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ASPECTS OF COLONIAL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION:
THE CASE OF THE NORTHWESTERN DISTRICT OF ASHANTI,

1904 - 1911

by Kwame Arhin*

Introduction

This paper attempts to look at the relations between the District Commissioner and chief and people for the light that they may throw on contemporary political ideas and attitudes. The essence of these ideas and attitudes, I believe, is the working notion that a government is 'supreme' and unassailable, and consequently, that the activities of its personnel are to be regarded with gratitude or disapproving gossip rather than as object of open critical examination. A government is not a servant but a master.

What is the origin of this working notion? 'Origin' in this context has both time and institutional dimensions, and, I mean by an 'institution' a pattern of related ideas and usages. The origin of the notion that a government, even when it is declared to be 'democratic', is a master not a servant, and is consequently an object of obsequious attention, and not of open critical examination and action, lies partly in our past political institutions and practices which have shaped our present 'public' conduct.

Of great importance among past political institutions and practice was the rule of the colonial district commissioner which seems to me to have played a great part in laying down the basis of contemporary government — people relations.

William Tordoff (1965:120)² has described the district commissioners as the lynchpins of the colonial administrative system. Much more intimately connected with the chiefs and their peoples than the provincial commissioners under whom they served and the chief commissioner, the head of the Ashanti administration, they provided the information for filling in details of policy and were also the executors of

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policy. All this is well-known. What I wish to emphasize here are the relative intimacy in which the commissioner dwelt with the people, and, the variety of methods which he used in getting things done. An examination of some of the letters on which this article is based, leaves me in wonder about how 'indirect' were the methods of the district commissioner.

This preliminary examination is based upon reports and letters written by district and provincial commissioners of the northwestern of Ashanti in the period 1904-1911.³ To make some of the reports and letters intelligible, it seems to me necessary to sketch the economic and political characteristics of the district. All district commissioners might have had similar general instructions as to the ends of colonial rule and on their mode of conduct towards the chiefs and peoples of the district. But the specific problems to which a commissioner applied himself were thrown out by the particular economic, political and social conditions of the district. I start, then, with a description of the district, its economic and political characteristics. The data are derived from the reports and letters of the commissioners and also enquiries I have made in the course of work on Ashanti's historical and political relations with the Brong peoples.

The Northeastern District: its economic, political, and social characteristics

The Northwestern District of Ashanti was one of four Ashanti administrative districts created under the Ashanti Administration Ordinance of 1902. As demarcated in 1902,⁴ the district (designated by another Ordinance in 1906 as the Western Province) consisted of the present Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana without the Atebubu, Nkoranza and Kintampo districts. The first two were included in the Northeastern District of Ashanti; Kintampo was the headquarters of the Black Volta District of the Northern Territories which included the Mo (Degha) chiefdom.

Since it bordered on the Ivory Coast the district was of some strategic importance: it was strategic considerations

that dictated the choice of Sikassiko, (close to the border with the Ivory Coast) as its first headquarters. The capital was removed in 1904 to Odomase and then in 1906 to Sunyani on account, as Fell the District Commissioner told the chiefs of the district, of better water supply and because the country was 'more open and more healthy for Europeans'.⁵

The district was, on the whole, potentially rich. The forests of Ahafo, Dormaa, Berekum and the districts east of Berekum were potentially great cocoa growing areas: It was part of the commissioners' duties to promote cocoa production by distributing cocoa pods and supervising their planting. Much of the area, including the typically forest areas of Ahafo and Dormaa (Wam) and the forest-savannah fringes of Techiman and Wenchi was rich in rubber. Rubber production which in this area had begun in the early years of the last decade,⁶ was then attracting migrant producers and itinerant rubber buyers from other parts of Ashanti and the Coast. The problems arising from rubber production, particularly in connection with land boundary disputes between chiefs, owing to the payment of land rents by producers, form the subject of many of the commissioner's letters.⁷

The forest-savannah fringe area, the northwestern parts of the district, was the area of the transit markets, the venues of trade exchanges between the forest and savannah peoples. It was in this area - at the markets of Bonduku, Wenchi, and Atebubu, - that in the previous century the Ashanti and the coastal peoples had exchanged kola and European goods for products (craftworks and livestock) and slaves from the savannah peoples.⁸ In spite of the formal demarcation British-French boundary at the close of the nineteenth century there was considerable trade between Ashanti and Bonduku. Donkey caravans from the Hausa and Mossi countries plied between Kintampo, Wenchi and the Berekum, Bechem and Ahafo districts in search of kola. Considerable revenue was derived from caravan tolls established at Wenchi, Techiman and Odumase.⁹

The traditional political organization of the district was not a clear-cut one. It contained six paramount chiefdoms - Asunafo-Ahafo (Kukuom), Berekum, British Gyaman, Dormaa, Techiman and Wenchi. Of these only two - Dormaa

and Techiman - had that status before the colonial period formally began. Asunafo-Ahafo had been a collection of villages grouped under, and serving the Asantehene, through various Kumasi chiefs.¹⁰ The people of Ahafo rebelled against Kumase in 1893, allegedly defeated a Kumasi¹¹ army and were recognized as a separate chiefdom under the Kukuomhene, who had led them in the war against Kumase, by Davidson-Houston, an officer of the Government of the Gold Coast, in a Treaty of Protection in 1896.¹² The Government of the Gold Coast recognized Berekum, an Ashanti buffer sub-chiefdom,¹³ which had served under the Bantamahene before 1896, as a paramount state in 1901, for her alleged loyalty to the British during the Asante uprising of 1900-01. The colonial authorities also added to Berekum former Kumasi-ruled sub-chiefdoms, including Bechem, Ahafo, Nkwanta, the two Odomase towns, and Nsoatre.¹⁴ These chiefs became sub-chiefs under the Berekumhene though they had previously been his equals. The restiveness of some of the ahene, sub-chiefs, under Kukuom and Berekum comes out in some of the letters to be cited below.¹⁵ British Gyaman, consisting principally of Drobo, Suma (Nweneme) and Seikwa, was separated from the old Gyaman chiefdom by an agreement with France in 1888-89, and placed under the headship of Drobo.

The territories of some of the chiefs were scattered. Dormaa, for example, consisted of a compact territory around the two Wam towns and the scattered territories of Boma in the Ahafo district, and Abessim and Chiraa near Sunyani, so that the main Dormaa territory was cut off from these by the territories of Odomase, Sunyani, Nsoatre and Berekum.¹⁶ Dormaa territories cut the new Berekum state into separate territorial blocks.

There were divisions within some of the chiefdoms on the basis of traditions asserting different place-origins. The fragmentary political organization of Asunafo-Ahafo was due to the diversity of origins of the various groups who, so it was believed, were placed by various Kumasi chiefs for the purposes of Ashanti security and economic pursuits.¹⁷ Although the colonial Ashanti administration organized Ahafo as single chiefdom, provided it with a charter and supported it with its power and prestige, the chiefs of Mim and Kenyasi (then Wing Chiefs)¹⁸ apparently never forgot their Kumasi connections so that Ahafo remained up to the creation of the

Asante Confederacy in 1935 a problem political entity. Even without its new additions, Berekum too was not a coherent entity in terms of traditions of origin. My collections of oral traditions show, for example, that the ruling lineage is a composite group of a woman's descendants from Asante-Asokore and their children who are descendants of an Adanse woman married to an early Berekumhene.¹⁹ The ruling group of the Gyaase division claims that their ancestors migrated from Denkyira. But of greater significance for the internal administration of Berekum was the claim of Nsapor, the adampan, chief village, of the Benkum group, that it originally migrated from Akwamu with Dormaa and that it should be part of the Dormaa state.²⁰

Finally, two aspects of the history of the district before the colonial period are worth mentioning, because they are relevant to an understanding of some of the letters. The first is the Asante domination of the West and Northwest. In this district, clearly, the Asante had made an attempt to ensure continued domination of Gyaman. Odomase, Sunyani, Nsoatre, Berekum and Seikwa had been directly ruled by Kumasi to ensure that Gyaman and Dormaa kept in line with Ashanti. Techiman had also been surrounded by towns and villages, including Nsawkaw, Badu, Tuobodum, four miles from Techiman, and Nchiraa, also for the purpose of maintaining a watch on Techiman and thus keeping her under control.²¹ In these enclaves the Great Oath of Ashanti had been instituted and enforced, and, so long had been the duration of the tradition that the Great Oath was still (in the period under investigation) sworn in face of its express prohibition by the colonial authorities.²²

Secondly, Berekum had in the reign of the Asantehene, Mensa-Bonsu (1875-1883) paid for her Ashanti connections.²³ According to the present Berekumhene and his elders she had been attacked by joint Dormaa-Gyaman forces and defeated. The chief had fled to Wenchi and the present chief's mother, together with some other members of the royal family, had been taken to a capital of the Gyaman chiefdom. This war is recalled in the chief Berekum oath, the Nkyebena (the battle occurred on a Tuesday) which in the absence of the Great Oath of Asante became the final highest Oath of the Berekum state. In about 1901, the Berekumhene started negotiations through the commissioners of the Northwestern

Districts and the Commandant of Bonduku for the repatriation of his relatives to Berekum and for permission for other captives to visit Berekum.²⁴

Presentation of the Reports and Letters

A problem arises of how to present the reports and letters. The reports are too long to be quoted in full, and, they are, therefore paraphrased. The letters, which are rather short, illustrate various aspects of the commissioner's work and methods and are grouped along these lines under three headings: (i) the commissioner as upholder of chiefship; (ii) the commissioner as judicial supervisor, and (iii) the methods of the commissioner. They are numbered consecutively to facilitate possible citation, and, each group of letters is preceded with introductory notes. I have also interposed between some letters explanatory comments and an extract from a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti for the purpose of clarifying a point. The names of the writers of the letters are not given since the concern is with the commissioner in his official capacity.

Finally, I state some preliminary conclusions from the reports and letters.

The Commissioner as a chronicler of economic and social activities

It was a duty of the district commissioner to report monthly, quarterly and annually, and, also at the request of his superiors on the district. These reports afford the best information on the people's economic and social activities; on the decay of old enterprises and the beginning of new ones; on the peoples' response to the efforts of the colonial administration in the various fields of what it called 'opening up' the country.

In a letter (d. 23/4/1904 at Odumase) the commissioner of the district, reported to the Acting Commissioner of

Ashanti as follows:

The court cases [the chief] had to settle usually had to do with 'money lent' generally for trading in rubber. Agriculture in and around Techiman was very good, the country being plentiful in farms; the Techiman people intended to grow cotton again²⁵; trade in Wenchi, 'the centre of commercial industry in the District', was very large, Wenchi [apparently for that reason] should be the headquarters of the District; traders between Sikassiko, and Bonduku, between Bonduku and Kintampo and between Atebubu and Kintampo had been 'dodging' caravan taxes; gunpowder was being traded to Ashanti from the [Ivory Coast] frontier, either in loads or in rubber bags made up to look like rubber; it was either traded in 'Ashanti proper' or else to 'big' traders in and around Wenchi ostensibly travelling as kola merchants or 'stock' traders.²⁶

In a letter (dated 25/5/04 to the Ag. C.C.A.) the Commissioner reported that he had distributed cocoa pods to Odomase, Tanosu, Bechem, Techimantia, Tanoso and Techire and that cocoa farms were usually made 'very large' and in food and kolanut plantations.²⁷

In the Report for July 1905, the Commissioner reported that 'rest-houses' had been built at Berekum, Pulliano and Seketia, that he was having difficulties in getting markets 'made' at Berekum and Techiman, though he had impressed on the people that they should plant a little more than their needs; (that apparently towards encouraging marketing activities) he had fined Nsoatre for not supplying the proper amount (unspecified) of food to the Odomase market.²⁸

In the Report for August-September, 1905, the Commissioner recorded that the Berekumhene had cleared his portion of the roads; that he had fined the Odomasehene because the Odomase people had brought insufficient supply of food into the market; that he had instructed that chiefs were to help in preventing the destruction of (rubber) trees; and that the Berekumhene's linguist and elders had

decided to send boys to the Berekum Basel School.²⁹

In the Annual Report in the year 1905 the Commissioner reported that

little use was being made of native courts; rise in French duties had affected trade to and from Bonduku and consequently that trade was being diverted to Wenchi, Techiman, Menge and to the Northern Territories; the price of carrying a load of rubber from Odumase to Kumase was 12/-; that there were tobacco plantations in the district; that there were 24 'scholars' in the Odumase and Berekum schools; finally that 'Money appears in Ashanti (Ahafo) Division to be plentiful. It is mostly derived from the sale of rubber and no one seems to experience difficulty in getting loans of large sums at, of course, an exorbitant rate of interest'.³⁰

The Report for the year 1906, reiterated the growing unimportance of chiefs in dispute settlement and suggested the growing dissatisfaction of their people with their courts. The chiefs, the Report said, settled only unimportant native palavers, and appeals from the courts to the Commissioner's usually had to do with 'excessive costs and charges'.

The Report noted that 'property' was a frequent subject of dispute; the civil cases at the commissioner's courts normally had to do with 'recovery of money lent or property alleged to have been unlawfully taken'. It suggested that at least the military aspect of colonial rule was unwelcome; the chiefs, it said, wished to move their villages 'on account of looting by soldiers'.

As would have previously been noted, economic matters usually formed the subject of the bulk of the Annual Reports. The 1906 Report noted that trade was in 'flourishing condition'; rubber was collected in large quantities and sold in Kumasi; chiefs had been 'overseeing' rubber tapping to prevent their destruction; demand for kola was in excess of supply; there were tobacco farms while cotton plantations were dying out; practically no more cotton had been planted during the past

years, because the natives were convinced that 'there is not sufficient profit to be made out of it'. Finally with the making of a Tanosu-Sunyani road, 'I trust a good market will be established [at Sunyani] and food supplies sold in sufficient quantity to do away with the present system of forcing certain towns to bring in loads at fixed days'.

On social questions, the Report noted the posting of a medical officer at Sunyani and the small attendance of 6 and 11 at the Basel Mission Schools at Odumase and Berekum, respectively.³¹

It seems to me the Reports quoted are enough to demonstrate the commissioner's role as a chronicler. But it may be of some use to quote a letter (d. 24/7/11) from Fell, (Commissioner of the Western Province of Ashanti) to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti on the progress of trade in the Sunyani area. He wrote:

It is gratifying to be able to report to you the increase in trade apparent in the Western Province.

At Sunyani Native storekeepers have become more enterprising and are keeping a much more diverse and elaborate stock, for which they appear to be getting a ready sale.

A month ago, a more ambitious enterprise has been undertaken, under the auspices, I understand, of Messrs Swanzy at Sunyani. A corrugated iron store has been erected with large stock of a more up-to-date character and I venture to prophesy that its success is already assured. The native manager informs me that he has been taking an average of about £90 a week and every week sees the arrival of new comers and, what are in this locality, novelties in the way of goods.

The opening of this store at Sunyani is already producing results elsewhere. In Berekum in a much smaller way, a small store has been opened with a limited stock and in Nsoatre one, I am told, is shortly about to open.

I most sincerely hope that these enterprises will be successful. I am informed that road improvement is responsible for the increased trade and I have little doubt that on completion of the road to Sunyani trade development on a large scale may be expected.

It has for many years been the complaint of some of the Coomassie merchants to me that only a very small percentage of money paid over in Coomassie for produce found its way back into the merchants' coffers from the purchase of goods. It has always appeared to me that the logical argument would be for the merchants to go where the money is. A large amount of money finds its way into this province through the purchase of rubber and I have very little doubt that stores such as have been opened at Sunyani could with advantage be opened in Bechem, Nkwanta, Odumase, Berekum, Wenchi and Techiman.³²

The Commissioner as Upholder of Chiefship³³

From the British viewpoint the strongest argument for using native institutions in administration was lack of adequate administrative personnel which was due to unwillingness to finance administration of colonial territories with external sources.³⁴ A district must pay for its administration which it was unlikely to do if it had too large a number of European officers. There was probably also a desire not to disrupt unduly the traditional, social and political structure of the governed except where, as in the case of Ashanti, a powerful kingdom had proved resistant and might continue to be resistant to colonial rule. The desire not to disrupt traditional, social and political structures did not, it seems to me, flow out of any respect for existing social and political institutions: it was just a question of letting things alone so long as they did not obstruct the march of colonial rule.

The chief was the pivot of traditional society, the readiest tool at hand for administrative purposes. But the chief was not part of the 'administration'; he did not take

part in policy-making. He was an executive agent. It was in that role that the colonial administration supported him. The regrouping of chiefs, already mentioned, was in order to fashion efficient instruments for the transmission of information and information gathering. But as is clear from the letters cited below, the regrouping resulted in non-traditional political relationships and in the problem of maintaining the coherence of these relationships. The Commissioner had to settle disputes between amanhene and ahene³⁵ and enforce law by traditional and imposed oaths. In order to ensure the survival of these political creations.

Letters

I. To the Berekumhene (11/11/05)

I send Kwadwo Mensah to you. He states Yaw Sokwa first swore the great Kumasi Oath on him. He was getting ready to go to Kumasi when he heard Yaw Sokwa had sworn your oath also.

After you have settled the case under your oath you are to send Yaw Sokwa to me to explain why the great Kumasi Oath was sworn by him without my permission.³⁶

The difficulty about the continued use of the Ashanti Great Oath was also experienced in getting the chiefs recently put under Berekum to accept the Berekum oath, Nkyebena, as the highest oath throughout the new state of Berekum. The Commissioners had cause to worry about oaths since they were of both symbolic and practical value. To accept the Berekum oath meant the acceptance of the Berekumhene as superordinate authority which would also mean a quiet execution of orders passed through him.

Apparently on the complaint of the Berekumhene, the Commissioner wrote (17/3/06) to one of the chiefs of Odomase ordering him to obey the summons of the Berekumhene and added:

11. You are clearly to understand that the Berekum oath is the highest oath in Berekum country. In any cases where two oaths are sworn, one being the King of Berekum's oath, the case always has to be heard by the King of Berekum, or person authorized by him, and not under the smaller oath. Any attempt to make the Odumase oath of more importance than the Berekum oath will get you into trouble as you know quite well that you are subordinate to Berekum.³⁷

The Commissioners were themselves aware of the basic problem which was the objection of Odomasehene to his subordination to Berekum. The Commissioner stated in a letter dealing with Odomase-Sunyanl conflicts (22/5/190) to the Acting Chief Commissioner of Ashanti:

The whole case shows to me that Odumase and probably the other tribes who were placed under Berekum after the last war have never yet settled down willingly in their new positions.³⁸

The Commissioner as a Judicial Supervisor

It was a duty of the Commissioner to hear appeals from the chief's courts. In this period a paramount chief could hear customary cases arising from oaths, and fine up to £16.³⁹ He could not imprison, the latter power being vested in the commissioner. As noted, the commissioner had rights of appeal and review: he could quash a sentence or order a retrial on complaint by a party or parties to a dispute. A commissioner was not legally bound but morally and politically obliged to give reasons often in writing for ordering a retrial reducing a fine or quashing a sentence. A good reason for doing so, in my view, was also to teach the chiefs British notions of 'natural justice' and principles of court procedure, including the rules of evidence.

Letters

III. To the Kukuomhene (27/2/07)

I have received your letters of 21st and 24th.

I have been told that in spite of my warning to you the men accused of taking your money have been ill-treated. You are to send them in to me at once. If they are not fit to walk you are to put them in hammock.

The soldiers will come back with the accused.

IV. To the Berekumhene (28/2/07)

I have received your letter of 27/2/07, but there does not seem to be any meaning in it.

As I wrote to you before, Kwasi Asante appealed to me against your decision in a certain land case. The case is not finished as I have not heard all Kwasi Asante's witnesses and I am not satisfied with Cherime Kofi, that he knows nothing about the case.

I am keeping Cherime Kofi here until the case is finished.

V. To the Kukuomhene (3/3/07)

You are to obey the attached summons and come yourself to Sunyani to answer the charge of causing two men, contrary to the laws of England, to be tortured in your town.

Any delay in coming will mean serious punishment to yourself.

- VI. To the Chiefs of Odomase, Nkwanta, Bechem, Mim, Sakwa, Nsoatre and Nweneme.

The Chief Commissioner has instructed me to inform you that no notice will be taken of any decision in your court which has been decided by the "casting of lots" should any of the parties appeal to me against your decision.

- VII. To the Chief of Bechem (27/3/07)

A man named Kojo Wia complains that a man named Kwamin Ajabor has sworn five oaths (Berekum, Wam, Odumase, Bechem and the Great Oath) on a woman named Yah Boada in Bechem not to mention Kojo Wia's name.

If she mentions Kojo Wia's name twelve pereguins [a pereguin (peredwan) was worth about £ 7] will be claimed and twelve sheep.

This seems to me an attempt on the part of Kwamin Ajabor to extort and I wish you to find out about the matter and report to me.

- VIII. To the Bechemhene (10/4/07)

A man named Kwaku Anto complains he had some case with his wife which he brought before you. I would be glad if you would tell me how you settled the matter.

I will be in Berekum next Wednesday.

IX. To the Berekumhene (6/6/07)

A man named Kobina Kra complains that his witnesses were not heard in a case with Kwaku Adai before you.

He has paid the expenses and is entitled to appeal.

I wish you to send your chief linguist to explain the case, and the man Kwaku Adai.

Because you have power to charge up to sixteen pounds it is not necessary you should always do so.

I myself can fine up to fifteen pounds but it is very seldom I do so.

X. To the Berekumhene (11/6/07) (In reference to the letter of 6/6/07), the opinion was given

that neither Kwasi Seki nor linguist Kobina Fah should have sat on the case as they are connected with the parties. I wish you to rehear the case without either of them, present and be assisted by linguist Kwamin Ntokor and any others not connected with the parties.

The costs in Kobina Kra's case are too heavy. The matter between him and Kwaku Adai is very small.

XI. To the Berekumhene (25/9/11)

You have the right to hear appeals from your sub-chiefs.

Before an appeal can be heard, however, judgment must be given. A man cannot run away in the middle of a case in one court unless some decision has been given in the first court.

The Commissioner's Methods:

The District Commissioner exercised his authority without too obvious an exhibition of the personnel of organized physical force, the army and the police. Army detachments periodically would cross the district for 'military exercises' and the Commissioner took care to let the chiefs know of their presence.⁴¹ But the British invasion of Kumasi in 1873-74, their capture of Prempeh in 1896 and their defeat of the Ashanti in the uprising of 1900-01 had left none in doubt about the power of Oburoni, the Whiteman. The saying Aborɔfo ye du, Whitemen are mighty, and the number of villages named Aborɔfo ye du signify popular feelings about the Whiteman's power. So that, although the physical symbols of that power were only periodically displayed, the chief knew that the Commissioner's threats about 'severe punishments' were not empty. But it was not all threats: it was also sometimes 'reward' for work done. The Commissioner, too, indirectly relied on services to both chiefs and people and acquired a certain intimacy with the latter who had access to him. This intimacy⁴² gave him a psychological weapon in his dealings with the chiefs.

Letters

XII. To the Kukuomhene (3/12/04)

I am writing to tell you to at once order this man Adabor out of the land which you are unjustly claiming. The land in question belongs to Sehwi and you have no right to send anyone into it, or collect anything from it. Your land is separated from Sehwi by the River Bea. This question was settled by the Chief Commissioner, Captain Stewart, long ago. The King of Sehwi has always received tribute in the form of bush meat, rubber, etc. from the land.

XIII. To the Chief of Nweneme (6/3/07)

You are to send to me at once a man named Yao Kokoh who is accused of unlawfully taking £9 10s. from a man named Tan Kofi In Wirime.

XIV. To the Kukuomhene (3/10/07)

You are at once to arrest and handcuff Yaw Antu and send him to me. The chief of Akrodie who has given up the stool to him has also to be sent to Sunyani.

One soldier, who takes this letter, will bring them to me and you are to send sufficient number of your people to guard them on the road to Sunyani.

XV. To the Nsoatrehene (8/3/07)

Yesterday only eight loads of food came in [to the Sunyani market] from your town.

Captain Perry [former Acting Commissioner] informed me that Nsoatre was constantly giving trouble by not sending sufficient food.

I fine you £1 and you are to pay the bailiff who takes this letter 6s.

I am afraid it will now be necessary to fine you every time food is sent in short from Nsoatre.

XVI. To Berekumhene (30/4/06)

The house built by your people for the Doctor [at Sunyani] leaks badly. I wish you to send people at once to repair the roof and to tell the people of Nsoatre also to come and repair the hospital roof which they built.

The guns and cartridges I ordered for your linguist, Kwasi Sachi, have arrived here. I will hand them over to him when the Doctor's house has been completed.

XVII. To the Berekumhene (1/5/06)

I saw the French Commissioner with report to your people living in French territory. [He said] they do not wish to return.

XVIII. To Bechemhene (21/8/07)

I saw some of your friends in Kukuom.

Afua Korama stated she was contended and would return to Bechem when she wishes to do so. Kwaku Bekwain stated he would return to Bechem as soon as he had settled his debts in Ahafo. The other people are in the bush.

I will enquire about your people in Mim when I next go there.

XIX. To Bechemhene (24/7/11)

I have already spoken to you about the fines imposed by you on the chiefs of Dema, Tapa, Bosankro and Mensing for arriving in Bechem (for being) late for the coronation festivities.

These chiefs, and the chief of Jemo, are certainly much to be blamed for their late arrival, but I have decided that there was no disloyalty in their intention and that they too wished to honour the day.

Although it was perhaps right that you should fine the chiefs, it is the wish of the Government that of this day, that should be remembered by everyone, only happiness should come and recollections of the coronation of King George V, should be pleasant and not unpleasant to the people who celebrated it.

I have therefore decided that, if the chiefs, whom I have mentioned, promise in future not to offend again, I will remit the fines inflicted by you upon them. The money to be returned is £32. 0. 0. divided, as you know, between Bosankro, Tapa, Dema and Mensing.

Mr. Ross, the District Commissioner, who will read this letter to you, will convey to these chiefs the CENSURE OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING ARRIVED LATE in Bechem on the 22nd June.

XX. To Nsoatrehene (3/5/07)

A woman named Anna Korama has asked me for a summons against her husband, Ohene Kobina. She says he has put a curse on her and that he refuses to remove it.

She shall bring the case to you and if you order him to remove the curse and he refuses to do so, you can send him to me to be dealt with.

XXI. To Nsoatrehene (22/5/07)

As we are making a large yam farm here, I am sending to you to tell your headmen and people to bring in to this place one pound's worth of yams for planting.

The yams will be paid for by the Officer Commanding the soldiers here.

I want you to have them send in here as soon as possible so that they may be planted at once.

XXII. To Drobohene (5/7/07)

I have not yet received your spirit licence for this year.

Please send the amount of fifty pounds to me with as little delay as possible or I will be obliged to issue a summons for the amount.

XXIII. To Wamhene (13/8/07)

The chief of Ntoitolsu has forbidden rubber to be tapped on his land during this year in order to give the trees a rest.

I have given him power to punish anyone tapping rubber on Ntoitolsu lands with a fine of £4.

As you have a boundary with Ntoitolsu, I wish your people to be particularly careful not to go and tap rubber on Ntoitolsu lands. If they do so they will be liable to a fine similar to [that of] the Ntoitolsu people.

XXIV. To the Wam (Dormaa) hene (13/3/07)

You may have heard that we have opened a new road [from Sunyani] to Tanosu.

The old road from Odumase to Tanosu has been closed. Part of the road runs through Wam land [Abessim] and I wish you to make arrangements for keeping it clean.

I should like some of your people to build a village on the road to look after the part which passes through your land. If you cannot arrange this, I wish you to send your linguist and the chief of Abessim to me to arrange how the road is to be kept in order.

Much trade passes along this road and it would probably be a profitable place on which a village might be started.

XXV. To the Berekumhene (26/3/07)

I wish you to inform traders passing through your town that the main road to Kumase passes through Odumase and Sunyani and not through Fiapre. I wish them to take that route as the chiefs of Odumase have cut a short road from their town to Sunyani.

You are also to tell traders that the road from Odumase to Tanoso has been closed and that the new road via Odumase and Sunyani to Tanosu is the shortest route and has always to be used in future.

I wish you to inform the chief of Nsoatre of those changes and to instruct him also to inform traders.

XXVI. To the Bechemhene (29/3/07)

I wish to give you a small present for having built a new rest house in your town for me last year.

If you send a bearer to me with your stick⁴³ and letter I will give him £3. 0. 0. to take to you.

XXVII. To the Nkwantahene and the Drobohene (29/3/07)

The Chief Commissioner of [Ashanti] has made a rule that any clerk who writes letters to the Government should be licensed by Government.

Your clerk has not yet taken a licence. He is to pay a fee to me of £1. 0. 0. and a licence will be provided to him.

No notice will in future be taken of letters written by clerks who have not taken out a licence.

XXVIII. To Berekumhene (26/9/11)

I wish to know why Kwasi Amankwa's wife, Amba Fima has been taken away from him.

He is one of the people who went with Kwaku Chai to Korase and he states that you have refused to allow him to come to Berekum town.

If this is so, Kwasi Amankwa would be entitled to all the expenses he has made on his wife and I will give him a summons for them unless the matter can be arranged amicably.

There is no necessity for you to refuse to allow Korase people to visit Berekum or Nsapor and such an action on your part is only likely to cause bad feeling for which there is no necessity.

I wish you to write and explain to me without delay why you have forbidden Kwami Amankwa to return to Berekum.

Concluding Remarks

As was stated in the Introduction, this paper is intended to be a preliminary study. My conclusions, therefore, must be regarded as tentative. The references to Busia, Tordoff and Fuller should indicate that I have sought to fill in some of the details of what has been said before, using letters as 'cases'. It may also be of some use to have redrawn attention to the reports and letters of district commissioners as source of information on what has generally been called 'economic and social changes' in the early years of colonial rule.

Incidentally, the information contained in this paper goes some way towards strengthening a suggestion I have made elsewhere.⁴⁴ This is that the British role in the economic development of Ashanti early in this century should be regarded not as one of implanting the idea of wealth-seeking as a new social principle but as one of broadening the scope of, and increasing the avenues of, wealth-seeking, principally by creating a novel infrastructure for wealth-seeking activities and increasing the

forms of wealth. The British altered the cultural setting of wealth-seeking and by their presence destroyed some of the traditional restraints on the pursuit of wealth. For example, in consequence of losing his sovereign political authority, the chief ceased to be the only socially-sanctioned ultimate repository of wealth. This suggestion needs to be more fully spelt out in a fuller study of the traditional state and the economy and the impact of colonial administration on it.

With regard to the significance of the district commissioner's rule for modern political attitudes, the letters fairly well speak for themselves. The commissioner assumed the position of a master and the chiefs and people of the rural areas, in particular, developed in response a tendency to regard all government representatives, both colonial and nationalist, as masters. The tone and language used by the commissioners in addressing the chief are still the tone and language used by the members of the government, which even today, is in reality an 'alien' body as far as the chief and peoples of the rural areas are concerned, in much the same way as the colonial government was.

I spoke in the introduction of the intimacy of the commissioners with the people and suggest that this throws a doubt on how indirect was colonial rule. Fuller, *op. cit.*, saw this as a sign of 'mutual regard and respect' between commissioners and people. I see it as a sign of direct rule and as subversive of the chief's authority.

There was actually a certain ambiguity about the commissioner's position towards the chief. The commissioner was supposed to, and in certain respects did, support the chief against his people, for example, in destoolment cases. Yet by entertaining grievances and appeals against the chief, he made it clear that he was the final authority and that the chief ruled at his behest. Hence the paradox: the commissioner both supported the chief and subverted the strength of chiefship.

N O T E S

1. K.A. Busia says, (Africa in Search of Democracy, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967, p.36): 'The heritage of religion and tribalism dates from the pre-colonial past; but it is colonialism which has provided the immediate background to the contemporary political problems of Africa'.
2. William Tordoff, Ashanti Under the Prempehs 1888-1935 O.U.P., London.
3. The source of the reports and letters is Duplicate Letter Book ADM.54/1/1-2; Ghana National Archives (G.N.A.), Accra.
4. See The Laws of Ashanti, British Togoland and Northern Territories, Waterlow and Sons, London, 1928, Vol. 1 Chapter 1, pp. 1-26. For a discussion of the administrative and political basis of the district demarcation see, W. Tordoff, op. cit., pp. 130-166.
5. Commissioner Fell, Letter (d. 18/11/05) to the chiefs of Wam, Ahafo, Berekum, Nim, Nkwanta, Odumase, Berekum and Nsoatre.
6. See Kwame Arhin, 'The Ashanti Rubber Trade with the Gold Coast in the eighteen-nineties'; AFRICA, Vol. XLII, No.1, January 1972.
7. See Letter XII.
8. See Kwame Arhin, 'Aspects of the Ashanti Northern Trade in the Nineteenth Century', AFRICA, Vol. XL, No. IV, October 1970.
9. Caravan tolls collected in the district amounted to £2,940. 8s. 3d. Report for 1906 in ADM. 54/1/2, G.N.A., Accra.
10. See Kwame Arhin, Collected Papers on Ahafo Land Tenure Supplement No.3 to the Research Review, Institute of African Studies, Legon, June 1970.

11. See Judgment (15/11/06) by F.C. Fuller (Chief Commissioner of Ashanti) on Wam-Ahafo Boundary dispute. Fuller poured scorn on the Ahafo people's claim to have defeated the Ashanti. He said:

The claim of the Ahafos based, as it is on their alleged defeat of the Kumases appears to me to be futile. That a small and insignificant tribe such as the Ahafos, should have subdued the power of Kumase is inconceivable. In the former days the Ahafos were merely the hunters of the Kings of Ashanti. That they may have driven back a handful of Kumases is not improbable, but that they should endeavour to transform a petty engagement into a defeat of the Kumases is ludicrous. Ahafos, moreover, served Kumasi until recently when it was relieved of its obligation by the British Government, which, to break the power of Kumasi, decreed that no tribe of the adjoining districts need serve them any longer. I cannot therefore allow the Ahafo claim to the land in dispute.

12. Captain Davidson-Houston in (ADM. 54/1/2, G.N.A.) Letter to the Acting Governor in No.1 - Confidential of 2nd July, 1896. Davidson-Houston signed the treaty with chief Antechi of Kukuom as chief of Asunafo-Ahafo on the 2nd of May, 1896. His version of Ahafo traditions is worth stating. He wrote:

These people (of Asunafo-Ahafo), like the people of Bechim-Ahafo (Bechem) were originally Ashanti hunters who have since 1874 thrown off the Kumasi yoke. The name Ahafo means hunters and Asunafo "lower" or "down" part, that is, the hunters who lived down stream on the River Tano, to distinguish them from the Bechem or Asutifi, or those hunters who lived on the "upper" part, "Asutifi".

13. The chief and his elders say that Berekum was founded following the second war with Gyaman (about 1744) in the reign of the Asantehene Opoku Ware 1720-50. The founder was a man named Amankona Diawuo, from Asokore Ashanti and his job was to report on the activities of Gyaman. Berekum was for sometime known as Berekum-Asokore.

14. For a discussion of the reasons for this elevation of Berekum see W. Tordoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-1391.

15. See Letters III.

Tordoff, *op. cit.*, p.136, says on the authority of an Assistant D.C. Sunyani that the people of Berekum were claiming (1933) Assin origin but that they had spent some time in Adansi before departing to Western Ashanti.

16. The chief and elders of Dormaa are unclear about when the main Dormaa group moved from the Abessim-Nchiraa area to their present area. Davidson-Houston suggests it was after 1876. He says (*op. cit.*); of the Dormaa people:

'These people used to occupy the country south of Odumassi till about the year 1876 when their chief town Abessim was destroyed in war with Kumasi, and since then they have become allies of Gyaman'. The movement was certainly during a war with Gyaman. But I get the impression from talking with the Dormaa-hene and his elders that it was much earlier than 1876.

17. See Kwame Arhin, Collected Papers, *op. cit.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. Information from the Berekumhene and his elders.

20. In the Report for 1905 the commissioner noted that the sub-chief Tarbil of Msapor had committed a breach of native custom by contracting a debt in Dormaa without telling the Berekumhene and without a Berekum security and wrote:

'In accordance with the king's (Berekumhene's) wishes, who was afraid this chief would in consequence try to secede to Wam, I ordered him to remain in Berekum and told the king secession from one tribe to another on account of debt would now be allowed'.

Report in ADM. 54/1/1.

21. See Tordoff, op. cit. 142.
22. See Letter 1.
23. Information about the period of the war from an elder brother of the Berekumhene. He arrived at the period by relating it to the Asantehene in whose reign it occurred, and according to him said it was in Mensah Bonsu's reign i.e. 1874-1883.
24. See Letter XVII. In a Letter d. 4/12/0, the commissioner told the Berekumhene:

'If you want your people back from French territory you must send up to claim them. I will give them a paper to take over to Bonduku so as to make a complaint before the French Whiteman'.

In ADM. 54/1/1 G.N.A.

25. I am told that the District of Dormaa, in particular, did very well in cotton cultivation and that it had formed a big part of agriculture before the colonial era. It ceased with the invasion of Manchester cloths. The people usually express surprise that the Government of Ghana does not encourage cotton cultivation in the district now that Ghana has to import cotton for her textile factories.
26. ADM. 54/1/1.
27. ADM. 54/1/3.
28. ADM. 54/1/1.
29. ADM. 54/1/1. In the Annual Report for 1905 the commissioner said this of current rubber-tapping: 'A tapped rubber tree is all but ring-barked, the act extending all round the tree and being so deep as to run into the heart of the tree'.
This was known as 'destructive tapping'.

30. ADM. 54/1/1.
31. ADM.-5/1/2.
32. ADM. 5/1/2.
33. See K.A. Busia 'British Rule and Chiefship', The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti, Oxford, 1951, Ch. VI, pp. 102-138.
34. Tordoff, op. cit., pp. 123-128, discusses the problems relating to the financing of district administration.
35. Amanhene (pl.) paramount chiefs, Omanhene (sing.) a paramount chief. Ahene (pl.) chiefs of divisions within a traditional area, Ohene (sing.).
36. The oath of a chief, it would be recalled, is an allusion to some catastrophe in the history of the state; to swear it was to issue some sort of a summons for starting proceedings in the chief's court. Letter in ADM. 54/1/1.
37. Letter in ADM. 54/1/2.
38. ADM. 54/1/2. In a Letter (d. 1/3/06) the commissioner told the Berekumhene:
- I have seen the chiefs of Odumasi with regard to your complaint and they clearly understand they are under you and they are to go to Berekum when you require them to do so. If they refuse you are to report them to me.
39. The Ordinance of 1st January, 1902 recognized Native Tribunals: See Section 23 of Laws of Ashanti, op. cit.
40. The source of all subsequent letters is ADM. 54/1/2. I have omitted the salutation. But it should be noted that for varying emphases the commissioner used 'My Good Friend' or 'Headchief' or 'Chief': the first to suggest amicable relations, the second annoyance and the third great anger.

41. Letters (d. 11/2/07) to Bechemhene, Tanosuhene and Seikwahene, informed them of the forthcoming stopping in their towns of 200 soldiers with 3 officers, and asked them to have plenty of food and houses prepared for them, ADM. 54/1/2.
42. F.C. Fuller, himself a Chief Commissioner of Ashanti wrote, (A Vanished Dynasty, Ashanti, London, 1921, 2nd ed. 1968, p.220): 'The close touch and constant intercourse between commissioners and natives have engendered feelings of mutual regard and respect'.
43. Sticks were given to chiefs for identification purposes.
44. Kwame Arhin, AFRICA, 1970, op. cit.