., p.107:
J.Skertchly, op.cit., p.167.

whom he dwelt in harmony. What evidently mattered to him more than anything was that everyone should treat him with respect and deference. His life was dedicated to maintaining an aura of personal grandeur.¹

De Souza's display of splendour was not, however, purely ostentatious: it had the political purpose of giving a clear idea of the vast resources upon which the new regime could draw. The Court, at Abomey, also lived in a fashion made magnificent by De Souza's lavish donations.² Indeed, Gezo perhaps gained as much prestige from De Souza's expenditure on useless luxury goods as he did from his purchase of weapons of war.

1 F.O.84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast, 7.8.1850: T.Canot, Memoirs of a Slave Trader, pp.164-7. Most nineteenth century writers on Dahomey devote at least some space to De Souza's career. Hutton and Canot, however, knew him personally and they have left good accounts of him—accounts which are essentially in accord.

2 One famous example of the type of gift made by De Souza to the King was a large wheel-mounted vessel named El Rey du Dahomey. Gezo loved to have this trundled around the court. See F.E.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.II, p.8.

Even in the 1820s, however, at the height of his seeming prosperity, there was a basic flaw in De Souza's trading arrangements. This was more than that his capital was being constantly frittered away in ostentatious extravagances. It was simply that he was an incompetent business man. He kept neither an inventory nor accounts.¹ His success had come about as a result of extraordinary good luck rather than by either hard work or clear-sighted enterprise. His early prosperity was due to the fact that he happened to be in the right place at the right time. The maintenance of success was due to his monopoly of Whydah. He may have had a great deal of political sagacity; he certainly had little or no commercial acumen. Nevertheless, as the Chacha of Whydah he had won considerable fame; so great was his reputation that

1 T.Canot, op.cit., p.166: I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.292. Canot states that De Souza was illiterate. Akinjobin considers that a signature appearing on a document dated 1803 may be his. Considering his methods of conducting business it seems unlikely that De Souza was literate.

innumerable cargoes of goods were sent out to him from Brazil. These consignments were never refused. Everything that came for De Souza was landed on shore. Many of the goods landed on the Whydah beach were stolen; other consignments rotted away before they were collected. Many of the goods supplied to him were used to glorify his own establishment at Whydah. Much was sent to the King in Abomey. Few of these goods were ever paid for. De Souza simply could not provide sufficient slaves to satisfy the demand. Captains and supercargoes were continually kept hanging around Whydah. In order to prevent them pressing their claims too forcefully De Souza provided for them every type of diversion and amusement. Ships were said to have broken up on the beach while awaiting consignments of slaves from De Souza. Some slavers, in despair of ever getting cargoes, often simply sailed away. Obviously this state of affairs could not last for ever. The Chacha's reputation was however so considerable and the slave trade in the nineteenth century was such a risky business that the Brazilian importers were accustomed to long delays in

payment. De Souza was judicious in the despatch of what slaves he had, and kept making part payments on his debts. In the hope that he would soon pay the balance, his trading partners for long continued to give him credit.¹ De Souza's luck therefore held for some considerable time. For more than a decade he had the use of goods for which he had never paid. In spite of the fundamental insecurity of his commercial empire, therefore, his support enabled Gezo to lay the foundations of a new and powerful monarchy.

The nature of the Chacha's operations had of course some effect upon the policies of the new regime. The demand for slaves on the coast most certainly caused the King to indulge in numerous slave-trading ventures. Many of the slaves exported from Whydah were, however, probably

1 F.O.84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast 7.8.1850: T.Canot, op.cit., pp.164-7. This account of De Souza's business methods is based mainly on a letter by the mulatto merchant, Thomas Hutton (see f.n.3 p.59.). It is confirmed to a remarkable extent by Canot's observations.

bought, not captured.¹ In the early 1820s, at least, the King does seem to have confined his attention to the old Fon raiding grounds in the Mahi country to the north of Abomey. He could not raid far towards the west for fear of antagonising Ashanti. Neither do the Fon at this period appear to have raided into Egba or Egbado territory.² Probably, however, they did begin to make their power felt after the battle of Paouignan, not only in the Mahi country but in Yoruba country on their north-eastern frontier. This Fon activity, together with the increasing wealth of the King of Dahomey, seems to have excited the hostility

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- 1 H.Clapperton, Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, pp.83 & 123. Clapperton met a group of Dahomans who he later discovered to be slave traders.
 - 2 P.Morton-Williams, 'The Oyo and the Atlantic Trade' 1670-1830, Journal of the Hist. Soc. of Nigeria, Vol.III, No.I. December 1964. The eastern trade route from Oyo to Badagry was still functioning in the late 1820s. This makes it unlikely that the Fon had begun raiding eastwards far to the south of Ketu.

of Dahomey's nearest north-easterly neighbours, Save and Ketu. In the mid-1820s a Yoruba army, closely associated with the two states, proceeded to invade Dahomey.¹ This army was led by one Adjinakou the Elephant, sometimes described as Balagoun of Oyo.

Oral traditions give differing versions of the circumstances surrounding Adjinakou's attack.² They are however agreed on the fact that the invasion was instigated by Oyo in an attempt to re-assert her sovereignty over Dahomey. One of them, possibly to emphasise the Oyo connection, even incorporates the events of the Paouignan campaign into the story of Adjinakou. That the Fon would be happy to record a great and glorious victory over the massed might of the dreaded Oyo army is not surprising: such an event

1 Taking into consideration the fact that Save probably was conquered in the early 1830s, and that the Fon conducted a series of campaigns between that against Adjinakou and the final one against Save, the war against the former probably took place at some time in the mid-1820s.

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.56-7:
A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.321.

would reflect ^{credit} not only on the new regime but also on the nation at large.¹ Nevertheless, it does seem unlikely that Adjinakou's army was an official Oyo punitive expedition. In the first place it is doubtful if Oyo in the 1820s would have been capable of sending out a major expeditionary force. In the second place the Adjinakou war seems to have been an episode in a developing hostility between Dahomey and its north and north-eastern neighbours. The campaign was preceded by Fon attacks on Mahi towns, and led directly to a campaign against the Yoruba town of Save. It was in fact part of a series of events in which Oyo was not really involved.

Adjinakou's attack appears to have been made in an attempt to curb the growing power of the Fon. It

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.56-7.
The tales may or may not have been amalgamated by Dunglas's informants. In spite of this amalgamation, however, Dunglas's version contains a great deal of useful information.

was an attempt made by those who feared and felt threatened by this growing power—the Mahi, Savé, and Ketu. Incidental evidence provided by oral tradition tends to supplement this view: many of Adjinkou's troops were said to have come from Savé and Ketu: Adjinkou himself, although at one point described as Balagoun of Oyo, is also reported to have been a native of Savé: after his capture it is implicitly stated that he was impaled with his face turned towards Savé—presumably as a warning to the people of that state.¹

Another tradition records that Oyo sent against the Dahomans the 'Partisan, Adjinkou',² This description may indicate that Adjinkou was more the leader of an irregular war band, cut adrift by the breakdown of Oyo authority, than an official commanding a punitive expedition. Such a group of near-condottiers, especially if Adjinkou had Savé connections, might easily have been hired by the enemies of Dahomey and might or might not have had the blessing of Oyo.

1 E. Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.56-7.

2 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.320-21.

Whether or not the invaders came from Oyo, Adjinakou's attack certainly revived Fon memories of past humiliations at the hands of the Yoruba and led them to exaggerate the threat to their security. Both the Chacha and the King of Porto Novo advised Gezo to make the best peace he could with the invaders.¹ The King, however, refused to yield to the fears of his friends and absolutely declined to take measures to obtain peace. The enemy appears to have crossed the River Ouse while Gezo and his army were engaged in the siege of the Eshi hill-top town of Kakpaloko. The people of that town, perched on their hill, saw the invading army, while the Fon below could not. The ill-advised rejoicing of the besieged citizens forewarned Gezo of his enemies' approach and he was able to turn his army quickly upon the four thousand²

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., pp. 321-2.

2 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p. 321; E. Douglas, E.D.XX, p. 51. The figure of 4,000 is probably an exaggeration. Douglas states that the invading army had a strong cavalry arm. This is probably only an indication that memories of eighteenth century Oyo campaigns were incorporated in the version of the tradition he heard.

followers of Adjinakou. The Yoruba were evidently taken by surprise and were soon put to flight. Adjinakou himself was captured and put to an ignominious death.¹

The major enemy having been put out of action, the Fon resumed their expansion in Mahi country. The town of Kakpaloko, which had greeted the approach of Adjinakou with such glee, was the first to be destroyed by the triumphant Fon. Rather than fall into the hands of the Dahomans, its King, Dagnon, jumped to his death from the highest point within his town.² As the result of over-confidence amongst the Fon troops, however, a later Fon expedition against the Mahi proved to be a complete disaster. Two of the King's brothers, Assogbaou and Toffa, were captured and put to work as agricultural labourers. This humiliation was too much for Toffa, who, in a fit of

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- 1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., pp. 321-2:
E. Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp. 56-7.
Herisse has been followed in giving
the broad outline of events: Dunglas
provides the details.
- 2 E. Dunglas, op.cit., pp. 58-9.

of temper, attacked and killed the Mahi who supervised his labour. For this crime he was himself put to death.¹ This was felt as an insult, not only by the royal family, but by the whole Fon nation. A new, well-organised expedition was therefore quickly despatched northwards. The Mahi towns which had successfully resisted the earlier Fon attack fell in rapid succession before this renewed onslaught. The chief Mahi town, Hounjeroto, was captured: Assogbaou was freed. The stain on Dahoman honour was thus wiped out.²

Just as the early raids on Mahi country appear to have led to Adjinakou's attack, these further Fon advances led to open war with Savé. The King of that state, Ekutchoni, had sent thirty soldiers to the aid of Hounjeroto. These warriors had been killed by the Fon after the capture of the town. When he heard of this deed, Ekotchoni sent word to Gezo that he was on the point of attacking Yegon, a town lying between Save and

1 These events form the subject matter of Paul Hazoumes's novel, Doguicimi.

2 E.Dunglas, op.cit. E.D.XX, pp.64-5

Dahomey: he declared that he would not now stop there but would advance and destroy Abomey. The Fon, determined to forestall a Save attack, themselves sent an army to Yegon. The people of that town greeted the Fon as liberators, gave the Dahomey army a number of men to act as guides and even sent a detachment of their own troops with the Dahomans in their march on Save. Thanks to the expert guidance of the Yegon men, the Fon were able to make, from the north, a successful surprise attack at dawn on Save. The town was sacked and the skull of King Ekutchoni sent to Abomey, where it was later used as a drinking cup.¹ Although there is no direct evidence, it seems likely that Save, from that time, acknowledged Fon overlordship and began to pay tribute to Dahomey.

It seems probable that in the 1820s, or early 1830s, both Porto Novo and Ketu also began to pay tribute

1 E.Dunglas, op.cit., pp. 67-8. Dunglas considers that this campaign took place between 1830 and 1835. Since the attack on Save followed directly on that of Hounjeroto, it probably took place in the early 1830s.

to Dahomey. Both kingdoms had long been accustomed to claim the protection of Oyo. With the collapse of the Oyo empire and the emergence of Dahomey, temporarily at least, as the strongest of the states in the western part of the former empire, it was perfectly natural that they should do so. There is certainly no record of armed conflict between Dahomey and these states. Possibly Porto Novo had already drifted into this position of subordination to Dahomey before Adjinakou's attack. The King of Porto Novo is, in oral tradition, definitely linked with De Souza as being one of the friends who advised Gezo to make peace with the Yoruba at the time of that attack.¹ The tributary relationship probably became more definite as Dahomey's power increased. By the 1840s Porto Novo was certainly considered a vassal of Dahomey.² So, too, was Ketu. Probably after the defeat of Adjinakou and

1 E.Dunglas, op.cit., p.19, f.n.3

2 F.O.84/893, Commander Wilmot to Commodore Bruce, 'Harlequin', off Lagos, 11.2.1852.

the overthrow of Ekotchoni this state also came to acknowledge Dahoman supremacy.¹

Having consolidated their position in Savé, Ketu, and Porto Novo, the Fon, in the early 1830s, seem to have begun expanding into Egbadoland.² Their first move in this case was probably to attack and destroy the town of Inoubi. Two years later they dealt in a similar manner with Lefou-Lefou. These attacks may have been made simply in order to obtain slaves. They were more likely to have had the additional purpose of extending Fon power in the

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- 1 F.E.Forbes, op.cit., Vol. I p.20. Forbes declared that Ketu became a vassal of Dahomey as a result of an agreement, not as a result of war.
 - 2 P.Morton-Williams, 'The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade, 1670-1830', Journal of the Hist. Soc. of Nigeria, Vol. III December 1964. Morton-Williams considers that Oyo control of Egbadoland may have broken down soon after 1830.

area.¹ The King of Porto Novo, who had claim to sovereignty over a number of Egbado towns,

1 E.Dunglas, op.cit., pp.76-77:
A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.32:
S.Johnson, A History of the Yorubas, pp.227-30
F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I pp.31 & 38, Vol.II pp.24-7:
R.Burton, op.cit., Vol. II p.401.
Johnson states that the attack on Lefou-Lefou (Refou-Refou) took place two years before that of Inoubi. He tells how Inoubi was betrayed by an Oyo renegade named Dekun. Dunglas considers that these attacks formed part of a chain of events leading up to the Fon-Egba conflict of 1851: he suggests 1841 as the probable date of the attack on Inoubi. Dunglas also related how Gezo, according to an Amazon tradition, on the advice of De Souza, a little after the Alafin Atiba came to the throne, handed Dekun over to Oyo for punishment. (See Chap. II p.64). Now, Atiba became Alafin about 1837 or '36. Johnson states that Dekun lived for some time in Dahomey after the attack on Inoubi. If he was handed over shortly after Atiba's accession and he lived some time in Dahomey, Inoubi must have been destroyed long before 1841. Johnson, although he does not date Inoubi's betrayal by Dekun, places it in the chapter before the accession of Atiba. Le Herisse places the attack on Lefou-Lefou approximately two years after that on Kakpaloko. This seems to fit in more satisfactorily with Johnson's evidence. Forbes, and following him, Burton, also mentions Dekun and Lefou-Lefou. They seem to refer, however, to different events. (See above, p.7 f.n. 1).

may have drawn the Dahomans into the area by asking their assistance.¹ The Fon were, then, by the 1830s, extending their influence all along their eastern frontier.

In the first seventeen years of Gezo's reign the status of Dahomey vis-a-vis its neighbours had changed remarkably. Instead of being a state, nominally, at least, still tributary to the Yoruba, Dahomey was by the mid 1830s a totally independent power with considerable influence over the states on her borders. This change was of course largely due to events outside the influence of Gezo. The Fon monarch had been incredibly lucky in coming to power at a time when the Oyo empire was on the point of collapse. The fact that Dahomey, an outlying province, was already a well organised state, gave her an enormous advantage in the initial stages of the realignment of political authority in the territory of the former empire. The Yoruba

1 S.Biobaku, op.cit., p.31. One of the most important Egbado towns, Ado, was claimed in the 1840s to be a tributary of Porto Novo.

state of Abeokuta, which was to be Dahomey's major rival during the remainder of the nineteenth century, Only consolidated its position in the 1830s. Until it did, Dahomey had no powerful rival able to prevent her from gaining control over the lesser Yoruba kingdoms on her eastern frontier. Gezo's part in the changes should not, however, be under-estimated. That Dahomey was able to take advantage of the circumstances favourable to expansion was due to the fact that Gezo had, in that crucial period, imposed a fair degree of political unity upon the turbulent Fon aristocracy. Without this new and somewhat precarious unity it is doubtful if the Fon could have taken the decisive action they did. By the mid-1830s, Gezo had certainly established himself as one of the most outstanding leaders of the Fon nation.

Gezo had by then gained considerable prestige from his successful break with Oyo, from his military victories and from the reduction of numbers of neighbouring states to positions of dependence. This, along with the influence he obtained by being able to tap De Souza's wealth at will, made his place in Fon politics absolutely

secure. The simple passage of time aided Gezo's augmentation of political strength. By the 1830s his early measures must have been beginning to bear fruit. The first generation of loyally brought up Amazon bodyguards, for example, must have reached maturity. The natural removal by death of officers of state must have enabled Gezo to manoeuvre at least a few personal followers into key posts.¹ Moreover, the last vestige of impropriety attending Gezo's rule was finally swept away during the years of triumphant success. At the beginning of the reign, Gezo's mother, Agosse-Evo, had been sold into slavery by Adanzan. The ritually-important duties of the Queen-mother could not therefore be performed. Tradition relates, however, that at the time of Gezo's defeat of Adjinakou, his mother was brought back from the New World to Dahomey, and under the new name of Agontimme, she took up her

¹ Fon beaurocratic posts were normally hereditary in the family. A powerful king seems to have been able to influence the choice of a relative to succeed a defunct beaurocrat.

rightful place in the life of the Fon court.¹ Although it is difficult to accept that Agosse-Evo was really found, and did actually return to Dahomey, the fact that some woman, at this time of triumph for the regime, did begin to fulfil the ritual role of Queen-mother does seem to indicate that it was then that Gezo became recognised as uncontested King of all the Dahomans.

In fact, although ostensibly more securely on the throne in the 1830s than ever before, Gezo's ability to dominate Fon political life was even then beginning to be undermined. This was because De Souza was becoming more of an embarrassment than a support. The Chacha's long-suffering trading partners had awakened to the fact that he was a bad risk. As a result they gradually ceased to advance him credit. Whydah's trade therefore began to dry up. The decline was noted by all who had

1 E. Dunglas, E.D. XX pp.63-4 .
Dunglas obtained his information from the Whydah family of Dossou-Yevo. The founder of this family was the man who had been sent by De Souza to the Americas to find Agossi-Evo and obtain her release.

reason to visit Whydah. The officers of the British Anti-Slave Squadron, not unnaturally, attributed it to their own increasing vigilance.¹ French naval officers tended to agree.² British West African merchants, however, realised that this was not the true reason why the slave trade was abandoning Whydah.³ Anglo-Brazilians in other ports on the Bight were making their fortunes without interference: the slave trade in Lagos in the 1830s and 1840s reached unprecedented proportions.⁴

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- 1 House of Commons, 1842, XL (551) p.226. Evidence of Lt.R.Levigne.
 - 2 M.M.C.Senegal III, 5, Equisse Commerciale de la Cote Occidentale d'Afrique par. M.Broquant. Années, 1838 et 1839.
 - 3 House of Commons, 1842, XI (551) pp.36-37 F.Swanzy, an Englishman with extensive trading interests in the Gold Coast, considered that the two cruisers stationed between Cape St.Paul and Cape Formosa had little effect on the volume of the slave trade.
 - 4 D.Ross, 'The Career of Domingo Martinez on the Bight of Benin'. Journal of African History, Vol. VI, No.I, 1965.

Whydah's difficulties were in fact almost solely due to De Souza's incompetence and over-optimism. His creditors were, in the mid-1830s, becoming more and more insistent: their agents began to arrive at Whydah in droves. Since De Souza had kept no record of his transactions the only methods open to him, when dealing with these creditors, were either to deny flatly that he had ever received the goods or to retire out of their reach to Abomey. The New World slave importers, in desperation, eventually began to send their representatives to the King.

Gezo, of course, had no wish to embarrass De Souza, and so for a period he paid no attention to the complaints that reached him. Only when the flow of goods to Whydah almost ceased was he forced to heed them. Upon investigation it became obvious that De Souza was heavily in debt and that he had no means of paying his creditors. At a great conference held at Abomey, presided over by the King and attended by De Souza and his creditors' representatives, it was decided that the Chacha would have to give up his monopoly of the Whydah trade. The great man was reduced to the position of a Dahoman functionary levying tax,

at the rate of one dubloon per slave, on the exports of other merchants. Anyone who so wished could now trade at Whydah.¹ Although De Souza's creditors could have had little hope of ever getting their money back from him, they at least had the prospect of recouping their losses by themselves trading in Whydah in his place. To the King, of course, the most important part of the settlement was the possibility of there being again a revival of trade at Whydah.

By the late 1830s, then, De Souza was no longer able to fulfil his role of chief supporter of Gezo's power. He was unable to supply equipment to the Fon army, he could no longer make contributions to the royal treasury, and he ceased to be able to make gifts to the Chiefs. Ostensibly, as much deference as ever was paid to De Souza: it would have been impolitic, to say the least, to have admitted publicly the worthlessness of

¹ F.O.84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape Coast 7.8.1850.

of an alliance that had once been the main prop of the monarch. The De Souza connection had, nevertheless, ceased to be of much real value to Gezo. The loss was not immediately disastrous since the King's early successes had, for the time being, secured his position. In order to keep the Chiefs happy, and thus ensure continuing smooth functioning of his government, Gezo had nevertheless to maintain the momentum of his commercial and military successes. Any serious setback would threaten a return to the anarchy of the previous reign.

C H A P T E R I I

T H E S E A R C H F O R N E W A L L I E S

1835-1852

In the 1830s Gezo was faced with two separate although inter-related problems. First of all, in order to keep his Chiefs contented, he had to bring about a revival of Dahoman trade with the Europeans. At the same time, in order to maintain his ascendancy in Fon politics, he had to see to it that such a revival benefited the Fon monarchy. Ideally, what he must have wanted was to create a system not unlike that formerly operated by the Chacha—one whereby trade with Europe was used to forward the Monarch's own political aspirations. Although his first and most urgent task was to end the period of commercial stagnation, Gezo never lost sight of the fact that it was essential for the well-being of the monarchy that the

King, and not the over-mighty Chiefs, should benefit directly from the profits of the trade.

Unfortunately, in the last analysis, Fon trade with Europe depended upon the willingness of traders to visit Dahoman ports. The Fon could not force the merchants to come: all they could do was to try to encourage them. In the late 1830s this proved difficult. Although a number of Afro-Brazilian merchants settled in Whydah after the ending of the Chacha's monopoly, none of them seem to have become exceptionally prosperous. The great volume of the Bight's slave trade was now done in Lagos. Whydah's commercial position remained unsatisfactory. A French observer summed up the situation clearly in November 1844:

'Le commerce des esclaves, malgré les croiseurs, qui le fréquent, a toujours un grand développement sur c'ette fraction de côte; mais, à Whydah même, il s'est beaucoup ralenti. J'ai vu entièrement vides ces grands magasins de marchandises humaines, jadis toujours pleins.'¹

1 Extract from a report by Captain Monléon 12.11.1844. *Annales Maritimes et Coloniales* 1845, tom.III, p.505.

Dahomey's trading position only began to show a real improvement after 1846 when Gezo permitted the ex-Lagos slave dealer, Domingo Martinez, to set up trading posts on Porto Nove and Cotonou beaches.¹ In the meantime, Gezo attempted to revive both Dahomey's commerce and the fortunes of his supporters, the De Souza's, by giving the sons and friends of old Francisco Felix the monopoly of trade in a number of outlying ports.² These ports were created, presumably, in an effort to attract to the other Dahoman towns the trade which obstinately refused to return to Whydah. That the monopoly rights were given to the De Souza's shows how reluctant the King was to allow the profits of the trade to fall into the hands of any but his friends. Gezo must have feared that the open trading he was forced to

1 See below, pp.74-75.

2 F.O.2/4 Consul Fraser's Commercial Report, May 1852: F.O.84/873 T.G.Forbes to Bruce Whydah 18.1.1852.

accept at Whydah might provide one of his subjects with the wherewithal to destroy his regime.

The out-lying ports experiment was not a success, however, until 1846. The De Souza family remained associated with the Chacha's immense debts and, although the younger members of the family seem to have been mildly prosperous, no great revival of the family's fortunes took place.¹ The old trading system could not be restored even in a modified form. The King really needed a series of new European contacts.

The need for change was made all the more urgent by the fact that the remaining Dahoman slave trade was no longer supplying the goods which the Fon wanted. As a result of the increasing vigilance of the English anti-slave trade squadron, the Afro-Brazilians, although still able to despatch slaves, were having great difficulty in importing trade goods. They were therefore having to pay for their supply of slaves in gold. The Fon were

1 F.O.84/775, Duncan to Palmerston,
22.9.1849.

thus deprived of the supplies to which they had become accustomed.¹ For purely commercial as well as political reasons Gezo had to develop a new relationship with the Europeans.

Such a new relationship did get under-way when the palm-oil trade began to develop in the Bight of Benin.² In 1838 a mulatto trader from the Gold Coast, Thomas Hutton,³ established a palm oil collecting post at

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- 1 P.Verger, 'Les Afro-Américains', The Dos Santos Letters, Nos.6-83, quoted in C.W.Newbury, The Slave Coast and its Rulers, p.40: C.Lloyd, op.cit., p.47. The evidence comes from the 1840s. The situation must, however, have come into existence in the late 1830s after the Squadron began to seize Spanish and Portuguese vessels equipped for the slave trade.
 - 2 N.J.Stillard, The Rise and Development of Legitimate Trade in Palm Oil With West Africa., Birmingham M.A. Thesis 1938, p.78. Stillard gives 1841 as the date when Hutton first began to operate from Whydah.
 - 3 Thomas Hutton was a mulatto trader from the Gold Coast. He was a 'nephew' of the London palm oil merchant W.B.Hutton. Although his firm was independent, he worked in very close association with the London Huttons. He was drowned off Lagos in 1857.

Whydah.¹ He had not been active there for long before he was joined by the Marseilles House of Régis. This French firm established itself in Dahomey in 1841, when its founder, Victor Régis, obtained permission from the French government to set up a trading post in the former French slaving fort at Whydah.² Gezo welcomed the traders, presumably realising they might be capable of supplying the demand that the slavers were no longer able to meet.³ The Afro-Brazilians, apart from the Chacha, fearing that increased contact with the legitimate trade would mean closer supervision by the Squadron, at first made

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- 1 C.O.96/13, T.Hutton to Lt.Gov.Winniatt, Cape Coast 22.12.1847: House of Commons Papers 1842, XI (551) p.667 evidence of W.B.Hutton. 1838 was the date Thomas Hutton gave. His uncle, W.B.Hutton, was more vague and sometimes gives different dates.
 - 2 M.M.C.Senegal IV, 42b, Régis to Marine, Marseilles 8.9.1841: B.Schnapper, 'La Politique et le Commerce Français dans Le Golfe de Guinea, 1838-1871, p.164-165.
 - 3 House of Commons Papers 1842, XI (551), p.116 evidence of Capt.H.Seward. Seward had heard of the Chacha offer to provide palm oil in exchange for goods. The fact that he no longer exported slaves probably influenced him in this.

the collection of palm oil as difficult as possible. Nevertheless, in spite of opposition, and in spite of the small amount of palm oil immediately available, the two European firms, with the encouragement of the King, persevered and gradually increased their Whydah¹ trade.

Commercial difficulties were not the only problems demanding Gezo's attention at this time. New developments in Yorubaland were making essential a reconsideration of Fon policy in that territory. In the place of the crumbling Oyo empire there had emerged a series of strong, if quarrelsome Yoruba successor states. The era of easy Dahoman eastward expansion was at an end: the Fon now came into contact with a series of new powers created by the strife of civil war. One of the most important, the Egba state of Abeokuta, was placed so as to present a latent challenge to the position of

1 C.O.96/12, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Aghway, 7.12.1846: W.B.Hutton to B.Hawes, Watling Street 6.7.1847. In his first year, T.Hutton was able to export only enough palm oil to supply half a cargo for one small boat. B.Schnapper, op.cit., p.172.

supremacy which the Fon had lately established in the south-western part of the former empire. In 1835, at Osogbo, the Egba had won a decisive victory over Ibadan and had established themselves, under the leadership of an outstanding chief named Shodeke, as one of the most powerful units in the area's new political system. In the later 1830s Abeokuta continued to grow in power and population,¹ and it soon became clear that in order to guard her trade routes to the sea the new state was likely to expand towards the coast.

Unfortunately, expansion southwards was liable to bring the Egba into direct conflict with the Fon, who had already established their suzerainty over Porto Novo and much of south-west Yorubaland. The Fon in the late 1830s and 1840s seem to have had the intention of extending their domination even further along the coast, Presumably they felt that they might thus solve their economic difficulties. This must have been their aim in 1847 when they took part in an unsuccessful attack

1 S.O.Blobaku, The Egba and their Neighbours, p.23-5.

on Lagos.¹ It was probably also their aim when they enforced general recognition of their possession of the beach as far as Badagry.² They probably wished to interrupt the trade routes to their major rival, Lagos: they may have even wished to reduce that town to a tributary position. At any rate, Fon ambitions of expansion to the east, and Egba ambitions of expansion to the south, seemed likely to come into direct conflict.

According to Aboman tradition, the Fon early recognised the danger inherent in the emergence of Abeokuta. Gezo, on the advice of the Chacha, in the late 1830s, established friendly relations with the Alafin, Atiba, so that if Dahomey found herself at war with Abeokuta, Oyo would not take the opportunity

1 C.O.96/12, Extracts from a correspondent at Badagry to W.B.Hutton; enclosed in W.B.Hutton to B.Hawes, London 3/9/1847.

2 F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I P.11. Forbes noted that Dahomey claimed the beach at Porto Novo and Badagry. European traders at these ports had to pay tribute.

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to attack. The focus of Fon attention thus passed from her north-eastern to her south-eastern frontier. War between the Fon and the Egba did not, however, break out as soon as might have been expected. Gezo himself was evidently reluctant to risk a major conflict at a time when his supremacy in Dahomey depended almost entirely upon maintaining his reputation for success. He seems, therefore, to have attempted to restrain his chiefs' expansionist ambitions. Luckily, Shodeke also proved unwilling to go to war: he probably did not wish to add another state to the active enemies of Abeokuta.² Gezo and Shodeke therefore concluded what amounted to a non-aggression pact.³ However, since this pact depended entirely upon the ability of the two leaders to restrain

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.77. Good relations were established by returning to Oyo the traitor, Dekun, who had betrayed Inoubi. This was done soon after Atiba became Alafin (1836 or '37). See above, Chap.I, p.46.

2 S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., p.27.

3 F.O.84/892, Gezo to Queen of England, 7.9.51: Letter written by Consul Fraser. R.F.Burton, op.cit., (1864 edition) Vol.II, p.403.

their warlike followers, the peace of south-western Yorubaland remained precarious.

For the time being Gezo was free to devote his attention to the twin problems of commerce and relations with the Europeans. In these fields new possibilities were certainly opening up: the development of Whydah's palm oil trade was not the only factor drawing Dahomey into the observation of Europe. As a result of the circulation of new ideas on methods of destroying the slave trade, Gezo, in the 1840s, began to receive a stream of English visitors. These men proceeded to draw the King's attention to what the development of the palm oil trade could mean for Dahomey. The first of these was a missionary, Thomas Birch Freeman,¹ who in September, 1842, followed immigrant Sierra Leone

1 T.B.Freeman was a Methodist missionary fifty years on the Gold Coast. His father was West Indian. For his early career see G.E.Metcalf, Maclean of the Gold Coast, pp.235-6.

Creoles to Abeokuta.¹ This visit aroused the jealousy and suspicion of the Fon and, in order to placate them, Freeman also paid a visit to Abomey.²

While in the capital the missionary was treated in an exceptionally friendly manner, and seems to have won the complete confidence of the King. In the course of several interviews which Freeman had with Gezo, he outlined the current British view of commerce and progress in West Africa. He of course urged the King to abandon both slaving and the practice of human sacrifice. Besides this, however, he evidently opened the King's mind to the possibility of laying out palm oil, coffee and cotton plantations and using their products to purchase the goods previously bought with slaves. He

1 For an account of the immigration of Creoles see Christopher Fyfe, op.cit., pp.227-8: J.F.A.Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-91, pp.25-31: J Herskovits Kopytoff, A Preface to Modern Nigeria, pp.24-60: S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., pp.25-6.

2 Rumours had been circulating that Freeman intended to build a fort at Badagry and that the missionary was hostile to the Fon.

in fact introduced Gezo to the idea of systematically exploiting the agricultural wealth of his country. Such a programme would, according to Freeman, win English approval and lead to England taking a friendly interest in Dahoman affairs.¹

Gezo was evidently very impressed by Freeman and, in a letter to Queen Victoria, stated, that although Dahomey was a slaving, not an agricultural nation, further English visitors would be very welcome to Abomey. The King wished to know more of what England wanted of him. He added that he would very much like to see the English fort at Whydah reoccupied and British ships unloading cargoes of cowries, guns and gun-powder

1 T.B.Freeman, Journal of Various Visits, pp.235-61. M.M.S. British West Africa, 4. Typescript Ms. by Freeman. Paul Ellingworth, 'Christianity and Politics in Dahomey', Journal of African History, Vol.V, 1964. There is no written record of these conversations with the King. It is, however, more than likely that he talked in this fashion: he certainly did so later. A letter which the King had written to Queen Victoria certainly indicates that Freeman's words were on these lines. See below, p.68, f.n.1.

in Whydah harbour.¹ Gezo was evidently beginning to see a solution to his problems in the development of a new relationship with England. Possibly he even visualised the English taking the place of De Souza as the main prop of his regime.

Freeman, too, was pleased with the outcome of the talks he had had in Abomey. On returning to the Gold Coast, he gave it as his opinion that Gezo, if well compensated, might even abandon the slave trade.² This was a somewhat over-optimistic view. Nevertheless, it is evident that from this point onwards, Gezo, in order to gain the benefits which Freeman promised him, was prepared to bargain over the regulation of the trade.

The missionary's views on Gezo's willingness to co-operate with the British were enthusiastically received both by the President of the Gold Coast Council, ²McClean, and by Commander Foote of the West African Squadron. Foote even drew up an anti-slave trade treaty and a treaty of

1 C.O.96/2. Gezo to Queen Victoria, Abomey 13.3.1843. See also Ellingsworth, op.cit.

2 C.O.96/2. Freeman to ²McClean. Mission House, Cape Coast 11.5.1843.

amity and commerce for the King to sign. In return for giving up slave importing Gezo would have received an annual subsidy for two years. ^bMc_flean, spurred on by Freeman, also determined to take positive action. Out of the Gold Coast's limited resources he sent a sergeant to reside at Badagry. The sergeant's instructions were to protect the Sierra Leoneans and their missionaries and to co-operate with the Squadron in preventing the export of slaves from Badagry. He even wished to establish a similar post at Whydah. Thomas Hutton, however, frustrated by the slavers' obstructionist attitude, and presumably fearing further difficulties, pointed out that if England wanted to prevent slaving by force, at Whydah, a large garrison would have to be established there. This ²Mc_flean could not do. The Colonial Secretary, reluctant as ever to extend English commitments, noted that the King had not at any time explicitly stated that he was prepared to give up slave exporting. The projected post was not therefore established. Freeman, who had expressed a desire to return to Abomey as soon

as possible, was in the event recalled to England on mission business.¹ For the time being, therefore, the English did not follow up this hopeful re-opening of relations with Dahomey.

Although Freeman's visit was not immediately repeated, it had nevertheless far-reaching consequences. It was the factor which set off a chain of reactions that, within two decades, revolutionised Fon economic and political life. Soon after Freeman's departure, Gezo seems to have begun the systematic production of palm oil for export. Moreover, he also appears to have begun to cut down on the number of people sacrificed each year in Dahomey. First of all he gained control of the numbers sacrificed by forbidding the Chiefs to undertake this rite. In the future such ceremonies

1 C.O.96/2. Stanley to Hill, 25.11.1845 & 16.12.1845: C.O.96/2. Mclean to Stanley, 20.5.1843 & 16.9.1843: C.O.96/2. T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, 28.2.1843: C.O.267/182, Foote to Herbert, 15.5.1843: GeE.Metcalf, op.cit., pp.301-4.

were reserved for the monarchy alone. Having taken this action, he then gradually limited the number of human sacrifices made in Abomey. The King also established a Court of Appeal at Abomey, so that the monarch was in future in full control of all capital punishment carried out in Dahomey.¹ The timing of these actions indicates that Gezo was mainly concerned with improving relations with England. Nevertheless, this concentration of authority in the hands of the monarchy also served Gezo's long-term aim of increasing the royal power at the expense of that of the Chiefs.

Gezo was not, however, able to pursue his schemes for internal reform. The rise of Abeokuta in the 1830s had not led, as might have been expected, to an immediate clash between the Fon and the Egba. Indeed, in 1840, the Fon were able to transfer, briefly, their attention to their western frontier, where they conducted a successful raid on the town of Atakpa~~me~~.² The peace between the

1 J.Duncan, Travels in West Africa, Vol. I p.258: Vol.II p.305: Methodist Missionary Society, British West Africa, 4: Freeman's Mss., folios 286, 310, 313.

2 F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I pp.16-17

Fon and the Egba in south-western Yorubaland nevertheless remained insecure, and relations soon began to deteriorate. The ambitious Egba continued to seek for a direct route to the sea and as a consequence began to penetrate into Egbado and Awori territory which owed some allegiance to Dahomey. In 1842 the Egba attacked and took the Egbado town of Otta. Although both Lagos and Ibadan offered to assist Otta, the Fon respected their pact with Egba and made no attempt to aid the town. A number of Egba Chiefs wished to continue the war and advance on Ado, an Awori ally of Otta. Ado was, however, a tributary of Porto Novo and therefore indirectly under the protection of Dahomey. Shodeke, probably in an attempt to avoid provoking a clash with the Fon, did not try to take the town but contented himself with a desultory seige.¹ Be that as it may, the Fon considered not unnaturally that by these operations the Egba had broken the pact,² and

1 S.O.Biobaku, op.cit, p.27

2 F.O.84/920, Fraser to Clarendon,
Lagos 30.5.1853.

thus offered provocation to Dahomey.

Gezo did not move precipitately. In spite of the pressure from his Chiefs he delayed for two years before taking action. Nevertheless, by 1844 he seems to have felt that the Egba could no longer be left unchallenged to systematically undermine Dahomey's power in south-west Yorubaland. In that year he set out with his army to relieve the beleaguered town. This reluctantly undertaken expedition was not a success. An Egba force, under the Balogun of Igbein, intercepted the Fon army at Imogulu and drove it back in disarray to Dahomey. Gezo even lost his war charms, umbrella, and stool in the fight.¹ The Fon had received a considerable setback—one which, it seems, many of the more powerful Dahomans were determined to avenge. Gezo and the more sober of his Chiefs must now, if not before, have realised that the Fon were facing by far the greatest threat to their power

1 S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., p.31.
E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.77-7.
Abouan and Ketu traditions relate that Imugulu was a sham fight. This seems to be disproved by Gezo's loss of his treasures.

since their defeat of Adjinakou many years before.

All the developments of the mid-1840s were not, however, to the King's disadvantage. His policy of fostering the trade of Dahomey's outlying ports began to bear fruit after an Afro-Brazilian slaver named Domingo Martinez was given monopoly rights over the Porto Novo and Cotonou beaches.¹ Unlike the 'older' Afro-Brazilian slavers, Martinez was not averse to dealing in palm oil. In fact he amalgamated the two trades very successfully. He was able to make large profits from exporting slaves, while at the same time his participation in the palm oil trade enabled him to supply the goods which his customers demanded. His example soon convinced the other slavers that they had little to lose and much to gain from the extension of

1 D. Ross, 'The Career of Domingo Martinez on the Bight of Benin' Journal of African History, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1965: C.W. Newbury, op.cit., p. 48. Newbury considers that Martinez established himself in the 1820s at Porto Novo and in the 1840s at Adjuda between Badagry and Lagos.

the palm oil trade. In 1846 the whole lagoon system from the Popos to Badagry became fully open to that trade.¹ The ports on Cotonou and Porto Novo beaches became the twin centres of a trading system incorporating both the slave trade and the palm oil trade. Martinez himself became the leading figure in the trade of the Bight.² Freeman's effort to increase the cultivation of palm oil had therefore the unforeseen result of greatly benefiting the slave traders.

As a result of these changes in the coastal trade, Gezo's financial position in the latter 1840s was considerably easier than it had been in the first half of the decade. He benefited both from the general increase in trade, and from the 'presents' which Martinez, in order to keep in the King's good graces, frequently sent to Abomey. Nevertheless, although Martinez' decision to establish himself on Fon territory considerably aided

1 C.O.96/12, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Aghwey 7.12.1846.

2 D.Ross, 'The Career of Domingo Martinez on the Bight of Benin' Journal of African History, Vol. VI, No.I 1965

the royal finances, Martinez never played the political role in Dahomey that De Souza had ceased to be able to play. Martinez amassed great wealth, but not nearly such great wealth as De Souza had been able to acquire in the freakish conditions of the 1820s. Moreover, Martinez, unlike De Souza, was not committed to the support of Gezo's regime, and was not prepared to donate a considerable proportion of his income to maintaining the King in power. He had intervened in Lagos politics;¹ but having had his fingers burned there, he presumably determined never again to take sides in the affairs of the state in which he operated. In Dahomey he remained simply a trader willing to work with any regime which left him in peace.

The increase in revenue therefore made no difference to Gezo's need for political support from outside his realm. Indeed, the escalation of the Fon quarrel with Abeokuta was making such support more and more necessary. After Freeman's departure the King had no further contact

1 *ibid.*

with England until 1845,¹ when, without any official encouragement, John Duncan, a former officer in the Life Guards and a survivor of the 1841 Niger expedition, visited Dahomey in the course of a journey undertaken on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society. Duncan found himself exceptionally well-treated in Dahomey and was even allowed to travel in the interior of the country—a privilege seldom granted to Europeans.² Gezo seems to have been doing his best to attract English attention to his country. He was now particularly anxious to open

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- 1 C.O.96/4, Hill to Stanley, Cape Coast 16.5.44 and 16.11.44: C.O.96/6, Hill to Stanley, Cape Coast Castle 26.2.45, enclosing Commodore Jones to Hill 6.12.44: C.O.96/8, Memo on Whydah by Viscount Canning 23.4.45, enclosing undated C.O. note from Stephen to Canning. In 1844 the Lt. Governor of the Gold Coast tried to organise an attack on Whydah, which he considered a nest of slavers. The Foreign Office had hopes of ending slaving there by negotiation while the Squadron considered that an attack would be difficult. Nothing came therefore of this proposal.
 - 2 D.J.Duncan, Travels in Western Africa, London, 1847. The deference with which he was treated is reflected in what is his nevertheless poor account of his visit.

direct relations since the Egba, through the Church Missionary Society missionaries, were, in the 1840s, forging more and more intimate links with the English.¹

The King achieved his aim. After his departure from Abomey, Duncan sent a series of communications to the Lt. Governor of the Gold Coast, and to the Colonial Office, indicating that the King of Dahomey was anxious to make further contacts with Britain and might even be prepared to abolish the slave trade.² Although these letters were greeted with suspicion at the Colonial Office,³ Lt. Governor Winniett of the Gold Coast welcomed Duncan's initiative enthusiastically and, without consulting the Colonial Office, set out, accompanied by T.B. Freeman, in March 1847, for Abomey.

1 S.O. Biobaku, op.cit., pp. 27-37:
A.J.F. Ajayi, op.cit., pp. 38-40
& p. 66.

2 C.O. 96/7. J. Lilley to Stanley,
Cape Coast 9.12.1845: C.O. 96/10,
Duncan to C.O., Middlesex 17.8.1846.

3 C.O. 96/7. Minute by Stephen on
J. Lilley to Stanley, Cape Coast
9.12.1845: C.O. 96/7 Winniett to
Gladstone, 23.7.1845.

Winniett's aim was to find out exactly how far Gezo was prepared to co-operate with Britain. In a spirit of optimism he took with him the two treaties which Foote had drawn up on Freeman's return from his first visit to Abomey.¹

Gezo received the Lt. Governor and his party with every mark of respect, and at once signed the treaty of Amity and Commerce. He declared, however, that since the slave trade had long been the main-stay of the Dahoman economy, he could not agree to abolish it immediately.² He wanted a year in which to reflect on Winniett's proposals and asked that some Englishman might visit him again in a year's time.³ Presumably the King wanted to see how much room he had for manoeuvre by testing the feelings of his Chiefs when they assembled for the annual

1 C.O.96/11, Winniett to Earl Grey, Cape Coast 22.2.47.

2 Foote had offered a subsidy of £700: the C.O. reduced this to £416.

3 C.O.96/11, Winniett to Earl Grey, 12.5.47.

customs. WinniETT fell in with the King's wishes and in the next year, again on his own responsibility, sent the Secretary of the Gold Coast Council, Brodie Cruikshank, to Abomey. The King's investigation of his Chief's views must have reinforced his opinion that Dahomey could not abandon the slave trade overnight. Gezo refused to sign the anti-slave trade treaty, saying that such trade was still essential to the economic well-being of his country. In spite of all this, however, the Fon monarch insisted that he wanted to establish closer relations with England.¹ What he evidently wanted was to establish a compromise—perhaps that he should receive some of the promised advantages if he consented to the regulation of the trade.

The conversations which Gezo had with these two officials, and the letter to Queen Victoria which resulted from them, throw a good deal of light on the Kings's

1 C.O.96/13, Brodie Cruikshank's report, Whydah 9.11.1848: Brodie Cruikshank to Lt. Governor WinniETT, Cape Coast 18.11.1848. Report partly reprinted in C.W. Newbury, 'British Policy Towards West Africa', Selected Documents, 1786-1874, pp. 342-4

political objectives.¹ What the King seems above all to have wanted was to draw the English into Dahoman affairs in support of his monarchy. He may even at this time have visualised giving up the slave trade, if this was the only way in which he could obtain English assistance. He could not, however, rely upon sufficient support from his Chiefs to make such a policy immediately possible. Both he and his Chiefs were willing, however, to see the slave trade destroyed in every other port in the Bight except Whydah. The extinction of that trade in the other ports would put an end to the growth of wealthy coastal states like Lagos. If Whydah became the only slaving port in the Bight of Benin, Dahomey was bound to become more wealthy and therefore more powerful than the other coastal states—and might, indeed, be able

1 C.O.96/13, Brodie Cruikshanks report, Whydah, 9.11.1848: Brodie Cruikshank to Lt. Gov. Winniett, Cape Coast 18.11.1848. Report partly reprinted in C.W.Newbury, 'British Policy Towards West Africa', Selected Documents 1786-1874, pp.342-44. C.O.96/11 Winniett to Grey, Cape Coast Castle 12.5.1847: C.O.96/13, Gezo to Queen Victoria, Abomey 3.11.1848.

to control them. The Fon Chiefs, on the understanding that this would come about, would have been agreeable to the regulation of Whydah's slave trade.

Gezo himself evidently viewed the regulation of the slave trade as simply a preliminary to the effective English reoccupation of Fort St. James at Whydah, and the placing at Abomey of a permanent English Resident who would act as a royal adviser. The King evidently wanted the English to take the place of De Souza; Gezo and the English Resident in Abomey would work out policies which would be mutually beneficial and would together then enforce them; the English control of external trade and the power of the English garrison at Whydah would ensure that this could be done.

It seems likely that the King even foresaw the ultimate abolition of the slave trade. He could not of course have obtained the support of his Chiefs in this: after all, they did not share his main objective—the building up of the power of the monarchy at the expense of that of the Chiefs. The Fon slave trade would only be ended if it appeared to the majority of the most powerful Chiefs that it was too dangerous for

Dahomey to continue it, or if Gezo could rely on English support to over-ride the opposition of his Chiefs. The first eventuality was not dreamt of in 1848: the second depended upon an English force already being within Dahomey. It is more than likely that Gezo was astute enough to realise that the English, once established in Fort St. James, would press for the total abolition of the slave trade. That he did understand this, and set about making it possible to co-operate with the English, is indicated by the steps he took to establish the Fon economy on a secure agricultural foundation.

Under the influence of Freeman and Martinez, Gezo had already fostered the growth of agricultural production. He now set about establishing palm oil plantations throughout the country. In doing this he altered the economic balance of the country to the detriment of its chief port, Whydah. Most of the new plantations were situated on the edge of the Abomey plateau, between Abomey and Daba, a river port on the River Oueme. The products of these plantations could be transported fairly easily down the River Oueme to Lake Hokue. They found their outlet to the sea at Cotonou, Godomey or Porto Novo. Other plantations lay near the river Cuffo in the west of Dahomey. As a port

for the export of palm oil, Whydah tended to be bypassed. There were of course also a number of plantations in the Whydah area, but most of them seem to have been served by the Afro-Brazilian merchants.¹ The bulk of Dahomey's palm oil exports in the future came to be exported down the rivers on the eastern and western frontiers of the Fon state.

The construction of these plantations not only altered the balance of economic strength in Dahomey, it also changed the racial composition of the state. The new royal plantations were to be worked by slaves captured in the various Fon raids on their neighbours. There had for long of course been domestic slaves in Dahomey, but the status of these plantation slaves was entirely different. They could not be absorbed into Fon society: there were now, therefore, groupings of hostile peoples at various points all over Dahomey. Their hostility to the state provided a fine opening for internal subversion.² It seems likely that changes such

1 F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I pp.114-6 & p.123

2 See Chap. III p. 141-42

as these were not to the taste of all the great Fon Chiefs. Fear that Gezo's new policies were likely to endanger Dahomey at this time probably began to produce opposition to the King himself.

Less dramatically, but perhaps equally importantly, the King, in 1848, spurred on by the pressure of famine, took steps to ensure that Dahomey's actual production of food increased. In that year, on the advice of the Chacha, Gezo ordered that manioc be cultivated throughout the country. This crop had been introduced into the coastal areas by Afro-Brazilians of Whydah and from this date onwards was to play a large part in nourishing the inhabitants of the interior of Dahomey.¹ Gezo had set about making his country agriculturally self-sufficient. If the slave trade were to be abandoned the Fon economy would survive.

The English of course simply wanted the slave trade abolished as quickly as possible. They did not understand Gezo's ambitions for them and they had no desire to play

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.79.

a part in the politics of the coastal area. Winniett nevertheless thought that garrisoning the fort at Whydah and sending a Resident to Abomey would be likely to bring about the ending of the slave trade. Cruikshank, however, influenced by the Chacha, took the view that Gezo benefited far too much from the slave trade ever to willingly end it.¹ Cruikshank therefore reported that the slave trade from Dahomey could be ended quickly only if coercion were used against that state. The operation of a two-year blockade—which was the only type of coercion he thought might succeed—would, he feared, harm the developing palm oil trade and involve England in disputes with foreign powers. Slaves from Dahomey might also be exported from other ports on the Bight. The use of force would, he thought, do more harm than good. England would therefore have to work

1 Winniett estimated Gezo's income from the slave trade at £10,000 per annum. Cruikshank, who obtained his information from De Souza, put it at £60,000. The Chacha must have known that if the English did as Gezo wished, his own residual power would disappear. He seems, therefore, to have attempted to persuade Cruikshank that Gezo would never abandon the trade.

for gradual improvement. He recommended only that someone should be sent to Whydah to advise the King and show him how to develop the agricultural wealth of his country.

The Colonial Office had not been pleased with Winniett's initiative.¹ His move might have led to England taking precipitate action. After some deliberation it was decided that although the Treaty of Amity and Commerce would be ratified, the Lt. Governor's other proposals should not be put into operation.² This was an unfortunate decision for Gezo. If the English had done as Winniett suggested and appointed an English Resident in control of a garrison at Fort St. James, such an official would probably have been drawn into Dahoman affairs in support of Gezo. The slave trade might even have been fairly rapidly abolished. Even Cruikshank's less radical proposals proved little more attractive to the Colonial Office than those of Winniett.

1 C.O.96/11, Colonial Office to Foreign Office 19.11.47.

2 C.O.96/13, Colonial Office Minute on Despatch, Winniett to Grey, Cape Coast Castle 7.2.1848.

Lord Palmerston at the Foreign Office, however, had become impatient of the Colonial Office reluctance to act, and he had now determined that the Foreign Office would move alone.¹

Early in 1849 Lord Palmerston appointed John Beecroft² to the post of British Consul in the Bights of Benin and Biafra. The new Consul, who had for long been a resident on the Coast, was given the duties of preventing quarrels between the African Chiefs and promoting legitimate trade as a replacement for the slave trade. In May, 1849, Palmerston made an appointment concerning Dahomey even more closely. Earlier that year John Duncan, who had previously requested a government post at Whydah, informed the Foreign Office that he was about to return to Dahomey. Palmerston seized this opportunity to appoint him, under the orders of Beecroft, as unpaid British Vice-Consul at Whydah.³ Duncan, who took up residence alongside Hutton's

1 R.J.Gavin, Palmerston's Policy towards East and West Africa. Cambridge Ph.D. 1959.

2 K.O.Dike, 'Beecroft, 1835-49', Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria. Vol. I December, 1956.

3 F.O. 84/775. Memo to Lord Palmerston, 4.5.1849: F.O.84/775. Lord Palmerston to John Duncan, 28.5.1849.

employees in the Fort St. James at Whydah, was given the general task of promoting trade and civilisation within the Kingdom of Dahomey.

Although the appointment of a Vice-Consul was by no means all that Gezo wanted of the English, the King does seem to have been gratified by what he must have regarded as the first tangible sign of Britain's willingness to co-operate with him. He therefore requested that Duncan and a naval officer visit him in Abomey in order to further discuss Anglo-Dahoman relations.¹

Duncan then proceeded to pay a second visit to Abomey, this time taking with him Lt. F. Forbes of H.M.S. Bonetta. Although cordial relations were established between the visitors and the King, nothing concrete resulted from the mission. During the negotiations Duncan again informed the King that Britain wished him to put an end to the slave trade and again listed the benefits which would accrue to him if he did so. Gezo again stated that he could not do so at once. It seems that the King determined to prove to the British that the opinions of his

¹ F.O. 84/775, Duncan to Palmerston
22.9.49.

Chiefs, and the high expenses of his Court, obliged him to maintain the slave trade, at least for a time. The ambassadors were therefore requested to return to Abomey at the time of the customs, in six months.¹ They would then see that the King could not possibly act as Britain wished.

Before the English ambassadors visited Abomey, Gezo had lost his old friend, Francisco Felix De Souza. The Chacha died at the age of 81 on the 8th of May, 1849.² Although De Souza had been for many years incapable of backing Gezo effectively, it had been possible to pretend, as long as he lived, that the alliance was as potent as ever. He had in fact been a living reminder of the early glorious days of the reign. His death, in poverty, made a clear break with the time when his wealth had made

¹ F.O.84/775, Duncan to Palmerston 22.9.49:
F.O.84/775, Gezo to Palmerston 7.9.49.

² F.O.84/775, Duncan to Palmerston 22.9.49:
F.O.84/819, T.Hutton to W.B.Hutton, Cape
Coast 7.8.50. Upon the death of a subject
the King was entitled to take over his
property. The King's agents found that
Francisco Felix possessed nothing of value
and he died 30,000 dollars in debt to the
King alone.

Gezo's power invincible. The Chacha's eldest son, Isadore, succeeded to his father's office,¹ but, burdened with his father's debts, and lacking his prestige, he was of even less use to the King than his father had latterly been. Gezo more than ever needed English support.

As a result of the Church Missionary Society's increasing commitment to the Egba view of events in south-western Yorubaland, it was, however, becoming less likely that England would supply the support which Gezo sought. The war in this area had in fact continued intermittently since the battle of Imojulu: the continuing Egba seige of Ado provided a constant reminder of Egba pressure and of Fon ineffectiveness in resisting it. Not that the Dahomans were always unsuccessful: in the spring of 1848 they had seized and destroyed, as a move in this power struggle, the large Egbado market town of Okeodan.² After the destruction of Okeodan the

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.81. Isadore was chosen as Chacha by the King from among three of old Francisco Felix's more important sons.

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.79.

missionary identification with the Egba grew steadily greater: they seem in fact to have helped to mould vague Egba expansionist aspirations into a systematic policy,¹ the aim and object of which was to gain easy access to the sea. Dahomey and Lagos were the obstacles in the way of this policy. In the missionary view the Egba state was the only one in the area amenable to English influence: Abeokuta ought therefore to be aided in what they regarded as its crusade against the slaving states—Dahomey and Lagos. The latter states were considered to be in close alliance against the forces of progress.²

1 S.O.Biobaku, The Egba and Their Neighbours, London Ph.D.1951, p.127.

2 F.O.84/858, Gollmer to Beecroft, Badagry 18.3.51: F.O.84/886, Fraser to Beecroft, Whydah 15.11.51. The only piece of evidence produced to support the idea of such an alliance was that Lagos soldiers were supposed to have been identified amongst the Fon troops who attacked Abeokuta in 1851. The Egba could well have invented this so as to encourage the British to aid them against Lagos. Vice-Consul Fraser discovered that only two months before the British attack on Lagos, Gezo had no knowledge of Lagos politics.

Dahomey itself was branded an aggressive power which would never willingly abandon the slave trade.

The Church Missionary Society had extensive contacts both in England and on the Coast and, as a result, the missionaries' view of the politics of south-western Yorubaland was everywhere accepted. Reports that Gezo sought English friendship were discredited and disbelieved. Missionary-thinking in terms of pro-and-anti-slave trading states made it appear that the war in south-east Yorubaland was one between an aggressive slave power and a pacific people. In fact the struggle was one between two rival powers, both equally determined to dominate the minor states lying between them. It was not realised that there were elements in Fon society, as in Egba, which saw benefits for themselves in co-operation with England.

The missionary view of Egba-Fon relations received much publicity in England and became popular on the Coast.¹ Naval officers and officials, for the lack of

1 S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., p.36

any other information, all accepted it. It formed the background to the thinking of the new British Consul, John Beecroft, who although he had been long resident in Fernando Po had no direct knowledge of Dahomey. As a result he had a tendency to rely on the missionaries for information about Dahomey. This was unfortunate for Gezo, in that, on Vice-Consul Duncan's death in November 1849,¹ Beecroft was instructed himself to undertake the coming mission to Abomey. The instructions given to Beecroft indicate that the British Government, influenced by Duncan's views, still hoped, at this point, to achieve its aims in Dahomey through friendly persuasion. The King was to be invited to sign an anti-slave trade treaty and in return offered, if he pleaded financial difficulty, for the duration of three years, an annual pension of £3,000. If Gezo mentioned that he would like Fort St. James reoccupied, he was to be informed that this was intended. If the treaty was signed arrangements could be speeded up. Missionary-influenced thinking

¹ Forbes, op.cit., Vol. I p.94.

was however apparent in that Beecroft was also instructed to exhort Gezo to refrain from any aggressive action against Abeokuta or the Popos.¹

In early 1850 the Dahomans gained what would appear to have been a costly victory over the Atakpames, and the English ambassadors were requested to postpone for a short time their visit to the Dahomey capital.² They were not however long delayed and arrived, for a stay of nearly seven weeks, in Abomey, on the 12th May. Gezo's aim during these weeks was evidently to convince these Englishmen both of his desire to fall in with their wishes and the impossibility, for the moment, of his so doing. He wanted the English to mitigate their terms so that his pro-British policy might win the support of a greater number of his Chiefs. In order to convince the ambassadors of his sincerity, and of his difficulties, the King allowed his guests far more

1 F.O.84/816, Draft instructions to Consul Beecroft, F.O. 25.2.1850.

2 F.O.84/826, Forbes to Fanshawe, 6.4.1850. F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I p.16.

opportunity of observing the processes of Dahoman decision-taking than any other visitor to pre-colonial Dahomey had ever been given. By doing this he seems to have considered that the ambassadors would be able to see for themselves the opposition which he would encounter if he tried to pursue in full the policy which they urged upon him.

Gezo's first proposal to Beecroft was that all the ports of the Bight of Benin except Whydah should be closed to the slave trade. This was the long-established ideal of Dahoman policy and must have been put forward by the King as indicating his basic bargaining position. What he evidently wanted was to work out a modus vivendi between his desire for free trade at Whydah and England's wish to end the slave trade everywhere. When Beecroft refused to consider Whydah as a free port, the King proceeded to modify his terms by asking that five slaving ships per year might be allowed to pass through Whydah. When this too was rejected he suggested that one ship might be allowed to pass. This last proposal also proved unacceptable. The ambassadors were not prepared to bargain—they demanded compliance.

The King of course had long known that the English wanted him to give up the slave trade. He now learned that they also wanted him to end the war with the Egba. From his conduct at the beginning of the war, it would seem likely that he would have been by no means averse to making peace on the basis of the status quo in south-western Yorubaland. Such a settlement did not, however, depend upon him, but upon the Egba who were, after all, the power which would benefit from a change. As the ambassadors themselves realised, after observing Fon deliberations, all the Chiefs were determined to attack Abeokuta. The Fon, having had to contend for almost a decade with gradual Egba encroachment,¹ were determined

1 F.O.84/976, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 15.2.1855:-

'I have in my possession a list of more than 25 of the towns and large villages on the Dahoman frontier which have been swept from the face of the earth, and their inhabitants either slain or taken captive by the Egba prior to the Dahoman attack on Abeokuta.'

to strike a knockout blow at their enemies by destroying Abeokuta itself. Gezo informed the ambassadors that he simply could not agree to a cessation of hostilities against that town. He carefully explained to them that it was more than his throne was worth to agree to abolish immediately the slave trade and at the same time give way to the Egba in Egbadoland.

When asked if he would admit missionaries to Dahomey, Gezo replied that he had already indicated that he would welcome them to Whydah but could not allow them to settle in Abomey. Both Forbes and Beecroft thought that the King, left to himself, would have agreed to missionaries penetrating even to Abomey: too many of his Chiefs were, however, opposed to this idea for him even to contemplate it. The ambassadors were not therefore satisfied even on this point. Neither did the King receive any satisfaction when he enquired about what most concerned him. On asking if Fort St. James was to be garrisoned, and if Commander Forbes might remain in Whydah as its governor, he was given the non-committal answer which the ambassadors had received in their instructions.¹ Commander Forbes, he was

¹ See above, p.94.

told, was not going to remain in Whydah but someone else was going to be sent there to replace Mr. Duncan. On only one, relevantly unimportant, point was agreement reached, and this came about as a result of Gezo doing as the English demanded. The King agreed to release a Sierra Leonean family, the McCarthy⁴s, who had been seized and put in prison.

The embassy¹ was therefore a failure. The ambassadors had indeed noted a great deal of what Gezo seems to have wanted them to note: it was realised that although the King desired England's friendship, he was not a free agent

1 For information on this embassy see:-
F.O.84/816, Beecroft to Palmerston,
Fernando Po 13.8.1850: F.O.84/585,
Beecroft to Palmerston, Fernando Po
14.10.1851: F.O.84/816, Beecroft's
journal and report, Beecroft to
Palmerston 22.7.1850: F.O.84/826,
Forbes' journal of his visit to Abomey,
Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe 2.4.1850:
F.O.84/827, Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe
18.7.1850. See also F.E.Forbes, op.cit.,
Vol. II p. In this work Forbes, at the
expense of Beecroft, somewhat over-
emphasises his own role in the negotiations.

and could not therefore fall in with English wishes. It was not deduced from this, however, as the King had evidently hoped it would be, that British policy should be modified so that Gezo could accept it. Britain was committed to abolishing the slave trade, not to regularising it. Beecroft, understanding that the Fon would not voluntarily give up the slave trade, considered that they should be forced to do so. It was not realised that by working with Gezo, Britain might have achieved her aim more easily.

Reporting on his visit to Abomey, Beecroft, besides stating that the Fon would not immediately abandon the slave trade, recommended that no further negotiations should take place and that no further presents should be given until the Fon fell into line. The best method the Consul could think of, to force the Fon to toe the line, was to blockade the coast of Dahomey. In London, Beecroft's report was found to confirm the already widely publicised missionary view. Palmerston, after reading it, agreed that it could no longer be hoped that Dahomey would voluntarily give up the slave

trade. Instead of considering further negotiations, Palmerston gave instructions for the despatch of a strongly worded letter warning Gezo not to attack Abeokuta.¹ In this the Foreign Secretary's reaction proved exactly the same as that of the Commander-in-Chief of the Anti-Slave Trade Squadron, Commodore Fanshawe, who, on receiving the ambassador's report, had immediately sent just such a letter to Gezo.²

Beecroft himself followed up his mission to Abomey with one to Abeokuta, where he found the Egba ready and willing to work with England. The British attitude to the political situation in the coastal area of the former Oyo empire was now defined. Before Beecroft's missions it had been possible, because of Gezo's friendly attitude, that Britain might have been drawn into Dahoman affairs. Afterwards the Church Missionary

1 F.O.84/816, Minute by Palmerston on Beecroft's report, Beecroft to Palmerston, 22.7.50.

2 F.O.84/828, Fanshawe to Gezo, 23.7.50.

Society's view of Dahomey as the aggressive irreconcilable slave power became everywhere axiomatic.¹

The failure of the Beecroft-Forbes mission and the receipt of Commodore Fanshawe's letter must clearly have demonstrated to Gezo that he could not yet obtain the English alliance for which he had so long sought. The English were not prepared to bargain: he could not accept their terms. Moreover, the Fon were determined to settle their account with the Egba. Their determination was reinforced by the Egba destruction, in late 1850, of a Dahoman-protected town named Ibege.² Gezo must have felt that he had no choice but to risk

1 F.O.84/876, Campbell to Clarendon, Lagos 15.2.1855. Only a few British voices were later raised to contradict this view. Consuls Fraser and Campbell both pointed out that the Fon were not solely responsible for the Egba-Fon struggle in Egbadoland. Even then the broad view of Dahomey as anti-civilisation was not challenged.

2 F.O.84/865, The English Missionaries in Abeokuta to Commodore Fanshawe, 7.11.1850.

an all-out war on Abeokuta. At the end of February 1851, a Dahoman army said to have been made up of 10,000 male warriors and 6,000 female warriors, left Abomey¹ under the command of the Gaou Akati, en route for the Egba capital. On the 2nd of March the army occupied Issagga, an Egbado town twelve miles from Abeokuta. The Chief of this town, Bakoko, although he submitted to the Dahomans, gave them false information concerning Abeokuta's defences: he also sent messengers to warn the Egba of the approach of the Fon army. The Dahomans were therefore on the next day misled into attacking the alerted city where it was most stoutly defended. The Egba, besides having the advantage of fighting on their own ground, had also a supply of English ammunition and the benefit of European advice. However, it is doubtful if these links with England

1 Estimates of the size of the Fon army come mainly from Egba orientated sources. It seems unlikely that the Fon had 6,000 Amazon troops. A third of that number seems more in keeping with later estimates of Amazon numbers. See Chap. VI p. 467

made much difference to the outcome of the battle. Once the Fon had lost the chance of making a surprise attack, they could have had little hope of taking the town. Abeokuta was simply too large and too populous to fall to an army like that of the Fon. More than one Englishman expressed astonishment that a town as large as Abeokuta should have lived in constant fear of the Dahomans.¹

In spite of the fury of their attack the Fon were driven back from the walls of the Egba capital. They nevertheless retired in good order and next day had sufficient strength left to fall upon the treacherous town of Issagga. Before they could settle accounts with that town an Egba army arrived on the scene. After a pitched battle, in which they sustained further severe losses, the Dahomans were again forced to flee. This time the retreat continued until the Fon reached the safety of their own capital.

This was the first major defeat Dahomey had sustained since Gezo came to the throne. The Fon are said to have

¹ F.O.84/976, Campbell to Clarendon,
Lagos 6.12.1855

lost 3,000 warriors in the campaign. The high number of casualties was very important in that the dead had been mainly soldiers of the regular army. The Amazons, who had exhibited exceptional courage throughout the campaign, were particularly heavily hit. Such a high casualty rate could not easily be absorbed by a nation the size of Dahomey.¹ The loss in man-power alone would have made the defeat a severe one for the Fon. The political consequences made it even more serious. The failure of this major expedition spelt out clearly Dahoman inability to curb the rising power of the Egba.

1 For the campaign against Abeokuta see:
E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.82-9 The Church Missionary Intelligence, pp. 165-6:
T.J.Bowen, Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856, pp. 118-20: S.Johnson, op.cit., pp.313-16: A.K.Ajisafe, A History of Abeokuta, pp.96-7: S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., pp.43-4: R.Smith, 'A Town Assaulted', pp.37-9 in J.F.A.Ajayi & R.Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century: J.F.A.Ajayi, op.cit., p.71. Most authorities agree, as seems most likely, that Gezo was with his army. Smith holds the opposite view. For the organisation of the Fon army see below, Chap. VI p.464-73.

Immediately, the defeat meant that Dahomey lost all control of Egbadoland. The small states of that area automatically gravitated into the orbit of Abeokuta now that the Egba had proved themselves stronger than the Fon.

The defeat also placed in jeopardy the earlier Fon gains in Yorubaland. The blow to Dahoman prestige can be seen particularly clearly in Ketu, where there grew up a party wishing to resist and even perhaps to make war on the Fon. This group certainly did not gain complete control of the state. Nevertheless, when a Dahoman army advanced towards Ketu to collect Fon prisoners of war sent there by the Egbas for exchange, all Dahoman merchants were expelled from the town, and the Fon army defied. The Fon, who did not apparently expect resistance, retired without even attempting to seize the prisoners. Ketu was no longer over-awed by Dahoman might.¹ It is very unlikely that this newly awakened state continued to pay tribute. From defying

1 G.Parrinder, The Story of Ketu, pp.37-42.

the will of Dahomey, it was a short step to actually joining the enemies of the Fon and making war on Dahomey. Although there is no definite evidence of Save's reaction to Dahomey's defeat by Abeokuta it seems more than likely that this state also ceased at this time to acknowledge Fon suzerainty. It is certainly true that it was only in the 1880s that the Fon, after a series of major campaigns, were again able to humble these two Yoruba states. The disaster before Abeokuta led then to a crumbling of the Dahoman position all along the eastern frontier.

This decisive campaign effectively ended Gezo's reputation for leading the Fon from success to success. A disaster of such magnitude was bound to have its effect on Dahoman politics. Stripped of much of his prestige the King would not for long be able to control his turbulent Chiefs. He no longer had the overwhelming financial might of De Souza to rely upon for support. Moreover, both his carefully selected Amazon bodyguard,¹

¹ R. Burton, op.cit., pp.263-4.

and his regular army, had been decimated in the war. They were so weakened that he could probably no longer depend on their being able to stamp out any disloyalty amongst his most powerful subjects. Gezo must have known full well that his position of supremacy in Fon affairs was in great danger. To preserve his authority, and perhaps even his life, he would have to obtain external support for his monarchy. In spite of previous failures the King therefore redoubled his efforts to enter into a close association with the English.

In April and May 1851 Gezo sent a series of letters to the English authorities, requesting that an ambassador be sent to him and asking that the men-of-war off his coasts might supply him with arms.¹ The Dahomans probably did not know how much aid the English had given Abeokuta. Consul Beecroft nevertheless feared that the Dahoman

1 F.O.84/886, Gezo to Queen Victoria, Whydah 26.4.1851: F.O.84/886, Gezo to Queen Victoria, enclosed in Bruce to Admiralty, No.51 of 1851: F.O.84/886, Yeovogan Dagwah for Gezo, 'To Whom It May Concern', Whydah 14.5.1851, enclosed in Beecroft to F.O., 19.2.1852.

defeat would provoke Gezo to violence against any English official in his territory. He therefore delayed sending the newly appointed Vice-Consul, Vice-Consul Fraser, to Whydah.¹

By July of the same year, however, Beecroft decided that Fraser could safely proceed.² This decision was hastened by the fact that Beecroft wanted to observe French activities in Dahomey—at that time a French officer was actually in Abomey. Régis, the Marseilles palm oil trader, had feared that the visits of various English missions to Abomey would win specially favourable trading terms for English merchants active in Dahomey. On his request a French official, Auguste Bouet, was sent to Abomey to assure Gezo that the French were deeply interested in the development of the palm oil

1 F.O.2/4 Stanley to Fraser, 4.12.1850:
F.O.84/816, Palmerston to Fraser:
F.O. 10.12.1850, Fraser was appointed
to replace Duncan. Unlike Duncan, he
received a salary and was permitted
to trade.

2 F.O.2/4, Fraser to Palmerston,
Fernando Po, 30.6.1851: F.O.84/886,
Beecroft to Fraser, Fernando Po,
4.7.1851.

trade in his country. The purpose of the visit was simply to enhance the prestige of the French trading in Dahomey: although Bouet took with him two brass cannons as presents for the King, the French had, at the time, no intention of taking any political action in Dahomey. Gezo and Bouet simply signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce like that the King had previously¹ signed with Winnieth.

Once in Dahomey, Fraser, on his own initiative, proceeded to visit Abomey. Although Gezo stated as clearly as ever his desire to reach an agreement with England, the visit could not be termed a success. A number of factors led to its failure. One was that Fraser's instructions would not allow him to enter into negotiations with the King until the King had agreed to end the slave trade. Another was that a letter from Palmerston to the King was couched in such

1 M.M.C.Afrique IV⁹⁶ Marine to Regis, Paris 10.1.51: E.D.XX, p.2. 'Treaty of Amity and Commerce': A.Bouet, 'Le Royaume De Dahomey' in Illustration July 1852: B.Schnapper, op.cit., p.165.

strong terms that it gave considerable offence in Abomey. Moreover, the whole background to the visit was poisoned by the fact that Fraser interpreted Beecroft's recommendations literally, and refused to make any presents to the Fon.

Gezo seems to have seen Fraser's uncompromising attitude as a move in the diplomatic game designed to make him more accommodating to English wishes. The King, evidently determined to play the same game, refused to accept that Fraser was really a representative of the British government. Fraser was even accused of being in the pay of the Egba, and of having stolen a letter sent by one of the Egba Chiefs to the King. Gezo seems to have meant the English to know that he would make no further concessions, and that he now expected the English to modify their terms. That the treatment meted out to him was merely a diplomatic threat was, however, something that the dismayed and perplexed Fraser could not be expected to recognise.¹

¹ F.O.84/886, Fraser's journal, Fraser to Beecroft 15.11.1851: F.O.84/892, Gezo to Queen of England, 7.9.1851.

Upon his return to Whydah, Fraser was treated with a marked coolness by the Fon. To add to his growing sense of social and political isolation the Naval officers stationed off the Coast tended to communicate directly with the Fon by letter, without informing him of the nature of these communications. When he protested he was disregarded.¹ At the same time his immediate superior, Beecroft, who was not interested in Whydah, omitted to keep him informed of what was happening in the eastern half of the Bight.

While Fraser was ploughing his lonely furrow in Whydah, events were moving quickly further along the Coast. Influenced by the views of the missionaries, the English had resolved to strike at what they by this time regarded as the core of the slave trade—Lagos. It had been decided to institute a blockade of the Coast. The Commodore of the Squadron

¹ F.O.84/886, Fraser to Wilmot, Whydah 29.7.1851: F.O.84/886, Wilmot to Fraser, 1.4.51: F.O.84/886, Fraser's Journal, Fraser to Beecroft, 15.11.51.

requested, and was given, permission to extend the blockade to the other ports on the Bight.¹ This blockade was proclaimed on the 6th of December. The King of Lagos was then driven from his throne and a pro-Egba monarch put in his place.²

Although the blockade had been proclaimed on the 6th of December, Fraser was not given official notice of this until the 21st of December.³ Both he and the Whydah authorities had learned of the impending action on the 17th of December from the Captain of a merchant ship. This made Fraser's position even more difficult in the sense that he had been unable to give the

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- 1 F.O.84/892, Bruce to Admiralty 1.11.91: Badagry was regarded as a non-slaving port and therefore exempted from the blockade. This exemption confirmed French suspicion that the blockade was designed to forward English trading interests.
 - 2 J.F.A. Ajayi, 'The British Occupation of Lagos 1851-61.' Nigeria No.69, Aug.1961: J.F.A.Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-91, pp.74-7: S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., p.46: C.Lloyd, op.cit., pp.156-60: C.W.Newbury, op.cit., pp.52-4: J.Herskovits Koptoff, op.cit., pp.63-80.
 - 3 F.O.84/886, Bruce to Fraser, 6.12.51, marked 'Received' by Fraser 21.12.51.

authorities any information on what was about to happen.¹ When the Vice-Consul did receive his instructions² they were to the effect that he should forward a letter from Commodore Bruce to the King, informing him that from the 1st of January the Dahoman Coast would be blockaded until the King agreed to England's demands.³ Upon receipt of this Gezo sent a letter to Whydah, requesting that Fraser and a Naval officer might go up to Abomey. After some indecision, Fraser and Commander T.G. Forbes of the Philomel set out separately for the capital. Forbes was accompanied by Thomas Hutton who was, at the time, in Whydah on business.⁴

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- 1 F.O. 84/886, Fraser's Journal, entry 18.12.51: Fraser to Beecroft, received by Beecroft 23.2.1852.
 - 2 F.O. 84/886, Fraser's Journal, entry 21.12.51: Fraser to Beecroft, received by Beecroft 23.2.1852.
 - 3 F.O. 84/892, Bruce to Gezo 17.12.51.
 - 4 F.O. 84/886, Fraser's Journal of October to December 1851: Fraser to Beecroft, received by Beecroft 23.2.1852: F.O. 84/892 T.G. Forbes to Commander Bruce, Whydah, 31.12.51: T. Hutton to Commander Forbes, Whydah 30.12.51, enclosures in Bruce to Admiralty 2.1.52. Gezo seems to have worked to gather as many of his 'English friends' around him as possible. He had already written to T.B. Freeman.

The English blockade of his coasts must have come as a very unpleasant surprise to the King of Dahomey. During the previous round of negotiations in which he had attempted to gain English support, he had, in order to get England to modify her terms, threatened to break off relations: a threat that had been his last diplomatic card. In the event, England, instead of altering the conditions under which she would co-operate, had seized a neighbouring state and now threatened to blockade his coast. It must have appeared to Gezo that the English were also playing their last diplomatic card: that they were replying to threats with threats. The English, of course, long before Fraser's first visit to Abomey, had determined that when the time was ripe they would blockade the Dahoman coast. The blockade had nothing to do with Fon diplomacy, but Gezo could not have known this.

Before the blockade the majority of the Dahoman Chiefs had never had enough to gain from agreement with

England to induce them to be willing to make sacrifices in order to obtain it. Gezo was now, it seems, able to work upon the fears of his Chiefs in order to get what he wanted. The English seizure of Lagos and the accession there of a pro-Egba King must have represented to the Fon the culmination of Egba policy. The Dahomans had already been driven ignominiously out of Egbadoland and their whole position in the East undermined. The allies of the Egba, the English, were now threatening to blockade the whole Bight. It must have seemed possible that other coastal towns might be seized—even Fon towns. The Egba and the English might together advance on the defeated and demoralised Dahomans. The very existence of the Fon state must have seemed to be in jeopardy.

A section of Fon opinion was probably outraged by this insult to Dahomey and wished to defy all their enemies. This was certainly the Dahoman reaction in 1876, when the English again blockaded the coast.¹ The more reasonable among the Chiefs seem to have been willing to pursue a more prudent course. Up until this time a working agreement

1 See Chap. III, p. 213-221

with England had evidently been the dream only of Gezo and his immediate supporters; they had wanted such an alliance for reasons of purely internal politics. At least a section of the Fon ruling class, however, after the Egba successes, seems to have felt that it was necessary to placate the English and draw them away from their alliance with the Egba. Gezo evidently now determined to use this feeling to put into operation the policy of co-operation with the English for which he had worked so long.

The King had nevertheless to move very carefully. The Dahomans probably felt insulted by the English proceedings. Gezo had therefore to agree to English demands but to do so in such a way that his agreement should not outrage Dahoman feelings by appearing an abject capitulation. The ambassadors who came to Abomey after the proclamation of the blockade were not therefore treated especially kindly. The luckless Fraser again became the victim of Dahoman pride. The King, wishing, it seems, to make clear his displeasure at English action, yet not wishing to insult the Queen of

England, made Fraser his whipping boy.¹ Fraser was again denounced, in no uncertain terms, for his so-called anti-Dahoman activities. The representatives of the Afro-Brazilian community, who had been summoned to Dahomey, also came in for a long harangue and were accused, not unjustly, of, for their own profit, attempting to harm Dahoman relations with England. Moreover, the English ambassadors as a group came in for a severe lecture in protocol; this was sparked off by the wording of Commodore Bruce's letter informing the King of the imposition of the blockade.

Throughout the proceedings however the King continually emphasised his desire to live in peace and harmony with the English. Moreover, he agreed to the most important

1 It looks as if it may have been an African diplomatic convention to blame an ambassador, rather than his state, for policies which one hoped to be changed. That no real hostility was harboured against Fraser is indicated by the fact that after what Gezo regarded as the settlement of outstanding difficulties, the King took Fraser by the hand and assured him that all former enmity was forgotten.

of England's demands. Probably because of the necessity of not appearing to capitulate to the English the King refused to sign the ordinary anti-slave trade form which was submitted to him.¹ What he did do was to approve a statement to the effect that the slave trade was forever abolished within the Kingdom of Dahomey. He also agreed to make peace with Abeokuta. In a letter, which he dictated, he made his position with regard to the Egba very clear. He stated that if two nations were at war it was suitable that a third, acting as an intermediary, should bring about a peace settlement; the intermediary should, however, take pains to understand both sides of the story. England had tried to make peace but had only listened to the Egba version of the origins

1 It may be that he was for superstitious reasons unwilling to put his mark on a document. He had, however, done so on other occasions.

of the quarrel. The English, the French¹ and the Egba should now send ambassadors to Abomey. The Europeans could then listen to both points of view and devise a fair solution. The English could hardly have been asked to do more than act as 'honest broker'.

There were three points in the unsigned standard anti-slave trade treaty upon which the King did not touch during the negotiations—presumably because he did not consider them very important. The first of these clauses was the one which stated that the English should be allowed to trade freely in Dahoman ports. The English had in fact always been permitted to trade freely, and the King had frequently indicated that he wanted this trade to increase. It is, then, hardly surprisingly that he omitted to mention trade. The second unmentioned clause was one requesting that English missionaries be allowed to enter Dahomey. The English had already been informed that the missionaries would be welcome if they were to settle at Whydah. Gezo had already made his

1 Gezo wished to include the French in this peace-making operation, presumably so that Dahomey would not appear to be absolutely dependent upon England. The move could hardly at this point have been meant very seriously.

attitude on missionaries clear to Beecroft. It is not unlikely that he considered that the English would be satisfied. The third point on which he did not touch was the one concerning human sacrifice. Gezo had already taken steps to limit this practice. To have asked his Chiefs to accept complete abolition would probably have been to endanger his whole policy. Moreover, it seems likely that the King was under the impression that this was not one of the more important of England's requests—recently he had heard far more about the slave trade and the Egba war. Gezo at any rate evidently felt that he had fairly met English demands.

The King seems to have considered that he had now acted as England wanted him to act. He must have expected the English to do as they had promised they would, if he fell in with their wishes. The leading English ambassador, Commander Forbes, was in fact relatively well pleased with the results of his visit to Abomey. He even remarked that although England had not obtained all that she wanted, the remainder would follow in due course. Fraser was more pessimistic; he did not consider that the mission had been

a success. At the time, however, Fraser seems to have been incapable of taking an objective view of the proceedings. He had been denounced and then ignored by the King: Forbes had been treated with respect and had taken complete control of the negotiations. Forbes even reported, in a reference to Fraser's refusal to give presents, that Fraser had merited the King's dislike. The strain to which he had been subject in his exposed position in Whydah, and his natural objections to being continually ignored, seems to have produced some jealousy of Commander Forbes' achievement. The only concrete reason which Fraser produced for considering the mission a failure was that Gezo had not explicitly stated that the missionaries would be admitted to Dahomey.¹

1 The paragraphs concerning the Forbes Fraser mission to Abomey are based on the following:-
F.O.84/886 Fraser to Beecroft, Whydah 17.1.52
F.O.84/886 Fraser to Beecroft, Whydah 8.1.52
F.O.84/893 T.G.Forbes to Bruce, Whydah 18.1.52
enclosed in Bruce to Admiralty 16.2.52
F.O.84/886, Gezo to Queen Victoria, Cana 12.1.52
F.O.84/886, statement on slave trade approved by Gezo, 13.1.52.

By exploiting his chiefs' fears of further defeat, Gezo evidently felt that he had put himself in the way of obtaining his long-sought English alliance. By agreeing to the abolition of the slave trade the King had, however, cut away the main economic support of the monarchy and the ruling class. Immediately after the conclusion of his negotiations with the English, he therefore took action to create a new economic basis for the power of the monarchy. His plans, which depended on English co-operation,¹ set forth a system which not only would have provided a new economic foundation for the monarchy, but would have also made it more powerful than ever. In a very astute manner indeed, Gezo seems to have been utilising the unfavourable political circumstances in order to improve the position of the monarchy within Dahoman society. The new system was to be based on a royal monopoly of the palm oil trade.

1 Both Fraser and Forbes reported these steps. It therefore seems probable that the King took pains to let the English know what he was about.

Orders were given that all the palm oil and palm kernel trade should in future be centralised in the hands of the King. If anyone sold these products except to the agents of the King, all his goods would be confiscated. Whydah was to be the only port in Dahomey through which the trade might be conducted: the other ports were to be closed. The amount of palm oil exported was to be measured on Whydah beach by agents of the Yeovogan. Agents of the King were sent down from Abomey to begin the royal collection of palm oil.¹

The speed with which the King acted indicates that he expected that the English would immediately co-operate with him. The decision to abolish the slave trade and make peace with the Yoruba must have given considerable offence to at least a large section of the Dahoman ruling group. The attempt to complete

1 F.O.84/886, Fraser to Beecroft, Whydah 17.1.52:
F.O.84/893, T.G.Forbes to Bruce 18.2.52:
Gezo may have at this time re-introduced
the idea of the dual nature of the Fon
monarchy. He may have created a twin for
himself—to trade in palm oil.
See Chap. VI, p. 426-28

this revolution by overhauling the economic power of the monarchy must have given even greater offence. If the new system had been put into effective operation, the King would have been able to dominate the economic life and, as a result, the political life of the country. Gezo in fact would have improved on the position which he had held when De Souza was at the height of his power. The Chiefs were unlikely to accept this unless the King were backed up by a strong outside force. Gezo, evidently well aware of this, put his scheme forward when the English ambassadors were still in Dahomey, so that they would see that he meant to co-operate with England. He must have expected the English to respond by acting as they had frequently promised they would—by re-garrisoning the Whydah fort, and by placing in charge there a capable governor who would act in Dahoman affairs in co-operation with the King.

Although Gezo knew what he wanted, the English did not. They could not make up their minds as to whether or not the King had met their demands. Commander Forbes, flushed with what he considered his Dahoman success, set out to obtain the adherence of the minor coastal Kings to

the anti-slave trade treaty. They all signed: some, like the King of Porto^{Novo}, because they thought that Dahomey had already reached an agreement with the English.¹ On the 11th of February, after this treaty-making process had been completed, the English raised the blockade of all those ports whose rulers had signed treaties.² Commodore Bruce, the Commander-in-Chief of the Squadron, could not make up his mind, however, whether or not the blockade of Dahomey should be lifted. He felt himself, that Gezo had complied with English wishes; he had however been instructed to obtain signatures to the standard treaty forms. Rather than risk the disapproval of his superiors he maintained the blockade of the Fon ports,³ and he sent Forbes and Fraser back to Abomey to attempt to induce the King to sign a normal agreement.⁴

1 F.O.84/893 Forbes to Bruce, Whydah 5.2.52:
F.O.84/886 Fraser to Beecroft, 1.2.52
enclosed in Beecroft to F.O. 28.6.52.

2 F.O.84/893 Bruce to All Whom It May Concern,
Whydah 11.2.52; F.O.84/886, Bruce to Fraser,
Whydah 11.2.52; enclosed in Beecroft to F.O.
28.6.52.

3 F.O.84/894 Bruce to Admiralty 1.4.52.

4 Forbes and Fraser were in Dahomey from
20th February to 3rd March, 1852.

The Dahomans were of course outraged by the fact that trade could be carried on in the minor ports of the Bight, while their coastline was still blockaded. The return of the ambassadors with the same old demands added insult to injury. Gezo disregarded all that the ambassadors said and treated them to an harangue on the size and power of his Kingdom. It became obvious, during the course of their interview, that the King feared that the English were about to attack Whydah. Nevertheless, although he showed concern and bewilderment at English policies, he continued to protest his friendship for England. Before the ambassadors left, the King went so far as to assure Fraser that the past was forgiven and that he wanted him to remain in Fort St. James as English governor. Gezo evidently wanted the English to stop making demands which would reduce Dahomey to a tributary position and to begin to fulfil what he regarded as their part of the bargain.¹

1 F.O.84/886 Forbes journal 20.2.52 to 4.3.52, enclosed in Deecroft's to F.O. 28.6.52: F.O.84/894 Forbes to Bruce 6.3.52, enclosed in Bruce to Admiralty 1.4.52.

Commander Forbes' second attempt to persuade Gezo to sign the normal anti-slave trade treaty did nothing therefore to end English indecision. Bruce, influenced by Forbes, continued to believe that Gezo wanted English friendship and declared that the best way of ultimately achieving English aims would be to co-operate with the King. The Commander-in-Chief was strengthened in this view by the fact that, with the forces at his disposal, he was aware, that he could not hope to coerce Dahomey into signing the treaty. He therefore recommended that the blockade of the Dahoman ports should be lifted.¹

The British government had no more idea of what to do than had the Commander-in-Chief. It therefore agreed that the blockade should end. On the 15th of June the Dahoman ports were again open to trade—the blockade there had lasted more than three months longer than at any port on the Bight.² It had, moreover, been lifted for purely negative reasons. The English could think of no other

1 F.O.84/894, Bruce to Admiralty 1.4.52.

2 F.O.84/895, Bruce to Admiralty 15.6.52:
Bruce to Admiralty 19.6.58.

policy to pursue with regard to Dahomey. Only those who had visited Abomey were convinced that Gezo wished to co-operate with England. The fact that he had not signed the formal treaty indicated to the Government that the King had no intention of doing what England wanted. The missionary-inspired view of Fon policy was so deeply entrenched that the positive achievements of the Forbes mission were passed over. What was noted and remembered was that Gezo had not signed the treaty.¹

Owing to a series of unfortunate circumstances England now came to break off all direct contact with Dahomey. The English did not realise that Gezo was evidently in the process of putting through an economic and political revolution which might have made Dahomey a model of what, in English eyes, an African state ought to have been. After the failure of the second Forbes-Fraser mission, the Naval authorities offered ^{the} Vice-Consul

1 C.W.Newbury, op.cit., pp.47-54
This work gives an alternative
view of England's relations with
the Fon in the 1840s and early 1850s.

the opportunity of withdrawing from Whydah.¹ Fraser, who had been completely bewildered by his unpleasant stay in Dahomey, gladly boarded an English war ship.² Forbes had been, on his return from Abomey, very critical of Fraser's conduct in Dahomey. He considered that in refusing to give the usual 'presents' Fraser had given needless offence to the Fon.³ After his departure the Vice-Consul was therefore concerned to point out that others besides himself had been mistreated by the Fon. In particular he drew attention to the fact that one of Hutton's agents in Whydah had been abused by the Whydah authorities. Although a later investigation proved that the conduct of the Whydah officials had in

1 F.O.84/886, Strange to Fraser 4.3.52.

2 F.O.84/886, Fraser to Strange 5.3.52.

3 F.O.84/893, Forbes to Bruce 18.1.52,
enclosed in Admiralty to F.O.10.4.52:
F.O.84/886, F.O. to Fraser 19.4.52.

this case been quite justified.¹ Fraser's contention further added to English distrust of Dahomey.

Consul Beecroft, as always interested primarily in the eastern half of the Bight, took the opportunity of Fraser's withdrawal from Whydah to place him temporarily in Lagos, from where close contact with the Egba could easily be maintained.² The Foreign Office soon followed up the logic of this move by suppressing the Vice-Consulate at Whydah and appointing a new man— Benjamin Cambell— as Consul at Lagos. The new Consulate in Lagos had charge of British relations with all the

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- 1 F.O.84/886, Fraser's journal 19.1.to 31.3.52: Stanfield to Fraser, Whydah 1.3.52: Fraser to Beecroft, Fernando Po 22.11.52: Beecroft to Fraser, 14.9.52: F.O.84/894, Bruce to Admiralty 14.4.52, Memo on Bruce&s despatch of 14.4.52: F.O.84/895, Bruce to Admiralty 15.11.52 enclosing Foote to Bruce, Whydah 28.9.52.
 - 2 F.O.84/886, Beecroft to Malmsbury, Fernando Po 20.6.52: F.O.84/920, Beecroft to Malmsbury, Fernando Po 4.2.53.

the states on the Bight of Benin.¹ Direct official contact between England and Dahomey was cut off. A British Consul in Lagos had little chance of hearing anything but the Yoruba version of Fon affairs. This was especially so since in 1852 Thomas Hutton gave up trading in Whydah and transferred his business to Lagos.² For the first time in almost a decade there were no Englishmen in Dahomey. All communications between England and Dahomey stopped just when Gezo had worked himself into a position in which he depended on English support.

1 F.O. 2/9, F.O. to Beecroft 19.2.53:
F.O. to Fraser 19.2.53.

2 During the extended blockade of Whydah, Hutton withdrew his agents from that port. The fact that he did not re-enter the Whydah trade after the blockade was lifted may be explained by the fact that the death of his uncle, William Hutton, necessitated a reorganisation of the firm's trading activities.

C H A P T E R I I I

I N D E P E N D E N T D A H O M E Y

1852-1878

Gezo had taken a revolutionary gamble. With English backing he might have won through: without it he had practically no chance of success. The ending of the slave trade deprived the Chiefs of their major source of income: the attempt to erect a royal monopoly of the palm oil trade would have made it impossible for them to recoup their losses. The imposition of peace with the Egba and the implied recognition of the destruction of Fon influence in Egbado and Aworiland outraged Dahoman pride. Gezo had been able to put his ideas into operation only because his Chiefs feared an Anglo-Egba attack. When this menace receded, or when the King's policies proved ineffective in averting it, the royal authority was bound to be challenged.

Every facet of the new royal policy was not rejected at once. The extent of the opposition in fact only became gradually apparent. The first sign, however, that the King was pursuing a dangerous course came quite soon, when he proved unable to enforce his monopoly of the palm oil trade. Trading simply continued in its traditional pattern. Perhaps the establishment of a British force at Whydah and a British refusal to trade with anyone but the King might have ^{en}abled Gezo to carry out his economic revolution. The monarch did try to export, but without this British co-operation the royal attempt to monopolise the palm oil trade never even got off the ground.¹

Gezo was however able, after the signing of the agreement with England, to put an end to the export of slaves from Dahoman ports. The Fon did not even take advantage of the ending of the blockade to resume the

1 F.O. 2/20 Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 7.3.57 enclosing statement by Fursier and Williamson, Master and Supercargo of the Columbine, Whydah 16.2.57.

trade.¹ When the minor ports on their borders, those not directly under Fon control, began to revive slave exporting the Dahomans themselves remained aloof.² Gezo was therefore able, for a time at least, to enforce the negative aspect of his new policy.

The King's initially successful attempt to end the Fon slave trade nevertheless eventually broke down. By May 1854 the export of slaves from Whydah was again in full swing.³ The collapse of Gezo's policies was probably due to the fact that they had not brought the expected dividend—an ending of Egba pressure on Dahomey's eastern frontier. This became clear when the Egba resumed their attacks in November 1853. This they did with troops

1 F.O.84/920, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 31.10.53.

2 D.Ross, 'The Career of Domingo Martinez on the Bight of Benin', Journal of African History, No.1 Vol IV 1965
Martinez at Porto Novo beach was, after the lifting of the blockade, the most outstanding offender.

3 F.O.84/850, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 30.5.54: F.O.84/851, H.Wharton to J.Beecham, Accra 16.8.54, enclosed in Beecham to Clarendon, London 27.10.54.

released from activities in the Lagos region.¹ The Fon must have felt that in giving up the slave trade they were making a useless sacrifice; the English had failed to hold the Egba in check.

Gezo himself could not easily abandon his new policies. Having adopted a revolutionary course of action, he seems to have aligned the traditionalists against him. His only chance of regaining the power which must have been slipping from him, remained to win external backing. He continued therefore to attempt to win English support. Having, he considered, put his own part of the bargain with England into operation, he could not, it appears, understand why the English had failed to do as they promised. He therefore asked his old friend, T.B.Freeman, to come to him; 'Since he now had no Englishman near him to advise him.' This request co-incided with Freeman's own plans and the missionary

1 M.M.C. Afrique, ^{9b} Extracts from letters from John Lartigue to V.Regis, Whydah 22 & 25.11.53.

travelled to Abomey in May 1854.¹ During an interview with the King, Freeman was assured that Gezo still wanted to co-operate with England in putting down the slave trade.

Gezo swore that for some time past he himself had taken no part whatsoever in the slave trade. The missionary was inclined to believe him: the Court, Freeman saw, had been greatly impoverished since his previous visit: the King's professed devotion to agriculture seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the countryside in general appeared to be in a much better state of cultivation.²

Freeman used the opportunity provided by his visit, to obtain permission to open a mission at Whydah. Having

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- 1 F.O.84/951 J.Beecham to Clarendon, Wesleyan Mission House, Wishin 24.10.54. It had already been decided to open a Methodist missionary post at Whydah. On receiving the King's invitation Freeman went to Abomey, taking with him two other Methodist missionaries—Dawson and Wharton.
 - 2 F.O.84/951 H.Wharton to J.Beecham Accra 16.8.54: F.O.84/951 T.B.Freeman to J.Beecham, Cape Coast 12.8.54.

done so, he left Abomey and returned in August 1854 to Cape Coast. Freeman's view that Gezo was still intent upon putting his peace policy into operation seems reasonable. It certainly accords with what is known of Gezo's political aims. In the Foreign Office, however, Freeman's views were treated with considerable scepticism: it was found impossible, there, to reconcile the King's statements with the continued export of slaves from Whydah.¹ British officials of course did not realise that the King was not absolute, and that in order to put his policies into operation he needed assistance. Because of this official disbelief no attempt was made to follow up Freeman's findings.

Even without English backing, Gezo endeavoured to make peace with the Egba. In late 1854, an exchange of ambassadors was effected with Abeokuta.² The negotiations did not bear fruit: the triumphant Egba were in fact hardly

1 F.O.84/951 Memorandum on the Slave Trade in Dahomey, 14.11.1854.

2 F.O.84/950 Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 6.12.54.

likely to have made peace unless forced into it by England. Moreover, Gezo seems to have completely lost control of the Fon political situation: a war party at this time certainly became vocal in Dahomey. It was probably as a result of the growing strength of this war party that rumours of an impending Fon attack upon Abeokuta began to circulate amongst the Egba in January and February 1855.¹ The fact that a large number of Fon Chiefs now saw, in an all-out war on the Yoruba, the only hope of Dahoman safety, made the implication of Gezo's peace policy highly unlikely.

On the rumours of an impending Fon assault on Abeokuta being reported in Lagos, Consul Cambell despatched a letter to Gezo warning him against making any such attack. In his letter, Cambell included an offer of mediation between the Fon and the Egba: England, he promised, would see to it that the Egba would not molest the Fon.² This was exactly what the King wanted. He

1 F.O.84/976, Chiefs of Abeokuta to Cambell, Abeokuta 29 & 31.1.55: F.O.84/976, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 15.2.55.

2 F.O.84/976 Cambell to Gezo, Lagos 26.1.55.

immediately summoned Dawson, the newly-established missionary in Whydah, to Abomey, where he informed him that he had no intention of attacking Abeokuta. Indeed, he emphasised his desire to co-operate with England and complained bitterly that he had had no contact with English officials since he had agreed to abandon the slave trade. Gezo, moreover, developed Cambell's offer of mediation: he requested that Cambell himself should come to Abomey to arrange a peace settlement. Rather ominously, however, the King warned Dawson that his will was not all-powerful in Dahomey.¹

It must have seemed to Gezo that the English were about to behave as he had always wanted them to behave. He was so delighted that he despatched to T.B.Freeman a letter in which he offered, for his consideration, the same schemes as he had already outlined to Dawson.²

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- 1 F.O. 84/976, Dawson to Cambell, Whydah 22 & 29.8.55. Although Dawson's interview with Gezo took place in April, he did not inform Cambell until August.
 - 2 F.O.84/976 Extract from an undated letter from T.B.Freeman to E.Gardiner, Cape Coast, enclosed in Cambell to Clarendon.

Cambell, when he received a statement of Gezo's views, was not impressed: he replied that no Englishman could go to Abomey until there was a definite prospect that a normal anti-slave trade treaty would be signed: since the slave trade was still active in the Fon ports there could, he declared, be no real hope of this.¹ To Gezo, Cambell's reply must have seemed singularly inappropriate. As a prior condition to doing what both he and the English wanted, Cambell required that the King do that which he could do only with English support. The Foreign Office, acting on the same assumption as Cambell, approved the Consul's reply.²

In early 1855, then, Gezo was still hoping for the British backing which might restore his crumbling political position. After mid-1855, however, such a restoration must have become well-nigh impossible. At this time the discovery of a plot to overthrow the Fon state seems to

1 F.O.84/976, Cambell to Dawson,
Lagos 15.10.55.

2 F.O.84/976 Cambell to Clarendon,
Lagos 15.9.55: F.O.84/976, Foreign
Office to Cambell 29.12.55.

have completely discredited the King's policies. What was discovered was a planned uprising of all the Yoruba slaves on the Fon palm oil plantations. It was to be led by a number of returned Brazilians,¹ and was intended to co-incide with an Egba attack.

On the discovery of the conspiracy consternation reigned throughout Dahomey. The whole country appeared to be in a state of panic: every able-bodied man was called to arms. In order to prevent flight neither European nor African was allowed to leave the country. The rising was discovered only just before it was due to take place: it was, however, discovered in time and the Fon were able to take action to prevent an insurrection. Three thousand of the conspirators were rounded up, sent to Abomey, and immediately executed.²

1 These 'Brazilians' were not the old-established slave traders, but recently freed slaves often of Yoruba descent.

2 F.O.84/976, McClosky to Cambell, Badagry 17.8.55: M.M.C. Goree et Dependancies XV, Regis to Marine 19.11.55, enclosing Monleon to Regis. This letter from an observer on the Coast is undated. Regis, However, received it 24.8.55.

These mass reprisals removed the threat of a slave revolt:¹ an unassisted Egba attack could be faced, if not with equanimity, at least with confidence. Nevertheless the conspiracy had been designed, and had come perilously near, to destroying the whole Fon state. The first reaction of the Fon leaders on the discovery of the plot was, of course, to take steps to ensure the safety of Dahomey. Their more considered reaction was to repudiate the policies which had brought this danger upon the nation. This Egba-Yoruba slave conspiracy in fact proved to be a major turning point in the history of 19th century Dahomey in that it finally discredited the innovations of the Gezoan monarchy.

To the Fon, it must have seemed that the King's abandonment of the slave trade had brought nothing but English indifference, coupled with continued Egba hostility. Gezo's measures to make the palm oil trade, rather than the slave trade, the basis of the Fon economy, had led not

1 F.O. 84/1002, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 10.7.55. Further groups of Yoruba ex-slaves, having the ill-luck to land at Whydah, were summarily executed.

only to losses to those previously engaged in slaving, but also to the creation of a large hostile population within Dahomey itself. Possibly the King's reduction in the number of human sacrifices was also seen as constituting a danger to the continued existence of the Fon state.

Altogether, Gezo's policies seemed to have placed Dahomey in a position of great danger. It was hardly surprising that many of the Chiefs came to view the future of Dahomey in terms of a return to traditional policies: in terms of refusing Europeans any say in the affairs of Dahomey: in terms of carrying out, to the full, traditional religious rites and, above all, of the undertaking of a great military effort against their age-old enemy, the Yoruba. The Chiefs, who had previously simply passively resisted putting the new royal policy into practice, were now, it seems, greatly strengthened in their opinions and set about implementing their own opposition policy.

The leader of the group opposed to the policies of the King was one of his sons, Badahou.¹ Prince Badahou's

1 F.O.84/1221, Burton to Russel 23.3.64:
R.Burton, op.cit., pp.334 & 143, f/n 1.

opposition to his father seems to have been partly a move in the normal struggle for succession and partly a matter of personal conviction: his later conduct clearly indicates that he was a traditionalist who believed that Gezo's innovations would eventually, and inevitably, lead to the destruction of Dahomey. There are indications that Badahou was greatly influenced by the Priests,¹ who may well have been outraged by Gezo's tampering with traditional rites. It seems likely that Badahou, who had been Vi-Daho since at least 1850,² had for long been the focus of opposition to Gezo: that he had not been eliminated is an indication of the magnitude of that opposition.

After the discovery of the 1855 conspiracy, Badahou and his supporters gained the upper hand in Dahoman politics to such an extent that after that date it was their policies which predominated, and those of the King had the support of only the minority. As one

1 R. Burton, op.cit., p.267

2 F. Forbes, op.cit., Vol II p.154

contemporary commentator noted three years later:

'Il est vrai que ce Roi, qui depuis plus de deux ans n'avait d'autre conseil que M. Vidal (Régis chief agent at Whydah), meme pour ses affaires d'interieur, n'est plus que l'ombre de son fils et son Ministre.'¹

Because of the scare resulting from the discovery of the slave plot, many of the Chiefs turned to Badahou for leadership. Even the Mehou, it seems, at this point² threw his weight behind Badahou. Since the Mehou was a very old man—indeed, he was one of the Chiefs reputed to have helped bring Gezo to power—it can be seen that

1 M.M.C.Afrique IV^{9d} Protet to Marine, Whydah 20.5.58. Protet attributed Gezo's loss of power to bad health. There is, however, no evidence whatsoever that Gezo, although an old man, was ailing.

2 M.M.C.Afrique IV^{9d} Protet to Marine, Whydah 20.5.58. Dr. Repin, 'Voyage au Dahomey', Tour du Monde 1863. Tombe I p.65. Repin remarks that Gezo conducted negotiations with the French in private, so that the Mehou should not be present. The Mehous made a number of attempts to discover exactly what the ambassadors had talked about to the King.

the abortive slave revolt had made a very considerable impression on the Fon leaders.

There were of course a number of factors influencing those who were opposed to Gezo—the group named the 'reactionary party' by one nineteenth century observer. Nevertheless, Badahou's following became well-nigh irresistible only after those frightened by the slave revolt turned to traditional politics in an effort to save Dahomey. The roots of much of the hard-core opposition to Gezo among the great Chiefs, however, probably lay very deep in the past. A number of them had been undoubtedly opposed to the King throughout. They had long resented his domination of political life, since this domination had both detracted from their importance and had limited their freedom to manoeuvre for their own profit. Above all, they seem to have disliked the fact that Gezo had obtained external support for his power: the De Souza's, of course, were the particular object of their hatred. This section of Badahou's following

wanted (not only) to get rid of Gezo, but also to ensure that his efforts to establish a strong monarchy would be ended once and for all. They wanted, in fact, a reversion to the politics of the early nineteenth century. Their opportunity to destroy Gezo's work arose only when they could ally themselves with those who desired a change in policy but were not necessarily opposed to having a powerful King.

Gezo himself did not repine under this reversal of fortune. Even at the time of the discovery of the slave conspiracy, he sent one of his Afro-Brazilian allies to Lagos, to find out if the English had supported this Egba-¹inspired plot. Although this Fon representative was informed that the British disapproved of Egba anti-Fon activities, Gezo by this time must almost have given up hope of English intervention. He nevertheless desperately needed outside support not only to achieve his ultimate

1. F.O.84/976, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 30.8.55. Jose Francisco De Santos, Gezo's representative, was assured by Cambell that the English did not encourage the Egba. De Santos replied, significantly, that the contrary impression prevailed in Dahomey.

aims but also to restore his position to what it had been during the greater part of his reign. The support of the Portuguese was now worthless: that of the British was not forthcoming. Gezo therefore turned to the only other European power with whom he was in contact—the French.

In spite of his advanced years, the old King began, at this point, to angle energetically for closer relations with the French. Naturally enough, he did this by attempting to co-operate fully with the only French firm then trading at Whydah, that of Victor Régis.¹ Gezo began to make friendly overtures to the agent in chief, A.M.Vidal. At one point he suggested that two of his sons be educated in France so that they could eventually act as trustworthy intermediaries between himself and the French. In fact the King made much the same approaches to the French in the 1850s as he had to the English ten years earlier.

1 After the withdrawal of the English firm of Hutton, Régis was left for a time as the only major European firm trading at Whydah. As such, Régis was the major beneficiary of Gezo's fostering of palm oil cultivation.

Victor Regis applied to the French government to send an official delegation to Abomey: he hoped by humouring the King to obtain further trading privileges for his merchant House.¹ The Ministry of Marine had at the time no political ambition in the area, but was nevertheless willing to assist the development of French trade. A delegation of French officers led by Lt. Vallon was therefore sent to Abomey in late 1856 and again in 1858. The embassies were exceptionally well received by the King, who even went so far as to show a disposition to embrace Catholicism. That he even expressed a willingness to consider adopting Christianity indicates that his political position within Dahomey was so desperate that he was prepared to take any measure, however risky and unpopular, in order to gain foreign support.

The majority groups headed by Badahou, although willing enough to increase Dahoman trade by agreement with the French were of course opposed to Gezo's attempts to involve the French in Dahoman affairs. The embassies

¹ M.M.C. Afrique IV^{9d} Regis to Marine, Marseilles 26.2.56.

failed in that the French obtained little that they wanted. In 1856 they were unable to arrange for the opening of a Regis trading post in Abomey itself: in 1858 they were unable to arrange a bargain for the purchase of indentured slaves for the French West Indies.¹ Although it was arranged that two Dahoman boys should be educated in France, it later emerged that they were not the King's children. All that was achieved was in fact the regulation of routine trading matters.² Gezo was no longer powerful enough to make trading concessions to those whose help he wished to obtain. His attempts to attract French support were absolutely ineffective because

1 F.O.84/1031, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 10.8.57 and 5.9.57: F.O.84/1061, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 6.5.58. S.O.Biobaku, op.cit., pp.60-61. B.Schnapper, op.cit., p 160 & 171-2. Schnapper provides the trading background to this scheme.

2 M.M.C. Afrique IV^{9d} Protet to Marine, Whydah 20.5.58: A.Vallon, 'Le Royaume de Dahomey' Revue Maritime et Coloniale t.II & t.III 1961: Dr.Repin, 'Voyage au Dahomey', Tour du Monde 1963, p.65: Lt. Guillemin, 'Voyage dans l'interieur du Dahomey', Nouvelles Annales des Voyages 1862.

they were opposed by the greater part of the Fon ruling class.

Between 1855 and 1858 the struggle between Gezo and his son, Badahou, reached a position of stalemate which could only be broken when one became strong enough to destroy the other. That a protracted succession struggle was in progress in Abomey is indicated by the fact that during these years rumours of Gezo's death were continually in circulation. In July 1856, for example, Consul Cambell heard from a number of different sources that Gezo was dead and that his son, an inveterate enemy of Abeokuta had succeeded him.¹ Although the rumours proved false, their very existence indicated that the political fever in Dahomey had reached such a pitch that only the death of one of the contenders for power could end the dispute. It is significant that similar rumours circulated in the 1880s when a similar succession struggle was in full swing in Abomey. That Cambell heard tales of

¹ F.O.84/1061, Cambell to Clarendon, Manchester, 2.8.58.

Gezo's death in July 1856 probably proves that it was during the first full meeting of the great Chiefs, at the annual customs after the discovery of the Yoruba slave conspiracy, that the opposition to Gezo became really powerful.

While Gezo was unsuccessfully trying to enter into closer relations with the French, his opponents were also trying to put their policies into operation. In 1856 and 1857 Badahou's messengers toured the neighbouring states of Ketu, Ibadan and Illorin, suggesting that an alliance be formed against Abeokuta.¹ Messengers were also sent to the ex-King of Lagos, Kosoko, at that time resident in Epe, asking him to use his influence to encourage the Ijebu to attack the Egba: he was also urged to shift his own base to Otta, from where he could stir up trouble for

1 F.O. 84/1002, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 26.6.56: F.O.84/1002, Alake of Abeokuta to Cambell, Abeokuta 18.6.56. Ketu was still divided as to whether or not to oppose Dahomey. This was reflected in the fact that although Badahou's messengers were imprisoned, no warning was sent to Abeokuta.

the Egba in Egbadoland.¹ Fon supporters of Badahou were active again in Yorubaland during the following year. This time Oyo was included in their itinerary.² These tentative approaches to the Yoruba powers were not however backed up by any action on the Eastern frontier. Gezo, although losing ground, was in these years still strong enough to prevent any real Fon moves in renewing the war against the Egba.

The first important Fon advance against the Yoruba came in February 1858. In that month the Yoruba town of Ekpo (Appo), near Ketu, was attacked and destroyed.³ The immediate aim of this large-scale raid was probably to frighten Ketu to its pre-1852 dependence upon Dahomey. In Fon politics, however, the raid marks the final triumph of Badahou over Gezo. The first step in the attempt to

1 F.O.84/1002, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 26.6.56 and 4.11.56.

2 F.O.84/1031 Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 4.2.57: F.O.84/1061, Cambell Clarendon, Lagos 7.4.58.

3 F.O. 84/1061, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 3.3.58.

reverse the implications of the Fon defeat before Abeokuta had been taken. The old King could no longer even restrain his opponents.

This first implementation of Badahou's policies was closely followed by the death of Gezo. It seems more than likely that Badahou and his followers, having gained the upper hand, proceeded to dispose of the King. Gezo was probably removed during the annual customs of July-August 1858. The official story given out at the time was that Gezo had died of smallpox.¹ If Gezo did die of this disease it certainly struck most conveniently. Since the Cult of Sakpata (the Smallpox Cult) seems to have been traditionally hostile to the monarchy this² was probably a conventional euphemism for regicide.

1 M.J.Horskovits, op.cit., t.I p.21
R.Burton, op.cit., (1864 ed.) Vol.II
p.406. This was the version given
by contemporary writers.

2 M.Palau-Marti, Le Roi-dieu au Benin, Sud
Togo, Dahomey Nigeria Accodentale, p.133.
See also Chap.VI pp.476-477. It may be
significant that King Kpengala (1774-1789)
is also said to have died of smallpox.

A more recent account of Gezo's death rejects the smallpox theory and substitutes for it a tale of the King's having been assassinated by a Yoruba youth immediately after the sack of Ekpo. This version seems to be mainly based on the oral tradition of Ketu; it must therefore be treated with caution since nothing would have been more pleasing to the Yoruba than a tale of how one of them had eventually killed their greatest Fon enemy.¹ It also appears to be founded on a misinterpretation of a rumour which reached Lagos in 1864.²

1. E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.91: G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.42: P.Hazoume, op.cit., pp.110-2: Th.Moulero, E.D. New Series, May 1965, No.4 p.59. One Fon authority gives an outline of the story—P.Hazoume—it is possible that his source may also originally have been Yoruba. Moulero attempted to confirm this tale: he told a group of Dahomans the story and judged by their reactions that this version of Gezo's death was an accurate one. Too much reliance should not therefore be placed on his confirmation.
- 2 R.Burton, op.cit., p.364: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.92. Dunglas lays considerable emphasis on this report, which declares that the King of Dahomey had died of wounds which he received in a slave raid. At the time (1864) this rumour was taken to refer to Gelele. There seems little reason to suppose that the report reflects anything more than the unrest in Dahomey during the unsettled reign of Gelele.

Moreover, this theory does not fit into the known sequence of events leading up to the death of Gezo. The attack on Ekpo took place in February 1858.¹ Gezo was alive when the French visited Abomey in April 1858. The ambassadors might certainly have seen one of the royal 'twins' who occasionally substituted for the monarch on state occasions.² These Frenchmen however seem in 1850 to have had some close contact with the King.³ In this their experience differed entirely from that of a French ambassador who in somewhat similar circumstances visited Abomey in 1859.⁴ Altogether it seems likely that Gezo

1 F.O. 84/1061, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 3.3.58.

2 See Chap. VI. p.434

3 M.M.C. Afrique IV^{9d} Protet to Marine, Whydah 20.5.58: A.Vallon, 'Le Royaume de Dahomey' Revue Maritime et Coloniale t.II and t.III, 1961: Dr.Repin, 'Voyage au Dahomey' Tour du Monde 1863, p.65: Lt.Guillevin, 'Voyage dans l'interieur du Dahomey' Nouvelles Annales des Voyages 1862.

4 The Bayol Mission: see Chap.V.p. 313-20

was simply 'removed' when his opponents gained the upper hand in Fon politics. This theory is given added weight by reports circulating on the Coast that Gezo had in fact been murdered.¹

The death of Gezo removed the man who was undoubtedly the dominant figure in the history of nineteenth century Dahomey, the period which the Fon themselves call their great century. Gezo was not only a great Dahoman King: he can claim a stature equal to that of any other African leader in the days before 'things fell apart'. His greatest, although transitory, success, was to re-establish the power of the monarchy. His more enduring achievements were twofold: in the first half of his reign he led his country to independence of Oyo: in the second half, after

1 Abbe Borgero to M. Planque, Whydah 30.9.61, in 'Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, 1861': A.L.D'Albeca, 'Au Pays des Evues', Tour du Monde 1895, p.105. Borgero, the first head of the Catholic mission in Whydah, reported that Gezo was murdered. D'Albeca, the first French administrator of the Whydah region, also reported that he had been murdered. Both based their reports upon tales current in their period, at Whydah

it became clear that the slave trade was doomed, he established the prosperity of his Kingdom on a sound new economic basis.

The most remarkable aspect of Gezo's career was his continued willingness to innovate—indeed, to rethink and redirect the most basic elements in his policies. At a time when the disintegration of the Oyo empire permitted Dahoman adventurism Gázo energetically espoused military expansion. Later, when this adventurism brought the Fon into conflict with new states mightier than Dahomey, Gezo saw the light and began working for a policy of peaceful co-existence. When the Afro-Brazilian slavers were at the height of their prosperity, Gezo saw to it that his country benefited from that prosperity. When the slave trade declined, Gezo took energetic steps to establish Fon wealth on a more secure footing. In this he was successful: even today, Dahomey is economically dependent upon the export of palm oil from the plantations laid down by Gezo.¹ The unpopularity of his later policies

1 J. Harisson Church, West Africa, p.430

eventually of course brought about his fall. His attempt to rebuild the strong Fon monarchy died with him. Nevertheless, it was Gezo's achievement that he first brought about Dahoman independance and later provided the economic basis essential to the maintenance of that independance.

On the announcement of Gezo's death Badahou, who took the 'strong' name of Gelele, was immediately proclaimed King. His succession was not unopposed. Gezo's son, Ouinsou, and that son's mother, the Ya-Vedo, had to be eliminated before Gelele's position was rendered absolutely secure.¹ It may be that Ouinsou was simply a Prince competing with Badahou for the leadership of the 'reactionary party'. It seems more likely that Ouinsou was a close political ally of the old King: he may, indeed, have been the son whom Gezo would have wished to succeed him. That Ouinsou was able to put up some resistance at least indicates that Badahou did not have the support of the entire Fon ruling class.

¹ E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.102

Apart from rival claimants and their royal partisans, no other enemies of Gelele are known to have been eliminated. Although one, at least, of the great Fon dignitaries is known to have been opposed to the new King, Gelele's accession did not prove the occasion for the outbreak of any large-scale fratricidal strife. The principal Ministers seem to have remained in office. A bureaucrat as important as Daba, Yeovogun of Whydah (an undoubted supporter of Gezo), was not removed from his post: his power was merely circumvented by the appointment of a Gelelian, Prince Tcindato, to the newly-created position of ~~Chaudadaton~~ ^{Chaudadaton} of Whydah. Power, in Whydah, during the first half of the new reign, rested effectively with this official.¹ It seems more than possible that other prominent supporters of Gezo were dealt with in a similar fashion.

Gelele's accession marked the end of the attempt to establish the monarchy as the all-powerful directing force in Dahoman political and economic life. The new King was

¹ M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3b} Caillet to C-in-C
Gabon 17.10.61: S.M.A. Dahomey, Old
Vicariate 1862: Abbe Borghere to
Planque, Whydah 8 6.62.

opposed by what was probably still an important group—— which certainly included the Yeovogun of Whydah. This was not in itself very unusual. What was significant was that Gelele's enemies were those Chiefs who had supported Gezo's attempts to construct a strong monarchy. In order to gain the throne, Gelele had depended upon those who had opposed Gezo's politics. They could have had no intention of allowing Gelele to begin building up the power of the monarchy. Political life in Dahomey tended to revert to the state of near-anarchy which had preceded the accession of Gezo.

Perhaps the most important immediate indications of this change was that after the accession of Gelele, the royal family was able to obtain important posts in the state beaurocracy.¹ The first holder of the post of Chaundadaton was a Prince of the blood royal: the Adanejan was also a member of the royal family.² This admission of members of the royal family to important posts in the

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.23

2 F.O.84/1221, Burton to Earl Russel
2-3.3.64: R. Burton, op.cit., p.138

Administration gravely weakened the monarch's hold on the machinery of government. Under Gelele, the Princes were able to use their new-found power to intrigue against the King himself.

During the first years of Gelele's reign the King's supporters remained happily involved both in indulging their hatred of Gezo's innovations and in preparing to put into practice their own new policies. The first victims of the long-suppressed hatred of foreigners powerful in Dahomey were the De Souza family. Although the family had long ceased to be of any real political importance, Gezo had continued to treat them with respect. They now paid the penalty of their former eminence. During the first years of Gelele's reign the three leading De Souza brothers died in very suspicious circumstances.¹

1 R. Burton, op.cit., pp.72 and 78-80:
J.F. De Almedia Prado, 'Les Relations
de Bahia avec le Dahomey', Revue
d'Histoire des Colonies, XLI, 1954
pp.167-222: P. Verger, 'Les Afro-Américains'
Memoire de L'Institut Français d'Afrique
Noire, No.27, 1953. Isadore, the Chacha,
Ignacio and Antonio (or Kwaku) De Souza
all died at this time. The new head of
the family, Francisco Felix De Souza II,
continued to call himself the Chacha but,
in fact, held no official Dahoman position.
He was absolutely subservient to the Fon
authorities.

The powers formerly held by the Chacha then reverted to the Fon administration in Whydah. Only those Afro-Brazilians who had confined their interests strictly to trade were left unmolested. Even they found their wishes disregarded and their influence much diminished.¹

The attack on the De Souzas was only a minor manifestation of the new regime's determination to bring to an end Gezo's subserviance to European influence. The revival of the practice of human sacrifice, as it had existed before Gezo's reign, was, in many ways, of much greater significance. This revival seems to have represented a rejection of European innovation and a reversion to the traditions of Dahomey. It probably symbolised some sort of mystical glorification of Dahoman independence. On a more mundane level it may have been designed to terrify (and thus keep subservient) the plantation slaves. The revival may also have been designed to serve as a warning to Dahomey's neighbours, that the Fon could no longer be treated with impunity.

1 R.Burton, op.cit., p.64:
D.Ross, 'The Career of Domingo
Martinez on the Bight of Benin',
Journal of African History, Vol VI,
1965, No.1.

A touch of irony is provided by the fact that Gezo's funeral ceremonies provided the new regime with its first opportunity to put the traditional rites of human sacrifice into practice. Altogether, between 1858 and 1861, there were probably at least 2,000 people killed during the sacrificial ceremonies at Abomey.¹ Those killed were not the political enemies of the new regime: the males were newly-captured slaves: the women were either wives of servile origin,² or also newly-captured slaves. Those members of the royal family who had opposed Gelele disappeared: they were not sacrificed. Great dignitaries, who had been close allies of the old King, had, as has been noted, their powers circumvented: they were not buried along with the King. Even the vulnerable 'foreign' enemies of the new regime, the De Souza's, were not publicly executed.

Although no Europeans were sacrificed, a Frenchman, present during part of the grand customs, saw being killed

1 For a detailed account of these ceremonies see Chap.VI pp.488-492.

2 A.Le Berisse, op.cit., p.180.

a number of Africans, wearing European clothes and with their faces painted white.¹ Since the De Souza's had ceased to be Dahoman functionaries, it is unlikely that these men were in fact their substitutes. This symbolic sacrifice of Europeans may have been intended to appeal to popular dislike of the European traders. Probably it was another gesture indicating the new regime's determination to reduce Europeans to their proper position in Dahomey.

Fon military activity between 1858 and 1860 was to some extent, at least, motivated by a desire to take slaves for sacrifice. It was also designed to induce, in the smaller states on the Dahoman borders, a proper respect for Fon power—to prove that the years of military inactivity were over. The first of the raids promoted by Gelele's followers had of course been the 1858 attack on Ekpo. This was followed in 1860 by an attack on Atakpame.² In the same year yet another town

1 M.A.E.Afrigue 51: J.Lartique, 'Relation du Voyage a Abomey'. This report has been partly reproduced in a number of publications. See Chap. VI p.492

2 R.Cornevin, Histoire du Togo, p.111

in the Ketuan area, Idahim (Idigny) was destroyed.¹

These were, however, relatively minor campaigns: the real military pre-occupation of the new regime was in preparing for a new attempt to settle scores with the Egba. Gelele's followers had been attempting to find allies even before Gezo died. Although they could not have contemplated undertaking a major campaign until after the grand customs for Gezo were over, they must have received considerable encouragement in 1860 when the Ijaye war broke out. Ibadan as well as Dahomey was

1 F.O.84/1115, Brand to Russel, Lagos 9.3.60, enclosing Townsend and Abeokuta Missionaries to Brand, Abeokuta 7.2.60 and 27.2.60: P.A.Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Vol. I, pp.141-3: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.103: J.F.Ade Ajayi, 'The Ijaye War 1860-5' p.8 in J.F.Ade Ajayi & Robert Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century. Ketu seems to have made some attempt to intervene in this affair. Since the Fon were able to carry off their prisoners it would appear that they were victorious. The Egba feared a Fon attack in 1860. They thought that the Fon had returned home because of unfavourable omens. The Fon were so heavily involved in ceremonial at this time that it seems unlikely that they would have contemplated undertaking a major campaign.

now openly hostile to Abeokuta.¹ During 1860 ambassadors were continually moving to and fro between Ibadan and Abomey.² It seems more than likely that some sort of offensive alliance was agreed upon.

In 1861, after the grand customs ended, a great army mustered in Dahomey. The outbreak of smallpox amongst the troops, however, effectively prevented any campaign being undertaken.³ In the following March, the Fon army attacked and destroyed the Egbado town of Isshaga. Dahomey thus revenged the defeat of 1852 and at the same time cleared the way for a later attack on Abeokuta itself.⁴ It seems more than probable that the Fon had decided to attack Isshaga at this particular time on the advice of the

1 For an excellent account of the outbreak of the Ijayi war and its course, see J.F.Ade Ajayi, 'The Ijayi War 1860-5' in J.F.Ade Ajayi & Robert Smith, Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century.

2 F.O.84/1115, Townsend to Brand, Abeokuta 29.5.60

3 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.108.

4 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.108-10 and E.D.II, pp.38-40. Among the captives taken at the sack of this town were a number of Christians.

Basorun of Ibadan.¹ In March 1863 a Fon army again marched into Egba territory, and on the 7th destroyed the village of Ibara (Ibala). Although this village lay at the foot of the Ato Hill, near Abeokuta itself, The Fon did not go on to attack the Egba capital. After having encamped in the area for some two and a half weeks, they simply returned to Abomey. The official reason given for this withdrawal was that Gelele had had a dream, in which he had seen that if he refrained from attack he would be assured of victory in the following year.² It is more likely that the Fon leaders disagreed amongst themselves as to the wisdom of whether or not an attack should be made.

In 1864, urged on, it seems, by Ibadan³ the Fon assembled an army of ten thousand and proceeded to march on Abeokuta. It was probably hoped to take the town by

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.109 and E.D.II, p.38

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.116-7 and E.D.II, p.47.

3 J.F.Ade Ajayi & Robert Smith, op.cit., pp.114-123. Ibadan had taken Ijaye^a but the war between Ibadan and Abeokuta had reached stalemate. It must have been hoped that a Fon attack on the Egba would break this.

by surprise. The country through which the Fon had to pass was, however, heavily populated and when the Dahomans attacked at dawn on the 15th March, they found the Egba well prepared. The Fon assault was greeted by heavy fire from the defenders: very few Fon soldiers were able to penetrate the outer defences and those who did were soon despatched by the Egba. It soon became clear that the assault was a failure. When detachments of Egba troops emerged from the shelter of the fortifications and proceeded to attack, the Fon army was forced to retreat.

At the refording of the River Oueme, the Fon army became disorganised and the retreat became a rout. Near the site of Ibara, about 5 miles from Abeokuta, the Egba fell on the army while it was attempting to regroup. Again the Fon fled in panic; this time they were forced to abandon much of their baggage, including two bronze cannons. Near the site of Isshaga the Egba again intercepted the invading army and this time took a number of prisoners. By this time the Fon were suffering greatly from hunger and thirst and when the Egba attacked for the last time, at nightfall, near Jiba, a still greater number

of prisoners were taken. During the night the Fon recrossed the River Yewa; only then did the Egba give up the pursuit. Before reaching Dahomey the Fon had however to beat off an attack by the army of Okeodon. It seems that the people of this town, under the leadership of the sons of the Chief, Anaba, who was slain by the Fon in 1848, gleefully seized this opportunity of taking their revenge on Dahomey.

Reports reaching Lagos, mainly from the Egba, indicated that about 3,000 Fon soldiers had been killed or captured. This partisan estimate was no doubt greatly exaggerated—especially since the Egba claimed that their own losses were only 50 killed and 100 wounded. Even accepting the Egba figures, however, Fon losses were not as great as those of 1852: losses in the crack Amazon regiments were not nearly as high.¹ The importance of this great defeat should not therefore be exaggerated. The Fon lost no further territory; it simply confirmed

¹ E. Dunglas, E.D.XX pp.120-5:
R. Burton, op.cit., pp.359-64.

the verdict of 1852 that the Fon were quite unable to re-establish their legemony in the Egbadoland region. Gezo's view that Dahomey was simply not strong enough to throw back the Egba had proved correct.

Although the Fon had suffered defeat when they attacked the Egba capital itself, their participation in the **Ijaye** war was not totally unrewarding: the various pre-1864 campaigns had been successful: their resumption of a warlike policy had provoked no European intervention. There was no doubt that the Gelelians could claim some success. For all that, it would appear that their failure to destroy Abeokuta caused considerable political upheaval in Abomey. Rumours reached Lagos in 1864 that Gelele was dead,¹ a sure sign that the Fon were engaged in political in-fighting. The rumour proved false and the King survived, but it does seem very probable that it was at this time the Vi-Daho, Hanasou, began to gain a following. By 1870 he was certainly very prominent in Fon affairs.² If the

1 R.Burton, op.cit., p.364

2 See below, p.204

Gelele's failed to satisfy the aspirations of the great Chiefs, Hanasou's following was bound to grow.

Gelele's policies affected, in different ways, those Europeans with interests in Dahomey. The French, in spite of Gezo's blandishments, had never attempted to play anything but a trading role in Dahomey and, unlike the leading Afro-Brazilian houses, were never molested. Nevertheless, the French did suffer in that their trade in the early years of Gelele's reign, because of the Dahoman concentration on war and ceremonial customs, declined by two-thirds.¹ There were no English traders in Dahomey at this time, but the change in Fon policy effected the Wesleyan mission situation at Whydah. The missionary found himself continually harrassed in his work.² The indignities which he suffered were obviously

1 M.M.C.Gabon IV_{3b} Caillet to C-in-C 17.10.81.

2 Rev. P.Ellingworth, 'Christianity and Politics in Dahomey', Journal of African History, Vol.IV 1964, No.2. The Wesleyan missionary at this time, the Rev.P.B. Bernasko, found that on the accession of Gelele his work was interrupted in a variety of ways. He was not allowed to preach against 'Fon barbarities' and, later, he was not allowed to preach in the open air at all. He was, moreover, repeatedly summoned to Abomey to witness various ceremonial executions. Bernasko was not, however, himself the ideal missionary.

intended as a direct insult to the British. This, together with the increase in Fon militarism and the revival of ceremonial sacrifice, however, served to confirm the accepted British view of the Fon state. The English had no idea that a major change had occurred.

A group of French Roman Catholic missionaries, who arrived in Dahomey in 1861, experienced treatment very different from that meted out to the Wesleyans. They were members of a recently founded Lyons group, the Society of African Missions, who had determined to establish a mission at Whydah, after hearing reports that they would be welcomed there by the King of Dahomey. Although they arrived after the death of Gezo they were, indeed, welcomed by his successor. This may have been due to the Fon fear of English intervention when they made their long-postponed attack on Abeokuta. The welcome accorded the Catholic mission may also have been designed to encourage the development of French trade and, above all, the development of the recent French interest in the supply of indentured labour.¹ Certainly considerable efforts were made to avoid

¹ The French attempt to buy indentured labour must still have been in their minds.
See above, p.

giving offence to the Catholic missionaries. They were even allowed to take up residence in the former Portuguese fort at Whydah.¹ As Fon interests changed, however, so did their attitude to the Society of African Missions.

After 1862, the Fon outlook on European activity began to undergo some considerable change. This is illustrated by the fact that the Wesleyan mission was no longer subjected to so much interference.² It became even more clear when Gelele requested that an English Officer be sent to visit him in Abomey. The reason for this change of attitude seems to have been that the Fon hoped to be able to profit from the deterioration in Anglo-Egba relations which followed the English annexation of Lagos.³

1 Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, 1863. Abbe Borghero to Rev. A. Planque, Whydah June 1862: R. Cornevin, op.cit., pp. 278-301. From the very start, Borghero noted that this goodwill could only be maintained if no attempt was made to make the Fon give up the slave trade or abandon human sacrifice.

2 Rev. P. Ellingworth, 'Christianity and Politics in Dahomey', Journal of African History, Vol IV 1964, No. 2.

3 S. O. Biobaku op.cit., pp. 67-78:
A. F. Ade Ajayi & Robert Smith, op.cit., p. 116

The Officer Commanding the British Squadron, Commodore Wilmot, upon learning of the King's invitation, proceeded, himself, to Abomey in December 1862. Wilmot, it seems, had long been particularly well-disposed towards the Fon: he had been in Whydah when Commander Forbes was conducting his negotiations with Gezo.¹ Wilmot's account of his reception was so favourable that the Foreign Office thought it worth while to allow the Consul at Fernando Po,

1 F.O.84/1031, Cambell to Commodore Adams, Lagos 27.3.57: F.O.84/1175, Freeman to Earl Russell, 4.11.62: F.O.84/1201, Freeman to Earl Russell, 9.1.63. The Naval officers throughout the 1850s and early 1860s were more inclined than the Lagos administration to take Fon protestations of friendship seriously. This was largely because they were not so constantly subject to the Egba-Anglican missionary view of Yoruba affairs. In 1857 Consul Cambell had squashed a proposal by a previous Commodore (Commodore Evans) to visit Gezo. Freeman did his best to put a stop to Wilmot's and Burton's visit.

¹
Richard Burton, to proceed on the visit to Abomey that he had already requested he might make. It was, to say the least, ironic that Gelele's first invitation to a British officer was accepted, while those of Gezo, after 1852, had, without fail been rejected. British policy was heavily influenced by the men on the spot and was, in consequence, anything but consistent.

The Consul was instructed to attempt to induce the Fon to admit and protect British trade---something which the Fon had of course never refused to do. He was also to advise them to abandon the various practices which the Europeans found offensive. More concretely, he was told to investigate the fate of the Christians captured by the Fon at Isshaga: if they were alive he was to attempt to

1 F.O.84/- Burton to Russell. Bonny River, 23.3.1864. Richard Burton's account of his visit is also contained in his often cited book, A Mission to Gelele. King of Dahomey. The documents relative to the despatch of Burton's embassy are contained in the Preface to the 1864 edition. Appendix III of this also contains a copy of Commodore Wilmot's report.

procure their release.¹ Perhaps most important of all, Burton was to investigate the possibility of again placing an English official at Whydah.²

Burton then proceeded to Abomey, where he remained from 23rd December 1863 to the 18th February 1864. Although he was inconvenienced by being kept waiting for his interview with the King, he was well received by the Fon. It was hardly surprising, however, considering the policies of the regime, that the Consul was unable to report that his mission had met with much success. The King absolutely declined to give up either the practice of human sacrifice or the slave trade: Burton was unable to discover the fate of the Christians. The King stated that a British official would only be allowed in Whydah if he prevented the Squadron from seizing slave ships. The era in which the Fon had been prepared to compromise was over: Gelele had only wanted to find out if England

1 They were released in 1867, when Thomas Tickel visited Abomey.

2 Russel to Burton, F.O.20.8.63, and 23.7.63—in R.Burton, 1864 edition Preface, Vol.I: F.O.84/1221, Burton to Earl Russel, Bonny River 23.3.64.

had changed her policies: the King had no intention of changing his.

Burton reported that the position of a British official at Whydah would be insupportable. All that he could recommend was that an ambassador be sent to Abomey once every three years to discover if the Fon had come any nearer to changing their views.¹ The 1864 embassy did not therefore produce any alteration in British policy towards Dahomey. The English found it impossible either to influence or coerce the Fon: they therefore left them severely alone.² This proved easier after the mid-1860s than it had earlier, since with the ending of the slave trade English interest in Dahomey tended to diminish.

The last slave ship appears to have left Dahomey in 1865. The trade had of course been of an irregular nature

1 F.O.84/1221, R.Burton to Russel, Bonny River 23.3.64.

2 A British representative was sent to Abomey in 1867. His mission was however set in motion by the Lagos administration. The British government did not approve. See below, p.

for some time. Nevertheless, Gelele's followers had intended again to make it the cornerstone of Fon economic life. This was clearly indicated by the fact that in the early years of Gelele's reign palm oil production was allowed to fall by two-thirds.¹ The economic fate of Dahomey did not however lie in the hands of either the new King or his fanatical followers. The outbreak of the American Civil War, and the consequent vigorous action of the Union Government in combating slave trading, soon made it possible to end the export of slaves from West Africa.² After 1865, the Fon had no choice but to concentrate on the production of palm oil.

1 M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3b} Captain Caillet to C-in-C, 17.10.64.

2 For the ending of the slave trade from West Africa in general and from Dahomey in particular see-
C.Lloyd, op.cit., pp.163-183:
D.Ross, 'The Career of Domingo Martinez on the Bight of Benin', Journal of African History, Vol VI, 1965, No.I.
M.Beraud, 'Note sur le Dahomey', Whydah 26.3.66, Bulletin de la Societe Geographique, November 1866.

During the early years of Gelele's reign the decline in the export of palm oil from Whydah must have encouraged the agents of Régis to look out for new trading opportunities. Porto Novo in many ways provided an ideal field for the firm's expansion. As the result of that town's position on the Lagoon near the mouth of the River Oueme, Porto Novo was by the early 1860s a more important palm oil exporting port than Whydah.¹ The trade of Porto Novo was dominated by Sierra Leoneans and by Régis' Whydah rivals, the Afro-Brazilians. The French traders in the early 1860s determined to set about obtaining a share in the profits of the Porto Novo trade.

1 F.O.84/1061, Cambell to Clarendon, Lagos 2.2.58: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3b}
Lt. Gelle to Marine, 1862: M.Beraud, 'Note sur le Dahomey, Whydah 26.3.62'
Bulletin de la Societe Geographic,
November 1866. In both 1858 and 1862 it was estimated that Porto Novo exported between 4,000 and 5,000 tons of palm oil. In the mid 1860s it was estimated that Dahomey produced 6,000 to 7,000 tons of palm oil. Whydah exported 2,300 tons of palm oil.

Régis' decision to break into the Porto Novo market made straight-forward economic sense. There were, however, a considerable number of political complications. The first of these was that in the early 1860s it looked as if Porto Novo would soon become part of Britain's Lagos protectorate. This would have meant that merchants trading in Porto Novo would have to pay the high Lagos tariff. Not surprisingly, Régis was determined to avoid doing this. As far as Régis was concerned the one sure way to prevent England seizing Porto Novo was to induce his own government to establish a protectorate there. The ruler of Porto Novo, King Sodgi, feared the English so much that he willingly co-operated. The trader's manoeuvre was entirely successful and in February 1863 a French protectorate was declared over Porto Novo. Marius Daumas, Régis's principal agent at Whydah, had already been appointed French Vice-Consul in Whydah.¹

¹ J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.110-14
C.W.Newbury, op.cit., pp.67-8

The establishment of the protectorate, although it effectively kept the English at bay, did not entirely solve Régis's problems. Porto Novo was not itself situated on the Coast, but on the Lagoon. As a result, it was only possible to bring goods to and from Porto Novo by way of the Porto Novo beach, or by way of the Lagoon from Lagos. The French did not of course wish to trade through Lagos and therefore needed free access to Porto Novo beach. This beach was, unfortunately for the traders, part of Dahomey, not part of Porto Novo.¹ Marius Daumas understood this, but he had gone ahead with his plans to open a trading post in Porto Novo because the powerful Chaundadaton of Whydah had promised that it would be a simple matter to obtain permission from the Fon to trade there. For many years, however, Domingo Martinez had exercised a monopoly of the trade of the beach, where he had two important trading posts—one directly opposite Porto Novo and one at Cotonou, the point at which the Lagoon most nearly joined the sea.

1 See above, Chap. II p. 63

Daumas found it far more difficult than he had expected to break the Martinez monopoly. The rights of the Brazilian were defended in Abomey by the Bokonou,¹ who seems to have had financial links with Martinez. The Chaundadaton himself appears to have been engaged in a struggle to exclude the Bokonou from power on this part of the Coast.² The whole matter therefore became part of one of the factional struggles which characterised Dahoman politics during the reign of Gelele. It delayed Fon reactions to French moves for almost a year. The Chaundadaton, however, eventually won the day. The Fon proved willing to accept the French protectorate of Porto Novo, a term which they never really seem to have understood, largely because they felt that a French presence there would curb any British advance westwards along the Coast. They also proved themselves willing

1 The Bokonou was the Chief Priest of Fa and politically a very important individual. See Chap. VI p.463.

2 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3p} B.Brossard de Corbigny to Laffon de Ladebat, Cotonou 12.6.64:
M.M.C. Gabon_{3p} M.Daumas to Laffin de Ladebat, Whydah 3.7.64.

to allow the French to trade on the Porto Novo beach.¹

In the meantime, French activities had led to the development of a number of new difficulties. The first of these was that the officers involved in the new protectorate unjustifiably assumed that the French protectorate over Porto Novo included a French protectorate over Porto Novo beach. The French traders did not correct this mistake—presumably because they hoped the Fon would simply acquiesce in the loss of territory. The Fon, however, did not acquiesce: they were determined that their territorial rights should be recognised and that the French traders should pay rent for the beach, as Martinez had done.

Dahoman distrust of French moves was greatly increased by the fact that one of the Afro-Brazilians closely associated with Daumas, a trader named Carvalho, boasted that once the French were in control they would

1 R. Burton, op.cit., p.64:
D. Ross, 'The Career of Domingo
Martinez on the Bight of Benin',
Journal of African History, Vol VI
1965 No. 1. Martinez was said to
have died in a fit of temper when
he heard the news.

open a channel through the narrowest part of the beach at Cotonou.¹ The Lagoon would then be joined to the sea.² This idea was anathema to the Fon, since they feared that once European boats could enter the Lagoon at this point they would be likely to try to pass through Lake Nokue and up the River Oueme to Daba, the river port of the Abomey plateau. This would leave the hinterland of Dahomey wide open to European penetration, an eventuality the Fon had long taken pains to avoid.³

1 M.M.C.Gabon IV^{3b} Daumas to Laffin de Ladebat, Whydah 4.9.64.

2 It was an oft-repeated tradition that the Lagoon had been joined to the sea at this point before Gezo's reign. It was said that Gezo, in order to destroy Porto Novan trade, had had it blocked up. It was certainly the case that French merchants did contemplate the scheme for opening the Lagoon to the sea at Cotonou. They in fact constructed a channel in 1885. See Chap IV pp.269-270. The opening of the Isthmus would have exposed a number of Fon coastal towns to bombardment from the sea.

3 The only other entrance was at Lagos. The Fon could not prevent the Europeans from entering the Lagoon. However, Lagos was far from the River Oueme and it was more likely that the Europeans would be tempted to venture up the river from Cotonou which was so much closer. That Fon fears were not groundless is shown by the fact that it was this route the French took when they invaded Dahomey.

The Fon, therefore, although prepared to welcome the French to Porto Novo, and willing to allow the French traders to use Porto Novo beach, were at the same time determined not to yield up sovereignty over that beach. On May 26th 1864 the Fon began to take measures to ensure that their will would prevail at Cotonou. The first move was against Carvalho who had 53 barrels of rum seized by the Fon when he was unloading them. This was probably intended as a warning to the French whom the Fon did not want to antagonise directly. Fon troops were later stationed on the beach and Fon customs officials were sent down to collect duty on all goods exported from the beach.¹ French attempts to secure acknowledgement of their supposed landing rights at Cotonou were disregarded. A French officer, Captain Desvaux, was sent to Abomey in October 1864 but although well received, was quite unable to persuade the Fon to give up their claim to sovereignty over the entire beach.

¹ M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3b} Lt. De La Marche to Laffon de Ladebat, 'Surprise' (at sea) 7.9.64: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3b} Ed. Lefort to Laffon de Ladebat, Porto Novo 19.7.64: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3b} Daumas to Laffon de Ladebat, Whydah 4.9.64.

On the 10th November the Chandadaton did announce some minor concessions. These were that Fon troops would be withdrawn from the beach and that 30 barrels of Cavalho's rum would be handed back: French claims to sovereignty were not, however, conceded.¹ In the end the Fon won hands down. The French withdrew their protectorate over Porto Novo despite anguished pleas from Régis.² They did so because of the impossibility of enforcing their views and because of trouble in Porto Novo after the death of King Sodji. Régis had no choice but to accept trade on Fon terms at Porto Novo and Cotonou. That this was not so very

1 M.A.E.Afrique 53 Laffon de Ladebat to Marine, Gabon 1.11.64: M.A.E.Afrique 53 Laffon de Ladebat to Marine, Gabon 21.11.64.

2 For an excellent detailed account of the European manoeuvres connected with the French protectorate of Porto Novo, see J.D. Hargreaves, Prelude to the Partition of West Africa, pp.110-18; see also C.W.Newbury, op.cit., pp.67-72.

difficult is proved by the fact that he was soon joined by two other French firms.¹

At Cotonou the Fon set up a customs system similar to that already in existence at Whydah. The French firm at Cotonou paid both an annual rent and customs dues to the King of Dahomey. The French traders, however, still harboured hopes of freeing themselves from the exactions of the Fon, and in 1868 the Regis agent, M. Bonnaud, who was also French Vice-Consul, produced a treaty supposed to have been signed by the Yeovog^an of Whydah on behalf of the King of Dahomey. In this it was stated that Dahomey confirmed the cession to France of 6 kilometres of territory at Cotonou. It was claimed that this cession had already been made verbally to Desvaux. There can be little doubt that this document was fraudulent.

1 B. Schnapper, op.cit., p. 193
The new trading firms were started by men who had previously worked with, or were related to, Regis. The first, Lasnier, Daumas & Co., started operating at Cotonou in 1866. The second, Cyprien Fabre, arrived in 1868. There was for a time intense jealousy and rivalry between Regis and the newcomers.

The French government did not act upon it, and at the time it was of no importance whatsoever.¹ Nevertheless, it later became the foundation of the French claim to Cotonou.

The withdrawal of the French protectorate over Porto Novo ended, for fourteen years, official French interest in the Dahomey region. The British remained in Lagos but, after 1865, the government at home frowned upon further expansion. Nevertheless, the English did develop in the 1860s a new policy towards the people of the interior. Under Lt. Governor Glover, the Lagos administration no longer regarded the Egba as the centre of civilisation: attention was now focussed on maintaining good relations with all the states in the area, on fostering trade and with preventing wars.²

1 The treaty is reprinted in E.D.IX pp.26-8: M.A.E.Afrique 53 Bonnaud to M.A.E. 22.5.68: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.120: C.W.Newbury, op.cit., p.99.

2 McIntyre, 'Captain Glover', Journal of African History, 1963: A.A.Aderibigbe, The Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate, Ph.D., London 1959. p.1-66

The Fon, noting the continuous deterioration in Anglo-Egba relations, began to hope again that the English might change their policy and co-operate with Dahomey in an anti-Egba alliance.¹ Even anti-Egba Lt.Governor Glover would not, however, accept Dahoman assistance against Abeokuta: the idea of Egba superiority over Fon barbarism was far too deeply entrenched for that. Nevertheless, in order to expand Lagos influence, he did work to enter into closer relations with the Fon. In April 1867, therefore, Glover sent the District Commissioner of Badagry, Thomas Tickel, to Abomey ostensibly on a mission of friendship to Gelele. The real reason was to sound out the King on the possibility of establishing an English customs post at Cotonou.² The Fon would not agree to this. They proposed that the English

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- 1 F.O.84/1250, Glover to Earl Russel, Lagos 6.10.65, enclosing King of Dahomey to Glover, Canna 5.8.65: C.O.147/11, Glover to Carwell, Lagos 6.1.66, enclosing King of Dahomey to Lt. Governor of Lagos, received in Lagos 27.12.65.
 - 2 C.O.147/14, Glover to Thomas Tickel, Lagos 28.12.66, enclosed in Glover to Colonel Blackhall, Lagos 4.2.68.

purchase the captives taken in war that year. They also reiterated their proposal for an alliance, with the English, against the Egba.¹ There therefore proved to be no grounds for co-operation.² Glover's initiative did not receive the approval of the Governor-in-Chief of the British West Africa Settlements, and the mission was never repeated.³

After the Lagos-Egba break in 1865, the Fon did, for a time at least, cease to fear English hostility. As a result, they had no further use for the French missionaries and gave their dislike of non-trading Europeans full rein. In 1865 the Governor of St. Thomé sent a garrison to Whydah to re-occupy the Portuguese Fort there. The Fon, probably

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- 1 C.O.147/14, Glover to Colonel Blackhall, Lagos 4.2.68, enclosing T.Tickel to Glover, Badagry 22.8.67.
 - 2 C.O.147/14, Glover to Colonel Blackhall, Lagos 4.2.68, enclosing T.Tickel to Glover, Badagry 22.8.67. To show his goodwill the King released the Christians captured at Isshaga. Since he had stated that some of them were dead when Burton tried to obtain their release, it can be seen that the Fon were seriously regarding Lagos as a potential ally.
 - 3 C.O.147/14 Governor-in-Chief to Duke of Chandos and Beckingham 12.2.68.

hoping that the return of the Portuguese garrison heralded a revival of the slave trade, agreed to the expulsion of the missionaries from the former Portuguese fort.¹ The Catholic Fathers were then subjected to progressively greater interference. The end came in 1871 when a child died as the result of punishment dealt by an over-zealous missionary: the Fon used this incident as a means of making it impossible for the Fathers to continue in Whydah. They first of all attempted to carry the offending missionary off to Abomey for punishment. They only gave up this idea on the payment of a substantial fine by the Whydah Catholics. For fear of what might happen next, the missionaries then withdrew from Whydah and established their headquarters at Porto Novo.²

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- 1 S.M.A. Old Vicariate 1865, De la Mark to Courdioux, 'Surprise' 14.2.65: Beraud to Father Superior. Whydah 14.2.65: Governor of St. Thome to French Consul, Whydah 11.3.65. Eventually the French government persuaded the Portuguese to pay the missionaries compensation for the repairs they had carried out on the fort.
 - 2 S.M.A. Dahomey, Vicariate du Benin 1871-3: Courdioux to Planque, Porto Novo 8.9.71.

During the first part of Gelele's reign the Fon had gone their own way and defied the Europeans to do anything about it. They revived the practice of human sacrifice and they continued to raid for slaves. The export of slaves from Dahomey ceased, but not because of any pressure brought to bear on Dahomey itself: both French and English missionaries had been abused with impunity. French and English attempts to take over Cotonou had moreover been repulsed with ease. The Fon could not know that their success had been brought about by the fact that the Europeans were not sufficiently interested in Dahomey to take measures to enforce their wishes. Gelele's view that the Fon should not in any way give in to pressure, but should rely upon their armed strength to carry out their aims seemed therefore to be justified. In the success of the Dahoman policy towards the Europeans during this period lies the reason for Fon resistance to European encroachment two decades later.

Perhaps the most important developments in the course of nineteenth century Fon history were taking place in the decade following 1865. These key changes concerned

European activity on the Coast and the development of a semi-Europeanised society there: they arose partly out of economic circumstances and partly out of Gelelean anti-European fanaticism. The very success of the regime's policy towards the Europeans contained the seeds of future Dahoman humiliation. A number of immensely important consequences emerged for example from the regime's hostility towards the Catholic mission. The missionaries, in this era, closed their school at Whydah and devoted their energies to Porto Novo: from then onwards the missionaries remained constantly hostile to Dahomey. They tended to identify their interests with those of the state in which they operated. The Fon, who had made their work impossible, they branded as barbarous reactionaries. The Fathers, who influenced opinion both locally, amongst the Europeans, and in Europe itself, consistently presented the Fon as the villains in all Coastal political disputes.¹ In a curious way, their

1 There was one exception. A missionary named Dorgere who worked at Whydah in the late 1880s and early 1890s presented the Fon version of events.

attitude to Dahomey exactly duplicated that of the Church Mission Society missionaries during the 1840s and 1850s.

Missionary hostility towards Dahomey was of course very important in the development of future French attitudes to Coastal expansion. The anti-Fon bias of the Catholic Fathers was however as important in the field of local education as it was in forming European views. It was they who educated the first Francophile generation on the Coast; this group of semi-Europeanised Africans inherited, and indeed exaggerated the missionary dislike of the Fon. To this mission-educated elite all things French were superior; Dahomây stood for everything opposed to their cult of French civilisation.

By the mid-1870s this group was beginning to become immensely important: it was they who, from the start, acted as intermediaries between the French and the African. It was they who provided the French with interpreters, with clerks and, later, with lower-grade colonial officials. It was through them that the French acquired their knowledge of local affairs. Two men educated by the mission

schools in this decade are especially worth mention. One was named Xavier Beraud, the Euro-African son of Régis's chief agent at Whydah in 1865:¹ the other was his contemporary, and close friend, Bernardin Durand. Both started life in Whydah, but both came to centre their activities in Porto Novo. Durand became interpreter to the French Residency in Porto Novo—a function he succeeded in doubling with that of procurer for the Residency brothel. Beraud became Chief of Police in Porto Novo.² They eventually became key men in the passing of information to the French administration of the late 1870s and early 1880s: both were influential at the Court of Porto Novo: both were thoroughly Francophile and both hated the Fon kingdom.

It was not the missionaries alone, however, who were creating a new balance in the Europeanised society of the Bight. New developments in French trade also played a very important part. Whydah's palm oil trade did increase after the ending of the slave trade, but

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XXI, p.16

2 S.M.A, Dahoman Prefecture 1889-91:
Pied to Planque, Porto Novo 25.10.91.

not as greatly as did that of Porto Novo and its transit port, Cotonou.¹ Porto Novo, in fact, by the mid-1870s had become the focal point of European activity between the Gold Coast and Lagos. The development of French trade had a considerable effect upon Porto Novo society. The former pupils of the mission school found their means of livelihood in the French firms. The expansion of trade tended to link many of the smaller African traders with the French exporters. This was particularly true of one of the most enterprising elements in coastal society, the Moslems.² These small traders began to feel

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- 1 F.O.84/1061 Cambell to Clarendon,
Lagos 2.2.58: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3b}
Lt. Gelle to Marine 1862: M.Beraud
Note sur le Dahomey, Whydah 26.3.66:
Bulletin de le Societe Geographic,
November 1866: M.A.E Afrique 77,
D'Elteil to M.A.E., Whydah (received
in Paris 26.12.80). Whydah exports
of palm oil rose from between 2,300-
2,700 tons in an average year between
1852 and 1862, to 3,500 tons in the
late 1870s. Porto Novo, in the former
period, exported 4,000 tons. Exports
via Cotonou alone, in the later period,
amounted to 6,700 tons. In the late
1870s Whydah exported 4,300 tons of
kernels. Cotonou exported 6,400 tons.
- 2 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay,
Porto Novo 7.8.91.

their own prosperity so linked to that of the French firms that they became strong advocates of the expansion of French influence.

A new type of society was in fact, in Porto Novo, in the process of formation—a society which was tied economically and sentimentally to France. Until the 1860s the only Europeanised group on the Coast had been the Portugese orientated, Afro-Brazilians, who had their centre at Whydah and whose acknowledged spokesman was the Chacha. This group, although it enjoyed a brief come-back in the early 1880s, had become progressively less vigorous during the 1850s and '60s, partly as a result of Fon activities. In the 1850s the leading Afro-Brazilian houses kept up an intensive commercial rivalry¹ with the French firm of Regis. Later, however, the Afro-Brazilians found themselves unable to withstand French pressure; the destruction of the Martines trading monopoly was perhaps the most notable event in the

1 A.Vallon, 'Le Royaume De Dahomey', Revue Maritime et Coloniale, Tom.2. 1861, p.359.

whittling away of their commercial advantages. Many gradually attached themselves to the French interest: Many of them, because the only educational facilities available to them were French, became culturally orientated towards France. This process was particularly marked in Porto Novo: Whydah remained a bastion of Portuguese influence.

The formation of this new economic grouping tended to produce some strange results. In spite of the influence of the Catholic Fathers, some branches of the old Afro-Brazilian families gave up Catholicism and became Muslims—basically, it appears, to further their commercial links with the interior. Commercially, and politically, this religious shift tended to cut the converts off from their Afro-Brazilian catholic relations and place them in the pro-French camp. There was even a Moslem branch of the De Souza family residing in Porto Novo. An interesting example of the complicated personal histories of this group is provided by the career of Ignatio Paraiso, the man who became the leader of the Porto Novan Moslems in the period of the French conquest

of Dahomey. This man claimed to be the descendent of a Moslem Prince who had been sold into slavery but had later returned to the Coast. In fact, he appears to have been the son of one Barbiero Paraiso, who had come originally to Porto Novo as Domingo Martinez' barber. Ignatio eventually rose to being leader of the pro-French Moslem group simply as a result, it appears, of commercial success.¹

During the mid-years of Gelele's reign there was then in the process of formation on the Coast, especially in Porto Novo, a new part-literate, French orientated, commercial society.² The 'new' men tended to be violently pro-French: indeed, they were far more committed to encouraging French expansion in the area than were the

1 ~~Palau-Mart~~^y, Etude sur Islam au Dahomey, pp.48-56 and 56-96.

2 J. Ballard, 'The Porto Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial Era', Odu No.1, Vol.II, July 1965. Ballard's article throws an interesting light on the later development of this society.

French traders.¹ They felt of course the need of European protection against local exploitation far more than the powerful European firms.

During this period of rapid assertion of Dahoman independence, developments in coastal society were, then, very unfavourable to the long-term interests of the Fon. Indeed, Gelelean policies had very few real successes to chalk up. The ending of the slave trade and the 1864 defeat before Abeokuta destroyed the real basis of the Gelelean position. Of course the fiction that these reverses were merely temporary continued to be kept up. Indeed, it was maintained for fifteen years after 1864 that the Fon were preparing to crush Abeokuta. The Dahoman army, however, only twice during these years advanced into Egba territory. In March 1873 they camped for three days on the Ato hill overlooking Abeokuta, but then withdrew without engaging the enemy. They again advanced towards Abeokuta in 1875, this time destroying

1 E. Chaudin, Trois Mois de Captivite au Dahomey. Even as late as 1889 few of the traders expected France to take over Dahomey. Chaudin's work shows this quite clearly.

two Egba villages: once more they encamped on the Ato hill but this time were driven back by the Egba under the leadership of a Christian, John Okenla, the Balagoun. The Egba forces were at this time overwhelmingly superior since they were armed with automatic rifles while the Fon had only the old flint lock type of gun.¹

Even after Gelele had been King for a decade, although it must have been fairly obvious that the aims which he sought to achieve were quite unattainable, no new departures in Fon policy were initiated. This lack of drive and initiative seems to have been due to weakness and division in the Fon political leadership. Dahoman decision-making, after the collapse of Gezo's power, was clogged by the rivalry between the various factions at Court. The rivalry between the Chaundadaton and the Bokonou for influence on the Coast was only one example of this. Gelele may have had some intention of giving his Chiefs their heads during the first years of his

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX. p.126.

reign and then gradually bringing them under control. If this was his ambition, he was certainly quite unable to fulfil it.

By 1870, when the English botanist, A.J. Skertchly, visited Abomey, Dahoman politics again centred around both the Vi-Daho, a prince named Hanasou, and the King.¹ This clearly indicates that Gelele's very throne was seriously challenged by a very powerful group in the Dahoman ruling class. Since Hanasou and a number of his brothers were later killed by the 'reactionary party'² it would seem that, over and above family and dynastic ambitions, the Vi-Daho's faction stood for a change in policy. Very likely they recognised that the Geleleans fanatical hostility to Abeokuta was harmful to Dahomey: they probably also had greater hopes of friendship with England. This could well explain why

1 A.J. Skertchly, Dahomey As It Is.
This appears clearly from Skertchly's account of his visit.

2 See below, pp. 213-216.

Skertchly was so well treated in Abomey and why he formed such a high opinion of Hanasou.¹ The indications are that in 1870 power was shared fairly evenly between the two groups: neither could gain the upper hand. This is probably why the Fon army made two purposeless advances and retreats into Egba territory in the early 1870s.

If the King had intended to attempt, eventually, to bring the Chiefs under his control, the circumstances of his elevation to the throne were very much against him: he was also, it appears, severely handicapped by the early onset of ill-health. From almost the beginning of his reign Gelele appears to have suffered from a disease of the eyes.² As early as 1864 this eye trouble was named as ophthalmia and was said to be threatening to degenerate into total blindness.³ Skertchly, in 1870,

1 A.J.Skertchly, op.cit., pp.158-9

2 R.Burton, op.cit., p.145.

3 M.M.C. Gabon-Congo IV, Extract from the Courrier du Flave, 15.10.65. This information in turn came from La Patrie which published news of West African affairs reported by way of Goree.

confirmed that the King's eyes were half concealed by cataract.¹ That Skertchley met and talked to a man with weak eyes also confirms that at this point Gelele was at least partly able to fulfil his monarchial duties. Soon after this date, however, his condition must have deteriorated: certainly by 1875 he had ceased to play any active political role.

During these years of feeble and divided leadership the Fon military effort was directed mainly against the minor states on the borders of Dahomey. Even against these petty political units the Fon were hardly successful. The chief sufferers in the Dahoman attempts to master their smaller neighbours were, not surprisingly, Atakpame, Grand Popo, Porto Novo and Ketu.

Another in the series of Fon raids on Atakpame took place in 1877: as before, the Atakpams, although defeated were able to preserve their independence.² Grand Popo also suffered from Fon determination to impose their hegemony over the small states to the West. The Fon attacked in

1 A.J.Skertchley, *op.cit.*, p.141

2 J.E.Bouche, Bulletin de la Societe de Geographie, 1875: 'Letters to his Brother'.
R.Cornevin, Histoire du Togo, p.111

1869, occupied the site of the town, but found the inhabitants had taken refuge across the Lagoon, beyond the reach of the Fon armies. Another attack was launched in 1870 but by this time the Fon do not seem to have got even as far as destroying the deserted town.¹ The war was then ended by the inhabitants of Grand Popo agreeing² to pay some sort of irregular tribute to Dahomey. Grand Popo could therefore be claimed to have been brought under Fon suzerainty. It was never possible, however, to exert this authority regularly.

As far as the Fon were concerned, no change occurred in their relationship with Porto Novo although, of course, developments in French trade were quickly altering the composition of society there. The reign of King Mekpon (1864 to 1872), successor to Sodji, was one of extreme confusion—confusion made worse by abortive efforts on the part of the British to bring Porto Novo within the

1 S.M.A.Dahomey, Old Vicariate, 1869,
Thallier to Planque, Whydah 28.11.69:
Segner to Planque, Whydah 28.11.69:
S.M.A. Dahomey, Old Vocariate, 1870,
Courdioux to Planque, Lagos 30.1.70.

2 F.O.84/1465 Strahon to Carnarvon,
Cape Coast 22.11.75. The tribute
was paid in salt.

the orbit of the Lagos protectorate.¹ Mekpon's power within Porto Novo itself was challenged by a number of important Chiefs, while his authority never seems to have extended much beyond the actual boundaries of the town. The King who followed Mekpon, King Messi, was a drunkard who had even less success in establishing his authority. The hinterland of the state, during his reign, was largely controlled by the sons of Mekpon who had enlisted the aid of the Egba. Messi was only just able, probably with Fon aid, to prevent the rival dynasty from gaining control of Porto Novo itself.²

After Messi died of drink in September 1872, the son of Sodji, Prince Dassi, came to the throne and he took the ^{strong}name of Toffa. His chief rivals were the Mekpon family who, with the aid of the Egba, still held large tracts of the interior of the state. Although Toffa had intrigued with the British during the reigns of his

1 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.118-20:
C.Newbury, op.cit., pp.71-76.

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.128:
N.Baudin, 'La Guerre Civile a
Porto Novo', Missions Catholiques,
Nos. 297-8, 12.2.75 and 17.2.

immediate predecessors, he gained the throne as a result of the support of the French merchants.¹ He was also committed to the Fon in that he had to rely upon their support for protection against his rivals. Perhaps in order to symbolise his solidarity with the Abomey regime, Toffa began his reign with a very elaborate traditional celebration of his three predecessor's funeral rites.²

From the beginning of his reign, Toffa's power rested on the twin pillars of Fon and French support. Because of the growing influence of the French in Porto Novo, the King was surrounded by the new French orientated merchant-clerk group who were violently anti-Fon in sentiment. In the early years of his reign, Toffa's dependance on the Fon for the defence of his Kingdom meant that ultimate Dahoman control was easily maintained.

1 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.209:
A.Akindele et C.Aguessy, Contribution
a l'Etude de l'Histoire de L'Ancien
Royaume de Porto Novo, p.77-86.

2 Annals of the Propagation of the Faith,
1876, Vol.37, J.Poirier to Planque,
Porto Novo 19.12.75 and Baudin to
Planque, Porto Novo 16.4.75.

The influence of the growing small trader group was, however, against the maintenance of this link with Dahomey. If France became willing to protect Toffa's throne he might not prove such a willing vassal of Dahomey. The manner in which this able and ambitious monarch manipulated the political forces at work in his Kingdom in fact provided the key to the later development of French relations with the Fon.

To the East of Dahomey, the politics of the Kingdom of Ketu were also in a state of flux. The second Fon defeat at the hands of the Egba had re-inforced the Ketuans ambition to act independently of Dahomey. Fear of its powerful neighbour, however, continued to create strife in Ketuan society.¹ As a result, Ketu did not

1 G.Parrinder, op.cit., pp.47-8. In 1867 conflict broke out between the two societies which dominated Ketu life. One of these, the Egbe Mayhon, was made up of farmers and war chiefs who favoured solidarity with the Yoruba. The other, the Egbe Afujere, which had the support of the traders, including the rich Moslems, favoured peace and trade with Dahomey. The strife between these two societies led to the flight of the Alak~~o~~tu Adiro to Meko.

follow a steady foreign policy. Ketu co-operated with first one Yoruba state and then another and the outcome was that she never really forged close links with any of them. This was not disastrous for Ketu while Dahomey suffered weak, divided leadership: it did not however prepare the town for a later determined Fon assault.

The Fon in this period, then, had little success in restoring and extending their hegemony over even the minor states which surrounded them. Only in Porto Novo, where their position had never really been challenged, were they in ultimate control. Even there forces were building up which were later to challenge Dahoman sovereignty. It was only in Grand Popo that the power of the Fon state was expanded: yet even there the extent of Dahoman control remained very dubious.

In spite of this lack of success the first years of Gelele's reign were the first in Dahoman history, since the time of Agadja, in which the Fon remained resolutely independent of any outside power. No foreigners had any say in Dahoman affairs. In spite, therefore, of the ending of the slave trade, the defeat by the Egba, and the failure to

bring new territories under Fon control, these years appear to the Fon as one of the most glorious periods in their history.

By 1875 Gelele's reign was effectively at an end. Although he remained King, all accounts stress that he no longer had any say in the running of the country. Only one European met a man said to be the King after this date—a French official, Dr. Bayol, who visited Abomey in 1889. Bayol saw this figure only when he arrived in Abomey: all the official business of his embassy was conducted through the Vi-Daho and the great Chiefs.¹ It is more likely that Bayol met one of the King's 'twins' who took the place of the monarch on ceremonial occasions.² What in fact seems to have happened was that Gelele, although he lived to a ripe old age, went blind at some point between 1870 (when Skertchley remarked that cataracts half-concealed his eyes) and 1875, when he ceased to be politically active.

1 See Chap.V pp.317-318.

2 See Chap.VI p.434.

A power struggle had long been going on in Abomey between the supporters of the King and those of the Vi-Daho. On the King becoming totally incapacitated it appears that Hanasou temporarily, at least, became the man who dominated Fon politics. This became apparent in May 1876 when a very high-handed move by the British was treated much more respectfully than it could possibly have been if the Geleleans had been in full control.

Early in 1876, the Yeovogun of Whydah, after a trade dispute with a Mr. Turnbull, the agent of the House of Swanzy, which had recently begun to trade at Whydah, confined the merchant, without his trousers, for two hours in a midden. On February 26th Commodore Sir William Hewett demanded that the Dahomans paid a fine of 500 panchions of rum (worth about £6,000). He threatened that if this was not paid in full by 1st June the coast of Dahomey would be blockaded. The British government, although they disliked Hewett's action, and felt it had been taken simply to punish the Fon for their barbaric

practices, felt bound to back the Commodore.¹ The immediate reaction of the Fon officials at Whydah, with, it would seem, the sanction of the authorities then dominant in Abomey, was to gather the oil with which to pay the fine.² This was at the beginning of May. In late May the Fon attitude towards paying the fine underwent an abrupt change:³ the fine was not to be paid.

It seems probable that the soft line had been initiated by Hanasou and his supporters. A policy of giving way before European threats could not have had

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- 1 For detailed accounts of the blockade and the events leading up to it, see: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.201-7: C.Coquery, 'Le Blocks de Whydah' Cahiers d'Etudes Africains, 7.1962.
 - 2 F.O.84/1464, Admiralty to F.O.9.6.76, enclosing Churchill to Hewett 16.5.76 and Yeovogun of Whydah to Hewett, Whydah 4.5.76: F.O.84/1465, R.W.King to Derby, Bristol 2.8.76, enclosing extract of a letter from Captain Charles Holden to R.W.King, Bristol 2.8.76.
 - 3 F.O.84/1465 Admiralty to F.O.4.7.76, enclosing Commander Pawlett to Admiralty 1.6.76.

the support of the Geleleans. In late May, then, Hanasou must have ^{been} overthrown: the supporters of Gelele must have reasserted their control of the state. Some light can be thrown on this event by a close study of one of the traditional historical tales of the Fon people. This story is called, Death is Raider of the King's Sons: the Wilfull Heir-Apparent.¹

The events of which this tradition tells are said to have taken place at the time of the death of King Gelele's mother. From European sources it can be ascertained that this sad event took place in 1876.² The tale relates how, when the King was away at war, he returned to find that his three eldest sons were dead. There is no mention of any epidemic having swept through the royal family at this time. It seems fairly safe to

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- 1 M.J. and F.S. Herskovits, Dahoman Narrative, pp.374-6.
 - 2 F.O.84/1466, Dumanesque to Lt.Gov. Lees. Lagos 14.9.76, enclosing extracts from a letter from Resident of Ahgewey to Dumanesque 28.9.76. The tale mentions a raid on Meko. This does not however appear to be the 1882 raid in which the Fon destroyed that town.

assume that the Vi-Daho and his brothers did not die natural deaths. In fact, it seems more than probable that a palace revolution had taken place. It does not, moreover, seem unreasonable to conclude that this took place in late May when the official Fon attitude to current problems changed so completely. Since this coup d'etat brought in a 'hard' line towards the Europeans, it must have been conducted by the supporters of Gelele. That the King was 'away at war' when this happened is probably a polite fiction covering the fact that the King was at the time politically impotent. The tale certainly reveals that Gelele had no control over the course of events.

The second part of the story tells how the King chose a new Vi-Daho from amongst his remaining sons. On the advice of a Chief who was after the King's death to become Yeovogun of Whydah, Gelele chose a prince named Kondo. Now, from an oral history of Whydah¹ it would seem that this Chief was named Nougbododhoue—

1 Casmir Agbo, Histoire de Ouidah, p.56

King Gelele's great fetish doctor. There were indications early in Gelele's reign that Priests made up a considerable part of the King's support. Later, in the reign of Gelele's successor, this Nougobodhoue, along with Gelele's chief wife, the Visesegan, attempted to seize power in order to have more vigorous anti-European policies implemented.¹ It does seem as though there is a great deal of continuity here.

What appears to have happened in the early 1870s was that the Geleleans, deprived of the active support of the King, had seen power slip into the hands of the Vi-Daho, Hanasou. He, together with a number of his brothers, had determined not to maintain his father's rigid attitude to the Europeans. Probably in this he had the support of the Whydah Chiefs who almost always worked towards conciliating the Europeans. After the coup, indeed, it was said that the Yeovogun, Seklocka,

1 See Chap. V p. 362-7

trembled for his head.¹ Hanasou's moderate line, however, produced a reaction from the Geleleans who, in seizing power, killed the Vi-Daho and his leading royal supporters.

The new Vi-Daho, Prince Kondo, soon proved that he was by no means Nougobododhoue's puppet. Presumably Kondo had some personal following: Nougobododhoue must have needed his support in order to carry out the coup. It seems more likely, from his later actions, that Kondo only partly shared Nougobododhoue's rigid views: he must, then, have co-operated with the Geleleans to some extent, at least, simply as a way of advancing his claims to the throne.

1 M.A.E.Afrique 76, De La Jaille to Marine, Whydah 30.4.77: M.A.E. Afrique 77, D'Elteil to Marine, Whydah 20.8.80: Casmir Agbo, op.cit., p.56 Seklocka, ~~however~~, survived for three years but was removed in 1880, ostensibly on a charge of rape. Agbo declares that the Yeovogun Dagba made an agreement in 1878 with France. Although the Yeovogun's name is not mentioned this could not have been so. That Agbo did not know of Seklocka's tenure of office indicates that oral tradition suppressed his name.

Much of the latter part of the tale relates how the new Vi-Daho, against his father's wishes, began to initiate a very warlike policy. This part seems to refer to the fact that it was Kondo, under his later title of Behanzin, who led the Fon resistance to the French. It was probably added merely to blacken Kondo's name and to disassociate Gelele's other descendants from the war against the French. This part can therefore be safely neglected.

Gelele himself, although he no longer played a part in the affairs of state, was not removed in the same way as Gezo had been. The fiction of his continuing to reign was the necessary background to Nougobodhoue's powerful position. Only when the Fon factions were forced to sink their differences in the face of imminent foreign danger was Gelele finally liquidated.

The immediate result of the coup in Abomey was to end any Fon move towards paying the indemnity. The British therefore, rather reluctantly, imposed a blockade on the Dahoman coast. This seemed to the Fon—as it had in 1852—a prelude to an armed attack. Fon troops were

rushed to the Coast and all 'roads' to and from the coastal towns were closed.¹ Knowledge of the British government's reluctance to impose even a blockade may appear to make Fon fears of a British invasion seem somewhat exaggerated. It must be remembered, however, that it was only two years since an English army had marched to Kumasi. English Officers, moreover, deliberately informed the French—who no doubt passed on the information to the Fon—that the English contemplated an immediate invasion.² Fon fears were moreover greatly increased by the fact that an English gunboat made two voyages up the River Oueme to Dogba,

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- 1 F.O.84/1466, Admiralty to F.O. 29.9.76, enclosing Commodore Hewett to Admiralty 17.8.76, and Turnbull to Senior Naval Officer on the Bight of Benin, Porto Novo 31.7.76: F.O.84/1465, Admiralty to F.O. 25.7.76, enclosing Commander Pawlett to Secretary of the Admiralty, Cape Coast Castle 22.6.76.
 - 2 F.O.84/1467, Admiralty to F.O. 5.7.77, enclosing Captain Sullivan to Lt.Gov. Lees, Whydah 6.5.77.

the route to Abomey from which the Fon had always excluded the Europeans.¹

Fon preparations for armed resistance proved unnecessary.² The British government's intention was to lift the blockade as soon as a face-saving formula could be found. This requirement was met when Victor Régis, whose trade was suffering as a result of the blockade, offered to advance half the fine, in palm oil, and charge it to Gelele's account.³ In theory, the Fon

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- 1 See p.¹⁸⁶ above: F.O.84/1466, C.O.to F.O.8.11.76, enclosing Dumanesque to Lt.Gov. Lees, Lagos 23.9.76: F.O. 84/1467, C.O. to F.O. 5.3.77, enclosing Dumanesque to Lt.Gov.Lees, Lagos 28.12.76.
 - 2 M.A.E.Afrique 54, P.Beraud & S.H.Carrena to M.Cardonnet, Whydah 18.6.76. The only violence committed against Dahomey at this time was the firing of a stray shot from a French vessel on a village near Whydah. No damage was done. This incident, however, often featured amongst later Fon complaints of French misconduct.
 - 3 F.O.84/1467, Admiralty to F.O. 18.4.77: Captain Sullivan to Commodore Sullivan, Whydah 17.3.77. The real sufferers during the blockade were the French traders. Neither the Popos nor Porto Novo were blockaded, and the Fon were able to buy what they needed from these ports.

were to pay the fine: in fact they seem to have known little or nothing of the Régis arrangement except that the French had prevailed upon the British to lift the blockade.¹ The English and the Dahomans, in the person of the Yeovogun of Whydah, then signed an agreement in which the Fon agreed to pay the fine.

It does not seem at all likely that the Fon knew what they were signing. The English officer in charge of the treaty-making, Captain Sullivan, took great pains to ensure that the Yeovogun understood the agreement. A French merchant, indeed, at first wanted to act as interpreter. Sullivan would not allow this. However, the man who did the translation was a Dahoman educated at Whydah. No doubt the French had him well primed. It would seem particularly unlikely that the Fon understood the agreement when it is considered that this document

1 M.A.E.Afrique 76, Extract from a letter from M.Germa, Whydah 10.12.77. Régis' agent, Germa, informed the Yeovogun that Régis would give him the money to pay the fine. He also gave the Yeovogun instructions upon how he was to behave to the Englishmen who came to arrange the lifting of the blockade.

also contained a clause whereby the Fon agreed to give up the export of slaves.¹ As far as the Fon were concerned, the Europeans had once again given way before a Dahoman show of force. Gelelean policies seemed again to have been justified.

1 F.O.84/1467, Admiralty to F.O.,
enclosing Captain Sullivan to
Commodore Sullivan, Whydah 15.5.77:
F.O.84/1467, Admiralty to F.O.
5.7.77, enclosing treaty with
Dahomey, signed on 12.5.77.

C H A P T E R I V

T H E Y E A R S O F S U C C E S S

1878-1889

The withdrawal of the English blockade had left the Geleleans more than ever convinced that Dahaoman territorial integrity could best be defended by out-and-out resistance to European pressure. The political impotence of Gelele had, however, somewhat reduced their power. They had been unable to destroy the coastal faction which favoured at least limited co-operation with the Europeans and they needed the co-operation of Crown Prince Kondo to maintain their position. The fact that no one group was strong enough to ensure that its candidate would succeed at the old King's death made it certain that until the succession issue was settled, Fon political life would remain very unstable.

Although the lifting of the British blockade and the subsequent removal of any threat of British invasion indicated to the Fon that the Geleleans, led by Nougobodhoue, had been right in preaching armed resistance to any European attempt to interfere in their affairs, the blockade in fact proved to be the starting point of renewed European activity on the Slave Coast.¹ The lull in European interest in this area which had provided the essential background to the success of Gelele's policy towards the Europeans, had come to an end. The first indication of this change came with the French determination to obtain confirmation of the rights on the Slave Coast, which, they claimed, had been granted to them in 1864 and in 1868. They had two reasons for wanting this information. The first was that the importance of Cotonou, as an entrance port to the rich oil markets of the interior, was continually increasing. The second and more important reason was

¹ Catherine Coquery 'Le Blocus de Whydah', Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines, 7, 1962.

that they wished to have sufficient evidence to force the English to acknowledge French claims to Cotonou so that these claims could be used as a bargaining counter in the forthcoming Gambia exchange negotiations.¹

A French officer, Captain Serval, was therefore sent to Whydah where, on the 19th April, 1878, he signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Yeovogun.² The most important clause of this treaty confirmed the cession to France of six square kilometres of territory at Cotonou. Serval took great pains to ensure that the Fon understood the treaty.³ His efforts to ensure

1 M.A.E. Afrique 76, M.A.E. to M.M.C, Paris 16.7.1877: M.A.E. Afrique 76, note pour le Ministre 23.7.1877: M.M.C. Afrique IV_{10c} Marine to Allemand, Paris 11.8.1877: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c}, Marine to Allemand, Paris 11.2.1878: M.M.C. IV_{10a} Allemand to Marine, Whydah 4.6.1877: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp. 208 and 209.

2 The treaty is reproduced in E.D. XI pp.28-9

3 M.A.E. Afrique 76, report by Serval, Whydah 23.4.1878, reproduced in Revue Maritimes et Colonial, 1878, t59.

Dahoman comprehension were, however, frustrated by the French traders—led by a long time resident on the Coast, M.Colonna di Lecca. These men gave the Fon to understand that the Cotonou clause simply guaranteed French trading holdings at Cotonou..

A French official on the Coast, Dr Bayol, later obtained a document, from the interpreter who had taken the Serval Treaty to Abomey, in which M.Colonna di Lecca assured King Gelele that the treaty in no way compromised Fon sovereignty. This confirms circumstantial evidence to the same effect: the interpreters at Whydah were employees of the traders. A Régis trading agent later attempted to buy from the Fon the rights over Cotonou which were already supposed to have been ceded to France: the Fon, until the conquest, always / mentioned that all that had been granted to the French at Cotonou was the right to trade.

The merchants were in fact playing a double game. They were trying to involve France in Cotonou, but, at the same time, they sought to avoid bringing down on

their own heads the wrath of the Fon.¹ The Dahomans of course willingly agreed to sign a document which they believed simply confirmed French trading rights. The French delegation therefore left Whydah convinced that they had obtained what they wanted, while the Fon remained happy in the knowledge that the French remained friendly and were at the same time interested only in trade.

With good trading relations re-established on the Coast, Fon attention was mainly concerned in the late 1870s with the problems posed on their eastern frontier by the renewal of the Ibadan-Abeokuta struggle.² The nature of the war forced both the Fon and the Egba to reconsider their policies towards each other. Because of their long-established rivalry with Abeokuta, the

1 M.M.C. Senegal^{7b} Bayol to Marine, Evguiries 11.10.1887: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{4b} Guillat to Bareste, Whydah 11.9.1884: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3c} Germa to Bareste, Porto Novo 2.1.1884.

2 S.Johnson, op.cit., pp.413-26. War between the Ibadan and Egba began in 1877.

Fon had for long been unable to see that the growing power of Ibadan posed a greater threat to Dahoman security than did Abeokuta. The fruitlessness of the anti-Egba campaigns in the late 1860s and 1870s must, moreover, have convinced many of the Fon leaders that the 1851 settlement in the Egbado and Awori regions would have to be accepted. Concentration on this old grievance was in fact diverting Dahoman attention from more urgent problems.

The course of the war between Abeokuta and Ibadan made the new threat to Fon interests glaringly obvious. Abeokuta had attempted to prevent Ibadan importing supplies of arms through her territory. As a result Ibadan began to expand her influence in the Ketu area: an area in which the Fon had long been sensitive to foreign intrigue. Ibadan's purpose was to obtain supplies of arms and ammunition from Porto Novo via Meko—a rebellious vassal of Ketu.¹ Toffa of Porto Novo

1 C.O.147/37, Lees to Hicks-Beech, Accra 26.4.1879, enclosing Moloney to Lees, Lagos 7.5.1879: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX pp. 129-30.

was ready and willing to allow Ibadan supplies to pass through his Kingdom. It was good trade. Besides, the Egba had aided his dynastic enemies, and he was therefore willing to do them any harm he could. Dahomey, although the overlord of Porto Novo, never interfered in trade matters. It was the menace of Ibadan's expanding influence on the frontier near the Fon province of Agony which really disturbed the Fon—not Ibadan's opening of a new trade route.

The Dahomans viewed this extension of Ibadan's influence with such distrust that they determined to abandon their hostility to Abeokuta. They therefore sent ambassadors with proposals of peace to that city.¹ That the Fon came to choose such a radical course of action is probably due to the influence of Prince Kondo. The Gelelean supporters of Nougbododhoue were never noted for a willingness to move with the times. The change in Fon policy, moreover, occurred almost

1 F.O.84/1467, C.O. to F.O. 13.4.1877, enclosing Onilado to Administrator of Lagos, Abeokuta 13.2.1877.

immediately after Kondo's influence began to be felt. It is therefore fairly safe to ascribe this new policy to Kondo's innovating spirit.

It appears that the Egba did not at first accept these Dahoman overtures—probably because they suspected treachery on the part of Dahomey. The Fon, however, persisted, and by 1878 or 1879 the two states had made peace. Hostages were exchanged in order to guarantee mutual respect for the new pact.¹ The Fon were now free to take action to prevent Ibadan penetration of the Kingdom of Ketu. On the request of the Ketuans themselves,² the Fon, in May 1879, attacked and destroyed

1 C.O.147/37, Moloney to Lt.Gov.Lees, Lagos 3.2.1879: C.O.879/20, Rowe to Derby, Accra 6.2.1883, enclosing Moloney to Lt.Gov.Griffith, Lagos 21.12.1882.

2 G.Parrinder, op.cit., pp.37-49: Ketu had for a long time played an ambiguous role in Yoruba affairs. In the struggles of the preceding years, probably as a result of internal division, she sided with one power and then with the other. As a result she had earned the distrust of all. At this point, fear of Ibadan and jealousy of Meko must have prompted her action

Meko, the Ketuan town which had been co-operating with Ibadan.¹

On the Coast in 1878 and 1879 events were also taking a decisive turn. The French had already decided in principle to appoint a salaried official to replace the intermittently functioning trading Vice-Consulate on the Slave Coast. The conclusion of the Serval Treaty, with its confirmation of the Cotonou concession, made the appointment more urgent. In November 1878, Lt.Col. Ardin D'Elteil² was despatched to the Slave Coast as Resident at Cotonou and Vice-Consul at Whydah.³ His task

1 G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.50: C.O.147/37, Lees to Hicks-Beech, Accra 26.5.79, enclosing Moloney to Lees, Lagos 14.5.79: M.A.E. Afrique 76, D'Elteil to M.A.E., Lagos 14.8.79. Parrinder gives the date of the sack of this town as 1882.

2 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Mattez to Marine, Libreville 11.6.1880: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.207-9. D'Elteil's son was an Agent, at Whydah, for the French firm of Fabre.

3 The Vice-Consulate at Whydah had lapsed many years before. Unofficially, Regis Agents had, however, continued to use the title.

was to guard French interests all along the coast from Senegal to Gabon.¹

When he reached the Slave Coast in 1879, D'Elteil found his position quite untenable. The Fon refused to recognise the cession of Cotonou. Indeed, D'Elteil's demand that they recognise French sovereignty there was probably the first they had heard of the supposed cession. Moreover, in keeping with Gelelean custom, the Fon, when he arrived, declared they would receive no permanent French official who was not also a trader. It took the combined effort of all the French in Whydah to persuade the Yeovogun even to meet him: the Fon authorities disregarded him and went so far as to prevent him moving freely along the Dahoman coast.

D'Elteil therefore decided, and was supported in his decision by his superiors, that his position in Dahomey was quite intolerable. He withdrew to Lagos where he acted as an agent passing on information to

¹ M.A.E. Afrique 76, M.A.E. to M.M.C.,
Paris 7.11.1878, Presidential Decree
of 4.2.1879: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit.,
p.207-209

the French Government.¹ Experience of coastal conditions led D'Elteil to urge the French Government (as the only way of gaining French rights) to forcibly occupy lower Dahomey. He also wanted France to guard her position there, against the English, by resuming her protectorate over Porto Novo. King Toffa had recently requested this.² The French Government did not at this time seriously contemplate any such move against Dahomey: neither were they willing to risk antagonising Britain in Porto Novo. Toffa's offer was, however, a useful diplomatic weapon to keep in reserve.

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- 1 M.A.E. Afrique 76, D'Elteil to M.A.E., Lagos 14.8.79: M.A.E. Afrique 76, M.A.E. to M.M.C., Paris 19.11.79: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3c} M.M.C. to M.A.E., Paris 19.11.79: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.210
 - 2 M.A.E.Afrique 76, D'Elteil to M.A.E., 22.2.79: M.A.E. Afrique 76 D'Elteil to M.A.E. 6.4.79, enclosing Toffa to D'Elteil, Porto Novo, 4.3.79: M.A.E Afrique 76, D'Elteil to M.A.E. 1.5.79.
 - 3 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.214.
In 1879 the French saw their claims on the Slave Coast as a bargaining counter in negotiations with England, not as a basis for conquest.

In fact it was not kept in reserve for long. The English reaction to D'Elteil's activities in Porto Novo was to raise the British flag over Ketonou, a strategic point on the lagoon system between Porto Novo and Cotonou. At the same time, they gave encouragement to the Chiefs of Oueme and Appa who were in rebellion against King Toffa's authority.¹ The French coastal traders feared, more than ever, that the English were intent on making their tariff system continuous from the Gold Coast to Lagos. Merchant discontent with the existing situation was, moreover, increased by the fact that landings at Cotonou became well-nigh impossible because of the activities of man-eating sharks.

As the merchants saw it, the solution to this problem was to open a channel between the lagoon and the sea at Cotonou. Launches could then ply directly between the ocean-going vessels and Porto Novo. This plan had long haunted the coastal traders, and was of course the one which had given so much trouble when injudiciously

1 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.210-13

aired by Cavalho in 1864.¹ To prevent Fon interference with such a project, the merchants knew they would have to have French protection. Therefore, so as to be able to put their project into operation and to ward off the threat of an extension of the Lagos tariff, the merchants also pressed the French government to occupy Cotonou and to assume the protection of Porto Novo.

¹ M.A.E. Afrique 77, Bareste to M.A.E., Whydah 20.5.1881: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Penfantany to M.M.C. 'At Sea' 26.1.82, enclosing Lemoux to Penfantany, 'At Sea' 26.1.82: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Grivel to M.M.C. 'At Sea' 10.7.82, enclosing Villeneuve to Grivel, Libreville 7.7.82: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 21.5.84, enclosing Colonna di Lecca to Bareste, Porto Novo 26.4.82, and Abbe Planque to M.A.E., Lyons (no date). In the early 1880s the idea of connecting the lagoon to the sea at Cotonou was very much in the air. A naval officer even reported favourably on the project. The trader, Colonna di Lecca, declared that the deriving of any advantage from a Protectorate over Porto Novo would be dependent on putting the scheme into practice. He outlined a plan whereby this could be done without Fon interference.

After considerable hesitation, and even after having received advice to the contrary from the Naval authorities in the area, the French government, in April, 1883, determined to re-establish their protectorate over Porto Novo.¹ No move was made to occupy Cotonou. The Resident appointed to Porto Novo was the merchant Colonna di Lecca who, in 1878, had seen to it that the Fon remained unaware of the French interpretation of the Serval Treaty. The Fon evidently suspected no new departure in French policy. They were always willing to welcome traders and seem to have seen in Colonna di Lecca's new title only a move to block the English in Porto Novo. So unaware were the Fon of the potential French threat to their interests that they immediately congratulated ~~d~~ Lecca on his appointment.²

The French traders in the 1880s had learned to keep their ambitions to themselves. The Fon therefore

1 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.294-7.

2 M.A.E. Afrique 78, Colonna di Lecca to M.A.E. Porto Novo 7.4.1883.

knew nothing of their plans for Cotonou. Indeed, with D'Elteil's withdrawal, it must have seemed to the Fon that both French claims to Cotonou and the idea of appointing non-trading representatives on the coast had been given up. Franco-Dahoman trading relations continued to be mutually beneficial.¹ If any European power appeared to present any threat to Dahomey it was England, whose attack on Ashanti, and whose blockade of the Coast, had been followed up by expansion into the territory of Dahomey's client Porto Novo.²

Even the English in the early 1880s did not appear directly hostile. The Dahoman position on the Coast seemed secure. Fon attention continued to be concentrated on their eastern frontier. In 1881, with

1 For the importance of French trade to the Fon, see Chap. III p.198

2 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Penfantany to M.M.C., Dakar 28.2.1882. In 1882 English participation in the trade of the ports directly under Fon control ended when Swanzu withdrew from Whydah.

Ketu's support,¹ the Fon raided Oyo country to the north-west of Abeokuta.² In the next year they sacked a number of Ketuan villages on the Upper Yewa.³ The Dahomans seem to have considered that this last raid would also have the support of Ketu. After the campaign they requested that Ketu provide them with food supplies. Their request was refused.⁴ The Ketuans seem to have decided that co-operation with Dahomey was no longer in their interests. They evidently considered that after her series of successful campaigns, Dahomey presented a greater threat to Ketu's independence than did Ibadan.

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- 1 S.Johnson, op.cit., p.455. Johnson reports that Afun, the Chief of Ketu, was the Fon guide on this occasion.
 - 2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.130. The Fon threatened that in the next year they would attack Oyo itself.
 - 3 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX p.131. Dunglas names the villages: Ibiyan, Aworo, and Tobolo.
 - 4 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX p.131: G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.51. When the Fon asked for food they received this reply:-
'If you want yams do as we do, cultivate your fields'.

The Fon in the 1880s seem to have been making a determined effort to strengthen their eastern frontier. It was probably in the 1880s that they began, for reasons of military security, to reorganise Agony into a province administered on the same lines as Whydah. Certainly it was only in the 1880s that the Fiogbe, the head of the Agony administration, came to play a prominent part in Fon political life.¹

Since 1851, when Ketu had again begun to pursue a policy independent of that of Dahomey, the Fon had resented their independence and regarded it as a threat. Oral tradition² suggests that it was the town's proximity to Agony which finally determined the Fon to attack Ketu. This may well be so. The value of the Agony area was continually increasing. Much of the palm oil which the Fon produced came from the east of Dahomey and had to be exported down the unprotected River Oueme. Ketu's refusal to

1 M.M.C. Dahomey III, p Angnot to Bayol, Porto Novo 5.1.1890; M.M.C. to Dahomey III, p Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 15.1.1890.

2 A. Le Herissé, op.cit., p 333

co-operate further with the Fon seems to have determined the Fon to attempt to re-assert their control of the town.

The determination to embark upon an attack on Ketu made it essential that the Fon re-assess the nature of their new relationship with the Egba, who had also been allied with Ketu against Ibadan. The Egba hostages held in Abomey were sent back to Abeokuta: the Egba were informed that the King to whom the hostages had been sent had died and that his successor had determined to resume the war against Abeokuta.¹ It seems likely that this was a diplomatic move designed to sound out the Egba reaction to the new Fon policy towards Ketu. The evidence as to this reaction is

1 C.O.879/20 Rowe to Derby, Accra 6.2.83, enclosing Moloney to Lt. Gov. Griffiths, Lagos 21.12.82. The Egba hostage who took this message back to Abeokuta in October 1882 was Okinkiola, son of Ogundipe, war Chief of Abeokuta.

¹
conflicting, but it does seem that the Egba-Fon mutual agreement to suspend hostilities, persisted throughout the 1880s.² The rupture in Dahomey's relations with Ketu does not therefore appear to have effected for long the new relationship with Abeokuta.

The Fon knew that Ketu was too strong for the Fon army to overcome her defences easily. They therefore, in time honoured Dahoman fashion, reverted to a ruse; in early 1883 they put about a rumour that

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- 1 C.O.96/155 Rowe to Derby, Accra 9.2.84: W.B.Griffiths to Rowe, Lagos 17.1.84, enclosing Lt.Governor's interview with Ketu messengers: C.O.96/168 Griffiths to Stanley, Accra 14.12.1885, enclosing statement by messengers from Prince Fetona of Ketu, signed by A.C. Willoughby, Lagos 3.11.85. At one point the Ketu claimed that they would obtain assistance from the Egba. It emerged later that they did not receive it. Probably a number of Egba Chiefs would have liked to support Ketu but never actually did so.
 - 2 There was no conflict between the two states in the 1880s. Moreover, in 1889, a French official, Dr. Bayol, visiting Abomey, reported that he knew of Egba messengers having been in Abomey. It is doubtful if he could have heard reports of the pre-1882 relationship.

the Fon army had just been defeated by the Mahi. Ketu therefore felt safe from Dahoman attack, and in July 1883, after Egba encouragement, a Ketuan army under a new General, Agidigbo Hungbo, was despatched to campaign against the Ibadan.¹ The Fon seized their opportunity, made a surprise attack on Ketu, and, in spite of the spirited resistance of a body of Moslems, were able to occupy the town. The Moslem resistance enabled a large number of people to escape. Nevertheless, the Fon were able to kill the Alaketu, Oleku, as well as the old war Chief, Afun, who had not left the town with the army. The Ketu army had not of course been destroyed, and in case they should

1 C.O.96/155, Rowe to Derby, Accra 9.2.84., enclosing Evans to Rowe 31.7.83: G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.51: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX p.131: A.B.Ellis, The Ewe-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast, 1890, pp.327-8. Dunglas states that the Fon army was sent out in August 1883. European sources indicate that the Fon attack which followed the departure of the army took place in June or early July 1883.

be intercepted by this army, the Fon retired—not,¹ however, before setting the town alight.

Perhaps to avoid interception by the vengeful Ketu army, or perhaps intent on attacking another Yoruba town, either Save or Okeiko, the Fon did not retire directly to Dahomey but, instead, marched northwards. During their march they were met in the Save forest by the armies of the Bariba, the Oyo, and the Save. The Fon army was very severely defeated and² many of the Ketu prisoners were set free.

1 G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.52: E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.131: C.O.96/155, Rowe to Derby, Accra 9.2.84, enclosing Evans to Rowe 30.7.83: S.Johnson does not mention this attack on Ketu.

2 C.O.96/151, Rowe to Derby, Accra 26.7.83. enclosing Willoughby to Evans, Lagos 13.7.83: C.O.96/155, Rowe to Derby 9.2.84, enclosing Evans to Rowe, Lagos 30.7.83. Neither oral traditions of Dahomey nor Ketu mention this Fon defeat. It seems that the Bariba were the principal architects of the victory. Greatly exaggerated reports of the scale of the Fon defeat reached Lagos. It was even claimed that the King of Dahomey had been taken to Oyo and held captive. S.Johnson, op.cit., pp.45-8. Johnson outlines the Fon campaigns of this period very briefly. For an analysis of the name Bariba see Cornevin, op.cit., pp.159-60. Presumably it was the state of Parakou with which the Fon came into conflict.

The Ketu army returned to its devastated home and, under the leadership of Agidigbo Hungbo, the people of Ketu proceeded to rebuild their town.¹ Encouraged by the recent Dahoman defeat, they soon began raiding into Dahomey territory. Even more serious, they organised against Dahomey a league consisting of the Bariba, the Oyo Yoruba, and the Save. They even managed to obtain promises of help against the Fon from a number of leading Egba Chiefs.² After an exceptionally heavy defeat, Dahomey now seemed to be confronted by the combined might of her eastern neighbours, all of whom were intent upon her destruction.³

Developments on the Coast in 1883 appeared to be equally threatening for Dahomey. The English continued

1 G.Parrinder, op.cit., pp.52-3:
E.Dunglas, pp.133-4.

2 C.O.96/155 Rowe to Derby, Accra 9.2.84,
enclosing Griffith to Rowe, Lagos 17.1.84
and Minutes of an interview with Ketu
messengers, signed by Hethersett, Lagos
14.1.84

3 In the event, the Egba gave little or
no assistance to Ketu.

to intrigue in Porto Novo, but, potentially even more detrimental to Fon interests, were a series of English negotiations with Portugal for the transfer to England of the Portugese fort at Whydah.¹ The Fon were informed of these negotiations in April 1883.² The Commandant of the fort was immediately summoned by the Whydah authorities and informed that the Portugese

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- 1 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.301-3:
S.E.Crowe, The Berlin-West Africa Conference; C.O.96/154, C.O. to F.O. 4.5.83, enclosing Draft VII of the proposed Congo Treaty with Portugal (relevant article, 14): C.O.879/22 African 283, Derby to Young 21.6.84: C.O.879/22 African 283, Derby to Young 22.8.84. The transfer of the fort was considered during the negotiations leading up to the Anglo-Portugese Congo Treaty of 4.2.84. In the Treaty, Britain secured not the transfer, but the right of pre-emption over the fort. As a result of Franco-German objections to the main body of the Treaty, it was abandoned soon after its conclusion.
 - 2 S.M.A. Dahaman Prefecture, 1883-88, Menager to Planque, Agoue 4.5.83: M.M.C. Afrique IV^{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 27.8.84, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 14.7.84.

must either re-affirm their friendship for Dahomey or at once quit the Kingdom. The Fon were obviously intent upon maintaining their right to determine who might occupy the fort.¹ Under pressure, the Portuguese Commandant agreed to write to his superior, the Governor of St.Thomé, concerning the rumour that the fort was about to be transferred to the English.²

On the 7th June 1883 a Portuguese gunboat arrived in Whydah with a soothing but quite untrue

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- 1 C.O.147/36, F.O. to C.O. 23.11.78, enclosing Mourier to Lord Salisbury 14.11.78: M.A.E Afrique 76, extract from a report from Commander Vaudereuil, Elmina 9.12.78: M.A.E Afrique 76, M.A.E. to M.M.C., Paris 13.3.78: M.M.C.Afrique IV_{11a} M.M.C. to M.A.E., Paris 21.11.78: J.A.Skertchley, op.cit., p. 174. The Portuguese had been in trouble before: in 1878 the Portuguese were accused of being too well disposed towards the English and on that occasion the garrison had been retained in Whydah against their will. The Portuguese had considered sending an expedition to the rescue. The government of the time wished to withdraw from the fort but national feeling in the Cortes had prevented this.
- 3 S.M.A.Dahoman Prefecture 1883-88, Menager to Planque, Agoue 4.5.83: M.M.C. Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 27.8.84, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 14.7.84.

letter from the Governor of St. Thomé, assuring the Fon that Portugal had no intention of handing the fort over to the English.¹ It then emerged that the Portuguese were interested in buying indentured labourers to work on their plantations in St. Thomé. The Fon began to see the Portuguese in a much more favourable light, and negotiations about slave buying soon got under way. In these negotiations the Portuguese Commandant relied heavily on the assistance of the new Chacha, Julianio De Souza.² De Souza's knowledge of the language and outlook of both Portuguese and Fon, and his position as leader of the Afro-Brazilian Coastal group soon gave him the place of

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- 1 M.M.C. Afrique IV11a M.A.E. to M.M.C. 29.8.83 enclosing Bareste to M.A.E., Freetown 5.8.83.
 - 2 Julianio was son of one of the important sons of old Francisco Felix who 'disappeared' between 1858 and 1860. He represented a more prosperous part of the De Souza clan than had Francisco Felix II who was his uncle, and who claimed to be head of the family in the days of Gelele. It would seem that Julianio had to 'dispose' of a number of rival relations before he himself became acknowledged head of the family.

an essential intermediary between the two. The power that this position gave encouraged him to act as an independent agent, moulding both Fon and Portuguese proposals to suit himself.

During the discussions about this disguised revival of the slave trade, the Portuguese began to advance the proposal that Dahomey should accept Portuguese protection.¹ In the first instance the idea seems to have been the brain-child of M.Custoda Miguel Da Boia, the Governor of St. Thomé,² who was concerned to protect his source of slave labour. No doubt Da Souza interpreted this proposal to the Fon in a very much modified form—— in fact he seems to have suggested a version of the old Gezoan policy of reliance, in matters concerning the Europeans, on the Portuguese-supported Chacha. It indicates

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- 1 M.M.C. Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E to M.M.C 14.5.1884, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 16.3.1884: M M.C Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 27.8.84, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 14.7.84.
 - 2 M.M.C. Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 9.6.84, enclosing M.Laboulage to M.A.E Lisbon 30.5.84.

how severely the Fon were affected by the defeats of 1883 and how worried they were by the prospect of Yorubaland uniting against them that, under the leadership of Kondo and Nougbododhoue, they did not reject such a proposal outright.

The difficulties of the political situation in Abomey must also have influenced the ruling clique towards accepting Portuguese overtures. One of Gelele's brothers, who was influential in the army, in fact attempted to use the disillusionment created by defeat to oust the ruling faction.¹ Although this coup failed, it is fairly obvious that the Kondo-Nougbododhoue group were beset by difficulties at home as well as abroad. Kondo, who was evidently of a much less fanatical turn of mind than Nougbododhoue, seems to have been especially attracted by the Chacha's idea that Portugal could be relied upon to protect Dahoman territory on the Coast

1 S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture, 1883-88:
Menager to Planque, Whydah 19.10.84:
M.M.C. Gabon IV^{3c} M.A.E. to M.M.C.
2.2.84: Planque to M.A.E., Lyons
20.1.84

against foreign intrigue. He was, indeed, sufficiently interested to propose sending Fon ambassadors to Lisbon to discuss the project. However, although Portugal sent a gunboat to Whydah in both January and May 1884, and although the Portuguese officers of these ships were feasted and feted to an unprecedented extent, no ambassadors were sent.¹ It may reasonably be inferred that Kondo was unable to persuade the traditionalists amongst his associates of the wisdom of such an alliance.

Although the Fon leaders procrastinated on the issue of the Portuguese alliance throughout 1884, they did take effective military and diplomatic steps towards mitigating the Yoruba threat to Fon independence. Their policy was to deal separately with their various enemies. First of all, on 15th February 1884, they made the position of Toffa somewhat more secure by destroying the town of Okeodan, which had harboured and given aid to Toffa's dynastic

1 M.M.C. Afrique IV11a A.O'Neill to M.M.C. 8.3.84; M.M.C. Afrique IV11a M.A.E. to M.M.C. 22.3.84, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 7.2.84; M.M.C. Afrique IV11a M.A.E. to M.M.C. 19.6.84, enclosing Montaignac to Bareste, Whydah 6.5.84.

enemies.¹ This attack was also intended as a warning to the Egba that the Fon were still capable of vigorous action. In 1884 the Fon either by threats or diplomatic action did manage to persuade those of the Egba who were contemplating aiding Ketu to give up any such idea.²

The Fon-Egba guarantees of non-aggression may be even have been renewed. The Dahomans in the early part of 1884, moreover, dealt so severely with the Yoruba town

¹ C.O.879/20, Rowe to Kimberley, Accra 23.2.82, enclosing Griffith to Rowe, Lagos 7.2.82: C.O.879/22, African 296, Young to Derby, Gold Coast 9.1.85, enclosing T.Tickel to Lt. Governor, Badagry 16.2.84: Okeodan had been sacked by King Gezo but had since recovered. It had been known for some time in Lagos that Toffa had requested aid from the Fon against Okeodan.

² C.O.96/168, Griffith to Stanley, Accra 14.12.85, enclosing statement made by messengers from Prince Fetona of Ketu, signed by A.C.Willoughby 3.11.85. The Egba did not aid Ketu. This may not have been due to Fon actions, but to Egba reluctance to co-operate with Ibadah which by this time had come to the assistance of Ketu.

of Save that they were able to reduce the town to a tributary position.¹ They were probably able to keep the town under control until the French conquest.

In spite of this victory however it would seem that the Dahomans had again to take the field against the Yoruba allies in the latter part of the same year. Oral tradition gives the details of a campaign which can only be placed at some time between July 1884 and June 1885. During this campaign the Fon army had to remain for five months protecting Agony against the threat of Yoruba attack.² This long threat to Agony seems to have convinced

1 C.O.96/168, Griffith to Stanley, Accra 14.12.85, enclosing statement by messengers from Prince Fetona of Ketu, 3.11.85: G.Parrinder, op.cit., p.87. In 1883 Save had been one of the powers opposing Dahomey. In 1885 Ketu messengers stated that they had received no help from Save because the Fon had conquered the town and placed a consul there. Early 1884 seems to have been the only time between 1883 and mid-1885 when the Fon could possibly have undertaken a campaign against Save. Parrinder states that the Fon ravaged Save in 1887. It seems more than likely that the attack to which he refers took place in early 1884.

2 A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.333. No other authority makes any mention of this campaign. Le Herisse himself does not date it accurately. His description does not square with what is known of the late 1883 campaign. It must have taken place before June 1885, when the campaigns which led to the destruction of Ketu began.

the Fon that the continued existence of Ketu was too great a menace to their security to be tolerated. Until this time it seems that the Fon had hoped that Ketu would again submit to Fon overlordship—as Savi had done. Instead, Ketu, in her extremity, had turned to the other Yoruba states for protection. This strategically situated town was therefore acting as an agent, bringing the hostility of the other Yoruba states to bear on Dahomey. It was decided that Ketu would have to be totally destroyed.

The Ketu were well aware of the fact that they had embarked on a struggle to the death, and, in February 1885, sent messengers requesting that Lagos take action to prevent the Fon again attacking them.¹ Momentarily, at least, Ketu seems to have been deprived of the support of her major

¹ C.O.96/166, Griffith to Derby, Christiansborg Castle 1.6.85, enclosing Barrow to Governor, Lagos 20.2.85. The messengers from Ketu requested that English boats should patrol the Oueme to prevent the Fon crossing it to attack them.

allies, Ibadan and Oyo. Probably in order to prevent any assistance reaching Ketu from Savalou, the Fon proceeded to reduce that town to obedience.¹ In early June 1885, the Fon, at the instigation of Toffa, conducted a brief campaign against a series of Oueme villages.² Then later in the year, probably in July 1885, the Fon determined that the time was ripe for an

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- 1 R.Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey, pp.131 and 146. Cornevin notes that Lintonon Gbaduidi, the seventh king of Savalou (1863-85) prepared to kill himself rather than co-operate with the Fon. His successor, Zoundela, the eighth king, did however co-operate and even lived some time in Dahomey. It seems therefore that in 1885 the Fon intervened successfully in Savalou to place a king favourable to Dahomey on the throne. Since later in the year the Fon were active on the Oueme, it would seem that this intervention took place in the normal campaign season—January to March—in 1885.
- 2 M.W.C. Gabon IV_{3c} M.A.E to M.M.C. 16.7.85: Marchelli to Bařeste, Lagos 6.6.85

attack on Ketu.¹ A Fon army therefore marched on Ketu and launched a powerful frontal assault on the city.² The Ketuans were however well prepared and after a stiff engagement drove off the attackers. The Dahomans then retired beyond the range of the defenders' guns and proceeded to lay siege to the town.

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- 1 M.M.C. Gabon I27b Dorat to M.M.C., Porto Novo, 21.12.85: C.O.96/168, Griffith to Stanley, Accra 14.12.85, enclosing statement of messengers from Prince Fetona of Ketu, signed by A.C. Willoughby, Lagos 3.11.85: S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture 1883-88, Berenger to Planque, Porto Novo 9.9.85, and Menager to Planque, Ague 21.9.85: S. Johnson, op.cit., p.455: E. Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.142: A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.333: G. Parrinder, op.cit., p.60-61 Johnson gives 1886 as the date of the only Fon attack on Ketu which he mentions. Dunglas gives 1886 as the date of the second attack. Le Herisse states that Ketu was destroyed after three years campaigning. G. Parrinder accepts 1886 as the date of the second attack but notes that this date has not been absolutely confirmed. European sources indicate that the second attack took place in July 1885 and that Ketu fell in late September or early October 1885.
- 2 According to reports reaching Lagos, the Fon were assisted by a body of Portuguese troops.

This siege proved a lengthy business and dragged on for three months. During these months the Fon, it appears, went in constant dread of massive assistance coming to Ketu from the other Yoruba towns. In early September, indeed, they learned that Yoruba reinforcements¹ were on their way. After scouring their country for reinforcements, the Fon determined to make a supreme effort to reduce the town. Luckily no reinforcements arrived in time, and Ketu's strength failed. The Fon were thus able to enter the town and, uninterrupted, were able to take their revenge on the town which had so long resisted them.² Only a few of the inhabitants escaped. Those who were not killed were led into Dahomey, either to be exported as indentured labourers to St. Thomé, or to be

1 S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture, 1883-85:
Menager to Planque, Ague 21.9.85.
Reports reaching Lagos state that
Oyo had sent an army to the aid of
Ketu, but on hearing the noise of
Portugese cannon immediately
retired.

2 E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, p.141:
G. Parrinder, op.cit., p.58.
According to oral tradition this
entrance was effected by treachery.

put to work on the Fon palm oil plantations.¹

The Fon had achieved a resounding success— even though it had only been made possible by continuous dissention amongst the Yoruba states. Ketu had been totally destroyed and, for some time at least, any possibility of a Yoruba coalition against them had been scotched. Moreover, the Fon had in the course of two years successfully protected their client, the King of Porto Novo, and had re-established their paramountcy over Save and Savalou. The Fon had in fact re-established their control of the border states which rejected their paramountcy in 1852. Kondo and Nougbododhoue had proved themselves astute and courageous leaders.

1 M.M.C. Gabon I_{27b} Dorat to M.M.C.,
Porto Novo 21.12.85: C.O.96/168
Griffiths to Stanley, Accra 14.12.85
enclosing statement of messengers
from Prince Fetona of Ketu, received
by A.C. Willoughby, Lagos 3.11.85:
E. Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.141-2.
G. Parrinder, op.cit., pp.55-61
A.B. Ellis, Ewe-Speaking Peoples of
the Slave Coast, pp. 327-8.

Nevertheless, although they had been amazingly successful, the Fon had gone for long in great fear of a combined attack by a number of the Yoruba states. During the long seige of Ketu, when their army had been immobilised outside this town and their country denuded of troops, this fear must have been particularly acute. This feeling provides a good deal of the explanation of why the Fon leaders, in August 1885, when the seige of Ketu was at its most critical stage agreed to accept the long considered offer of Portuguese protection.

It does not however provide the whole explanation. Events on the Coast as well as in the interior had been moving quickly in 1883 and in 1884. The death of Di Lecca,¹

1 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 18.9.83, enclosing Guilman to Bareste, Porto Novo 4.7.83: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3d} note from L'Avenir des Colonies et de la Marine (undated): M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Presidential Decree 12.7.83: Di Lecca died on 14.5.83, and was followed by a series of shadowy trader successors, all agents of Mantes Freres and Borelli.

the trader-Resident of Porto-Novo, had been followed in May 1883 by the appointment, to the post of Resident, of a French Naval Officer, Colonel Dorat.¹ Dorat's quickly implemented policy of attempting to re-inforce the King of Porto Novo's power, and opposition to English manoeuvres within that Kingdom,² might have been welcome to the Fon. The appointment of a non-trading French official backed by French troops, albeit a very small number, however, proved very worrying indeed to the Dahomans. This development was doubly disturbing in that it was combined with a revival, for the first time since 1879, of French insistence on their possession of Cotonou. Both Dorat and his replacement Lt. Roget made a series of representations

1 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} Masseron to Marine, Porto Novo 3.7.84. Dorat arrived in Porto Novo on 2.7.84.

2 J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., p.199:
C.Newbury op.cit., p.109.

to the Fon¹ on the subject of their yielding up to France the rights which France acquired in the 1878 treaty.²

At first the Fon seem to have felt that, on the whole, the increasing French activity in Porto Novo was beneficial since it limited English ability to

1 C.O.879/21, African 278, Rowe to Derby 10.2.84: Lt. Governor to Rowe, Lagos 12.2.84. The trading Residents, like the trading Consuls or Whydah, used their position to increase the influence of their firms. They attempted to encourage the French government to contemplate expansion but they were careful not to jeopardise their positions by letting this be known to the Fon. Only one of them, A. M. Germa, went too far: he offered, on behalf of his company, to buy the coastline of Dahomey.

2 Dorat received a Decree, putting the Resident of Porto Novo in charge of Cotonou on 20.7.84. The Fon always maintained that they had never granted France rights of sovereignty over Cotonou.

intrigue in that state.¹ In the latter part of 1884, however, the French activity in Porto Novo was paralleled by unprecedented French and German activity on the Popos. It became obvious by early 1885 that the Europeans were determined to control the tiny Popo states.² So much European intervention at both extremities of Dahoman coastal territory persuaded the Fon that the Portuguese were justified.

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- 1 S.M.A., Vicariate du Benin 1880-82:
Menager to Planque, Ague 7.9.80:
S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture, 1883-88:
Menager to Planque, Ague 28.6.84.
This is shown by the fact that in June of that year they even allowed the Societe des Missions Africaine to re-open their Whydah mission station. The Society had had a catechist school ~~school~~ in operation there since 1880.
 - 2 C.Newbury, op.cit., pp.110-18 and Appendix pp.209-10: J.D.Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.323-8: French and German claims in this area were extremely complicated. The final delineation was carried out in 1887 when France received only Grand Popo, the most easterly of three small states. The problem which, above all, concerned the European diplomats was how to establish a workable Customs system in their tiny, newly-acquired territory.

in their contention that Germany and France, as well as England, had designs on their country. The Fon, fighting a desperate war for survival in the interior, seem to have felt that they simply could not at the same time deal with the rising tide of European advance on the coast.

The Portugese were informed of this decision early in 1885 and on the 25th June a delegation, headed by a Portugest judge, Bernado Leito, arrived in Whydah.

The delegation proceeded to Abomey where, on the 5th of August, Leite signed, and Prince Kondo marked, a document which came to be known as the Treaty of Aguinzuin. This became effective on the 6th September, when the Governor of St. Thomé, M.Custado Miguel Da Boya arrived in Dahomey¹ and officially raised the Portugese flag at Whydah.

1 C.O.96/170, F.O. to C.O. 14.12.85.,
enclosing documents issued by the Gov.
of St. Thome: M.M.C. Gabon IV^{4b} DA. Boya
to Guilliat, Whydah 14.7.85: M.M.C. Gabon I^{26b}
Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 8.7.85: M.M.C.
Gabon I^{26b} Dorat to M.M.C., Paris 16.10.85:
M.M.C. Gabon VI^{4b} Guilliat to Bareste, Whydah
11.9.85.

The Portuguese version of this treaty placed the entire coastline of Dahomey under Portuguese protection and made Portugal responsible for Dahoman relations with the European powers: it committed Portugal to buying one hundred indentured labourers from Dahomey every year: it also gave Portugal sovereignty over a small piece of land, called Zomai, near Whydah, on which Portugal was to build a barracks: in return for a small pension Dahomey was to give up the practice of human sacrifice.¹

The Fon view of the treaty was very different. The Dahomans were in fact aware of only part of it. They knew of the part referring to the selling of slaves, and they had agreed that Portugal should deal with any European attempt to violate the territorial integrity of their coastal provinces. It became apparent however, in

1 C.O.96/170, F.O. to C.O. 14.12.1885, enclosing documents issued by the Governor of St.Thome: M.M.C. Gabon^{VI} Da Boya to Guilliatt, Whydah 14.7.85: M.M.C. Gabon I^{26b} Roget to Marine, Porto Novo, 8.7.85: M.M.C. Afrique IV^{67b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. Paris 22.6.88, enclosing Diario do Governo of 8 and 9.5.88, containing Captain Rolin to Governor of St.Thome, 9.6.87.

the course of the next two years, that they had made no agreement to abandon human sacrifice: had made no concessions of territory to Portugal, and had no idea that the treaty stipulated that Dahomey became a vassal of Portugal. Indeed, it would have been surprising, to say the least of it, if the Fon, after their struggles to preserve their freedom from European influence had, tamely and unanimously, agreed to such a settlement with Portugal.¹

What the Fon did consider that they had accepted, apart from a purchase order for slaves, was the Portuguese offer to ward off foreign interference with Fon rights on the Coast. To them, the resurrection of the powers of the

1 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{4d} P.Oumoux to Marine, Whydah 10.10.85: M.M.C. Gabon IV_{4c} extract from a report from Captain Dumont, Dakar 8.3.86. The only opposition to the treaty came from Whydah, the area traditionally favourable to co-operation with the Europeans. The opposition came from the Yeovogun who was, it seems, personally jealous of the Chacha. He could, however, have had little support in the province and less in Abomey for soon after the signing of the treaty he 'disappeared'.

Chacha of Whydah was part and parcel of the agreement.¹

Juliano De Souza was to be the agent of both the Fon and the Portuguese in their relations with Europeans in Dahomey. The Fon would be sheltered by the Chacha from European ambitions while the Chacha would have behind him not only the authority of Dahomey but also that of Portugal. It is not difficult to see that it was Juliano himself who planted this idea in the minds of the Fon leaders.

The appointment of the Chacha as joint controller of Fon-Portuguese foreign relations on the Coast also fitted in well with the ideas of the Governor of St.Thome.² Da Boya, in establishing this protectorate, was motivated

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- 1 M.M.C. Gabon IV_{3c} J.De Souza to Dorat, Whydah 22.11.85: M.M.C. Gabon VI_{4b} Guilliat to Bareste, Whydah 11.9.85: S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture 1883-88: Menager to Planque, Whydah 11.11.85.
 - 2 M.M.C. Afrique VI_{53b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 5.3.86: M.Billot to De Freycinet, Lisbon 17.2.86: M.M.C. Afrique VI_{53b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 25.3.86, translation from 'O'Seculo' 3.3.83: M.M.C. Senegal IV_{121a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 21.12.86: Consular agent at Whydah to Bareste, Whydah 14.10.86.

partly by a desire to keep his sources of indentured labour free from the prying eyes of the rest of Europe, and partly by the nationalistic aim of preserving for Portuguese influence this section of the African coast. He had no intention of establishing a real administration on the Dahoman litoral.¹ Nevertheless, out of respect for the dictum produced at the Congress of Berlin, which stated that only effective occupation entitled a European power to claim possession of a section of the Coast, he had to place the Dahoman coastline under the jurisdiction of a Portuguese official. Such an official was ready to hand. He was none other than Juliano Felix Da Souza, newly created an honorary Lt.Colonel in the Portuguese army.²

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- 1 M.M.C.Gabon VI_{4b} Guilliat to Bareste, Whydah 11.9.85: M.M.C Gabon I_{27a}
M.M.C. to Dorat, Paris 17.8.85.
 - 2 M.M.C. Gabon VI_{4b} De Boya to Guilliat, Whydah 14.7.55. The Portuguese 'territory' of Zomai was placed under the separate jurisdiction of Major Antonio Domingo Cortez du Silva Curado. In fact, however, he commanded only the Portuguese fort at Whydah.

Juliano Felix De Souza had therefore created a remarkable position for himself. He had in fact formalised his role of intermediary between the Fon and the Portuguese. His position was, however, from the beginning dangerous, since it rested on the assumption that he could permanently keep the two parties to the treaty of Aguinzuin from learning that their interpretation of the treaty differed profoundly. Still, De Souza's resumption of the powers of the Chacha marked the beginning of something of an Indian Summer in the history of the old-established Afro-Brazilian families. He and his relations, principally his son Germano and his brother Antonio, waxed rich and powerful. These De Souzas were again a force in Fon political life, and they were undisputed leaders of Afro-Brazilian society. They attempted as far as possible to resume the ostentatious way of life which the leading members of their family had followed in their hey-day: they constructed gracious houses for themselves in Whydah, houses which were to be landmarks long after their power had collapsed. They also attempted to resume ownership of land along the coast which had not

been claimed by their family since the 1850s. They exploited their newly-found status to the full. In fact they considered themselves so indispensable that they had no hesitation whatsoever in endangering their position, by cheating both Fon and Portuguese out of the proceeds of the slave trade.¹

The lack of foresight displayed by the De Souza clan becomes even more obvious when it is seen that Fon-Portuguese relations ran into difficulties almost immediately after the signing of the treaty. On ^uAugust 21st 1885, Fabre's agent at Cotonou, fortified by the presence

1 M.M.C. Gabon I26b Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 24.8.85: M.M.C. Gabon I26b Dorat to Marine, Paris 10.10.85: M.M.C. Gabon I27b Dorat to Marine, Porto Novo 11.2.86 & 26.11.86: M.M.C. Senegal IV121a Castellini to Bareste, Whydah 16.9.86: C.O.96/170, F.O. to C.O. 10.11.85, enclosing G.Petrie to Salisbury, Lisbon 24.10.85. The fact that Julian De Souza, as Chacha, acted as intermediary between the Fon and the Portuguese in the buying and selling of slaves aided their accumulation of wealth. Between July 1885 and September 1886 approximately 640 indentured labourers were sent from Whydah to St. Thome. The English investigated the situation at Whydah and protested to Lisbon, but got no satisfaction. The trade in indentured labour was apparently legal.

of an acting French Resident and French troops in Porto Novo, put into operation the long prepared plan for joining the waters of the lagoon to the sea. By using explosives, the merchants at Cotonou removed the spit of sand separating the sea from the lagoon. They chose the month of August to do this because it was at this time that the waters of the lagoon were at their highest. Indeed, the Acting-Resident and the merchants protested to the Fon that they took action only because the high waters in the lagoon threatened to flood the French factories.¹ This was, however, only a ruse: the plan outlined by Colonna Di Lecca in 1882 had been followed to the last detail. The merchants were in fact determined to improve their trading position even at the cost of incurring Fon hostility.

This action confirmed Fon fears that the increasing European activity on the Coast heralded some move

¹ M.M.C. Gabon I26b Roget to Marine,
Porto Novo 1.9.85: M.M.C. Gabon I26b
Roget to Marine, Cotonou 27.9.85:
M.M.C. Gabon IV36c J.Pratt to Roget,
Cotonou 21.9.85.

prejudicial to Dahoman interests. On the 22nd August the Fon authorities on the Coast rushed all available troops to Cotonou, closed the roads, and forbade any Europeans to leave the country.¹ The Fon leaders in Abomey, however, seem to have determined to follow the treaty of Aguinzuin to the letter, and left the Portuguese to deal with the French.² Accordingly, Da Boya, who was still in Whydah, on the 13th September despatched the Chacha with a body of Portuguese troops to Cotonou. In an attempt to frustrate any further French attempt to make their will felt there, the Chacha raised the Portuguese flag over that town. Lt. Roget responded by sending a detachment of French troops to Cotonou, where they, in their turn, raised the French flag. Both

1 M.M.C. Gabon I26b Roget to Marine, Cotonou 27.9.85.

2 M.M.C. Gabon IV3c M.A.E. to M.M.C. 22.12.85, enclosing Guiliat to Bareste, Whydah 27.10.85: M.M.C. Gabon IV3c Roeder to Pradier, St. Thome 24.2.86: M.M.C. Gabon I27b Dorat to Marine, Porto Novo 12.4.86. This decision was not, however, taken without argument. It was rumoured in St. Thome that a number of the Fon wished to kill all the French on the Coast. Kondo's will, however, prevailed.

garrisons remained encamped there, surrounded by two hundred Fon troops. On the 17th December, after a series of French protests both on the Coast and in Lisbon, the Portuguese force was withdrawn.¹ In Europe, at least, it was recognised that the French had the paramount claim to Cotonou.

In the eyes of the Fon the Portuguese had gone back on the most important aspect of the Aguinzuin agreement. They complained bitterly to the Portuguese that they had no right whatsoever to concede Fon territory to the French.²

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- 1 M.M.C. Gabon I26b Roget to Marine, Cotonou 15.9.85: M.M.C. Gabon I26b Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 1.10.85: M.M.C. Gabon I27b Dorat to Marine, Porto Novo 21.12.85: M.M.C. Gabon I27a M.M.C. to Dorat, Paris 17.10.85: M.M.C. Gabon I27b Dorat to M.M.C. Dakar 14.11.85: When Roget protested to Da Boya that the Portuguese action was a violation of French rights, the Governor was genuinely surprised. He declared that in 1878 France had only obtained trading rights in Cotonou. The two men left the problem to be worked out by the metropolitan governments.
- 2 M.M.C. Afrique VI53b M. Billot to M.A.E Lisbon, 18.2.86, enclosing translation from 'O'Seculo', 18.2.86.

The destruction of Ketu without Yoruba intervention had, moreover, left Dahomey triumphant in the interior. After they had been let down over the Cotonou issue, the Fon had no further interest in close co-operation with Portugal. However, since they were still vitally interested in the export of slaves the Dahomans took no action to ~~actually~~ repudiate the Treaty of Aguinzuin.

Portugal's failure to protect Dahoman interests left the Fon with the problem of how best to deal with French encroachment. The moment had passed when they might have attacked in the heat of their wrath. Moreover, the fact that the cutting at Cotonou proved unnavigable after the floods subsided ¹ made the problem

¹ M.M.C. Gabon I_{26b} Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 29.8.85: M.M.C. Gabon I_{27b} Dorat to Marine, Porto Novo 7.1.86: M.M.C. Gabon I_{26b} Roget to Marine, Cotonou 27.9.85. In September small boats had used the channel. The Fon, however, proceeded to block it by throwing baskets filled with sand into it. They were aided in their task by a natural subsidence of the lagoon waters once the rains were over.

appear less urgent. They therefore did nothing more than protest and make vague threats of impending military action. The situation at Cotonou had however been effectively changed. Even although the Fon administration of the area continued to function, the French flag now flew over the town. What was more, a French garrison was established there to guard the flag.

The French administrators on the Coast had been impressed by the Fon reaction to the merchants' initiative in Cotonou, and in 1886, moved very cautiously both in that town and in Porto Novo. They did continue to increase their control of these areas, but they advanced so gradually that they did not provoke the irate Fon to direct action. In January 1886 Dorat, despairing of re-asserting Toffa's authority in Oueme, began to attempt to attach the Chiefs of that area directly to France rather than to Porto Novo.¹ In August, despite Fon protests, the French began constructing a telegraph post

1 M.M.C. Gabon 127b Dorat to Marine,
Porto Novo 21.1.86.

at Cotonou.¹ In the same month, taking advantage of the presence of ships engaged in laying the telegraph cable, the French built barracks to house their Cotonou garrison.² The Fon leaders protested vigorously against all these actions, but found none of them, individually, sufficiently provocative to launch a full scale attack on the French.³ The cumulative effect of these French measures was, nevertheless, to strengthen considerably the French hold on Cotonou and Porto Novo.

In the last months of 1886 a significant change took place in French activities on the Slave Coast. This change was due to control of the French territories there being transferred from Gabon to Senegal. Officials began to appear on the Slave Coast who had already taken

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- 1 M.M.C. Senegal IV₁₂₁ M.A.E. to M.M.C. Paris 12.10.86, enclosing Bareste to M.A.E. Freetown 6.9.86: M.M.C. Senegal IV₁₂₁ De Beausset to Marine, Ile de Prince 22.8.86, enclosing J.F. and A. De Souza to Fabre's agent in Whydah (no date).
 - 2 M.M.C. Gabon I_{28a} Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 5.6.86: M.M.C. Gabon I_{28a} Roget to Marine, Porto Novo 12.8.86.
 - 3 M.M.C. Gabon I_{26a} Dorat to Roget, Porto Novo 11.4.87.

part in the French advance into the Senegal hinterland, and who automatically applied this forward policy in their new sphere of action.

The first and perhaps the most important of these officials, Dr. Jean Bayol, the Lt. Governor of the Rivières de Sud, came to the Slave Coast in January 1887 with orders to mark out the Franco-German frontier on the Popos.¹ This he did, in conjunction with the German Commissioner Falkenthal, in the first months after his arrival.² During his tour, in an attempt to define the Porto Novo-Lagos frontier as well, he set in motion a series of incidents which led to an acute crisis. Bayol, it seems, was determined to show that the French had a right to Ketonou, the spot on the lagoon between Porto Novo and Cotonou, where the English had a toll house. The French flag was raised over Ketonou, French troops were installed there, and a rival, French, Customs post was erected. This new

1 M.A.E. Afrique 83, De la Porte to Bayol, Paris 20.9.86.

2 C.Newbury, op.cit., pp.114-15:
E.Dunglas, E.D.IX, pp.69-75.

development in the struggle over conflicting claims to Ketonou led to an acute crisis in April-May 1887 when the soldiers manning the opposing posts began firing on each other.

In June 1887 the Commander of the French South Atlantic fleet, Admiral Ribell, and the Governor of Lagos agreed to withdraw all troops from the disputed areas pending a delineation of frontiers.¹ If merchant reports are to be believed, Bayol's actions during this crisis revealed irresponsibility and perhaps dishonesty.² Only after intervention by the metropolitan governments was the problem frontier defined in August 1889. The immediate result of Bayol's activities was to outline clearly the French coastal officials' determination to expand French influence.

1 C.O.879/26 African 334, Evans to Holland, Lagos 30.3.87: Evans to Holland, Lagos 1.5.87, and Moloney to Meade, Lagos 19.6.87, enclosing Convention of 18.6.87.

2 M.A.E.Afrique 83, Fabre to M.A.E. 8.9.87: Unnamed merchant to Fabre, Porto Novo 5.5.87: unnamed merchant to Fabre, Porto Novo 5.7.87. Bayol, without thought of the consequences, ordered French troops to Ketonou. When things went wrong he blamed his subordinate, Dr. Pereton, the new administrator of Porto Novo, who had come with him from Senegal.

While the French were engaged in finding internationally accepted boundaries to their possessions, the Portuguese were active in attempting to instil some formal meaning into their Dahoman protectorate. The initiative in this matter had passed from St.Thomé to Lisbon. Da Boia was recalled, and a new Governor, Augusto Sacramento, was sent out with instructions to either induce the Fon fully to implement the Treaty of Aguinzuin or to withdraw Portuguese protection from Dahomey: there was no question of Portugal using force to put the treaty into effect.¹ In order to regularise their protectorate, to make it acceptable in the eyes of the civilised world and, indeed, to make it pay for itself, the Portuguese tried to persuade the Fon to permit the setting up of Portuguese Customs posts along the litoral: they also tried to persuade them to end the ceremonies which involved human sacrifice. A Portuguese major,

¹ M.M.C. Gabon I28a Roget to Marine,
Porto Novo 19.5.86: M.M.C. Senegal
IV121a M.A.E. to M.M.C. Paris 21.12.86,
enclosing Vice-Consul at Whydah to
Bareste 14.10.86. M.M.C. Senegal I87c
Bayol to Governor 20.3.87

Cortez Silva Curado, was sent to Abomey in April 1886 to attempt to gain Fon consent to these points. It is doubtful if the Fon really knew what he wanted. At any rate he was unsuccessful.¹ The Fon in fact had nothing to discuss: the treaty was now only useful to them in that it enabled them to sell slaves.

In February 1887 Sacramento (having given four months warning of his arrival) himself visited Dahomey. The Fon however refused to allow him to go to Abomey on the grounds that the King was away from the capital at war. He had therefore to leave without undertaking any meaningful negotiations.² In April 1887 a Portuguese delegation headed by Captain Vincente Da Rosa Rolim, and accompanied by the Chacha, did actually get to Abomey. On their

1 M.M.C. Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. Paris 6.4.86, enclosing Guilliatt to Bareste, Whydah 18.2.86: M.M.C. Afrique IV_{11a} M.A.E. to M.M.C., Paris 6.8.86, enclosing Guilliatt to Bareste, Whydah 28.6.86.

2 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{121a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 19.4.87, enclosing Castellini to Bareste, Whydah 26.2.87: M.M.C. Senegal I_{87c} Bayol to Governor 20.3.87: M.M.C. Senegal IV_{121a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 2.12.87: Billot to M.A.E. Lisbon 22.11.87.

arrival the Fon immediately began to talk about the only part of their relationship with Portugal which still interested them. They protested they were receiving too low a price for their slaves. This set in motion a general investigation into the doings of the Chacha. In the course of this a Portuguese trader and rival members of the Da Souza clan decided that it was in their interests to reveal that the Chacha had not only been cheating on the price of slaves, but that he had also totally misled the Fon as to the nature of the Treaty of Aguinzuin. The Fon then courteously but firmly declared that although they wished to maintain friendly relations they would never agree to becoming a vassal of Portugal.¹

1 M.M.C. Afrique VI^{67b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 22.6.88, enclosing translation of King of Dahomey to King of Portugal, Secume 16.7.87, and Diaro Do Governo St.Thome 8 & 9.5.88, containing Captain Rolin to Governor of St.Thome, St.Thome 9.6.87: M.M.C. Afrique VI^{67b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 21.5.88. enclosing translated despatches which had appeared in Diaro Do Governo: Governor of St.Thome to Marine 2.8.87, and 7 & 10.9.87: M.M.C. Afrique VI^{67b} Billot to M.A.E. 4.1.88, enclosing translation of a statement by Portuguese Minister of Marine, printed in Diaro Do Governo 28.12.87: M.M.C. Senegal 187b Bayol to Marine. Eyguieres 11.10.87: M.M.C. Senegal IV^{122a} Ribell to Marine, Ile de Prince 26.6.87.

The Portuguese, who had no intention of using force against Dahomey, then officially abandoned their protectorate.¹ It is hardly surprising that Juliano, Antonio, and Germano De Souza 'disappeared' or died very suddenly afterwards.²

As a result of rumours of impending Portuguese withdrawal from Dahomey, Lt. Governor Bayol had been instructed, in 1886, to consider whether it would be to the advantage of France to occupy the points ~~on the~~

1 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{121a} M.A.E. to M.M.C. ? 12.87, enclosing Decree of Portuguese Council of Ministers 16.11.87. After this date only the fort of St. John the Baptist at Whydah remained officially in Portuguese hands.

2 M.M.C. Afrique VI_{67b} M.A.E. to M.M.C. 22.6.88, enclosing Diaro Do Governo of 8 & 9.5.88 including Secretary General of St. Thome to Marine, St. Thome 23.10.87: M.M.C. Senegal I_{87b} Bayol to Marine, Eyguieres 11.10.87: M.M.C. Senegal IV_{122a} Ribell to Marine, Ile de Prince 26.6.87. The Chacha was arrested and then he 'disappeared', not, however, before the Fon had invited the Governor of St. Thome to his trial. Germano and Antonio were poisoned.

on the coast where France had historic rights.¹ All the Fon had achieved by their association with Portugal was therefore to encourage the French to think that Dahomey would be willing to accept their protection instead of that of the Portuguese.

Bayol visited Whydah in February and May 1887. As a result of the information he gained there, he formulated the theory that because the Whydah authorities had resented the revival of the Chacha's powers, they would be disposed to look favourably upon the advance of French power. He claimed that once the Portuguese withdrew, the Fon would naturally seek the protection of France. That the Chacha had been overthrown and the Portuguese treaty rejected precisely because Dahomey would countenance no European attempts at control, no matter by whom, simply did not occur to Bayol. He reported that although it would be inopportune to expand French interests in Dahomey while Fon relations with Portugal were still in

1 M.A.E.Afrique 83, De La Porte to Bayol, Paris 26.9.86. This was the first official use of the phrase 'historic rights'. It referred to Cotonou, Porto Novo, and even less justifiably to Whydah. In fact, the French had had from the King only the lease of the fort at Whydah; they had no legal claim to the fort, let alone to Whydah itself.

doubt, it would be wise to follow a conciliatory policy so that Dahomey would be favourably disposed towards France in the future.¹

Dahoman ideas on the subject of future relations with the Europeans can be seen very clearly in the Dahoman letter to the King of Portugal informing him of the Dahoman's refusal to accept the Treaty of Aguinzuin. In this letter, the King of Portugal was advised to warn other European nations against attempting to seize African territory. He was told that the Fon had resisted such attempts in the past and would do so again in the future. If the Europeans persisted in acting in this fashion, the Africans would cease to trade and would, themselves, learn to manufacture the goods the Europeans brought.² There certainly was not much prospect of Dahomey being flattered into yielding territory to France.

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- 1 M.M.C. Senegal 187b Bayol to Governor of Senegal, on board 'Message' 20.3.87, and Bayol to Marine, Eyguieres 11.10.87.
 - 2 M.M.C. Afrique 67b M.A.E. to M.M.C., enclosing translation of King of Dahomey to King of Portugal, Secume 16.7.87.

This was made even more explicit when a treaty-making expedition to the Lower Oueme, undertaken on Bayol's orders, produced a strong Dahoman protest reminding France that Dahomey would tolerate no European activity on that river.¹ The French Colonial Department nevertheless showed considerable interest in Dahomey once the Portuguese withdrew. The Foreign Ministry, however, on the reasonable grounds that France would encounter the same difficulties as had Portugal, refused to countenance any sort of forward policy in the area.²

In Abomey itself, the repudiation of the Portuguese alliance left the Kondo-Nougobodhoue ruling factions virtually without an agreed policy towards the movements of the Europeans on the Coast. Many of the Chiefs, probably the followers of Nougobodhoue, wanted an all-out war on the encroaching French. Kondo's views on this

1 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{122a} M.A.E. to M.M.C
Paris 22.9.87, enclosing Rolin to
Maillot, Dahomey 22.6.87.

2 M.M.C. Afrique_{67b} Du Flouries to
Kranz, Paris 31.1.88.

cannot be definitely ascertained. Nevertheless, since he was later more willing to compromise than was Nougbododhoue, it seems probable that, at this time, he tried to restrain the more beligerent group.¹

The Whydah Chiefs certainly took a more tolerant line. The Coastal areas had a vast network of vested interests impelling them towards maintaining good relations with their chief trading partners. The Chiefs of these areas also appreciated that their territory was wide open either to bombardment or even attack from the sea. From the fact ^{that} Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi alone of the lands south of the Marais later remained loyal to Kondo in the successive struggle, it seems likely that these Coastal Chiefs even contemplated ceding Cotonou to the French.

One of Kondo's younger brothers, or half brothers, Prince Topa,² at this time began to gather a following to back his claim to the throne. He became the close ally

1 See Chapter V p.362-67.

2 This Prince appears as 'Dapeh' in the English records: he appears as 'Topa' in the French.

of the Whydah Chiefs. It can be reasonably inferred that he gained their support by taking a very tolerant stand on the issue of how to deal with the French. He himself, however, as his later support for the war against France was to show, did not for a minute consider any cession of territory. Like the rest of the royal family, he was adamant on this point. However, he was probably willing to accept the status quo in Cotonou as a possible basis for re-establishing friendly relations with France.

Besides a reputation for flexibility in his dealings with the Europeans, Topa probably also had some dynastic link with the Coastal areas. At any rate he won the support of the Coastal Chiefs for his candidature to the throne soon after the abandonment of the Portuguese alliance. By December 1888 the rivalry between the two Princes had become so acute that Topa had withdrawn to Whydah to live amongst his supporters. He must have in fact had a fairly large and powerful following. If he had not had such a following, no doubt Kondo would have had him disposed of in the traditional Dahoman manner.

Fighting did not break out between the two parties, but Kondo attempted to undermine Topa's position by cutting off all Whydah trade with the interior.¹

In 1888, then, Whydah and its hinterland were to a large extent alienated from Abomey. Trade between the two areas was at a standstill, although communication had not completely ceased. Further to the east, Porto Novo, by 1888, was the scene of growing French activity. French government agents there were talking openly of taking over the coastal areas of Dahomey. The group of violently pro-French Creoles in Porto Novo society was rapidly gaining strength. Seeing the Dahoman confusion on the Coast, encouraged by talk of French expansion, and probably urged on by his Creole advisers, King Toffa determined to make a bid for independence of Dahomey. This he did in the full knowledge that his army was

1 C.O.879/28 African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 3.12.88: Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 14.12.88, enclosing Minutes of interviews with Prince Fasinu, 30.11.88, and Princess Gibenbosi 10 & 12.12.88: C.O.879/29 African 365, Denton to Knutsford, Lagos 15.4.89, 27.6.89 and 12.7.89.

weak and that many of his Chiefs would refuse to support him.¹

Knowing that his own resources were in no way adequate to protect his position, Toffa must have made this break in the expectation that the French would both maintain him in Porto Novo, and protect Porto Novo against Dahomey. His all-important object in his future relations with the French was therefore to draw France into his quarrel with Dahomey. The French were not informed that Porto Novo was making

1 Many of the Chiefs in Porto Novo were Toffa's dynastic enemies. They would welcome a chance to overthrow him. The most important of the Porto Novan Chiefdoms, the Decame, or Oueme Kingdom was bound to throw off any allegiance to Toffa. Legally, the position of this Chiefdom was dubious. Toffa was its suzerain: the King of Dahomey was Toffa's suzerain. To whom did Toffa's Chiefs owe allegiance? Such feudalistic argument is pointless. The Decame, for example, lay close to Fon territory. The Chief of the Decame, Aide, was bound to side with Dahomey.

a bid for independence: they were told that Porto Novo was already independent, and that Dahomey was determined to destroy the town. They were assured that this was an attack on France as well as on Toffa.

The Fon, in the Porto Novan version of the quarrel, were therefore portrayed as the aggressors. France was to be asked to come to the aid of a small nation about to be overwhelmed by a large, warlike neighbour,¹ a form of propaganda which has frequently proved effective.

1 This is the version given by Akindele and Aguessy in Contribution a l'Etude d'Histoire de Ancien Royaume de Porto Novo. Following Toffa's line, French contemporary chroniclers of France's war with Dahomey all regarded Dahomey as the aggressor. See, for example, E.E.Aublet, La Guerre au Dahomey 1888-93: J.DéRiols, La Guerre au Dahomey 1889-92: A.Barbou, Histoire de la Guerre au Dahomey: M.A. De Salinis, Le Protectorate Francais sur la Cote des Esclaves; La Campagne du Sane 1889-90.

The version of the quarrel with Toffa given by the Dahomans runs as follows: Toffa, in 1887, engineered an incident as a justification for his quarrel with Dahomey. He requested the Fon to destroy a rebellious Porto Novan town called Wefain. This was not an unusual request. He had frequently asked the Dahomans to destroy his enemies and the Fon willingly obliged. Toffa then asked that a number of his subjects captured in the town should be returned. Again the Fon did as he asked. No sooner had these subjects been returned, than Toffa closed all the trade routes between Dahomey and Porto Novo. At the same time he expelled all Dahoman traders from his town. He then announced that he had done this because the Fon had wantonly attacked one of his villages.¹

1 M.M.C. Senegal IV p Gelele to French President, Abomey 12.5.89 and Gelele to Resident of Porto Novo, Abomey (no date): C.O.147/71, Denton to Knutsford, Lagos 27.6.84, enclosing Gelele to British Government, Dahomey 12.5.89. This corresponds closely to the Fon tradition recorded by A.Le Herisse, op.cit. p 334-5 C.Newbury, op.cit., p.128. Newbury remarks that the Fon official version of the quarrel can be found in J.M. & F.S.Herskovits' Dahoman Narrative, p.381-4. This does not record the tradition nearly as well as does Le Herisse.

This story is borne out by the observations of Europeans on the Coast at the time. Ballot, the French Resident, reported in May 1888 that although Toffa spoke of an impending Dahoman attack on Porto Novo, Fon messengers had just come to Porto Novo leading with them eighteen captives. This Ballot saw as a gesture of goodwill.¹ Toffa was continually emphasising the danger from Dahomey, Ballot considered, in order to obtain the despatch of a French gunboat and troops to Porto Novo. Toffa's greatest fear, he declared, was that the French would withdraw as they had in 1865.² Earlier in the year, according to the English District Commissioner at Badagry, Toffa had published an edict severing relations with Dahomey and banning all Dahoman trade with Porto Novo.³ In October, the same British

1 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{123a} V.Ballot to Governor of Senegal, Porto Novo 12.5.80.

2 M.M.C. Senegal VI₂₀ V.Ballot to Governor of Senegal, 15.4.88.

3 C.O.879/27, African 345, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 24.4.88, enclosing Millison to Colonial Secretary at Lagos, Badagry 23.4.88

official reported that Toffa had put to death a number of Porto Novan traders who had disobeyed this edict.¹ The view that the Dahoman version of their quarrel with Toffa is an accurate one was moreover confirmed by a report of a confession made by Toffa when in a state of absolute panic after a Dahoman attack in April 1889:-

'Toffa a déclaré lui-même dans une reunion tenue devant les commercants qu'il avait provoqué le roi du Dahomey: c'est qui'il comptait que les Francais le vengeraient. Toffa a été la soule cause de cette invasion et reconnait aujourd'hui sa bêtise.'²

In early 1888, then, Toffa, knowing of the divisions in the Dahoman leadership, spurred on by the increasingly anti-Fon Creole group concentrated in Porto Novo, and confident of French support, totally rejected Dahoman overlordship.

1 C.O.879/28, African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 20.10.88.

2 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{124a} De Beeckman to Governor of Senegal, Porto Novo 5.4.88. Most of the despatch is reproduced in E.D. XX pp.95-97. This paragraph, the penultimate, has been omitted.

The Abomey leaders were therefore faced with a situation of exceptional seriousness on the Coast. Whydah was in a state of at least incipient rebellion while Porto Novo was openly hostile. Although Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi remained loyal to Abomey their position between Whydah and Porto Novo was obviously dangerous. It was not unlikely that Abomey might be cut off from the Coast, where lay the only sources of supply of arms and luxury goods. The Fon in Abomey in 1888 concentrated their attention on attempting to secure a safe route to the Coast.

With their difficulties of supply in mind, the Abomey leaders toyed with the idea of establishing a new route to the Coast, via Ketu and Egbadoland. They considered rebuilding Ketu and placing there, as a client of Dahomey, the son of the last Alaketu, Prince Fetonah.¹

1 C.O. 879/28, African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 18.11.88, enclosing Willoughby to Secretary, Lagos 12.11.88: C.O.879/28, African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 31.7.88. Fetonah himself seems to have been playing a double game: while he was said to be negotiating along these lines with Dahomey, he was also seeking English protection for a re-established independent Ketu.

After rebuilding Ketu they visualised attempting to gain control of Illaro, Otta, and Ado.¹ This could give them direct access to Lagos. When it is remembered that the Fon state was to be in existence for only another four years, such a policy may appear somewhat over-ambitious. However, it must be borne in mind that after the 1885 victories, Dahomey was stronger than it had been since the 1840s.

This projected movement ties in with the fact that a Dahoman embassy was sent three times to Lagos between December 1888 and June 1889. Officially, the

1 C.O.879/28, African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 21.8.88, enclosing Minutes of an interview with Oji Balagun of Okedo, 16.8.88: C.O.879/28 African 355, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 1.11.88, enclosing Minutes of an interview with messengers of the King of Iseyin 1.11.88: C.O.147/66 Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 19.10.88 enclosing Alafin of Oyo to Moloney, Oyo 25.9.88. Dahoman raids in that year took place in Iseyin, Okedo, and Oyo territory. These towns were so intimidated that they applied to Lagos for protection.

purpose of the first two visits, in December 1888 and April 1889, was to seek English protection for Dahomey.¹ Unofficially it was stated that the real aim of the embassy was to ensure that the Fon had access to a coastal port. The Fon wished to establish good relations with England so that they could trade through Lagos. Later, when Kondo and Topa became reconciled, the Fon changed their policy. Once the danger of a revolt in Whydah had been removed, Abomey no longer needed to seek a new route to the coast. The purpose of the third visit

1 C.O.879/29, African 355, Meade to Foreign Office 12.12.88: Pauncefoote to Colonial Office 17.12.88. 'Protection' had become a fashionable word. The Fon probably meant alliance in much the same way as they had thought of their relationship with the Portuguese as an 'alliance'. Lagos treated the proposition seriously. Moloney considered (and the Colonial Office agreed) that the proposal should not at once be rejected.

was to withdraw the request for protection.¹

The reconciliation itself probably came about as the inherent danger of an open split in Fon society

1 For the sources of information see f/n, p.287. The ambassadors were, on every occasion, the same. The official leader was Prince Fasinou, a fourteen-year-old son of Prince Kondo. The delegation was escorted by Princess Gibenbosi Honi of Ketonou, who passed on to the Governor much of the information on Dahoman politics she had learned from the delegates. The strange composition of the party was said to be due to the fact that it was impossible for a senior Dahoman official to pass through either Porto Novo or Yorubaland without being detected. Princess Gibenbosi Honi was chosen to escort Fasinou because, being a citizen of Ketonou (at this point still under British protection) and trading regularly in southern Dahomey, she would not be suspect when travelling through Porto Novo. It was claimed by the delegation, on its third visit, that Fasinou was not Kondo's son and that the offer made by him to accept protection was therefore meaningless. The Princess believed simply that Fon policy had changed. So did the Lagos officials. C.W.Newbury (op.cit., p.128) dismisses, in 8 lines, the history of Fon relationship with both the Portuguese and the British during 1885 to 1888. He equates them with vague rumours of Fon application for German 'protection.

became more and more obvious. It seems likely that it was the French Resident, De Beeckman, who brought home to the Fon the extent of French ambitions in Cotonou and the necessity for Dahoman unity. At the beginning of March 1889 he curtly informed the Dahoman authorities that the French intended to replace the Fon Customs posts at Cotonou with French ones. At the same time he rather ominously remarked that the Fon would do well to accept the French offer of compensation.¹ The threat posed by increasing French ambitions and by Porto Novan rebelliousness in fact forced Kondo and Topa into a reconciliation.

Soon after the reconciliation Dahomey closed the trade paths and the Resident was asked to go to Whydah to receive a message from the King.² De Beeckman left Porto Novo on the 27th of March and on the 29th was informed in Whydah, by a royal messenger, that French

1 Reproduced in E.D.IX, part 3, p.91-95
De Beeckman to the Governor of
Senegal, Porto Novo 6.3.89.

2 M.M.C. Senegal IV, 125a Captain Bertin
to Colonel Dodds, Porto Novo 5.4.89.

attempts to end the Fon control of Cotonou would not be tolerated. This move seems to have been a diversion deliberately created to remove the Resident from Porto Novo. On the very day after De Beeckman left that town a Fon army arrived on the Porto Novan frontier.¹ The Dahomans had determined to bring Toffa to heel. The Porto Novan army was severely defeated by a united army of Ouemians,² and Dahomans. Many of Toffa's leading supporters were killed.³ The panic-stricken population of Porto Novo, headed by Toffa himself, fled across the lagoon to English territory where they considered they would be safe.

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- 1 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{125a} Captain Bertin to Colonel Dodds, Porto Novo, 29.3.89.
 - 2 The sub-states in Porto Novo over which Toffa claimed to rule, took the Fon side in this conflict without hesitation.
 - 3 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{124a} Iwè Irokin Eko 6.4.89: C.O.879/24, African 365, Denton to Knutsford, Lagos 3.4.89, enclosing F.Colley-Green to D.C. at Badagry, Kotonou 29.3.89: Higginson to Lagos, Colonial Secretary, Badagry 31.3.89: F.Colley-Green to Higginson, Kotonou 30.3.89.

On the 29th, Captain Bertin, ^{the} Officer in Command of the tiny French garrison, reported that the Resident and all the French traders in Fon territory had been seized and held prisoner. Both he and the French traders in Porto Novo requested Rear Admiral Brown De Colstoun, Commander in Chief of the French South Atlantic Fleet, to come to Porto Novo immediately. In order to protect French lives Bertin considered that it was essential to land troops at Whydah, Cotonou, Godomey, and Porto Novo.¹ However, on the 6th April when a company of Marines were landed at Porto Novo they could find no opposing army against which to defend the town.² The Dahomans, having demonstrated their strength by annihilating Toffa's army and destroying a number of his palm oil plantations, had simply retired. Moreover,

1 M.M.C. Senegal IV, ^{124a} Brown De Colstoun to Marine 29.4.89, enclosing Bertin to Brown De Colstoun, Porto Novo 30.3.89: Agents of Fabre and Regis to Brown De Colstoun, Porto Novo 4.4.89.

2 M.M.C. Senegal IV, ^{124a} De Beeckman to Governor of Senegal, 10.4.89: part, but only part, of this despatch is reproduced in E.D.IX.

the rumour reported by Bertin, that the Resident and the French traders in Dahomey had been made prisoners, proved totally false. Neither De Beeckman nor the traders had been molested. De Beeckman's view of the situation was entirely different from that of Bertin. He realised that the attack on Porto Novo was directed only against Toffa and that the Europeans had nothing to fear. The Cotonou dispute, he emphasised, was quite unrelated to the Dahomey-Porto Novo war.¹

The aim of this Fon move against Porto Novo seems to have been to indicate, to the inhabitants of that town, Toffa's inability to resist Dahomey. This demonstration, they expected, would produce the overthrow of Toffa's regime. It was a method of getting rid of Toffa, deliberately thought out, so that it would not bring the Fon into direct conflict with the French. It was in order to avoid any chance of endangering French lives that the Fon refrained from making a direct attack on Porto Novo when they had the opportunity to do so after the destruction of Toffa's army.

¹ M.M.C. Senegal IV, 124a De Beeckman to Brown De Colstoun, Porto Novo 1.4.89.

So that there would be no misunderstanding of their intentions, the Fon sent a series of letters to the European administrations on the Coast, stating clearly their reasons for making war on Toffa.¹ It was stated in these letters that the Fon did not wish to harm either the people of Porto Novo or the Europeans in that town. The attack had been made on the city in order to demonstrate to its inhabitants that Toffa had incurred Dahoman displeasure and ought to be deposed. The Porto Novans had been instructed to depose Toffa and place Soginbe, the candidate of the rival Mekpon dynasty on the throne.² Indeed, only the arrival of the French troops had prevented the overthrow of Toffa by

1 C.O.147/71 Denton to Knutsford, Lagos 6.89 enclosing King Gelele to H.M.'s Government, Yavondi Palace 12.5.89: M.M.C. Senegal IV^{124b} Gelele to President of France, Whydah 12.5.89: M.M.C. Senegal IV^{124b} Gelele to Resident; no date.

2 While Toffa acknowledged the authority of Dahomey, Soginbe had been an Egba protege. After Toffa's dereliction, Dahomey reversed its policy and supported Soginbe's claim to the throne.

his panic-stricken people. Even with the presence of French troops there was a great underswell of unrest in the town.¹

During this crisis De Beeckman quarrelled bitterly with Captain Bertin, who held his appointment independently of the Resident.² De Beeckman considered that Bertin was unduly favourable to Toffa, whom De Beeckman held responsible for all the trouble. The Resident felt that Toffa should not be supported, since this only drew France into a quarrel with Dahomey. Bertin, however, continued, against De Beeckman's advice, to prop up Toffa's tottering regime.³ The quarrel was made all the

1 C.O.879/29 African 365, Denton to Knutsford, Lagos 7.4.89, enclosing Peel to Acting-Governor 6.4.89.

2 At this period the Resident was in charge only of civil affairs. The Commander of the Armed Forces was responsible independently for military policy. The Resident of Porto Novo took his orders from his superior officer in Senegal. Only in the Marine, in Paris, did this chain of command unite.

3 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{124b} Governor of Senegal to Colonial Under-Secretary, St.Louis, 5.6.89, enclosing De Beeckman to Governor, Porto Novo 6.5.89: G.G.A. G22, Rapport Du Capitaine Bertin, Porto Novo 14.1.89: S.M.A. Dahoman Prefecture, 1889-91, Pied to Planque, Porto Novo 4.4.89.

more acute by the fact that because of Bertin's alarmist reports, at the beginning of April, it was thought in France, for a time, that De Beeckman had allowed himself to be made a prisoner by the Fon. Before this impression was corrected De Beeckman was recalled, for lack of sang froid. The Governor of Senegal was instructed to replace De Beeckman by a more senior official, Dr. Tautain, the Director of Political Affairs in Senegal.¹ Ultimately, De Beeckman got the better of the quarrel. Bertin himself was recalled,² while the Governor of Senegal commended De Beeckman's conduct. Dr Tautain, moreover, after he had studied the situation, agreed whole-heartedly with De Beeckman's analysis of the situation.³ Nevertheless, as a result of Bertin's support, Toffa preserved his throne.

The intention of the Dahomans in making this attack, as has been noted, was to force the people of Porto Novo

1 M.A.E. Afrique 125, Colonial Under-Secretary to M.A.E., Paris 5.4.89.

2 M.M.C. Senegal IV_{124b} M.M.C. to Colonel Dodds, Paris 3.6.89.

3 See below: Chap. V. p 306

to overthrow Toffa and put the now more amenable Soginbe in his place. That the presence of French troops prevented Toffa's overthrow astounded the Fon.¹ It was because the Dahomans had not reckoned on French support for Toffa, and were shocked by this support, that they sent letters on the 12th May to the French and English, carefully setting out the reasons for their attack.² The letters were primarily designed to prove the justice of the Dahoman case. They also clearly informed the Europeans that if they wished to show goodwill towards Dahomey they would depose Toffa and place Soginbe on the throne. A threat was, moreover, attached to this request: if the Europeans did not do as the Fon asked, then the Dahoman army would return to Porto Novo in eight month's time, and would set about destroying the palm oil plantations around the town. This threat was designed to impress the French in that French trade

1 The Fon claimed that French troops had fired at Jibey on units of the Fon army. This incident appears to have passed unnoticed by the French.

2 See f/n 1, p.301

would suffer: it would not, however, involve the Fon in any direct action against the French.

These letters, as well as dealing with Porto Novo, also dealt with Franco-Dahoman relations as such. Dahoman grievances against France were listed: the firing on Whydah; the deception of the Serval Treaty; the opening of the Cotonou isthmus and the latest addition, the action of the French troops at Jibey.¹ All-in-all these letters give a detailed statement of Dahomey policy in the coastal area. Dahomey was determined that Toffa should be overthrown and would tolerate no further French territorial expansion on the Coast.

At much the same time, the third Fon embassy to Lagos rejected British intervention in the area. The conflicting directions of Dahoman policy were being sorted out. Topa had returned to Abomey. The revolt of Porto Novo, combined with the increasingly hostile activities of the French, was forcing the various factions in Abomey towards a settlement of their differences.

1 see f/n 1, p.304.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

August 1889-April 1892

Dr. Tautain, the Senegal official who had been sent to replace De Beeckman at Porto Novo, soon came to think of the situation on the Slave Coast in the same terms as his predecessor. He stated that Toffa's activities in Porto Novo caused trouble with Dahomey, and recommended that the King should be deposed at the first favourable opportunity.¹ Unfortunately for Dahomey his policies were never put into operation. Changes in France came to the aid of the unscrupulous monarch.

The conflicting reports of the Fon attack on Porto Novo had induced the French Colonial Department to undertake a general review of French policy on the

¹ M.M.C. Senegal IV_{124b} Tautain to Governor of Senegal, Porto Novo 1.6.89.

Slave Coast. The whole French approach to Colonial problems was at this time in fact in a state of rapid flux. The change was clearly marked when Eugène Etienne,¹ the leading Parliamentary advocate of Colonial expansion, entered the Cabinet as Colonial Under-Secretary.² The Colonial Department had been up-graded and its staff strengthened to suit its new importance. A new atmosphere now pervaded the administrative approach to Colonial development.

One of the first acts of the newly-transformed Department was to carry out a complete reorganisation of the administration of French West Africa. The

1 Eugène Etienne (1844-1921), Deputy for Oran. He entered the Tirard Government of February 1889-March 1890 as Colonial Under-Secretary.

2 J.Chastinet, Histoire de la Troisième République, Vol.II: F.Berge, 'Le Sous-Secrétariat et les Sous-Secrétaires d'Etat aux Colonies'. Revue Française d'Histoire d'Océanie (1960)

Except for a brief spell in 1884 the Colonial Department had always been attached to the Marine. Etienne was given the position in fact, if not in name, of a Minister.

establishments on the Slave Coast emerged from this as somewhat more important than hitherto. This increased importance was recognised in the fact that the Resident of Porto Novo gained a good deal of independence from control of the Senegal administration.¹ At the time of the reorganisation it was decided that a senior official should be sent to the Slave Coast to take over from Dr. Tautain and make a thorough-going investigation of the area's problems. This new analysis of the situation was of course to supercede that of Tautain.

Because of his experience on the Slave Coast in 1887, the Lt. Governor of the Rivières du Sud, Dr. Bayol, was chosen for the task. The instructions given to Bayol show that Etienne made no major change in the aims of French policy in the area.² Bayol was to

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey VII, a Decree of 1.8.89. The Resident was still under the supervision of the Gov. of the Rivières du Sud but could correspond directly with the Colonial Under-Secretary.
 - 2 M.A.E. Afrique 125 Etienne to Bayol, Paris 12.8.89: C.W. Newbury, op.cit., p.129. Newbury interprets this document somewhat differently: he also quotes it as coming from Faure.

investigate the possibility of reoccupying the French fort at Whydah; to decide whether or not the Coastal towns of Avrekete and Godomy should be occupied; to consider the best way of putting into operation the clauses of the Serval Treaty which related to Cotonou; to decide whether or not King Toffa should be deposed. In fact he was to look into all the various proposals made by different officials over the preceding years.

What does mark a departure in the French approach is, that, although Bayol was instructed to find negotiated solutions to the political problems of the area—and above all the Cotonou problem—the use of force to settle them was not ruled out. Until this date the Colonial Department, although desirous of occupying Cotonou, considered that it would not be worth using force to achieve this objective. Policy was, now, that if French aims could not be achieved by diplomacy, force might be used. Large-scale military operations were not however contemplated. Etienne was well aware that he would get little support from his Cabinet colleagues if a major expedition proved necessary. It was hoped that Bayol would be able

to regulate matters on the Slave Coast, if not by diplomacy, at least without calling on reinforcements. The limited nature of the involvement envisualised by the Colonial Department is shown by the fact that Bayol was informed that the Benin garrison, if really neccessary, might be reinforced by one Company of Trailliers Senegalais.

The new attitude prevailing in the Colonial Department was soon reflected in the general approach to French problems on the Slave Coast. This can be seen from the remarks made by Bayol during the Paris negotiations on the delineation of the Lagos-Porto Novo frontier. Bayol here declared that he feared, because of recent Fon excesses, it would be necessary for France to teach Dahomey a severe lesson.¹ According to the British diplomatist, E.G.Egerton, the reason why the French wished to extend the Lagos Porto Novo frontier ^{to} in the interior, was that they wished to be absolutely undisturbed

¹ C.O.879/29, African 365, F.O. to C.O. 5.7.89, enclosing E.G.Egerton to Salisbury, Paris 1.7.89.

in their operations against Abomey.¹ Moreover, in December 1889, before Bayol had sent in his report on his attempt to 'settle' the Dahoman question peacefully, the Colonial Department ordered the Military Commandant in Senegal to send an officer to Porto Novo to study the conditions under which an expedition should be sent against the Fon capital.² The French were already thinking in terms of a conquest of Dahomey. The question as to what were the real rights of the Africans and the Europeans on the Coast was already an academic one. France was now going to demand that her will be done.

Bayol disembarked at Cotonou on 1st October and proceeded from there to Porto Novo, to decide on the question as to whether or not Toffa should be maintained as King. Unlike his two civilian predecessors, Bayol declared that reports on King Toffa's conduct were

1 C.O.879/29, African 365, F.O. to C.O. 10.7.89, enclosing Egerton to Salisbury, Paris 2.7.89.

2 P.A. de Salinis, La Campagne du Sane, p.126. The officer involved was Captain Septans who proposed, as did the other military men later sent to Porto Novo, a march up the river Oueme to Abomey.

favourable.¹ What seems to have influenced the Lt. Governor most strongly was Toffa's willingness to do whatever the French wished. Toffa had little choice: his power was now entirely dependent on French support. This situation so endeared the King to Bayol that he decided against deposing him. His official reasons were that to remove Toffa would be embarrassing to the French representative, and that the Porto Novans would find it difficult to adjust to a more liberal regime.² His real reason was that the French could never have found a more pliable puppet. This determination to maintain Toffa, although Bayol did not realise it, brought French and Dahoman policy in Porto Novo into head-on collision.

Having settled the problem of how to deal with the King of Porto Novo, Bayol proceeded to tackle the

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I, b Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 29.10.89.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I, b Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 10.1.90. There was in fact no lack of claimants to the Porto Novo throne.

question of Cotonou. During his previous visit to the Slave Coast, Bayol had formed a favourable opinion of the Dahomans. This was based on the fact that he assumed, erroneously, that a courteous welcome to a French representative meant that the Fon were willing to meet whatever demands the French cared to make. The Lt.Governor set out to improve Franco-Dahoman relations in an optimistic frame of mind.

His first action with regard to the Cotonou question was to visit Loocou, the Yeovogun of Cotonou. This official received him politely and assured him of Dahoman goodwill towards France.¹ Pleased by the success of this somewhat obvious venture, Bayol, on the 14th October, sent a letter to King Gelele, asking him to send to Cotonou someone who would have full powers to negotiate all the questions at issue between France and Dahomey.

The Fon reply came on the 31st October. The King had no interpreter and could not understand the message

1 D.N.A.1889. Bayol to Etienne.
Cotonou 12.10.89.

This was simply a diplomatic way of indicating that the Fon would not for a minute entertain the French proposals. The King requested that Bayol should send his interpreter to Abomey. Bayol himself determined to go to the capital. He considered that he could find a peaceful solution to the Cotonou problem only by direct negotiation.¹ Bayol, his secretary, M. Angnot, and an interpreter, Xavier Beraud, then left Cotonou for Abomey. They arrived there on the 21st of November.

They were greeted in Abomey with the elaborate ceremonies with which the Fon always greeted visiting Europeans. Bayol was well pleased with his reception and considered it an indication that Dahomey would be disposed to recognise the justice of French claims. When he came to discuss political matters with Prince Kondo he was, however, soon disillusioned. To Bayol's proposal that Cotonou should be handed over to the French, in return for a French payment of compensation for customs rights, Kondo replied, categorically, that

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey I, p Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 4.11.89.

it was impossible to cede even an inch of Dahoman territory. The compensation issue was treated by the Prince as irrelevant.¹ Dahomey did not, and would not, recognise the Serval Treaty. Kondo then went on to list the grievances against France which Dahomey had accumulated during the previous ten years. The recent French support for King Toffa received a prominent place in this recital. It was requested that Toffa be removed or, better, sent to Abomey. Kondo rounded off by advising the French to recall to the French throne a member of either the Napoleonic or Bourbon dynasties, so that some control might be imposed on what he considered inconsistent French policy.

That a barbarous African prince should oppose the will of France, accuse France of pursuing an inconsistent policy, and then presume to advise a reorganisation of French political life, was too much for Bayol, who was reduced to a frame of mind bordering on hysteria.

¹ The sum involved was 20,000 francs—only part of what the Fon customs brought in every year.

From being inclined to think that Dahomey would willingly co-operate with France he swung over to the equally unfounded conviction that Dahomey was implacably opposed to the French and wished to drive them from the Slave Coast. From that day until the 31st December, when he left Abomey, Bayol refused either to leave his house or to undertake any ceremonial duty.

Although the Lt. Governor continued to be treated with courtesy and consideration he began to imagine that his life was in danger. This is perhaps not so surprising when it is remembered that the most bloody of the customs were in progress during his stay.¹ Nevertheless, there was no foundation for the charges of ill-treatment which he was later to make against the Fon. They seem in fact to have been produced in order to prove that the failure of his mission in no

¹ Bayol later made much of the fact that Porto Novons were sacrificed during his stay. This he took as a personal threat. Most likely they were sacrificed in order to show the French that the Fon were determined to break Toffa.

way reflected on his own conduct. These fabrications were, however, developed and expounded in Etienne's speeches in the Chamber of Deputies, passed into common verbal currency, and played a large part in the development of the myth which was used as the justification for French expansion into the interior of the Slave Coast. The only result of Bayol's visit to Abomey was that it became obvious that the French could only take full possession of Cotonou if they were prepared to seize it by force.¹

When in Abomey, Bayol was greeted by King Gelele. The King was described by M. Angnot as a thin old man aged about seventy-five. This would not, however, necessarily confirm that Gelele was still active and had kept control of all his faculties. It is mentioned

¹ The account of Bayol's embassy is based on the following:-
M.M.C. Dahomey III_{1b} Angnot to Bayol, Porto Novo 5.1.90: M.M.C. Dahomey III_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 15.1.90: M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 1.1.90: M.M.C. Dahomey V_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 4.1.90 enclosing Bayol to Etienne, Abomey 6.12.90.

by a contemporary writer¹ that there were men living in the Abomey Palace who closely resembled the King and who would on certain ceremonial occasions take the place of the King. Probably Bayol saw such a one. Bayol did confirm that the King played no part in the making of political decisions.

In Abomey, Bayol's demands had the effect of forcing the various factions to come together. The process had started in early 1889: Bayol's clear outline of French intentions now induced them to close their ranks completely. A month elapsed between Bayol's statement of French demands and the delivery of the Dahoman reply. This time seems to have been employed in formulating a reply acceptable to all shades of opinion. It was also used to redistribute offices amongst the various factions who had now agreed on a policy. Topa became Mehou: Nougobododhoue became Yeovogun²

1..E.Chaudoin, Trois Mois de Captivité
au Dahomey, p.273.

2 Casmir Agbo, Histoire de Ouidah, p56
Nougobododhoue is here given as the
name of Gelele's 'great fetish doctor'
the last Yeovogun of Whydah.

of Whydah. The leaders of the two groups, previously bitterly opposed on issues of foreign policy, now jointly controlled Fon relations with the Europeans. Topa, having become Mehou, gave up his claim to the throne. Kondo's right to succeed was undisputed. Gelele's death was announced just before Bayol left Abomey. The old King's life had depended on the ruling class being fairly evenly divided over the question of who should succeed him. It seems more than likely that he did not die a natural death.¹ At any rate, at the end of December 1889 Kondo took the throne and the new 'strong' name of Behanzin.

Bayol returned from Abomey firmly convinced that not only would the Dahomans never allow the French to establish themselves at the points claimed, by the French, along the coast, but also that the Dahomans were intent upon driving the French from the Slave Coast altogether. In his first conviction he was absolutely justified: he had

¹ It was suggested by Xavier Beraud in March 1891 that the King had been poisoned. (See below p.364)

been warned that Dahomey would never tolerate any French occupation of her territory. His second conviction, based as it was on his misunderstanding of the Dahoman attacks on Porto Novo and his hysterical misinterpretation of his treatment in Abomey, was quite unfounded. The Dahoman aim was simply to maintain the status quo: to trade freely with the French but to prevent the French seizing Dahoman territory.

With regard to the immediate object of Bayol's going to Abomey—to come to some decision as to what to do about French claims to Cotonou, Bayol, on his return, offered as the only alternatives, two suggestions: one pacific and the other radical. His first suggestion was to place customs posts at Porto Nove beach and direct all shipping there instead of to Cotonou. Bayol considered that this would bring the King of Dahomey to heel since it would deprive him of Cotonou's revenues. This was not of course necessarily the case: the inalienable nature of Dahoman territory was far more important than was its economic value. His 'radical' solution was to send a military expedition to the Slave Coast immediately and

to use it to seize the ports of Dahomey to which the French laid claim.⁽¹⁾ It was made clear in his military report that he himself was very much in favour of the 'radical' solution

Bayol considered that an expedition would be particularly successful at this time because Behanzin would not be securely established on the throne so soon after his father's death. He also stated that, since the French did not intend to take Abomey, no serious opposition need be expected.⁽²⁾ After Kondo's careful explanation that any French attempt to seize Fon territory would meet with total resistance, it is difficult to see quite how Bayol arrived at this last view. The explanation must be simply that Bayol had become by this time emotionally committed to the idea of an armed attack on Dahomey; knowing that the metropolitan government would not allow itself to be involved in a major colonial war he convinced himself, and then attempted to convince

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, 4.1.1890

2 M.M.C. Dahomey III_{1b} Bayol to Etienne 11.1.1890

his government, that no great military effort would be required to crush the Fon. To push home the message he added:

'Douanes à Whydah et Cotonou et les contributions de guerre permettraient sans s'adresser au Parlement de couvrir les frais de cette occupation qu'est pour l'avenir de nos Etablissements du Golfe de Benin et le renom de la France en Afrique d'une importance exceptionnelle.'¹

Not only could the occupation of coastal Dahomey be put into operation without much opposition, but it would also cost no extra money.

Bayol had, then, during his stay in Abomey, become committed with all the hysterical violence of his unstable character to the idea of an expedition to seize southern Dahomey. He was convinced, it has already been noted, that Dahomey intended to expel the French from the Slave Coast. Soon after his return from Abomey, he began to inform the Colonial Department that Dahoman activities

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey III, b Bayol to Etienne, 11.1.1890.

were becoming more and more hostile to the French. A minor trade dispute at Whydah, and a protest by the Cotonou authorities against the burial of a French soldier without their permission, convinced him that the Fon were intent upon provoking a break with the French. Quite how Bayol reconciled his conviction that Dahomey was about to attack the French with his view that a French expedition to seize southern Dahomey would meet very little opposition, he never explained. Nevertheless, believing the Fon to be hostile, Bayol sent a request, on the 13th January, for an urgent decision as to which of his two proposed policies he should put into operation.¹

The Colonial Department replied, on the 16th January, that the Government was unfavourable to an expedition which would require the voting of Parliamentary credits. Details of the sort of expedition contemplated by Bayol were requested. The Department wanted to know how many troops were required, if the operation was possible at that time of year, how long would such an expedition be

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey I, 118 Bayol to Etienne,
Porto Novo, 13.1.90

likely to last and would it be really necessary to reinforce the Benin garrison?¹ Unfortunately Bayol's reply has not been preserved. It would seem from comments on it, however, that it was in line with his claim that very little resistance need be expected. He considered that the expedition could be undertaken with the troops in the Benin Establishments reinforced by the company from Senegal which Etienne had promised in August 1889. These would have amounted to less than 400 men.

The Cabinet remained undecided, and determined to consult with Commandant Fournier, the Commander of the Cruiser, 'Sané', on duty off the West Coast. His reply was that any expedition against Dahomey would be very dangerous indeed.² The aim of the Government³ with regard

1 Victor Nicolas 'L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890' Annex 8 Despatches: Colonial Department to Lt.Governor, 16.1.1890

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3a} 'Sané' to Marine, Gabon 8.2.1890. It is from this reply that it can be learned what sort of expedition Bayol had prepared.

3 The Tirard Government, February 1889 to March 1890.

to Dahomey was to avoid any colonial reverse which might endanger its position in Parliament. It seems that although Etienne upheld Bayol's view that an expedition should be made, he was over-ruled by his colleagues who, following Fournier, feared that Bayol took an over-optimistic view of the military position.¹ On the 17th of February the Lt. Governor was informed that the Government had decided that any operation ought to be strictly limited to the defence of French territories and the protection of French nationals. Bayol was warned to act prudently and to leave the direction of military affairs in the hands of the Officer Commanding the Military Forces; any military reverse, even the most minor, he was told, could have very grave consequences for the Government.² The Cabinet had therefore ruled against any forward movement to seize Dahoman territory.

1 Eugene Etienne, Son Oeuvre. Etienne was later to claim that he wished to pursue a forward policy but was over-ruled.

2 V. Nicolas, 'L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890' Annex 8 Despatches: Colonial Department to Lt Governor, Paris 17.2.1890.

While the Cabinet had been reaching their decision, Bayol had been taking measures to meet a Dahoman attack. In his view all the French traders in the Dahoman area were in serious danger. Bayol saw it as his duty to protect them. On the 12th of February the Lt. Governor was informed that the reinforcements from Senegal were soon to arrive at Cotonou. On the 13th he informed the chief agents of the two French trading Houses with agents along the Coast that their representatives should all take shelter by the 17th of February. At this time it seems that he intended that all Frenchmen should leave Dahoman territory by that date. This was in preparation for the expedition which Bayol was sure could be launched against the Coastal towns as soon as the reinforcements arrived.

The French traders in Whydah considered that the Fon authorities would never allow them all to leave Whydah at the same time. They therefore determined to barricade themselves into Fabre's factory in Whydah, where they were confident they could resist any Fon attack

until the arrival of French forces.¹ They expected the arrival of the French forces on the 19th of February. Bayol was later to swear that he had not told the general agents on the 13th that Whydah was to be occupied. Even if this is true, it does seem that Bayol must at some time have indicated that Whydah was to be occupied on the 19th; it is unlikely that these traders would have shut themselves up in an isolated building without the means to withstand a siege if they had not been convinced that they would soon be rescued. It was not that they expected to be attacked by the Dahomans; some of them later testified that the Dahomans had in no way molested them and were astounded at their

1 The Whydah traders involved were Bontemps, French Consular agent, and five other employees of Fabree. There were also two of Mantes Freres et Borelli employees. With them there was Father Dorgere who was in charge of the Lyons Fathers' Missionary Station in Whydah. Two German traders of the House of Godelt and the German Consul, Randal, joined them.

conduct.¹ Bayol was in fact preparing to put his 'radical' policy into action.

When Commandant Terrillon, the new Commander of the troops from Senegal, arrived in Cotonou on the 19th, the

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} C.Fabre to Colonial Department, Marseilles 23.7.90, enclosing Bontemps' Report 24.2. to 8.5.1890, Porto Novo 11.5.1890:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3c} copy of a letter from M.Randal to Messrs Godelt, Lagos 10.3.90:
M.M.C. III_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Paris 14.12.90 (Bayol's defence):
M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Whydah 5.10.90:
M.M.C. Dahomey XV_{3a} E.Chaudoin's petition to the Chamber of Deputies, Official Journal 21.12.90:
M.A.E.Afrique 126, J.Bocamy to M.Bontemps 14. 2. 90:
M.A.E. Afrique 126, Eichemberger to M.Toglia, Porto Novo 13.2.90:
M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 25.3.90:
E.Chaudoin, Trois^{Mois} de Captivite au Dahomey:
E.Chaudoin, 'Trois Mois de Captivite au Dahomey' Illustration, 1890.

The traders were later taken captive by the Fon. They considered that they had been taken prisoner because of Bayol's bungling of the political situation. Some of them even laid a petition before Parliament claiming compensation for official irresponsibility. Because of this dispute there is a vast amount of contradictory evidence on the subject.

situation was, therefore, that all the traders had fled from Dahomey, except those of Whydah, who had shut themselves in Fabre's factory. By the 19th the Dahomans were thoroughly alarmed by the actions of the French traders. The landing of the French troops at Cotonou alarmed them even further, and on the same day they closed all 'the roads' in southern Dahomey. This to Bayol was final proof that the Fon were about to attack. He considered that the roads had been closed in order to prevent the Whydah traders leaving, and that these traders were being kept in Whydah as hostages. His anxiety was increased by the fact that Toffa was continually bombarding the French administration with reports of Dahoman preparation for war.¹ Commander Terrillon, completely new to the area, was easily persuaded that the situation was urgent. He was shown Bayol's instructions

¹ The Dahomans were of course preparing as they had stated in May 1889 (see Chap. IV.p. 304) for a raid on Porto Novo to destroy Porto Novo's palm oil producing plantations. Toffa, in order to gain French protection presented these preparations in the light of an all-out Dahoman attack on the French.

to protect French nationals and French territory. It was decided that something had to be done to save those French merchants in Whydah. Bayol wanted to seize Whydah and Cotonou immediately. Terrillon declared that it was impossible to take both ports with only the 360 men now under his command. Bayol had no choice but to agree. An alternative plan was therefore concocted: the Fon Authorities of Cotonou were to be seized so that their lives could be bargained against those of the Whydah Europeans. On the 22nd February these Authorities were enticed to the Régis factory at Cotonou, made prisoners, and despatched to Porto Novo where they were entrusted to King Toffa as prisoners. Cotonou was then occupied. In the process fifteen Dahomans were killed¹. This was an act of unprovoked French aggression.

After the occupation of Cotonou, Bayol telegraphed the somewhat cryptic message to the Colonial Department that he was 'Happy to announce the occupation of

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{2a} Colonel Terrillon's Journal, 7.2. to 7.3.1890: M.M.C. Dahomey III_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Paris 14.12.1890.

Cotonou'.¹ The Colonial Department was not so happy to receive the message; it immediately demanded to know why force had been used; had Cotonou been attacked?; did Bayol recall his orders to protect French nationals and not to take the offensive?² The Colonial Department considered that Bayol had exceeded his orders.

Luckily for Bayol the question as to whether or not he had exceeded his orders soon became irrelevant. On the 23rd February the local Dahoman levies counter-attacked, and Bayol was able to use this attack as justification for his claim that the seizure of Cotonou had been a purely defensive measure. The assault itself was easily beaten off, but nevertheless Bayol requested that his garrison be reinforced by 250 men. This was in order that he might go on to occupy Whydah.³ The Lt. Governor's interpretation of his orders of the 17th February

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Tel. Bayol to Colonial Department, Cotonou 22./2.90. 0.
 - 2 Victor Nicolas, L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890, Annex 8 Despatches, Colonial Department to Lt. Governor, Paris 22./2.90. ?
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 24.2.90.

was that the occupation of Whydah would also be defensive, since it would be undertaken to protect French property and French nationals.

At Whydah on the same day, the 24th, the Europeans in Fabre's factory, having run out of food and despairing of the arrival of French troops, gave themselves up to the Fon authorities at Whydah. The Germans and a Dutch priest were allowed to go free. The Frenchmen were, however, arrested, stripped, chained, and confined in a tiny stinking room in the Agore.¹

The events of the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th of February added up to the fact that the French were now involved in a full-scale war on Dahomey. The French had on the Slave Coast 360 well-trained men, armed with modern rapid-firing rifles. The Dahoman forces could hardly hope to destroy a force of this nature provided the French kept a vigilant watch against surprise attack. The regiments of the Fon army were armed with various types of flint guns. The most common type was a small

1 See p. 328, F/N 1.

carbiner ¹ Français which seemed to be favoured particularly by the Amazons. The other most usual type of gun was the trade gun manufactured in Birmingham. One Corps was armed with what would appear to have been 'nursery rhyme' muskets described by Bayol as 'Tromblons au Espignoles', like those carried by French Sappers before the French Revolution.² All these guns were charged with a diversity of objects, the most common being pieces of iron bars and small stones. The Dahomans also possessed some ancient cannon which were of no military value whatsoever.³

The French government, as has been noted, was by no means as enthusiastic about the turn of events in the Slave Coast as was Bayol. After the first battle of Cotonou, although the seizure of that port was accepted

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- 1 'Mousquetons de la Cavalerie Francais Model 1822'.
 - 2 Short guns widening out from the middle towards the mouth. They had been sold by the Portugese to the Fon.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey III, Bayol to Etienne Reseignements Militaires, Porto Novo 11.1.90. It is reproduced in part in 'Les Forces Militaires au Dahomey' by J.Bayol in Revue Scientifique, Paris 1892.

by Paris as 'defensive' and therefore not contrary to the Cabinet's instructions, Bayol was warned not to be so carried away by that first minor success as to exceed the orders given by the Government. Any advance beyond those orders, it was stated, would cause the Government grave embarrassment in Parliament.¹

These instructions——'That any operations were to be strictly limited to protecting French nationals and French interests'——were open to different interpretations. The first interpretation was that the Lt.Governor should take no action to change the existing situation: force should only be used against attack. The second interpretation (that of Bayol) was that French nationals and French interests could only be protected by occupying the Coastal areas and, above all, Whydah, where Frenchmen were held captive.

After the Dahoman 'attack' on Cotonou, the French Government was divided as to whether to allow Bayol to

¹ Victor Nicolas, 'L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890', Annex 8 Despatches: Colonial Department to Lt.Gov., Paris 24.12.90.

go ahead and occupy Whydah, or whether to order him to remain simply on the defensive at Cotonou. The point at issue was not, would France be justified in taking Whydah, but would an expedition be so expensive, or so dangerous, that the Government's position in Parliament would be undermined? Etienne it seems supported Bayol.¹ As a result of the division of opinion, the Cabinet temporarily allowed the men on the spot to carry on as best they could. The reiteration of the double-meaning formula of 17th February was used as a cover for the lack of Governmental decision.

On the 1st March the French in Cotonou again repulsed a Dahoman attack, made this time it seems by the Dahoman levies raised south of the Lama.² By the 3rd March, however, another Fon army had reached the Cotonou area and on the night of the 4th launched an attack on the French garrison of that town. Taken by

1 Eugene Etienne, Speech in Chamber of Deputies, 11.4.1892. (See, Son Oeuvre)

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{2a} Terrillon's Journal, Estimates of Fon dead range from 190 to 300.

surprise the French were nearly overwhelmed. Nevertheless, after the landing of reinforcements from the Sané, now stationed off Cotonou, the Dahomans were driven off leaving 127 dead inside the French lines.¹ It seems that there were about 3,000 troops involved in this attack. The presence of the King, the numbers of Fon troops involved, the speed with which they arrived at Cotonou, and the fact that the Amazons played a leading role in the attack, all suggest that it was the section of the 'standing army' stationed in Abomey which made the attack. That the regular army arrived from Abomey fully equipped and ready for war, only ten days after the French seizure of Cotonou indicates that when news of the French action arrived in Abomey, there was no ⁱdiversion of opinion as to what action to take.

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{2a} Terrillon's Journal 7.2. to 7.4.1890: J. Bayol, 'L'Attaque de Cotonou', Revue Bleue, Paris 1892. Bayol claimed that the Fon had lost altogether 500 dead and wounded. Porto Novan spies put the Fon dead at 250. Both sources are unreliable. The French lost 8 men, 2 of whom were Europeans. 26 were wounded.

This Fon army having been repulsed before Cotonou, retired to Abomey Calavi. The French proceeded to bombard the town from the sea.¹ On the 6th March it was learned that a second Dahoman army of about 2,000 men had arrived at Badoo on the River Oueme.² It looks as though at least a part of the army guarding the Yoruba frontier had moved southwards to guard the Oueme route from Porto Novo to the Abomey plateau. On the 10th March it was learned that Behanzin had gone northwards leaving a considerable army to protect Godomy and Abomey Calavi.³

The King was probably returning to the North to consult with the Chiefs as to what political steps should be taken to deal with the situation which had arisen on the failure of the Dahoman army to retake Cotonou. Such a decision was made even more necessary since the Northern Yoruba had taken advantage of the Dahoman war with France to attack north-western Dahomey.⁴

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{2a} Terrillon's Journal
7.2. to 7.4.1890: M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b}
Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 4.4.90.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{2a} Terrillon's Journal
7.2. to 7.4.1890.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne,
Porto Novo 4.4.90.
 - 4 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne,
Cotonou 13.3.1890.

The Fon defeat on the Coast and the successful Yoruba raid on the North seems to have persuaded Behanzin to seek allies. His first move in pursuit of this aim was to offer the King of Portugal an alliance and to request that the Governor of the Portuguese fort should assist the Fon against the French.¹ The attempt failed.

The French Whydah traders and Father Dorgere had, on the 27th February, been marched in chains from Whydah to Allada, where they remained until the King arrived there, on the 13th of March. They were then brought before Behanzin, who, as soon as he was informed of the conditions of their captivity, gave orders that they should receive better treatment. Their clothes were returned and they were freed from their chains. They were sent (on the 20th) to Abomey, where they were well treated, lodged in the former Chacha's residence, and allowed to move freely around the quarter in which the house was situated.²

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{1b} Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 8.3.90

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} Fabre to Colonial Department, Marseilles 23.7.90, enclosing Bontemp's report on the captivity of the hostages in Abomey, Porto Novo 11.5.90: E. Chaudin, Trois Mois de Captivite au Dahomey.

As has been noted, the Government's official policy remained to protect French nationals and French interests. The views of the Deputies, expressed in Parliament when a question was asked, on the 8th of March, about the situation in Dahomey, did not encourage those in the Cabinet who wanted the implementation of a 'forward' policy on the Slave Coast.¹ Etienne informed Bayol that Parliament would be unfavourable to any action which was designed to do more than enforce treaties and protect French nationals.² The formula covering policy remained the same but it had been ascertained that Parliamentary opinion would support only a defensive war.

Bayol himself pressed on with his arrangements for an attack on Whydah. He requested that the number of troops in the area should be increased by 150 men and that a blockade of the Dahoman Coast be put into operation

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- 1 The question was asked by M. Deloncle, a member of the Colonial Group in the Chamber. It seems likely that the question was deliberately asked so as to sound Parliamentary opinion.
 - 2 Victor Nicolas, L'Expédition du Dahomey, Annex 8, Despatches: Colonial Department to Lt. Governor, Paris 9.3.1890.

as soon as possible.¹ Lt.Colonel Terrillon had however by this time evolved a military policy of his own. He considered that a march on Abomey, on the lines of the English march on Kumasi, would be more effective in forcing the Fon to agree to French demands than a seizure of Whydah.² The French Cabinet, fearing for its position in Parliament, would of course have nothing to do with the idea of a major expedition into the interior.³

This difference in policy was the beginning of a bitter quarrel between Terrillon and Bayol. Its development seems to have been due, in so far as it did not arise out of a personality conflict,⁴ to differing

1 M.M.C.Dahomey I, Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 4.3.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I, Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 11.3.90.

3 Victor Nicolas, L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890, Annex 8, Despatches: Colonial Department to Lt.Governor, Paris 13.3.90.

4 Bayol had already quarrelled equally bitterly with Dr.Pereton in 1887 and with Dr.Tautain in 1889. It seems that he had a gift for it.

opinions as to how Whydah should be occupied. Bayol believed that, after the arrival of the next 150 troops, Whydah could immediately be occupied. Terrillon, with a more sound appreciation of the military situation, considered that the Dahoman forces in the Porto Novo-Cotonou area, would have to be destroyed before it would be safe to remove the major part of the garrisons of those towns for an attack on Whydah. The quarrel became steadily more bitter, and by the 1st March Bayol was complaining that Terrillon was conducting military operations without consulting him.¹

On the 26th March Terrillon's forces marched into the hinterland of Porto Novo, where he encountered and defeated a body of Dahoman soldiers. Terrillon reported that he was moving to disengage Porto Novo before marching on Whydah². The Colonel then proceeded to put a series of

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I, p Bayol to Etienne, Cotonou 26.3.90.

2 M.A.E. Afrique 126, Governor to Colonial Department St. Louis 28.3.1890, enclosing Lt. Col. Terrillon to Governor of Senegal, Cotonou 26.3.90. No estimate of Dahoman losses is given although they were said to be heavy.

Oueme villages to the sword.¹ To Terrillon this campaign was a sensible military precaution. To the Dahomans it seems to have indicated that the French were preparing to advance up the Oueme valley. The Fon army at Godomey was withdrawn to Allada², where it was in a position to move quickly to any point in the coastal area which the French might attack.

Having 'disengaged' the Porto Novo area. Terrillon reported that he hoped to take Whydah within a week.³ The fact that the men on the spot were about to take action which might have repercussions in Parliament seems to have stimulated the new Cabinet, in which Etienne remained Colonial Secretary, to take a decision as to the meaning of the formula which had until this time taken the place of a policy. According to the

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I, 1b Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 28.3.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I, 1b Bayol to Etienne, Porto Novo 1.4.90.

3 M.A.E. Afrique 126, Governor of Senegal to Colonial Department, St. Louis, 1.4.90, enclosing Colonel Terrillon to Governor, Cotonou 31.3.1890.

new Premier, ^{De} Freycinet, the Cabinet's main object was to avoid the expense which an expedition would have involved.¹

The Cabinet was, moreover, doubtful if it would be wise to attempt to take Whydah with the limited number of troops available on the Slave Coast. The conflict between Bayol and Terrillon did nothing to increase the Government's confidence in the judgement of the Administrators of the area. It was therefore decided that a peace settlement should be sought before an attempt was made to take Whydah. If peace could not be made before, it should be made immediately after the town was occupied. It was also decided that Bayol had better be removed. The official reason was, that since he had been in command when the war broke out, he was not a suitable person to conduct the peace negotiations. The real reason was most probably that the Cabinet had lost confidence in the Lt. Governor's judgement. On

¹ De Freycinet, replying in a debate in the Chamber on 10.5.92.

the 1st of April Bayol was informed of this new policy and requested to return to Konakry immediately.¹

The Cabinet, having dismissed Bayol, proceeded to ask Commandant Fournier, the Commander of the 'Sané', which was at that time lying off Cotonou, if an attack on Whydah had any chance of success. Fournier replied that there were only 700 French troops on the Slave Coast and that 1,500 would be necessary to make sure of success.² The Cabinet immediately issued instructions to the effect that an expedition against Whydah was absolutely forbidden.³ The information provided by Fournier finally convinced the French Government that the Colonial administration in Benin had been acting irresponsibly.

The Commander of the French North Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Cuverville, was now made Supreme Commander of

1 M.A.E. Afrique 126, Colonial Department to Lt.Governor, Paris 1.4.1890.

2 Victor Nicolas, L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890. Annex 8, Despatches Marine to 'Sané', Paris 1.4.1890: 'Sané' to to Marine, Cotonou 3.4.1890.

3 M.A.E. Afrique 126, Colonial Department to Lt.Governor, 5.4.1890.

the land and sea forces in the area. As he was cruising off the Americas at the time, Commander Fournier was to exercise these powers until he arrived. The official reason for this transfer of control was that the war was being waged by both land and sea, and that the Command should be unified. It was also decided that since a Marine officer was to be in charge in the Benin establishments, responsibility in Paris for affairs there, should, for the duration of the war, be transferred from the Colonial Department to the Marine.¹

On the 8th of April, Fournier, the new Commander, received instructions embodying the policy agreed upon by the Cabinet. Cotonou and Porto Novo were to be defended and the blockade to be maintained. Fournier was also instructed to enter, as soon as possible, into negotiations with Dahomey for a peace settlement. Peace

1 Etienne defended this action in Parliament on 10.5.1890 on the grounds that it was necessary to have a unified command. It is doubtful if he was as favourable in the Cabinet. He later, on 11.4.1892, declared that he had opposed (in the Cabinet) the veto on the expedition to Whydah.

was to be made, if possible, on the basis that Dahomey should recognise the independence of Porto Novo, French possession of Cotonou, and that Dahomey should return the Whydah hostages. If the Dahomans would not agree to this the French were prepared also to offer the King an annual pension equal to the customs receipts at Cotonou.¹ No attempt was to be made to gain possession of more Dahoman territory.

Bayol himself left Cotonou on the 5th of April. His achievement was that he, single-handed, manufactured the myth which was to be used to justify the French conquest of Dahomey. It was he who linked the fortunes of France in Benin indissol^uably with those of Toffa, and it was he who invented the idea that the dearest Dahoman ambition was to expel the French from the Slave Coast. He alone had been in a position to ascertain the real aims of Dahoman policy. His interpretation of these aims, together with the continual barrage of anti-Dahoman propoganda kept up by Toffa's Porto Novo supporters,

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3b} Marine to Fournier,
Paris, 8.4.90.

convinced all the French in Benin, apart from the Whydah missionaries and the traders in contact with them, that Dahomey was hostile to France. Bayol started a war which the French Government of the day wished to avoid. It took six months to end the war. The myth of Dahoman injustice and hostility to France has lasted for as many decades.

After the departure of Bayol, the campaign went on under the impetus it had acquired while he was in control. The men in charge, Fournier, Terrillon, and the new Resident of Porto Novo, Victor Ballot, had come to the area when the war was in progress, and of course accepted the Bayol version of its outbreak. It was the accepted view amongst the French in Benin that punitive measures 'to teach the Fon a lesson' would have to be taken against Abomey before the war could be ended.¹

In spite of the French Government's hopes of peace, Colonel Terrillon continued operations in the Porto Novo

1 M.A.E., Afrique 126, 'Sane' to Marine, Cotonou 22.4.90. This despatch summarises the views expressed at this period.

area where the Fon had gathered in strength. The French feared a Fon assault and, on the 20th April, in order to forestall such an eventuality, attacked the Dahoman army, at Atcheribè, about seven kilometres to the North of Porto Novo. The French claimed the resulting battle as a resounding victory: the Fon certainly suffered heavy losses and retired from the field. Atcheribè could not however have been a very dreadful blow to the Fon since they continued to operate in the Porto Novo area.¹ In fact the battle did not even distract them from their main purpose—to destroy, as they had threatened they would, the palm oil plantations around Porto Novo.² They did not wish to

1 M.A.E. Afrique 126, 'Sané' to Marine Cotonou 21.4.90: C.O. 147/74, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 30.4.90: A.L. Dalbeca, La France au Dahomey, 1884. Fournier states the Fon army consisted of 7,000 men of whom 300 were killed. D'Albeca says 1,000 were killed. British sources indicate that the French vastly over-rated Dahoman losses. Perhaps 100 were killed. It also seems very likely that the French over-estimated the number of Fon troops involved.

2 See Chapter IV p. 304

fight the French: they simply intended to apply economic pressure. Having destroyed innumerable palm oil plantations the Fon proceeded to withdraw northwards. The French continued to build defensive works around Porto Novo but the Dahomans did not return.¹

Because of the official's conviction that a Fon attack was imminent, De Freycinet's policy of negotiation did not go into operation immediately. Indeed, the first peace moves came from Abomey. Some days after they arrived in Abomey, the French hostages were summoned to an interview with a Caboceer whose official capacity they did not know. This Caboceer dictated a letter to the President of the French Republic in which it was proposed to return the hostages to Whydah on condition that the Cotonou Authorities were reinstated. The Resident of Porto Novo, Victor Ballot, acting on Commander Fournier's instructions, sent, on 21st April,

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3a} 'Sané' to Marine, Cotonou 28.4.90. C.O.147/74, Moloney to Knutsford, Lagos 30.4.90, enclosing Johnston (District Commissioner at Badagry) to Lagos Colonial Secretary 5.5.90.

two African messengers to Abomey to follow up this correspondence. Their task was to see if it would be possible to effect an exchange.¹

The messengers arrived in Cana on the 28th of April and were welcomed ceremoniously by the King at the Zagnando Palace. The Europeans were sent for and, after the envoys had delivered their 'message', told that they were to be set free. Before they left Cana on the 2nd of May the King dictated a reply to Ballot in which, although a further protest was made against French aggression, the key passage emphasised the Fon

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} C Fabre to Etienne 23.7.90, enclosing Bontemp's report, Porto Novo 11.5.90: M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} Declaration of Soissou and Aouge. The letters themselves are not in existence. The first Dahoman letter must, however, from Bontemp's evidence, have been sent in the last days of March or the first days of April, probably before the departure of Bayol. It is unlikely that Bayol saw the irony of the fact that Dahomey made the first offer to restore the hostages—Bayol had seized the Cotonou Authorities ostensibly to ensure that the French had people to exchange against the Whydah merchants. This aim was lost sight of remarkably quickly.

desire to live in peace with the Europeans. Dahomey as always wanted only peace and trade; the French would be free and at liberty to trade at all points on the Coast, provided France returned to the Cotonou Authorities the positions they had held before the French seizure of that Port.¹

The hostages arrived at Whydah on the 5th May. Commander Fournier then informed the Whydah Authorities that if they were not on board a French ship by the 9th, the town would be bombarded and completely destroyed. The Authorities stated that they thought the return of the French hostages to Whydah sufficient to obtain the release of the Cotonou hostages. They declared that they would have to consult the King before they could allow their prisoners to go aboard a French ship. The hostages were allowed to move freely about Whydah. After they arrived in the town they went straight to the Portuguese fort where the Portuguese Commandant, M. Dos Santos, took them under his protection. Next day Dos Santos, with a number of Portuguese troops, escorted them to the

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} Behanzin to Ballot, Cane 2.5.90.

beach where they were picked up by a boat from the French ships off the Coast.¹ To have stopped them, the Whydah Authorities would have had to use force against both the Portuguese and the French. This, it seems, they were afraid to do. The Fon Cotonou Authorities were released and returned to Dahomey on the 7th of May, immediately after the French party arrived in Porto Novo.

An exchange had, then, been effected. This was not however what the Fon had wanted. They had intended that the French hostages should return in freedom to Whydah to begin trading again, and that the Cotonou Authorities should be restored to their former positions. What they wanted was simply a reversion to the political situation as it had existed before the French attack. Their political objectives took no account of the fact that the Fon armies had been defeated. That no account

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3a} C.Fabre to Etienne
23.7.90, enclosing Bontemp's report,
Porto Novo 11.5.90: E.Chaudoin,
Trois Mois de Captivite du Dahomey.

had been taken of the alteration in the coastal balance of power may have been partly due to the fact that the Fon attitude to current political problems had been worked out in 1889 only with difficulty, and consisted of the minimum programme on which the various factions within the ruling group could agree. Any change in this programme might have meant a return to earlier struggles to control decision-making. Even although they were anxious for peace, the Dahomans would therefore maintain, at least until the French put forward alternative proposals, the programme of December 1889.

The French administrators in Benin had been slow to put into practice the Government's instructions to enter into negotiations. They had not realised that the Fon had attempted to make the exchange of hostages into a peace settlement. Nevertheless, Commandant Fournier on the 21st of May advised Victor Ballot to send a messenger to Behanzin with an outline of the points on which the French were willing to negotiate a peace settlement. Ballot himself was not in favour of sending an ambassador, since he considered that only a severe

defeat would bring the Fon to agree to terms which he thought France might accept. Holding this view, he considered that sending a messenger would simply lower French 'prestige' in the eyes of the Africans.

The man selected, by Ballot, for this mission, was Bernardin Durand. No messenger would have been less likely to spread sweetness and light in Abomey.¹ It seems that Ballot, knowing Durand's devotion to France and his linguistic ability, simply failed to realise how unpopular his choice of messenger would be in Abomey. Durand arrived in the Dahoman capital on the 5th of May. There is no record of the wording of the proposals which Durand carried with him, but it can be safely assumed that they were based on the policy

1 See Chapter III p 197 for outline of career of Durand. Ballot seems to have been regarded by his colleagues as an upright, honest man and, it seems unlikely even though he was not in agreement with official policy, that he would have attempted to undermine it by sending on an unacceptable messenger. The Porto Novans, however, would have had no such scruples. Durand himself applied for the job.

set out by the Government in its instructions to Fournier on the 8th April.¹

To have agreed to negotiate on the basis of Durand's proposals would have meant for the Dahomans a radical departure from the compromise on which the Fon ruling group had been able to unite. Many of the Chiefs do seem to have been convinced by the defeat of the Fon armies and by the recession of trade, that it was necessary to alter Fon political objectives and to make peace with the French. It was said that the loss of trade was heavily felt in Abomey, where the price of all European luxury goods had doubled. Moreover, the loyalty of the coastal towns, terrified by the French bombardments, seems to have been becoming doubtful.

According to reliable information received by the French from Dorgere, the Mehou Topa, and another of the King's brothers, Prince Adoknin, were the leaders of the

1 Durand's 'message' being based on the statement of policy of 8.4.1890 would have proposed Dahoman abandonment of Cotonou and Porto Novo.

group who wanted a peace settlement.¹ The majority of the Chiefs, it seems, were in favour of a settlement even if it meant that Dahomey had to accept a loss of territory. Some of the Chiefs, indeed, may have wished to make peace to forestall the French, under the influence of Toffa, from beginning an all-out war on Dahomey. Fear that the Yoruba, taking advantage of the Franco-Dahoman conflict, might unite and make a concerted attack, probably also influenced the Fon to seek a peace settlement.

The minority who were against the settlement were no doubt the Geleleans, who were, as always, opposed to giving in to European pressure and, above all, to ceding Dahoman territory. Although a majority of the Chiefs were in favour of a peace, Durand remained in Dahomey until the end of June without receiving any reply to the proposals which he had brought. It seems, from later events,² that the taking of a decision was held up, not by the

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{3d} Cuverville to Marine
9.9.90: M.A.E. Afrique 126, Cuverville
to Marine, Cotonou 1.8.90.

2 See below 361-362.

strength of support for the Geleleans, but by distrust of the French, greatly reinforced by the distrust of the French messenger.¹

When Durand was in Abomey, a section of the Fon, under the leadership of the King, was engaged in a retaliatory raid on a number of Northern Yoruba villages.² On his return to Abomey, the King indulged in a 'triumph' which it is to be presumed was designed to convince his people that the Dahoman military machine was sweeping all before it. Probably the King had associated himself with the northern campaign in order to enhance his prestige. The French hoped that this raid on Yoruba

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4a} Bernardin Durand to Ballot, Porto Novo 5.9.90. Durand was asked to repeat his message at different times to different groups of Chiefs. They then compared what he had said. A.M. Alexandre was called up from Whydah to check Durand's translations of his offered letter. This checking and counter-checking of both Durand's statements and the documents which he carried, indicates how much the Fon distrusted him.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4a} B. Durand to Ballot, Porto Novo 15.9.90.

territory would stir up the Egba to march on Abomey.¹
It did not. The Egba had been content, since 1878, if not to co-operate with Dahomey, at least to see in their mutual hostility to the northern Yoruba, and in the similarity of their problems in dealing with the advance of the Europeans from the coast, good ^areasons for maintaining a neutral attitude in the French-Dahoman conflict. While the King was engaged in raiding Yorubaland, and for two months afterwards, the main part of the Dahoman army was stationed in the south awaiting any French movement.²

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{3c} C.Francois to Ballot, Abeokuta 7.7.90: Olindo to Governor of Porto Novo, Abeokuta 7th & 26th.7.90: M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4c} Francois to Ballot, Abeokuta 25.8.90: M.M.C. Dahomey I_{4b} Ballot to Etienne, Porto Novo 2.8.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{4b} Ballot to Etienne, Porto Novo 2.4.90: M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou 3.7.90.
The Dahoman army watching French movements was divided into five groups of between 2,000 and 4,000 soldiers stationed at strategic points in the Oueme valley.

On the 10th of June while Durand was in Abomey, Admiral Cuverville arrived at Cotonou to take over the direction of French policy. Cuverville's orders were the same as Fournier's: to follow the policy laid down on the 8th of April. He was, however, also instructed to study the ways and means of making a march on Abomey in case such a march became unavoidable.¹

When he came to the Slave Coast, the Admiral seems to have had no preconceived notions as to the politics of the area. Ballot was of the opinion that Behanzin would never sign an acceptable Treaty until Dahomey had suffered a considerable defeat—including, probably, the French seizure of Abomey. The Admiral at first accepted this view. However, during the first few weeks of his direction of affairs on the Coast, the Admiral seems to have met Father Dorgere, the Whydah missionary who had been one of the 'Whydah hostages' and

¹ M.A.E.Afrique 126, Marine to Cuverville, Paris 19.5.1890. This is an indication that enthusiasm for a forward action amongst the French in Benin was beginning to make it thought, in Paris, that no other action was possible.

who had greater experience of Dahoman affairs than had any other Frenchman in the area. Dorgere and Cuverville had a great deal in common. This was especially true of their religious views; both were strong catholics and both disliked the Third Republic. Dorgere considered that an immediate peace settlement with Dahomey was very possible, and offered to go himself to Abomey to treat with the King. The Admiral accepted Dorgere's offer enthusiastically.¹

Having ^{been} convinced of the usefulness of Dorgere's mission, Cuverville immediately began negotiations with the Whydah Authorities for the reception of the mission. The Whydah Authorities were over-joyed, and Cuverville's messengers were received with great honour in Whydah.² Dorgere's instructions were very simple: to obtain the release of Durand and the 27 native employees of the

1 M.A.E. Dahomey I_{3d} Afrique 126,
Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou
1.8.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to
Marine, Cotonou 30.7.90.

Whydah factory who had been retained in Abomey since the taking of the Whydah hostages;¹ to explain that the French had promised to defend Porto Novo independence; to attempt to gain Dahoman admission of the French claim to Cotonou; to sound out Dahoman views on the subject of French occupation of the French Whydah fort.²

Although Durand had been, by the end of July, in Abomey for over a month and a half, no reply had been made to the French proposals. This was due, as has been noted, to the fact that Dahoman distrust of France was so reinforced by distrust of Durand, that the Chiefs could not make up their minds as to what reply to make. On the 30th of July, Dorgere arrived in Whydah, thus confirming that he was going to Abomey to attempt to make a peace settlement. Dorgere was trusted and respected in Dahomey. He had lived in Whydah many years and, it seems, had been

1 Although Durand had sent letters from Abomey, Durand's long stay there had convinced the French that he was being held as a hostage.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou 5.9.90.

well liked.¹ He had, moreover, been a captive in Dahomey; that he was willing to return to the scene of his captivity convinced the Fon of the sincerity of his mission.

When Dorgere arrived in Abomey he was greeted with great honour and found that the King and his Chiefs were ready and willing to negotiate.² Since the proposals Dorgere carried must have been virtually the same as those carried by Durand, it seems that it must have been the character of the ambassador which made the Fon alter their attitude. It would seem therefore that on the news of Dorgere's arrival the majority of the Chiefs had determined at once to enter into negotiations. This ties in with the fact that Durand reported that on the 1st of August a revolt occurred in which a number of important

1 The Dahomans had in 1888 given his mission, for the first time, the right to teach the children in their mission school in French, not in Portuguese. This concession would seem to indicate that Dorgere was highly respected in Dahomey. M.M.C. Dahomey V2a Lecron to Marine, Agoué 31.10.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V4a Dorgere to Cuverville Abomey 11.8.90.

Caboceers, a number of Behanzin's wives and a number of Gelele's wives all took part.¹ Durand gives no reason for the revolt, saying simply that these people were discontented with the policy conducted by the King. It seems reasonable to suppose from the date of their revolt they were making a last desperate attempt to prevent the King and the majority of the Chiefs from entering into negotiations with the French. The King, however, discovered the plot, put some of the conspirators in prison and had others executed. Given that these conspirators would seem to have been opposed to any compromise with the French, it is reasonable to deduce that they were in fact the 'Gelelean' party.

There is in existence a letter written in 1891

1 M.M.C. Dahomey Vol. 4a Durand to Ballot,
Porto Novo 15.9.90.

to the Resident of Porto Novo by Xavier Beraud,¹ which seems, when carefully handled, to throw some further light on this crisis in Dahoman politics.² This letter purports to be the tale of how King Gelele poisoned himself in December 1889 and how his successor, against the will of Gelele's closest supporters, adopted a hostile attitude to the French. It therefore contains a deliberately false interpretation of political events in Dahomey in 1889 and 1890.³ Its main purpose seems

1 Xavier Beraud was one of the violently pro-French group who surrounded the King, Toffa, (see Chapter III p 197). He was at this time interpreter to the French Resident; he used this position to present the Fon in as bad a light as possible. Moreover, he seems to have been playing something of a double game. He was greatly distrusted in Abomey but in order to make himself more valuable to the French he attempted to present himself as an intimate of the Fon. He seems to have added notes to Fon communications in order to make his role seem authentic. This would seem to be the only possible explanation of letters such as that quoted by C.W.Newbury op.cit., pp.131-132.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey III₂ Beraud to Ehermann Porto Novo 12.3.91.

3 C.W.Newbury, The Western Slave Coast and its Reigns, p.129. Newbury takes this letter at its face value and finds the information that it gives doubtful.

to have been to show the new Resident¹ that any French concession to Dahomey only added to Behanzin's prestige, and so led him to pursue a more aggressively anti-French policy. Presumably it was designed by Toffa's supporters to prevent the new Resident making any rapprochement with Dahomey. This seems especially likely since it was written just after an embassy had been sent to Abomey by the French.² It contains only one piece of information of any importance. This is on the subject of a plot which took place against Behanzin.

Although this plot is said to have taken place just after Gelele's death, it bears a close resemblance to that mentioned by Durand. Beraud says he acquired his information from a reliable source. He was a close

1 Eherrmann became acting-Resident of Porto Novo on the departure of Victor Ballot on sick leave, in January 1891.

2 The October (1890) Agreement had only just been put into operation and the new Resident had not been long enough on the Coast to be known to be so reliably anti-Dahoman as had Ballot. The embassy was the Audeoud Embassy. See pp. 387-392.

friend of Durand. It therefore seems likely that he acquired some information on the August plot from Durand, and proceeded to embroider this information for his own political purposes. If it is accepted that Baraud's plot and Durand's plot are in fact the same, some of the basic information given by Beraud can be used to shed light on the composition of the Gelelean party which rose in revolt on the 1st August, 1890.

Using Beraud's information, one of the leaders of the 'Geleleans' would seem to have been the late King Gelele's chief wife, the Visesezan. Presumably she had held that position because she had shared the old King's views. Another important man in the plot was the Yeovogun of Whydah. This was of course Nougbododhoue.¹

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I₆₀ Ehmann to Ballot 8.9.91: Casmir Agbo, Histoire de Whydah, p56
M.J. & F.S. Herskovits, Dahoman Narrative pp.374-376.
He is described by Beraud as Chaudaton of Whydah, King Gelele's fetish doctor. Casmir Agbo names the last Yeovogun of Whydah nominated by King Behanzin after King Gelele's death in 1889 as Nougbododhoue. He is, however, described as 'King Gelele's quack doctor'. The two names would seem therefore to refer to the same person. The man who became, later, the Yeovogun of Whydah on Gelele's death was the man who nominated Kondo Crown Prince in 1876. This Yeovogun was executed in Abomey in the summer of 1891. One of the reasons given for his execution was that he mistreated the Whydah hostages.

A ward Chief at Whydah, a M.Nicolas, was also involved in the plot. Another important Gelelean Chief involved was the Binazon. The attempt to seize control by this group seems to have been a last despairing effort by a minority of the Chiefs who could not hope to prevent, by normal means, the opening of negotiations. The power of the Geleleans seems to have been ended without too much difficulty. Their policies had proved unwise when the Europeans began to exert themselves.

Although Dorgere was given a very warm welcome in Abomey, ceremonial was not used as an excuse for delay, and the King and his Chiefs immediately got down to discussing peace terms. This was so unlike former Dahoman negotiations with Europeans that it indicates that the important decisions had already been taken. By the 11th of August, Dorgere could write to Cuverville that Dahomey accepted the independence of Porto Novo and that the problem of Cotonou could probably be settled, although the amount of the indemnity to be paid would involve lengthy negotiations. The King insisted that his Caboceers should be allowed to return to Cotonou.

However, he agreed that they were to have no dealings with and no jurisdiction over Europeans: their functions would be confined to governing the Fon and regulating all that related to the indemnity.⁽¹⁾

The only point on which Dahomey refused all compromise was on the suggestion that they should agree to allow French troops to reoccupy the French Whydah fort.²

The Dahomans thus proved themselves willing to negotiate and to make considerable concessions in order to obtain a peace settlement.

Dorgere and Durand returned to Whydah on the 24th of August,³ carrying with them a letter from the

- 1 This compromise (that the Fon Authorities would continue in Cotonou but would have nothing to do with the Europeans) gave the French control of Cotonou while, at the same time, satisfying Fon traditional scruples that no part of Dahoman home territory should be alienated.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4a} Dorgere to Cuverville, Abomey 11.8.90.

3 They took with them the Whydah traders' African employees who had been held in Abomey since the release of the hostages.

King.¹ This letter confirmed that Dahomey was willing to accept a settlement along the lines Dorgere had indicated. The Dahomans did however protest against what they considered Toffa's false interpretations of the boundaries of Porto Novo. The French were asked to keep the King of Porto Novo under close supervision. With regard to Whydah, the King confirmed that he could not agree to the reoccupation of the French fort, but offered to expel the Portuguese from their fort, so that it should not appear that the Fon favoured any nation more than they did the French.² The letter also included a request that France should sign with Dahomey a treaty for the mutual extradition of prisoners. Cuverville was well pleased with the result of Dorgere's mission, and considered that on the basis of these proposals a settlement could be worked out.³

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4a}, Behanzin to Cuverville, Abomey 18.8.90.

2 Cuverville indignantly rejected this offer. France did not wish to injure the rights of others.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou 7.9.90.

Rather predictably, the Resident of Porto Novo, Victor Ballot, did not share Cuverville's pleasure in the result of Dorgere's mission. Before Dorgere had set out, Ballot had complained of Cuverville's sending the missionary to Abomey. In Ballot's opinion Durand was being held hostage, and it was unlikely that Dorgere would fare any better.¹ That Dorgere had been one of the Whydah hostage group, who were bitterly critical of the Colonial Administration's actions in Benin, probably increased Ballot's hostility to the missionary. He did not change his views on Dorgere's return. In a letter to the Governor of the Rivières du Sud, he remarked that Durand had confirmed the news which he had already heard ^{and} that Behanzin would make no reasonable concessions.² Ballot had completely absorbed the Bayol-Toffa view of Dahoman affairs, and regarded Behanzin as the extreme

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{4b} Victor Ballot to Etienne, Porto Novo 2.8.90.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4c} Ballot to the Governor, no date. Since the letter is concerned with Dorgere's recent return from Abomey it must have been written either at the end of August or the beginning of September.

anti-French leader in Dahomey.¹ Ballot considered that Behanzin was only buying time so that he could build up his forces for another attack on the French.

Cuverville, however, after the successful outcome of Dorgere's visit to Abomey, on the 13th of September sent Captain Montesquiou to Whydah to begin final negotiations. Official treaty-making however proved difficult and the negotiations dragged on without any sign of coming to a conclusion.² The points at issue

1 Bayol, in Abomey, had been confronted with Behanzin's (Kondo's) refusal to admit French claims to Dahoman territory. He had assumed that Behanzin was an extremist determined to dislodge the French from the Slave Coast. Since he had considered, in 1887, equally without justification, that Dahomey was likely to give in to French demands, he assumed that King Gelele had been friendly to France and that his successor had reversed this policy. Behanzin was therefore cast by the French Administration as an inveterate opponent of France. Dorgere, with first-hand knowledge of Dahomey, knew better.

2 The actual linguistic difficulties were quite considerable. The Coussagan had to translate from Abomey-Fon into Whydah: Candido, a Whydah mulatto, translated from Whydah into Portuguese: Dorgere translated from Portuguese into French.

were, the occupation of the Whydah fort by French troops, the status of the Fon Authorities in Cotonou, the question of a Cotonou railway,¹ and the Dahoman demand for a treaty of extradition.²

On the 2nd October Cuverville himself went to Whydah. Seeing that negotiations might drag on even longer, he prepared a brief statement of the minimum terms the French could accept. He then despatched this document to the Fon negotiators, with a message that if these terms were not agreed to within forty-eight hours France would resume the war.³ It was signed on the 3rd of October—although not without protest. In the settlement Dahomey recognised the French protectorate over Port Novo and agreed to abstain

1 This was a new French idea: it was probably thrown in as a bargaining point.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4c} Montesquiou's correspondence, 13.9. to 2.10.90.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4b} Marine to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Paris 1.12.90, enclosing Cuverville to Coussagan (acting-Yeovogun) Whydah 2.10.90.

from raiding Porto Novo territory. Dahomey also agreed to recognise the French right to occupy Cotonou indefinitely. France was, however, to pay a sum of not more than 20,000 francs annually to Dahomey as compensation for the loss of her Customs rights at Cotonou.¹

As Cuverville took pains to point out, this was not a treaty but simply an arrangement which safeguarded French rights and which re-established peace in the area.² It was laid down in the agreement that Dahomey would respect the French protectorate of Porto Novo: there was, however, no attempt to define the boundaries of this state nor of the French protected territories around Grand Popo. At Cotonou no attempt was made to define the relations between the French and the Cotonou Authorities whom, it seems to have been 'understood', were to be allowed to return. The strongest part of the agreement was one which was later quietly dropped and which went unmentioned in France. This was

1 E.D.IX, p.101. Arrangement between France and Dahomey concluded 3.10.1890.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine 5.10.1890.

the Treaty of Extradition to which, on Dahoman¹ insistence, Cuverville had agreed.

The agreement therefore really only provided for the ending of hostilities. It made no attempt to define future Franco-Dahoman relations. For Cuverville, however, it was something more than a peace settlement.

'C'est une oeuvre d'apaisement qui rétablira la confiance du Dahomey dans la loyauté et la générosité de la France.

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{4b} Marine to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Paris 1.12.90, enclosing Treaty of Extradition, Cuverville, Whydah 2.10.90. This provided for French-Dahoman exchange of criminals who had taken refuge in the other's territory. For obvious reasons it was not mentioned in France. The Dahomans never claimed to have put it into operation.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{3d} Cuverville to Marine 5.10.90. It is in this document that, as well as setting out his own policy, Cuverville lists the sins of Bayol---his unjustified seizure of Cotonou: the ill-treatment of the Cotonou Authorities, etc. Cuverville even goes as far as to say that if judgement were to be made on the conduct of the two sides during the past year, Dahomey would appear in a far better light than would France.

Cuerville, under the influence of Dorgere, declared that the aggressive actions of the French over the previous year had made it impossible for the Fon to trust the French enough to sign a real treaty. By this Cuerville seems to have meant that if the French treated the Fon well, the Dahomans could be induced to accept French guidance and tutelage. Cuerville then went on to define the policy which he had pursued and which he wished to be maintained.

'Ma politique avait pour le principal objectif de rétablir d'abord le bon renom de notre pays et de prouver à ce vaillant petit peuple que en France la loyauté passe tout: il faut bien nous garder d'imiter sa barbare et son astuce. La paix qui vient d'être conclue ne durera qu'à cette condition.'

Cuerville, always, it seems, susceptible to ecclesiastical influence, was so impressed by Dorgere and his views that he completely adopted the missionary's attitude to Dahomey. The Fon were assessed as a 'valiant little people' who

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{3d} Cuerville to Marine,
Whydah 5.10.1890.

had been badly abused by the Colonial Administrators. Cuverville's aim, like that of the Colonial officials, was to bring Dahomey under French influence and thus civilise the country. This was to be achieved, however, not by conquest, but by binding the Dahomans to France by winning their sympathy and trust. The Frenchmen who were to win Dahoman trust were of course to be the Catholic missionaries. The 3rd October agreement was viewed as only the beginning of the process of winning Fon trust and affection. Seen in this way it was not necessary to make nice definitions of boundaries and frontiers. By French exercise of goodwill and by the spread of Christianity, Dahomey would come under French influence and no disputes would ensue. Cuverville himself stated that without tolerance and understanding the agreement would not preserve the peace.

From his vantage point of lofty goodwill, Cuverville considered that the Colonial officials had been 'misguided' in their dealings with Dahomey.¹ While saying numerous

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine,
5.10.1890.

complimentary things about the upright character of Victor Ballot, Cuverville kept him completely in the dark as to the course and conclusion of the negotiations at Whydah.¹ So doubtful was Cuverville of the likelihood of the Colonial officials following out his policy that he advised that the control of the Benin Establishments ought to remain in the hands of the Marine.² The Government had, however, little idea of what Cuverville was about, and they paid no attention to his suggestion. Cuverville had brought the war to an end, and had thus saved the Government from what might have been political embarrassment. Beyond this, Paris was uninterested in Cuverville's policy in Benin.

The Admiral's view that the October agreement was a hopeful foundation for future Dahoman relations was not

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6b} Ballot to Ballay, Porto Novo 8.11.1890. Ballot did not hide his displeasure at being excluded.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Whydah 5.10.90. Behanzin himself had requested this.

widely shared. The Government, it has been noted, only accepted it to avoid possible political embarrassment. Etienne, who had in 1889 wished to occupy the whole Dahoman coastline and who was already talking in terms of using the Dahoman coast as a base for progress inland to link with the other advancing French frontiers in Senegal and Algeria, must have accepted this settlement as a temporary expedient due to the limitations imposed on his policy by French politics.¹

On the Coast itself, Toffa and his supporters were of course totally opposed to any rapprochement between France and Dahomey. Ballot, speaking for the Colonial officials, resented exclusion from the making of the settlement and considered that Behanzin's record made it seem very unlikely that he would keep this treaty.² The Marseilles traders, influenced by a projected Customs reorganisation at Whydah, also protested vigorously against

1 Eugene Etienne, Son Oeuvre. Etienne had spoken of this as early as 10.5.1890 in the Chamber of Deputies.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6b} Ballot to Ballay, Porto Novo, 8.11.90.

a settlement which left Whydah in Fon hands.¹

It did not look as if tolerance and goodwill were going to get much of a chance. However, it must be added that it was, to say the least of it, unlikely that Cuverville's policy could have brought permanent peace to the area. Dahomey was certainly willing to co-exist peacefully with the French: it is possible that Dahomey would have abandoned (as in Gezo's day) some of the state practices most obnoxious to the Europeans. However, Cuverville and the missionaries, like the other Europeans, were intent on controlling Dahomey. Such control, it is certain, Dahomey would never have accepted.

In Abomey, the Fon, although impressed by Dorgere² and Cuverville, were justifiably still suspicious of French intentions. The Fon had suffered military defeat

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4b} C.Fabre to the President of the Commission set up to examine the treaty made with the King of Dahomey. Marseilles, 3.1.1891.

2 Behanzin himself had asked that French Naval Officers should remain in charge of Slave Coast affairs.

and were determined that they should not do so again. Their defeat they attributed to the supremacy of French military equipment. During the war, in July 1890, they had already entered into negotiations with a German trader named Barth for the purchase of modern rifles and ammunition. At the end of the war Fon plans for re-equipping their army went ahead rapidly. In order to obtain money for this re-equipment, Behanzin, soon after the conclusion of the October agreement, began negotiations with Dos Santos (the Commander of the Portuguese Whydah fort) for the sale of more 'indentured labourers'.¹ To French Colonial officials this arms-buying and slave-dealing indicated not fears of French aggressive intentions, but Fon determination

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey V₄₆ Ballot to Cuverville, Porto Novo 11.8.1890: M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4a} Durand to the Resident, Porto Novo 15.9.90. It was rumoured that Behanzin had given Barth £5,000 to provide these arms. It was also rumoured that modern weapons were passing from Lome to Dahomey, in spite of the Imperial law forbidding this.

to revoke the October treaty and make another attempt to expel the French.

In spite of the opposition to the October agreement, the work of putting it into effect went ahead rapidly. Cuverville, however, found it necessary to issue instructions that all French officials and officers should behave towards the Fon at all times in a prudent, moderate and circumspect manner. These virtues it seems had not been much in evidence when the Fon began rebuilding and re-occupying the native village at Cotonou.¹

The most difficult part of the pacification was of course the attempt to induce the Kings, Behanzin and Toffa, to live in peace. Behanzin had already indicated his

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{3d} Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou 5.11.1890. The Fon had been authorised, it seems, by an unrecorded verbal agreement with Cuverville to re-establish and rule the village of Cotonou. The Fon Authorities were to have no jurisdiction over the Europeans. The French Colonial officials on the Coast were never given the details of this agreement and remained mystified as to what actions their relationship with the Fon Authorities of the village should be.

willingness to do this. Toffa of course had no choice but to fall in officially with the wishes of the French. Unofficially his aims remained as before, to extend the area of his rule by gaining French backing for his ambitions. By the 10th of November the Dahomans had withdrawn all their troops from the disputed areas.¹ All French land and sea forces, except 600 Traillieurs Senegal²is, were then withdrawn from the area², and Cuverville was able to inform the Marine on the 8th of December that the work of pacification was complete.³

Cuverville had positive plans for winning Dahoman confidence, ensuring peace and generally drawing Dahomey under the influence of France. As a start he proposed sending the enemies of Dahomey to Abomey on a mission of reconciliation. He requested Dahoman permission

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Behanzin to Ballot:
M.M.C. Dahomey III_{1c} Ballot to Cuverville,
Report on Mission to the Decame, Porto
Novo 13.9.1890.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{4b} Marine to Etienne,
Paris 1.12.1890.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d} Cuverville to Marine,
Cotonou 8.12.1890.

to do this. The mission was to be headed by Victor Ballot, and was to consist of several French officers, the principal French traders on the coast and four of King Toffa's laris.¹ The Porto Novans were said to have been included in order to further the reconciliation between Porto Novo and Dahomey.² Although Cuverville nowhere explicitly states it, it seems more than likely that the same motive lay behind the sending to Abomey of Ballot, the officers and the traders. Cuverville however failed completely to inform the man whom he instructed to make up the mission, as to what was to be the purpose of their journey. It seems that he somewhat optimistically considered that a visit to Abomey would at once persuade them that the Fon were, in his own words, 'a valiant little people' with whom the French ought to co-operate.

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6d} Victor Ballot
to Governor Ballay, Porto Novo
9.12.1890.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6d} Victor Ballot
to Governor Ballay, Porto Novo
9.12.90: M.M.C. Dahomey I_{3d}
Cuverville to Marine, Cotonou
5.11.90.

That such a visit would have convinced the Coastal Europeans of this is open to doubt: there was even less likelihood that a visit of Toffa's laris to Abomey would have reconciled that monarch to giving up his ambitions.¹ Cuverville was never however given the chance to put his theories into practice. The French Government had transferred control of the Colony from the Colonial Department to the Marine only for the duration of the war. No notice was taken of Cuverville's plea that the Marine might remain in charge. When the Admiral declared on the 8th of December that the pacification of the area was complete, he was withdrawn and control was resumed by the Colonial Department.

When Cuverville left Benin in December his powers devolved (until Governor Ballay should arrive)

¹ It was considered in Abomey during the French conquest that Toffa wished to become King of Dahomey. There may well be some truth in this Dahoman nightmare.

on the Resident of Porto Novo.¹ Ballot however contracted fever and was forced to leave for France on the 7th of January 1891.² On Ballot's departure, his deputy, M.Ehermann, a newcomer to the area, was left in charge. On the 12th of January Dahoman messengers arrived at Whydah with the request that the embassy which Cuverville had proposed to send to Abomey should now set out. Cuverville had not left any instructions as to what should be the conduct or the purpose of the mission: in fact, as has been noted, he had kept the Colonial Administration in the dark as to his intentions.

Governor Ballay, expressing the views of the regular Colonial Administration, had no desire to send an embassy to Abomey, since he considered that it would only be used by Behanzin as an indication that he had

1 Governor Ballay was Lt.Governor Bayol's successor. He had been instructed to visit Benin to supervise the resumption of political control by the Colonial Administration.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6c} Ehermann to Ballay, Porto Novo 8.1.91.

triumphed over the French. Nevertheless, he felt that to refuse to send the embassy which Cuverville had already requested would be an insult to Dahomey, and might provoke Behanzin to resume the war.¹ A resumption of the war, at this time, was contrary to the wishes of the French Government. Ballay therefore stated his views and requested instructions from Paris.² The Colonial Department, which, like Ballay, was unsure of Cuverville's intentions, and saw no useful purpose in the mission,³ nevertheless agreed that to omit to send an embassy would be insulting. Ballay was therefore directed to send any available officers up to Abomey with presents for the King. Dorgere could be sent with the officers if it seemed

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I5a Ballay to Etienne, Porto Novo, 9.3.91.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I5a Ballay to Etienne, Porto Novo 3.2.91.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey III2 Etienne to M.A.E, Paris 18.1.91: MA.E. to Etienne 10.1.91. Etienne had already asked both the Marine and the Ministere des Affaires, Etrangères, the raison d'etre of the mission, Neither could tell him.

that his presence would be useful.¹

Five Officers, led by Commandant Audeaud, were therefore despatched by Ballay to Abomey. The embassy had, however, nothing of an attempt to reconcile France and Dahomey about it. Etienne sent instructions before it set out, after having consulted Victor Ballot,² that Dorgere was on no account to take part in the embassy.³ The removal of Dorgere meant that the policy of drawing Dahomey into the French orbit by co-operation was set aside untried.⁴ The orders given to the ambassadors were to hand over ~~the~~ presents to the King and to inform him that the Council of Ministers had

1 M.A.E.Afrique 127, Etienne to Ballay, 5.2.1891.

2 Ballot had newly arrived in France from Benin.

3 M.A.E.Afrique 127, Etienne to M.A.E. 12.2.1891.

4 At the request of Behanzin, Dorgere did in fact go to Abomey at the same time as the embassy. He went, however, as a private individual and was not allowed to take part in official business.

accepted the Treaty of 3rd October. With regard to the Agreement itself the ambassadors were to observe the greatest possible reserve: any subject which might lead to discord was to be avoided.¹ The embassy had no constructive purpose: it was sent merely in order to avoid trouble with Dahomey.

The embassy left Whydah on the 20th of February: it received such a warm welcome in Abomey that the ambassadors were soon convinced that Behanzin intended to live in peace with France. The ambassadors, however, seem to have regarded themselves as being not so much on a mission of friendship as on a reconnaissance expedition.² The reports submitted on the return of the embassy were largely concerned with establishing a body of military information which would be useful in the conquest of Dahomey. The only remnants of

1 M.M.C. Dahomey III₂ Ballay to Audeoud, Porto Novo 9.2.91.

2 R. Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey, p. 334. Cornevin, having studied the mission's reports, regards the embassy as a 'Mission d'espionage et d'information'.

Cuverville's ideas on the purpose of the mission were that four of Toffa's laris were taken along: their visit certainly led to no decrease in Toffa's hostility to Dahomey.

Two incidents, which took place during the embassy's visit,¹ had an unfortunate effect on future Franco-Dahoman relations. The first concerned the official French 'present' to the King, which one of the ambassador's found difficulty in believing cost the 3,000 francs supposed to have been spent on it.² The Dahomans, as this officer had foretold, were displeased with the present, and even sent a group of Caboceers to the French officers to complain that the lengths of cloth which made up part of it were short of the normal length. Although nothing further was

1 The ambassadors were, besides Commandant Audeoud, Captain Deceur, Captain Hoquart, M.l'Aspirant d'Ambieres and Lt.Charles.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey III₂ D'Ambieres report to Cuverville. The present consisted of some rich cloth, two cases of champagne, some cigars, ten centimes and some trade umbrellas.

heard of the matter, the poverty of the French 'present' seems to have been interpreted as something of an insult.

The second incident seems to have had its origins in a Fon political manoeuvre. When the officers were officially welcomed to Abomey, the Cougassan¹ requested that the French might carry palm branches as a sign of peace. Commandant Audeoud, having asked about the significance of this gesture, was assured by the Dahomans, and by Toffa's laris, that there was nothing humiliating in it. In fact, those asking for Fon protection usually carried palm fronds.² That the French should carry them was presumably meant to suggest to the Fon population at large that the ambassadors were abasing themselves before the King. The Porto Novans must have been so frightened of the Fon that they gave the French false

1 The Chief who supervised the activities of the French at Whydah. He knew Father Dorgere well. Since the destruction of the Gelelean party in June 1890 he had been 'acting-Yeovogun' at Whydah.

2 F. Forbes, op.cit., Vol. II p. 182

information. On their return to Porto Novo, however, Xavier Beraud informed the French that this carrying of palms indicated to the Africans that 'France was asking pardon'.¹

The Porto Novans knew that the French had been opposed to sending the embassy in the first place, in case it would mean a loss of French prestige. They therefore played on this French fear. The palm-carrying served only to confirm general French suspicions that the existence of an independent Dahomey was a permanent insult to France. The mission of reconciliation on which Cuverville and the missionary group had placed so much hope had evolved into a reconnaissance mission which achieved nothing but to

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey III₂ Xavier Beraud
to Ballot, Porto Novo 11.4.1891:
M.M.C. Dahomey III₂ Audeoud to
Ballay, Porto Novo 3.4.91.
(Reprinted in E.D. IX, pp.126-8).

sow deeper distrust between the two peoples.¹

The Fon, although they wished to live in harmony with France, continued to be suspicious of French intentions. Having ceded Porto Novo and admitted the French right to control Cotonou,² they were determined that no more concessions should be made. Even a lease of land which Father Dorgere requested for his mission at

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- 1 The information on the Audeoud embassy comes from:

M.M.C. Dahomey I^{5a} Ballay to Etienne,
Porto Novo 9.3.91:
M.M.C. Dahomey III² Ballay to Audeoud,
Porto Novo 9.2.91.
M.M.C. Dahomey III² Audeoud Mission,
Decoeur's Journal (reprinted in E.D.IX
pp.105-15):
M.M.C. Dahomey III² Mission Audeoud,
Hoquart's report, Porto Novo 2.4.91.
(reprinted in E.D.IX pp.128-34):
M.M.C. Dahomey III² Mission Audeoud,
Charles report:
E.D.IX pp.115-25.
M.M.C. Dahomey III² Audeoud Report:
M.M.C. Dahomey III² d'Ambiere's Report.

- 2 It must be remembered that Cotonou, in the eyes of the Fon, had not been ceded to France. It was part of the Kingdom of Dahomey: the Fon still ruled the Africans in the town. What had been ceded was the French right to collect the Customs duties there.

Whydah was refused.¹ The Fon were, moreover, intent on equipping their army with modern rifles in case the French should again attack. Their pressing need was to obtain the wherewithal necessary for the purchase of these arms. Having lost the lucrative Cotonou Customs post,² they attempted to modernise the method of Customs collection at Whydah by modelling it on the Lagos system.³ This attempt came to nothing, probably because of French opposition.

The Dahomans' main source of money for the purchase of arms continued, perforce, to come from the revived

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{5a} Report on the Benin political situation from 10.3.to 10.4.91.
No signature.
 - 2 Etienne stated in Parliament, on 28.11.91, that this Customs post was worth between 100,000 and 150,000 francs per annum. France had agreed to pay Dahomey 20,000 francs per annum in compensation.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{4b} C.Fabre to President of the Parliamentary Commission examining the treaty made with the King of Dahomey, Marseilles 3.1.1891.

slave trade. In the 1890s this trade was mainly with German West African merchants who despatched the slaves to build railways and work plantations in the Congo, the Cameroons and St.Thome.¹ With the proceeds, the Fon proceeded to re-equip their army.²

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey I5c Governor to Marine, Cotonou 7.5.92: M.M.C. Afrique VI100 M.A.E. to the Colonial Under-Secretary, Paris 25.4.92, enclosing a translation of a Despatch from the Imperial German Commissioner in Togo, 12.3.92, showing that in November 1890, 200 men were despatched to St.Thome: in September 1891, 300 men to the Cameroons: in October 1891, 80 men to the Cameroons and in November 1891, 300 men to the Congo. These were the 'official' German figures of the authorised export of 'indentured labour' and were produced only after French protests. It is very likely that many others were exported 'unofficially'. The French agent of one of the trading Houses at Whydah reported that on 2.5.92 the German packet boat 'Woermann' embarked 500 slaves.
 - 2 A.L.D'Albeca 'La France au Dahomey' in Annex I. A list of these weapons sold by Germans at Whydah is given. This list is taken from the books (confiscated) of the German firms at Whydah. Between January 1891 and August 1892, the Germans sold 1,700 rifles of various makes. They also sold 6 cannons, 5 machine guns and 400,000 assorted cartridges. More arms were probably bought from the Germans in Lome and Lagos.

One of the employees of the German House of Woeber and Brohm, named Richter, who had military experience in Europe, spent September 1891, in Abomey, instructing the Fon in the use of this new military equipment.¹ French fears of the importance of this re-armament seem to have been exaggerated, since only the 'standing' army, if that, could have been equipped with the weapons. The cannons and machine guns might have been of some importance to the Fon but, it seems, from reports during the conquest, that their usefulness was limited by the inability of the Fon, in spite of Richter's instructions, to manipulate them satisfactorily.

As has been noted, the Fon were totally opposed to making any further concessions, territorial or otherwise. They therefore disregarded French attempts to influence them to end their traditional policy towards neighbouring African states: border warfare continued as it had always done. This the French put down to the Fon need for slaves to sell on the Coast. That the raids were

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay, Porto Novo 27.10.91.

necessitated by commercial pressures, however, seems unlikely, since the number of slaves being sold at ¹Whydah was not in fact very great. It is more likely that the raids were necessary in order to maintain Fon authority on the Dahoman borders. The frontiers were ill defined and the border villages always inclined to seek independence: because of the Dahoman defeat at the hands of the French it was probably essential to emphasise Fon control.

In May the Fon army raided somewhat unsuccessfully on the borders of the neighbouring northern-Yoruba states; ²in September they operated rather more successfully against a number of trans-Oueme towns; ³in October

1 M.M.C. Afrique VI¹⁰⁰ M.A.E. to the Colonial Under-Secretary, Paris 25.4.92.

2. M.M.C. Dahomey I^{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay, Porto Novo 8.7.91: M.M.C. Dahomey I^{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay, Porto Novo 7.8.91: M.M.C. Dahomey III² Audeoud to Marine 8.7.91. The Dahomans pillaged a number of Yoruba villages but were driven back by the Baribas.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay 8.9.92. Toffa wished to use this raid as an excuse to arrest all the Dahomans in Porto Novo and thus provoke a break with Dahomey.

and November they raided the Ouatchis of the lower Mono valley to the north of Grand Popo. Unknown to the Fon, who had never been informed or invited to agree, this territory was regarded by the French as being under their protection. For a time, indeed, the French expected that their posts at Grand Popo and Athieme would be attacked.¹ Erhmann even sent a strongly worded protest to Abomey. Behanzin, in reply, explained that he was only asserting his authority within his own territory.² In the event, the French posts were never molested, and Behanzin assured the Chiefs of Grand Popo that they had nothing to fear.³

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6c} Eherrmann to Ballay 29.12.91: E.D.IX p.147, Eherrmann to Ballay 8.12.91.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{5b} Eherrmann to Behanzin, Porto Novo 10.12.91: E.D.IX p.155, Behanzin to Eherrmann, Abomey 2.1.92. Dahomey had some claim to Grand Popo (See Chap.III p.207). This letter had been translated, like most of Behanzin's communications, by Xavier Beraud. Its accuracy is therefore rather doubtful.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6a} Eherrmann to Ballay, Porto Novo 3.1.92.

The French Administration in this post-war period, although doing everything to avoid any immediate conflict with Dahomey, nevertheless considered that another war in the long run was inevitable. Erhmann, however, after some experience on the Coast, recognised that the Dahomans had no intention (at least in the immediate future) of attacking the French. In order to maintain if not good, at least peaceful, relations, he arranged that the 20,000 franc indemnity for 1891 should be paid to the Fon.¹ During that year, indeed, no visible change took place in the relations between the French and the Dahomans: the Fon simply maintained their ancient ways, refused to accept European interference and remained thoroughly suspicious of French intentions.

¹ M.M.C. Dahomey I_{6c} Erhmann to
Ballay, Porto Novo 24.9.91:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{5b} Ehermann
to Behanzin, Porto Novo
10.12.91.

Although little of great importance happened on the Slave Coast in 1891, changes were taking place in France which were to have momentous effects on Dahomey. As has been noted, Etienne had, in August 1889, wished to occupy the coastline of Dahomey. By May 1890 he was talking in the Chamber of Deputies of a French advance from the Coast of the Bight of Benin to the Lower Niger.¹ This would have linked up with other French inland movements from Senegal and Algeria.

The idea of gaining the Lower Niger for France seemed to have been frustrated by the 4th August 1891 Agreement with England. In this Agreement, made by the French Foreign Office against the wishes of the Colonial Department, the French agreed not to advance further south than the Say-Barrawa line. The French Colonialists saw that although France, after this, could not penetrate the Lower Niger from the north, a literal interpretation of the Agreement would not prevent France reaching the river from the south—from Porto Novo through Dahomey.

¹ Response a une interpolation par
M. Boissy d'Anglas seance du 10.11.90

The conquest of Dahomey therefore became much more urgent. The advocates of Colonial expansion made considerable efforts to increase their support both in the country at large and in Parliament. One indication of their success was the formation, in the autumn of 1891, of a Colonial group in Parliament. That the conquest of Dahomey should be undertaken was the most important immediate aim of the propagandists for Colonial expansion.¹

The Agreement of the 3rd October with Dahomey had been accepted by the French Government, and had been laid before a Parliamentary Commission, presided over by Admiral Vallon,² for examination. This Commission

1 This paragraph is based on H. Brunshwig, L'Imperialisme Colonial Francais, Chap. VII, on Marcel Blanchard 'Francais et Anglais au Niger (1890-98)', Le Monde Francais, 1948: J. Flint, Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria, Chap. VIII & X: An article in the Revue d'Histoire d'Outre Mer (1960) by Francis Berge, 'Le Sous-Secretariat et les Sous-Secrétaires d'Etat aux Colonies' shows clearly the development of the power of the Colonial Under-Secretary and the relationship of this developing power to the Dahoman question.

2 Former Governor of Senegal, deputy for Senegal and an advocate of Colonial expansion.

produced a report which was very critical of the Agreement.¹ The majority of the Commission recommended that the Agreement should be ratified, since it had been concluded in accordance with Government instructions. They recommended, however, that it should be approved by Presidential Decree, not by Parliamentary ratification. The more formal method would, they considered, be far too solemn for an unsatisfactory agreement with a petty African Kinglet.

Two of the members of the Commission recommended outright rejection. In the debate in the Chamber on the 28th of November 1891, Etienne, indeed, stoutly defended Government policy.² He had no choice. The

1 The grounds of their criticism were that the Treaty was detrimental to French interests: they considered that Dahomey ought to have been forced to accept every French wish. Possibly there was also a desire to find fault with the work of an officer who was known to be anti-Republican.

2 As a member of the Cabinet he was bound to support publicly the policy of the Government even though he privately disagreed with it.

Commissioners' Report, which in fact set forth his own views, must, however, have given him every satisfaction. Parliament accepted the report and the Agreement was approved by Presidential Decree on the 3rd of December 1891. Although the Agreement was accepted, the Parliamentary debate indicated that a majority in Parliament were dissatisfied with the situation and would approve a resumption of hostilities in order to obtain more acceptable terms. The work of converting Parliamentary opinion to a 'forward' policy in Benin had been completed and the conquest of Dahomey could be carried out whenever an opportunity arose.¹

Victor Ballot returned to the French Benin Settlements in February 1892.² Towards the end of March Ballot was informed that a band of Dahomans were again

1 Etienne resigned on 8.3.1892 on the fall of the Freycinet Government. He did so voluntarily, since he was offered the chance of remaining at his post in the Loubet Ministry that followed. His successor, Jamais, held the same opinions as himself and continued his policies.

2 Eherrmann died soon after Ballot's arrival.

raiding in the Oueme area. On the 27th he sailed up the river in the gunboat 'Topaz' to see for himself what was happening. Beyond Daba the Topaz was fired on by a group of 400 Dahomans: four Frenchmen were wounded. Ballot took this to be an indication that the Fon were about to attack the French-protected territories.¹ He informed Behanzin that the French government would look upon the attacks, on the Oueme villages and on the Topaz, as a very grave offense.²

The King replied that he had only been ensuring control of his own territory, and that a French gunboat should not have been so far up the River Oueme without having first obtained permission from Abomey. The Oueme had always been forbidden to the Europeans who had not been authorised by the King to travel up it. It was therefore not surprising that the ship had been fired on. Behanzin added, for good measure, that he had been informed that the French Chamber had declared

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I6d Ballot to Ballay
8.4.92.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V5b Ballot to Behanzin
Porto Novo 28.3.92.

war on Dahomey.¹ The Fon, declared Behanzin, wished to live in peace but if the French wanted to make war then the Fon would be ready. The Dahomans² were obviously alarmed by the fate of the Cuverville Agreement, by the voyage of the Topaz and by Ballot's message. They therefore rushed troops to the Porto Novo border area. Ballot then judged that war was imminent and requested reinforcements.² By the end of April, however, he realised that the Fon troop movements were merely defensive.³

During the following months Behanzin continued to protest his pacific intentions. He pointed out that if he had wanted to make war on France he would have seized the French Residents in Whydah: this of course

1 This seems to have been a misinterpretation of the fact that the French Parliament had decided that the October Agreement should be accepted not by Parliamentary ratification but by Presidential Decree.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I5a Ballot to Under-Secretary Porto Novo 22.4.92, enclosing Behanzin to Ballot 10.4.92.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey I5a Ballot to Under-Secretary Porto Novo 8.5.92.

he had not done. The Fon protests were, however, disregarded.¹ The French government decided to make the relatively trivial Topaz incident their casus belli. Action was taken quickly. The Senate and Chamber of the French Parliament voted (by substantial majorities) on the 12th and 13th of April, credits of three million francs to be used for a war on Dahomey. On the 21st of April it was decided to place the conduct of the war in the hands of the Marine and to put Colonel Dodds, Commander of the troops in Senegal, in command on the Slave Coast with full military and civil powers.²

1 M.M.C. Dahomey I^{5a} Ballot to Under-Secretary, Porto Novo 8.5.1892, enclosing Behanzin to Ballot 1.5.92: M.M.C Dahomey V^{5b} Behanzin to Dodds, Dahomey 10.6.92. These are only two examples from the flood of letters which Behanzin sent to the French during May and June that year.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey I⁸ Marine to Dodds, Paris 4.5.92: Berge, op.cit., p.28, tells of a political quarrel which led to the resignation of the Minister of Marine before Dodds was given supreme command by land and sea.

C H A P T E R V I

THE KINGDOM OF DAHOMEY

1812-1899

The Fon monarch claimed sovereignty over two distinct types of territory. He derived his power of course from his rule of the Kingdom of Dahomey itself. The frontiers of this state were never carefully defined, but it is possible to say that by the end of the nineteenth century the territory owing allegiance directly to Abomey was bounded in the West by the River Cuffo, in the East by the River Ouémé and in the South by the sea. In the North the boundary ran between the Rivers Cuffo and Ouémé, beyond Atcheribe—itself the most northerly Fon centre in the Kingdom.

The core of the Fon state remained, throughout the nineteenth century, the territories grouped together by Agadja—the Abomey plateau area and the Provinces of Whydah and Allada. As the result of innumerable campaigns in the course of the century, other areas were added to

this core. The lands of the Mahi to the north of Dahomey, for example, were eventually completely absorbed in Dahomey. So, too, was the territory of Cotonou, between Whydah and Porto Novo, and the lands of Agony between Abomey and the River Ouémé.¹ These newly-acquired areas were not treated in a uniform manner. Cotonou and Agony were, late in the century, brought within the Fon administration system. No attempt was ever made to give Mahi any such Dahoman provincial organisation.

The King of Dahomey also claimed sovereignty over a shifting number of states on the borders of Dahomey proper. In Fon terminology, these states were referred to as part of the Dahoman 'family': the King of Dahomey was described as the 'big brother' of the King of

¹ The chief place in this area is now Zagnando. The office of Flogbe itself may in fact date from the 1880s.

the lesser states.¹ The most important of these Kingdoms lay on the Eastern frontier of Dahomey, where the collapse of the Oyo empire had tended to force the smaller units of that empire to drift into the orbit of their larger neighbours. In the 1820s and 1830s Dahomey reduced a number of these minor states to a tributary position—Porto Novo, Ketu, Sabe, and Savalou. In mid-century the Fon lost control of all except the first of these states. They were, however, able to re-establish their hegemony in the 1880s: Sabe and Savalou again acknowledged Fon overlordship; Ketu was destroyed because it refused to do so; Porto Novo was only able to proclaim her independence because of her close links with the French.

In the West, too, the Fon made intermittent attempts to assert their power over their smaller

1 F.O.84/893 Commander Wilmot to Commodore Bruce, 'Harlequin', of Lagos 11.12.1852. This is how King Sodji of Porto Novo described his relationship with the King of Dahomey. The terminology also applied to the other vassal states.

neighbours—in this case Atakpame and Grand Popo. However, although Grand Popo, in the 1870s at least, did pay some sort of tribute to Abomey, Dahomey was never able to control these two states.¹ Probably Fon success in the East and failure in the West can be explained by the fact that, as a result of long-established good relations with Ashanti, political security in the West was not as essential as it was in the East.

No attempt was ever made to rule these peripheral states directly from Abomey. The Fon never tried to place Dahoman representatives in positions of authority in the tributary kingdoms. They did not station ^{there} Ajele,

¹ Grand Popo paid tribute in 1870. The Atakpalme always declared that they had never paid tribute to Abomey.

or Consuls, as on the Oyo Yoruba model.¹ No attempt was made to control the day-to-day internal affairs of the states owing allegiance to Dahomey. The Fon simply relied upon their military might to over-awe their tributaries and keep them subservient. All that they required of the vassals was that they fell in line with Dahoman foreign policy and paid regular tribute to Abomey. They never became part of the Kingdom of Dahomey proper.

1 C.O. 96/168, Griffith to Stanley, Accra 14.12.1885, enclosing statement by Ketuan messengers from Prince Fetona, signed by A.C. Willoughby 3.11.1885: J.Duncan, op.cit., Vol. II p.35.

A Ketuan ambassador remarked to the Governor of Lagos in 1885 that the Fon had placed a Consul in Sabe. It seems more than likely that this merely meant that Sabe had acknowledged Fon overlordship. The Ketuans, recognising that Sabe had become dependent upon Dahomey had unjustifiably attributed to the Fon the Yoruba system of Imperial organisation. Duncan mentions that a Dahoman was sometimes sent to 'help' the Chief of a subject town. This seems to refer to small places either in or very close to Dahomey proper, not to the great tributary kingdoms.

An interesting example of how this system of overlordship was formalised is given by a mid-century French commentator:

'à la suite d'une guerre avec la tribu
des Nagos voisine /frontières, quatorze
députés de cette nation étaient venus
faire leur soumission au roi Gezo et lui
demander l'adjonction de leur territoire
à son royaume.

aux / ?

Le Migan fit appel à un certain nombre
de cabocères qui allèrent avec lui se
prosterner en face du roi, dont ils écou-
tèrent la volonté transmise par le Mehu—
ils regagnèrent ensuite leurs tabourets que
des esclaves avaient rangés autour du bassin
et des quatorze députés accroupis sur le
sable—deux sièges plus élevés étaient des-
tinés au Migan et au Prince Bahadou. Les
députés, admis à se faire entendre, expo-
sèrent tout ce que leur nation avait souffert
de la dernière guerre et déclarèrent se livrer
à merci, eux, leur familles et leur pays. Le
Migan leur fit signe d'aller s'agenouiller
tout autour du bassin. La tête inclinée sur
le terrible récipient; puis le bâton de justice
fut passé de main en main dans le plus grand

silence, interrompu seulement par les 'oun' successifs d'acquiescement que faisaient entendre, en aspirant fortement cette syllabe, les membres du Consul. Le bâton revenu jusqu'au Migan, ce Ministre se leva et pressa légèrement du Genou la tête de chaque député, en prenant ainsi possession au nom du roi. Les nagos furent ensuite admis à se couvrir devant Gezo de toute la poussière qui se trouva à leur portée; ils étaient sujets de Dahomey.¹

The system was not satisfactory. The lack of close supervision made it very easy for the vassal state to throw off its allegiance, if the Fon suffered any military setback. Moreover, in practice, the freedom of the vassal states in internal affairs meant that there normally existed in these state^s groups using dislike of the Fon connection to stir up trouble for the Fon-orientated ruler. The history of nineteenth century Porto Novo and Ketu largely consists of such intrigue. This continuous political instability made impossible

¹ A.Wallon, 'The Kingdom of Dahomey', Revue Maritime et Coloniale, 1861, Part II, tome III, p.352.

the achievement of the Fon aim of control without day-to-day responsibilities. It meant in fact that the Fon had frequently to intervene militarily. Such military operations tended to involve Dahomey in large-scale wars—as in Ketu in 1884-5 and Porto Novo in 1889. The Fon, then, failed to work out any adequate system for governing the neighbouring states whose political stability was often essential to Dahoman security.¹

The administration of Dahomey proper followed the logic dictated by the expansion of the Kingdom. The area of the Abomey plateau was ruled directly by the King himself. Other ^{VIRUALLY.} ~~virtually~~ important parts of the Kingdom were ruled through appointed delegates. The oldest province, Allada, lying to the south of the Lama, was administered by Akplogan, who was directly responsible to the Migan, the King's chief Minister at Abomey. Most

1 B.Awe, 'The Ajele System: A Study of Ibadan Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century' Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol.III, December 1964, pp.25-46. Ibadan, one of Dahomey's major rivals, was able to work out such a system.

probably also under the control of the Migan, since it had been created for reasons of military and political security, was the province of Agony. This province, ruled by the Flogbé, and lying between the Rivers Zou and Ouémé, was certainly reorganised, and was probably created during the last decade of Fon independence.

On the Coast there lay the two best known of the Fon provinces—Whydah and Cotonou. Of these two the organisation of Whydah, dating from the reign of Agadjá, was by far the more ancient. Traditionally, its Administrator, the Yeovogun (or 'Chief of the White Men'), ranked in importance in Dahomey only after the King and his two chief Ministers, the Migan and the Mehou. The province of Cotonou, on the other hand, only came into existence in the second half of the nineteenth century after the French began to trade there.¹

¹ I.Akinjobin, op.cit., p.248:
Lombard, 'Ville Africaine', E.D.X 1953.
A settlement had been in existence at Cotonou since at least the 18th century. It first became an important outlet for Fon trade when Martinez set up a trading post there. It was only in the 1860s, when the French became operative there, that it became a trading centre of the first magnitude.

Its administration was modelled on that of Whydah, and by the 1880s it had a Yeovogun at its head. This official controlled the eastern part of the Dahoman coastline—Abomey Calavi and Godomy, as well as Cotonou itself. Both Yeovoguns were responsible to the Meh^ou, not to the Migan.

It is difficult to assess exactly how independent of Whydah Cotonou really was, since in the 1880s the armed forces of the two provinces were levied absolutely separately.¹ It would seem that they were administered independently. Although by the 1880s Cotonou was economically more important than Whydah, the Yeovogun of Whydah continued to be, politically, the more important figure. Whydah remained in charge of relations with Europeans. It was after all the office of Yeovogun of Whydah which Nougbododhoue took, at the death of Gelele, when he wished to be in a position to stiffen Fon resistance to French demands.

1 M.M.C. Dahomey III, Bayol to Etienne,
'Military Information' Porto Novo 11.1.90:
J.Bayol 'Les Forces Militaires au Dahomey'
Revue Scientifique, Paris 1892.

These provinces (Allada, Whydah, Cotonou and Agony) were ruled by an administrative hierarchy appointed in, and in theory at least, dependent upon, Abomey. Other areas, however, also recognised as integral parts of Abomey, enjoyed no such organisation. The Fon area to the north of Abomey, around Atcheribe, to which Behanzin fled after the French occupation of Abomey, had no such administration. It was nevertheless massively loyal to the Aladaxanou dynasty. Similarly the territory to the South West of Abomey, containing the religious centre of Tado, remained completely outside the centralised system of government.

In the eighteenth century it had been necessary to create an administration to replace the newly overthrown Allada and Whydah governments. In the nineteenth century it was necessary to create a centralised administration for Cotonou partly because it was feared that the Europeans might move against it, and partly because of its ever-increasing economic value. Similarly, direct control of Agony had had to be instituted because of the exceptional strategic importance of that province.

No such military, strategic or economic pressure had existed in the case of the Atcheribe and Tado districts. Older political forms there were never superceded. The localities simply continued to owe allegiance directly to the King of Dahomey. Village and family units sufficed to preserve these areas within the boundaries of Dahomey.¹ Occasionally perhaps an official from Abomey might be sent to a

1 M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., Vol.II pp.23-6, remarks that his informants invariably postulated the existence of six provinces over and above the metropolitan district of Abomey plateau. The provinces were Allada, Whydah, Zagnando, Maxi (Sabe & Savalou), Atakpane and Adja (Tado). The first three, if Zagnando is taken as Agony, certainly existed as organised provinces. Maxi, or Mahi, if it is taken to be referring not to Sabe and Savalou but to the area to the north of Abomey containing Mahi and Fon peoples, was also part of Dahomey. So, too, was 'Adja'. These last two were not however systematically administered as were the first three. Atakpane, in the nineteenth century, was not even loosely subject to Dahomey. Herskovits' informants did not mention Cotonou—which would in fact have been the sixth area of Dahomey.

locality to aid a Chief.¹ This does not however appear to have been a regular occurrence. Although, therefore, the remarkable Fon bureaucratic system was in the nineteenth century extended to new areas of Dahomey, there remained large Fon areas which were never absorbed into this machine.

The four provinces in which royal authority was delegated were under the control of provincial Chiefs whose function, basically, was to see that decisions of state taken in Abomey were implemented in the provinces. The four Chiefs, the Akplogan, the two Yeovoguns and the Fiogba, were also in charge of the day-to-day administration of their territories. This entailed the supervision of customary law, the regulation of trade and agriculture and, at times, the levying of the armed forces.² Reasoning by analogy from what we know of Whydah, it seems possible

1 J.Duncan, op.cit., Vol.II p.35

2 The provincial governors did not themselves go to war although they conducted the levying of troops.

that these provincial governors shared their power with a council consisting of gatherings of provincial Chiefs and royal delegates in the provinces. In this, their position within their province was not unlike that of the King, in Dahomey as a whole.

It seems that when the central government was united and determined the local provincial Chiefs would have little say in the affairs of the province. When the central power was weak, the provincials wielded a good deal of power. It seems possible that on such occasions, as at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the provincials were able to see to it that their own men received royal appointments in the provinces.¹ That the provinces (or at least the older ones) had, in a period of uncertainty, a good deal of independence and were, perhaps, able to ensure that they had one of their own men at their head, would explain why Whydah in the 1870s and 1880s was always more inclined to conciliate the Europeans than was Abomey. It would also

¹ McLeod, op.cit., pp.34-6

explain why, when the great Fon Chiefs settled their differences in 1889, Abomey reasserted its control and the strong man, Nougbododhoue, became Yeovogun of Whydah. A permanent feature of Fon political life, in fact, would seem to have been a tug of war between Abomey and the provinces.

In the last resort, the central government always could control the provincial government. Even in day-to-day matters the powers of the provincial authorities were severely limited. In judicial matters, although they could at any time convene a court, which would act in the King's name, they had to refer to Abomey those cases which might involve the imposition of capital punishment: their powers were limited to sentences of imprisonment and the imposition of fines.¹ In affairs of state, too, the provincial governors were always bound by decisions taken at Abomey. In only one recorded case (that of Whydah) did anyone in the four ^{bureau?} beaurocratic provinces hold authority direct from the King independently

¹ J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., p.51

of the provincial governor. This was the Chacha of Whydah who, between 1818-1858 and 1885-1887, took over the functions of Yeovogun of Whydah, in so far as they concerned relations with the Europeans.

The central government of Dahomey functioned around the person of the King. This is not to say, as many nineteenth century European observers did, that the King was all-powerful. He had been, perhaps, in the days of Agadja and his immediate successors: even then it appears that the King had to struggle constantly to maintain his position. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the real power of the monarchy had declined and during Adanzin's reign (1797-1818) Fon political life had drifted into a state of political feud in which rival groups struggled to gain control. Gezo, by virtue of his alliance with the outsider, Francisco Felix Da Souza, was partly able to retrieve the power of the monarchy and succeeded (until the last years of his reign) in controlling the actions of the great Chiefs. Despite his efforts, the tendency towards a break-down of the political system remained, and even in Gezo's

time the Fon monarch was no despot. This was ascertained by the only two Europeans invited deliberately to observe the Fon process of political decision-making. One of these, Beecroft, observed in 1850:

'I think it will be proved on the perusal of this journal that this great Despot, the King of Dahomey, has been awfully exaggerated as to his wealth and power. I am perfectly satisfied that he is under the control and opinion of several of his principal officers.' ¹

and again,

'I do declare he is not the despot generally reported—he has not his own will.' ²

The other, Forbes, stated:

'There is no Dahoman nation, but a few chiefs holding feudal power under a high chief, Gezo.' ³

1 F.O.84/816 Beecroft to Palmerston 22.7.50.

2 F.O.84/585 Beecroft to Palmerston 4.10.51.

3 F.O.84/827 Forbes to Fanshawe, 'Bonetta' Princes Island, 18.7.50.

Decisions were taken in the name of the King and these decisions were theoretically incontestable. Court etiquette demanded extreme deference to the person of the monarch. Nevertheless, behind this facade of royal authority lay the real power of the Chiefs. Only at the great ceremonial assemblies of the Chiefs, in July-August and November-December, could really important decisions be taken.¹ A powerful King like Gezo, at the height of his prestige, could normally control these meetings and obtain the decision which he himself favoured. Nevertheless, Gezo's power was limited; even he could not simply state his will—although normally he could manoeuvre in such a fashion that he could obtain what he wanted. He could not, however, impose thoroughly unpopular policies. When he did so, gambling on unforthcoming English support, he lost both his throne and his life. Gelele, a monarch whose political position was much weaker than that of his father, could only act as the most powerful elements

¹ See below, p.477-78

in the political life of his country wished him to. This was clearly indicated in a conversation which Gelele had in 1870 with the English botanist, Skertchly:

'He (Gelele) said that he would think over the matter, but that he knew that if he attempted to stop the Customs his people would rise against him and dethrone him; and then where would be the gain?' ¹

R.F.Burton stated the position even more clearly:

'The ministers, war captains, and fetishers may be, and often are, individually punished by the King: collectively they are too strong for him, and without their cordial co-operation he would soon cease to reign.' ²

The King was not a free agent. He shared power with the great Fon Chiefs. It remains, ^Whowever, exceedingly difficult to say exactly what power was

1 J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., p.305

2 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.159

possessed by different groups in Fon society. This is only partly because contemporary Europeans seldom penetrated beyond the facade of royal ^Sdespotism. It is also because the political, economic and religious factions of Fon government were bafflingly intermingled. Institutions of government, political activity and economic development were all shaped by what is, as yet, an imperfectly understood view of the world. This philosophy, for example, dictated that there should be an element of dualism throughout the whole Fon governmental system. Each official had to be complemented by others whose functions dovetailed his own.

This system of 'happy pairs'¹ seems to have been based on an idea of the necessity of a balancing opposites—left and right: royal and non-royal: interior and exterior: sacred and profane.² The Mehou was the complement of the Migan: within the Palace were women officials—the Gundene and Yewe—who duplicated

1 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.142

2 Palau-Marti, op.cit., pp.200-4

the functions of these male ministers.¹ It was even necessary that the Migan and the Mehoul complemented each other physically: the Migan was supposed to be of massive build: the Mehoul of a less imposing stature. Even if such traditional precepts were, upon occasion, twisted, or even evaded, the necessity of creating balance between opposites, together with the impossibility of certain men fulfilling some functions, must have considerably effected the course of Fon political development.

Traditionally sanctioned institutions could of course be adopted and developed to embrace entirely new functions. This in fact happened in the case of the monarchy—which being at the apex of the Fon political system summed up in itself the Fon concept of duality. The King of Dahomey always had a mythical double: that of Gezo was Gakpwe: that of Gelele was Addokpon. In the 1850s, with the adoption of the palm oil trade as the corner-stone of Dahoman economic life, Gezo, in order

¹ See below, pp. 453-461

to disguise the unpalatable fact that the warrior King of Dahomey obtained most of his income from trade, began to conduct his business operations under the name of Gapwe.¹ A British Naval Officer, who was conversant with the affairs of the Bight of Benin in the 1850s, makes this point quite clearly:

'I have ascertained positively that Prince Garpuay, named by them (British merchants) and also by the natives, is really another name of the King of Dahomey, which he uses in all his transactions that he does not wish his own name to appear in.'²

In this case something is known of both the politico-economic pressures at work and of the nature

1 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.268:
J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., pp.270-72:
M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., p.50:
Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.158 and
pp. 117-223: P.Mercier, in 'African
Worlds' (Ed. Daryll Forde) pp.232.
For a brief summary of this
argument see C.Newbury's 'Introduction'
to R.F.Burton's Mission to Gelele, King
of Dahomey, p.36.

2 F.O.2/20 Campbell to Clarendon, Lagos
7.3.1857, enclosing Commander Bay to
Commodore Adams, 'Firefly' 24.2.57.

of the institution in the process of change. Much of the philosophic framework within which Fon political life took place remains, however, conjectural, and although the course of Fon institutional development can often be charted, conclusions as to why such developments took place must remain largely tentative.

The majority of the inhabitants of Dahomey, excluding the vast servile population, were free men. They were peasants, who could be neither bought nor sold, who were required, upon occasion, to serve in the army, but who certainly had no say in the government of the country. In theory any of them could be raised, by the King, to the position of a Minister of State. No doubt a few, even in the nineteenth century, received some such advancement.¹ The great beaurocratic posts had been created in the eighteenth century in order to

1 A. Le Herissé, op.cit., p.4 . There are indications here that Behanzin's Flogbe was not of the charmed circle. E. Chaudoin, op.cit., p.278. The Chuydaton of Whydah just before the conquest was also a 'new man'.

aid the King in running and controlling the expanding Fon state. In order to prevent male members of the royal family, rivals or potential rivals of the King, from using the powers of office to advance their claims to the throne, Princes of the blood had been excluded from these offices. In theory, ministers were freely chosen by the King. In fact, ^{however} ~~beaure~~ocrats began to be drawn from a limited number of ministerial families. Dalzel's story of how one Mehou took great pains to avoid his son taking over his functions seems to prove that it was in the eighteenth century that these offices became hereditary. By the nineteenth century they certainly were.¹ No doubt an heir could occasionally be passed over and another member of the family selected, if there was some pressing reason for so doing. It is sometimes mentioned that high dignitaries

¹ A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.37:
P.Mercier, Civilisations du Benin, p.142:
Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.140:
F.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.I p.27:
A.Dalzel, The History of Dahomey, p.174.

had the right to select men to fill certain posts.¹ Since office was in the main hereditary this seems very unlikely indeed. Probably the official had only the ceremonial right of presenting the new man to the King, Court and people. When the King himself wished to give a personal supporter a position in the beaurocracy it seems likely that he had to create a new post. Prince (Kondo, for example, seems to have engineered the appointment, in the mid-1880s, of a personal friend to the probably newly-created office of Fiogbe.²

Something of an oligarchy was therefore created : not, perhaps, a closed oligarchy, but an oligarchy nevertheless. Moreover, the royal family remained powerful. Considering the number of eighteenth century coups and conspiracies, it seems unlikely that their

1 R.Burton, op.cit., p.138

2 M.M.C. Dahomey III, p. Angnot to Bayol, Porto Novo 5.1.1890: A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.4. It emerged during Bayol's mission to Abomey that the Fiogbe was a very close associate of Kondo. The Fiogbe was probably a 'new' man.

power was ever broken. At any rate, at the turn of the century, the monarchy (as a result of both economic and political difficulties) ceased to be able to control the political life of the state. Members of the great ministerial families could not themselves reach the highest dignity in the land, but they could intrigue with ambitious members of the royal family. They could, thus, along with the royal family, play at politics in order to achieve for themselves office, wealth, influence and power.

The royal family and the ministerial families were closely linked by ties of blood. The eldest daughter of the King, by one of his wives given to him after he became Vi-Daho, always married the Migan. The second daughter married the Mehoul. The King's sons, on the other hand, were brought up in the households of the great ministers.¹ The royal and ministerial families were, thus, closely linked by upbringing,

¹ A. Le Herissé, op.cit., p.8:
R.F. Burton, op.cit., Pp. 139,
176-77 and 212.

training and marriage. By the first decade of the nineteenth century there had, inevitably, come into existence a political circle made up almost exclusively of members of the royal family and their ministerial allies. This circle was divided into factions whose rivalry occasionally erupted into violence.

Politically the monarch was only the leader (or even figure-head) of one of the competing factions into which the ruling class was divided. The eighteenth century crisis reached its culmination in 1818. Gezo himself was only able to secure the throne, and indeed maintain himself on it, as a result of the assistance he received from a non-Dahoman, Francisco Felix De Souza. The power of the monarchy had been so eroded, before Gezo's accession, that only with external aid could the King control the turbulent political class. When he came to the throne, even Gezo had to acknowledge the increasing power of the royal family by creating for the Princes positions of second-in-command to all the great Chiefs of the bureaucracy.

Gezo was powerful enough to make sure that although the Princes were granted an official place in the Administration, they were still excluded from positions of real control.¹ With the accession of Gelele, however, some at least of these Princes were able to advance themselves into positions of actual power.² They also managed to gain positions of real importance in the army.³ After the political upheavals in the late 1870s and 1880s, when conditions rivaled those at the beginning of the century, the last barriers to the ambitions of the royal family were swept away: they were able to seize even the highest offices in the land. One of Behanzin's brothers, Topa, was Mehou:

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- 1 A Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.33 & 44:
J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., p.131.
According to Le Herisse the office of Binanzon, second-in-command to the Akplogun, was created for a Prince. Skertchly writes that the Binanzon was second-in-command to the Mehou. This was probably a mistake. Skertchly does however confirm that the Binanzon was of the royal family.
 - 2 The Chuydaton of Whydah, for example.
 - 3 See below, p. 466

another, Gautchili, was Gaou.

In spite of the fact that the monarch's political powers were often severely limited, the King remained the focal point of national life. The King's importance in the political life of the state varied. At the height of his power Gezo dominated Dahomey: by the end of his reign Gelele was a political cypher. It always remained essential, however, that the monarch played the central part in the continuous round of religious ceremonial which was vital to the perfect functioning of the Fon world. This was so in spite of the fact that in the eighteenth century King Tegbesou had cast aside some of the more politically hampering attributes of the monarchy.¹ It was the case even though it was quite normal for a substitute to take the place of the King in a public ceremony.²

The heir to the throne, the Vi-Daho, had a recognised position in Fon society. The word 'Vi-Daho' means,

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.11:
Palau-Marti, op.cit., pp.133-4
P. Hazoume, Dogulicimi, pp.483-4

2 J.A. Skertchly, op.cit., p.290
E. Chaudoin, op.cit., p.273

literally, 'grand-son'. This indicates fairly clearly that the succession had not always proceeded from father to son. Indeed, both Agadja and Kpengla, according to the normally accepted geneologies, succeeded brothers. Nevertheless, by the end of the eighteenth century it seems to have been normal for a son to succeed his father. The pains which tradition takes to portray Gezo as a son of Agonglo underlines this point.

According to tradition, the Vi-Daho was chosen for his kingly virtues by the monarch after consultation with the Gods by way of the Bukonou¹. Frequently, it was said, the consent of the Migan and the Mehoun was necessary before the King could make his selection. His choice was always restricted to those sons born of women given to the King by his father when he himself had become Vi-Daho—probably the Kposi. Sons by wives

1 A. Le Herissé, op.cit., pp.6-9:
M.J. Herskovits, op.cit., pp.30-32
& 37-38. Herskovits throws very
little light on the role of the
Vi-Daho. For the role of the
Bukonou see below, p. 463-464

taken earlier, and by wives of the blood royal, were excluded from any claim to the throne.

Although the Vi-Daho was said to have little or no political influence, he in fact played a vital role in the life of the Fon state: he was the focal point of the opposition to the King. Badahou was the leader of the opposition to Gezo: Hanasou to that of Gelele. The important Princes were intent on succeeding to the throne as quickly as possible and were therefore the natural political enemies of the King. Even Kondo, who came to be Vi-Daho only as a result of the overthrow of Hanasou, probably had his father removed as soon as a settlement with his political rivals permitted him to do so. Hanasou was in fact the only Vi-Daho in the nineteenth century to die before his father; his attempt to take over had been premature. Gelele's supporters were stronger than he and as a result it was he, not Gelele, who was 'removed'. One of the King's sons became Vi-Daho only when there was an opposition sufficiently strong to force the King to recognise its

candidate as his successor. Only if ^{he}_A had no choice would a King be likely to acknowledge what must have been an unwelcome change in the political situation.

Far from being chosen by the King, then, the Vi-Daho appears to have been chosen in direct opposition to the King's wishes. The support which the Vi-Daho attracted may have been due to the nature of his political views. It is more likely that his views were designed to attract political support. Probably, too, a Prince's importance varied according to the strength of his links with other members of the Fon political class. The mothers of Princes likely to succeed to the throne were said, according to tradition, to have been given by the King to the Vi-Daho. However, if a Prince had to force the King to recognise him as Vi-Daho, it seems likely that he would have attempted to gain allies by contracting to take as wife, when Vi-Daho, daughters of important Fon Chiefs. The King would have had little say as to which women he

he gave to the Vi-Daho. The Princes of the next generation would, therefore, be able to draw on their mother's relatives for political support. Moreover, the mothers of claimants to the throne were often themselves powerful in the Palace bureaucracy; one of the most important rivals of Gelele, for example, was the son of the Ya Vedo. The political power of the various Princes was therefore invariably related to their mothers' importance in the state. A Prince aspiring to be recognised as Vi-Daho may also have been able to draw on contacts made when he was a child. This would not be difficult since Princes were not brought up in the Palace, but were brought up in households of the great Ministers. A Prince might, in childhood, form close relationships with a politically important family¹ that would, later, stand him in good stead.

¹ A. Le Herissé, *op.cit.*, p.8
E. Chaudoin, *op.cit.*, p.272.

Gelele's eldest son, Bedozan, for example, was educated at the home of the Chief Priest of Fa, the Bokonou.¹

The choosing of a Vi-Daho was therefore a political manoeuvre rather different from that presented in tradition. He was not the choice of the King, and it seems possible that the role of the Bokonou in consulting the oracles had more political than religious significance. Probably the Migan and the Mehoul played a key role in the nomination of a Vi-Daho. It was perhaps these two officials who formally indicated to the King that the time had come for an heir to be appointed. They themselves may or may not have been in sympathy with such a move. Certainly when Badahou was nominated he had the support of the Mehoul. No doubt the views of the Migan and the Mehoul were exceptionally important in any far-reaching political initiative. Nevertheless, it does seem that they, like the King, had to act in accordance with the views of the majority of the powerful Chiefs.

¹ R.F.Burton, op.cit.,pp.176-7

A prince even after becoming Vi-Daho could not be sure of succeeding his father. The King might be able to rebuild his political fortune and even eventually dispose of his unwelcome heir. Nevertheless, in two out of three struggles occurring in the course of the nineteenth century between the Vi-Daho and the King, the Vi-Daho, it seems, did manage to have his father removed. The 1876 succession dispute was, moreover, somewhat unusual in that it was sparked off by and centred around an acute crisis in external relations. Both sides in the dispute had then to act more precipitately than they would perhaps otherwise have done. It seems in fact that normally the Vi-Daho acted only after he was sure of overwhelming support from the political class. The King then died and the Vi-Daho succeeded to the throne.

Possibly the King was actually rather than symbolically slain during the course of the hwe hu li-len custom. Since Gezo and Gelele both seem to have died during seasons when yams are harvested in Dahomey, the ceremony may, in the nineteenth century, have been used

for its original purpose. An outline of this custom, given by a modern French writer, indicates that this ceremony may well have had its origins in the ritual killing of the King:

'C'est un rituel de purification de la personne royale; il a lieu tous les ans au mois de septembre, mois qui marque le début de l'année dahoméenne^N avec l'apparition des premières ignames. L'expression se traduit, terme à terme:

hwé hu li-len

annuel du corps lavage

Dans ce rituel le roi est en quelque sorte dédoublé en la personne d'un petit enfant qui est entermé vivant, le roi est donc virtuellement mis à mort et emporte avec lui toutes les impuretés; la vie peut recommencer avec l'année, rien ne peut plus entraver la marche. La veille du jour de la cérémonie, le roi dort à Calamina, la cérémonie devant avoir lieu au village de Hunto, situé à 5 km au sud de Calamina. Dès l'aube, les ahosi (femmes du roi) se mettent à filer du coton; le fil est aussitôt remis aux tisserands qui fabriquent sur seize métiers autant de bandes

d'étoffe, celles-ci serviront à confectionner un pagne dans la journée même. Les ahosi apportent le pagne terminé auprès de la rivière Hunto où doit avoir lieu la cérémonie, en même temps que trois pagnes de fabrication européenne, des boissons, etc. Des serviteurs de Houdouhwe' (le chef trésorier du roi) conduisent à l'endroit un petit garçon non pubère, et ils creusent un trou profond.

Vers la fin de la journée, le roi, accompagné d'une nombreuse suite, se rend au lieu de la cérémonie. Après avoir traversé le Hunto, le cortège s'arrête et le roi poursuit, accompagné uniquement de Migan et de Mew (ses premiers ministres de droite et de gauche, respectivement), du Vidaho, du bokonon du palais et de quelques ahosi portant le crachoir royal et des boissons. Le roi se déshabille complètement et revêt de ses habits le petit garçon, lui met ses colliers, ses sandales, etc. Ensuite, le bokonon coupe les cheveux et les ongles du roi; celui-ci se lave alors avec de l'eau de la rivière qu'on lui a apportée dans une jarre, puis s'habille avec des pagnes

européens et chausse ne nouvelles sandales. On jette dans le trou tous les objets ayant servi au bain du roi (jarre, eponge, etc.), les cheveux et les ongles coupés, ainsi que le pagne blanc; le petit enfant est descendu vivant dans le trou et entermé. Le roi rejoint le cortège resté à l'écart, qui le salue: E dio ku (il a échangé la mort).¹

The deaths of Gezo and Gelele together with the the succession of Badahou and Kondo were regarded as natural constitutional events; the new King publicly and privately honoured the memory of his father. Gezo's succession, on the other hand, represented a violent break with the past; he was the representative of a rival line, not the son of Adanzan. Adanzan was kept alive after he had been deposed; his memory was execrated and it was declared that he ought never to have been King at all. Gezo's succession was something entirely different from the normal succession of the Vi-Daho.

1 Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.131
The original information on this custom seems to have come from J.Bertho, 'Notes Africaines:1945' No.27 pp.14-15. Palau-Marti's account, however, seems more useful.
See also G.Parrinder, West African Religion, p.136.

The Vi-Daho, on his father's death, might find it necessary to dispose of a number of his brothers—rival claimants to the throne. In the nineteenth century only Gelele was faced with this situation. According to tradition, fraternal rivals were not usually killed. More often than not they were exported as slaves. Gelele secretly kept one of his rivals, a brother, Godo, alive, although a close captive.¹ If a prince was killed his blood was not spilled; he was sewn into his hammock, secretly carried down to Whydah and deposited in the ocean. The career of an ambitious Fon Prince, if not nasty and brutish, was certainly very liable to be short.

According to tradition,² there were seven Ministers of outstanding importance—the Gbonougan Daho—who along with the King saw to the smooth running of the government of the state. These were the Migan, the Mehoul, the Yeovogun, the Adjaho, the Sogun, the Tokpo and the

1 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.131, f/h.9

2 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., pp.37-45

Akplogun. In nineteenth century Dahomey they were the most ancient and honourable offices of state. In origin they were probably priestly offices of the King's household. At any rate, all of them had been in existence since the first half of the eighteenth century. By far the most important of these dignitaries were the Migan and the Mehou. In practice and theory the functions of these two officers were complementary. Between them they supervised almost every function of the Fon state. Together they played an important role in the selection of a successor to the King,¹ and they acted as Regents for three days after the King's death.² The Migan and the Mehou wielded an influence unrivalled by any of the other Gbonougan Daho. In the main their beaurocratic functions were supervisory: those of other Gbonougan Daho were more specific and were more limited.

1 See above, pp. 435-6

2 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.41

In the household of the early Aladaxanou Kings, the Migan had his place at the right-hand of the King and acted as the royal priest-executioner. In the nineteenth century his duties in this capacity were still his most important function: it was he who despatched the most important sacrifices in the ceremonies necessary to the continuation of the Fon world. The Migan had, besides, important judicial functions: he was the supreme judge in all cases with which the King himself did not deal. As part of his judicial power he had the right to keep the most important prison in Abomey. Moreover, he also was the people's representative before the King: this duty may have entailed his persuading the King to take action which he did not wish to take—an action like nominating a Vi-Daho.

After the conquest of Allada the Migan's power was enlarged so as to make him overseer of the officers of that province: it seems likely that after the Organisation of Agony, he was also charged with the administration of that territory. That he dealt with these provinces

probably ties in with the fact that he was responsible for all administrative matters concerning the army.¹

The Migan's opposite number, the Mehou, sat on the left-hand of the King. He also had functions which were in some way priestly for he acted as executioner at the sacrifices for the King's double. The Mehou was the King's representative before the people. His duties included looking after the affairs of the royal family; judging them, naming them and perhaps arranging their marriages.² One account³ states that the office of Mehou was created only after the conquest of Whydah. This seems unlikely; his duties are so interwoven with those of the Migan that the two offices must have had their origins at about the same time. The difficulty may have arisen out of the fact

1 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., pp.30;38;40:
R.Burton, op.cit., pp.137-8:
J.Skertchly, op.cit., p.445

2 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., pp.41-2

3 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.41

that after the conquest of Whydah the Mehou was charged with overseeing the affairs of that province. In the latter part of the nineteenth century he probably came to be charged with supervising the affairs of Cotonou as well. The Mehou also saw to the affairs of all European visitors to the Court and organised their ceremonial reception. He was the Minister consulted ultimately on all matters concerning the regulation of trade with the Europeans.¹

The Yeovogun of Whydah ranked after the Migan and the Mehou in the traditional picture of the Dahoman Ministerial hierarchy. His office seems to have been formed by an amalgamation of the duties of a number of beaurocrats of the former Kingdom of Whydah. Unlike the other Gbonougan Daho, his position seems to have had little of the priestly about it. His high status, far above that of the Akplogun, was due to the importance attached to trade with the Europeans. For much of the nineteenth century his real power was no greater than

1 R. Burton, op.cit., pp.138 & 150

that of the Akplogun nor, indeed, of the more recently created provincial governors. From 1818 to 1858, and from 1885 to 1887, the Chacha was in control of relations with the Europeans. Moreover, during the greater part of Gelele's reign political power in Whydah rested with the Choydatan, not the Yeovogun. In fact the office of Yeovogun of Whydah only regained its traditional importance when the central government recovered its unity on the accession of Behanzan.

The office of Adjaho had probably a priestly origin.¹ It was he who administered the oath at trials before the King. The Adjaho was the official who had under his control the administration of the royal palaces. He maintained contact between the outside and the inside, the palace and the world: he was in fact in charge of the Owutunum, or King's eunuchs.² He also supervised the activities of the King's spies. An English commentator gives a guide to this institution:

1 R.Burton, op.cit., p.40

2 A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.42

'In the house of each minister lives a King's daughter and two officers; these superintend the minister's trade, on which he pays tribute according to their report. If a dispute arises in which the King's interest is at stake, these officers report direct; and if the dispute is serious, the minister is arrested or fined. The whole system is one of espionage, cunning, and intrigue.'¹

This account may over-estimate the 'espionage' activities of these 'ministerial assistants' who were normally, it seems, referred to as 'legedes'.² Their main function may have been simply to act as second-in-command to the great beaurocrats. These legedes do, nevertheless, seem to have acted as intermediaries between the court and the great officials. In time of political crises the role of such an intermediary may not have been all that far removed from that of a spy. The Adjaho's relationship with these legedes must have given him a position of considerable influence.

1 F.E.Forbes, op.cit., pp.34-35

2 M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., Vol.I pp. 69 & 112

The duties of the Sogun in the nineteenth century concerned only the royal household: his functions had not multiplied as the Kingdom expanded. His rank did not correspond in any way with his power and was thus purely honorary. The importance of the Tokpo is however much more easily recognised; in origin his office was probably that of a priest of the various agricultural cults. In the nineteenth century he was in charge of the organisation of agriculture and markets throughout the Kingdom. Even before 1851 the ceremonies of agricultural production and trade were closely supervised from the centre. After Gezo's economic revolution the Tokpo played a key role in trade with the Europeans as well as in the internal organisation of the state.

The last official in the traditional list of Gbonougnan-Daho was the Akplogun. The original duties of this official seem to have been of a priestly nature in that he was a guardian of the royal tombs at Allada. After the conquest of Allada he became governor of that province of Dahomey.¹

¹ For the work of the provincial governors
see pp. 418-9

Although the Gabonougnan-Daho held the most honourable offices in Dahomey, their actual power was not therefore necessarily commensurate with their status. Indeed, Francisco Felix Da Souza, as Chacha in the first half of Gezo's reign, and Nougbododhoue, as the King's chief fetisher in the second half of Gelele's reign, wielded considerably more influence than any of them. Nevertheless the administrative power of the Migan and Mehou was as great as their rank indicated. New officers were, however, created in the course of the nineteenth century, with functions as important as those of most of the other Gbonougan Daho. The Flogbe and the Yeovogun of Cotonou were at least as important as the Akplogun. Politically and administratively these officials were certainly more important than the Sogun. Moreover, the ever-increasing power of the Princes of the blood adversely effected the real influence of the Gbonougan-Daho. It seems likely that the Yeovogun of Whydah was not the only ^{burument} ~~beaureat~~ whose power at times was circumscribed by his royal second-in-command. By the nineteenth century therefore, the power

structure of Dahomey had so altered that the Gbonougan Daho were not the only men who, together with the King, wielded great power. Indeed, their political importance might in fact be considerably less than that which was held by one in a relatively minor office.¹

In Dahomey, the Palace and its inhabitants played an exceptionally important part in the life of the state. In Fon thought, the Palace was in fact the 'complement' of the country: the organisation of the women of the Palace, the 'interior', in many ways duplicated that of the male functionaries of the 'exterior'.

1 Palau-Marti, op.cit., pp.197-204. Palau-Marti has worked out, by theorising elaborately on Fon numerical symbolism, that there were, as Herisse stated, seven Ministers of outstanding importance: the Gbonougan Daho. From this number is excluded the Sogan and the Yeovogun. In it are included the Gaou and the Kposu. The latter Chiefs had, however, unlike the Gbonougan Daho, a purely military role. The Gbonougan Daho were a group of Ministers traditionally 'great', whose power in the nineteenth century was not necessarily commensurate with their high status.

Apart from the King, a number of eunuchs, and the very young amongst the King's sons, no men were permitted within the Palace. In the reign of Gelele, and of Behanzin, there were altogether about 8,000 Palace women.¹ Many of these women were slaves, others were either the wives or daughters of the King, priestesses, or Palace attendants.²

The most important of the Palace women, at least in ritual matters, were the Kpodjito, or 'mothers' of the Fon monarchs. The actual mother, or the representative of the mother, of the reigning King, was the leading figure in this group. Indeed, in ceremonial affairs she was the second most important person in the Kingdom.³ If the mother of the King were alive, it

1 A. Le Herissé, op.cit., p.27

2 R.F. Burton, op.cit., p.153;
J.A. Skertchly, op.cit., p.145;
The female attendants in the
Palace who acted as messengers
between the Palace and the
exterior were called 'Daros'.

3 Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.215

was essential to the continued smooth running of the Fon world that she lived in the Palace and performed her religious duties there. How essential this was is shown by Gezo's frantic search of the New World for his enslaved mother. If the King's 'real' mother were not alive then some specially sanctioned substitute had to take her place and perform her duties. Women of the Palace were also appointed to act as the 'mothers' of former Kings—tending their tombs and playing a leading part in the ritual ceremonies due to their memories. Every one of these Kpodjito ranked as very high dignitaries at the Court.

Most of the ^{non-}slave women of the Palace were wives of the King. Only a limited number were, however, wives in any real sense of the word. Many of them were members of groups with special duties which had little to do with normal marital relations. The most remarked upon were those of the King's wives who made up part of the standing army—the Amazons.¹ They were in fact the

¹ See below, pp. 466-7 and 472 for the organisation of the Amazons in war.

King's bodyguard. These women, who numbered about 2,000, were bound by the same conventions as the other royal wives: they lived in the Palace and were forbidden any contact with any man other than the King.¹ In spite of their warlike attributes they sometimes did bear children to the King.

The 'real' wives of the King were the Kposi, or Wives of the Leopard. There were about forty of these ~~Kposi~~², who were young and attractive, who lived with the King in his part of the Palace and whose duty it was to attend the monarch.³ Of all the King's wives, only the Kposi could produce an heir to the throne.⁴ The Kposi were therefore originally the women who formed a Prince's stud when he became Vi-Daho.⁵ After one of them began to

1 J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., pp.359-60.
This law was not always enforced.

2 A.Le Herisse', op.cit., p.27

3 A.Le Herisse', op.cit., p.27:
R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.211

4 Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.129

5 See above p.435

grow old, or perhaps after the King realised that one of them might be of more use to him elsewhere, a woman who had been one of the Kposi could cease to be one and might move on to take up some position elsewhere in the Palace. In 1863 the mother of two of the King's important sons, and of his eldest daughters, was the she-Yeovogun.¹ Former Kposi, the mothers of claimants to the throne, were therefore to be found in positions of power throughout the Palace beaurocracy.

It has been suggested² that the Kposi watched over the activities of the royal Ministers, and thus played a vitally important part in the administration of the state. The Kposi were, according to this argument, divided into groups of 8, one of which was always with the King. It was the duty of each of these groups to be present at all the King's interviews with certain functionaries, and to remember the report made and views expressed by these functionaries. Over a period of time it was presumed that the Kposi would be able to detect

1 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.212

2 M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., Vol.I p.111

any subterfuge or any discrepancies in what was reported by those with whom the King had to deal. There is, however, no contemporary evidence to support the contention that the Kposi played such a role. It does seem an unlikely activity for these women who were essentially the King's personal attendants. It was only really after they had ceased to be Kposi that they moved into the bureaucracy. If they had acted as the royal archivists they would have become more valuable as they grew older. In fact, however, the Kposi were always young. No doubt after being with the King for some time a number of them exercised considerable influence at Court. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Kposi ever had any institutionalised bureaucratic functions.

The wives of the King who did play an important part in the state bureaucracy were called the Naye. These women may have been former Kposi. They probably also included in their number women who had formerly belonged to a less important group of the royal wives. Each of these Naye, and there were fifty-one of them in

the second half of the nineteenth century,¹ acted as the counterpart of a male minister and was usually referred to as that minister's 'mother'. The 'mother' of the Migan was known as the Gundeme, that of the Mehoul,² the Yewe. The Yewe was in charge of the women of royal blood within the Palace: the Gundeme was in charge of the others. The two female ministers also duplicated the 'overseeing' functions of their male equivalents. They did more than this, they also watched over the activities of the male ministers themselves. This was in fact the most important function of all these 'mothers': their task was to memorise the reports and scrutinise the doings of the

1 J.A.Skertchly, *op.cit.*, p.251.

2 A.Wallon, *Revue Maritime et Coloniale*, t.II, p.338, 1861. R.Burton, *op.cit.*, p.212. Burton at this point refers to the Mehoul's 'mother' as Egbelu, or the 'female Mehoul'. Wallon, writing only a few years before Burton refers to the 'she-Mehoul' as 'Egbelou'. It is probable therefore that 'Egbelou' was the personal or 'rank' name of one particular she-Mehoul.

male bureaucrats. The 'mother' of a Minister was always present when that Minister had an important interview with the King. She probably also consulted with her male counterpart as to the wisdom of his actions.

The state bureaucrats were not the only men who had 'mothers' within the Palace. Every European visitor to the Court found that one of the King's wives had been appointed to watch over those of his nationality who ventured to Abomey. The male attendants also had their counterparts within the Palace. Even the Court eunuchs had their female counterparts in the Ya Vedo and her deputy, the Vissekan. Some, at least, of the 'mothers' of the attendants had, at an earlier stage in their career, been Kposi. The Ya Vedo was the mother of a rival claimant to the throne in 1858; the Vissekan in 1890 was described as being King Gelele's chief wife. Their status was in fact little different from that of the 'mothers' of the Ministers.¹

1 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.141

The majority of the King's wives had however no part in the functioning of the state machine. Such wives—the Ahosi—had the simple duty of cooking for the royal household. They had little or no communication with the more important royal wives.¹ It seems not unlikely that their birth was more lowly than that of the politically important women. The Ahosi within the Palace in fact corresponded to the mass of the Fon peasantry in the state.

Nevertheless, in spite of this Palace check on the activities of officials and in spite of the contacts maintained by Adjaho, the monarch never had full control of the ministers of state. Perhaps the very fact that so many checks existed indicates how ineffective they all were. Ministers, Princes, and Priests all had their allies within the Palace as well as without. The system of supervision broke down completely when the succession was in dispute—and it was around that issue that Fon political quarrels tended to centre. The Kposi themselves

1 A.Le Herisse, op.cit., p.27

were the mothers of the claimants to the throne. They were therefore very willing to intrigue to secure the succession for their sons. Gezo had attempted to place more and more power in the hands of the women of the Palace whom he hoped he could control more closely than the great Chiefs. After the breakdown of his system the women of the Palace were as heavily involved in political conflict as the males outside it. In two, and probably in all three of the violent political upheavals recorded during the last two decades of Dahoman independence, women of the Palace played a leading role.¹

Besides the wives, the ministers and their 'doubles' the King's immediate entourage consisted of a number of personal attendants. Prominent amongst these were the King's Chief Diviner, the Priest of Fa, the Bokonou.

1 The revolt of Nougobododhoue and Visseگان in 1890; the revolt of 1884 and the killing of Hanasou and his brothers in 1876. Visseگان had long been associated with Nougobododhoue. She probably therefore played a part in the events of 1876.

He was consulted on all matters of state, including the selection of an heir, and was therefore an extremely important figure at Court.¹ Important also——if only as a messenger between the Palace and those outside——was the Tononou, or chief eunuch, and one of the few males allowed within the Palace. His duties were to look after the welfare of the women of the Palace. Prominent amongst those always attending Court were the half-heads——or Lari——the King's messengers whose duty it was to carry messages at full speed from the Court to the provinces.²

The Fon military organisation, like the Fon civil beaurocracy, was a highly complicated social machine.

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- 1 It was Behanzin's Bokonou who befriended and gained the confidence of Dorgere.
 - 2 A.Adande, 'Les Recades des Roi du Dahomey', A.F.A.N., 1962. As a sign of their royal authority the 'half-heads' carried the famous 'Recards' or staffs of office. Everyone had to give way before them. In origin this appears to have been a Yoruba office introduced during the period of Yoruba dominance.

Indeed, the two were not really separate institutions. All the civil ministers, apart from the provincial governors, had a traditional military role. Even the Court Fool, the Kpofensu, had a well-defined place in the army.¹ The King himself went to war, as did the Migan and the Mehoul. The monarch was in charge of his Amazon guards:² the Migan was responsible for the right wing of the army: the Mehoul was responsible for the left. The preliminary strategic decisions—where and when to attack—were taken like all other political decisions; the whole political class took part. Indeed, the military leaders were just as heavily involved in political life as were the officials of the civilian ^{bureau} ~~beauro~~cracy. The actual command of the army while on campaign was left to the Gaou—a military Chief who had no civilian duties. Besides being Commander-in-Chief, the Gaou was, in battle

1 A.J. Skertchly, op.cit., p.447. He was leader of a company equipped with blunderbuses.

2 The King was accompanied by his Amazons, who took up a central position in the Fon battle formation. He did not lead his army: probably so that no blame should fall upon him in the event of defeat. Since he was the living embodiment of Dahomey itself his life was presumably too precious to expose to danger. Although he did not fight, he certainly took part in the making of all military decisions.

the leader of the right wing of the army. His Lieutenant, the Kposu, was leader of the left wing. In the reign of Gelele, Princes of the blood became powerful in the army as Seconds-in-Command to the Gaou and the Kposu.¹ In the reign of Behanzin the Gaou himself was a brother of the King.

The King's wives, a section of whom played an important role in the civilian bureaucracy, also fulfilled an essential role in the functioning of the military machine. The military section were called the Minos, the famous Amazons. Although the King's wives had, in the eighteenth century, been mobilised in an attempt to increase the armed forces of the state, it was Gezo who first made the Amazons^a permanent part of the Fon army. They formed the King's personal bodyguard, came to be one of the most reliable elements in the army and, indeed, held a central position in the normal Fon battle formation. As the female civil administration duplicated the male, so, too, did the female military heirarchy follow the older male organisation. The Gundeme

1 A.L. Herisse, op.cit., p.63. The titles of these royal officers were the Matro and the Aouigbame.

commanded the right wing of the Amazons while the Yewa commanded the left. In battle the Amazon right was led by a she-Gaou, the Akpadume, and the left by a she-Kposu, the Fosupou. As befitted Ahosi, the Amazons, when not at war, lived in the various royal Palaces—cut off from the society of all men except the King.¹ The Amazon officers, however, played an equal part with the males in taking military and, indeed, political decisions.

The Fon army consisted of a number of units recruited in a variety of ways. The most important section, made up of both male and female troops, and the one which bore the brunt of the fighting, was the standing army. The core of the standing army, the 2,000 Amazon troops, was, when not at war, stationed in Abomey or Cana.²

1 See above, p.456.

2 R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.263:
A.J.Skertchley, op.cit., p.455:
A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.67:
M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., pp.80-81.
Burton estimated the total number of Amazons at about 2,500: of these 1,700 were actually fighting women. He fulfills a useful function here in cutting down the extraordinary estimates of previous visitors. Skertchley states that they may have numbered 4,000 but indicates his doubt. Le Herissé gives figures (probably vastly exaggerated) for only a few of Gelele's Amazon regiments. Herskovits seems to have felt that Burton's estimate was low, but he tended to exaggerate both the size and the organisation of the Kingdom. Altogether, 2,000 Amazons would not seem to be an unreasonable figure.

One part of the male section of the standing army—the section usually seen by Europeans—was stationed for ceremonial purposes at Abomey. Another section was normally stationed on the frontiers watching the activities of the neighbouring peoples. During most of the century there was a high concentration of troops in the Agony area watching the Yoruba. The remainder of this standing army was made up of troops stationed at various Customs posts throughout the Kingdom. Altogether it seems that there were ~~over~~ more than three thousand permanent male soldiers.¹ Gezo, again, is often credited with the creation of this standing army.² Since he was the first Fon monarch to pursue policies of continuous war on powerful neighbours, this does not seem unlikely.

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- 1 The more reliable commentators did not attempt to estimate the number of men in the standing army. Bayol estimated the royal army which attacked Cotonou at about 3,000. Possibly half of these were male. The other half of the standing army was at the time stationed on the eastern frontier.
 - 2 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.58. According to tradition the Chacha advised Gezo to create such an army. See Chapter 1 p.20

Probably the majority of the nineteenth century Fon annual ⁱcampaigns were simple punitive expeditions, or slave raids, and were undertaken by the standing army alone. When a major campaign was contemplated a general levy of all the able-bodied men was undertaken. This was put into operation by the various provincial governors.¹ The levy then met the rest of the army at Cana.² These recruits had not of course the skill or

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- 1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.70.
It is known from a report made by Jean Bayol (see f/n 2 below) that in 1889 troops were levied from Allada, Whydah and Cotonou province. Le Herisse mentions the Agony contingent. Troops would also have been drawn from the Abomey plateau. It is doubtful if any were drawn from the areas of Dahomey not under central supervision. Even in the organised provinces the number of troops raised depended both on how much independence the governor had and how committed to the war the provincial Chiefs were; the provincials were seldom as willing to fight as the Fon of Abomey. The Agony troops, for example, often ran away. The subject states did not contribute troops to the Fon army. If they were involved in a war, as the Dekame was in the war against France, their army remained a separate entity.
- 2 M.M.C. Dahomey III, Bayol to Etienne, 'Military Information' Porto Novo 11.1.1870, reproduced in part in J. Bayol, Les Forces Militaires au Dahomey. Revue Scientifique, Paris 1892.

the stamina of the standing army and in order to combat these weaknesses, many of them were introduced into the regiments of the standing army. These therefore gained in numbers, while at the same time the trained troops lent impetus and morale to the recruits. Nevertheless, sections at least of the levies did fight alone.¹

There also existed side by side with what may be termed the system of state recruitment, another method of obtaining men. A number of important Chiefs sometimes or, indeed, it may have been always, themselves provided a number of fighting men for the Dahoman forces. The Chacha did so in the reign of Gezo.² Such groups seem to have functioned as units on their own. That these did not come only from the 'unorganised' areas of the country is indicated by the presence of the Chacha's

1 A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.70, mentions the Aladatu, the troops from Allada, and the Adopo from Agony.

2 A.L.D'Albeca, 'Au Pays du Fon', Tour du Monde, 1895, p.88. D'Albeca states that the Chacha was wealthy enough to raise 1,400 soldiers.

forces amongst their number. The very existence of these regiments indicates the survival of a non-state organisation and points to the weakness of the beaurocracy and, indeadd, of royal control. It may be a reflection of the breakdown in monarchicial control in the second half of the nineteenth century that instances of the great Chiefs' independently providing forces are more numerous in the reign of Gelele than in that of his predecessor.¹

Once assembled for a normal campaign—one not involving a siege, or a war on two fronts—the Fon army travelled quickly towards their objective. The best means of attack had already been learned from the spies. The essence of any Fon attack was surprise, preferably at dawn. The Fon army would frequently make a false start—feigning to be about to make war in an an area far from its real objective—in order to lull its victims into a false sense of security. The Dahomans attacked in an arc formation with the Gaou in command of the right wing, the Kposi in command of the left and the

1 A.Le Herissé, op.cit., p.69.

Amazons, also divided into right and left under their own officers, at the centre.¹ The King's Amazon body-guard, whose place was officially between the two Amazon wings, were normally held in reserve and only used as emergency reinforcements. The Amazon regiments had the most ferocious reputation of all the troops and in difficult attacks like those on Atakpame in 1848, Abeokuta in 1850, and Cotonou in 1892, bore the brunt of the attack. In most of its campaigns during the course of the nineteenth century the Fon army acted as a unified force. In order to combat attack on a number of fronts during the war against the French, however, the Fon divided their forces into separate units, each

1 Some of the nineteenth century commentators state that the Migan commanded the first male regiment on the right wing of the army while the Gaou commanded only the second: similarly, the Mehoul was said to command the right division and the Kposu the left division on the left wing. Although there are records of the Gaou and the she-Gaou having taken part in, and, indeed, having been killed in battle, there is no record of any such thing happening to the Migan or the Mehoul.

under one of the great officials. Even at full strength, as in the campaigns against the Egba and the French, it is doubtful if the Fon had ever more than 16,000 to 20,000 troops under arms.

When on campaign each soldier was supplied with weapons and ammunition. The levies, however, received no pay and had to find and carry their own provisions. Every soldier, in theory, was supposed to bring back a captive, or a head, for the King, who bought them at a fixed price at one of the customary post-campaign ceremonies in Dahomey. In this way the King, in the first decades of the century, was supplied with slaves for export and, in the second, with slaves to work the palm oil plantations. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the Fon forces were armed with trade guns. Thanks to Gezo's close association with Francisco Felix Da Souza, these were abundantly available in the first half of the century. Dahomey was not, however, provided with repeater rifles as soon as its Yoruba neighbours.¹

¹ See Chapter III, p. 203

It was only just before the final overthrow of the Kingdom that the Fon obtained from the German traders at Whydah any large supply of these weapons. The greatest losses sustained by Fon troops seem to have occurred, however, not as a result of enemy action, but as a result of the ravages of disease.¹

There were, besides what might be described as the official standing army, other organised bands of permanent Dahoman fighters. These were the male and female game hunters. Their main duty was to supply the Palace with fresh meat, but they had, as a secondary task, the policing of the countryside.²

1 There is a great deal of tangled information available on the Fon army in both secondary and primary material. The following have been found most useful:
M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., pp.70-101:
A.Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.59-72:
A.J. Skertchly, op.cit., pp.443-60:
R.F.Burton, op.cit., pp.63-86:
M.M.C. Dahomey III, Bayol to Etienne, 'Military Information' Porto Novo 11.1.70, Reproduced in part in J.Bayol, 'Les Forces Militaires au Dahomey,' Revue Scientifique, Paris, 1892.

2 A.Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.89-90.

In this police work they acted in co-operation with the soldiers stationed at the various toll posts throughout the Kingdom. The soldiers watched travellers and could if necessary 'close' the paths. The hunters, at the same time, scoured the countryside for malefactors—in particular runaway slaves. As a means of controlling criminals this system was probably effective;¹ as a means of controlling political movements in the country, completely ineffective. Many of the toll posts were under the control of the great Chiefs,² and besides, the hunters were themselves officered by members of the 'political' class.

The civilian ^{unlwa} ~~beaure~~cracy and the military machine were two of the great institutions of Fon corporate life. Another was the organised religious life, taking place around the various cult houses erected for the worship of the 'Great Gods'. The followers of these

1 A. Skertchly, op.cit., pp.84-85:
A. Le Herissé, op.cit., pp.88-89.

2 The King frequently 'gave the right' to levy toll to a favoured Chief.

cults, who made about half the population of the Kingdom, were closely supervised by the chief Priest of each house. According to anthropological accounts, the cult houses were rigidly controlled by the monarchy.¹ Little or no direct evidence exists as to how far the monarch was actually able to watch over the activities of the priests. It does, however, seem unlikely that the cult houses—whose chief Priests came from the same families as the other Fon leaders—were in fact closely supervised. More probably the priestly class was involved in the same jockeying for position as were the leaders of other institutions of Fon life. One of the dominating figures of nineteenth century Dahoman political life, Nougobodhoue, was, after all, a priest. Moreover, there is some indication that the priests of one of the most important cults, that of Sakpata, the smallpox cult, were traditionally hostile

1 M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., pp.132-4.

to monarchical power.¹ The great emphasis placed publicly upon the cult of the royal ancestors probably arose out of continual attempts by successive kings to magnify the importance of the monarchy vis-a-vis the cults.²

Decisions of state, to be put into operation by the ^{written} bureaucracy, the army, and the priests were taken at Abomey by the 'political' class acting in the name of the King. Important decisions, those which involved argument, tended to be taken only during the annual customs of July-August or November-December,³ when all the able-bodied Chiefs of Dahomey were assembled

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- 1 Palau-Marti, op.cit., p.133.
No source for this is given although by implication it would appear to be oral. The examples given date from the eighteenth century, not from the nineteenth.
 - 2 This would apply to the growth of the ceremonies until the death of Gezo. The growth of the ceremonial making of human sacrifices, after Gezo's death, was probably the result of an emphasising of traditional and anti-foreign policies.
 - 3 The dates of the customs varied: the date of the first might, on occasions, be in June rather than in July or August.

together.¹ They came together to celebrate the religious rites due to the monarchy, to present reports, to discuss the next season's campaign and to bring tribute. It was then that there took place the complicated bargaining and the occasional outbursts of hysterical violence which characterised Fon political life.

It was in July-August and November-December that the most important ceremonies of the Fon year took place. The Fon Court was, however, throughout the year involved in a continual round of ceremonial duties—customs. This has been somewhat obscured by the way in which contemporary writers used the term 'customs'. Originally the word meant the charges paid to the King at a certain season of the year.² It came to mean the

1 Politically, the July-August ceremonial seems to have been the more important.

2 R.F.Skertchly, op.cit., p.178:
R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.200.
Skertchly gives the following definition:
'certain state cereomonies, the performance of which has become imperative through long usage.'

the ceremonies seen by the Europeans when they visited Abomey to pay their respects to the King. By the nineteenth century the word had come to cover every ceremony seen in Abomey. A distinction was made only for the Grand Customs, which were celebrated after the death of a king. Every ceremony seen in Dahomey in a normal year was, however, described as part of the 'annual customs'. Few visitors, however, stayed in the Abomey plateau for more than three months and each tended to assume that the ceremonies he witnessed were the Dahoman customs. In their writings they convey the impression that elaborate court ritual lasted only for about three months. This was not the case: the Court was, throughout the year, apart from the campaign season, involved in a continuous round of ceremonial duties. Indeed, even the annual campaign might be described as a ceremonial duty.

Practically every event in the life of the Fon state required ritual expression—royal funerals, the return of an army from war, or the paying of tribute. These ceremonies can be divided into two types: the

public and the private. In order to enhance their prestige most of the Kings attempted to add to the number of public celebrations. Not surprisingly, Gezo's reign was the period of the nineteenth century most fertile in new ceremonial forms. His reign saw, for example, in commemoration of the defeat of the Oyo, the inauguration of the 'Oyo customs' at Cana. This ceremony which usually took place in June after the return of the army from war, had as its outstanding feature the sacrifice of a number of men dressed in the costume of the Oyo.¹ Gezo's reign also produced the much-remarked Gun Custom: the firing to Whydah—a custom which seems to have been designed to emphasise the King's close association with the Whydah merchants and the prosperity which the association had brought to Dahomey.²

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- 1 J.Duncan, op.cit., Vol.I, p.219:
R.F.Burton, op.cit., p.126:
A.J.Skertchly, op.cit., pp.179-80.

- 2 A.J.Skertchly, op.cit., p.421.
He declares that the custom was instituted by F.F. De Souza. After the reign of Gezo it was practised in a much less spectacular fashion, since it was in fact very expensive. The last time it was performed was in 1885 to celebrate the Portugese alliance.

In spite of nineteenth century innovations, the most important public ceremonies, the Sosin or Horse Tying Custom and the Attoh or Platform Custom, remained basically the same as in the eighteenth century. These were 'made' by the King for his father; the 'Bush King also 'made' customs for his father. It was these customs, those involving large scale human sacrifice, which the various European¹ writers usually described.

Perhaps politically less important, but more important for the perpetuation of the Fon state, and, indeed, the Fon world, were the private ceremonies conducted by the King and his immediate attendants. Such were the Hwe-Li-Len, or the seasonal custom¹ celebrating the rebirth of the monarch, and the Sin-

1 For a useful outline of these customs see C.Coquery-Vidrovitch, *La fête des coutumes au Dahomey*. Annales Vol.19, no.4.1964.

2 See above, pp.441-443.

Kwain or Watering of the King's Grave custom.¹

By far the greatest number of human sacrifices, of course, took place during the Grand Customs, or ceremonies taking place after the death of a King. In the nineteenth century only one such celebration took place. Adanzan was deposed, he did not die: Gelele had no major funeral ceremonies because in the years after his death his countrymen were heavily involved in foreign wars. The Grand Customs of 1858-60, following the death of Gezo, are therefore unique.

The first major ceremony took place in January 1859, when the King's body was placed in a vast grave and surrounded by the bodies of a number of his wives and male attendants. This was the King's official burial. He would have been given a preliminary burial

1 A.J.Skertchly, op.cit., pp.383-413. Skertchly was the only European to witness and record this ceremony. M.J.Herskovits, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.57-69. Herskovits was present at a Colonial celebration of this ceremony. R.F.Burton, op.cit., pp.308-314: F.E.Forbes, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.128-174. Both these observers were in Abomey when the ceremony took place, but they did not actually witness it.

immediately after he died. This would have been a secret ceremony that probably took place before the public announcement of his death and one that involved very few human sacrifices.¹ In January 1859 about 800 people, some of them the King's slave-wives, some his male retainers, either killed themselves, or were killed, in order that they might accompany the King to the here-²after. The grave was then temporarily closed.

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- 1 1 J.Poirier, Mort Du Roi Messi including Baudin to Planque, Porto Novo 16.4.75: Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, 1876, Vol.37, and also in Missions Catholiques, 1875. The preliminary burial was a normal Fon device. The ceremonies following the death of a Dahoman King closely resembled those performed on similar occasions in Porto Novo. The preliminary burial in Porto Novo was also a secret affair.
- 2 F.O.84/1088, Cambell to Malmsbury, Lagos 4.2.1859. A.Le Herisse, op.cit., pp.178-181: J.Poirier, Mort Du Roi Messi, including Baudin to Planque, Porto Novo 16.4.75: Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, 1876, Vol.37, also in Missions Catholiques 1875. Since the figure of 800 came to Consul Cambell second or third-hand, it cannot be regarded as reliable. However, it does broadly correspond with the number of human sacrifices made at later funeral ceremonies. Nobody of importance was sacrificed to accompany the King. In Porto Novo important Ministers delegated slaves to be sacrificed as a substitute for themselves. Probably the same thing happened in Abomey.

Eighteen months later the grave was re-opened in preparation for the year-long ceremonies which accompanied the official installation of the new King. The focal point of these ceremonies seems to have been the removal of the deceased King's head¹ and its display to the crowd by the new King. A French trader named Lartique, who was present at a number of the ceremonies which took place in July and August 1861, reported that he saw Gezo in his

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- 1 Travassos Valdez, Six Years of a Travellers' Life in West Africa, Vol. I Chapter VI:
Dr. Repin, 'Voyage Au Dahomey' Tour De Monde,
1863, p.67.

Valdez was never in Abomey, but was on good terms with the Whydah Portuguese who knew more about traditional Fon ceremonial than any other non-Dahomans. Although he visited Whydah just before Gelele's installation, the forthcoming ceremonies were probably a constant topic of conversation in Whydah. Repin, on this point, simply quotes Valdez.

grave, surrounded by the bodies of 600 women,¹ and that he himself witnessed the killing of over 700 men while he was in Abomey. He stated, moreover, that another 700 were going to be killed in October of that same year.² This impressive report is borne out by the much less detailed account left by the Rev. P. Bernasko, who was also present at a number of these ceremonies and who estimated that about 2,000 people³ had been massacred for Gezo's funeral ceremonies.⁴ Altogether, Bernasko's estimate does not seem unreasonable: if anything it is too conservative.

1 This figure therefore accords well with Cambell's figure of 800 killings in the 1859 ceremonies.

2 M.A.E.Afrique 51, J.Lartique, 'Relation du Voyage a Dahomey (1861)' partly reproduced in W.Brunschwig 'L'Avenir De L'Afrique Noire du XIX Sciecle a nos Jours', Quoted by E.Dunglas, E.D.XX, pp.103-6.

3 All of those sacrificed were either captives or slaves. See Chap.III p.165.

4 Extract from a letter from the Rev. P. Bernasco, Whydah 29.11.1860: Wesleyan Missionary Notices, 25.2.61 reproduced in R.Burton, op.cit., 1864 edition, Appendix III, Vol.I, p.330.

It is well-nigh impossible to make even an approximate estimate of the number of human sacrifices made in Dahomey during an 'average' year.¹ There is no evidence whatsoever as to how many human sacrifices were made in the first half of Gezo's reign. In the second half of his reign, as a result of English influence, the numbers fell. Forbes in 1850 saw only 34 sacrifices: he nevertheless states that 140 sacrifices had been made in 1849. There can be little doubt that during the reigns of Gelele and Behanzin fantastic numbers of beings were killed in the course of the public festivals. Euschart in 1852 saw 80: Wilmot in 1862 saw 20: Burton in 1864 saw 80: Tickel in 1867 saw 150: Skertchly in 1871 saw 70: Bayol in 1889 saw 80.

These men witnessed only the public celebrations. They were, moreover, in Dahomey for only about 3 months and therefore did not know of all the ceremonies. Taking these facts into consideration, Skertchly estimated that

1 If indeed there ever was such a thing as an 'average' year. Human sacrifices were made not only for the death of a King, but also for his mother. It may be that they were also made for the dead King's 'mothers'.

about 200 human sacrifices must have been made during the year in which he visited Abomey.¹ This figure seems particularly reliable since Skertchly, who was permitted to see more than most Europeans visiting Abomey, does not appear to have been a man likely to exaggerate. He had, moreover, the benefit of being able to check his observations against Burton's attempt to cut down to size all imaginative reports of Fon blood orgies.

The great majority of the victims were either prisoners of war or slaves. Some visitors to Abomey were assured that the victims were all criminals. One of the travellers (Wilmot) was however able to identify the victims he had been told were criminals, as Yorubas. Most witnesses agree that those sacrificed were normally

1 Bayol spoke of 200 victims during his stay: he did not see them. Tickel, in a very vague report, seemingly designed to paint Dahomey in as bad a light as possible, estimated the number of victims sacrificed at almost 500 during his stay.

¹
prisoners of war.

The upkeep of the great ever-increasing apparatus of state, and the royal clan, made for a very considerable economic drain on the resources of the country.

The vast majority of Dahoman producers cultivated the land. Their's was a subsistence economy: only if agriculture failed, as it did in 1849, did they starve. The ruling classes were economically parasitic: part of their upkeep came from the payment of taxes on agricultural produce, part from the payment of tribute. Most of the funds which supported them came, however, from trade and taxes on trade. Some of this income came from internal trade and from Dahoman trade with

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- 1 The paragraphs on the customs are based on the following books, Duncan, Forbes, Burton, Skertchly, Le Herisse and Herskovits and on the reports listed below.
Commodore 'Wilmot's' Report (pub. by Burton).
C.O.147/14, Tickel to Glover, Badagry 22.8.67:
C.O.147/14, Glover to Blackall, Lagos 4.2.68:
J.Bayol, M.M.C. Dahomey III_{3b}, Rapport
Journalier de Mission à Abomey, Porto Novo 5.1.90.
M.Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'La Fête des Coutumes au Dahomey', Annals, July, 1964, this article gives a useful survey of the Dahoman customs.

neighbouring states. It is practically impossible to determine how great this was: contemporary writings indicate that revenue from this source was not insignificant:

'On arriving at the square about two-o'clock in the afternoon of today, I was surprised to see a considerable increase in the number of Muslim spectators to the Custom. I was afterwards told that a large party of Hausa, and other northern people, had arrived on a visit to the Kingdom to dispose of their wares, and also to buy slaves. From repeated inquiries I ascertained that these traders succeeded in buying ninety-four of the Nago captives from the King, the price he received being on the average about sixty dollars (\$12) per man.' ¹

Most of the revenue for the upkeep of the Court and its personnel came, however, directly or indirectly from the profits of trade with the Europeans. In the first half of Gezo's reign, De Souza, controlling the greater part of Dahomey's trade with Europe, made generous grants to the royal treasury. Gezo, as a

1 J.A.Skertchly, op.cit., p.346.

result, was able to obtain arms, bribe and buy the Great Chiefs, and pursue an ostentatious policy of extravagant public consumption. He was in fact, for almost two decades, well able to provide for the upkeep of the ruling class.

In the 1840s, after the onset of De Souza's financial embarrassments, it was the difficulty of maintaining this lavish expenditure that convinced Gezo his country needed a new staple trade, while he himself needed a new ally. He did manage to provide the new export trade, but he could not find the new ally. It was not the economic crisis of the early 1840s, nor indeed the famine of 1849, but the political search for a new ally in the 1850s that destroyed Gezo. The political climate at the beginning of Gelele's reign severely hampered the growth of the new palm oil trade: nevertheless, it survived and for the remainder of the century provided adequately, if not lavishly, for the upkeep of the Court and the ruling class. It was, therefore, only between the 1840s and 1850s that the Fon economy was under any real strain during the nineteenth

century. Even during these decades political upheavals were only partly caused by economic troubles.

The instability of the Fon state was due to political rather than to economic weakness: it was due to the political strength of a constantly feuding ruling class. Gezo and Kondo were intent upon building a monarchy strong enough to control this class. Building on the foundations laid by eighteenth century monarchs, these two leaders expanded the centralised system of Government. It was remarkable in its time, and place, even if not so complete as present-day Fon traditions indicate. Alongside their system there continued in existence, however, a form of non-centralised government, with powerful Chiefs in control of the levers of power. During the course of the century these Chiefs were able to penetrate into the apparatus of state-government and thus render it useless as a form of monarchical control.

Sometimes, as in the great days of Gezo, it seemed that a strong central government might finally be established: at other times, as in the first two decades of Gelele's reign, Fon politics were simply the politics of anarchy: sometimes, as when Kondo was Crown Prince

the two elements in Fon political society struggled openly for supremacy. The strife, however, was always there. It was this continual struggle for power which explains the proliferation in the Fon system of government of the various checks on bureaucratic power. It also explains the spirit of treachery and suspicion which pervaded Fon political life. The underlying conflict goes a good deal of the way towards explaining the periodic outbreaks of hysterical and murderous violence indulged in by the ruling class. It also gives a background to the almost incredible horror of the continuous mass slaughter which characterised Fon religious life.

E P I L O G U E

THE CONQUEST

EPILOGUE

THE CONQUEST 1892-94

Colonel Dodds arrived at Cotonou on the 20th May 1892. His instructions were to take measures to guarantee French possessions on the Slave Coast against Dahoman attack, to study the situation there and to put the Government in a position to take a decision on future policy. Besides this, he was to occupy Whydah and inflict upon the Fon a defeat severe enough to ensure that they would be willing to treat seriously with France.¹

The Colonel advised that a severe blow could best be effected by an attack on Abomey; he recommended that such an attack should be made by way of the River Ouémé. The government accepted Dodd's proposals and agreed to despatch to the Slave Coast the troops he considered

1 R.Cornevin, Histoire du Dahomey, pp.339-357. 'Les Divers Episodes De La Lutte Contre Le Royaume d'Abomey (1887-1894)' in Revue Française d'Histoire D'Outre-Mer, vol.47, 1960 pp.161-212. Cornevin gives a very useful accurate account of the conquest. There are, of course, a great number of contemporary histories of the conquest, see Bibliography. None really adds anything to the official accounts on which the above has been based.

necessary for such a campaign.¹

The Fon were aware of French movements and of course prepared to resist. They amassed an army which must have consisted of between 12,000 and 15,000 men.² The French began their not unexpected attack by a sea bombardment of various Dahoman coastal towns. A section of the newly formed Expeditionary Force then advanced along Lake Nokoué and forced the Fon army watching Porto Novo to withdraw. After having cleared the Porto Novo area the French began the first stage of their campaign against Abomey by moving up the River Ouémé as far as Gbede. On the 4th October they began their overland attack and advanced via Paguessá, Samio, Koto, Kotokpa, Ouaka and Diokoue to Cana, which they entered on the 6th November.³

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{6a} Dodd's Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Chapter I.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{6a} Dodd's Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Chapter I. C.W.Newbury, op.cit., p.123. Newbury considers the numbers of Fon troops involved to have been between 8,000 and 10,000.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{6a} Dodd's Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Chapter VI. A.Le Herisse, p.346. Dodd's report and Le Herisse's account can be taken as the official account of the war from both sides.

The Fon fought the French all along the line. At every spot which could be defended they put up a furious resistance. Nevertheless, the Dahomans found it impossible to prevent the inexorable advance. A French bayonet charge always scattered even their finest troops.

During the advance on Cana the French lost only 11 officers and 70 men.¹ Disease carried off more of these than did Dahoman fire power. Fon resistance, although heroic, was hardly very effective.² The French were, because of the Fon habit of always removing their dead from the field of battle, never able to ascertain exactly how many Dahomans they had killed. It is fairly certain, however, that the Amazon corps and the Royal army were practically wiped out;

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Conclusion.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Chapter VI: R.Cornevin, op.cit., p.343. On the 6th October the French captured and shot three Germans and a Belgian who had been with the Fon army. Presumably they had been instructing the Dahomans in the use of their newly-purchased weapons.

losses amongst the Princes of the Blood were also said to have been exceptionally heavy. Although no accurate figure can be given, Fon losses must have amounted¹ to between 3,000 and 5,000 dead.

With the French army before Cana, Behanzin offered² to make peace. However, owing to the French over-estimation of Dahoman resources, the Fon proved quite³ unable to meet the invaders exorbitant demands. The Expeditionary Force then resumed its march on Abomey and entered the partly destroyed capital on the 17th November.⁴

The invaders now considered that their main task was over. They now hoped that the non-Dahoman peoples,

1 E.Dunglas, E.D.No.XXI, p.82.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on the Campaign of 1892-93, Chapter VI. He had already done so at Koto, but had been unable to accept the French demand that the Fon abandon their defensive positions.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on the Campaign of 1892-93, Chapter VI. M.M.C. Dahomey I^{8b} Dodds' to Marine, Porto Novo 23.11.1893.

4 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on the Campaign of 1892-93, Chapter VI: M.M.C. Dahomey I^{8b} Dodds to Marine, Porto Novo 23.11.1893.

or the Fon themselves, would rise against the defeated Behanzin, kill him and perhaps put in his place someone¹ with whom the French might deal more easily. When this did not happen, and when the Fon did not submit,² the French issued a proclamation deposing Behanzin.

Illness amongst the troops, and difficulties in communications in the dry season, made the French work to end operations as quickly as possible. Dodds, now promoted to General, left Abomey for Porto Novo on the 30th of November. The Abomey expeditionary force was dissolved on the 1st of December. Only four posts³ manned by French troops were left north of the Lama.

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{8a} Lambinet to Marine, Whydah 30(?).5.1893.

2 M.A.E. Afrique 12 Proclamation by Dodds, Porto Novo 3.12.1892.

3 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1892-3. Chapter VI.
M.M.C. Dahomey V^{10a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4. Introduction.

Having largely withdrawn from the Abomey plateau, the French proceeded to occupy the lands of the old kingdoms of Whydah and Allada. They encountered no opposition in these territories.¹

In the north, Behanzin and his followers had withdrawn to Atcheribe where the King began to re-organise his shattered forces. The population of the area in which Behanzin established himself was completely loyal. The King was, moreover, able to draw food supplies from the fertile province of Agony. Behanzin evidently expected the French to behave as the Yoruba invaders had previously done; to maintain some sort of remote control in return for the payment of tribute. The withdrawal of the greater part of the French force South of the Lama must have strengthened this belief.

The Fon army gradually reassembled and Behanzin, by March 1893, was able to count on the support of 2,000 armed men. A start was even made on the recruitment of

1 M.A.E. Afrique 127, Dodds to Marine, 16.12.1892. Tel.
M.M.C. Dahomey V^{6a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1892-3, Chapter VII.

young girls to take the place of the fallen Amazons. Royal control was gradually reasserted over all the Abomey plateau outside the French posts.¹ Armed bands of up to 20 Fon warriors regularly patrolled the area. The French posts North of the Lama even began to fear for their communications with the Coast.

While rebuilding their position at home, the Fon tried to obtain external assistance. They attempted to win German support, and, on the advice of a contact in Lagos, named Jackson, they even sent an embassy to Paris to appeal for the personal intervention of the French President. These Fon attempts to win European sympathy² of course gained them nothing.

1 M.A.E. Afrique 127 Dodds to Marine,
Porto Novo 11.12.1892:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{10a} Dodds' Report on
Campaign 1893-4, Chapter I:
M.M.C. Dahomey I_{8c} Dodds to Marine,
Whydah 20.4.1893:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{8b} Lambinet to Marine,
Whydah 25.6.1893:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{8a} Dumas to Marine,
Whydah 8.7.1893.

2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{10a} Dodds' Report on
Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter I:
A. Le Herisse, op.cit., p.348:
E. Denglas, E.D.XXI, p.97-8
R. Cornevin, op.cit., p.349.

While looking to Europe the Dahomans also, during April 1893, conducted a series of abortive peace negotiations with the Europeans stationed on the coast. The Fon were willing to cede the area south of the Lama, to accept a French protectorate, and to hand over all their arms and ammunition. They would not, however, accept that Behanzin be deposed.¹

The continuing existence of the Dahoman state and the refusal of the Fon to accept French terms, convinced the French on-the-spot that another major expedition would have to be undertaken against Dahomey.² The metropolitan government agreed, and General Dodds, who had left the Slave Coast on 23rd April, returned on the 30th August, with instructions to pacify the country.³

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{8a} Lambinet to Marine, Report on Negotiations with Behanzin, March to May 1893:
M.M.C. Dahomey V_{10a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter I.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{8a} Lambinet to Marine, Report on Negotiations with Behanzin, March to May, 1893.
 - 3 M.M.C. Dahomey V_{10a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter I.

In the face of a renewed invasion the Fon saw that resistance was impossible, and again attempted to make peace. On the 3rd November, Fon messengers arrived in the French camp offering to hand over all their remaining arms and ammunition provided that their King's title was respected. Dodds took no notice of the Fon terms and told messengers that if the Princes and Chiefs wished to surrender they would have to give themselves up. Many of the important chiefs now began to submit to the French. By the 20th December the French held the majority of the Dahoman leaders captive and had effectively occupied the Abomey plateau. Behanzin was reduced to the position of a fugitive, fleeing from village to village with an escort of only four or five men.

With the most important Dahomans now in their charge, the French began to take soundings as to where to find a new monarch. It soon became apparent that the old antagonisms in the royal house had by no means died away. The French found a number of former friends of Gelele who were

1 M.M.C. Dahomey Vol. 10a, Dodds' Report on
Campaign of 1933-10a, ~~Shastone~~ VI.
893-4; Chapters V & VI.

hostile to Behanzin. Indeed, many of the royal clan, seeing, presumably, a chance of saving their positions, began to echo the French contention that Behanzin alone had been responsible for the war with the French. On the advice of those members of the royal family willing to co-operate with the French, Dodds chose Prince Goutchili, a brother of Behanzin and a former Gaou, as the next King of Dahomey. This Prince was then designated King by the unanimous choice of the Princes and¹ Caboceers assembled by the French.

According to an account given later by one of the Fon Princes, the Fon aristocracy were told that Behanzin supported this move. Only later did they discover that Goutchili was involved in an underhand manoeuvre to gain the throne.² Since Dodds' principal adviser was Behanzin's former rival, Topa, it is hardly surprising that something of a plot against Behanzin had occurred. When Dodds

1 M.M.C. Dahomey V. Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter VI.

2 A. Le Herissé, op.cit., pp. 351-2
E. Dunlas, E.D. XXI, p. 104.
P. Hazaume, op.cit., pp. 36-8.
Hazaume considers that Goutcheli was in fact chosen by Behanzin and made a blood pact with the former King. This does not seem to accord with the evidence.

chose him as King, Goutcheli had not actually made his peace with France. Topa and a daughter of Gelele, named Yaya, soon, however, brought him to Dodds. He was, then, on the 15th of January, presented to the people under the title of Agoli-Agbo, the new King of Dahomey.¹

On the 25th of January the new King informed Dodds that he knew where Behanzin was hiding. A detachment of French troops was sent to the ex-King's place of concealment, and Behanzin was persuaded to give himself up.² On the 29th of January the puppet King, Agoli-Agbo, signed a treaty of protection with France.³ The Kingdom of Dahomey was shorn of the coastal regions and Allada. In the future the King was to reign only under the guidance of the French Resident. In 1900 even the fiction of the continuing Fon monarchy was abandoned.⁴

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- 1 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{10a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter VI.
 - 2 M.M.C. Dahomey V^{10a} Dodds' Report on Campaign of 1893-4, Chapter VI.
 - 3 R.Cornevin, op.cit., pp.355-7
Cornevin reproduces the treaty.
E.Dunlas, E.D.XXI, pp.110-113.
 - 4 G.W.Newbury, 'A Note on the Abomey Protectorate', Africa, Vol.XXIV, No.2. April 1959.

The memory of Behanzin's kingdom was, however, kept alive in that in June 1894,¹ its name was bestowed on the new French colony. Since then Dahomey has been the name of a state far greater than the nineteenth century Fon kingdom.

1 M.M.C. Dahomey VII,^c Presidential Decree of 22nd June, 1894.

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This series has been used extensively and was found to be especially valuable between 1845-1865. Volumes consulted have been those containing Fernando Po, Lagos and Whydah consular correspondence and those containing reports forwarded to the F.O. by the C.O. and the Admiralty. Useful information, often provided by merchants, was also found in these volumes which come under the heading 'domestic various'.
- F.O.2/1 Slave trade Domestic and Various 1825-1838.
- F.O.2/3-47 Consular Correspondence 1847-66. Information from the consuls found in the Slave Trade series was usually found to concern Dahomey much more closely.
- F.O.403 Africa and the Slave Trade. Confidential Prints.

Colonial Office Records

Since the C.O. volumes normally contain an index it was possible to obtain material from a vast number of volumes.

C.O.96 Gold Coast Original Correspondence 1843-49; 1883-85. This series was found particularly useful in the eighteen forties before consuls were placed in the Bight of Benin. It also contains Lagos correspondence 1883-5.

C.O.147 Lagos Original Correspondence 1861-1894. This series is, after the mid eighteen sixties, the most fertile source, in the English records, of information on Dahomey.

C.O.267 Sierre Leone Original Correspondence It has been found useful occasionally, especially in dealing with the affairs of the Popos, to refer to this series.

C.O.806 and C.O.870? Africa : Confidential Prints.

It was sometimes more convenient, and sometimes, because the originals had been destroyed, essential, to consult the confidential prints.

AdmiraltyI. In letter 1816-40, from officers of the West Africa Squadron. In the second and third decade of the nineteenth century this series supplements the slave trade file. After the mid eighteen thirties all the relevant information was found in the Foreign Office records.

French Archives : Colonial Archives (in custody of the Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer).

The documents in these archives are classified according to territory and subject. Material on Dahomey is therefore found under a series of headings. The system leads to frequent duplication and to the occasional appearance of documents in somewhat unlikely folders. Only those folders which have been found to contain relevant material are listed below. After 1878 these archives were by far the most fertile source of material on Dahoman history.

AFRIQUE I 4 - 10. Letters to and from the Officer commanding the Naval Division (1842-54).

IV 9 - 11. The Independent Kingdom of Dahomey (1845-88).

VI 36, 43, 53, 67, 68, 82, 83, 92, 100, 107, 109, 116. Diplomatics Affairs (Germany and Portugal) 1883 - 94.

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I 89 - General Correspondence 1886-89. (In fact this folder contains Lt. Roget's despatches from August to December 1886.)

III 5b - Voyage of the Malouine 1837-40.

III 20 - Diplomatic Affairs; Portugal.

IV 19d - Diplomatic Affairs; England, Porto Novo 1886-90.

IV 42 - Correspondence concerning Whydah 1818-50.

IV 120-125 - Expansion territoriale et politique indigène Benin 1886-1889.

GABON I 25 - 28 - General Correspondence, Benin June 1884- September 1886.

IV 3 - Expansion territoriale et politique indigène
a, The Popos 1881-5,
b, c, d, Porto Novo and Cotonou 1865-88.

VI 1b - Diplomatic Affairs; England; Porto Novo 1863-5.

VI 4 - 5 - Diplomatic Affairs. Portugal, 1864-1902.

VII 1c - Administrative Organisation; Porto Novo 1863.

- VII_{4d} - Administrative Organisation; Cotonou 1871 - 79.
- VII₆ - Administrative Organisation; Porto Novo and Cotonou 1882-84.
- XIII₂ - Commerce; Porto Novo 1859-66.
- DAHOMÉY I₁₋₈ - General Correspondence September 1889 - April 1893.
- III₁₋₂ - Explorations, Missions 1889-93. Angot; Bayol; Ballot; Audeoud.
- IV₁₋₅ - Expansion territoriale et politique indigène 1889-95. Relations with chiefs.
- V₁₋₁₁ - Military expeditions; relations with Dahomey 1889-94.
- VI₂ - Diplomatic Affairs 1889-95. Native recruitment.
- VI₃ - Diplomatic Affairs; relations with Germany.
- VII₁ - General Administration; Administrative Organisation 1889-95.

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris.

The material concerning Dahomey has been found in the bound volumes of Mémoires et Documents. These contain correspondence with the Marine, with merchants and with

deputies etc. These documents often supplement the more extensive M.M.C. collection.

Mémoires et Documents. Afrique. 51-54, 76-83, 125-127.

Etablissements français du Golfe de Guinée
(1838-94).

Archives in West Africa

French West African Archives contain a great deal of material relating to Dahoman history. Since, however, it was much more convenient to use the Paris archives reference has only been made to those files containing documents not available in Paris.

Government - General Archives - Dakar.

Series 8.G. - contains correspondence on Dahoman political, administrative and muslim affairs 1886-1920.

8.G. 1-3 - Political situation and administrative organisation 1886-98.

Dahoman National Archives - Porto Novo

This collection is uncatalogued. Titles refer to folders and bound volumes of manuscripts.

General Correspondence 1887-88, 1888-89.

Missionary Archives

The correspondence contained in both relevant archival collections (those of the Methodist Missionary and the Society of African Missions) is uneven both in bulk and in value. Missionary correspondence nevertheless produced a series of insights into Dahoman affairs. The archives of the S.M.A. are moreover exceptionally useful during the 1880s in that they produce a coherent non-official view of the activities of French administrators.

Methodist Missionary Archives

Relevant material is classified under:

Correspondence: West Africa: Gold Coast.

Biographical: West Africa: Box 2, Box 3 and Box 4.

Society of African Mission Archives - Rome

The correspondence from the missionaries on the Bight of Benin (Dahomey, Old Vicariate 1861-71, Dahomey, Vicariate du Benin 1871-82, Dahoman Prefecture 1883-91) is classified by year under the general reference 12/80200.

Unpublished Theses

A.A.B. Aderbigbe: Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate
1863-1900, Ph.D., London, 1959.

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Ph.D. London 1963.

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Africa 1830-1865. Ph.D. Cambridge, 1959.

W.H. Scotter: International Rivalry in the Bights of
Benin and Biafra, Ph.D. London, 1933.

N.H. Stillard: The Rise and Development of Legitimate
Trade in Palm Oil with West Africa. Birmingham,
M.A. 1938.

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a) British

Parliamentary Papers:

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1847-48. XXII (272, 366, 536, 623) Four Reports from Select
Committee on the Slave Trade.

1849 XIX (309, 410) Two Reports following session.

1850 IX (53,590) Report of Select Committee of House of Lords.

1852 LIV (221) Papers relating to the reduction of Lagos
by H.M.'s forces.

1861 LXIV (1) Slave Trade Correspondence, Africa (Consular).

1861 LXV (2904) Despatches relating to the taking of Porto
Novo.

1862 LXI (1) Slave Trade Correspondence, Africa (Consular).

1862 LXI (339, 365) Papers relating to the occupation of
Lagos.

1865 XXXVII (533) Papers on War between Native Tribes in
the neighbourhood of Lagos.

1887 LX (1,167) Correspondence between Native Tribes in
the interior and negotiations for peace con-
ducted by Government of Lagos.

C.W. Newbury: British Policy towards West Africa. Select
Documents (1786-1874), Oxford 1965.

E. Hertslet: The Map of Africa by Treaty, (London 2nd
edition 1896).

b) French

Annales Maritimes et Coloniales 1816-47 (after 1843
one volume called Revue Coloniale)

continued as Revue coloniale 1848-58

" " Revue algérienne et coloniale 1858-61

" " Revue Maritime et Coloniale 1861-96

Extracts from the reports of administrators and explorers
were published in this official journal.

Etudes Dahoméennes, No. IX Porto Novo 1953. A selection of documents from the local archives, by J. Lombard.

A. de Launay Pawlowski: Bibliographie raisonnée des ouvrages concernant le Dahomey, Paris 1895.

c) Works containing primary material

Books and articles containing oral traditions have been listed under this heading. Very often, however, such works also contain the collector's comments and interpretations. The classification of such compilations cannot therefore be exact.

A.L. D'Albeca: Le Dahomey en 1894. Paris 1895.

... La France au Dahomey. Paris 1895.

... Les Etablissements français du Golfe de Benin. Paris 1889.

... Au Dahomey Hier et Aujourd' Hui in "Revue de Famille" Paris May 1892.

... Au Dahomey in "Tour du Monde", Paris 1895.

... Au Pays des Eoues, in "Tour de Monde", Paris 1895.

A. Akindélé et C. Aguessy: Le Dahomey. Paris 1955.

Contribution à l'étude d'histoire de l'ancien royaume de Porto Novo. Mémoires Acad' Ifan. No. 25 Dakar 1953.

- Casmir Agbo: L'histoire de Whydah. Avignon 1959.
- V. Ballot: Mission Dahomey et Golfe du Benin. Revue Francais, Paris January 1891.
- N. Baudin: La Guerre Civile à Porto Novo in "Missions Catholiques" Lyons February 1875.
- J. Bayol: Les Forces Militaires du Dahomey in "Revue Scientifique, vol.49, Paris 1891.
- ... L'Attaque de Cotonou in 'Revue Bleu', Paris 1892.
- M. Beraud: Note sure le Dahomey in "Bulletin de la Société Géographique", vol. 12, Paris 1866.
- Capitaine Bertin: Reseignments sur le royaume de Porto Novo et Le Dahomey. Revue Maritime et Coloniale 1890.
- A. Borghero: La Guinee et Le Dahomey in Annals of the Propagation of the Faith 1862, 63, 64, 67.
- Capt. Blanchely: Voyages à Abomey. Missions Catholiques, t 23, 1891.
- J.E. Bouche: Note sur les Republics Minas de la Côte des Esclaves in Bulletin de la Société Géographique, Paris 1875.
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Mayer) London 1935, edited by A. W. Lawrence.
- E. Chaudoin: Trois mois de captivité au Dahomey, Paris
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- R. Cornevin: Histoire du Dahomey. Paris 1962.
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- E. Dunglas: La Première attaque des Dahoméens contre Abeokouta in Etudes Dahoméennes vol.2, 1948.
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- ... Contribution a l'histoire du Moyen-Dahomey (Royaumes d'Abomey de Ketou et de Ouidah) in Etudes Dahoméennes vols. 19 and 20 1957 and vol. 21 1958.
- J. Dupuis: Journal of a residence in Ashantee, London 1824.
- E. Etienne: Eugène Etienne, Député d'Oran. Son oeuvre coloniale, algérienne et politique (1881-1906) Discours et écrits divers réunis et édités par la "Dépêche Coloniale" Paris 1907.
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- T. B. Freeman: Journal of various visits to the Kingdoms of Ashanti, Aku and Dahomi. London 1844.
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H. Huntley: Seven Years Service on the Slave Coast of West Africa, London 1836.

S. Johnson: The History of the Yorubas, 6th edition London 1966.

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G. Parrinder: The Story of Ketu. An Ancient Yoruba Kingdom. Ibadan 1956.

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- M. Quénum: Au Pays des Fons, Paris 1938. Also in Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, vol. 18, 1935.
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- M. F. Sossouhonto: 'Les anciens rois de la dynastie d'Abomey' in Etudes Dahoméennes, vol. 13 1955.
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- A. Vallon: Le Royaume de Dahomey in Revue Maritime et Coloniale, Paris 1861, t.II and III.
- P. Verger: Les Afro-Américaines. Mémoire de l'institut Français d'Afrique Noire, No.27, Dakar 1953.

Francisco de Valdez: Six Years of a travellers life in
West Africa, London 1861.

(sometimes written Francisco de Travassos Valdez)

d) Works on the French Conquest of Dahomey

The conquest was the subject of a great number of books published during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The following are a selection of the more useful.

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... La Conquête du Dahomey 1893-94, Paris 1895.

A. Barbou: Histoire de la guerre au Dahomey, Paris 1893.

J. L. Brunet et L. Giethlen: Dahomey et dépendances,
Paris, 1900.

L. Grandin: A l'assaut du pays des rois. Le Dahomey.
Paris, 1895.

V. Nicolas: L'Expedition du Dahomey en 1890. Paris,
Limoges, 2nd edition 1893.

J. Poirier: Campagne du Dahomey 1892-4. Paris, Limoges,
1895.

J. De Riols: La Guerre de Dahomey 1889-92. Paris 1893.

A. De Salinis: La Marine au Dahomey. Campagne de la
Naide 1890-92. Paris 1901.

... La Protectorat francais sur La Côte des Esclaves.
La campagne du Samé (1889-90) d'après des

... documents ineditis. Paris 1908.

F. Schelamear: Souvenirs de la campagne du Dahomey.

Paris 1896.

G. H. Toutée: Du Dahomé au Sahara. La nature et l'homme.

Paris 1899.

e

e) A selection of eighteenth and nineteenth century works providing background information on nineteenth century Dahomey.

J. Adams: Sketches taken during ten voyages to Africa between 1786 and 1800. London 1822.

... Remarks on the country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo. London 1823.

J. Aitkins: A voyage to Guinea, Brazil and the West Indies in the Swallow and Weymouth, 2nd edition, London, 1737.

J. Barbot: A description of the coasts of North and South Guinea; and of Ethiopia Inferior, vulgarly Angola. In Churchill's Voyages, vol.5. London, 1732.

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W. Bosman: A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, divided into the Gold, the Slave and the Ivory Coasts. 2nd edition, London, 1721.

B. Cruikshank: Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa. London, 1853.

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A. Dalzel: The History of Dahomey; An Inland Kingdom of Africa; compiled from Authentic Memoirs. London 1793.

O. Dapper: Description de l'Afrique. Amsterdam 1680.

W. Hutton: A voyage to Africa. London, 1821.

P. Labarthe: Voyage à la cote de Guinée. Paris 1803.

R. Norris: Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomey, An Inland Country of Guiney, London, 1789.

W. Smith: A new voyage to Guinea. London, 1744.

W. Snelgrave: A New Account of Some Ports of Guinee
and the Slave Trade. London, 1734.

E. Viard: Au Bas-Niger. Paris, 3rd edition 1886.

E. Bouet-Willaumez: Commerce et traite des noires aux
cotes occidentales d'Afrique. Paris, 1848.

f) Secondary Works

This thesis touches on a number of far-reaching historical problems - for example the development of French Imperialism and the decline of the Oyo Empire. The following list is not, therefore, exhaustive and includes only those works most directly relevant to the history of nineteenth century Dahomey.

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J. F. A. Ajayi: The British Occupation of Lagos 1851-61
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London, 1965.

I. A. Akinjobin: The prelude to the Yoruba Civil Wars of the nineteenth century. Odu. Vol.I, no.2. 1965.

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B. Awe: The Ajele System. A study of Ibadan Imperialism in the 19th century. In The Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol.III, no. 1, 1964.

J. A. Ballard: The Porto Novo Incidents of 1923: Politics in the Colonial Era in Odu. Vol. 2, no.1 July 1965.

Also in Etudes Dahoméennes New Series. No.5 October 1965.

W. R. Bascom: The Sociological Role of the Yoruba Cult-Group. In Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, no. 63.

S. Berbain: Etudes sur la traite des noirs au Golfe de Guinée. Le comptoir français de Juda (Ouidah) au XVIIIe siecle, Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, no.3. Paris.

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- F. Berge: Le Sous-Secretariat et Les Sous-Secretaires d'etat aux Colonies in Revue d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1960.
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- S. O. Biobaku: The Egba and their neighbours 1842-72. Oxford, 1957.
- M. Blanchard: Administrateurs d'Afrique Noire. in Revue d'Histoire des Colonies t.IX no. 40, 1953.
- H. Blet: Histoire de la colonisation francaise. Grenoble and Paris 1946-50.
- A. Boahen: Asante-Dahomey Contacts in the Nineteenth Century. In Ghana Notes and Queries. No. 7. January 1965.

H. Brunschwig: Mythes et Réalités de l'Imperialisme colonial français 1871-1914. Paris 1960, English edition. LONDON 1966

... L'avènement de l'Afrique noire du XIX^e siècle à nos jours. Paris 1963.

E. M. Carroll: French Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs 1871-1914. New York 1931.

J. Chastenet De Costaing: Histoire de la Troisième République. Paris 1952.

R. J. H. Church: West Africa. London 1957.

R. Cornevin: Les Divers Episodes de La Lutte Contre Le Royaume D'Abomey (1887-1894) in Revue Française D'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, vol. 47, 1960.

C. Coquery: Le Blocus de Whydah, in Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines, 7, 1962.

C. Coquery-Vidrovitch: La fete des coutumes au Dahomey in Annales - Economie, Sociétés, Civilisations, vol. 19, no. 4. 1964.

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K. O. Dike: "Beecroft 1835-49" in Journal of the Nigerian Historical Society, vol. I December 1956.

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- J. Flint: Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria. London, 1960.
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- G. Parrinder: Yoruba-speaking peoples in Dahomey, in Africa, vol. 17, no. 2, 1947.
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- P. Pelissier: Les pays du Bas-Ouémé. Cahiers d'Outre-Mer, vol. 15, no. 59, 1962.
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- D. Ross: The Career of Domingo Martinez in the Right of Benin, in Journal of African History, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1965.
- B. Schnapper: La politique et le commerce française dans le Golfe de Guinée de 1838 à 1871, Paris 1961.
- J. Suret Canale: Afrique Noire, Paris 1961.
- P. A. Talbot: The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, London, 1926.
- C. Tardis: Porto Novo, Les Nouvelles Générations Africaines entre leurs Traditions et L'Occident. Paris and La Haye, 1958.

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Bas-Dahomey' in Première Conférence Inter-
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Rendus, vol. 2. Dakar.

L. K. Waldman: An unnoticed aspect of Archibald Dalziel's
The History of Dahomey, in Journal of African
History, vol. VI, no. 2. 1965.

F. D. Walker: T. B. Freeman; the son of an African,
London, 1929.

E. G. Waterlot: Les Bas-Reliefs des Batiments Royaux
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de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, No. I. Paris,
1926.

ADDENDA

Four studies of some importance have been published since the virtual completion of this thesis. Two are articles appearing in Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines, no. 25 Vol. VII, 1967.

The first of these articles is:

"L'image du Dahomey dans la presse française (1890-5); les sacrifices humaines.

The second is:

La reprise des relations franco-dahoméennes au XIXe siècle: la mission d'Auguste Bouet à la cour d'Abomey (1851).

The former analyses the content of a number of French works concerning Dahomey and throws some light on the development of French attitudes to Africa in general and to Dahomey in particular, during the latter part of the 19th century. The second of these articles, which concerns the sending of the first French 19th century embassy to Abomey, in itself perhaps not a subject of overwhelming importance, nevertheless adds

considerably to our knowledge of the rather dubious activities of Victor Régis.

Two books relating to the subject of this thesis have also been published very recently. One of these, "The Eighteenth Century Slave Trade from Dahomey" by the late Karl Polanyi (Washington 1967) has, for a variety of reasons, proved unobtainable. It appears, however, that the work is basically an expansion of the arguments which appeared in the author's treatise on the economics of eighteenth century West African trade. These appeared in an article called "Sortings and "Ounce Trade" in the West African Slave Trade." Journal of African History, Vol. V, no.3, 1964.

Another book "The Fon of Dahomey" by W. J. Argyle (Oxford 1966) has more direct bearing on nineteenth century Dahomey. This study is basically an anthropologist's analysis of the best known published works on pre-colonial Dahomey. The author considers a number of contemporary descriptions of the kingdom along with various modern accounts of the Fon state and then, from these, produces his own version of Dahoman corporate life.

Argyle fails completely to utilise the vast wealth of contemporary unpublished material concerning Dahomey. Indeed he has left untouched many of the more obscure published nineteenth century works. Moreover he does not appear to have consulted such an essential and easily accessible work as Akinjobin's study of eighteenth century Dahomey. Nevertheless, Argyle has used his material wisely and has presented the, to date, most lucid and comprehensive study of pre-colonial Dahomey.

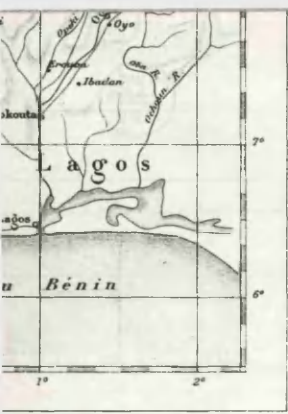
Argyle's work and this thesis overlap at a number of points. Argyle, for example, has a chapter on nineteenth century Dahoman history. Being based, however, on entirely fairly well known sources, the chapter, although it raises a number of questions which it is hoped are given tentative answers in this thesis, does not really break new ground.

Some conflict with Argyle's work might also be expected to arise in the sixth chapter of the thesis. In fact the approach to the material has been so different that the resulting accounts of the Fon state hardly overlap and are, in fact, largely complementary. In the thesis deductions about the nature of the state have been made from the way in which it appeared to function in the

nineteenth century. Argyle's account is based on a critical assessment of various known descriptions of Dahomey.

Only at two points do interpretations presented in the thesis clash with those in Argyle's book. Argyle feels that certain nineteenth century authors have overestimated the role of the Kings' spies in Fon government. Perhaps these writers did stress this point too strongly. Nevertheless such espionage activities were the probable outcome of Dahoman political life as it existed in the nineteenth century.

Argyle also produces a theory in which he attributes many Fon military manoeuvres, not to rational calculation, but to adherence to a long established formula of supposedly supernatural origin. This new interpretation fits the facts and seems thoroughly acceptable.



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