

GEOGRAPHICAL EXPEDITIONS WERE A NECESSARY PREREQUISITE TO THE COLONIAL OCCUPATION OF AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Though there were Geographical expeditions, they were not intended to discover anything for Geographical purposes. As far back as the early 15th century, there were no such expeditions because the need had not arisen. The few expeditions were on commercial basis and carried on by the Phoenicians. It was when the need for commercial expansion arose that it was thought wise to explore the continent of Africa as a possible substitute for the lost Colonies of America. Except for the Hawkins who came to the West Coast of Africa purposely for slaves, and a few others, those who called on the shores of Africa did so accidentally until the 18th and the 19th centuries when full expeditions were planned and set out to find if there were any commercial possibilities in Africa. But before this time, the cultures of Africa were blooming.

The Portuguese had taken the initiative in this field as a result of the Papal Bull 1493 – 1494. The fall of Constantinople powers had forced other European Powers, notably the French, the English, the Germans and the Dutch to attempt to break the Portuguese monopoly.

CLIMATE AND THE NATIVES

The reports brought home by these European interlopers about the inclement climate of Africa and the inhospitality of the natives made it necessary for expeditions to be sent in advance to pre – study the existence of such fears in any area where colonization was aimed. These expeditions did not take place earlier than they did because of earlier wars which arrested every country in Europe; and the successes of the American Colonies and the East Indian Companies appeared to be satisfactory.

WHY DID BRITAIN AT FIRST APPEAR LUKE – WARM

After the abolition of Slave Trade, Britain's interest was aroused in search of a substitute commodity. Besides other participants in the exploration, Britain had in the long run to play a prominent part because she dared more than others to trace the course

of the Niger, the Nile and the Zambesi. But earlier, the problem created by the America Revolution were still fresh in their minds. Hence they regarded further colonization as worthless encumbrances.

REASONS FOR COLONIZATION

Doubtless, Geographical expeditions were necessary for the Colonial occupation of Africa. But it may not be correct to say that they were reasons for colonialism. Colonialism was an unfortunate consequence of the discoveries.

What really necessitated Colonization of Africa, in England in the 18th century was the loss of the America Colonies. The Colonies were formerly regarded as a dumping ground for English criminals. British goods were also exported thither. America Independence closed this avenue to them. Following this, almost immediately was the Napoleonic Wars which threatened Britain's economic stability. The Industrial Revolution' flushed England with manufactured goods, and there was frenzy for raw materials, and an overseas market where the manufactured goods could be sold. Australia and New Zealand after the voyages of Abel Tasman in 1642 had not been exploited. It was therefore a matter of urgency and necessity and that the Tropical countries should be colonized.

After the Napoleonic Wars, there was an unprecedented unemployment due to the demobilization of the armed forces. To this was added the disbanded Industrial workers. England was filled with many sturdy beggars and vagrants, a majority of whom came from Ireland.

To relieve England of all these undesirable rabbles, another colony should be exploited. The knowledge of the existence of Australia was nothing more than the Gondwanaland, until the expedition of the Geographers and Scientists headed by Captain Cook explored it. The existence of Africa was no more a fact than that England existed. But the nature of its climate, inhabitants, and the possibilities of trade was a mystery.

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1. *It may not be very correct to call it an 'Industrial Revolution'. A Revolution is always accompanied by violent and sudden changes and upheavals. The changes caused by the so called 'Industrial Revolution' were a result of a long and gradual process of 'Industrial Evolution.' There was never a sudden break in the mechanism of Industrialization which could have warranted a sudden 'risorgimento.'*
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People were therefore sent under the fake – name of Geographical Association. Their aim was to discover the regions, the means of communication, the nature of the climate, and the strength of the natives. This was of vital importance, if they were to attempt conquest and finally an occupation. It was not surprising, therefore, that the first series of expeditions were called Geographical expeditions.

A similar comment may be made of the earlier Phoenicians who, in 610 B.C., were sent by King Neco of Egypt to sail round Africa. The Phoenicians were themselves wealthy traders who explored and colonized wherever they thought commerce could flourish. It was not an era of intellectual risorgimento: it was an epoch of accumulation of wealth; any statement therefore to the effect that it was meant to study the geography for the advancement of knowledge should be discredited.

THE RIVER NIGER

The River Niger is the main river in West Africa. Up till the time of Mungo Park, little was known about the Niger. In Europe, it formed a subject of speculation and controversy. There were fantastic tales about a great West African river flowing past Timbuc too. Some thought it was a continuation of the Senegal, and that it emptied its waters into a lake at the foot of the Cameroon mountain. Some thought that it flowed from west to east; this notion was supported by Bello.

Believing now as all Europeans did that the West Coast of Africa might prove a suitable substitute for the lost colonies, and a laboratory for commercial exploitation, Sir Joseph Banks formed the African Association in 1788. His aim, as he put it, was to clear the mystery surrounding the Niger, but this aim, as I, and others may understand it was to explore the Niger as a means of stepping into the interior for commercial exploitation; and as successful commerce led to settlement, these discoveries were to aid remotely the colonization of West Africa.

OPINIONS ABOUT GEOGRAPHERS AND THE ABOLITION OF SLAVE TRADE ON THE NIGER

The Geographical Association had nothing to do with the abolition of slave trade on the West coast of Africa. Rather, it was a reply to the abolition of slave trade, for the promoters of the association were people who had lost much as a result of the

abolition. It was their determination to continue their interest in West African trade. But with the abolition of slave trade, they did not know what merchandize to carry to West coast of Africa. It was therefore the purpose of the Geographical Association to discover, besides physical geography of the region (which was necessary before any occupation) also social and economic condition of the region, to know what materials could most adequately take the place of slave.

It was also believed by such geographers as Franz Czerny that the Geographical Association went to Africa to regenerate that negro race. This is only a sign of muddled thinking. In short the chief assignment to the Geographical Association was espionage.

THE PRELUDE TO COLONEL OCCUPATION

THE FRENCH WEST AFRICAN EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY – SENEGAL

Throughout the 16th century, the French concerned themselves with the discovery of America. But they co-operated with the English to break the Portuguese Monopoly of West Africa. After 1624, the French directed their expedition towards the Senegal river. The first notable expedition was that of Captain Lambert and the historian Claude Jannequin de Rochfort in 1637 they landed at the mouth of the river and explored about 210 miles of the interior, and obtained permission from the natives to establish the chartered Norman Company. This company sold its right to the French West Indian Company which later passed on to “Royal Senegal”.

By 1683, the “Royal Senegal” had decided to settle down at the mouth of the river. This led to the building of Fort St. Louis in 1683. In 1696, a trader as well as a scientist was sent out, and he, it was said, really laid the foundation of the French Empire in West Africa. His name was Andre de Brue. He travelled into the interior for further discovery which could develop trade. For 15 years he lived on the coast of Senegambia.

In 1748 Michel Adanson, a Scottish scientist was commissioned to conduct a five-year exploration of the fauna and flora of Senegambia. This greatly increased the myopic knowledge about the products of Tropical Africa. The French continued to occupy and develop Senegal until 1758 when it was captured by the British. It was, however, given back to them in 1778, recaptured in 1793 and retained throughout the Napoleonic Wars.

During the first half of the 19th century, the French in the Senegal, attempted occupying the interior from their base in Senegal. They were, however, driven back by the Fula and Tukolor powers under Sheikhu Ahmadu and Al Haj Omar. The French then turned their attention towards Algeria until 1854.

WORY COAST

Until Colonel Binger's exploration had remained one of the most unknown parts of Africa. Explorers had been sent before which culminated in the building of the first French factories in 1700 – 7. In 1842, the French occupied Assini and Grand Bassum. In 1887 – 9, 1892 – 3, Colonel Binger explored more extensively the protectorate of Ivory Coast.

THE NIGER

In taking up the exploration of the Niger, Mungo Park felt it his duty to open up the gate of Africa to his countrymen by giving them a geographical knowledge of Africa. His mission, no doubt, was to trace the Niger from its source to the mouth. One might ask, what was the reason for this? The principal reason was to open a means of communication which would lead the traders into the interior. The British would have been the most stupid of all people if they were exploring the Niger without any motive behind it – not even commercial.

The results of his first mission were so encouraging that he prepared for a second journey. This time, he was accompanied by doctors to study the sanitary conditions of the region, and recommend prerequisites for the lives of the future settlers, traders to study the trades of the regions and know what merchandise would sell better, industrialists and geographers were also sent.

In 1896 Friedrich Hornemann a German, had joined the Geographical Association and travelled from Tripoli to the Niger. In 1802, Mr. Young the Secretary of the Association criticized the Government for being reluctant to pick up the opportunity offered by Park and Horneman in Africa. He warned the British government against the danger of letting other nations seize this opportunity, and

threatened to offer their services to other nations if the government was luke-warm to help them.

In 1804, the Colonial Minister, Lord Camden invited Park to start the second voyage: that the results of the expedition were not handed over to the Geographical Association but to the Government showed that the Association was looking for something more than Geography. The fact that the Government would spend over £9,000 cannot convince me that it was not interested.

Park in this voyage was asked to determine the military strength and what the people produced. It is a lie therefore to say that Britain was not interested in West Coast of Africa or in colonization. The mere fact that the Colonial Secretary was interested was enough evidence.

Some of the expeditions were however for geographical reason with an underlying colonization aim, this is obvious in the interest which the crown showed in this Association and the report being handed over to the Government not to the founders of the Geographical Association.

These Associations had their ebb and tide, and the number of people sent out depended on the country. One might ask why Geographical Society or more correctly, African Geographical Association, not formed before 1788? These explorers, as I have pointed out, were nothing short spies, and I have discussed their principal targets.

HUGH CLAPPERTON

In 1818 – 1819, the regency of Tripoli and Fezzan had been explored by Consul Ritchie and Captain George Lyon, R.N. In 1821 – 22, 1822 – 24, they were succeeded by Dr. Oudney, Commander Hugh Clapperton, R.N., and Major Dixon Dengam.

This exploration, though supported by Geographical Association was by no means a trade delegation and it used every means at its disposal to get anywhere it wanted. The explorers obtained recommendations from the Sultan of Tripolis under the command of the Sultan of Turkey who was influenced by the British Ambassador.

In 1823, they arrived with recommendation to El. Lanemi who was instructed to take care of the travellers and protect them. These travellers fearing that they might be treated as spies dressed like the Moslems to avoid religious and any suspicious

controversy. Clapperton took the name Abdullah, and Denham took the name Rayes Khaleel.

The Emir of Bornu wrote that between them and the Christians, there had been an agreement and they were the sort they would tolerate. The letter of recommendation from Tripolis was however dictated by the British Consul who realized the commercial as well as national importance of such missions.

In January 1824, El. Kanemi wrote to the Emir of Kano on behalf of the Christians, saying that between the nations of these Christians and the Muslims there has always been a friendly relationship, “and their forefathers and our forefathers have always lived in friendship.”

These Europeans claimed that the Teaching of Abu Hamfa’s had always been respected, and that whenever the Muslims were attacked, the British had always helped them. They referred to Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign of 1796. But this was a concerted lie to protect their interest. Napoleon in attacking Egypt was dreaming of taking the British Indian Empire; and the British opposed Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign to frustrate his efforts towards the occupation of India: So that it had nothing to do with their respect for the Muhammedan religion.

El. Kanemi also wrote to the Sultan of Sokoto and added that a true Christian had always tried not to split Christian blood. These Christians brought presents to the kings who allowed them to trade. They also carried out espionage work in the central Sudan. When El. Kanemi saw that these people were trying to exploit the possibility of a future trade and not merely to admire the Northern grassland as they said, he wrote back to the king of England that “our country does not suit any traveller with heavy wealth,” but if the wealth was light, the travellers were permitted. He did not, however, allow them to settle, and this refutes the statement that Africa offered himself to be colonized.

Sultan Bello was not intellectually bankrupt. He knew that these traders would aim at occupying his territory; so in negotiating with Clapperton, he was very careful and diplomatically implied that he would forbid slave trade in his territory, and that the British traders could establish on the coast. He knew that the coast did not belong to him. He needed British ammunition. He on 18th April, 1824, wrote to the King of

England and assured the British Monarch that British traders in Ashanti, Dahomey and Togo should be instructed to abolish slave trade. Bello would not accept them in his territory, but rather he sent his officers to collect the ammunition from the coast, and repeated that the British should not bother to come to his region. The British Consul could protect the coast in conjunction with Bello's representative. The failure of this protection was due to the immaturity of international relationship at that time and the attitude of the Africans.

Clapperton's reports were so glowing and tended to divert the Sudanese trade to the coast. In his second voyage, he was trying to convince the Hausas that he had come to see the grassland. But this obvious lie could not move a man of Bello's caliber who was not ignorant of Egyptian and Indian experiences.

The expedition which now entered the country from the South wanted to reach the Sokoto Empire from Badagry. This time Clapperton was to enter into his kingdom, for by now, it was getting crystal clear that they were not coming to study the grassland for geographical reason, but for a possible occupation as happened in India.

After these explorers came such men as Mac Gregolarid, Dr. Old – Field, Baike, Richardson and Overweg. All discovering the Niger and the Chad respectively.

Dr. Heinrich Barth, in his writing betrayed the expected consequence of the Geographical Association. While he was in Sudan, he wrote home that he was surprised that Britain should allow the America goods to flood the Sudanese markets, and he reported to British Consul in Tripolis and British foreign Minister. This shows that he came not only for exploration but for commercial exploitation. He sternly charged the British with slowness in colonization.

In an audience with the Sultan of Sokoto, he tried to get a letter from Aliu to authorize the English to settle in Sudan, and a personal letter of protection was demanded to Timbuctoo. The Sultan, however, told him that although trade was unifying, he regretted that his father did not allow them at first to settle. Barth gave Aliu two gun pistles before he signed it, but, he, Barth, was not satisfied with the contents of the agreement. In fact neither Bello nor Aliu was prepared to sign out his sovereignty to a trading concern. Aliu, however, signed a commercial treaty because he felt that trade had always promoted a friendly relationship.

OPINIONS EXPRESSED

I believe that these explorers were only trying to see if, when they travel across the Sahara failed, they could, if they discovered that the Niger emptied its water into the sea, penetrate into the interior through the River Niger for commercial purposes.

‘**Mungo Park** saw” a large town called Kabba in the midst of a beautiful and highly cultivated country, bearing a greater resemblance to the centre of England, than what I should have supposed had been the middle of Africa.” At Kirwani, he saw that the inhabitants seem to have carried the system of agriculture to some degree of perfection; ..”

Mungo Park also described Segu which he little expected to be as extensive and magnificent.

Clapperton wrote that at Jannah, in the Yoruba country, he saw a manufactory containing ten looms. “The cloth is good in texture and very fine”. Dying was a common and old industry. Throughout the country, he observed that cotton and indigo were cultivated ^I. The colour and dying he argued equaled or excelled those in Manchester.

Richard Lander observed the making of gold trinkets and other ornaments had been developed to a high degree. In Oyo, Richard and John Lander saw a variety of beads. They also noticed that soap – making was already established. Sokoto was a specialist at leather work, and Kano could manufacture cotton cloth and dye. Cushions, bags and sandals were also made there ^{II}. They also noticed that “the Ibo people were also famous for making large canoes.

Mac Gregolarid observed that the country had an advanced social organization and had sports and horse racing.

Dr. Barth also discovered that there was silk manufacture, and that copper and bronze and brass work had a great standard....

In short, these explorers took care to observe and study those things in which trade could be developed. There were little or no geographical reports.

I Hamilton: The River Niger

II Amanke Okafor: The New West Africa

RESULTS OF THE EXPEDITIONS

They disclosed the weakness of some of the Africans, they sowed discord among them and supported one section against the other, using a weaker neighbour as a tool to suppress a strong neighbour whom theyand after a heavy slaughter of Africans by Africans, they would return as mediators and peace makers. It was this way that the unpeaceful Pax Britannica led to the conquest and occupation of Nigeria. They settled down and made themselves consultant judges and gradually but diplomatically they striped the Africans of their administrative and judiciary powers ^I. In fact, these British may be called commercial explorers.

LAGOS AND THE SOUTH NIGERIA

The occupation of the colony of Lagos arises from the well-known conflict over slave trade between King Akintoye and Kosoko, from 1841 to the bombardment of Lagos, 1851. The weakness of Docemo culminated in the cession of Lagos, 1861, to the British crown, with

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- I. *The same thing happened in India and after the Indian Mutiny 1858, it was argued that a trading concern should not make itself a ruler of such a vast territory.*

“Even if these people were inclined to oppose the occupation of different points on the banks of the river by our countrymen,” wrote Mac Gregor Laird, “they are incapacitated from doing so efficiently on account of the disorganized state of the country¹.

when Sultan Bello of Sokoto told Clapperton that he had learnt that he was a spy, Clapperton hinted “that it would be better I should die, as the English had taken possession of all India by first going there ones and twos until we get strong enough to seize upon the whole country.

It was in the same way that these explorers, discovered, settled, disorganized and conquered the country.

2. *Commander Clapperton: Journal of School Exp. into the interior of Africa, 1892.*

I. *The New West Africa: Amanke Okafor quotes Laird: Narrative of an expedition into the interior of African.*