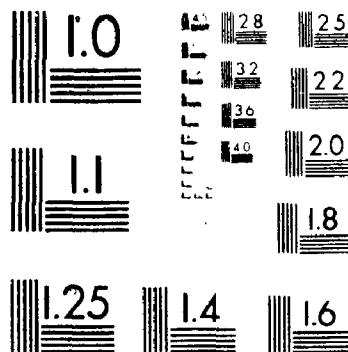


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"British Policy on the Gold Coast 1805-1831"

by

David Patrick Power, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April, 1986

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ABSIBAGI

The clash between the coastal Fante confederation and the powerful inland kingdom of Ashanti in the early nineteenth century posed a serious problem for British policy. The Government's lack of interest, and the Company of Merchants' limited military and financial resources, reduced British decision-makers to three options: either to ally with one of the warring states, or to remain neutral and seek an accommodation with the victor.

The latter policy was adopted by the Company, and later by the Colonial Office. It was vindicated when the Ashanti emerged as the dominant economic and military power on the Gold Coast. But the British failed to consolidate an alliance, despite the signing of two treaties. By 1824 they were at war with the Ashanti, and supporting the Fante, against Britain's own interests. This turn of events was largely the result of competing, conflicting policies pursued by the men on the spot and their superiors in London.

The object of this study is to recreate, to a certain extent, the environment, both on the Gold Coast and in London, in which decisions were reached, and then implemented, in order to discover the origins of the conflicting policies. Inconsistencies in British approaches to the problem resulted in the loss of the Ashanti alliance, a protracted war, the resurgence of the Fante, and deeper British involvement in Gold Coast politics.

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INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese first discovered the Gold Coast in 1482, and named it "Mina" (the mine), a somewhat optimistic reference to the quantities of gold which could be obtained there. They erected the first castle, or fort, at Elmina in 1482. French and English traders arrived in the 1530's, but were more of a nuisance than a serious challenge. By 1640, however, the Dutch had succeeded in taking over the trade, and completely supplanted the Portuguese. Their relations with Africans were largely determined by the climate, and by the nature of the growing slave trade, which so dominated European interests on the Gold Coast. The Dutch had to be content with establishing a series of fortified trade posts, for it proved difficult or impossible to assume direct control. Large numbers of troops could not be maintained on the coast because of the prohibitively high death rate.⁽¹⁾ The nature of the trade made it unnecessary for all but a few merchants to remain in permanent residence, as slaves were brought directly to the forts. Also, the coastal tribes violently opposed all

(1) Of the 5,823 European soldiers sent to West Africa by the British between 1810 and 1825, there were 1,912 (33%) deaths due to battle or disease; for the same period, only 254 of 6,769 (3.75%) of the African soldiers were lost. An investigation of the mortality rates among European troops in the years 1817-1836 make this point clearly: of the men stationed in Britain, some 1.5% died of disease annually; the figure rises to 7.9% for the West Indian garrisons, then to a staggering 48.3% for the Sierra Leone Command. See Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 483-485.

European attempts to communicate with the interior, which might have displaced them as middle-men. These two factors made inland penetration both unwise and unnecessary.

The British formed a series of chartered companies, granted monopolies by the Crown, to compete with the Dutch: the Company of Royal Adventurers into Africa (1660), the Royal African Company (1672), and the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa (1750). Cape Coast Castle was taken in 1664, and in the next forty years the British built nine more fortified trading posts on the Gold Coast. By 1785 they had defeated the French, and wrested control of the lion's share of the slave trade from the Dutch. Like their predecessors, the British did not own the land they occupied, but remained the tenants of local kings. Rent was paid to those who held title deeds, or "Notes", for the forts. Though often tempted to impose their will by force of arms, the Company lacked the manpower and other resources to even defend their forts against a determined attack. This weakness of the Europeans vis-a-vis their African neighbours was inevitable, given the obstacles to the maintenance of large numbers of soldiers or settlers on the Coast. To ensure their security, protect their communications, and provision the trading posts, they paid retainers or subsidies to the coastal tribes and towns. The British depended mainly on the fante, a Confederation who acted as middle-men in the trade.

The period covered in this thesis includes the years

1805-1831: the former date marked the arrival in force of the Ashanti,⁽¹⁾ a powerful inland kingdom, who succeeded in breaking the Fante hold on the coastal areas and radically altering the balance of power; the latter date marked the signing of a peace treaty with the Ashanti, and the resumption of the administration of the forts by a merchant company.

It is possible to place the British experience on the Gold Coast into a larger context of theories of imperialism, to focus on the "value" of the colony: its importance as a market, or as a source of labour for the plantations, against the cost of maintaining the settlements, and, with the abolition of the slave trade, the search for alternate, legitimate forms of commerce. This approach also takes into consideration the decision to revoke the Company's charter, and assume direct Crown rule in 1821.

Others have focused on the topic from an African point of view, such as the growth and composition of the Ashanti empire, or the attempts of the Fante to unite and control trade with the Europeans. But the majority of historians, have treated the period of Ashanti-Fante competition as a dilemma facing the British: how to choose an ally and trading partner to guarantee

(1) I have chosen to use this spelling (Ashanti), as it is the traditional form that appears in standard works on the Gold Coast, and because it was the one I encountered first (and most often) in my research. More recent studies tend to use the form "Asante". For tribal and other place-names, I have attempted to remain consistent, and conform to the most common usage.

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the safety of their forts, supply trade goods, and provide access to the interior.(1) This decision would have important repercussions on British policy, notably the level of their intervention in Gold Coast affairs.

This question has prompted a "popularity contest" of sorts, a debate over the relative advantages or disadvantages of an alliance with either party. Standard works have tended to analyze and evaluate British policy in terms of this choice. But it can be shown that not only did the British not make a clear decision, but that the consequences of their policies produced results directly opposed to their stated interests. In this case, it is possible to apply Robinson and Gallagher's "man-on-the-spot" thesis, with some reservations. As well, it is generally accepted that British policy was limited by the resources allocated to the Gold Coast: financial, military, and commercial. To properly understand the decision-making processes, it is necessary to attempt to reproduce the environment, both in London and on the Gold Coast, in which these decisions were reached. As well, the perceptions of British decision-makers must be taken into account.

Because of the Governor's geographic isolation, the difficulties and delays in communication, and his control of the flow of information, he enjoyed considerable freedom of action.

(1) This approach was also suggested by the late Prof. G.P. Browne, at Carleton University, 1983.

But he was nonetheless limited by his resources, local conditions, his sources of information, and, by his technical subordination to higher sources of authority. He was answerable to his superiors, the Committee of the Company of Merchants, who controlled funds, sent instructions, and criticized past actions. The Committee, in turn, were subject to advice and criticism from several Parliamentary agencies, notably the Board of Trade and the Colonial Office. The Company's conduct, record of achievement, and public image were vitally important, as they were entirely dependent, especially for the continuation of their annual grant, upon the will of Parliament. As well, the merchants needed the support and assistance of the Royal Navy. All of these agents were influenced by events or conditions in Britain, West Africa, or the West Indies. An increase in the demand for slaves, for example, reaffirmed the importance of the Company and its trade; conversely, the fall of sugar prices and the decline of the planters' influence heralded the fall of the African Merchants.

Both Parliament and the Committee were sensitive to pressure and criticism from a number of sources: abolitionists, radicals and reformers, commercial interests, and intra-party politics. These influences often affected the extent, and the nature of Government and Company involvement in the formulation of policy for the Gold Coast. Thus the Governor was dependent upon, and accountable to several bodies in Britain who could advocate policies of their own. As well, there were a number of more

immediate influences on the senior officer's conduct: European competition (Dutch and Danish), the Governor's Council, British merchants, the inhabitants of the towns near the forts, the Fante states, and the Ashanti empire, with its vassals and tributaries. British imperial policy was not formed, in this case, by calm deliberation, or according to abstract principles of colonial rule or economic theory. It was influenced, to varying degrees, by a number of domestic and foreign circumstances and events. Finally, there was no single source of decision-making, which often produced contradictory or conflicting approaches to the question of British intervention on the Gold Coast.

THE DECISION-MAKING ENVIRONMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to build a model of the decision-making process, introducing elements of and influences upon British policy that have been somewhat neglected in historical works to date. This will also serve to introduce themes that will be referred to in subsequent chapters.

The Royal African Company, dominated by London interests, was formed in 1672, but dissolved in 1750, because of its poor record of performance and serious competition from Bristol and Liverpool merchants. The Company of Merchants Trading to Africa (hereafter referred to as the Company), open to all three cities, was then granted exclusive rights to trade with the Gold Coast. It remained, essentially, a joint stock company, because of the risks involved in overseas trade.(1) Parliament subsidized the Company with an annual grant of 10,000 pounds sterling, to maintain fortified trading posts, or factories, upon the Coast.(2)

(1) K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company*, (London: Longmans, 1957), p.3; J.D. Fage, *An Introduction to the History of West Africa*, (Cambridge University Press, 1965, 3rd ed.), p.71.

(2) The grant was increased to 13,000 annually in 1761, and to 23,000 in 1807. The latter was intended to compensate the Merchants for the expected loss of revenue, after the abolition of the slave trade. Special grants could also be obtained in the event of extraordinary need: 6,000 in 1753, for example, to rebuild Annomaboe fort after its destruction by the French, and a similar amount in 1765 to build a new blockhouse at Apollonia. See Eveline Martin, *British West African Settlements 1750-1821*, (London: Longmans, 1927), p.17.

These grants, despite their apparent value, were somewhat of a two-edged sword. The Company was held accountable, and subject to scrutiny and criticism from Parliament, the Exchequer, and the Board of Trade.(1) But this potentially decisive influence was only infrequently brought to bear. The attitude of Parliament towards the Company has been described as one of "critical apathy with spasms of reforming zeal".(2)

Nonetheless, the Company often faced considerable pressure at home: opposition from independent traders demanding unrestricted access, planters calling for cheaper slaves, exponents of free trade, and radical or reformist critics of the government.(3) Perhaps most important, in the context of this paper, was the growing debate over abolition of the slave trade.

Traditionally, the Company had jealously guarded its privileges, and resented any interference. But the Merchants, faced with the prospect of a successful abolition campaign, and increasingly sensitive to criticism of its often incompetent administration, began to show a marked tendency to abdicate responsibility, and to defer the burden of policy-making to Parliament, to deflect criticism and avoid the possible loss of their monopoly privileges. This was, in part at least, an attempt to survive the inevitable loss of the slave trade, by

(1) Martin, p.16, p.24; see also, for example, T70 1586.

(2) Ibid., p.17.

(3) Davies, pp.129-133.

continuing to fulfill a useful function. Carefully monitoring the progress of the debate in the House of Commons, the Company were not caught off guard in 1807, and were well prepared to jump in any direction the Government might desire. As their secretary wrote to Castlereagh in 1808:

The Committee are aware that it is their peculiar duty, and they feel it equally their inclination to promote by all means in their power the commercial interests of this country with Africa, upon such principles as the legislature shall sanction, and in such manner as the government may direct.(1)

The Committee, the ruling body of the Company, was made up of 10 representative members: 3 for London, 3 for Bristol, 3 for Liverpool, with a secretary.(2) They were elected under a system that was frequently, if not regularly abused, which on occasion raised embarrassing cries for reform and accusations of illegal

(1) Martin, p.146.

(2) BT6/19.

conduct and corruption.(1)

Historians of the Gold Coast, it would seem, have tended to neglect the element of the 'Home Front' and its influence on the formulation of British policy. The question of 'public opinion' is, admittedly, a nebulous one, as the available sources represent only certain groups, notably those who expressed themselves in print, or in the House of Commons.(2) But it does illustrate the environment in which the Company had to function, and thus to a large extent a number of the influences upon the formulation of policy. This holds true for the period of the Company's administration, as well as the assumption of Crown rule after 1819.

There was, without a doubt, a much greater awareness of

(1) Benedict Der, "Edmund Burke and Africa 1772-1792", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. XI, 1970, pp.1-8. For example, Der cites an article in the *Bristol Public Ledger* of April 20th, 1772, which claimed abuses in management, electoral fraud and corruption. Elections were supposedly held regularly, and anyone paying the membership fee of 40 shillings was entitled to vote. Typical members were Members of Parliament, East India Directors, councillors, attorneys, physicians, surgeons, stockbrokers and tradesmen. But the Committee were accused of flooding the membership to insure their reelection, by paying the fees for a number of clerks, (including some from the East India Company who were underage), and "cheesemongers, journeyman weavers, cooks, barbers ...". In another case, Vincent Briscoe and Joseph Champion were both found to have heavily exceeded their terms on the Committee between 1750 and 1772. Whether or not these accusations were well founded, this episode illustrates the type of pressure brought to bear on the Committee.

(2) Helen Taft Manning, *British Colonial Government After the American Revolution 1782-1820*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp.4-5.

Africa by the end of the 18th century. According to Robin Hallett, this can be partly explained by the tremendous increase in the volume of trade with Africa between 1720 and 1780.(1) West Africa accounted for perhaps 3-4% of British exports between 1780 and 1800.(2) African products, however, never amounted to more than 1% of total British imports.(3) Between 1805 and 1810, the value of imports from the Gold Coast rose from 193,000 pounds sterling to over 535,000; but exports fell from 1.1 million to under 700,000.(4) Trade increased by only 50% between 1805 and 1825, but tripled overall in the period 1805-1840.(5) But the importance of the African market did not depend solely on the financial returns: it was a major source of slaves, and the sole supplier of certain specialty goods. It was also indispensable as a link with the West Indian plantations: one fifth of West

(1) Robin Hallett, "The European Approach to the Interior of Africa in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of African History*, (Vol.4, #2, 1963), p.196. Exports to Africa increased from 130,000 pounds sterling in 1720, to 866,000 in 1780.

(2) B.K. Drake, "Liverpool's African Commerce Before and After Abolition of the Slave Trade", unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Liverpool, 1974, p.93.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.154.

(4) G.E. Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History 1807-1957*, (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 1964), p.17. These figures do not include gold, and should be adjusted upwards, to account for the 1/5 or 1/6 of the ships which were lost at sea or captured.

(5) Drake, p.154.

Indies produce exported to Britain was carried in slave ships.(1) In addition, gold brought back from Africa was minted in London, and stamped with the Company's Elephant symbol.

The use of the company's emblem upon the guineas which were put into circulation provided an unusual and picturesque form of advertisement which has probably been responsible for the excessive importance sometimes attached to West Africa as a source of precious metal.(2)

Naturally, merchants and manufacturers, especially in London, Bristol and Liverpool, were well acquainted with the Company.

Interest in Africa came from other sources as well: the African Association, from 1788 on, urged Britain to explore the interior of the continent, for scientific, commercial and strategic reasons. Their motives were a mixture of geographic curiosity, inspired perhaps by the voyages of Captain Cook, James Bruce, Mungo Park, and economic goals, namely the discovery of new markets and raw materials. According to A.A. Boahen, it was not until much later that the Association became closely linked to the abolitionists.(3)

(1) *Ibid.*, p.36. This figure refers to the year 1805.

(2) Davies, p.181.

(3) A. Adu Boahen, "The African Association 1788-1805", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol.V, part 1, 1961, pp.45-46. It was not until 1825 that instructions given to the explorers mentioned the question of slavery. Though the Association's first secretary was an abolitionist, its founder, Sir Joseph Banks, and two successive secretaries were all convinced anti-abolitionists.

The African Institution, founded in 1807, provides more insight into British attitudes towards Africa. The Institution stressed that it had no plans to found a colony or carry on commerce, but "only to assist and give a right direction to the enterprise of others, and to excite the industry of the natives of that continent".(1)

The abolition debate was a source of considerable, if undesirable publicity for the Company of Merchants. The Committee feared that a successful anti-slavery campaign would mean the destruction of their trade, the end of their privileges, and a possible merger of their forts with Sierra Leone. The abolitionists succeeded in carrying their cause to Parliament, where they received the support of all the best orators, from Fox and Pitt to the eloquent Canning.(2) Castlereagh neither spoke nor voted on the question;(3) and of the major figures in the House of Commons, only a few, such as Lord Liverpool, Bathurst, Windham and Eldon gave the slavers any support.(4) But the

(1) First Report of the African Institution, July 15, 1807. Vincent Harlow and Frederick Madden, *British Colonial Developments 1774-1834*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp.463-464.

(2) Peter Dixon, *Canning*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp.19-21; Wendy Hinde, *George Canning*, (London: Collins, 1973), p.70.

(3) Hinde, *Castlereagh*, (London: Collins, 1981), p.126.

(4) Dixon, pp.19-21. Lord Liverpool opposed abolition on the grounds that conditions would be much worse on non-British ships.

Company, for a time, had an eloquent supporter of its own: no less a figure than Edmund Burke.(1)

Edmund Burke had many friends on the Committee, notably John Bourke and John Barnes, as well as John Schoolbred, the secretary. It would seem that he was representative of English attitudes to Africa, combining considerable interest and curiosity with almost total ignorance. After 1788, Burke took up the abolition debate, siding against his erstwhile friends and the slave traders. This campaign clearly hampered the Company's freedom of action, as its enemies continued to grow in strength, while its powerful allies, notably the West Indian planters, began to give ground.(2) As their political stock declined, criticized for their ineptitude as well as their connection with the slave trade, the members of the Committee began to fear that they would be swallowed up by their abolitionist neighbours in Sierra Leone.(3)

On several occasions, charges of nepotism, misconduct and even embezzlement were laid against the Company and its employees. In 1772, for example, Liverpool MP Sir William Meredith brought his constituency's complaints to Parliament.

(1) Der., pp.208-210. Burke was, however, poorly informed about Africa, "an affliction that beset most of his contemporaries".

(2) The planters seem to have been prepared to accept abolition by the turn of the century, as most had a surplus of slaves already.

(3) Curtin, pp.109-110.

These public inquiries and debates suggest that the Company was not only well-known (or notorious), but that it frequently faced serious pressure.(1) And, in a more general manner, Africa seems to have gripped the imagination of literate Englishmen: from 1785 to 1789, more books on the subject were printed than in any previous decade.(2) As well, the debate in Parliament spilled over into the press, as most newspapers were tied to, or even subsidized by, the political parties.(3) The press reached the people in a number of ways: through reading rooms and reading societies, at public meetings where newspapers were read, and with coffee-house and ale-house newspapers, designed to combat illiteracy. The Government circulated its own pamphlets, and allocated secret funds to influence newspapers, usually through

(1) *Ibid.* Der gives an excellent account of several of these proceedings, including a motion in the House of Commons in 1772 to restrict the right to vote to those who owned shares or were actively engaged in the African trade. The author also identifies the complainants and those members who rose to defend the Committee.

(2) Hallett, p:200fn. For example, John Peter Demarin, "A Treatise Upon the Trade from Great Britain to Africa", (London, 1772); "Considerations and Remarks on the Present State of the Trade to Africa", (London: Robinson and Roberts, 1772). Also, after the turn of the century and the beginning of the campaign against the institution of slavery, a number of periodicals began their circulation, notably *The Anti Slavery Monthly Reporter*, *The Anti Slavery Record*, and others. This period also saw the beginning of the *Colonial Journal*.

(3) A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press c.1780-1850*, (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949), p.v.

patronage appointments or lucrative pensions.(1) There was also a proliferation of periodical journals, including *The Colonial Journal*, which gave accounts of speeches in the House of Commons, monitored the debate over abolition, and even reported the events of 1805-06 on the Gold Coast some ten years later.(2)

Though it may not be accurate to discuss "public opinion", it would seem that there were already many forms of public pressure on the Government. Peter Fraser argues that the people, influenced no doubt by the French Revolution, were no longer ignorant: the leaders were susceptible to this pressure, as "the power of public opinion was silently yet continually bringing them under its influence."(3) The abolitionists were able to monopolise debate-time in the Commons: "Before 1779, Parliament hardly ever received, and never debated, petitions from the public upon state affairs. By 1829 things had so changed that both Houses did little else".(4) The Whigs also condemned any colonial ventures as expensive luxuries.(5)

Despite the difficulties inherent in any attempt to

(1) See Aspinall for a comprehensive list of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century newspapers, with their political affiliations.

(2) *The Colonial Journal*, No.II, July 1816.

(3) Peter Fraser, "Public Petitioning and Parliament Before 1832", *History*, Vol.46, No.158, Oct. 1961, pp.196-211, p.196.

(4) *Ibid.*, p.207.

(5) Manning, *British Colonial Government*, pp.6-7.

understand 'public opinion', several conclusions can be suggested: the British, relatively ignorant of the nature of Africa and its people, were nonetheless frequently interested in the commercial and strategic possibilities, as well as the administrative problems, of the British possessions there.

Historians have tended to treat the transition from Company administration to Crown rule as a solution to the nagging question of the 'value' of the settlements, or as a case study for imperial theories. All too frequently, however, little attention has been given to the role of the administrative structure and the chain of command in decision-making. D.M. Young, in *The Colonial Office in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1961), raises a number of points relevant to this problem, especially when considered in the context of the Robinson-Gallagher "man on the spot" theory.

It was in the Colonial Office that the political heads first openly admitted their inability to handle personally the volume of regular business, which had increased significantly over the first quarter of the century.(1)

More responsibility therefore devolved upon the clerks, numbering only 15 in 1806 (reduced to 11 in 1816, returned to 17 in 1824).(2) The Colonial Office was probably seriously

(1) D.M. Young, *The Colonial Office in the Early Nineteenth Century*, (London: Longmans, 1961), p.3.

(2) *Ibid.*, p.4, p.9. These numbers compare unfavourably with the six principal banks in London, who employed between 32 and 56 clerks each.

under-staffed, yet the Opposition in Parliament argued in 1816 that its business could be handled by an Under-Secretary and four clerks attached to the Home Office.(1) Young's estimate of this department's efficiency should come as no surprise:

Some colonies received only two or three despatches a year, and for a colony to receive more than twenty a year was virtually unknown, unless it happened to be of military concern at the moment. Only the most urgent matters received attention. Colonial despatches went unanswered, colonial governors reported crises, complained of their wrongs, and even died, without the minister seeming to be aware of the fact.(2)

Poorly informed, handicapped by the absence of up-to-date, accurate information, and forced to rely on meagre official records, the Colonial Secretary's despatches were often "wooden replies", partially obsolete instructions, or 'formula' answers, with little bearing on the matter at hand.(3)

Early Colonial Secretaries, such as Castlereagh (July 1805-Feb. 1806, March 1807-Oct. 1809), and Lord Liverpool (Oct. 1809-June 1812), were undoubtedly preoccupied with the war against Napoleon, and had little concern for the Gold Coast. Lord Bathurst (June 1812-April 1827) deserves special attention, as his term covered the majority of the period under consideration. Henry, 3rd Earl Bathurst, was, in succession: A

(1) *Ibid.*, p.22.

(2) *Ibid.*, p.12.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp.9-10; see also Helen T. Manning, "Who Ran the British Empire 1830-1850?", *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol.5, No.1, 1965, p.89.

Lord of the Admiralty, A Lord of the Treasury, A Commissioner of the Board of Control, Master of the Mint, President of the Board of Trade, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, and Lord President of the Council. He was well acquainted with the Company of Merchants, and a close friend and confidant of the Prime Minister. Bathurst is generally accepted to have been a man of considerable talent, but utterly devoid of ambition or energy. (1) He was apparently a lazy man, whose "frequent solicitations for his wife's health concealed inadequately his own decided preference for the fields of Lancashire over the labours of Whitehall." (2) The Duke of Wellington considered him totally unfit, because of his habit of changing his mind "twenty times a day". (3) Bathurst was a man of moderate views, liked and trusted, but who never placed a personal stamp on any of the measures of the day, presumably because he exercised his office with "beau'coup de nonchalance". (4)

The Under-Secretary, until 1821, was Henry Goulbourn, who was also the chief British negotiator at the Congress of

(1) Young, p.10; Sir Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh 1812-1822*, Volume II, (London: G. Bell, 1963), p.15.

(2) W.R. Brock, *Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism 1820-1827*, (London: Frank Cass, 2nd ed., 1967), p.56.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.189.

(4) Webster, p.15; Manning, *British Colonial Government*, pp.481-483.

(5) Hinde, *Castlereagh*, p.220.

Vienna.(5) He had considerable talents in administration and finance, and may have provided much of the energy and organization so lacking in his superior. Under Bathurst and Goulbourn, the Colonial Office was mostly concerned with appointments, a balanced budget, and, since Parliament demanded it, the campaign against the slave trade.(1)

Bathurst's nonchalance may have been due to personal inclinations, but it may also have been a response to fear of controversy: from 1815 on, the Government faced a rising tide of criticism directed at the administration of the colonies.(2) The abolitionists, after their victory in 1807, were beginning to attack the institution of slavery itself. But the main problem was one of finances: after the enormous burden of over twenty years of war, blockade and counter-blockade, the Government was under considerable pressure to reduce expenditures. In 1819, for example, Joseph Hume led a carefully prepared attack against the King's Ministers for their failure to bring colonial matters before Parliament. He inveighed against the high costs of maintaining garrisons and the absence of checks on the spending of governors.(3) Parliament, despite its sensitivity to criticism, often bowed to the radical pressure from Hume and the Benthamites, because they agreed with the obvious need to reduce

(1) Manning, British Colonial Government, p.525.

(2) Manning, "Who Ran ...", p.91.

(3) Manning, British Colonial Government, p.525.

the country's financial commitments. The Liverpool Government believed that it was much weaker than its predecessors, and was thus more susceptible to pressure.(1)

Simultaneously, there was a serious shift in the balance of political power, especially in the case of the African Company. For years, powerful and influential friends, as well as the connection with the West Indian planters had deflected much of the criticism aimed at the notoriously inept management of the Gold Coast settlements. As W.R. Brock put it:

The Government ... did not represent the commercial classes; but it was peculiarly sensitive to the criticism of those classes. When such criticism was made the Government tried to meet it and it was in this imperceptible modification of policy, not in spectacular revolts against the ministers, that the influence of the mercantile class lay.(2)

In the case of the African Company, this influence had been irrevocably lost by 1807: with the passage of abolition, the Committee was abandoned by the West Indian lobby and a number of their supporters. This new relationship between the merchants and Parliament can be seen in the fearful, subservient tone of the Committee after 1807.

The scrutiny of colonial finances and the revision of imperial theories boded ill for the African Company. Bereft of allies, and stripped of its most useful function (the supplying

(1) Fraser, p.195.

(2) Brock, p.89.

of slaves to the colonies), all the inadequacies of their management would soon come to light. D.C.M. Platt's comments on the "extraordinarily limited role commonly accepted for British government intervention in private business engagements overseas"(1) no longer seemed to hold true in this case. The attitudes of the men in power were changing, influenced perhaps by radical pressure, fiscal constraints, and a new assessment of the value of colonies. Castlereagh, in 1814, decided to retain some of Britain's conquests for their strategic value, while returning others for the sake of alliances. [The Government] "do not desire to retain any of these colonies for their mere commercial value ...".(2) Castlereagh felt that further colonial acquisitions would also be unwise because of the jealousy and suspicion they would cause in Europe.(3) Any further expansion by Britain might have destroyed the credibility of her international campaign against the slave trade. Lord Liverpool, then Prime Minister, told a free trade deputation in 1820 that he had long been convinced of the truth of their principles, and that he believed Britain had prospered despite protectionism, and not because of it.(4) Others pointed out the financial dangers

(1). W.M. Louis, ed., *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, (New York: New View Points, 1976), p.155.

(2) Webster, Vol.1, p.195.

(3) Hinde, *Castlereagh*, p.219.

(4) Brock, pp.42-43.

of over-colonizing. At the same time, Britain's convincing control of the seas calmed the fears of those who had supported the overseas possessions (and, indeed, the slave trade), as a vital training ground for seamen and the key to British naval superiority.

Renewed interest in the affairs of the African Company can thus be attributed to non-African causes: the end of the Napoleonic wars and the desire to reduce expenditures; the political isolation of the Committee after abolition, and the increased influence of its enemies; and new attitudes to the colonies, especially the marked dislike of settlements which did not "pay for themselves. Soon afterwards, the Government would begin to take an interest in the administration of the Gold Coast forts. This aspect can, and has been studied as an inquiry into the 'value' of the colony, or as a prelude to the assumption of crown rule. But it should also be considered as an alteration in the working of the chain of command, and a further influence on the decision-making process.

The fortified trading posts on the Gold Coast were administered by a council, consisting of the senior commanders of the important forts, and the Governor-in-Chief, in charge of Cape Coast Castle. Because of the distance from England and the length of time required for communications from London, these men enjoyed a high level of freedom of action and independence from

interference. As these officers were the first, and often most important element in the decision-making process, one must consider their background and character, as well as the environment they worked in.

The Company was largely unable to make use of patronage, as incentives on the scale of, for example, the East India Company, were plainly out of reach. Their financial inducements were "not particularly attractive", and a number of factors combined to make service with the Company unappealing: the dangers of life in Africa, rumours reaching England of arbitrary treatment of soldiers and civilians by officers, frequent attempts to detain men beyond the terms of their agreements, and unsatisfactory arrangements for remitting home the effects of those who died on the Coast.(1)

The most serious of these hazards was the astronomical death rate in West Africa. The unhealthy effects of the climate were compounded by ignorance (evident in the poor choices of locations for the forts), and the English habits of over-eating and widespread alcohol abuse, brought on in part by the lonely, dangerous existence.(2) The only possible advantage to this phenomenon was the likelihood of rapid promotion, if the candidate could survive long enough to succeed to the positions

(1) Davies, pp.253-254.

(2) Mary McCarthy, *Social Change and the Growth of British Power in the Gold Coast: The Early Years 1807-1874.* (New York: University Press of America, 1983), p.35.

of his superiors.

Recruitment proved to be very difficult, especially in the case of skilled artisans or surgeons. (1) Foreigners often had to be hired, in many cases no better than "human driftwood", or locals were trained for these positions. The existence of a half-caste society, free of the restrictions of both African and European custom, created a group who could, and did, attach themselves, whether through labour or independent trade, to British interests.

For its clerks and officers, the Company occasionally tried to make its service more attractive by permitting them to carry on private trade. This privilege was roundly abused, to such an extent that the Company could only complain of the dishonesty, disloyalty, and inefficiency of its servants. (2) To be fair, the Committee expected its officers to combine a number of skills: accounting, familiarity with a unique trade, a flair for languages, military engineering, and diplomacy and negotiations, often in complex inter-tribal politics. Finally, all of these qualities were useless unless their owner also had the "constitution of a horse" and "absolute incorruptibility". (3) Obviously, most governors fell short of these requirements in more than one aspect. Complaints about their behaviour were

(1) Davies, pp. 242-243; see also T70 1586.

(2) T70/51.

(3) Davies, p. 255.

frequent, and few officers completed their service without some recrimination. As K.G. Davies put it:

Instances of bad conduct are certain to be better documented than examples of good, but the former are too numerous to permit any conclusion other than that the Company was, with a few exceptions, poorly served.(1)

This is certainly understandable: with reasonable, but never generous salaries, harsh conditions and incredible mortality rates, only the hope of acquiring a fortune by private trade could make service in Africa at all attractive. There is no question that the vast majority of the Company's officers were lured to Africa by expectations of profit.

Contemporary observers regularly criticized these governors for sacrificing the maintenance and provisioning of the forts to furnish themselves with capital for private trade.(2) Evidence suggests that the governors were a fairly homogeneous group, putting their own interests before those of their employers, and rarely hesitating to indulge in questionable or unethical methods to protect or increase their fortunes. As previous studies have shown, more detailed examinations of the careers of the men who

(1) Ibid., pp.255-256.

(2) T70/39. Letter to the African Office, London, Feb.25th, 1771.

entered the Company's service might provide useful insights.(1)

Much has been written about the nature of the African trade and its relation to such questions as the value of the colony, but rarely are connections made to the question of its influence on policy or decision-making, especially by the men on the spot. Yet this can be important, for example in the case of local demand for particular goods. The Africans seem to have preferred 'Danish' guns over other firearms, which put pressure on English manufacturers to produce copies. As well, the marked inferiority of British trade goods, before the turn of the century, to those of other European nations(2) may have fuelled the Governors' jealousy and distrust of their Dutch and Danish rivals, a feeling that was often to manifest itself in the policy of the Company's employees at Cape Coast Castle. On the other hand, if by 1785 they had so far outstripped their rivals as to dominate the trade

(1) Henry Swanzy, in "A Trading Family in the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast", *Transactions of the Historical Society of the Gold Coast and Togoland*, Volume II, Part 2, 1956, pp.87-93, traces the career of James Swanzy and his family. The first Swanzy in Africa was the second son of an Irish 'squireen', a "penniless youth of middle-class education". He was hired as a surgeon in 1789, retired ten years later at the age of 32, became a member of the Committee in 1813, and returned to the Gold Coast in 1817, where he died six years later. Two brothers and all four of his sons also served there. See also M.A. Priestley, "Richard Brew; an Eighteenth Century Trader at Anomabu", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Volume IV, Part 1, 1959, pp.29-39. Brew, another Irishman, hoped to acquire a fortune and retire as a gentleman.

(2) J.E. Inikori, "The Import of Firearms into West Africa 1750-1807: A Quantitative Analysis", *Journal of African History*, Volume 18, 1977, pp.339-368.

(over 50% of West African trade, and a much higher percentage on the Gold Coast), (1) then these fears were largely groundless. This is even more likely when one considers the European situation at the time: Holland, overrun by the French revolutionary armies, had become the Batavian Republic, and by 1815 was a British satellite and an Austrian possession, while the defeated French were in no position to challenge the victors.

On another level, the nature of the carrying trade and the inevitable long, dangerous voyages were an important factor from the point of view of communications. Liverpool slavers averaged two and a half months to reach the Gold Coast, (2) then spent up to two or three months collecting their slaves, before sailing for the West Indies, a journey which habitually brought them back to England the better part of a year later. (3) The length and danger of these voyages, could only be increased in time of war. In a study of 138 ships operating out of Liverpool between 1798 and 1810, B.K. Drake showed the risks involved in sailing to West

(1) *Ibid.*, pp.348-349; also Fage, p.70, p.75. Fage estimates that the British had, by this time surpassed their main competitors, the Dutch. Though the latter controlled one half of the trade in 1700, and England only one third, by 1785 the roles were reversed: of 68,000 slaves exported annually from West Africa in that period, Britain carried 38,000, France 20,000, the Dutch 4,000 and the Danes 2,000. Inikori gives the British 45% of the trade.

(2) B.K. Drake, "Liverpool's African Commerce", Appendix 19, p.253, and Appendix 24, p.260.

(3) Roger Anstey and P.E.H. Hair, *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition*, Volume II, (Bristol: Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1976), Table 10, p.49.

Africa: 28 were captured, 34 foundered, 13 were condemned as unfit, and only 53 were still operating in 1810.(1)

These difficulties in communications engendered an inevitable time lag between London and Cape Coast. Time and distance encouraged the governors to act independently. Both the Committee and the Colonial office faced the same problem: neither had any real control over the internal administration of the forts except the ability to appoint or remove governors, and to limit their financial resources. Many Governors were highly independent, especially since they supplied the majority of the information upon which their superiors were forced to base decisions.(2) When, as was often the case, a Governor seeking a free hand encountered an apathetic or preoccupied attitude in London, the result could be similar to that described by Zachary Macaulay in 1807: the government, he wrote, would be disposed to adopt "any plan which we may propose to them with respect to Africa, provided we but save them the trouble of thinking".(3) Macaulay was referring to Sierra Leone, but there is no question that many Governors could play a substantial role in the formulation of policy on the Gold Coast.

The object of this discussion has been to show that British

(1) Drake, pp.92-93.

(2) Manning, "Who Ran ...", p.89.

(3) Macaulay to Governor Ludlam (Sierra Leone), Nov.1807. Harlow and Madden, p.484.

policy was largely decided by the Governor of Cape Coast Castle, instructed or influenced by his superiors in London, whether the Company or the Colonial Office. All of the organs of the decision-making process were in turn affected by a host of influences, ranging from trade rivalries and perceptions of empire to political lobbies and personal jealousies.

To complete this model, one must include the political situation on the Gold Coast, because, as K.G. Davies put it, "the most obvious factor influencing the form of European imperialism was the kind of native population encountered in each region".(1) Here he is in agreement with Robinson and Gallagher, who emphasize the influence of local conditions on the timing and location of imperial intervention.(2) It might be added that British actions depended not only on local conditions, but also on contemporary perceptions of the situation.

Traditionally, historians have presented the situation in 1806 as a crisis, caused by the dilemma facing the British: that of choosing an ally, or trading partner. The Fante, a 'confederation' of coastal tribes, controlled access to the forts and acted as middlemen in the trade; while the Ashanti were an expanding kingdom further inland seeking to communicate directly with the Europeans.

(1) Davies, p.3.

(2) Louis, pp.53-54.

There has been some debate over the cohesiveness of the Fante tribes: 'members' of the alliance enjoyed a common language, culture and history, but had a number of different types of organisation, ranging from absolute monarchs (Appollonia) and aristocratic oligarchies (Ahanta) to power-sharing or semi-democratic arrangements. (1) It had been asserted that the Fante had coalesced in response to the Europeans and because of the growing threat of Ashanti (already apparent by 1700 with the defeat of Denkyera). (2) But, more recently, James Sanders suggested that the Fante were already powerful, due to their early access to European trade goods, and that their reaction to the threat of Ashanti was not to expand themselves, but to form alliances with neighbouring kingdoms. They were the principal trade partners of the British, who actively encouraged and supported their expansion early in the eighteenth century, apparently in an attempt to exclude the Dutch. (3)

Fante policy towards the Ashanti was not always straightforward: though they wished to keep this potential rival from reaching the coast and upsetting their monopoly of the trade routes, they were also eager to maintain good relations with the inland kingdom in order to continue to enjoy the benefits of

(1) Henry Meredith, *An Account of the Gold Coast of Africa*, (1812), (London: Frank Cass, 1967), pp.26-27.

(2) James Sanders, "The Expansion of the Fante and the Emergence of Asante in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of African History*, Volume XX, #3, 1979, pp.349-351.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.352, p.357.

their trade.(1) The Fante response to this apparent dilemma was to change sides frequently in an attempt to balance alliances. Fante expansion, argues Sanders was not dictated by the Ashanti threat, and only partly influenced by the presence of the British.

The relationship between the Company's employees and their nearest neighbours was not one of equals: trade does not seem to have been vitally important to the Fante economy, whereas it most certainly was so to the British officials and merchants. The middle-men were often able to shut off or blockade the forts indefinitely in order to gain concessions.(2) Despite their apparent unity, the Fante states competed with each other, sometimes to the point of open hostilities, a fact the British hoped to exploit.(3)

Views of the Ashanti and their empire also tend to differ. Originally a small group of tribes linked by kindred ties, they were persuaded to lay aside their rivalries to join "as partners in a higher association". Within the space of a hundred years, their territory grew from a 1200 square mile enclave to a great

(1) Ibid., p.357.

(2) McCarthy, pp.51-52.

(3) J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa*, Volume 2, (London: Longmans, 1974), pp.172-173. There are records of numerous Fante disputes: Cape Coast and Comenda in 1789, Anomabo against some of the inland states, 1791, Cape Coast vs. Anomabo in 1802, and Shaba against Comenda in 1805.

empire covering nearly 13,500 square miles. New conquests were admitted to membership on equal terms, with their lands intact and with due respect for their language and customs. Without garrisons or annexation, however, the empire had no effective system of provincial administration, relying instead on tribute or voluntary additions to the King's army or treasury. This was the great weakness of the Ashanti empire: conquered tribes who could not be won over by fair treatment or continued to resent the Ashanti presence were left in peace to recover from their defeat and plot revenge. Eventually, the core of Ashanti was surrounded by a cordon of vengeful, restless enemies, awaiting only the proper opportunity to rise in rebellion. The signal for such an event was often the accession of a new ruler, or simply a report of an Ashanti defeat.(1)

Traditionally, Ashanti expansion was ascribed to the slaves-firearms cycle, but Kwame Arhin disputes this. The structure of their empire, he argues, suggests that their conquests were politically motivated.(2) They ruled three types of areas: directly connected provinces; protectorates, or allies, who contributed armed contingents to the army; and tributary states, who escaped this duty by paying tribute.(3) This aspect

(1) W.E.F. Ward, *A History of Ghana*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948, 3rd edition, 1966), pp.140-142.

(2) Kwame Arhin, "The Structure of Greater Ashanti 1700-1824", *Journal of African History*, Volume VIII, #1, 1967, pp.65-85.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.81.

of the empire will be raised again, when discussing a later British Governor's perceptions of the Ashanti.

A third group on the Gold Coast deserves to be included as a distinct and separate influence on British policy. These were the towns beneath or near the European forts. All too often they have been linked to or even included in the Fante confederation. But these 'tribes' had a unique background: a half-caste society was created, free of the restrictions of traditional tribal rule or European law, which made them an attractive haven for fugitives and refugees. Thus there existed a number of communities outside the jurisdiction of the nearby chiefs.(1)

The best examples of these are Cape Coast, Annamabo, and Elmina, the Dutch Castle. Cape Coast sheltered some 8000 people at the turn of the century, or perhaps 11,000 by 1811.(2) The towns did not belong to the Fante confederation, but some confusion on this issue is understandable: they were vulnerable to diplomatic and military pressure, and did often act in concert with their powerful neighbours. But the Elminas, for one, pursued an independent policy, and were at war with the Fante for years, because they became allies of the Ashanti. The Cape Coast people, for their part, were often considered, even by their contemporaries, to belong to the Fante union because of their

(1) Fage, p.55.

(2) The first estimate is from Meredith (p.95); the latter is McCarthy's (p.10).

similar language and customs. Despite this racial homogeneity, the former were usually reluctant to be identified politically with the Fante.(1) The course of events, and the repercussions for British policy, will further support this argument.

The relationship between the British and the towns under their forts were far from harmonious. A contemporary observer, Henry Meredith, labelled the town of Annomabo "remarkably indolent and unruly", citing "frequent acts of outrage", and noting that they had even commenced hostilities against the fort.(2) The town of Cape Coast fares no better at the hands of W.W. Claridge, as he describes the relationship they had with the British:

... though nominally masters, the English really had no authority whatever; and the supply of slaves being entirely in the hands of the people, who well understood the advantage they held, led them to raise frequent disputes and obstructions to the trade, with the object of obtaining some advantage as the price of peace, and although the English had from time to time made attempts to resist these extortions, yet the natives had invariably triumphed. So outrageous did the conduct of the people of Cape Coast eventually become that they not

(1) McCarthy, p.10.

(2) Meredith, p.74. This officer is an ironic witness, for as commander of Winnebah fort in 1812 he was kidnapped and murdered by the people of the town. The aftermath of this incident also reveals the unfortunate state of British relations with the people they occasionally claimed as subjects: "For years afterwards English vessels passing Winnebah were in the habit of pouring a broadside into the town, to give the natives some idea of the severe vengeance that would always be exacted for the murder of a European." A.B. Ellis, *A History of the Gold Coast of West Africa*, (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969)(1893), p.127.

only insulted but actually assaulted ships, merchants, and even officers of the Company.(1)

The British were periodically tempted to impose their will by force of arms,(2) or to assert their authority, as in 1802. Governor Jacob Mould attempted to extract from the town an agreement whereby they would concede to him the right to mediate in their disputes. In 1803, Mould arrested "a principal man" for "tendering base metal ... in lieu of gold" and demanded a payment of 40 ounces of gold from the town because the people had been throwing stones at the Castle and had threatened an officer.(3) The reply was an armed siege of Cap Coast Castle and the end of Mould's ambitious demands.

The Company's influence with their neighbours obviously suffered from the absence of military force, but it was also limited by the ruinous effects of competition and the interference of smugglers and interlopers, which rendered the people "so insolent that they are not to be dealt withall under any reasonable terms."(4) Even the ground rent paid for the land occupied by the forts was interpreted as a form of tribute.(5)

(1) W.W. Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*, 2 volumes, (London: Frank Cass, 2nd ed., 1964)(1915), Vol.1, pp.230-231.

(2) As the Dutch had done on a few occasions, notably at Axim, 1645-47.

(3) McCarthy, p.57; J.J. Crooks, *Records Relating to the Gold Coast Settlements*, (London: Frank Cass, 1923), pp.99-100.

(4) Davies, p.140.

(5) Anstey and Hair, p.22.

The Europeans were "entirely devoid of political authority and political reputation in the eyes of the Africans, whose tenants they were".(1) As the 17th century Dutch governor William Bosman put it, the British and the Dutch had equal power: "That is, none at all".(2)

Such apparent contempt on the part of the Africans was not solely the result of European military weakness. The British, and others, had long ago destroyed their own credibility by indulging in dishonest practices and cut-throat competition. When pushed to extremes, the British had only one option that had any effect on the townspeople: the siege of Cape Coast Castle, for example, was not lifted until the British threatened to hand the town over to the Fante.(3) This incident demonstrates not only the weakness of the British vis a vis Cape Coast, but also the distinction between the latter and the Fante.

The Governor was forced to purchase cooperation, through an elaborate system of bribes. The services acquired in this manner included provisions for the forts, trade agreements, or promises from the tribe in question not to make an alliance with the Dutch. Many of these bribes went to strategically placed groups

(1) Ward, p.146.

(2) Martin, p.52.

(3) R. Porter, "The Cape Coast Conflict of 1803: Relations Between the African and European Communities", *Journal of African History*, Volume XI, 1970, p.63.

who could shut off communications with the forts at will.(1) Eveline Martin estimated that "payments to natives made up more than half the annual expenses of the fort service".(2)

Faced with this situation, the Company's officials seem to have had little power. The vulnerability of the forts and their utter dependence on the goodwill of the surrounding people for the survival of the trade was evident even to the Committee in London, who consequently preached a policy of neutrality and non-involvement. But, despite the limitations to their influence, many governors chose to meddle in local politics, to improve the trade, weaken the Dutch, or, as was most often the case, to increase their own personal profits.(3) Thus, on occasion, the policies pursued in London and Cape Coast Castle were not always consistent. As events on the Coast were to show, this conflict and disagreement at several levels of the decision-making process would have disastrous results for the British.

(1) See Crooks, pp.128-132, for a list of the Company's payments to local chiefs and headmen.

(2) Martin, p.51.

(3) Boehen, pp.21-22.

TORRANE 1806

The nature of Anglo-Ashanti relations depended heavily on the ability of the latter to reach the coast and deliver their trade goods, or arrive in force and remain for any considerable length of time. On the British side the Governor's freedom of choice was limited by a host of influences: relations with the Fante, as well as the people of Cape Coast and other towns, Dutch and possibly Danish competition, instructions from the Committee and advice from his Council, and the scrutiny of official bodies such as the Board of Trade. Colonel George Torrane was the Company's chief officer on the Gold Coast when a long anticipated war between Ashanti and Fante broke out, and the inland kingdom finally reached the sea in 1807. Torrane was thus the first Governor to face a radical transformation of the balance of power, and the destruction of established trading patterns.

The confrontation began innocently enough as a petty dispute between tribal chiefs in the Ashanti tributary of Assin. Amu, ruler of the eastern half of the province, accused a follower of Chibu and Kwaku Aputai, joint chiefs of the western half, of the serious crime of grave-robbing. The Asantehene, Osei Tutu Kwamina, was forced to impose a truce after attempts at mediation had failed to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. Both parties eventually submitted to the King's arbitration, and a decision was reached in favour of Amu. Chibu and Kwaku Aputai chose to reject the settlement and defy their lord, and launched a

surprise attack, in which Amu was heavily defeated. (1)

With this success, the two chiefs apparently lost their heads and murdered the Ashanti messengers. (2) The rebels were quickly defeated and put to flight by an Ashanti army. Chibu and Kwaku Aputai eventually arrived in the lands of the Fante, where they were given sanctuary. The coastal tribes were traditionally prone to shelter fugitives, and it would seem likely that the two chiefs suspected that they would receive little or no aid from any chief within easy reach of the Ashanti.

The Asantehene requested the return of the chiefs, or alternatively, permission to pursue them across Fante lands. The messengers were again murdered, which clearly constituted a declaration of war. The Ashanti invaded in force, defeated the rebels and their allies in two battles, and continued their advance deep into Fante territory until Kwaku Aputai offered to submit himself, promising hostages as securities. The Asantehene relented, and sent presents of gold as a token of his good faith. But the promise of submission was only a ploy, probably to gain

(1) For a more detailed account of these, and subsequent events, see Claridge, volume 1, pp. 238-241, or Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

(2) Claridge portrays the two as flushed with success, and attributes their massive overconfidence to a "fatal flaw" in the African character, "that utter disregard for consequences and inability to look into the future". Failing that, the two may have concluded that they had already gone too far and that they could not hope to preserve their gains by submitting.

time, and the Ashanti envoys were again murdered, this time atrociously.(1) This provocation was followed by yet another Fante defeat, and the fugitives fled to their last possible sanctuary, the British forts on the coast. Kwaku Aputai and Chibu were thus responsible for bringing about the long awaited Fante-Ashanti conflict, and for drawing the British into the problem as well.

Two important questions are raised by the events, to this point, the first being that of the apparent forbearance displayed by the Ashanti. The Asantehene's seemingly endless patience with regard to his turbulent vassals may have been due to unknown factors, such as the possibility of uprisings elsewhere in his empire, or it may have stemmed from a desire to avoid arousing the fears of other tributary states. Ward suggests that the Ashanti were merely cautious(2), but this seems unlikely, considering their impressive military record, unless it was true that they were genuinely slow to take up arms, preferring mediation to war. Osei Tutu Kwamina's restraint in the face of constant treachery is very surprising, and his numerous pauses before committing himself to open hostilities with the Fante have won him almost universal praise from historians and contemporary observers. Certainly he appears to have been, even by

(1) The bodies of the messengers were suspended from trees, and their severed heads, with the mouths stuffed full of excrement, were placed at intervals along the path of the expected Ashanti advance.

(2) Ward, p.150.

anachronistic Western standards, a far more enlightened ruler than any of his contemporaries, including the British.

A.A. Boahen states that, in the nineteenth century, there was not a single invasion of the coast which was not preceded by "weeks, months or even years of negotiations", and that only when diplomacy failed did the Ashanti take up arms.(1) This is even more astonishing when one considers the historical grievances they had against the Fante middle-men.

For the last half-century, the Fante had denied them direct access to the coast, prohibited the sale of firearms, powder, iron bars, lead, and pewter to the Ashanti, meddled in their neighbour's internal affairs, most notably by encouraging rebellion among the disaffected tributary states,(2) and by granting sanctuary to criminals and refugees from the Ashanti empire.(3) This problem could only be solved by force, or by abandoning any hopes of trading directly with the British. These Fante practices were also detrimental to the Company: pure gold obtained from inland was often mixed with base metals before its sale on the coast, Ashanti traders were frequently attacked or robbed, and Europeans were prevented from travelling to the

(1) Boahen, *Topics in West African History*, (London: Longmans, 1966), p.79.

(2) Denkyera, Wassaw, Twifo and Akyera, among others.

(3) Michael Crowder, *West African Resistance*, (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p.22.

interior.(1)

The second important consideration, equally surprising, is that the Fante seem to have brought about their own defeat by provoking a war with the Ashanti. Historical hindsight makes this decision seem foolish, given the overwhelming military superiority of their opponents. But the Fante themselves were powerful, and the Ashanti by no means invincible.(2) The Fante might have been hoping for large scale defections or rebellions among their enemy's vassals, or they may have believed that a failure to support these rebels would irreparably damage their ability to interfere in Ashanti politics in future. Finally, they may have considered a war inevitable, and decided to confront the Ashanti then and there.

Whatever their motives, the Fante were put to flight, and the Ashanti achieved their ambition of reaching the coast. The problem now had to be faced by the British and the tribes of the seaside towns. Governor Torrane would be forced to make a momentous decision: to ally with the Fante and the coastal tribes to keep the Ashanti at bay, or remain neutral and seek to trade with whoever emerged victorious.

The second course had much to recommend it: it was practical, considering the almost abject military weakness of the

(1) Ajayi and Crowder, p.168.

(2) Ward, p.150.

British; trade could continue almost immediately with the victor; and neutrality might permit the Governor to mediate between the two parties, and perhaps increase trade without the dislocation of a war."

An alliance with the Fante can hardly have been attractive, yet Torrane eventually chose to shelter the Assin chiefs. Pro-Ashanti historians have argued that this decision was influenced by the Company's ignorance of the Fante's opponent. Forced to rely on the neighbouring tribes for information, it is hardly surprising that the British formed a biased impression.(1) These historians explain Torrane's decision as an error of judgment based on ignorance, caused in part by the absence of any effective precedent.(2) British unpreparedness was compounded by rivalry with other Europeans: Dutch and Danish indifference to Ashanti control of the coast (both surrendered their forts and quickly came to terms with the invaders) seemed to confirm British fears that their competitors would profit more by an Ashanti conquest, as the Company was so strongly identified with the Fante.(3)

Pro-fante historians have also emphasized British unpreparedness. Ellis rebukes Torrane for not acting sooner,

(1) Claridge, pp.253-4; Ward, p.152.

(2) Ward, p.152.

(3) Crowder, West African Resistance, p.27.

when he might have prevented the clash.(1) In fact, the Governor's initial reaction was to send a flag of truce and propose mediation. But this initiative was rejected by the Fante, as they had already decided on war. In any case, there was little likelihood of success for such an embassy after the murder of the Ashanti envoys, as Osei Tutu Kwamina had sworn an oath not to sheath his sword until he had taken the heads of the rebels.

Torrane eventually took in Chibu and Kwaku Aputai, promising them protection "by mediation or force of arms". The Fante courted the people of Cape Coast, successfully, despite British warnings not to join the alliance.(2) This last action seems to suggest that Torrane was not totally committed to supporting the Fante, and that he may have been keeping his options open.

Meanwhile, the Ashanti advance continued: the vastly overconfident Annamaboes unwisely chose to do battle, and were heavily defeated. The fugitives were taken in by the commander of Annamabo fort, Edward White, who believed that his heavy guns would dissuade the Ashanti from attacking. The fort was, in fact, stormed, and only a heroic defence by its tiny garrison prevented its fall. Undoubtedly White would have been forced to surrender the following day, if not for the direct intervention of Governor Torrane, who was prepared to placate the Ashanti by

(1) Ellis, pp.111-2.

(2) Claridge, p.259.

handing over Chibu (Kwaku Aputai had contrived to escape). This unscrupulous gesture achieved its object, and the Ashanti came to terms with the British. To cement the agreement, the Annamaboes sheltering in and around the fort were divided between the two parties and sold as slaves.

These events, and the meeting of Torrane and the Asantehene have produced a number of historical controversies. First, the wisdom of Torrane's policy during this crisis has been debated. This problem has spilled over into an examination of the Governor's character. Also, the substance of the Anglo-Ashanti agreement reached there has become a crucial focal point in the debate.

Pro-Ashanti scholars have regretted the ignorance and unpreparedness that delayed the Anglo-Ashanti rapprochement, and recognize the unfortunate circumstances that may have crippled it from the outset. Pro-Fante historians, on the other hand, have treated the whole affair as a gross error, compounded by thoroughly disreputable conduct. Though this is an over-simplification, it is still possible to focus on areas where there is clear agreement or continued debate. Both camps seem certain that British ignorance and unpreparedness was partially or wholly to blame for an error in policy. Both groups condemn Governor Torrane's actions as reprehensible, though they disagree on the value of his policy. Finally, there is still some confusion, and hence controversy, surrounding the text of the

verbal agreement between Torrane and the Asantehene.

A.B. Ellis found the Company's "apathy" incomprehensible, and criticized Torrane for his inactivity in the early stages of the conflict: the proper course of action, he argues, would have been to make an offer of mediation, in order to avoid bloodshed. Ellis accuses the Company of "short-sightedness", in that they were unable to see that a Fante defeat would allow the Ashanti to reach the sea.(1) But more recent research would seem to suggest that British inactivity was not the product of apathy, nor of ignorance: though there are traces of confusion and uncertainty in the Company's response, their policy of non-involvement is probably attributable to their desire to remain neutral, and their inability to accurately predict the outcome of an Ashanti-Fante war. But there is no doubt that such a conflict had been anticipated. Sir Dalby Thomas, Chief Governor in 1700, was well aware of the inland kingdom's expansion, and their victory over Denkyera in particular. He began to consider the Ashanti as a possible counterweight to the Fante, who were suspected of acting in collusion with the Dutch.(2) In fact, Ashanti traders apparently reached the coast, and left a strong impression on Thomas, "the first of a long line of Englishmen, soldiers, writers and administrators, to discover in the Ashanti qualities which were thought to be lacking in other African

(1) Ellis, pp.111-112.

(2) Davies, p.288.

peoples".(1) In 1708, the Asantehene was able to communicate directly with the British, asking "to know if Sir Dalby Thomas was willing he should open the wayes by destroying those who opposed it".(2) At a very early date then, the British knew of the Ashanti, their desire to trade directly, and their willingness to attack anyone opposing them. The Company may not have realized that the conquest of Fante by the Ashanti was "an historical inevitability", or "a matter of time",(3) but they must have known that a war between the two was inevitable.

The British also had some information on the composition of the Ashanti empire: in the 1750's, Governor Thomas Melvil remarked on the Ashanti wars of succession and their harmful effects on trade.(4) Though it is clear that Company officials recognized the danger to their trade of tribal wars, it is difficult to ascertain if they realized to what extent the bulk of their trade originated in Ashanti.

This is not to say that the British were well-informed; the Ashanti, it seems, were no more certain about the Europeans. The Fante, in 1753, tried to show that they had a solid alliance with

(1) Ibid.

(2) T70/5, Thomas to the Company, September 30, 1708.

(3) Ajayi and Crowder, p.167.

(4) J.K. Fynn, "The Reign and Times of Kusi Obodum", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (Vol. VIII, 1965), p.25.

the British.(1) This ploy may have succeeded: a British merchant reported that a projected Ashanti invasion of the coastal states had been postponed, because of the unknown potential of the Europeans.(2) In fact, fear of the British may have prevented earlier Ashanti monarchs from attempting an invasion of the coast. Obviously, neither side was particularly well-informed about the other; but their 'ignorance' is perhaps slightly exaggerated. It can also be safely shown that references to the "lack of a precedent" to guide Torrane are completely mistaken. Between 1765 and 1772 there occurred several war scares where the possibility of an Ashanti-Fante confrontation seemed imminent.

The Ashanti were trying to reach the coast in order to trade directly, only to find themselves blocked by an alliance between Wassaw and Akim in 1765.(3) The Fante, suspecting that their turn might soon follow, joined the alliance temporarily, but proceeded to betray both sides as they sought the best advantage. The British and the Dutch, concerned by this threat to their trade, met to consult on the matter. The latter seemed to prefer the Ashanti, which may have aroused British suspicions. In any case, the murder of an Ashanti messenger by the Fante drove the

(1) Ibid., p.26.

(2) S. Tenkorang, "The Importance of Firearms in the Struggle Between Ashanti and the Coastal States 1708-1807", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (Vol. IX, 1968, pp.1-16), p.14.

(3) For a detailed account, see Margaret Priestley, "The Ashanti Question and the British: Eighteenth Century Origins", *Journal of African History*, Vol.II, #1, 1961, pp.35-59.

Governor to call for naval assistance, as the outbreak of war seemed imminent.

Thus the Company officials had considered the problem and its ramifications some thirty or forty years before Torrane's dilemma. The decision reached at this time is highly relevant, as it constitutes a clear precedent for the events of 1806. The Company had begun to suspect the value of Ashanti trade, but feared having to deal with a despotic, centralized empire who might control a monopoly: the Fante, on the other hand, a turbulent, decentralized confederation, offered the advantage of separate arrangements with individual towns and smaller units.(1) Nonetheless, the British were under no illusions as to the reliability or admirability of their neighbours, as this comment by then Governor Gilbert Petrie reveals:

I am quite of a different opinion in regard to their strength and bravery, neither of which I ever saw an instance of but in bravado: the tyrannical exercise of their superiority over the lesser states - their neighbours on the sea-coast and their insolence to Europeans, who have chosen to make themselves dependent on them.(2)

However, the Fante had made themselves useful to the Company before, as in the 1750's, when they agreed to exclude the French traders.(3) Also, the British sought to tie the Fante to

(1) Ibid., p.50.

(2) ADM1/3810, Petrie to the Committee, October 9, 1767; Tenkorang, p.12.

(3) Margaret Priestley, "Richard Brew ...", p.33.

themselves, as they would again in future, from fear of Dutch intrigues. They believed, not without foundation, that their rivals enjoyed close relations with the Ashanti, and would profit from their victory. This fear of Dutch intrigues was very real, as Petrie reveals:

It has been a maxim in their political conduct from which they seldom, if ever, err; to aggrandise themselves at our expense. They have succeeded in making this Ashanti King regard us as his enemies, at least the allies of his enemies.(1)

This distrust of the Dutch, who obviously expected to gain from their connections with the Ashanti, and British fears that it would be difficult to deal with a powerful, autocratic monarch, who held a monopoly over their trade, contributed to the Company's marked preference for the Fante. However turbulent the Confederation, their internal disputes made it possible to bypass or circumvent undesirable elements, an advantage many governors felt might be lost if the Ashanti gained control.(2)

These views had to be communicated to the Committee in London, to explain the course of action the Governor and his council had chosen. Perhaps to justify this decision, the following assessment of the two parties was despatched to London in 1772:

[The Fante were then] a people long used to the manners of the Europeans and pretty much civilized: as neighbours far preferable

(1) Tenkorang, p.12.

(2) T70/31, Hippiisley to the Committee, July 13, 1766, and Mill to the Committee, June 22, 1772.

to the Ashantis who are a rude unpolished set of men governed by a despotic tyrannical prince with whom we might find it very hard (if practicable) to live on any terms.(1)

The Council at Cape Coast Castle thus decided to support the Fante. Any hope of mediation or Anglo-Dutch cooperation was dashed by mutual suspicion, the intransigence of the Fante, and the meddling of self-interested private traders and interlopers.(2)

But the council's declaration met with a rebuke from the Committee, supported by the Board of Trade, who preached a policy of neutrality and non-involvement. This disagreement between the men on the spot and their superiors in London was to have serious repercussions, but at the time, it merely made the precedent that much clearer. The Committee, the various organs of Parliament to which it was technically responsible, and the merchants of London, Bristol and Liverpool all considered the Ashanti trade to be highly desirable, and deplored the risk of open war, which would inevitably entail the dislocation of commerce. In 1772, the Committee and the Board of trade expressed their dissatisfaction with the Council's actions, and a year later Governor David Mill was categorically ordered to obey his instructions and pursue a policy of non-involvement.(3) In any case, the war scares subsided without serious incident, and the council was able to lapse into a curious form of inertia:

(1) Crooks, p.37.

(2) Priestley, "The Ashanti Question ...", p.53.

(3) Ibid., p.58.

supporting the Fante, but earnestly hoping that they would never be put to the test. Nor was the difference of opinion between London and Cape Coast Castle ever conclusively resolved.

In September 1804 the Committee met to discuss its members' apprehensions over the inefficiency of their Governor-in-Chief, a case of insubordination among the junior officers, and the insecurity of the forts under the present administration.(1) The solution, they decided, was to name a new Governor, with the honorary rank of Colonel to enhance his authority, instructed to "clean up" the Company service. The Committee's choice was George Torrane, who began his service with the Company as a Writer in 1785, progressing to Deputy Accountant in 1787, Accountant (1789), Officer of the Guard, and finally Commander of Tantumquerry and Member of Council, until April 1792, when he resigned, apparently dissatisfied with his superiors on the Coast. Under pressure to reform, the Company was seeking respectability: Torrane was given the task of restoring order and reducing waste and corruption, by means of vastly increased personal powers, which would effectively make him almost independent of his Council.(2) These measures, too, would sow the seeds of future disagreement.

Torrane was apparently "a vigorous hand at the helm", who

(1) Crooks, p.102. Meeting of the Committee of the Company of Merchants, 1804.

(2) Martin, pp.147-8.

not only kept his books up to date, but completed those of his predecessors, who were some nine years in arrears. He compares very favorably with his two immediate forerunners in office, Archibald Dalziel (March 1792-Dec 1798; April 1800-Sept 1802) and Jacob Mould (Dec 1798-Jan 1799; Sept 1802-Feb 1805). The former was "timid and irresolute", allowing discipline to lapse; the latter was a feeble leader, guilty of financial mismanagement and incredible indolence, as well as "a devotion to the bottle".(1) It was Mould's mishandling of the situation that sparked the Cape Coast riot of 1803.

Torrane had very little time to repair the damage wrought by years of mismanagement and incompetent administration before he was faced with the dilemma of the Ashanti invasion. While historians have stressed British ignorance and unpreparedness, Torrane pursued a policy which conforms remarkably to the Committee's guidelines, as stated forty years earlier. His first instinctive reaction was neutrality; and, while he did shelter the fugitive chiefs, it must be added that a refusal to do so might have angered the Fante and aroused their antagonism. Also, Torrane nonetheless continued to avoid involvement in the dispute: he sent a circular to the other forts, ordering them not to take in the refugees, to avoid provoking the Ashanti, and personally sought to dissuade the people of Cape Coast from

(1) R. Porter, "The Cape Coast Conflict of 1803", pp.27-63.

joining the Fante.(1)

Unfortunately, this rather startling adherence, or, at least, agreement with the Committee's policy has been overshadowed by the incident at Annamabo. Even those historians who favour his pro-Ashanti stance have joined in the universal condemnation. The pro-Fante Ellis dubbed the betrayal of Chibu and enslavement of the Annamaboes "a monstrous transaction", and suggested that Torrane shared the spoils with Cape Coast town, only to purchase their cooperation.(2) C.C. Reindorf refers to his "cowardice and cruelty", (3) and even Claridge finds Torrane "guilty of a most dastardly act ... in itself sufficient to nullify all the glory derived from the spirited defence of Anomabu fort", and accuses him of currying favour with the Asantehene to pave the way for a successful conference.(4) Most historians have compounded the indictment by praising John Swanzy, the only man who protested and refused to be associated with the exchange. Later versions of the events have carried on in this vein: The House of Commons Papers of 1865 record that

(1) Tenkorang, p.16. Torrane's order read that "the natives [not] be received in the fort, on the principle that the King of Ashantee would demand them, and that it might involve the fort in a war with the Ashantees". Only the clear threat to one of his forts persuaded him to come to terms, rather hurriedly, with the victors.

(2) Ellis, p.118.

(3) C.C. Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966), p.140.

(4) Claridge, pp.249-50.

the Ashanti attacked the Fante, "whom the settlers, with a selfish but mistaken regard for their own interest, abandoned to their fate".(1) This interpretation is highly coloured by anachronistic views: the Company's officers were hardly 'settlers', and their regard for their own interest was exactly what their superiors expected, and demanded of them.

This type of act, it would seem, was fairly characteristic of European and African conduct: as K.G. Davies states, diplomacy and bribery were synonymous, and agreements were regularly broken.(2) The Fante, certainly, did not seek to take revenge, if only out of fear, and the people of Cape Coast were not too scrupulous to forego their share of the slaves. Ward argues that the British were in no way bound to aid the Fante, "whom indeed they had little cause to love".(3) Torrane cannot be blamed for standing aloof, he adds, but only for going out of his way to curry favour with the Ashanti by means of an unnecessary act of treachery. But the circumstances surrounding the event suggest that the Governor had very few options. As D.C.M. Platt states, "The turnover of allies in a crisis was often remarkable". In many cases, British policy was partially determined by the amount,

(1) Crooks, p.117.

(2) Davies, p.284-7.

(3) Ward, p.152.

of wealth and military power committed to the area.(1) Given the extremely limited resources at Torrane's disposal, his decision to seek an accommodation with the Ashanti by whatever means possible should come as no surprise. Moreover, there existed a strong precedent for this sort of action: fugitives and refugees seeking shelter in the British forts were frequently sold into slavery.(2) It was not so much the act of betrayal itself, then, but the scale on which it was carried out, that makes the event at Annamabo worthy of note.

John Swanzy's lone demurrals should indicate that Torrane's action was generally accepted. As for personal attacks on the Governor, which have been quoted to support the condemnation of his behaviour, these may have been due to his unpopularity with certain individuals, the natural reward of a vigorous officer intent on 'cleaning up the service'. One officer, John Dawson, was antagonized by the appropriation of his quarters for Torrane's mistress; and John Wilson, a free trader, had little cause to love the Governor after he was imprisoned for striking a slave.(3) Also, the Danish Governor's description of a man "so discourteous that Fort Christianborg simply broke off all correspondence with him"(4) cannot be taken at face value,

(1) Louis, p.132.

(2) Claridge, pp.233-234.

(3) Martin, p.60; McCarthy, p.43.

(4) Georg Norregard, *Danish Settlements in West Africa 1658-1850*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1966), p.188.

considering Danish attitudes towards the British in the wake of Nelson's action at Copenhagen. This is not to say that Torrane was a man of impeccable character: he died indebted, having left England in 1804 owing 766 pounds sterling to the firm of L.B. Cohen and Son,(1) and there may well be good reason to criticize his conduct on moral grounds. But any assessment which is entirely based on the propriety of the events at Annamaboe, or the character of the Governor, will, of necessity, be incomplete and unfair.

Torrane was, without a doubt, far more efficient than his predecessors, and, faced with a crisis, adopted a policy compatible with the guidelines laid down by the Committee. It must be noted that no attempt was made to undo the alliance reached with the Ashanti, nor was Torrane immediately censured. It is interesting to note the reactions of other officers on the spot: the surrender of Chibu, wrote Henry Meredith, second in command of the fort when it was attacked, was a wise act, as it saved them from certain destruction and ensured good relations with the Ashanti.(2) Edward White, the commander of Annamaboe fort and Torrane's successor as Governor, informed the Committee of the latter's death in 1807:

By this very severe loss, Gentlemen, your service is left in a delicate situation, a person of abilities similar to those possessed by Colonel Torrane is wanting to succeed to the chair. I am sorry to say

(1) T70/1586.

(2) Meredith, p.162.

there is none such in your service.(1)

The morality of Torrane's "treacherous act" has obscured its political importance. Whether by design or mere coincidence, Torrane followed the Committee's instructions. By handing over Chibu, the Governor hastily changed his position to come to terms with a new power. However dubious the method, he succeeded in gaining the confidence of the Ashanti, and reached a potentially profitable agreement with them.

The momentous first meeting between Torrane and the Asantehene remains a source of controversy. Perhaps the most cited quote is the King's remark, years later, regarding the enslavement of those who had been sheltering in the fort. "From the hour Torrane delivered up Otibu [Chibu], I took the English for my friends, because I saw their object was trade only, and they did not care for the people".(2) Critics of the Governor have fastened on the last part, naturally, but this admission indicates how successful the Company's policy of non-involvement might have been, had it been properly followed up. The Governor was only interested in trade at this time, before the advent of abolitionist influences on colonial decision-making. Further, he had neither the resources nor the ability to intervene in local politics of this scale. Therefore, as the Asantehene's reaction suggests, Torrane's, and the Committee's approach to such a

(1) Martin, p.149.

(2) Ward, p.155.

radical shift in the balance of power and control of the trade routes was the most profitable, and perhaps the only option open to them.

A second controversy surrounds the question of Ashanti gains recognized by the Governor. It has been commonly accepted that Torrane agreed to the Asantehene's right, by conquest, to the rent for the British forts: the vital question of the 'Notes'.(1) The Danes and Dutch had already surrendered their title deeds to the conquerors, so it would not be unusual for the British to have done the same. Torrane, however, reserved for the Company a vague degree of judicial authority over the coastal towns adjacent to their forts. This seemingly innocuous detail would later provide the basis for the fatal rift between the British and the Ashanti, and the destruction of any serious hopes of alliance. But, for the present, Torrane recognized the King's conquests, and the two parties separated on excellent terms. The Governor was able to relay to the Committee the Asantehene's promise to avoid all towns under the British forts, provided the inhabitants were not in arms against him.(2) Unfortunately, the meeting did not produce a written treaty, and the Ashanti, suffering from smallpox and dysentery in the unhealthy coastal climate, were forced to withdraw before they had completely consolidated their gains. The consummation of a

(1) Ellis, p.117; Ward, p.155.

(2) T70/35, Torrane to the Committee, July 20, 1807.

solid Anglo-Ashanti commercial and political alliance was not only postponed: it was to become the subject of a fierce dispute between agents of the Crown and the Company, dragging on for twenty-five years of war and confrontation before it was irrevocably lost.

1807-1815

With the withdrawal of the Ashanti and the death of Torrane, new problems arose for the Company, regarding the interpretation of their policy. The Committee would have had few doubts as to the proper course of action, after receiving Torrane's unequivocal assurance that " the Ashantee will win wherever they go".(1) Here, then, was a desirable trading partner, possessed of almost overwhelming military force, who could be dealt with on favourable terms: "In all my negotiations with the King, I had cause to remark, what I have not experienced on the Sea Coast - to wit the strictest regard to his word - ... indeed all the principal Ashantees, seem half a century advanced in civilization; to these people on the waterside."(2) Torrane also communicated to his superiors the Asantehene's promise to avoid all towns under the British forts provided they were not in arms against him. The result of Torrane's meeting with Osei Tutu Kwamina, and his subsequent report, must have suggested to the Committee that their espousal of a policy of neutrality and accommodation had been vindicated. The dilemma facing British policy had disappeared: the balance of power had been broken, and as the Fante had become vassals and tributaries of the Ashanti, there was no longer any need to choose an ally.

(1) Torrane to the Committee, July 20, 1807; C.W. Newbury, *British Policy Towards West Africa: Select Documents*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p.282.

(2) *Ibid.*, p.283.

However, the Ashanti withdrawal plunged the coastal areas into renewed chaos and uncertainty. By 1809 the resurgent Fante embarked on a war of revenge against Accra and Elmina, who had sided with the invaders. The Ashanti attempted to aid their allies, but their assistance was limited, as rebellions had broken out in Akim and Akwapim. Cape Coast, too, might have felt the wrath of the Fante, if only because they had not suffered equally during the invasion.(1) But the town escaped retribution by volunteering to aid them against Elmina, despite Governor White's warning.(2)

By 1811, the Ashanti succeeded in relieving Accra, and the Fante were forced to resort to guerilla warfare. In 1814, after a series of battles and skirmishes, the latter were soundly defeated, and their military power effectively shattered.(3) But these years of warfare caused great destruction and misery, as well as the interruption of trade.(4) The British 'alliance' with Ashanti lapsed, as the Company retreated to a position of neutrality once again.

This was to occasion sharp debate, perhaps accentuated by the behaviour of the Dutch, who intervened to help the

(1) McCarthy, p.10.

(2) Meredith, p.169.

(3) Ward, pp.156-59.

(4) Ellis, pp.122-23.

neighbouring Elminas against the Fante attacks.(1) Henry Meredith came down solidly on the side of the Ashanti, whom he described as "evidently better acquainted with the rules of decency and morality, than any people we know of in this country". The Fante were, "in comparison, an indolent, faithless, and ferocious people, and their caboceers, or petty chiefs, in general drunken, deceitful, and avaricious, ever seeking an opportunity to gratify their passions".(2) Peace was necessary for trade: neither, argued Meredith, would be established until the Fante "faced facts". "But they are a vain and obstinate people, and will not yield without the interposition of another power; and that power is the English".(3) Thus he advocated a military alliance with the Ashanti, to ensure peace and protect the trade. Meredith wanted strong measures: in his opinion the Fante would only understand terror, and might grow even more troublesome if not for the Ashanti.

Torrane's successor, White, took a more conciliatory line, perhaps to avoid antagonizing the Fante while they had the upper hand: he proposed peace with the Ashanti, which the Coastal confederation promptly refused. He seems to have shared, to a certain extent, Meredith's poor opinion of their neighbours.

(1) Meredith, p.90.

(2) Ibid., pp.190-91.

(3) Ibid., pp.204-5.

"The Fantees are a bad bullying people ... They are at this moment exercising their utmost to injure the people of Cape Coast, and only (as I am informed) because the latter did not suffer equally with themselves."(1)

The abolition of the slave trade in 1807 would further complicate the Company's decision-making: the vast majority of its former trade was now illegal, and the Committee was forced to seek to fulfill functions that would continue to make their services necessary. Of course, the likelihood of abolition had been accepted as early as 1790, so that it was neither a surprise nor a disaster.(2) "The passing of the abolition act caused at the time strikingly little stir either in the administration of the Company of Merchants, or on the Gold Coast." The inevitable was accepted, and a request for an additional 5,000 pounds sterling, to compensate for expected losses in revenue, was duly granted.(3)

On the coast, however, abolition caused "strikingly little stir" because for the next ten years, it was only of secondary importance, compared to the destruction and suffering brought about by the continuous wars. Governor White reported that the

(1) White to the Committee, May 5, 1809; T70/35; see Newbury, p.14.

(2) Drake, PHD Thesis, p.92.

(3) Martin, p.150.

conflict made ~~it~~ difficult to measure the effects of abolition.(1) The slave trade, of course, was not suppressed: the Africans continued to deal in slaves,(2) and the British themselves participated until 1810, while smugglers and traders of other nations kept the trade going for a number of years.(3) In 1816, the African Society estimated that some 60,000 slaves a year were still being carried across the Atlantic, by traders who simply flew the American, Portuguese or Spanish flag.(4) White confessed his inability to prevent smuggling by the Spaniards, and his successor accused the Dutch Governor of actively helping Spanish and Portuguese slavers.(5)

It is, unfortunately, difficult to establish what role, if any, Company officials of the post-abolition era played in the suppression of the trade. This is an important question, for many historians have used evidence of abolitionist sentiment as proof of 'moral character'. But it would seem unlikely that the Company's officials, having built their careers and fortunes on the slave trade, would become staunch abolitionists. The Merchants hoped that their forts could become bases for the

(1) T70/35, White to the Committee, December 26, 1809.

(2) Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), p.266.

(3) McCarthy, pp.72-76; Drake, p.120.

(4) Webster, Vol.II, p.456.

(5) Newbury, p.18, White to Committee, March 25, 1811; p.38, Governor and Council to Committee, March 5, 1817.

suppression of the trade, in order for them to continue to serve a useful purpose, but it may be unrealistic to look for philanthropic motives among their employees on the Gold Coast. Captain Edward Harrington, an American who visited the coast in 1840, wrote that "their efforts have not been so far crowned with any great visible success" as slaves were still held in the houses of the resident merchants. As well, Harrington's description of the lifestyle of the whites is very similar to that given in the first chapter of this paper.(1)

The end of the legitimate slave trade was to cause some confusion with regard to British relations with the Ashanti. The Asantehene, for some reason, seems to have believed that the Company had shut off the trade, as a means of bringing pressure to bear on him. He thought that his war with the Fante had caused abolition, and offered to cease hostilities and come to terms, hoping that the Governor would "in return consider if he cannot renew the slave trade, which will be good for me".(2) The end of this traffic, however, does not seem to have decreased the importance of trade with Ashanti. Although legitimate commerce would not equal the old profits for some time, the inland kingdom remained the largest supplier of gold and ivory, and might hold

(1) George E. Brooks, Jr., "The Letter Book of Captain Edward Harrington", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (Volume VI, 1962, pp.71-78), p.74. Harrington described them as practicing "gross sensuality".

(2) I70/40, Copies of two letters from the Asantehene to Governor John Hope-Smith, May 26, 1817, and September 22, 1817.

the key to British contact with the vast hinterland of Africa.

The search for an alternative, legitimate trade haunted the Committee. Nothing could replace the immensely profitable slave trade, but the Merchants were preoccupied, in the years after abolition, with the question of their very survival. They endeavoured to discover a role which would continue to make them useful to the Crown, and preserve the valuable subsidies towards the maintenance of their forts. To this end, they "begged" for advice from the Government, asking what kind of trade they were to carry on.(1) Unfortunately for them, Parliament remained indecisive: abolition and the suppression of the slave trade required the development of 'legitimate' substitutes, but nothing was readily available to fill the enormous gap.(2)

Other trades already existed; Africa was virtually the only source of barwood, redwood, camwood, ivory, gum, Malaguetta pepper and palm oil.(3) In the early nineteenth century, Africa

(1) Martin, p.153.

(2) Peter L. Wickins, *An Economic History of Africa from the Earliest Times to Partition*, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.17.

(3) Anstey and Hair, p.141; Drake, PHD Thesis, pp.63-64. Barwood, camwood and redwood were dyewoods of a variable reddish brown colour. Malaguetta peppers, also known as Grains of Paradise or Guinea grains, were a drug or spice formerly exported overland to the Barbary states, and from thence to Italy. By the nineteenth century, they were available almost exclusively from the Gold Coast, and were used as a spice, or in veterinary practice. They had been used to flavour malt liquors, gins, or cordials, before this custom was declared illegal in Britain.

was usually the source of a mere 1% of total imports to Britain, but the possibility that she was the sole or dominant supplier of some products made her far more important than the strictly quantitative statistics show. (1) B.K. Drake, in his PhD Thesis, "Liverpool Trade With Africa Before and After Abolition", shows West Africa's ability to meet British demand for various products, notably: between 70% and 90% of the ivory (1805-1820), 90% of the gum Senegal (1805-1814), 100% of the palm oil (1805-1835), 90% to 100% of the camwood (1805-1835), 50% to 100% of the redwood (1805-1835), and 90% to 100% of the teak (1820-1835). (2) Of these, palm oil was to become a large commodity in the first half of the century: imports from West Africa rose from 223 tons in 1800, to 21,723 tons in 1850, a staggering increase of over 9700%. (3).

But this would come far too late to save the Company, who were forced to justify their existence and prove their value to the Crown by other means. The years leading to the end of the Merchant's Charter also helped to obscure the effects of abolition, and contributed in no small way to the decline of the Anglo-Ashanti understanding.

(1) Drake, PhD Thesis, p.154.

(2) Ibid., Appendix 21, p.256.

(3) Martin Lynn, "Change and Continuity in the British Palm Oil Trade With West Africa 1830-1855", *Journal of African History*, (Vol. XXII, #3, 1981, pp.331-348), p.332.

The period immediately following abolition also brought about several changes in the Government's attitudes towards the Gold Coast. As the war against Napoleon continued, the political status of the smaller states of Europe underwent a radical transformation. The Danes no longer posed a threat to Britain after the destruction of their fleet by Nelson at Copenhagen, and the majority of Holland's valuable colonies had been captured. To combat Napoleon's Continental System, and perhaps in the hope of weaning these small states from their ties to France, the British chose to accord them special treatment.

The Company, eager to serve Parliament's interests, quickly shifted their policy on the Coast. The Committee passed a resolution to treat the Dutch and Danes, their rivals and often enemies, with "forbearance".(1) Soon thereafter, the Board of Trade would inform them that British ships were ordered not to molest vessels of these two nations.(2) This led to a surprising degree of cooperation, especially in the case of the Danes, who were unable to send a ship to the Gold Coast between 1807 and 1814; Governor Schionning, reduced to dire straits, was able to persuade English merchants to provide him with loans amounting to

(1) T70/149, October 14, 1807.

(2) BT3/10, Board of Trade to the Committee of African Merchants, September 9, 1809.

over 10,000 pounds sterling.(1) This era of indulgence and cooperation was not permanent; the Company officials would soon return to blaming their problems on 'Dutch intrigues', and the Government's interest, and involvement in the Gold Coast forts was soon to increase dramatically.

The passage of the Abolition Act and the end of twenty years of war with France were dark omens for the African merchants. The loss of their lucrative trade was not the only ill effect of abolition; with the campaign in Parliament, the Company found itself exposed to public scrutiny. In 1811, prompted by abolitionists, supporters of legitimate trade and other groups interested in the exploration or 'civilizing' of Africa, Parliament authorized a Commission of Inquiry to report on the West African settlements.(2) Sierra Leone, already in use as a refuge for liberated slaves and a base for the suppression of the trade, won considerable praise, while the Company's trading posts were condemned as a needless expense. Only three of the forts were considered at all useful. This clear criticism of their administration aroused the merchants' fears of a forced merger with Sierra Leone.(3) These apprehensions were well grounded: as early as May, 1807, the Governor of the latter, Zachary Macaulay,

(1) Norregard, p.190. Governor Schionning borrowed 1500 pounds sterling in 1810, 1,086 in 1811, 3500 in 1812, and 4000 in 1813.

(2) Metcalfe, p.3. The Commissioners were all former Governors of Sierra Leone.

(3) Martin, pp.154-5.

wrote to Lord Castlereagh, proposing exactly that, arguing that the Gold Coast forts were no longer needed to promote the slave trade.(1)

The advent of peace in 1815 was no more favourable to the Committee. The struggle against Napoleon had been an enormous financial drain, and the Government began a policy of fiscal restraint. The colonies, in particular, came under close scrutiny, as Britain sought to reduce her expenditures. Faced with shortages of cash and serious social problems, the British adopted a new attitude to their overseas possessions: once valued as the source of the nation's wealth and power, the colonies were now seen as a financial and military burden. The old mercantilist theories were giving way to the pressure of free trade, and even the role of the colonies in the 'seapower' argument no longer held true: Britain had undisputed control of the seas, having annihilated the navies of her rivals. At this juncture, only the possibility that the forts could be used as bases for the suppression of slavery would ensure their continued existence.

The Company, with its often incompetent administration, and lacking the support of a powerful lobby in Parliament, was increasingly vulnerable to this public scrutiny. The report of a Select Committee of the House of Commons on the African Forts in 1816 was a crushing defeat. Their trading posts were labelled

(1) Macaulay to Castlereagh, May 8, 1807, Newbury, pp.4-5.

"very trifling, unproductive concerns" which were maintained at a loss, and existed only by the goodwill of the local tribes. The Select Committee suggested that the majority be simply abandoned.(1) A second Select Committee report the following year was equally critical, noting that the forts were incapable of withstanding attack, and insufficient as trading centres. But the report held out a ray of hope for the Committee: the trade in gold, ivory, palm oil and dye woods was increasing, and the forts could potentially be used for suppression of the slave trade.(2) The Select Committee went so far as to recommend that the annual grants to the Company be increased, to enable them to reach the interior and establish regular intercourse with the Ashanti.(3)

These proceedings reveal an unprecedented level of Government involvement in the affairs of the Gold Coast, and a clear interest in gaining access to the interior. Philip Curtin suggests that Britain was largely undecided about a West African strategy at this stage,(4) but several elements of a consistent policy seem to have appeared in the discussions in Parliament. It is interesting to note that the local crises (i.e. the Ashanti wars) did not prompt this new interest in the management of the

(1) Report from a Select Committee of the House of Commons on the African Forts, June 26, 1816, Harlow and Madden, pp.488-9.

(2) Martin, pp.162-3.

(3) Report from a Select Committee of the House of Commons, June 25, 1817, Harlow and Madden, pp.491-3.

(4) Curtin, *Image of Africa*, pp.160-1.

forts. The Select Committee reports were part of a larger examination of colonial expenditures, and the Government's other interests in the Gold Coast related to suppression of the slave trade, the sponsoring of legitimate, alternative commerce, and access to the interior.

The Company eagerly grasped at any positive indications that could be gleaned from these reports, for if the Committee could continue to serve a useful purpose, they might hope to stave off the threat of a merger, or of complete dissolution. They adopted the positions apparently advocated by Parliament, and, to a lesser degree, the public. Inland penetration, for example, had long been deemed unnecessary and unwise: African traders could be counted on to bring their slaves and produce to the forts, and the unhealthy climate and fierce opposition from middle-men were sufficient deterrents.⁽¹⁾ But now, with the weakness of the Fante, and the support of the Ashanti, the exploration of the interior was more attractive, and certainly within reach.

The Committee applied their energies to convince the Colonial Secretary that they were willing, and able, to implement any policy the Government might choose. In a letter to Lord Bathurst, they offered to reduce the number of their forts as desired, and increase the efficiency of their administration. Only the Company's officers, they argued, could remove the

(1) Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p.24.

obstacles to increased trade, mediate in the Ashanti-Fante dispute, and open regular communications with the powerful inland kingdom, while being careful to avoid arousing the jealousy of the coastal tribes. Winnebah would have to be rebuilt, and the other garrisons reinforced by "not more than 100 soldiers" (mulattoes). The Company promised great commercial arrangements and the exploration of the interior, with only a slight increase in expense.(1)

From 1815 to 1820, the Company was, in a sense, on trial for its very existence. In those six years they once more revealed their gross incompetence. The Merchants failed, miserably, to achieve any of the goals that might have justified their continued privileges. They were of no use in the suppression of the slave trade, failed to end African disputes and reopen trade, and became involved in a confrontation with the Ashanti, instead of gaining their trust and permission to explore the interior. Their failures once again reveal a dichotomy between the objectives of the Government, the Committee, and the Company's officers on the Coast.

(1) Committee to Bathurst, December 5, 1815, Harlow and Madden, pp.486-8.

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The Governor and Council, who would carry out the Committee's new plans to restore its failing reputation, were also in favour of an embassy to the Ashanti capital, for their own reasons. Without a stable, lasting peace, African traders could not reach the British forts, and the Company's commerce would remain almost non-existent. The Ashanti, despite their decisive victories, never consolidated their hold on the coastal areas, for a number of reasons: as was explained in Chapter I, the King had no lasting form of provincial administration, other than the imposition of tribute, and, apparently, the expectation that the vanquished would recognize the inevitable and accept their new status. The Asantehene appointed viceroys, or "ambassadors", to some of the conquered states (Akyeampon, Elmina, Cape Coast, Abora, and Annomabo), but they were withdrawn in 1818 when the Ashanti closed the paths to prosecute their war against Gyaman.(1) Also, the Ashanti rarely mobilized large forces against the coastal tribes, whether for fear of antagonizing the British, or because of wars or disturbances elsewhere in their empire.

The Fante, however, remained turbulent, and consistently attempted to throw off the 'Ashanti yoke'. Ward suggests that

(1) Ajayi and Crowder, p.176. The envoy to Annomabo was in fact recalled earlier, as the commander of the British fort refused to allow him any authority.

the Fante may have thought they could cease paying tribute in a few years, when the British would be in a better position to help them against their enemy. (1) Torrane's betrayal of Chibu was apparently forgotten, ten years later.

It seems surprising that the Fante could have hoped for eventual aid from the British, who desired nothing more than the extension of their trade to the interior. But the Ashanti seem to have been even more confused by the conduct of the Company's officers. They soon came to doubt the trustworthiness of the new Governor, John Hope-Smith. The Asantehene suspected the British, with good reason, of selling him poorer quality goods at inflated prices. As this compared very unfavourably with the trading practices of the Dutch at Elmina, the King felt cheated. (2) The Ashanti also felt that, contrary to the spirit of the agreement entered into by Governor Torrane, the British were not watching over their ally's interests. The interpretation of this problem in standard histories of the Gold Coast, notably Ward's *A History of Ghana*, has led to a slight misconception. The error, encouraged no doubt by the tendencies of contemporary British sources, lies in the indiscriminate use of the term 'Fante' to indicate any of the groups residing on or near the coast. As has been shown, the tribes in the towns near the British forts constituted a distinct unit, separate from the Fante

(1) Ward, p.163.

(2) Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee*, (London, 1824).

Confederation, and eager to preserve their independence. This diversity was clearly recognized by a number of the Company's officers, especially Governor Hope-Smith.

The Ashanti states Ward were puzzled by British policy. Torrane had reserved for the Company some vague form of judicial authority over the towns near the forts. The Asantehene, having ceded this right, expected the Governor to take action in the event of a dispute with these groups: to punish them himself, step aside and allow the Ashanti to do so, or represent the towns and be responsible for them. (1) The problem was partly caused, and certainly compounded, by the absence of accredited Ashanti representatives. But Hope-Smith refused to take action himself, and persisted in opposing Ashanti efforts to mete 'justice' in an area they considered theirs by right of conquest. The Governor, by contrast, claimed the townspeople as British subjects, outside the jurisdiction of the Ashanti. The distinction between Cape Coast, for example, and the Fante Confederation, became a nagging obstacle to an alliance between the Company and the Asantehene. It is interesting to note that the Asantehene's views on the people of Cape Coast were remarkably similar to those held by the majority of his contemporaries, with the exception of John Hope-Smith.

Once again a sharp division in British policy becomes apparent: the Committee, on one hand, desired to consolidate an

(1) Ward, p.164.

understanding with the inland kingdom, at the expense of their coastal neighbours, if need be; and the Governor, on the other, who seemed willing to jeopardize good relations with the Ashanti, to preserve the independence of the Cape Coast people. Hope-Smith's attitude confused the Ashanti, but it must be noted that his actions did not reflect the hopes and aspirations of his employers or of the Crown. A naval captain, Sir James Yeo, expressed more properly the British position:

The people of the coast called Fantees have done everything in their power to prevent the Ashantees, natives of the interior, from having any communication with it; as by excluding them from the trade, they act as brokers between the Ashantees and the European merchants. They are a vile, abandoned sort of people and rob both one and the other; and what is more extraordinary, we have countenanced them in it, although it is both unjust to the Ashantees and in direct opposition to our commercial interests, as a free trade with the natives of the interior would be of great national importance, and which the King of the Ashantees is most anxious to establish. (1)

This letter was transmitted by the Admiralty to the Colonial Office. It clearly identifies British interests and the value of a commercial alliance with the Ashanti, and recognizes the Fante as an impediment. The Committee took a similar line in a despatch to the Governor and Council, dated November 13, 1816.

The Committee are extremely anxious and in this respect the wishes of all classes of People in this country go with them that no exertions should be spared to become better acquainted with the interior of Africa ...

(1) C0267/44, Letter from Captain Sir James Yeo, HMS Inconstant, transmitted by the Admiralty to the Colonial Office, November, 1816.

and they cannot too strongly impress upon the minds of the King and people of Ashantee, that the only objects His Britannic Majesty has in view are to extend the trade with that country, to prevent all interruption to their free communication with the water-side ... (1)

The Committee, it seems, were firmly wedded to principles acceptable to the public: this same letter includes a promise to teach Ashanti children to read and write, a pledge that would surely appeal to abolitionists, the African Institution, and other such organizations.

It is interesting to note, however, that the Committee conceded considerable freedom of action to its chief employees. Because of the necessary delays in communication, Hope-Smith was empowered to use his own judgment: the embassy to Kumasi was to go ahead only if "nothing shall have transpired in the interim of this despatch being received by you, to make the measure objectionable". (2)

The expedition to the Ashanti capital was a Committee initiative, designed to demonstrate the Company's competence in the handling of African affairs, and the potential value of the forts as a base for trade with the interior. (3) But Governor Hope-Smith had his own reasons for supporting this venture: he was alarmed and insecure because of repeated friction with the

(1) T70/40-42, Extract from the Committee's Despatch to the Governor and Council, November 13, 1816.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Curtin, *The Image of Africa*, pp.167-9.

Ashanti, and feared that the Dutch Governor, Daendels, was intriguing with them to involve the British in difficulties.(1) The Dutch had already sent an embassy of their own, the Huydecoper mission, earlier in the year.(2) But Daendels had apprised Governor White of his intention in advance, and suggested the British send an envoy of their own.(3)

The British mission left Cape Coast Castle on the 22nd of April, 1817. Its members were Frederick James, the Commander of James Fort, Accra; Thomas Edward Bowdich,(4) the Governor's nephew, who had entered the Company service as a writer in 1814; William Hutchinson, another writer, who was to remain as Resident

(1) Ellis, p.130.

(2) Graham W. Irwin, "PreColonial African Diplomacy: the Example of Asante", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1975, Vol.8, #1, pp.81-96), p.84.

(3) T70/150, White to the Committee, July 12, 1816. There is no doubt that Daendels intended to compete with the British for the trade of Ashanti; in a letter to the Asantehene, he outlined some of the added benefits of trade with the Dutch:

We will help you, sire, to teach your nation to read and write, and to practice all the arts and sciences which they now lack. Splendid palaces, filled with Royal European furniture and ornaments, of which the presents that I shall offer you, sire, on my coming can give only a faint conception, will be built by you and sent for from Europe. You and your great men shall drive on comfortable coaches drawn by six horses along the roads which you sire will have made, and which will convey you in the most comfortable manner from one part of your kingdom to another, or you shall ride on beautiful horses like the Moors and Afabs.

Taken from the Journal of H.W. Daendels, see Drake, p.154.

(4) Born in 1791, Bowdich was the son of a Bristol shoe manufacturer.

in Kumasi; and Henry Tedlie, the surgeon, for scientific purposes. (1) James, who had served with the Company for 17 years, (2) volunteered to lead the expedition, apparently because he hoped to attract Ashanti trade to Accra instead of Cape Coast. (3) This assertion can be partially supported by certain character references, supplied at the time of Governor White's death: James received some fairly typical mentions, having "the reputation of being a man of ability and irreproachable character". But this verdict is overturned by the appraisal of a Mr. Innes: "Mr. James has been engaged in speculations; in money matters he has not been able to keep his word, but in other respects he is a man of veracity." (4) James was destined to fail, partly because of his personal inadequacies, but also because he was burdened with irreconcilable conflicts of interest: his own, the Company's, and the Governor's.

'Hope-Smith' passed on the Committee's instructions to James, then added a substantial list of his own. The primary objective,

(1) Ward, p.165.

(2) T70/154, Rank Lists. James was a Factor at Cape Coast Castle in 1801, and at Dixcove the following year, Deputy Surveyor in 1803, Commander of Whydah in 1808, and finally Commander of James Fort, Accra.

(3) Thomas Edward Bowdich, Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, (1819) (London: Frank Cass, 1966, 3rd edition), introduction by W.E.F. Ward, p.37. See also T70/40-42, Bowdich to Hope-Smith, May 22, 1817. James supposedly confessed to Tedlie that he was seeking a private interview, to have Ashanti trade routed to his fort instead of Cape Coast.

(4) Bowdich, p.22.

of course, was to further 'the commercial interests of Britain'. But "in addition to the Committee's instructions", Hope-Smith required information: the size and boundaries of the Ashanti empire, the power of the King over his subjects, the number of their armed forces and those of their allies, the amount, and sources of the King's revenue, rules of succession and tribute, crime and punishment, and much more.(1) More importantly, James was to obtain the goodwill of the Asantehene "towards the natives residing under our protection", and to impress the Ashanti with the power and wealth of Britain.(2) In Hope-Smith's complementary instructions, it is possible to discern his apprehensions for the safety of the Cape Coast people, as well as a considerable degree of ignorance of the nature and organization of the Ashanti empire.

The embassy reached Kumasi May 19th, 1817, and enjoyed a promising beginning, until the Asantehene raised the subject of the 'Notes'. These were the title deeds to the land occupied by the European forts, the owner of which was entitled to their rent. The Ashanti, in the course of their invasions, had captured the notes for Elmina, and the forts at Accra, but not Cape Coast and Annomabo. Governor Torrane had paid them the rent for these two forts, but the Asantehene never received the original

(1) T70/40, Hope-Smith to James, April 9, 1817.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ellis, p.131.

documents.(3) The Fante Kings of Annomabo and Mankessim had persuaded Hope-Smith to pay only one sixth of their value to the Ashanti, and kept the remainder themselves. The Governor's role in this fraudulent transaction remains clouded, but the Ashanti, not unnaturally, leaped to the conclusion that he was conspiring with the Fante to cheat the King of his due. James was completely unable to answer the Asantehene's pointed questions, and only Bowdich's timely intervention saved the embassy. A letter from James to Hope-Smith explaining the problem seems to prove that the Ashanti suspicions were well-founded.

He said that we had come to his capital without any expression of friendship and good will, and contradicted our assertions by insulting him with so paltry a sum as 4 ackies. Bearing in mind your conversation on the subject of these Notes, I endeavored to parry the attack, by stating that it was not you who offered him the sum of 4 ackies but the Fante Caboceers, who had requested you to make the notes and deduct them from their pay as an acknowledgment of their faith and allegiance towards him.(1)

Clearly the Governor had anticipated the question, and James' inability to answer the Ashanti accusations is highly damning. He continued to prevaricate, and avoided the obvious recourse of communicating directly with the Governor to obtain a satisfactory reply. But again, this was because his hands were tied by the Governor's instructions: "recollecting your positively saying that Amoney and Aducoo should not give up the whole of their notes, whatever might be the consequence deterred

(1) T70/40, James to Hope-Smith, May 22, 1817.

me from offering to communicate with you immediately."(1) James' refusal was also due to a healthy regard for his own safety, as well as that of their mission. He suggested to Hope-Smith a plan for dealing with this problem that reveals the duplicity on their part.

Aducoo in my opinion cannot be of any service to the British nation, nor while we are friends with the King of Ashantee can he do us any injury, therefore depriving him of his note can be of little consequence, where so urgent a call demands. Amcooney is certainly entitled to a note, which if given up can be renewed by the Company, without the King knowing anything about it, should you however deem it necessary to continue with both, the Expenses to the Company will be trifling, when brought in competition with the whole object of the mission; avoiding a war, and in all probability the sacrifice of 4 officers ... (2)

James' equivocation, then, would seem to be an admission of guilt, or at least of complicity. The fact that Bowdich was able to intervene successfully suggests that he was ignorant of the matter. As Ward puts it:

It was all very well for Bowdich to leap up and tell the King that he was quite sure the Governor could not have meant anything like what the King supposed, and that if a letter were sent down to Cape Coast, the matter would be cleared up at once and everyone would be satisfied. Bowdich knew nothing about it. James knew that - for whatever extraordinary reason - the Governor did mean just what the King supposed ... (3)

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Bowdich, Ward's introduction, pp.33-4.

Not only did Hope-Smith have interests and objectives of his own, but these were directly in conflict with those of the Committee and the Crown. He was apparently willing to risk the loss of Ashanti trust. By referring the matter to Cape Coast, Bowdich forced his uncle's hand. There were, however, several bright spots to this near-debacle. The Asantehene wanted the Governor to settle all disputes for him with the people of the towns under the British forts, effectively conceding to them the 'judicial authority' requested by Torrane. Also, Bowdich's quick-witted reaction saved the embassy and preserved the possibility of a successful commercial understanding.

Hope-Smith answered these letters by recalling James and replacing him with Bowdich. He explained the 'misunderstanding' over the Notes by claiming that the Fante Chiefs had asked him to deduct the smaller amount from their 'pay' and deliver this to the Asantehene as a pledge of their allegiance. This 'error' having been revealed, he had "no hesitation in complying with the wishes of the King".(1) In a letter to the King, he regretted the 'trouble' over the Notes, and in an offhand manner suggested that there would have been no misunderstanding if the matter had been referred to him immediately. Hope-Smith also warned that others would seek to slander the British, or to weaken Anglo-Ashanti friendship. Once again, Hope-Smith feared the interference of the Dutch, or of Fante tribes who were jealous of

(1) T70/40, Hope-Smith to Bowdich, June 21, 1817.

the towns under British protection. Having calmed the Asantehene's fears, the Governor proceeded to present a complaint against one of his allies.

I have learned with regret that the people of Elmina are using their influence to induce you to make a palaver with the Commendas; they are a mere handful of people, extremely poor, and not worth your notice; besides they are under my protection therefore I hope you will not think further of this affair; and I shall consider your compliance in this instance as the greatest possible proof of the sincerity of your intentions towards the English.(1)

This request is surprising, considering that one would have expected the tone of his letter to be more apologetic. If, as he claimed, the Governor feared Dutch intrigues, his communications with the Ashanti compared very unfavourably with those of his rival. Clearly Hope-Smith had assumed the mantle of protector of the people living in the towns near his forts. The Elminas were seeking revenge on the Commendas, who had joined the Fante against them. Knowing that the Asantehene's action would likely be the imposition of a stiff fine, the Governor chose to intercede on their behalf.

But the matter did not end there: in a letter to Bowdich, Hope-Smith complained that the King had not forgotten the Commendas. The Asantehene, as their overlord, had imposed a fine. This, the Governor argued, was an impediment to good relations with the British, and the offending tribe, too poor to

(1) Ibid.

pay the sum demanded, had offered a lesser amount. Hope-Smith ordered Bowdich to put pressure on the Ashanti.

The many proofs the King has had of my friendly intentions towards him, and the consideration of the benefits that will accrue to him from his alliance with the English, will I hope induce him to accede to the terms offered him by the Commendas. A refusal must be considered as an avowal of his determined resolution not to conciliate the affair, and as the indigent circumstances of these people makes it utterly impossible for them to pay a larger sum, you will, should he persist in extracting more, procure his permission to leave the country, and return here with the other officers as soon as you can. To sacrifice the mission after the heavy expenses which have been incurred, and when we are induced to believe that every other object is propitiated to our utmost expectations, should be avoided if possible; but if he insists on a larger sum being levied from the Commendas than has been offered, there remains no other alternative. The dignity of the Flag must be the superior consideration to all others.(1)

This was precisely the problem: the Asantehene had not had "many proofs" of British "friendly intentions". The last line is highly interesting; was this Hope-Smith's true attitude, or was it intended for public consumption? Certainly the dignity of the Flag was not normally of any great concern to the Company, or to the Governor himself, until now. The Asantehene proved amenable, and compromised several times. Believing, erroneously, that his wars against the Fante had caused abolition, he offered to make peace with the Fante, and consider them English subjects, if Hope-Smith would "in return consider if he cannot renew the slave

(1) T70/40, Hope-Smith to Bowdich, August 11, 1817.

trade which will be good for me".(1) But on the subject of the Fante, the Asantehene could prove stubborn. As James reported to Hope-Smith, the Ashanti had numerous grievances against the coastal tribes. The Fante, they claimed, cheated them (with watered down liquor, powder mixed with charcoal, and bad gold) and sometimes seized Ashanti traders and sold them as slaves; and they had sheltered runaways from the King's justice and committed atrocities against his messengers. The Asantehene could not comprehend Hope-Smith's attempts to protect these people, or his apparent ignorance of Ashanti rights. If the English army conquered a town, he asked, would they not expect the rent from it? The Fante had been conquered, and had submitted to him. He owned the Notes for the European forts, and if the Dutch and Danes paid their rent, why did the English seek to cheat?(2) These grievances seem highly reasonable; and the confusion caused by British actions is easily understood.

Hope-Smith did not see the payments on the Notes as rent, but referred to them, on one occasion, as an "allowance". "You will acquaint the King it is my wish that in future he receives his company's pay at this Castle, and not at Accra as formerly."(3) The tone of this, and of many subsequent communications, suggests that the Governor had little or no

(1) T70/40, Asantehene to Hope-Smith, September 22, 1817.

(2) T70/40, James to Hope-Smith.

(3) T70/40, Hope-Smith to James.

respect for the Asantehene, and that the subordination of a British Governor to an African ruler may have rankled with him. Certainly he was notably lacking in diplomacy, and took a very uncompromising line with the very allies he was instructed to court. Also, but for the timely, if naive, intervention of Bowdich, Hope-Smith might have scuttled the Company's hopes for a treaty with the King.

In fact, considering the diverse and complex diplomatic influences being exerted upon the Ashanti, the Company was, in a sense, lucky to have emerged with a treaty. The competition for an alliance with the Ashanti came from a number of sources. The Dutch had sent two delegations, one in favour of continuing the slave trade, and another against, while the British had three representatives with highly conflicting approaches: James, Bowdich, and Hope-Smith.(1) The Asantehene's response to these competitive, contradictory influences was surprisingly honest and consistent. Bowdich was finally able to overcome the suspicion and confusion created by James and Hope-Smith, and signed a treaty September 7th, 1817.

The first two articles promised perpetual peace and harmony between the Ashanti and British subjects, as well as those under Company protection. In the third article, the Asantehene guaranteed the security of Cape Coast (in particular from the hostile Elminas). Subsequent articles dealt with the

(1) Irwin, pp.85-6.

accreditation of a British Resident at Kumasi, the promotion of trade, safeguards for Ashanti traders, visiting the coast, the education of the Asantehene's children at Cape Coast Castle, and an Ashanti promise to influence their neighbours in favour of a proposed British expedition to explore the interior.(1)

Both sides seem to have gained what they most desired: the promotion of trade. To ensure uninterrupted access to the coast, the Ashanti had the Governor's pledge to protect the "persons and property" of their traders. In return, the Asantehene gave Hope-Smith the right to punish any found guilty of secondary offences, while referring more serious cases to Kumasi.(2) Most important of all, both sides agreed to a formula to prevent further misunderstandings:

In order to avert the horrors of war, it is agreed that in any case of aggression on the part of the natives under British protection, the King shall complain thereof to the Governor-in-Chief to obtain redress, and that they will in no instance resort to hostilities, even against the other towns of Fantee territory, without endeavouring as much as possible to effect an amicable arrangement, affording the Governor the opportunity of propitiating it as far as he may with discretion.(3)

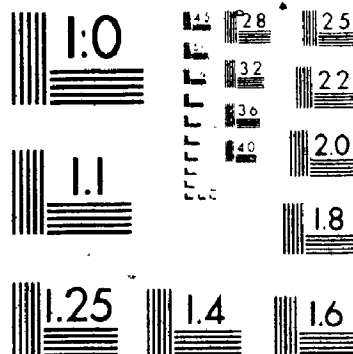
This remarkable paragraph would, in future, become the source of a confusing and bitter dispute between Hope-Smith and the Ashanti, because of misinterpretation. The Governor assumed

(1) Claridge, p.298.

(2) *Ibid.*, see Articles 7 and 8 of the Bowdich Treaty.

(3) *Ibid.*, see Article 4 of Bowdich Treaty.

2



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

that the Ashanti had relinquished any claims to the town of Cape Coast, while the Asantehene seems to have been merely granting his new ally some measure of status as a potential mediator to alleviate any future problems with these uniquely-placed subjects. On the whole, however, the treaty was essentially sensible, and demonstrated the willingness of the King to accommodate the Company's wishes, while seeking to ensure a minimum of possible interruptions or impediments to regular communication between the new trading partners.(1)

The Bowdich mission received a great deal of publicity and recognition in British circles, as did his assessment of the Ashanti: they were, said Bowdich, destined to become "indisputably the greatest and the rising power of Western Africa".(2) A book recounting his 'adventure' in the interior, *Mission From Cape Coast to Ashantee*, was published in 1819, and became very popular. Its references to an exotic, unknown kingdom sparked a period of 'Africa-mania'.(3) This phenomenon, and the fact that the mission had been successful, where the

(1) Michael Crowder also adds that Bowdich had agreed that the Company would return Ashanti runaways, a major cause of the first invasion of the coast. Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, p.145.

(2) Ivor Wilks, "The Northern Factor in Ashanti History: Begho and the Mande" *Journal of African History*, (1961, Vol.11, pp.25-34), p.33.

(3) The Dictionary of National Biography refers to the book, which was "the most important after Bruce's, [and] excited great interest, as an almost incredible story (recalling The Arabian Nights) of a land and people of warlike and barbaric splendour hitherto unknown". See Volume 6, 1885, p.42.

British had encountered only failures elsewhere, led to a misconception, argues Ward, that persisted in official and public circles for some time. The importance of the Bowdich mission, and the extent of its success, were overrated because of the popularity of this book.(1)

While in England, Bowdich quarrelled violently with the Company's management. With the success of his mission to Kumasi, he felt entitled to a sizeable increase in rank, and pay, which he did not receive. Angry at what he considered the Company's "parsimony", Bowdich published a pamphlet denouncing their corrupt and inefficient administration of the Gold Coast settlements. This tract, and his book, records the Dictionary of National Biography, "made such an exposure of the management of their possessions that the Government was compelled to take them into its own hands".(2) This prompted an angry reply from Simon Cock, the Secretary of the Committee: "Bad as the service is, Mr. Bowdich would have gladly joined it; and the public would never have heard of his opinions and disgust of it, if the Committee had complied with his terms".(3)

Cock's rebuttal suggests that Bowdich had probably overrated his own importance, but that his criticism hurt the publicly sensitive Committee members. The appraisal of the Dictionary of

(1) Ward, p.165.

(2) Dictionary of National Biography.

(3) Bowdich, Ward's introduction, pp.12-3.

National Biography may be too simple, and certainly constitutes a mild exaggeration. But there is no question that this adverse publicity hurt the Company. The mission to Kumasi, designed to gain credibility, backfired horrendously, and probably only accelerated the decline and fall of the Company of Merchants.

DUPUIS AND HOPE-SMITH

The honeymoon after the signing of the Bowdich treaty was very short; by October 1817 a new problem arose between the British and the Ashanti. A slave trader named Richard Brew arrived at Kumasi to complain that the people of Cape Coast were trying to kill him. William Hutchinson, a member of the mission left behind to act as British Resident, reported to the Governor, and passed along a letter dictated by the Asantehene. The King expressed his desire to learn the truth, and stated that whoever was in the wrong would have to pay a fine.(1)

Hope-Smith reacted angrily to the Asantehene's communication, and rose to the defense of the town. This 'palaver', he argued, was between the Ashanti and the British authorities, and had nothing to do with the people of Cape Coast. In a strongly worded letter to Hutchinson, he stated his position:

You will expressly state to the King, and in the most decided terms, that the Cape Coast people are not his slaves, nor have they ever been acknowledged as such, neither can they nor any of the natives residing under British protection be included in that most degrading title ...

Any interference on the part of the King in matters concerning the people residing under the protection of the forts, cannot possibly be allowed. If they offend, the door of redress is open to him; but it is expected complaints will not be of the

(1) Metcalfe, Documents, pp.47-8, Hutchinson to Hope-Smith, October 11, 1817.

frivolous nature of those that have already been exhibited, which have been mere pretexts for introducing arbitrary acts of oppression and the extortion of money ... (1)

This note suggests a serious difference of opinion concerning the status of the coastal towns and the rights of the Asantehene over his subjects. Hope-Smith, obviously angered by the King's reference to 'his slaves', denied the Ashanti jurisdiction over Cape Coast. Further, he saw the imposition of fines as attempts to oppress and extort money, based on shallow pretexts. He may have believed, as was probably the case, that the Asantehene was biased against the Commendas, who had joined with the Fante to attack the Elminas, allies of the Ashanti. But Hope-Smith was not empowered to interfere in the King's administration. Also, the people of Cape Coast, in the case of Richard Brew, were guilty of a breach of article 7 of the treaty. Hope-Smith's interpretation of the Ashanti motives for imposing fines, and their justification, contrasted sharply with other views of the Asantehene. In any case, the Governor disputed Ashanti sovereignty over the towns near his forts.

The Asantehene clearly explained his position in this regard: the only difference between Cape Coast and the rest of the Fante lands was that it had not been physically overrun by his armies, not because he lacked the power, but out of

(1) T70/1606/2, Hope-Smith to Hutchinson, November 21, 1817.

consideration for the British.(1) The validity of the King's claim was to remain a sore point with the Governor, but this particular dispute was soon overshadowed by the arrival of Joseph Dupuis, appointed Crown Consul at Kumasi.

This appointment raises several questions regarding the Company's relationship with the Colonial Office and Parliament. It must be supposed that the Bowdich mission had been considered a success, but the arrival of a Crown nominee for the post of Kumasi demonstrated a certain lack of confidence in the Company. But it remains difficult to ascertain if this move was merely the prelude to a Crown takeover of the settlements.

Dupuis' commission granted him "full power and authority" to aid and protect the merchants, examine and hear all differences, contentions and suits that might arise, and to advance and increase trade and mutual commerce. But there remained some confusion as to the nature of his relationship with the Company. Claridge quotes his commission: "Wherefore We will, and by these presents, do strictly charge and command all and every Our said merchants and other Our subjects coming into, trading or residing in the Kingdom of Ashantee aforesaid, or any of the dominions thereof, to own and acknowledge the said Joseph Dupuis ..."(2) By giving Dupuis his consular power in Ashanti, and by omitting

(1) Metcalfe, *Documents*, p.49, Hutchinson to Hope-Smith, November 16, 1817.

(2) Claridge, pp.304-5.

the Company's possessions on the Coast, the Crown created a bone of contention between their new representative and the Company before he had even arrived. There were no guidelines for his status while on the Company's lands, and the question of sovereignty over Cape Coast and the other towns would become a problem between Hope-Smith and Dupuis, as well as between the Governor and the Ashanti.

The Lords of the Treasury informed the Committee of the appointment, and the latter quickly moved to comply with this directive. The Company was instructed to make Dupuis an allowance of 500 pounds sterling out of their own grant, and provide him with presents for the Asantehene.(1) This small attempt by the Government to reduce expenditures also had dangerous repercussions. Dupuis was left dependent on the Committee for his finances, which was to put him in a somewhat subordinate position. This, it soon became clear, he was not at all prepared to accept. The Company may have seen in this royal appointee the first signal of their impending destruction. Certainly they did not welcome his arrival,(2) and attempted to limit his effectiveness from the outset, by placing several checks on his freedom of action. They immediately sought to 'instruct', rather than 'advise', the new consul: "... so much must depend upon the actual state of things when you arrive upon

(1) CO2/11, Committee to Dupuis, October 31, 1818.

(2) Martin, p.160.

the coast, that the Committee have judged it better to refer you to the Governor and Council, than to lay down for you any specific and positive rule of conduct."(1)

The Committee clearly apprehended Dupuis as a danger, and sought to constrain him by making him subordinate to their representatives on the spot. Unfortunately, the new Consul was a proud man, who bristled at these attempts to undermine the powers granted in his credentials. "From the outset his mission was hindered by the jealousy between him and the Company's officials, from the Governor downwards. They were jealous of his royal commission, and he took no pains to conceal his scorn of the 'servants of a mercantile board'."(2) The problem became a clash of personalities, but Dupuis was justified in his resentment of the Committee's interference. He was to report directly to the Colonial Office, and, once in Kumasi, would be totally independent of the Company.

Dupuis was apparently chosen because of his long residence at Mogadore, in Morocco, and his command of the language. The Crown, obviously, hoped that he could open and exploit trade routes into the sub-saharan areas from his position at Kumasi. The hopes of the Merchants, however, differed substantially. The Committee advised him to remain on the Coast for some time, in order to become acclimatized, learn the languages and customs,

(1) C02/11, Committee to Dupuis, October 31, 1818.

(2) Ward, p.171.

and obtain permission from the Ashanti to travel to Kumasi.(1) Dupuis was also given a seat on the Council, ostensibly to familiarize himself with the Company and its dealings with the local tribes. But the Committee went on to reveal their true reason for this proposal:

In concluding upon this last measure, the Committee are much influenced by the consideration of the extreme importance both to the Service and to yourself, of your appearing to the Natives to be a Member of the Company, and wholly dependent upon the Governor and Council, since were the natives to imagine that your situation was independent of the Company, you would be tormented with numerous applications of various kinds, which however improper, you would find it difficult if not impossible to avoid: Whereas, by making it distinctly understood that you are subject to, and that your conduct must in all cases be regulated by the Governor and Council, you will be able, whenever you see proper, to evade coming to a decision by sending to Cape Coast for instructions.(2)

To Dupuis, who saw himself as an envoy with plenipotentiary powers, this suggestion would have been infuriating. What appears to be, on the surface, a plausible recommendation, was in fact a stratagem to make Dupuis subordinate and responsible to the Governor. The transparent weakness of their justification for such a course makes the self-interest of their motives quite clear. The Committee went on to outline their priorities, which they obviously expected him to adopt as his own: he was to have the main path widened, and attempt to convince the King to use

(1) C02/11, Committee to Dupuis, October 31, 1818.

(2) Ibid.

prisoners for the work, instead of sacrificing them; and also to obtain a grant of land near the coast, which could be cleared for cultivation. These suggestions may have been designed to win favour at home, by showing the Company's commitment to bringing civilization to Africa. They also advised Dupuis to establish mutual confidence, and convince the King of British sincerity, before telling him that they wanted most of all to trade beyond his dominions; for this purpose, Dupuis should bribe the Muslim traders at Kumasi if he had to. (1)

Dupuis was shown the Committee's instructions to the Governor and Council, dated November 13, 1818, but Hope-Smith also saw their 'instructions' to the Consul. This must have angered Dupuis; but it also meant that Hope-Smith was aware of the Committee's tone towards the newly arrived Consul, and must have realized that his superiors would support him should he adopt a similar approach. In any case, the two men seem to have developed an immediate dislike for each other, which carried over into their official dealings.

Dupuis chose to name a vice-consul, perhaps to assert his authority and independence. But his choice of Francis Collins, a teacher who had quit the Company service, may have been designed to show his displeasure at the meddling and interference to which he was subjected. The Committee expressed their disapproval to the Governor and Council, and hinted that the choice was unlikely

(1) Ibid.

to meet with "the approbation of His Majesty's Government". (1) In a letter to Dupuis, the Committee took a strangely recriminatory tone: he was advised to set out for Kumasi in the near future, or the Company would be forced to "represent to His Majesty's Government the useless expense of having a Consul ...". (2) The nomination of Collins as vice-consul did not meet with their approval, and as they had not been consulted, the Committee refused to recommend him to the Government. While at Cape Coast, Dupuis was informed, he was "merely" a member of Council, and he was instructed to make his correspondence jointly with the Governor.

These admonitions would seem to suggest that the Company intended to limit the Consul's freedom of action. A private letter from Simon Cock, the Secretary, discusses the 'Collins affair', in "the strongest terms of disapprobation and regret". He questioned Dupuis' action, especially since the latter had not even been to Kumasi yet, and reminded him that his salary was being paid by the Company. The Committee, wrote Cock, could not be expected to approve of Collins, because he had quit their service, and had been "idling" at Cape Coast. The Secretary regretted to learn of the personal animosity between Dupuis and Hope-Smith, who "though strict, and, as it is said, harsh towards others, is evidently a Gentleman of talents and in most respects

(1) C02/11, Committee to the Governor and Council, September 8, 1819.

(2) C02/11, Committee to Dupuis, September 9, 1819.

eminently qualified for his station".(1) The Committee were not averse to threats, as their letters to Dupuis reveal: he was urged to proceed to Kumasi, "for unless you are enabled to do so, I clearly see that you will not be long in the service", (2) and again, "The Committee will be under the necessity of reporting the matter to Government; who, in these times of economy, will deem your salary thrown away".(3)

The Consul was not slow to answer this criticism: he asked the Committee, in no uncertain terms, why they interfered, if, as they admitted, the affair was entirely his own. Dupuis rejected their attempts to "dictate" to him, and refused to send his correspondence jointly with the Governor and Council, "a Board whose measures I have long since been ashamed to sanction". "Permit me to tell you, Gentlemen that this observation only confirms me in the opinion that you have taken upon yourselves more than legal authority in dictating to me in these terms."(4) He candidly asserted his independence, stating "I am responsible to the Crown for all my actions", adding "Government has the power to punish me or censure my conduct and not you Gentlemen or anybody else unless you can convince me that such power has been

(1) C02/11, Cock to Dupuis, September 4, 1819.

(2) *Ibid.*

(3) C02/11, Cock to Dupuis, August 30, 1819.

(4) C02/11, Dupuis to the Committee, November 19, 1819.

delegated to you".(1)

Dupuis' acidic answers signalled the failure of the Committee's plan to constrain and manipulate him. But the Merchants could, and did, resort to pressure tactics and thinly veiled threats, especially regarding his delay in leaving for Kumasi. But, as he complained to Bathurst directly, the delay was not his, but the Governor's.(2) This assertion tends to be supported by a series of letters between Hope-Smith and the Consul. The Governor suggested that "... until our differences with the King are amicably terminated it would be exceedingly injudicious your attempting to leave Cape Coast".(3) Dupuis replied that the Committee, Hope-Smith's superiors, were pressing him to leave, and threatening to complain to the Government if he did not do so.(4) The Governor's answer to this was only that it would be preferable for Dupuis to keep his intentions secret; for some reason Hope-Smith feared the reaction of the Fante, had they learned that Dupuis was bound for Cape Coast.(5) It is highly likely that the Governor was seeking to prevent, or at least delay the Consul's journey to Kumasi. It is also possible, though difficult to verify, that Hope-Smith and the Committee

(1) Ibid.

(2) C02/11, Dupuis to Bathurst, January 10, 1820.

(3) C02/11, Hope-Smith to Dupuis, November 10, 1819.

(4) C02/11, Dupuis to Hope-Smith, November 13, 1819.

(5) C02/11, Hope-Smith to Dupuis, November 12, 1819.

were seeking to discredit him, although they may have had completely different goals and motives. Dupuis, because of his personal bias, is unfortunately an imperfect source regarding the intentions of the Governor. But his grievances against Hope-Smith, outlined in a formal letter to the Council, raise a number of questions about the conduct of the latter.

In fact, after the high point of the Bowdich treaty, relations with the Ashanti had deteriorated, largely due to the Governor's intransigence. The Asantehene, insulted by a man from Cape Coast, expressed his desire to fine the guilty parties, but was prevented from doing so by Hope-Smith. A second insult to the King, resulting from an exchange of words between an Ashanti boy and a woman of Cape Coast, led to threats against the latter. The Governor had the woman brought into the Castle for her protection. Her offense was a serious one, in the eyes of the Ashanti, but a representative of the King suggested that the prescribed penalty of mutilation (by cutting off her lips) could be reduced to a fine. Hope-Smith was perhaps justified in his response to this demand: "I ... considered the affair of so trifling a nature, that after having insured the safety of the woman, I dismissed it without further notice."⁽¹⁾ The Governor may have acted as his conscience, or his interests dictated, but there can be no question that he was well informed of the Asantehene's views.

(1) Bowdich, Ward's introduction, pp.46+8.

In a letter to the Governor, the Asantehene explained his position:

The treaty of alliance entered into by us makes me appeal to you in any difference that may arise among the people or traders from this country and the coast. I am anxious to maintain the friendly intercourse so recently entered into. But Abroorfo King of Cape Coast town having an affair to settle between two persons, an oath was taken on my head, which Abroorfo vainly attempted to compromise by settling it without your knowledge.(1)

This attempt took the form of a bribe to an Ashanti representative, which indicates that the culprits understood, only too well, the seriousness of their offense. An insult, or the taking of an oath on the King, constituted a major case of lese-majeste, and was believed to call down unhealthy spirits upon the person named.

Finding this in vain, an appeal was made to you, Sir, for satisfaction. But as I think you were not aware of this previous circumstance, I hope you will give the matter another hearing, as I am extremely anxious that this affair should be settled. Abroorfo must have known he was in the wrong, or why attempt to bribe my messengers ...(2)

The Asantehene's message shows remarkable moderation and patience, as he sought to explain to the Governor the justice of his claims. As well, the Ashanti demonstrated considerable respect for the treaty they had signed. But Hope-Smith's answer was distressingly uncompromising, as he informed Hutchinson of

(1) Ibid., p.49.

(2) Ibid.

his decision:

You are directed again strongly and explicitly to express to the King, as the sentiments of the Governor-in-Chief, and from which he is determined not to swerve, that no affair similar to that of Abroorfo will again, even in the slightest degree be countenanced; and should it ever be attempted on any natives under the protection of the British Flag, the justice of their cause will be supported to the utmost.(1)

Justice was on the Ashanti side, however severe and excessive the penalties may have appeared. Hope-Smith not only lacked the Asantehene's moderation and regard for the treaty, but he took an astonishingly vehement and unyielding stance. This response demonstrates clearly the absence of any understanding or sympathy for his allies. Those who resented the Ashanti supremacy could only be encouraged by the resistance of the Governor. Without, perhaps, being aware of it, Hope-Smith was helping to undermine the Asantehene's empire, even as he methodically destroyed their trust in the Company.

Hope-Smith's apparent bias against the Ashanti is difficult to explain. But in some cases, serious disagreements or misunderstandings may have arisen from ignorance, or from misinformation. The Asantehene's complaint against the Commendas provides a good example of this problem. This message, which was "fair and reasonable" in tone, according to Ward, was incorrectly translated, perhaps deliberately, by the interpreter at Cape Coast, named De. Graft. This man, a mulatto in the Company's

(1) Ibid., p.50.

employ, gave the note a menacing tone, and added a threat that was nonexistent in the original.(1) Dupuis eventually learned of the 'error', and the fact that an Ashanti messenger told him that the King "wanted him to come"(2) suggests that the tone of the original message was more reasonable than De Graft made it out to be. In reality, the Asantehene was surprised at Hope-Smith's violent answer, and believed that his envoy was lying. He sent a second message, asking the Governor to reread the treaty, and, if it was correct, to stand by the agreement. Claridge states that the Ashanti did not want war, but were so confused by Hope-Smith's hostility that they were unsure of British intentions.(3) Hope-Smith's refusal to act on the complaint is thus somewhat more understandable. The Governor, lacking as he did any firsthand contacts with the Asantehene, was dependent in part on information from local tribes and Fante chiefs, who were, naturally, hostile to the Ashanti.

But the charges levelled at him by Joseph Dupuis reveal that Hope-Smith may have been predisposed to accept negative comments regarding the Ashanti, and that he was not personally committed to advancing the interests of his allies. Dupuis claimed that he had not been consulted after the Asantehene's message of March 1819. The Governor returned a harsh, immoderate answer to the

(1) Ward, p.171.

(2) CO2/11, Dupuis to the Governor and Council, January 9, 1820.

(3) Claridge, pp.306-8.

Ashanti claims, threatening retaliation if any hostile action was taken against the people of Cape Coast in particular. The solution, argued Dupuis, was not to behave so provocatively, but to send the Consul to seek a reconciliation. Hope-Smith's response had been "premature, intemperate, impolitic and contrary to the wishes of His Majesty's Government". (1)

Many of Dupuis' charges are tainted by his personal dislikes, but there is no question that Hope-Smith was exceeding his authority and attempting to prevent the Consul from opening any meaningful dialogue with the Ashanti. In September of that year, for example, Dupuis was not informed of the arrival of Ashanti messengers. He accused the Governor of disrespect and gross dereliction of duty, pretending ignorance of the Consul's role, and cutting him off from all communication on the subject of the Ashanti. (2) But if Hope-Smith was preventing Dupuis from carrying out his mission, against the stated wishes of the Crown and the Committee, he was also jeopardizing the alliance with the Ashanti. Claridge and Ward have supported this contention, arguing that Hope-Smith had breached the treaty and was directly responsible for the deterioration in Anglo-Ashanti relations. This opposition was manifested in underhanded ways, such as the appropriation of a carpet intended as a gift for the Asantehene

(1) C02/11, Dupuis to the Governor and Council, December 27, 1819.

(2) Ibid.

for his own private use, (1) but also in grand gestures, such as his spirited defense of the Commendas.

The Asantehene, despite the Governor's protests, insisted on imposing fines on the people of Cape Coast and Commenda. Dupuis, in a letter to Lord Bathurst, explained that for the British to accept these fines would be disgraceful, but that the King's complaints were well justified: Hope-Smith had directly violated the treaty, and the Asantehene had a reasonable grievance against the Commendas. (2) Although he was appalled by the amount of the fine (3200 ounces of gold, or 12,800 pounds sterling), Dupuis suggested that it be paid, if only to prevent an Ashanti attack: Hope-Smith, on the other hand, refused to contemplate any such course of action, and ordered Dupuis, in no uncertain terms, to refuse the demands:

... you are not under any circumstances to permit even its discussion, much less the payment of a single ounce on such a pretext or for the purpose of avoiding a war ... should the King persist in demanding an exorbitant sum, this Castle must interfere with its power to protect them, and ... in fact the King's declaring war against these people will be considered as a declaration of war against the Castle as it never can be permitted to any power in Africa to oppress with impunity such people as reside under the British forts and claim British protection. (3)

The matter was eventually settled in May, 1820, when the

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Metcalfe, Documents, Hope-Smith to Dupuis, January, 1820.

Governor and Council accepted the inevitable, but chose to assist the Cape Coast people in paying their fine, as long as the Ashanti recognized them as British subjects.(1)

A new treaty was signed March 23, 1820, which resolved the textual discrepancies of the Bowdich accord, settled the present dispute amicably, and established a clearer understanding of the complex legal relationships between Kumasi, Cape Coast Castle and the towns. The Asantehene withdrew his demand for an indemnity (Article 3), and promised, in future, to refrain from shutting off the trade if any differences should arise (Article 4). The King and his sub-chiefs took a "sacred oath" of allegiance to the British Crown, and swore to protect British interests, with his armies, if necessary (Article 2). In return, Dupuis recognized the Ashanti claims to Fante territory, as part of his dominions, and his right to discipline, but not destroy, the Cape Coast people, for whom Dupuis reserved special protection: these natives were to be entitled to British laws (Article 5 and Supplement 2).

Parts of the Bowdich treaty were repeated, but a new problem-solving mechanism was added: the King's complaints were to be submitted only to the Consul (Article 6). In this, and other articles, it is possible to see the hand of Dupuis, who seems to have been insuring his independence and venting some of his frustration at Hope-Smith's interference. He readily

(1) *Ibid.*, Governor and Council to the Committee, May 19, 1820.

admitted that the Company had been guilty of overcharging the Ashanti, and stressed that, in future, the Consul would be responsible for paying the Notes (Article 10).

Nonetheless, the treaty was a remarkable achievement: the Asantehere had been deeply offended by the townspeople whose disrespect was only encouraged by the Governor's intransigence. He had even suggested another alternative, short of destroying Cape Coast, as a solution to the problem: "I will bring them all to Coomassy and send another tribe to live among the Whites. I will not kill them." (1) But Dupuis was able to restore his confidence in British honour, and the Asantehere seems to have believed that they would protect his interests, as he had sworn to watch over theirs.

But in this he was to be disappointed. When Dupuis returned to Cape Coast, he was met with open hostility. The Governor and Council, without any legal authority, refused to ratify his treaty. Their greatest objection was ostensibly to the second supplementary article, which recognized Ashanti suzerainty over Cape Coast town. (2) The Ashanti delegation were refused admission, and Hope-Smith asked Sir George Collier, commander of the British naval squadron then off the coast, for support against the Ashanti. But Collier declined, and refused to

(1) Daryll Forde and P.M. Kaberry, *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Oxford University Press), p.229.

(2) Claridge, pp.326-7.

intervene, though Dupuis also asked him for help. The Consul, eventually, was left with no option but to return to Britain for official ratification of the treaty. The immediate results of this open rift between Dupuis and Hope-Smith were disastrous for Anglo-Ashanti relations. The people of Cape Coast were emboldened; and the furious Asantehene, who could not fail to recognize the hostility of the Company, waited ten months for Dupuis to return, then cut off trade with the British, turning instead to the Dutch and Danes.(1)

This pivotal point in the history of the Gold Coast has produced a number of conflicting views. G.E. Metcalfe accused Dupuis of sacrificing British interests out of fear for his personal safety and a general "want of spirit"(2) He supports the Governor and Council, whose refusal to ratify the treaty was legitimate, because it conceded Ashanti sovereignty over the Cape Coast people.(3) A.B. Ellis suggests, implicitly, that Dupuis was partly motivated by egotism, stating that there was no need to supersede the Bowdich treaty, for which the Ashanti showed such reverence.(4) But these arguments are weak: the Bowdich treaty was flawed, if only by its inconsistencies and the differences between the two copies; and the Dupuis treaty would

(1) Ibid., pp.328-30.

(2) Metcalfe, Documents, p.62.

(3) G.E. Metcalfe, *Mahele of the Gold Coast*, (London:1962), p.38.

(4) Ellis, p.134.

seem to have been an improvement, with its safeguards against a recurrence of similar disputes. Metcalfe's accusation would have been better levelled at Frederick James: Dupuis conducted his negotiations in an atmosphere of cordiality and renewed trust, without any threat to his personal safety.

Claridge provided an answer to Metcalfe's second argument: the Governor and Council had no authority whatsoever to ratify, or to refuse to ratify the treaty; and their objection to the second supplement was pointless, as Ashanti sovereignty over Cape Coast had already been recognized, by Torrane, and by Hope-Smith himself, because he paid the rent on the Notes.(1) Claridge agrees with Dupuis, who blamed the Governor's obstruction and hostility on personal "jealousy".(2) But W.E.F. Ward is perhaps more accurate when he ascribes equal responsibility to both parties for the conflict of personalities.(3) Their mutual dislike may have crippled British policy towards the Ashanti. This is not only the case with Hope-Smith; Dupuis was probably guilty of pursuing a private vendetta, which may have tainted his treaty. But the Governor's real objections may have been based equally on those articles which transferred to the Consul powers and functions belonging to the Company.

Dupuis returned to London, "obliged" to leave Africa, "in

(1) Claridge, p.327.

(2) Dupuis, p.188.

(3) Ward, p.173.

consequence of being interrupted in the discharge of my official Duties by the Governor and Council".(1) Leaving Hutton as his successor, he reported in person to Lord Bathurst, and repeated his accusations against the Company. Hope-Smith, he stated, had deliberately inflamed the quarrel with the King to prevent him from reaching Kumasi, then had refused to see Dupuis on his return. Further, the Governor was beginning "hostile preparations", which had so emboldened the people of Cape Coast that Dupuis and the Ashanti messengers had feared for their lives.(2) He excused leaving his post by citing a number of reasons: a serious illness in his family, the Governor's stated intention of submitting him to an "examination" by the Council, and his obvious inability to preserve the peace in the face of such determined opposition. Dupuis admitted that his somewhat high-handed refusal to accept "instructions" from the Company might have caused their hostility, thus accepting for himself equal responsibility for the lack of cooperation. But he rejected the Governor's accusation that he had "sold out" the people of the towns, arguing that the Company had already recognized the Ashanti claims.(3)

After his report, Dupuis disappeared from the scene. He was apparently very short of cash, having had to pay his own way back

(1) C02/11, Dupuis to Bathurst, London, September 19, 1820.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

to England. His proxy, Hutton, also returned from Africa, leaving George Robertson, a merchant, to watch over their interests. Robertson reported to Bathurst later in the year, warning that the Company were intent only on their own gain, and could not be trusted.(1)

Bathurst's apparent inactivity in this period is difficult to explain, but the barrage of vitriolic accusations reaching him from Dupuis and the Company must have elicited some sort of response, or influenced his decision in some fashion. It is possible that the plan to assume direct Crown control was already well-advanced; in that case, the stream of conflicting letters which reached him may have been largely irrelevant, or they may have merely confirmed his opinions with regard to the Company. The relegation of the Consul to obscurity is somewhat mysterious, but Dupuis may have earned his own unpopularity: he had voided the Bowdich treaty, which was considered, in public, at least, to have been entirely successful, and his conduct probably won him Bathurst's disfavour. But it was the Company who had been dealt the most serious blow. As Eveline Martin succinctly states:

The main result of the Ashanti missions was that, instead of proving the value of the Company's administration they made clear its weaknesses on all sides, and in spite of the Committee's effort to show themselves enlightened rulers by their attempts to open up the interior.(2)

(1) CO2/11. Unfortunately, this copy of the letter is largely illegible.

(2) Martin, p.161.

The last act in this comedy, the refusal to ratify the treaty, was also disastrous on the coast, as Sir Francis Fuller points out: the Governor's action was "much to be deplored, as this fact transformed the friendly attitude of the Ashantis into one of angry suspicion".(1) The Committee's last attempt to restore their damaged public image and stave off dissolution was a dismal failure, and only accelerated the process. But John Hope-Smith, instructed to increase trade and solidify the alliance, was responsible for the alienation of the Ashanti, and the near-complete breakdown of relations. Despite the importance of this man's actions, and the enormous impact of his policy, very little has been written regarding his character, or his motives.

Hope-Smith began his career with the Company in 1800, and by 1803 was a Factor at Cape Coast, then served as Commander of Commenda and Tantumquerry. The death of Governor White, on July 6th, 1816, forced the Committee to select a successor. The senior officer was Joseph Dawson (commissioned July 1789), but, in the opinion of officers then on leave in England, he was unfit for the position: he was deaf, with a defect in one eye, and entirely lacking in "the requisite talents for Chief Governor".(2) John Hope-Smith, his junior by eleven years in the service, received more general praise. His nephew, Thomas

(1) Sir Francis Fuller, "The Romance of Ashanti", *United Empire*, (Vol. 12, May 1912, pp. 365-374), p. 368.

(2) T70/1601.

Bowdich, called him "a man of talent and, unimpeachable character"; a Mr. Miles Dynon testified that he was "a man of very good private character, rather clever than otherwise"; and a Mr. Innes rated him "a man of great talent and good character".(1)

These references cannot be taken at face value: Bowdich was Hope-Smith's nephew, and had been in the Company service little more than a year, while Mr. Dynon had been absent from the Coast for seven years. The tone of the praise is uncomfortably similar to that given to the cowardly and dishonest Frederick James. It seems likely that Hope-Smith's promotion was due as much to the inadequacies of his rival as it was to his own talents. Nor can his "unimpeachable character" be proved: Hope-Smith was capable of fraud, dishonesty, and petty larceny. He conspired to defraud the Ashanti on the subject of the Notes, cheated them on trade goods, and 'appropriated' a gift to the Asantehene for his own private use. It is difficult to reconcile this conduct to his staunch defense of the "rights" of the townspeople, because of the absence of any clear motive. Dupuis occasionally referred to the Governor's "own secret interests, prejudices and animosities", without explaining what these were. As Ward and Claridge agree, this is the major weakness of any case against Hope-Smith.

He considered the Ashanti aggressive: their demands for

(1) Ibid.

finer or tribute were "economic spoliation" and "oppression".(1) This attitude, suggest Kwame Arhin and others, resulted from a fundamental misconception of the nature and organization of the Ashanti empire, most likely because of the Governor's ignorance and dependence on unfavourable sources of information. On the other hand, if these exactions were not in fact oppressive, they were at least considered so by the coastal tribes, impoverished by years of warfare and the abolition of the slave trade.(2) Unfortunately, Hope-Smith chose to adopt the attitudes of a group whose bias against their conquerors was perfectly understandable.

He sought, with his limited power and resources, to protect the coastal people from what he considered oppression. It is unclear, then, whether his attempts to cheat the Ashanti were a matter of policy, or simply of inclination. He assisted Cape Coast in particular, sharing their fines, sheltering them from the penalties of the Asantehene's justice, and organizing military resistance as a last resort. It must be stressed again that this protection did not extend to all of the Fante confederation: he also suspected them of conspiring, out of jealousy, against his proteges.

It is also interesting that the Council did not always share his views: after the departure of Dupuis, and as the Ashanti commercial blockade intensified, his officers called on him to

(1) Arhin, p.81.

(2) McCarthy, p.91.

explain his conduct. Hope-Smith's justification is revealing:

. I was actuated solely by a solicitude for the safety and well-being of the natives residing under British protection - by the desire to prevent the dishonor which would attach to the British name were the commission of human sacrifices to be permitted with impunity, within so short a distance of our Head Quarters; ... I am not convinced ... that a man connected by the nearest ties with this Town - who has been living with his family, in it for so many months²⁰ is not entitled to British protection.(1)

Hope-Smith was forced to admit that his power and legal authority were ill-defined, that he had deviated from the Committee's orders, and had acted arbitrarily, without the advice of his Council. The Governor readily conceded the irresponsibility of his policy, but continued to hold to his opinion. Because he was willing to sacrifice the interests of the Crown and the Company, as well as the Ashanti alliance, the Governor's motives become extremely important. His often stated intention was to keep the Ashanti at a distance, to preserve the special status of those he considered entitled to the protection of British law.

With regard to the Ashantees, they ought to be entirely abstracted from this question; whatever influence they may be enabled to exercise over the Fantees, their interference would never be acknowledged. It would be thoroughly inconsistent with that system of policy which has been invariably approved by you, Gentlemen! to suffer to King of Ashantee to arrogate to himself a right, (which he has too often attempted to assume) of interfering

(1) C0267/54, Hope-Smith to the Council, March 3, 1821.

in the affairs of the people of this place.(1)

Clearly, Hope-Smith was determined not to protect the interest of his supposed allies. But was he motivated by honest principles, to which he so often paid lip-service? His attitude to the slave trade is an interesting case in point. Ellis seems to have believed that the Governor was sincerely opposed to this practice: "Mr. Hope-Smith did his utmost to suppress the traffic, and on several occasions acted with energy".(2) Yet this historian admits that he was largely powerless to prevent continued illicit trade.(3) On the other hand, two merchants directly accused Hope-Smith of trading with American vessels and permitting the slave trade.(4) Also, the Castle's linguist and interpreter, Joseph De Graft, was accused of slave trading by a junior officer. Bowdich believed that this could not have occurred without his uncle's knowledge; the accusation must have been false, he argued, or Hope-Smith would have dismissed the man. But Ward remains unconvinced: "it is possible that the Governor could not, or would not, dismiss De Graft, and the actions of the disreputable interpreter must reflect somewhat on his employer.(5)

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ellis, p.136.

(3) Ibid., p.136. In February, 1818, for example, seven large slave ships took on cargoes near Cape Coast Castle.

(4) BT3/15. Lacks to Goulbourn, December, 1818.

(5) Bowdich, Ward's introduction, p.52.

Hope-Smith may have opposed the trade, but it would be erroneous to suggest that this attitude was the cause of his hostility towards the Ashanti. Nor can he be easily credited with abolitionist sympathies, having participated in the trade himself until 1807. Certainly he had few qualms about the institution of slavery itself: in 1816, the Company still owned 454 slaves on the coast.⁽¹⁾ The Ashanti, understandably, were puzzled by his open hostility. They often tended to believe that this was "largely due to the influence of Fannie Smith", his Fante "wife".⁽²⁾ This suspicion is perhaps impossible to substantiate, but there is no doubt that the Asantehene understood the people of Cape Coast better than the Governor. They were "a saucy, turbulent people", who cheated the British as often as they did him, "bidding defiance to the authority of governors, and treating white men in common with brutality".⁽³⁾ Historians have consistently supported the Asantehene's verdict on the coastal tribes; and this compares very poorly with the almost unanimous praise lavished upon the Ashanti. Hope-Smith cannot have been unaware of the Cape Coast riot of 1803, and he was the officer who reported the murder of Meredith by the Winnebahs.

Nevertheless, his continued support of the towns was apparently based on strong moral principles: "The civilization of

(1) McCarthy, p.48.

(2) Ibid., pp.43-4.

(3) Ibid., p.55; Dupuis, p.LXIII.

Africa, the amelioration of the condition of that unfortunate portion of its inhabitants, whose lot is slavery are circumstances ardently desired by the British Nation".(1) But Hope-Smith cannot have been unaware that the wishes of the British nation, as expressed by Parliament and repeated by his employers, were for the extension of trade and the exploration of the interior. Yet he would not promote these interests: "I am fully aware of the importance of trade, and, I have endeavored to foster and increase it, - but I have always considered it of minor importance, when put in competition with points of public duty in which the British character may be involved."(2)

This incredible statement simply cannot be reconciled with the conduct of John Hope-Smith. George Torrane's character and morals have been crucified in print because he sacrificed Africans to serve the interests of the Company, and, in a larger sense, the country. But Hope-Smith has been forgiven his offences: fraud and deception, petty larceny, breaking a treaty, pursuing a personal vendetta, deviating from or openly disobeying his orders, and risking a war which his Government was unprepared for, and certainly did not desire. But some historians have lauded his actions, and endorsed his policy. Ellis argues that the Governor was perfectly justified in resisting the Ashanti

(1) C0267/54, Hope-Smith to the Council, March 3, 1821.

(2) *Ibid.*

demands.(1) Even those who disagree with his policy, and lament the utterly unnecessary war with the Ashanti, concede that Hope-Smith may have been in error, but none dispute the soundness of his principles. However, it is impossible to trust to his sincerity, after a thorough examination of his character. Unfortunately, the true motives of the Governor are probably still unknown. But it would seem extremely unlikely that he was guided by the principles he so often stated.

(1) Ellis, p.139.

CROWN GOVERNOR MACCARTHY

However poor the Company's performance in the last few years of its existence, the impetus for the Crown takeover of the Gold Coast settlements seems to have come from London. The Lords of the Treasury, by December, 1820, recommended that the Government abolish the Company and occupy the forts, because Parliament had been bearing the costs in any case.(1). On May 7th, 1821, this act was carried through, though the Company continued to fight on in Parliament for another year.

Eveline Martin suggests that the Gold Coast forts were retained to prevent their use as bases for the slave trade.(2) The new 'colony' was merged with Sierra Leone, increasing the duties of the Governor in Freetown. This, after years of neglect and disinterest, was the Government's response. In part, at least, the Company's demise was due to its corrupt and inefficient administration, and its inability to produce any visible return on the considerable investment made by the Crown. But it remains difficult to judge the relative weight of the Company's ineptitude, against the Government's desire to reduce expenditures, in the formulation of a new policy on the Gold Coast.

In accordance with the old merger plan suggested by the

(1) Harlow and Madden, p.494.

(2) Martin, p.163.

abolitionists, the settlements became the responsibility of the Governor of Sierra Leone, Sir Charles MacCarthy. Born in 1768, the scion of "an ancient and princely family", from County Cork, Ireland, MacCarthy pursued a career in the army, serving in Flanders, the West Indies, and at Ferrol. In 1811 he was promoted to command the Royal African Corps, and a year later was entrusted the administration of civil government in Senegal and Goree.(1) He should have been an excellent choice for the post, given his commitment to abolition, experience as an administrator, and years of residence in West Africa.(2) MacCarthy worked hard to resettle the liberated slaves, and cooperated with the Church Missionary Society.(3) After a short term as Acting-Governor, he was given the full rank in September 1815, then took an extended period of leave from July, 1820, to November, 1821.

While in London, he met, and was briefed by Joseph Dupuis, who stressed the importance of maintaining good relations with the Ashanti.(4) MacCarthy had already met his Dutch counterpart, Daendels, who characterized the Fante as "troublesome". Finally, he may have been influenced by a letter from a British merchant,

(1) Crooks, *A History of the Colony of Sierra Leone*, (London: Frank Cass, 1903), p.91.

(2) Fage, *History of West Africa*, p.125.

(3) Christopher Fyfe, *A Short History of Sierra Leone*, (Hong Kong: Longmans, 2nd edition, 1979).

(4) McCarthy, p.90.

describing the Ashanti as "... people of a superior race with regard to civilization than other tribes ...".(1) These sources of information suggest that MacCarthy was not totally unprepared for the complex situation he was soon to encounter. There would seem to be little foundation for Ward's assertion that the new Governor was largely ignorant of the realities, and lacked experienced advisors, as the Company's officers refused to serve under him.(2)

It cannot be claimed that MacCarthy began his administration under a cloud of ignorance. It is true that Hope-Smith and his second-in-command, James Swanzy, declined to continue in his service, the former citing his health and his twenty year absence from England, the latter because he planned to take up private trade.(3) But fifteen of the Company's officers, including the secretary, accountant, and surgeons, as well as the interpreter Joseph De Graff, were retained by MacCarthy on Hope-Smith's recommendation.(4) The new Governor could not, then, have suffered from a lack of experienced advisors. As well, it would seem safe to assume that the Company's old employees, from the ex-Governor down, took advantage of the opportunity to voice their opinions. MacCarthy probably did not lack for sources of

(1) C0267/42, MacCarthy to Bathurst, January 2, 1816.

(2) Ward, p.175.

(3) Crooks, Records, p.142.

(4) Ibid., pp.146-147.

information with which to form his conclusions.

Both Ward and Metcalfe suggest that the new Governor may have been somewhat out of his depth, and fairly ignorant of the true situation.(1) But he had been briefed by Dupuis, and there was no shortage of experienced officers when he first arrived; in fact, MacCarthy heard both sides of the dispute. Unfortunately, he met with a unanimous barrage of complaints and accusations against the ex-Consul, and the Ashanti were made out to be tyrannical and treacherous savages. Though he may have had his reservations, the Governor was apparently converted to this view, as he seems to have accepted these opinions at face value. This is hardly surprising, considering the almost universal agreement of the Company's employees. Again, the absence of Ashanti representatives added to the problem: in 1820, the Asantehene's nephew had gone to Cape Coast with a large retinue, but he was recalled in frustration when Dupuis failed to return.(2) Also, it is possible that, on a more personal level, Hope-Smith made a more favourable impression on MacCarthy: Dupuis was well-known for his somewhat abrasive personality, while the new Governor and his predecessor apparently found strong common ground. A dedicated abolitionist, MacCarthy was pleased to commend Hope-Smith for his efforts to prevent "that odious traffic".(3)

(1) Metcalfe, Maclean, p.42.

(2) Ajayi and Crowder, p.176.

(3) C0267/56, MacCarthy to Bathurst, May 16, 1822.

After a short time on the Coast, MacCarthy seems to have adopted the majority of his predecessor's attitudes and opinions, as well as his interpretations of past events. He echoed the Company's traditional dislike and distrust of the Dutch. Despite the severe limitations imposed on his Dutch counterpart's finances(1), MacCarthy still feared his potential ability to harm or weaken the British position. "General Daendels", he wrote, "with the most sinister views fomented the hatred of the King of Ashantee against the British Merchants on the Coast...".(2) This clearly reveals MacCarthy's belief that Ashanti hostility must have been the result of outside influences. Further, he felt that the Bowdich and Dupuis missions had failed, because they were unable to remove "the strange prejudices of that chief".(3) Since he was suspicious of the Dutch, and scornful of Dupuis' achievements, it is not surprising that MacCarthy rejected their advice, notably their views on the relative merits of the Fante and the Ashanti.

This verdict of past events could only encourage MacCarthy to believe that further negotiations with the Ashanti would serve little purpose. With no hope of success by peaceful means, only a strong line against Kumasi could be expected to produce the desired result. But the Governor's erroneous version of recent

(1) Governor Daendels' yearly allowance had been reduced from 10,000 pounds sterling to 4,000.

(2) CO257/56, MacCarthy to Bathurst, May 18, 1822.

(3) Ibid.

history was based on wholly mistaken assumptions. The embassies had been successful in allaying Ashanti suspicions, which had been caused by Hope-Smith's refusal to safeguard their interests. The Dutch may have encouraged these fears, but British duplicity was undoubtedly to blame for the deterioration of relations with Kumasi. But MacCarthy chose to repudiate Dupuis and all his works, referring to the "imbecility of his measures", and criticizing him for surrendering Cape Coast town to the authority of the Asantehene.(1)

Hope-Smith returned to England, handsomely compensated for the expense of maintaining his forts in the interim between the abolition of the Company's charter and the new Governor's arrival on the scene. But he left behind a successor who fully endorsed his policy and his conduct, and now had far greater means at his disposal to implement them. The revocation of the Company's Charter removed a confused, self-seeking influence upon British policy. The departure of Dupuis should have been beneficial, in a sense, because it left left only a single legitimate source of authority and decision-making, freed of competitive and mutually antagonistic influences. MacCarthy was now the single formulator of British policy on the Coast, with the full backing of the Crown. But he lacked advisors favourable, or at least not hostile to the Ashanti.

At first, MacCarthy gave signs that he was both perceptive

(1) Ibid.

and fair. He soon realized that the Ashanti were not irrevocably opposed to the British, but that they were vexed by the conduct of Cape Coast and suspicious of the Governor. They continued to trade with the British through Annamaboe and Accra, but the Asantehene forbade contact with Cape Coast, to minimize the potential for friction. MacCarthy recognized the wisdom of this decision, designed to avoid any further disputes with the turbulent inhabitants.(1) Clearly, the Governor was an honest, moral man, guided by humanitarian principles, dedicated to the abolitionist cause, and to his country's best interests.

MacCarthy, however, adopted the bias of his predecessor; even more unfortunately, he had far greater resources at his disposal. Hope-Smith, given his military weakness, had felt compelled to resort to obstruction and outright dishonesty to protect his interests, which included the safety of Cape Coast. But MacCarthy now had military forces to call upon: he had brought 15 officers and 206 African soldiers of the Royal African Colonial Light Infantry to garrison the Gold Coast forts, and an additional 15 officers and 340 men of the 2nd West Indian Regiment were available in Sierra Leone.(2) With these troops present, MacCarthy's decision that further negotiations were useless, increased the likelihood of armed conflict in the event of another dispute.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Crooks, *Records*, p.160.

MacCarthy was frequently absent, occupied as he was with the administration of Sierra Leone.(1) His second-in-command, Major Chisolm, held views similar to those of Hope-Smith. He believed that the Ashanti were opposed to the British presence. He had also been told, by the interpreter De Graft, that the Ashanti feared MacCarthy would form an alliance with the Fante to attack them, as soon as he returned from Sierra Leone with additional troops.(2) Chisolm encouraged his superior to take a strong line, which was, he felt, the only way to check Ashanti "rapacity".(3)

MacCarthy returned to Cape Coast after receiving a letter from Chisolm, describing the abduction of an African sergeant at Annamaboe "at the instigation of the King of Ashantee".(4) The sergeant, in an argument with an Ashanti trader, had "abused" the Asantehene with a curse. With no sign of action from Chisolm, the Ashanti had taken matters into their own hands. MacCarthy returned hurriedly, hoping to settle the dispute peacefully, but he brought a small contingent of troops, as he "thought it advisable to be prepared for defence if necessary".(5) But the

(1) MacCarthy was present on the Gold Coast from March-May 1822, December 1822-March 1823, and November 1823-January 1824.

(2) C0267/56, Chisolm to MacCarthy, September 30, 1822.

(3) Newbury, p. 291.

(4) C0267/56, Chisolm to MacCarthy, September 30, 1822.

(5) Crooks, Records, pp. 166-167, MacCarthy to Bathurst, November 11, 1822.

Governor showed considerable restraint and moderation, as did the Asantehene:

... I believe from the report they have received that they are inclined to apologise for their conduct and that matters will be made up in a manner that may impress him (the Chief) with a better Idea of the British Nation, and prevent such an act in future. As the direct commercial intercourse is now at a stand[still?], I am anxious to bring matters to a close as soon as possible. (1)

MacCarthy recognized the need for peace and stability, if profitable trade was to continue. But he may have had little understanding of the seriousness of the sergeant's offence, and his reference to 'the Chief' may have indicated an underestimation of the Asantehene. But his efforts to resolve difficulties and remove obstacles to the trade are noteworthy, given the extremely biased and belligerent attitudes in the British camp.

Soon after the abduction, MacCarthy received a letter from a group of British merchants on the Coast, most of whom were former employees of the Company. They suggested that if he opened hostilities against the Ashanti, he would not lack for allies.

so ... overbearing [is] their deportment when they exact their extortionate tribute from the lesser states who have the misfortune to be subjected to their yoke, that they have not a friend among the nations adjoining there, nor, we sincerely believe, an ally who would not forsake them, and become their enemies should circumstances evince a reasonable prospect of freeing themselves from the thralldom of so galling a

(1) Ibid., pp.167-168, MacCarthy to Bathurst, December 14, 1822.

connexion.(1)

They lauded the conduct of Major Chisolm, then reiterated the old argument that the Ashanti were trying to unlawfully extend their authority over Cape Coast town. The abduction of the sergeant, they pointed out, provided the Governor with an excellent pretext to attack and overthrow the Ashanti.

The act of aggression may therefore be considered rather fortunate than otherwise as it affords an opportunity of destroying or humbling a power that must be destroyed or humbled before our footing in this country can be considered safe or respectable and before the leading objects of His Majesty's Government -- the increase of our knowledge respecting the unknown countries in the Interior of this vast continent -- the extension of our intercourse with the natives -- the promoting [of] their improvement and civilization and eventually the gradual diffusion of Christian knowledge -- can ever be carried into effect.(2)

The merchants cleverly stated their preference for a long term settlement, rather than an uncertain truce or a hollow peace, and painted a bright picture of the probable advantages of a defeat of Ashanti. They appealed to the Governor's christian and abolitionist sentiments, as well, as the best interests of the nation.

(1) C0267/56, Letter to MacCarthy, December 12, 1822. The signatories were James Swanzy, the former Governor of Annamaboe, William Hutchinson, Henry Swanzy, P.J. Fraser, Thomas B. Swanzy, the former Accountant and Deputy Secretary, James Heddle, Edwin Jones, J. Pierce, John Aule, the former Deputy Surveyor, P. Dodd, James Bannerman, and Frederick James, the original leader of the first embassy to Kumasi.

) (2) Ibid.

The kidnappers eventually executed their prisoner, in February, 1823. The Asantehene demonstrated his willingness to stand by the British, by cooperating throughout the crisis as far as he was able, and dissociated himself from the affair by ordering the execution in turn of the perpetrators, who had cursed the King of England. (1) This episode reveals, as MacCarthy may have realized, that the Ashanti attitude towards curses and insults was not merely a convenient pretext for assessing fines. But the Governor had already decided upon a show of force, and organized an expedition to punish the offenders. He had been converted to the idea of a "limited war", to protect what he saw as a British sphere of influence. It was hastily planned, and poorly executed, as MacCarthy hoped to catch the kidnappers, by surprise. Through the treachery or stupidity of the guides, the party left the roads and was ambushed, losing 9 dead and 57 wounded, without having achieved their objective. (2) MacCarthy's own summary of the events, as presented to Lord Bathurst, reveals his attitudes towards the Ashanti, and the extent to which he had hardened his position. The pretext for his 'Expedition to Dunquah', he wrote, was the

(1) *Ibid.*, MacCarthy to Bathurst, February 10, 1823.

(2) Crooks, *Records*, pp. 169-171, General Order, H.Q., Cape Coast Castle, March 1, 1823. The expedition, led by Captain Ricketts, consisted of 2 officers and 33 men of the 2nd West India Regiment, 4 officers and 137 men of the Royal Colonial Light Infantry, 125 volunteers under Mr. G.A. Robinson, another 160 led by a local chief named 'Rynca', and 100 of the King's Artificers and Labourers under Mr. James Cleland.

abduction of the sergeant, "treacherously seized by some villains employed, under the direction of the Barbarian Chief of the Ashantees, within a very few days of solemn protestations of friendship". The man had been "infamously murdered", "under the shallow pretence that he had spoken ill of the King". "Such an insult to the British name", he concluded, "could not be left unpunished".(1)

Although the expedition had been a near-complete failure, MacCarthy went on to congratulate his troops:

His Excellency ... cannot but feel the highest gratification at the successful issue of a contest brought on him as Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief by the villainy of the Ashantees, and he hopes that the chastisement they received may have the effect of proving to the Natives around that the blood of British subjects will always find avengers.(2)

The Ashanti had hardly been defeated, nor even put to flight; they retreated from the engagement because they had no desire to fight the British, their supposed allies, and were completely surprised to encounter them at all. Nonetheless, MacCarthy accurately summed up the consequences: notice had been given that he had both the will and the troops to oppose what he saw as Ashanti perfidy. Because it was believed that they had fled in consternation, the myth of Ashanti invincibility was

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

broken(1) and, perhaps equally important, relations between the 'allies' had broken down to the point of hostilities. The Governor succeeded in galvanizing the Fante and other local tribes, who began to see an opportunity to throw off the Ashanti yoke. Whether the merchants had been correct or not in stating that he would find many disaffected groups ready to challenge the inland empire, MacCarthy began to receive offers of aid, almost immediately after Dunquah. "From that period to the present not a day has elapsed without the arrival of messengers from all the native chiefs residing near the waterside, as far down as Accra, requesting to be sworn on White Man's Book (The Bible) that they would fight with us."(2) MacCarthy was left in no doubt that it was his forceful response that had galvanized the Fante, and prodded them into action: "It [the expedition] has dispelled the terror of the Fantees, and other native tribes, who had for several years been held under the most abject state of oppression by the Ashantees, and in hopeless despair considered them as invincible."(3)

There were, however, some coastal tribes who were more cautious, or less sanguine about MacCarthy's chances against the powerful Ashanti: some chiefs near Aborah and Dunquah, who lived much closer to the seat of the Asantehene's power, asked if they

(1) G0267/58, MacCarthy to Bathurst, April 7, 1823.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

could remain neutral. But the Governor was encouraged by the adherence of so many Fante, and began to feel he had found a counterweight to his mighty opponent in a British-Fante-Danish alliance.(1) This also marks MacCarthy's shift from the concept of a limited war, to a more decisive struggle, with the aim of liberating Ashanti vassals.

The Fante 'rebellion', sparked by the expedition to Dunquah and MacCarthy's open defiance, has raised an interesting historiographical debate. It is possible, as G.E. Metcalfe implicitly suggests, that this uprising would have occurred without the Governor's interference, as Ashanti "rapacity" and demands for tribute drove the Fante to unite.(2) This was often the case in Ashanti history, as a weak or disputed successor to the throne often faced a spontaneous revolt among disaffected tribes on the peripheries of his empire. But Mary McCarthy has studied this particular question more thoroughly, and points out that Hope-Smith's opposition and resistance had produced no offers of aid or assistance.(3) Yet the Fante considered Ashanti demands for tribute as tyranny and extortion, and the end of the slave trade, with its resulting loss of revenue, must have made it difficult to pay in gold or ivory. Again, the speed with which the Governor was able to assemble a considerable contingent

(1) Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, p.30.

(2) Metcalfe, *Maclean*, pp.37-38.

(3) McCarthy, p.89.

and coordinate rebellion among the Fante suggests widespread disaffection and genuine resentment against the Ashanti.(1)

But the arrival of MacCarthy, and the presence, for the first time, of a considerable number of British troops, may have been the deciding factors. The Fante may have been unable to gather the strength to attempt a rising after their numerous defeats (1806-1814), but there can be little doubt that Dunquah, and the Governor's apparent willingness to take the lead were catalysts for the rebellion.

MacCarthy's term also signals a significant change in British perceptions. It is entirely possible that Hope-Smith would not have allied with the Fante, nor they with him, because of their mutual suspicion and animosity. He consistently defended the distinct status of the Cape Coast people, separate from the Fante, whom he suspected of conspiring with the Ashanti out of jealousy. It may never even have entered Hope-Smith's mind to cooperate with them. MacCarthy, on the other hand, lacked the long experience on the Coast of his predecessors, and seems to have had no prejudice against his nearest neighbours. Given his dislike of Daendels, it is logical to assume that he rejected the Dutch Governor's scathing portrayal of the Fante. Without any experience of the 1803 riot, or the murder of Meredith, it is unlikely that he developed any fear or antipathy towards the coastal tribes. Finally, MacCarthy does not seem to

(1) *Ibid.*, pp.89-91.

have made any great distinction between the Fante and the inhabitants of the coastal towns under his authority. The latter he considered British subjects, but he seems to have treated his new allies with equal care and respect.

The Governor soon began to entertain confident hopes that a war against the Ashanti would be successful. If all the promises were kept, he estimated his total armed strength at well over 30,000.(1) But it is difficult to determine if MacCarthy was encouraged by these developments to take an even stronger tone towards the Asantehene. His correspondence to Lord Bathurst, however, took a harsh anti-Ashanti line.

I entertain very confident hopes that the spirit of hostility raised against the Chief of the Ashantees by his tyrannical measures and oppressions, and now carried to the highest pitch by the murder of the Serjeant, will prevent any serious attempt being made on this part by that Ruffian and his adherents, who are daily decreasing.(2)

However, the Governor was still prepared to settle matters peacefully, if not amicably, and, having secured the Coast to his satisfaction, returned to Sierra Leone in May 1823. The Fante, without his direct leadership, took no overt action, and the British forces remained on the defensive. Only a breakdown of

(1) C0267/61. A later estimate, from July 29, 1824, comes to a total of 29,980, broken down as follows: 13,700 from the towns near British forts (including Cape Coast, Dixcove, Annamaboe, etc.), 1,780 from sea-coast allies, 9,400 from inland states, including Denkyera, Twifo, Akim, and Wassaw, and 5,000 from Accra.

(2) C0267/58, MacCarthy to Bathurst, April 26, 1823.

communications along the trading routes, or perhaps complete confusion and disbelief can explain the prolonged Ashanti silence and inactivity. MacCarthy himself complained frequently of the lack of reliable information: "there is so much difficulty in obtaining any intelligence that can be depended upon", and again, "there is no forming any reasonable conjecture in the state of ignorance in which I am, as to the time they will move forwards".(1)

If the Ashanti had been distrustful of Hope-Smith, MacCarthy at least made his intentions clear. The Asantehene could only have been perplexed by the apparent inconsistencies of the British, after their two embassies, and solemn promises to recognize his authority and watch over his interests. Still, Osei Tutu Kwamina remained patient and moderate: a messenger arrived in MacCarthy's absence, "expressing [the Asantehene's] wishes for peace". The Governor, when he learned of this, was skeptical, and sent a polite but guarded reply. Considering his suspicions, MacCarthy too was acting with considerable restraint, but this was of little or no use: without a concerted, determined effort by the British, there was no hope of ending the dispute. As far as the Asantehene was concerned, in spite of Dupuis' promise to resolve the inconsistencies, the British had once again broken the treaty. The Asantehene's patience was nearly exhausted: if the Governor wanted war, he was not entirely unwilling.

(1) *Ibid.*, MacCarthy to Bathurst, February 10, 1823.

There is no evidence to suggest that MacCarthy ever considered the treaty. As far as he was concerned, the Ashanti were entirely responsible for the present dispute, and did not honestly desire peace. This position is understandable, given his ignorance of the Ashanti, and the weakness of his sources of information. But the Asantehene's suspicions that his 'ally' was attempting to provoke a war was confirmed by a little-known British action, which took place in April, 1823. This incident remains somewhat mysterious: it does not appear in the Colonial Office records until July, 1826.

Shortly after the Dunquah expedition, Captain Blenkarne and a party of British troops marched into the Danish town of Accra, and surprised a group of Ashanti traders. These men, unprepared for hostilities, offered no resistance: three were killed, and the remainder fled. Blenkarne then arranged with a chief of the Danish town, named Aobado, to capture the approximately two hundred Ashanti then in Accra. The majority were quickly taken, and all but forty were executed on the spot by Aobado. Seventy-five of the survivors took refuge in the house of a Danish merchant, who refused to surrender them, although the traders gave up their goods. The house was eventually stormed, and twenty more were captured and killed.

The fate of the surviving prisoners remains unclear. Some were enlisted in the Royal African Corps, others were sent to Sierra Leone, and others were kept, under guard, to work in

Accra. The Danish Governor, exasperated, dismissed the miscreant Aobado from his service. MacCarthy ordered the Commander of James Fort, Accra, to double the man's 'salary', and retain him in British pay. This surreptitious act was kept secret, to prevent a scandal: "Had it been known among the other chiefs, that this man was in the pay of the English Government it would have created great jealousy and probably have got to the knowledge of the Danish Governor".(1)

The mystery surrounding this unusual episode has not been completely solved. Beecham, Metcalfe, and Ward do not even mention it; Reindorf states that as MacCarthy had already declared martial law, this was the first action by the British to open hostilities.(2) Claridge, with the superior detail of his narrative, explains that the Governor, on his way to Sierra Leone, stopped at Accra to win over its people to his alliance. With the help of the Danish Governor, this was easily achieved, and Claridge adds that MacCarthy enrolled a local militia before his departure.(3) The very next day, the Accras were apparently provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their allegiance, as some Ashantis arrived to trade. According to Claridge, the first attack was carried out by this new militia and a detachment from

(1) C0267/73, Memorandum Given to Major General Sir Neil Campbell Respecting the Attack on the Ashanti Traders, London, July 17, 1826.

(2) Reindorf, p.180.

(3) Claridge, p.341.

James Fort (though he does not specifically name Blenkarne). When the Ashantis returned and retaliated, the Accras flew to arms and the 'massacre' ensued. Surprisingly, MacCarthy did not leave James Fort until the following day, May 17th, certain that "he had put the whole country in a thoroughly satisfactory state of defence, and believing there was no immediate danger of an invasion." (1)

Claridge's version of the events would seem to implicate Sir Charles, where the official record simply states that it was "made known" to him, whereupon he arranged Aobado's pay. (?) Though Captain Blenkarne was no friend of the Ashanti, having been a member of Council in 1820 who supported Hope-Smith, it is doubtful that he would have undertaken such an act on his own initiative. The evidence, then, would seem to suggest that MacCarthy was the author of this attack.

The sources further suggest that this was somewhat of an embarrassment to the British. There is no record of the event in MacCarthy's otherwise thorough and lengthy correspondence to Lord Bathurst, and his secretive dealings with Aobado indicate that the Governor himself was not eager to reveal his own part in the affair. The official copy of this memorandum in the Public

(1) Ibid.

(2) C0267/73, Memorandum Given to Major General Sir Neil Campbell Respecting the Attack on the Ashanti Traders, London, July 17, 1826.

Record Office merely adds to the mystery.(1) The key passage reads as follows:

I take this opportunity of acquainting you for the information of Earl Bathurst that there are now serving in the R. African Corps a considerable number of Ashantees (if I recollect about 20) who were taken prisoners in an attack which was made upon them at Accra by a detachment of British troops upon some peaceable Ashanti traders with their followers before they were prevented from trading and the commencement of hostilities in 1824. I have no doubt that Mr. Bannerman will willingly relate to you this circumstance.(2)

This somewhat garbled text shows indisputable evidence of having been corrected: after "about 20", the words 'or 30' have been crossed out; "an attack" has been substituted for 'a disgraceful massacre', which has been crossed out but remains clearly legible; in the same way, "made upon them" has been substituted for 'perpetrated'. Unfortunately, the reason for these corrections remains unknown. It would seem that certain persons regretted the episode, and it was covered up, or that subsequent events delayed a report for two years. It is difficult to reconcile this underhanded attack, and the secretive arrangements that followed, with the otherwise high principles associated with the character of Sir Charles MacCarthy. Obviously, he had decided that hostilities were inevitable, and

(1) The source of this document was a Mr. Bannerman, "one of the greatest proprietors of Land and formerly of slaves upon the Gold Coast", who was recommended by a naval officer, Captain Grace.

(2) Ibid.

chose to deliver the first blow.

The Governor was clearly determined to fight a war, for the sake of his allies and those states under Ashanti rule, if not to promote British commercial interests. In any event, when he returned in November, 1823, to find an Ashanti army some 9,000 strong "laying waste the countryside", (1) MacCarthy chose to interpret this as the opening of a general war. But the Ashanti were not yet committed to the idea of fighting the British; this force was directed against their rebellious tributary states, notably Denkyera. The Governor gathered his allies, and sent out large parties to confront the enemy. A detachment under Captain Laing surprised some Ashanti, who fled before them, merely confirming the fact that they were intent only on subduing their recalcitrant vassals, and had not received permission from the Asantehene to attack the British. In this case, it would seem that Osei Tutu Kwamina was the victim of ignorance, or perhaps of wishful thinking: accustomed to numerous previous examples of British inconsistency, he does not seem to have believed that they would jeopardize the obvious economic and military advantages of an alliance with Ashanti.

MacCarthy praised the conduct of his African allies in this engagement, citing the valour of the King of Denkyera: "The skill and gallantry displayed on that occasion are truly worthy

(1) Crooks, Records, pp.178-179, MacCarthy to Bathurst, December 12, 1823.

of the cause he has eagerly embraced, to emancipate his country from the oppression of the Ashantees".(1) The Governor had gone far beyond his predecessor's policy: no longer content with protecting the tribes near the British forts, he intended to liberate the Fante and other subject peoples from the bonds of the Ashanti empire. This was not merely dictated by military necessity. Though he would certainly need African allies to fight the enemy, his extension of British aid to all tributary states would inevitably cause a serious escalation of the conflict. Ajayi and Crowder, contrary to the majority of earlier historians, contend that MacCarthy is to be blamed, rather than pitied for his errors. Having "imbibed" the contempt and hostility of local merchants and officials, he neglected to obtain any first-hand information regarding the Ashanti. Captain Laing, who volunteered to go to Kumasi or Abora, was denied permission.(2)

Eager for battle himself, MacCarthy led out a mixed force in person, in January, 1824, hoping to once again surprise the enemy. But the Governor displayed very poor tactical sense, as he split his force into two unequal halves. The smaller contingent, under MacCarthy himself, blundered into the main Ashanti army in the area. The British force was quickly surrounded, as the allied African levies fled almost immediately, and the vastly unequal battle was quickly decided.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ajayi and Crowder, pp.186-189.

Major Chisolm initially reported that the Governor and his staff had been captured and "barbarously killed"(1) , but Captain Ricketts, who was present at the engagement, testified that MacCarthy had committed suicide to avoid capture.(2) The British, abandoned by their allies, lost 177 dead and 90 wounded. The Ashanti, states Claridge, were surprised to find the British there at all, as they were intent on putting down the rebellion of Denkyera and Wassaw.(3) MacCarthy's presence was apparently unknown until his body was found.

On the very same day, Osei Tutu Kwamina passed away in Kumasi. This Asantehene was praised by every European who met him, as an honourable, forbearing man of sound sense. His attitude towards the British, despite their inconsistent approaches, suggest that the Ashanti alliance would have been strong and secure.(4) But his death at this juncture was highly fortunate for MacCarthy's successors, who were largely unprepared for an immediate resumption of hostilities. After this debacle, they would have found it very difficult to recruit among the Fante, who feared reprisals, and were already regretting their decision to openly defy their conquerors.(5) It was to be some

(1) C0267/60, Chisolm to Bathurst, March 5, 1824.

(2) Crooks, Records, p.179.

(3) Claridge, p.364.

(4) Ibid., p.360.

(5) Ibid., p.362.

time before these chiefs regained their confidence.

The effects of the Governor's death are more difficult to determine, but this news must have caused some surprise and consternation at home. It seemed that the high hopes raised by the Bowdich mission were dashed, and the Ashanti alliance lost. The Government, and the Treasury in particular, were well aware of the high cost of continuing the war, and recommended that the British forces fall back on the defensive.(1) In fact, the British made plans for evacuation and complete withdrawal, but the course of events moved more rapidly than decision-makers in London, and proved in the end to be the more decisive influence on policy for the Gold Coast.

(1) Curtin, p.170.

1824-1831

After the death of MacCarthy, the British remained on the defensive, which was the only course open to them, considering their resources and the lack of dependable troops. The Fante had proven unreliable in battle, and no new efforts could be made to raise large contingents of allies. Through the mediation of the Dutch Governor, Major Last, the British finally met with Ashanti messengers at Elmina. The envoys stated that the Ashanti army had taken the field solely for the purpose of capturing the rebellious Chiefs of Denkyera, Twifo, and Wassaw, and that the encounter with MacCarthy had been entirely accidental. They also denied that the Asantehene had ordered the kidnapping and execution of the sergeant. As Claridge suggests, these acts seem to have been carried out without the knowledge or approval of Osei Tutu Kwamina.(1) The Ashanti had no desire to fight the British, and demanded only that the rebel chiefs be handed over, as Torrane had surrendered Chibu. The new Asantehene's position, coming, as it did, after a decisive victory that left the British leaderless, and their African allies disheartened, was surprisingly moderate. But the main obstacle to an Anglo-Ashanti alliance remained unchanged: the complicated status of the tributary states, and their tenuous connection to the British.

Captain Ricketts' reply to the Ashanti overtures was

(1) Claridge, p.365.

"unfortunately rather ambiguous". He too professed a desire for peace, and suggested that "properly accredited" messengers should come to Cape Coast. However, he did not make it clear that the British had no intention of repeating Torrane's "treacherous act".(1) A settlement was not impossible, despite the recent hostilities: the situation was remarkably similar to that of 1807, when, after an attack on Annamaboe fort, Governor Torrane had chosen to placate the Ashanti, instead of continuing an obviously hopeless struggle. In this case, both sides promised to hold further talks, and the Ashanti were persuaded, again on the intercession of the Dutch Governor, to release a British prisoner.

A temporary cease-fire ensued, but Major Chisolm was never forced to consider the betrayal of his allies, as decisions reached both in London, and by the rebellious vassal states, pre-empted a settlement. The Fante were apparently not so certain that the British would not repeat Torrane's treachery: fearing that they were to be delivered to their enemies, the rebel chiefs resumed hostilities. This independent act produced the desired results, as the Ashanti regarded these new attacks as yet another example of British duplicity, and a breach of promise. Small skirmishes broke out, and another major engagement was avoided only because those Fante allies still with the British once again fled before the battle.

(1) Ibid.

Though the Fante had sabotaged a settlement, the British were not committed to continuing the war. Major Chisolm had immediately reported to London that the Ashanti were prepared to negotiate(1), but he fell ill and died in October, 1824. Captain Alexander Laing, then in command of the troops in the field, had a novel suggestion for bringing the Ashanti to heel. He maintained that they could be forced to cooperate if the British simply threatened to bypass Kumasi by trading further up the Volta. Commercial concessions could then be obtained in return for the right to buy firearms.(2) This plan, while attractive, was, in the main impractical: the British would have found it difficult to bypass the Ashanti(3), and any arms boycott would have played into the hands of the Dutch, who were only too happy to supply Kumasi. Laing was eventually forced to leave for reasons of ill health, and it was not until March 1825 that Major-General Turner arrived, with 15 officers and 495 men of the Royal African Corps. Turner's appraisal of the situation was both succinct and accurate. There was no profit to be had from the Gold Coast, he realized, as long as the war continued.

(1) C0267/60, Chisolm to Bathurst, May 12, 1824.

(2) Curtin, p.282.

(3) C.P. Lucas, *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, Volume III, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), pp.213-215. More than fifty years later, Lucas still found the Gold Coast "difficult of access", with no natural harbours and few navigable rivers, because of numerous sand bars and treacherous surf and breakers.

Turner also explained to Lord Bathurst the dilemma of British policy: to side with the Fante meant, inevitably, that Britain would be forced to fight the Ashanti, with all the costs and danger that entailed, but an alliance with Kumāsi did not necessarily mean a war with the Fante.(1)

Bathurst seems to have understood the situation fairly well, and was moved to intervene, perhaps because of the rapid turnover of senior officers, or the increasing danger that Britain would be drawn into a costly and unprofitable war against its own interests. He advised Turner to keep only Cape Coast Castle and Accra, thus reducing the scale of the civil establishment and, perhaps more to the point, its cost. Also, British forces could then be pooled, with only two forts to defend. He also instructed the Governor to "abstain from all interference in the dissensions which appear to prevail among the nations and tribes ...".(2) These instructions strongly resemble the Company's advice to its Governors twenty years before; namely, a policy of neutral non-involvement. This advice had been ignored in 1817, and was too late in 1825.

Soon after his arrival, and before receiving Bathurst's instructions, Turner issued a proclamation, on April 2nd, 1825, in which he stated:

If the King of Ashanti will content
himself with governing his own nation and his

(1) Crooks, Records, p.219, Turner to Bathurst, March, 1825.

(2) Ibid., p.224, Bathurst to Turner, July 5, 1825.

own people, and does not stop the trade of the interior with the coast, or attempt to oppress his neighbours, let him say so to me, and I will make a treaty with him on these terms; but I will not make peace with him on any other terms, nor until he gives up every claim to tribute or subjection from the surrounding nations. (1)

This proclamation was directly contrary to Bathurst's instructions (which Turner would not receive until much later) to avoid any interference in the affairs of the neighbouring tribes. Turner was sanctioning the rebellion of the vassal states, at a time when the victorious Ashanti still held the balance of power. The new Governor, whether he realized it or not, was rejecting the Asantehene's peace initiative by setting terms that were simply unacceptable to the Ashanti. The war, then, would go on.

On April 25th, the Denkyeras were defeated by the Ashanti, but on May 21st the British won a victory; they were prevented from exploiting their advantage by the flight of their Fante allies. With too few troops to continue, they returned to the Coast. Osai Okotui, the new Asantehene, completely rejected Turner's terms, and sent a defiant message to Cape Coast, while preparing a full scale invasion, which he launched in June. When the Ashanti arrived within five miles of the Castle, seamen were landed from HMS Victor. Reinforcements had arrived on July 4th, and Major von Richelieu, the Danish Governor, sent a contingent of Accras, 5,000 strong. A week later, a battle was fought, and

(1) Ibid., p.383.

soon afterwards, the Ashanti army retreated.(1)

The Ashanti retreat was seen in quite a different light by the two sides. The British and their jubilant allies believed they had won a great victory. But the Ashanti had not been decisively beaten, and their withdrawal from the coast was prompted mainly by the ravages of smallpox and dysentery. As well, the destruction of the coastal lands during the advance had caused a serious famine, and, to make matters worse, a Danish force was creating a diversion by marching into Akin. Depleted by disease and starvation, and faced with the prospect of further rebellions in their rear, the Ashanti were left with no option but to withdraw. It was these causes, more than any serious defeat at the hands of the British and their allies, that determined the course of their actions.(2)

The British, in fact, were no better off: Cape Coast was in dire straits for some time, as famine and the destruction caused by the invasion took their toll. Nor were the Ashanti any more prepared to surrender their empire. On the contrary, they seem to have believed they were winning the war, since their victory over MacCarthy. But they had failed to take Cape Coast, and the coalition against them was growing stronger. The Danes had cast in their lot with the British, and relations with the Dutch were

(1) See Claridge, pp.376-379, for a more detailed description of the attack on Cape Coast. The British lost 2 killed and 8 wounded, their African allies 102 killed and 410 wounded.

(2) Ibid., p.379.

much better, under their new Governor.(1)

Major-General Turner, believing perhaps that the war had been won, or that there was no further danger to Cape Coast, returned to Sierra Leone in April, 1826, taking most of the British troops with him. The British had taken some time to recover from the ravaging of the coast, and the Ashanti were preoccupied with internal rebellions. For some months the Gold Coast was practically denuded of British soldiers. Turner died March 7th, 1826, and Major-General Sir Neil Campbell was appointed to succeed him. By the time Campbell arrived at Cape Coast, on September 19th, 1826, the decisive battle of Dodowah had already been fought.

The Ashanti had decided to punish the Accras, their former allies, who had changed sides. An allied force gathered to assist the threatened Accras, and the two armies met on open ground, on the 7th of August. Some 500 British-organized militia were present, with contingents of Danish militia, and nearly 11,000 Africans, mainly Denkyeras, Akwamus, Akims, and Accras. The Ashanti army has been estimated at 10,000 men.(2) The result was a complete victory for the allies. Less than 100 British subjects were actually involved, and, except for the decisive intervention of a squad firing Congreve rockets, the battle was entirely an African affair.

(1) Crooks, Records, p.193.

(2) For an account of the battle, see Claridge, pp.385-389.

Dodowah completely transformed the Gold Coast: the British, for the first time, became the owners of the land they occupied, and the troublesome question of the "Notes" was at an end. Only the Dutch continued to pay rent to the Ashanti for Elmina Castle, an unfortunate precedent which would cause a great deal of trouble in the future.(1) The former vassals and tributaries of the Ashanti had won their independence, and Governor Sir Neil Campbell faced a situation almost entirely unprecedented.

Campbell had joined the army in 1797, served at the capture of Martinique and Guadeloupe, fought with the Portuguese army in the Peninsular campaign, and with the Russian armies in Poland. He had accompanied Napoleon in exile to Elba, and marched into Paris with the Duke of Wellington, and was promoted to Major-General in 1825.(2) He too received a set of instructions from Lord Bathurst which were completely out of date. He was ordered to remain on the defensive, and dissociate himself from the Fante. If it should prove impossible to arrange a peace with the Ashanti, he was told:

You are not on that account to undertake any military operations in the field against them, but you are to maintain possession of Cape Coast Castle, and without the assistance of the native tribes, whose total want of discipline renders them unworthy of confidence, and whose dissensions with the Ashantees arise out of local questions, which do not interest the policy of this country in

(1) Ward, p.185; Claridge, p.591.

(2) Crooks, Records, p.230.

maintaining a settlement on the Gold Coast.(1)

This extraordinary document was only a few years too late. By this time Bathurst had clearly realized how unreliable the Fante had proved as allies, and that their objectives were largely incompatible with those of the British. A number of reports from military officers who served in close proximity to their African allies painted their fighting capabilities in a very poor light. As Lieutenant-Colonel Purdon put it, the Fante were incapable of following orders or discipline, but glad of British protection when the Ashanti attacked.(2) Bathurst may also have been influenced in this regard by the death of MacCarthy, after his allies had fled. In any case, the Colonial Secretary had decided that disputes between the Fante and Ashanti were of little consequence to the British. Bathurst may have agreed with Sutherland's comment on the war with Ashanti, namely, that it was "illfated, ill advised, and unprofitable".(3) It may have taken a defeat and the death of a Governor to bring the Government to take a serious interest in the Gold Coast, or perhaps the years of war, with few positive results, and the virtual extinction of trade, were simply deemed too costly.

Governor Campbell arrived at Accra, and reported his impression that the extent of the victory had been exaggerated.

(1) *Ibid.*, p.231, Bathurst to Campbell, June 20, 1826.

(2) *Ibid.*, p.233, Purdon to Bathurst, August 10, 1826.

(3) C0267/61, Sutherland to Bathurst, May 28, 1824.

There had been no pursuit of the enemy, he found, nor had any of the allies entered Ashanti territory.(1) Campbell finally reached Cape Coast two weeks after the battle, and gathered the allied chiefs. Though he congratulated them for their victory, he suggested they follow a moderate course: "... the present time, while the King was thoroughly beaten and humbled, would be a suitable occasion on which to send messengers". Campbell proposed to ask only for guarantees of security for the British and their allies, in return for peace.(2)

The Fante Chiefs were, not unnaturally, shocked and dismayed at this apparent reversal of policy. Governor Turner, in the darkest days of the war, before the attack on Cape Coast, had taken a much stronger stand, and "issued a pompous manifesto in which he asserted that he would only grant them a peace and make a treaty - for which, by the way, they had never asked - upon his own terms".(3) Now, after a decisive victory, Campbell proposed to make overtures to the Ashanti and grant them a favourable peace. This offer "to negotiate, in the eyes of the Africans, could only be seen as an admission of weakness, and they refused to sanction the Governor's proposal. Campbell, on the other hand, did not believe that the Ashanti had suffered a serious setback, and wished to bargain from a strong position while he

(1) Crooks, Records, p.236. Campbell to Bathurst, August 15, 1826.

(2) Claridge, p.392.

(3) Ibid.

still could. Also, British interests demanded a speedy return to peaceful trade, and the Governor saw no profit whatsoever in imposing a harsh settlement. In the end, the Fante were vindicated: they argued that an embassy should be deferred for a year, in which time the Ashanti, as the weaker party, would likely ask for negotiations themselves. This proved to be the case. But Campbell continued his attempts to sway the Fante, and their steadfast refusal to compromise only confirmed his belief that their aims and those of the British were essentially incompatible. A group of Cape Coast headmen were even persuaded to travel to Kumasi to open negotiations, but they were threatened and intimidated by their Fante neighbours, and the expedition was cancelled.(1)

No further hostilities took place, save for the continued siege of the Ashanti ally, Elmina, by the Fante. Messengers came and went for months, and the Asantehene, who had released his British prisoners as a sign of good faith, protested the fact that Elmina was not included in the general armistice.(2) The Fante stubbornly refused to lift the siege, and continued to obstruct all attempts to negotiate a moderate peace. They seized an Ashanti envoy who had been invited, with assurances for his safety, to come to Annamaboe, and accused him of spying.(3)

(1) Crooks, Records, p.239, Campbell to Bathurst, November 5, 1826.

(2) Claridge, p.400.

(3) C0267/74, Campbell to Bathurst, October 1, 1826.

Campbell was well aware of these activities, and must have begun to feel frustrated: he succeeded in convening a series of meetings only in December, 1827, but the outcome was again negative.(1)

By this time, the Government seemed prepared to wash its hands of the whole affair. Their patience with the obstruction tactics of the Fante had been exhausted: as Lord Goderich (who had succeeded Bathurst) wrote to Campbell, the British should, in future, "avoid entangling alliances with small bodies", "whose extreme weakness would be perpetually urging them to claim interference on their behalf."(2) A special Commission of Inquiry Report also reveals many of the Government's attitudes towards its Gold Coast possessions. They debated, as the Company did in 1805, the expediency of interfering in African affairs. While they recognized the inherent dangers, the Commission concluded that the right to intervene certainly existed, and that an increased level of British involvement could be of great benefit to the people.(3) But the report also included a sharp indictment of past policy, which the Commission judged to have been mistaken, and contrary to the nation's interests. The advantages of the Gold Coast trade would be non-existent, they wrote, until peace with the Ashanti was re-established. The

(1) Ward, p.186; Claridge, p.400.

(2) Harlow and Madden, p.496, Goderich to Campbell, August 25, 1827.

(3) Ibid., Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry, June 29, 1827.

Commission's findings reveal a tremendous swing in British policy: their interpretation of the situation agrees almost entirely with Dupuis and Campbell, while it implicitly criticizes the actions of Hope-Smith and MacCarthy.

... it seems unfortunate that, while the interests of the Ashantees and the British with reference to trade are the same, the latter should be so much identified with those whose motives and objects are at variance with both. The principal obstacle to an extended trade with the interior is formed by the present allies of the British. Their object is to throw every impediment in the way of direct intercourse, in order that they may become exclusively the factors of each party and impose upon both. Formerly those tribes were disunited and weak; but they have been united by the policy of the British, and in proportion as they feel their strength, will the barrier which they oppose be effectual in restricting the trade. If this be the case, it would follow that the British have now only the choice of withdrawing their support from those with whom they have latterly been united, or of relinquishing the hope of extended commerce.(1)

This remarkable document reveals a strong shift in British perceptions and policy. For the first time, there is agreement from the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, and Parliament (in the form of this Commission of Inquiry) on several of the key facets of the Gold Coast Settlements. It was well understood that without peace, there could be no trade, and that trade was the main object; the interests of the British and the Ashanti with regard to trade were essentially compatible and mutually beneficial, while those of the Fante were not. There is perhaps

(1) Ibid., pp. 496-497, Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry, June 29, 1827.

a slight misconception here: the motivation of the Fante for opposing and preventing a settlement, which may have caused this unprecedented introspection and re-examination of policy by the British, was probably their desire to reap the fruits of their victory. Though they might have hoped to once again enjoy the position of middle-men in the trade, they had not done so since their defeats in 1807 and 1814.

The report stresses the central dilemma of the British position: that, despite the advantages offered by the Ashanti alliance, and the negative role of the Fante, they were in fact allied with the latter, and still at war with the former. The obvious tone of regretful hindsight in the report vindicates the efforts of Torrance, Bowdich, and Dupuis, and condemns the actions of Hope-Smith and MacCarthy, who, for whatever reasons, were working against British interests. The question of Hope-Smith's defence of the Cape Coast people, which alienated the Ashanti, was no longer relevant. Though he disobeyed instructions and sacrificed the objectives of both his employers and his country, the status of the tribes nearest the forts were no longer an issue after Dodowah. Both the Fante and Ashanti seem to have conceded the area to Britain by right of conquest. But while this unfortunate policy prevented a close alliance with the Ashanti, the actions of Sir Charles MacCarthy may have caused the war. By extending his protection and support to the Fante and other subject states, he interfered in the internal politics of the Ashanti empire. The Commission clearly recognized his role

in bringing about a coalition against the Ashanti, and encouraging rebellion. The conclusion of the Inquiry, then, was to withdraw their support from the Fante, and re-establish a trading relationship with Kumasi.

With the decision to abandon the role of 'protector' of the Fante, it was no longer necessary to maintain large forces on the coast, and the Government could realize its long-cherished goal of reducing expenditures. The cost of repairing the forts was prohibitively high: estimates put the figure at over 15,000 pounds sterling for Cape Coast Castle, and over 47,000 for Accra.(1) As Bathurst had already explained to Campbell, no more garrisons or civil administration would be maintained by the Government, because of the cost. The forts would be available to merchants, as factories, but they were no longer to be classified as settlements, and the Governor of Sierra Leone would have no further responsibility for their security. The Government was prepared, however, to supply arms and ammunition if the merchants chose to recruit a local militia: the sum of 2,000 pounds sterling was offered for the first year, 1,500 for the second, and 1,000 for each year thereafter.(2)

Fuller suggests that the Government's withdrawal was due to

(1) Crooks, Records, pp.249-250, Report of Captain Boteler, Royal Engineers, 1826.

(2) Ibid., pp.241-241, Bathurst to Campbell, March 21, 1827.

"all the unrest".(1) This is partially accurate, because it would seem that only the war, and Sir Charles MacCarthy's spectacular death, could attract the Crown's attention to the high cost of maintaining unnecessary forces on the coast. In addition to the financial drain, it had proved impossible to station European troops there, and even the African regiments suffered heavily from disease: Fage estimates that one quarter to one half of the soldiers died annually.(2) The only possible justification for such an expenditure, argues Fage, would have been the protection of a valuable trade: but commerce had been at a near stand-still for years. Now, after a victory, the British could withdraw without seeming to give in to the Ashanti. But this course of action was fiercely opposed by the merchants.

The Government's decision created a sensation of deepest sorrow. The merchants had too much at stake even to dream of abandoning their houses and their trade. They had calculated the risks of carrying on business in such a country before embarking in it, and they did not feel inclined now to forego the advantages which seemed likely to arise from the defeat of the Ashantis. Moreover, the abandonment of their business, with the heavy liabilities which they had in England, appeared nothing else than a cowardly desertion of their duty, equally repugnant to honour and interest.(3)

The obduracy of the merchants, whatever their motives,

(1) Fuller, p.369.

(2) Fage, "The Administration of George Maclean on the Gold Coast 1830-1844", *Transactions of the Historical Society of the Gold Coast and Iogo*, (Volume I, Part IV, 1955, pp.104-114), p.104.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.104n.

succeeded in forcing a compromise: though the troops were withdrawn, the flag continued to fly, and a Committee of three merchants were made responsible for the Gold Coast forts.(1) They received an annual grant of between 3,000 and 4,000 pounds sterling. These merchants, in London, eventually appointed a Governor, George Maclean, who arrived in February, 1830.(2)

Maclean arrived to find that trade had been virtually destroyed by the war, and that a settlement was still being prevented by the Fante. In fact, their conduct, as they went about "boastfully singing of their victory and vaunting their own invincibility", seemed likely to drive the exasperated Ashanti to renew the struggle.(3) Maclean, suggests Claridge, was entirely responsible for bringing about the treaty that put an end to the hostilities. He too perceived the Fante as the main obstacle to peace, and by threatening to withdraw British support, succeeded in persuading them to compromise. He convened a large meeting of

(1) *Ibid.* George Barnes, Robert Brown, and Matthew Forster, representing the firms of Barnes, Brown and Forster, and Forster and Smith. These three men led the protests against the Government's planned withdrawal.

(2) Claridge, p.405. In the interim, Mr. John Jackson, the oldest merchant on the coast, served as President of the Council. He repaired much of Cape Coast town, and enlisted 185 men from the Royal African Colonial Corps into the militia. He declined the Committee's offer to confirm his appointment as Governor, stating that the post should be occupied by someone who had no conflicting interests, able to devote his entire attention to the problems at hand. Accordingly, Maclean was chosen, as he had served in the R.A.C.C. in 1826, as military secretary to Colonel Lumley.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp.405-406.

all the Fante Chiefs and representatives from Kumasi, and hammered out an agreement. The Ashanti were also willing to negotiate, as they had been seriously weakened by the revolt of Denkyera and Assin. Finally, on April 27th, 1831, a treaty was signed.

The Asantehene paid an indemnity of 600 ounces of gold, and provided hostages from the royal family as surety. Both sides agreed to open the paths to trade, and the practice of swearing oaths and cursing, which had caused so many incidents in the past, was strictly forbidden. The Ashanti relinquished their claims to Denkyera, Assin, and other tributary states, while these former vassals promised to refrain from provoking or insulting the Asantehene. Any future disputes, it was decided, would be referred to the Governor.

While Maclean succeeded in achieving a sort of balance that the Government would have approved, public perception in Britain had shifted. Though the Governor did not hesitate to call out the garrison in 1830 to quell a riot in Cape Coast(1), the Fante had become much more closely associated with the British presence. The Ashanti, so popular after the publicity of the Bowdich mission, had steadily lost ground to the Fante, who were now seen as Britain's "partner" on the Gold Coast.(2) In many

(1) Fage, "The Administration of George Maclean 1830-1844", p.114.

(2) Beecham, p.410.

ways, too, Maclean's administration resembled that of the Company before 1821: the Governor once again paid retainers to local chiefs, and a competitive relationship resumed with other Europeans on the coast. The Dutch continued to pay rent to the Ashanti, a fact which was to have serious repercussions at a later date, and they were suspected of conspiring to resume the slave trade. The Danes, meanwhile, intrigued to spread their influence, and competed with the British for supremacy in Accra.(1)

Relations with the Ashanti could not return to the promising stages reached in 1817 and 1820. The British had sabotaged their own interests, and failed to attain their objectives. Before the end of the century, the Fante would once again spark a war between the Ashanti and Britain, once more, calling into question British policy on the Gold Coast.

(1) Fage, *History of West Africa*, p.128.

CONCLUSION

British policy, originating as it did from several divergent sources, resulted in competitive and often conflicting approaches to the Gold Coast. This problem was accentuated by the relative independence and freedom of action of the Governors, the senior "man on the spot". Theoretically, the goals of the Government in London should have carried the greatest weight, as they represented the wishes of the highest authority. But Parliament's attitude was most often one of apathy or neglect, as they had little interest in the Gold Coast until after 1815. The Government, preoccupied by the struggle with Napoleonic France, spared little attention for the administration of their overseas possessions. The Secretary for War and the Colonies was certainly content to leave the Gold Coast in the hands of the Company. After the war, a serious financial crisis prompted a review of colonial expenditures, including the annual grant to the Committee. The abolitionist campaign, radical and reformist pressure, scientific and geographic curiosity, and severe social and economic difficulties all helped to refocus British attention on the administration of her colonial settlements. The revocation of the Company's charter in 1821 can be partly attributed to these factors, although continued displays of ineptitude and outright incompetence by the merchants certainly contributed to their downfall. In this context, the decision to send Joseph Dupuis as Consul to Kumasi in 1819 can be seen as a

compromise, to achieve the Government's ends, without incurring the added responsibility of assuming direct control. It is possible that this approach might have led to a form of indirect British control, or the establishment of a protectorate. But the Company's continued failures to reduce tensions, increase trade, and gain access to the interior made it increasingly obvious that the Crown would have to administer the Gold Coast settlements. It was also expected, or at least hoped, that this would substantially reduce the cost of maintaining the forts.

The first new Governor pursued a policy even more damaging to British interests, at a much higher cost. After his disastrous defeat, the Government stepped in: Parliament was obviously appalled to find the country at war with the Ashanti, with whom they had signed a pair of treaties. Disillusioned with their Fante allies, and unwilling to pursue an expensive policy which was unlikely to achieve the desired ends, the Colonial Secretary began to advocate neutrality and non-intervention.

Robinson states that the choice of an "indigenous collaborator" often determined the organization and character of colonial rule; where no suitable or effective cooperation could be found, the British were compelled, or simply chose to withdraw. On the other hand, the breakdown of a system of collaboration in many cases led to deeper imperial intervention and often a direct takeover.(1)

(1) E.J.R. Owen, and Robert B. Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, (London:1972), p.139.

This model can be applied, with some accuracy, to the Gold Coast between 1805 and 1831. Britain hoped that the Ashanti could fulfill the functions of an indigenous collaborator, providing peace and stability, profitable trade, and access to the interior, without the need for increased commitment or expense on their part. The failure of the Company to consolidate this alliance, despite the Bowdich mission, prompted the Crown to send a Consul, and, when Dupuis was frustrated by both Hope-Smith and the Committee, to assume direct control. MacCarthy's failure to achieve the Government's ends brought about a withdrawal from the Gold Coast, and the resumption of merchant administration. Thus, the breakdown of the Ashanti alliance forced Britain to intervene in force, and their inability to reach an agreement with the inland kingdom dictated a withdrawal.

But, in this case, the "value" of the settlements influenced the extent of British interest in local developments: Paul Kennedy states that, "in those parts of the globe where the existing polity failed to protect or respect British interests ... the government in London did not hesitate to use armed force to ensure that protection".(1) This, indeed, was the policy pursued by Sir Charles MacCarthy. But London did not consider the Gold Coast important or valuable enough to warrant intervention. As British interests were not sufficient to

(1) C.C. Eldridge, *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: MacMillan, 1984), p.24.

justify the expense, the Government chose to withdraw. The Gold Coast was completely neglected until the financial crisis and re-evaluation of colonial holdings. The benefits of trade, it appeared, could be obtained without annexation, or increased expense. Even the search for an alternative to the slave trade after abolition was not entirely guided by economic principles. The suppression of the dominant form of commerce required the development of a "legitimate" substitute.⁽¹⁾ In the end, even after a victory over the Ashanti, the return to a merchant administration revealed that the Government was not at all committed to the Gold Coast.

Many of the options, and certainly the problems, facing the Government were legacies left to them by the Company. The Committee, faced with the likelihood of a war between the Ashanti and the Fante, had already espoused a policy of neutrality and non-involvement. Well aware of their military weakness, and unwilling to permit their employees to engage in private trade, they cautioned against intervention in local politics. The Company's vulnerability and fear of criticism made them highly sensitive to the pressure of abolitionists and reformers. To deflect the rising tide of negative publicity, they sought to make themselves indispensable by slavishly adhering to policies compatible with the nation's interests. The Bowdich mission was designed to develop legitimate trade, gain access to the

(1) Wickins, p.17.

interior, and demonstrate the Company's usefulness as an intermediary between Britain and the Ashanti. But this embassy was also necessary for the Company, to increase trade, reduce tensions on the Coast, and to compete with the Dutch. The mission, despite its successes, did not prevent the Crown from taking a greater interest in West African affairs. Continued disputes with the Ashanti, and domestic financial pressures contributed to the decision to send Joseph Dupuis to Kumasi.

The Committee strove to control the new consul, or at least limit his freedom of action. But the ensuing squabbles with Dupuis served only to further discredit the Company, whose fate had probably already been decided. Their failure to consummate an alliance with the Ashanti, and repeated proofs of their general ineptitude only hastened their downfall. But the governors, whether servants of the Company or the Crown, continued to enjoy considerable independence. Their decisions, often based on personal attitudes or private concerns, potentially carried more weight than the occasional pronouncements of their distant superiors.

George Torrane was the first to face the problem of Ashanti power, which shattered the Fante and radically altered the political balance. His policy of accommodation with the victors proved successful, though a debate over the morality of his actions continues. But this decision was reasonable, considering the paucity of the resources at his disposal, and, whether by

design or mere coincidence, conformed exactly to the policy of neutrality and non-intervention preached by his employers. By recognizing the Ashanti conquests, and paying the rent on the Notes, Torrane merely accepted the arrival of a new landlord, without substantially altering the status of the British as tenants.

Circumstances prevented both sides from reaching a comprehensive, permanent agreement. Disease and hunger forced the Ashanti to withdraw shortly after the conquest of the coastal areas, then a series of internal wars, coupled with the resurgence of the Fante, shut off trade and communication between Kumasi and Cape Coast until 1815. By the time peace had been restored, John Hope-Smith was the new Governor.

Hope-Smith put his own aims before those of his employers or the Crown. First and foremost, he sought to protect the people of Cape Coast from what he deemed Ashanti "oppression". Torrane had reserved for the Company "some form of judicial authority" over the coastal towns near their forts, but Hope-Smith persistently blocked all attempts by the Asantehene to mete justice, while steadfastly refusing to take any action himself, despite a series of complaints from the Ashanti regarding the conduct of these people. He considered them British subjects, entitled to his protection, and strove to shield them from both the Ashanti and the Fante. But the towns clearly belonged to the Asantehene by right of conquest, and even the British owed him

the rent for their forts. Hope-Smith, it appears, chose to defraud the King with regard to the Notes, a transgression that aroused understandable suspicion. The mission to Kumasi, undertaken at the Committee's behest, suited the Governor's purposes, as well: after his somewhat dubious conduct, it was necessary to placate the Ashanti. But Frederick James' inept dealings revealed that Hope-Smith continued to place his private interests before those of the Company, as he persisted in trying to cheat the Asantehene. Only Bowdich, ignorant of these under-currents, was able to save the mission, allay Ashanti suspicions, and produce a reasonably secure treaty.

But the treaty was flawed by textual inconsistencies between the two copies, and by the fact that Hope-Smith clearly had no intention of observing its stipulations. Instead of watching over the interests of his allies, he obstructed them at every turn, and sheltered those who incurred their displeasure. This defence of the rights of the coastal towns was threatened by the arrival of Joseph Dupuis. As a rival source of policy, the possibility existed that he might jeopardize the status of the Governor's proteges. Hope-Smith deliberately sought to prevent, or at least delay, the consul's voyage to Kumasi. Finally, he refused to ratify the new treaty, on the grounds that it sacrificed Cape Coast to the Ashanti. Hope-Smith's actions contributed to the downfall of the Company, and destroyed the possibility of an Anglo-Ashanti understanding. It remains difficult to reconcile the Governor's stated principles with his

conduct on certain occasions. It is possible, though doubtful, that he was intimidated by the close proximity of the coastal people; certainly he should have feared the Ashanti far more. Torrane, whose treachery at Annomabo might have earned him the hatred of the Fante, showed no signs of any such apprehensions. It remains impossible to accurately assess the effects of geography, and the long history of Anglo-Fante relations, upon the Governors in this period.

Sir Charles MacCarthy quickly adopted his predecessor's point of view: he considered the Ashanti "oppressive", and resolved to oppose their "depredations". Eventually, he rejected the position of Bowdich and Dupuis, and refused to believe that the Ashanti desired a peaceful understanding. A series of events brought Anglo-Ashanti relations to a state of crisis; they confirmed MacCarthy's suspicions, and led him to take a hard line as the only possible solution. This Governor could draw on military and financial resources far greater than those of Hope-Smith, which made his adherence to the latter's point of view even more serious. Instead of merely obstructing the Ashanti, MacCarthy was able to push matters to the point of confrontation.

His decision to "teach the Ashanti a lesson" encouraged their tributaries, in particular the Fante, to consider the British as the possible agents of their liberation. MacCarthy had originally contemplated a "limited war", but he soon extended

his support to the restless vassal states, whom he also considered victims of Ashanti oppression. He committed Britain to a war she did not desire, against the very kingdom she sought as an ally, to protect groups whose aims were diametrically opposed to her own. MacCarthy served as a catalyst for a rising that would destroy the foundation of the Anglo-Ashanti alliance, and the rebellious states "liberated" by the British would continue to obstruct a settlement of the dispute until 1831.

The nature of the Ashanti empire also played a part in preventing the establishment of a stable, peaceful environment for trade. Structural weaknesses, notably the lack of an efficient system of provincial administration, left the Ashanti prey to the threat of recurring rebellion. The British, unwittingly or not, served as an outlet for the aspirations of such tributary states as the Fante and the coastal towns. Despite the remarkable patience and diplomacy of the Asantehene, a series of misunderstandings, aggravated by the antagonism of Hope-Smith and MacCarthy, succeeded in producing a crisis which provoked open hostilities.

The tributary states, whose interests were clearly incompatible with those of the British, profited from these disputes. Encouraged by the sympathy and support of the governors, they took advantage of the British presence to throw off the Ashanti yoke and regain their former position. It is highly possible that these rebellions would not have succeeded,

or perhaps never occurred, had it not been for the continued difficulties between Kumasi and Cape Coast Castle.

These same themes were to be repeated: the Fante would again unite, under British auspices, to profit from their position, in the Bond of 1844. The question of the Notes again caused difficulties, when the British purchased Elmina from the Dutch, but refused to continue paying the rent to the Ashanti. The Fante, once again, were able to provoke disputes with the inland kingdom, and succeeded in embroiling them in another war with the British, from 1863 to 1874.

Historians have echoed the surprise and dismay of the British in the late 1820's: how could it be, they wondered, that Britain was at war with the very kingdom they sought as allies, in defence of those whose interests conflicted so sharply with their own? This apparent "error" of British policy led to a debate over the relative merits of the two groups with whom they had to deal. The almost universal admiration of the Ashanti among contemporary observers has been echoed by later writers.

The standard narratives of Ward and Claridge express a sense of regret that the alliance with Ashanti was lost. Ellis and Metcalfe, on the other hand, take a pro-Fante approach. Both sides, to a certain degree, support the 'ignorance' theory. For the former, a lack of communications, Hope-Smith's inexplicable hostility, and MacCarthy's ignorance were to blame for the war against the Ashanti. Their opponents criticize Torrane and

Dubois, in particular, for abandoning the rights of the coastal towns, and praise Hope-Smith and MacCarthy for their staunch defence of Cape Coast. They also argue that the British could have prevented the Ashanti-Fante war in the first place, if they had taken a strong stand in 1806. But more recent research has shown that the Company were not unprepared for the outbreak of hostilities. The British knew of this danger far in advance, and while some governors favoured an alliance with the Fante, the Committee chose a policy of neutrality. This historiographical debate seems to have affected contemporary observers as well. The Committee, the Colonial Office, and certain governors, notably Torrance, White, and Campbell, adopted the non-intervention policy; Meredith, Bowdich and Dupuis favoured an alliance with the Ashanti; while MacCarthy, a number of merchants and officials, and Hope-Smith, to a degree, opposed the Ashanti and, inadvertently, or not, supported the Fante.

This debate gave rise to a "popularity contest", which has continued to pervade studies of the Gold Coast in this era. Gold Coast missionary Austin Freeman put the question in social Darwinistic terms:

With the unerring instinct of a professedly philanthropic nation they have selected the sturdiest, most enterprising and most courageous tribe as the special object of their hostility, and have consistently endeavoured, after the fashion too common among philanthropists, to secure in the most perfect manner the survival of the unfittest.(1)

(1) Claridge, p.362.

But this sort of criticism is based on the supposition that the British chose to support the Fante. MacCarthy, it appears, merely saw them as useful and necessary allies, who also suffered under the Ashanti. The Government, the Company, and select governors clearly sought to consolidate an alliance with the Ashanti. That this endeavour failed was entirely due to confusing, contradictory policies pursued at different levels in the decision-making process, and an unhappy series of circumstances and events which combined to sabotage the alliance. The Government's hopes for peace and stability, increased trade, and access to the interior were then sacrificed by Hope-Smith and MacCarthy, to protect the rights of those they considered British subjects. As a result, the British found themselves in arms against their allies, tied to groups whose interests were directly opposed to their own.

Later historians have tended to take a more Afro-centric approach. Ivor Wilks' studies of the structure and administration of the Ashanti empire have helped to question the standard view that they 'could conquer, but not rule'. Still, the Ashanti remained vulnerable to rebellion, a condition exacerbated by the presence of a third power. As Mary McCarthy, James Sanders, and R. Porter have shown, the British were a destabilizing influence on the inland kingdom. British opposition to the Asantehene seems to have been the catalyst for the revolt of Denkyera and the Fante states.

There remain, however, several important questions that have been only imperfectly answered. The nature of British relations with the coastal towns becomes crucial to an understanding of Hope-Smith's intentions. Also, the personalities, perceptions, and access to information of the men on the spot become important, given their relative freedom of action. Finally, the role of the Company, and later the Government, in the formulation of policy, must be examined more closely. If, as it appears, British approaches to the Gold Coast consisted of a number of competitive, contradictory policies, it is necessary to study the environment that shaped and influenced these decisions.

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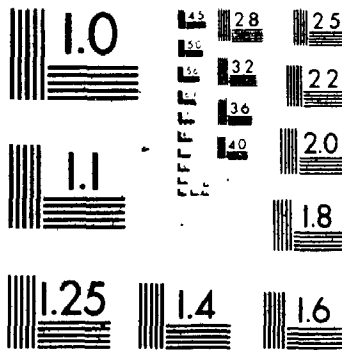
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