Résumé
K. Arhin — Signification économique et sociale de la production et du commerce du caoutchouc en Côte d'Ivoire et Côte de l'Or, 1880-1900.
Quel qu'ait été le rôle joué par le cacao dans les transformations économiques de cette région, la voie avait été préparée, à la fin du xixe siècle, par le développement de la demande de caoutchouc sur le marché mondial. C'est son commerce qui a familiarisé les populations du Centre et de l'Ouest de la Côte de l'Or et de l'Est de la Côte d'Ivoire avec l'économie monétaire, tout en introduisant, dans l'organisation foncière, des changements préparant ceux qui ont suivi l'introduction du cacao. En outre, la production, basée sur l'utilisation d'une main-d'œuvre servile, a marqué une rupture avec l'ancienne organisation familiale du travail et un stade de transition avec l'économie salariale liée à la production cacaoyère.

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The Economic and Social Significance of Rubber Production and Exchange on the Gold and Ivory Coasts, 1880-1900*

It is generally accepted that structural economic change in central and southern Ghana began with the development of cocoa in the eighteen-nineties. Bauer (in his Preface to Szereszewski 1965) defines structural economic change on the Gold Coast as the ‘process which [...] transformed the economy of the Gold Coast from a traditional economy based on subsistence production and the collection of naturally occurring products into one dominated by a cash crop which has become a major staple of international commerce’.

On the other hand, Dumett (1971: 94) has written of the significance of the rubber industry in the economic history of Ghana: ‘The spread of rubber tapping and trading throughout Asante was the mainspring of economic transformation in the region.’ In a previous paper (1972), I made much the same point, that, beside the addition to the wealth of the producers, the rubber industry prepared the ground for cocoa production through fostering organizational skills, inducing certain changes in systems of landholding and the transfer of assets and labour used in the rubber to the cocoa industry. This paper elaborates the points made in the previous article by incorporating materials discovered since then. It focusses on (1) the spread and monetary value of the industry; (2) the methods of obtaining rubber and (3) slave labour in rubber production. It makes the following claims: the rubber industry, more than earlier trading activities, was responsible for involving the peoples of west-central Ghana and the eastern Ivory Coast in the use of cash; it was responsible for inducing changes in land tenure that matched those brought about by cocoa production; and it was based on a slave mode of production and, thus, marked a change from the household economy of the previous centuries and opened the transition to the new labour relations of the cocoa industry.

* This paper was first read at the Staff-Graduate Seminar, Legon, Institute of African Studies.

Cahiers d’Études africaines, 77-78, XX-1-2, pp. 49-62.
I. Spread and Value of the Rubber Industry

To start with the beginning, spread and value of the rubber industry, Dickson (1971: 162) has stated that a Basel Mission agent exported rubber (*Funtumia elastica*) in the 1860's, but that exporting was discontinued, until a Mr. Grant of Cape Coast started experimenting with rubber production in the early 1880's. Statistics of rubber exports show an export of 1,200 lbs. valued at £43 in 1880 (Arhin 1972: 34; Dumett 1971: 80). The earliest centre of production for the Cape Coast merchants, including John Mensah Sarbah, was in lower Denkyera and Sefwi, but their agents later extended their activities to eastern Aowin and Wass (Dumett 1971: 79 sq.). In the east, rubber reached Accra in the late 1880's from the inland Volta districts, including Peki, Buem and Krachi, through Kpong, Akuse, Odumase, Somanya, Akropong and Aburi; and from Kwahu and Akyem through Abetifi, Kibi, and Nsawam (Dumett 1971: 84). Production in the districts of Wass, Dormaa, and Gyaman (Ghana) and on the east bank of the Comoé river (Ivory Coast) began in the second half of the 1890's.

Two factors conditioned the spread of the rubber industry. First, the manner of rubber tapping led to quick exhaustion of the productive trees: producers tapped some trees three to four times a year and felled some of them. It was due to this manner of production that the forests of the Fante, Assin and Akyem districts were quickly exhausted and dealers had to advance further inland (Dickson 1971: 162).

Second, varying political conditions dictated the directions in which dealers could go for produce, much as they did with the progress of coastal peoples trading into the interior before 1874. From Sefwi, Fante and Assin, traders could go northwestwards to Gyaman (both the Gold and Ivory Coasts) and the Agnibilekrou district, using routes that skirted the central Asante boundaries; and from 1893, Ahafo and Nkoranza fell outside the control of Kumasi and became accessible to the coastal

1. H. Eyre, District Commissioner (hereinafter D.C.), Volta District, to Colonial Secretary (hereinafter Col. Sec.), on roads in Crepe (Peki) 28.5.1889, Public Record Office/Colonial Office (hereinafter PRO/CO) 879/28/359.
2. The Gyaman kingdom, also known as Abron, was divided between the British and French governments in 1889.
3. Kwasi Du, an Elmina petty trader turned rubber producer, told the British Resident in Kumasi in 1898 that he had been operating as rubber trader in Assikasso, south of Agnibilekrou (Ivory Coast), for the past ten years. Kwasi Akoranti, also a petty trader from Elmina, stated that his father had built his own village of Suaprikrom, south of Yakasse (Ivory Coast), when he was a boy (statements in Enclosure 2, in Gold Coast Confidential—hereinafter GCC—of 21.2.1898, No 6612, PRO/CO 96/312).
5. See also H. M. Hull to Col. Sec., 27.5.1897, Enclosure in GCC of 27.5.1897, No 212, Bo. 13413, PRO/CO 96/293.
rubber dealers. It was after 1896, when the British formally established themselves in Kumasi, that the forests of central Ashanti became available for rubber exploitation. Dickson (loc. cit.) states that the rubber industry was saved from extinction due to destructive tapping ‘when the forests of Ashanti were made to yield their wealth of rubber from 1890’. This is true only to the extent that ‘Ashanti’ included the Ahafo, Brong, Dormaa, Gyaman, and Agni districts on both sides of the Gold Coast and Ivory Coast border.

The progressive advance of the dealers into the districts north and east of Sefwi in the eighteen-nineties is reflected in the export figures, which are reproduced in the table below together with their monetary values, in order to give an idea of the additions to the wealth of exporters, dealers and producers engaged in the industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rubber exports quantity (lbs.)</th>
<th>Value (£ sterling)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>57,913</td>
<td>2,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>223,843</td>
<td>13,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>5,484,474</td>
<td>26,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>1,549,121</td>
<td>69,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1,306,252</td>
<td>62,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>878,387</td>
<td>38,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1,241,628</td>
<td>55,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>3,301,055</td>
<td>231,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>2,946,913</td>
<td>198,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>3,027,527</td>
<td>323,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>4,022,385</td>
<td>322,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>3,735,439</td>
<td>313,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>4,957,016</td>
<td>419,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>5,894,984</td>
<td>551,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>5,572,554</td>
<td>555,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1880-1891: Governor’s despatch to the Colonial Secretary, 1893, in J. M. Sarbah Papers, Ghana National Archives (GNA), SC/6.26.

It would be useful to give an idea of how much of these values went to the different categories of participants in the rubber industry: the merchant-exporters, the brokers or agents of the merchants, and the local producers of rubber. But this is impossible to estimate and one
can only suggest that a certain proportion—perhaps a quarter or a third of the amounts—went to the producers in the form of silver coins and trade goods: gin, salt, gun powder, brass and copper rods, iron and lead bars, matchets and cotton goods. It was the demand for such money and goods that induced both the landlords to lease land for rubber production to strangers and the rubber producers to go to work.\(^6\)

Following the long-established trade relations in the northwestern districts, the rubber industry was, in large part, responsible for speeding up the entry of the peoples of these districts into the cash economy.

2. Rubber Production and Land

Rubber dealers in the Ahafo, Brong, Dormaa, Gyaman and Agnibilekrou districts, inhabited mainly by Akan peoples, were ‘strangers’. Among the Akan a ‘stranger’, \(gho\o\), had meanings which varied with the context. It could refer to an \(omanfrani\), that is a non-member of the actor’s or speaker’s own largest political unit, i.e. the traditional State (\(oman\), under the \(omanhene\), ‘head’ of the \(oman\)). It could also mean a non-member of the village community (one who was not a \(kroniba\)) under the \(odekro\), ‘village head’. Finally, it could designate a person neither politically nor socially connected with the speaker and his audience.

The different categories of strangers obtained land for cultivation of food crops and such other productive activities as gold-mining on differing terms. An \(omanfrani\) could obtain land for cultivation only after he had sought the permission of the highest power holder to settle, and on the following basis: the presentation of \textit{nsa} (‘drinks’) to the \(omanhene\), and an undertaking to share his produce with the landlord, usually on \textit{abusa} basis, which meant that he would keep a third of it. An \(omani\), a co-member of one’s State, or a \(kroniba\), a co-villager, could have land on \textit{abunnu} basis; that is, have a half-share of the harvested crops without asking the \(omanhene’s\) permission and without paying tribute. On the other hand, an affine, even if he was an \(omanfrani\), could have land gratis if duly presented to the political authorities (Sarbah 1968: 66-67; Hill 1956: 8-34; Arhin 1974, ch. iii). Slaves, both captive, \textit{nomum}, and purchased, \textit{nonkofo}, another category of strangers, obtained land as members of their owner’s household or lineage. For the purpose of land rights, they were regarded as subjects of the paramount stool holder, that is, they enjoyed rights in land as civic rights, in return for the performance of civic duties to the local ruler, such as helping to build the \(odekro’s\) or \(omanhene’s\) palace, working on their farms and delivering portions

\(^6\) W. B. Davidson-Houston, Report on Visit to the Northwest, in GCC of 20.7.1866; Treasurer to Col. Sec., 24.2.1893. Enclosure in GCC of 2.3.1893, No. 65, PRO/CO 96/232. The treasurer wrote that the increase in the demand for silver coins was due to large quantities of produce, principally India rubber, coming into the colony.
(thighs or forelegs) of the bigger animals, trapped or killed, to the local ruler.

It has been considered necessary to make these distinctions in order to appreciate how stranger dealers were able to obtain land for rubber production. Dealers operating in the Sefwi, Ahafo, Brong, Dormaa, Gyaman and Agnibilekrou districts included the peoples of Akyem, Asante, Assin, Denkyera, Fante, and Sierra Leone. The enclosure in the Acting Governor's despatch (see infra, p. 54) has a list of traders, their place of birth, previous occupation, areas of rubber operation and, in some cases, periods of stay in the area of rubber operation.

Of the number, two, Yaw Kwan [17] and Kwame Nnipa [20], described themselves as 'rubber maker' or 'rubber worker': they were employed in converting the rubber into balls for conveyance to the coast. James Edwards and John Forson described themselves as non-resident or temporarily resident, which means that they themselves did not produce rubber but obtained it from sub-agents or local producers. The rest were migrant or resident traders or 'brokers'. Brokers obtained rubber in one of three ways: (a) from producers who tapped rubber in their own stretches of forests; (b) through sharp practices; or (c) they produced it on land leased from local rulers. These methods were not mutually exclusive: a resident dealer could combine all three.

Methods (a), like (b), involved sharp practices. Brokers tampered with their scales and succeeded in short-weighing the rubber brought for sale. Hull calculated that a rubber producer lost about 30 lbs. during the weighing, which was the difference between the 'bush' and Cape Coast weights. Brokers paid the local prices: £2 at Wenchi for a load of 90 lbs., and £1 10s. to £1 16s. at Debisu as against £4 to £4 5s. for the same load on the coast. They also made advances in money to be repaid in rubber at inflated interest: Hull (1897) estimated that they thus made two hundred to three hundred per centum on their money.

Brokers employed rubber workers who, in the Sefwi, Ahafo and Gyaman districts, were mainly people from Akyem. Rubber workers were people in debt and without capital, who got themselves hired for periods of four to five months to produce rubber which they shared with their employer. They carried their own share to the coast, sold it and obtained goods for re-sale in the forest areas in order to obtain more rubber for sale (Hull 1897). They thus ensured continuity of operations until they had paid off their debts or set themselves up in business. Their

8. See ref. in note 5. Also, D. Stewart, the British Resident at Kumasi, wrote: 'I am afraid the scales the traders use would not bear inspection', and said the 40 lbs. in Sefwi would weigh 70-80 lbs. at Cape Coast (Stewart to Col Sec. 1.2.1984, Enclosure in No 287, PRO/CO 96/259). Stewart said he had received numerous comlains in Sefwi and Gyaman of unfair prices; yet producers had always preferred to sell to middlemen rather than to carry their produce to Cape Coast.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Home town</th>
<th>Previous trade</th>
<th>Place of residence for rubber trade</th>
<th>Period of stay in place of rubber trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kwadwo Oppong</td>
<td>Fanti Nyankumasi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Akyem, Sefwi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwabena Acquah</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Puaprim (built by Puaprim)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi Puaprim</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assikasso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi Dadie</td>
<td>Gomoa Bofo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assikasso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osei Kwame</td>
<td>Kumasi</td>
<td></td>
<td>French territory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaw Apofoi</td>
<td>Mampong (Denkyera)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Slave Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Edwards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cape Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sefwi and Gyaman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi Adweni</td>
<td>Sawua near Kumasi</td>
<td>goldsmith</td>
<td>resident at Sefwi</td>
<td>temporary residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi Agakwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>resident at Gyaman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaw Afuakwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>resident at Dakrofu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Forson</td>
<td>Mampong (Denkyera)</td>
<td></td>
<td>resident at Assikasso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kojo Donkor</td>
<td>Bonkokrom</td>
<td></td>
<td>resident at Assikasso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame Apprah</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td>petty trader</td>
<td>Kotoku Ayera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi Du</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td>petty trader</td>
<td>Kotoku Ayera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi Akoranti</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi Asafo</td>
<td>Elmina</td>
<td></td>
<td>Suaprikrou near Nanzanounsel north</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaw Kwan</td>
<td>Ekrofu Essem</td>
<td>rubber maker</td>
<td>of Yakase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame Biaba</td>
<td>Adubase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bentikrom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adanse-Asante</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assikasso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi Ntem</td>
<td>Mampong-Denkyera</td>
<td>rubber worker</td>
<td>village in Pamu (Dormaa)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame Nnipa</td>
<td>Mampong-Denkyera</td>
<td>Kokrokru</td>
<td>Benanfi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
situation was similar to that of the impoverished people who pawned themselves and took to kola production (Arhin 1965: 144-145) and also foreshadowed share-cropping in the cocoa industry (Hill 1956: 8-34, 13).

Method (b) often supplemented method (a). Brokers, dressed in the European fashion, pretended to be authorised by aban, ‘government’, to set up courts. They tried alleged infringements to alleged laws, fined the supposed offenders in loads of rubber which they were compelled to carry to the coast; or forced them to sell their rubber at the local prices.

The best known of these courts was established by Ashmore, an Assin man, aided by Munday, a Sierra Leonean, at Assikasso in the Ivory Coast. Ashmore, a resident rubber trader, bought rubber for his brother-in-law at Cape Coast. He had operated his court at Assikasso for some time before he was reported to the British Resident at Kumasi in 1897 by Kwasi Dadie, a trader from Gomoa Bofo. Dadie’s report was corroborated by the nineteen other dealers and ‘workers’ mentioned in Table II and by other traders. Kwabena Ankrah, an Ashanti resident in Gyaman, who traded to Bettie on the Comoé river, stated that Ashmore and Munday ‘hold courts and are the right hand men of the French officer at Assikasso’, that ‘they levy heavy fines and charges. If a man is sued for £1 he is made to pay £20’, and that ‘some time ago they collected 100 Fanti rubber traders and made them build huts for the French officer’. The fluctuations in rubber exports mentioned by Dickson (1971) were due, in part, to the activities of Ashmore and Munday, which scarred away rubber traders or deprived them of some of their working funds.

These doings deserve detailed investigation for two reasons. First, although they were acting within a long tradition of malpractices by coastal middlemen in their dealings with inland sellers, the activities of Ashmore and Munday suggest a maturing of predatory capitalism and a growing of the acquisitive spirit, as a result of the increasing pressure of cash brought about by the nearly total monetization of life on the coast.

Second, these practices are the immediate progenitors of the relations of exploitation that have since subsisted between the literate buyers and illiterate sellers of export crops, particularly cocoa: rubber brokers became cocoa brokers and brought these practices into cocoa buying. The produce or buying clerks of the United Ghana Farmers’ Council succeeded the brokers and learnt from them. When cocoa buying was made a monopoly of the United Ghana Farmers’ Council, cheating became institutionalized.

9. Acting Governor 1898 (see ref. in n. 7); also Stewart 1894 (ref. in n. 8); and Hull 1987 (ref. in n. 5).
10. In W. Maxwell (Governor of the Gold Coast), 1.10.1897, Enclosure 2 in GCC of 30.9.1897, No 19459, PRO/CO 96/297.
11. The exploitation of cocoa farmers by brokers and produce clerks is a matter of common knowledge in the cocoa areas but has not been fully studied. The
It was not only in its contribution to the institutionalization of exploitative relations between the seller and buyer of produce that the rubber industry was economically and socially significant. Of even greater significance was the migration and settlement of the rubber producers. As stated, many of the brokers leased lands from the local rulers: Kwabena Ankrah, already mentioned, was a refugee\textsuperscript{12} from Deniase (near Bekwai) who settled and collected rubber in the Gyaman district and sold it at Cape Coast. He said he had bought land in Gyaman for rubber production.\textsuperscript{13} He was engaged in trade between Gyaman, Cape Coast and Bettie, a market town on the Comoé river where ‘gin, rum, gun-powder, lead, flints, guns and other things are sold’. Ashmore and Munday were well established enough to have set up a local tribunal. Kofi Puaprim, from Elmina, built a village called Puaprikrou, south of Yakase in the Ivory Coast. Kwame Diaba of Adubease had a village in the Dormaa district with a food farm inhabited by his wife, children and forty ‘servants’. The father of Akwasi Akoranti, a petty trader of Elmina, obtained land from the ruler of Tenkoran and built a village which he called Suaprikrou, near Monzanouan, northeast of Agbengourou.\textsuperscript{14}

This material suggests two points. First, migrant rubber dealers were probably as much responsible for the growth of the rubber industry as Akwapim migrant cocoa farmers were for the early growth of the cocoa industry (Hill 1963). Secondly, fieldwork guided by the documentary material would show that, though not to the same degree, the rubber industry effected in those districts the same kind of changes in the land tenure systems as palm-oil and cocoa production did in southeastern Ghana (ibid. : 1).

British officials and Kwabena Ankrah spoke of land purchases in the Brong and Gyaman districts. This requires further investigation, since land could have been obtained in leasing instead of purchased. But even then the permission they got to build permanent villages for the exploitation of rubber and the setting up of farms, and the willingness of local rulers to lease land suggest significant changes in local attitudes towards strangers and considerable monetary inducement. This could occur only under considerable economic pressure. It is an indication of the increasing monetization of life and growing demand for imported goods in the last quarter of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{15} It also suggests the gradual dissolution of ethnic frontiers, under the growing impact of the colonial inter-

\textsuperscript{12} Refugee from the Asante civil wars, 1885-1888.
\textsuperscript{13} Acting Governor 1898 (see ref. in n. 7). Lamb (1893, ref. in n. 4) also spoke of the sale of rights in land for rubber production.
\textsuperscript{14} Acting Governor 1898 (see ref. in n. 7).
\textsuperscript{15} As Hull (1897, see ref. in n. 5) noted, years of plenty had turned many imported goods into luxuries.
vention. The rubber industry, like the palm-oil industry in the eastern Gold Coast hinterland, prepared the ground for the acquisition by strangers of land for cocoa production.

3. Labour in Rubber Production and Exchange

An idea of the considerable labour required for the production of rubber may be obtained from Hull’s contrast of the rubber productive processes in Para and in the Gold Coast. He wrote:

‘In the province of Para the rubber gatherers climb the trees cutting a gash here and there with a special form of axe. Below each gash a small clay pot is fixed to collect the sap which exudes, whereas on the Gold Coast the trees are channelled from near the top to the foot where the sap is collected. It would seem that much of the sap must solidify in its course down the tree. Again the Para gatherers dry their rubber by dipping a wooden blade into the receptacle which contains the milk and then whirling it round in a dense, hot smoke made to rise by a peculiar method from a fire of wood and palm nuts. In this way the rubber milk is solidified and prepared for dispatch to the coast in two days and the admixture of dirt largely avoided, the latter point being a most important one. Here the native, after securing the land, runs up the ruder of rude shelters close to some stream and commences operations. Each day he pours the milk gathered into a coffin-shaped hole made in the ground and smoothly lined with swish. Rubber thus requires 3 to 4 weeks to solidify and, in the meantime, although the holes are rudely covered with strips of barks, this does not prevent a great deal of dirt and grit from finding its way into the hardening milk and so detracting from its value.’ (Hull 1897.)

And the rubber industry also required labour for conveying the product to the coast.

Rubber dealers used slaves to supplement family and other kinds of labour, though they did not admit that they did so. They used, instead, the euphemisms of ‘boys’ and ‘servants’. There is no doubt that Diaba’s ‘servants’ were slaves; and that people who built villages for rubber production populated them with slaves. A survey conducted in 1897 among the District Commissioners in the coastal towns of the Gold Coast shows an almost general agreement among those officials that slaves were used for porterage in lieu of paid labour because the latter was more costly.

N. Loy, the District Commissioner at Tarkwa, believed that, in the district, slaves who carried rubber to the coast and trade goods back were bought at Bondouku from Samory,16 who was fighting in the eighteen-nineties in the Kong, Bona, Bondouku, Dormaa and Bole districts. The Commissioner said (12.10.1897) that he did not think ‘the coast traders could profitably carry on trade with Salaga and other inland towns by

16. For an account of Samory’s activities in the northwestern districts, see Goody 1965.
any other means. The journey is so long that the wages of hired labour would more than eat up the profit. Since slavery had been formally abolished on the Gold Coast in 1874, people denied buying slaves, and suspected slaves themselves would not give information for fear of being cast adrift and losing employment. The District Commissioner of Axim, A. O’Brien, stated (12.10.1897) that he believed slaves were engaged in carrying rubber; that these slaves were bought in Sefwi in exchange for goods and also sold for imported goods in the bush behind Benin. A. W. Thompson, D.C. of Discove, said (30.9.1897) that slaves were in high demand for carrying rubber and goods, and that women and children were preferred to men as slaves: women could later be turned into wives, and men were a risk in view of the law relating to slavery on the Gold Coast.

L. W. Brislowie, D.C. of Elmina, stated on October 7, 1897, that there was and had always been demand for slaves and that slave children were preferred to adults. He cited a recent case of two slave children who had been liberated in the interior.

The District Commissioner of Cape Coast, G. H. Cowie, gave a more detailed report (7.10.1897). He stated that in the one-year period from September 1896 to September 1897 there had been thirteen cases of slave dealing at Cape Coast; nine slaves had been liberated by the Cape Coast court between 1893 and 1897; and five additional liberated children sent to the local Roman Catholic mission. The people of Cape Coast who were interested in slaves obtained them in Gyaman (slaves could not be sold in Cape Coast) and incorporated them into their families. Porters who brought down rubber appeared to be generally not slaves, but there were cases of porters running away to police stations for protection and thus gaining freedom.

C. R. Rode, D.C. of Saltpond, said he believed that ‘the men who carry rubber down from the interior are not slaves but either independent people who buy the rubber themselves from the producers in the interior and sell it on the coast on their own account, taking back either money or goods in return, or else people employed by the producers to take the rubber to the coast and bring back imported goods’.

He thought the situation could be different with women but said he was not in a position to make definite statements (18.10.1897). The District Commissioner of Winneba, F. H. Kelley, believed that ‘many of the carriers are slaves’ but had little doubt that they returned after delivering their loads (20.10.1897). A. K. Pringle, D.C. of Akuse, recalled a story at Keta that ‘the rubber trade was killed by the liberating of the slave carriers’ (27.9.1897). The District Commissioner of Keta,

17. In Hodgson (Governor of the Gold Coast), GCC № 52 of 29.1.1898, № 4552, PRO/CO 96/311.
H. Howard Bell, thought there was no slave dealing at Keta but only several cases of pawnng there (7.9.1897). 18

There is no doubt that brokers used slaves in producing and conveying rubber to the coast. In a statement on the Ashmore and Munday courts, Benyamin Eninful, an Assin broker, spoke of ‘women and children belonging’ to the Fanti traders who, together with their owners, numbered 90. He said that in consequence of the activities of Ashmore and Munday, ‘My boys left my 39 loads of rubber and £90 cash at Meabu. The rubber traders have lost about £3,000 to £4,000 worth of rubber, cash, personal effects and goods.’ 19 The words ‘belonging’ and ‘boys’, like ‘servants’, clearly indicate slaves.

It was the normal practice of an African trader to invest a large proportion of his wealth in slaves (Swanzy 1874: 6). Slaves became cheaper in the 1890’s as a result of the wars of Samory. It is recalled even today in Kintampo that before the British colonial government established its presence there in 1896, and started driving off the Samory slave caravans, there was such a glut in the supply of slaves on the market that the price of a normal adult slave fell from the usual apakan, a load of 2,000 kola nuts (Arhin 1979, ch. iv). Asante rubber traders obtained war captives against strips of ‘grey baft’, calico, from Samory’s war camps in the neighbourhood of Bonduku, and put them to work in rubber and kola production: a Dormaa trader is reported to have ‘owned’ as many as 167 slaves during the Samory wars (Arhin 1972: 38).

Slave caravans from the Samory war camp disposed of captives in the markets of Atebubu, Kete, Krachi, Kintampo and Wenchi, which waxed and waned with the supply of slaves. 20 In 1896, the Atebubu market declined in favour of that of Kete because, following the posting of a British Resident in the former town, it was no longer possible to obtain slaves there while the Germans, who controlled Kete, were not fussy about slave trading. The Akan kola traders were more interested in slaves than in anything else (Arhin 1979, ch. iv), and Hausa and Mossi traders wanted kola. In consequence both groups of traders were attracted to the markets where slaves were to be obtained. The Kintampo market lost its traders to Wenchi because the British presence was established in the former town in 1896 and only later in Wenchi (ibid.).

18. All these reports in Hodgson 1898 (see ref. in n. 17).
20. All the British officials who travelled into the northwest after 1896 reported large-scale slave dealing: Davidson-Houston reported that Samory ‘hampered’ trade because of slave dealing by his caravans (in GCC of 20.7.1896). The Acting Resident of Kumasi, Pigott, reported from Kintampo that he had arrested a Samory caravan of 200 people including 30 slaves, of whom 14 accepted his offer to release them. The same day (23.7.1896), he reported that Parmeter said that, when the Germans attempted to abolish the slave trade at Kete, the market started to decline so they closed their eyes to it (Enclosure 8 in GCC of 6.5.1896, No 11544, PRO/CO 96/292).
Slaves had always featured in the economy of the Akan and the non-Akan groups who traded rubber in the Ahafo, Brong and neighbouring districts. But the scale on which slaves featured in the rubber industry was impressive. It suggests that slaves were no longer used only to supplement family labour but had become the basis of a productive activity which was unrelated to the demands of the traditional domestic economy; the rubber villages appear to have had ‘plantation’ dimensions. Rubber, like palm oil in southeastern Gold Coast and cocoa in the 20th century, demanded greater labour than could be supplied by family labour, and slaves were preferred to paid labour because they were much cheaper, particularly in the period of Samory’s wars, and because paid labour had not yet become a dominant feature of the economy of the Gold Coast.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to draw attention to those features of the rubber industry which suggest significant departures from the traditional economic organization and which can be said to have contributed to the development of cocoa in the Ahafo, Brong and neighbouring districts in the 20th century, in much the same way as the palm oil industry facilitated the development of cocoa in the southeastern districts in the late 1880’s and 1890’s. These features included the contribution of the industry to the growth of the cash economy; the lease and grant of land to strangers for the establishment of villages for rubber production; the practice of share-cropping; and the large-scale use of slaves both in the production and the carrying of rubber for sale on the coast. It has also been suggested that the ‘sharp’ practices which have since the beginning of this century formed a feature of the buyer-seller relations, particularly in the cocoa industry, have their roots in the relations between the buyers and sellers of rubber.

Rubber production in the northwest occurred upon the background of four centuries of trading in the area. But trading had, before the era of the rubber trade, and since Begho was established in the 20th century, been mainly the preserve of the local rulers and of the Mande-Dyula professional traders in Begho, Wenchi and Bonduku. Commoners had been occasional or target traders, generally interested in consumer goods. Neither the rulers nor the commoners had built up such ‘capital’ as could be found among the Hausa or Mande-Dyula traders resident, for example, in Bonduku (see Arhin 1979, ch. 1). Trading, therefore, had only added to the material culture of the participants, but not made any significant breach in the traditional economy of hoe cultivation; it had not effected changes in the traditional land tenure systems or led to such differentiation

21. See the study of slavery in Gvaman by Terray (1975).
of labour among the Brong-Akan indigenes as was to be found in the traders’ enclaves of the trade centres (ibid.).

Rubber production and exchange was the industry of commoners. They could lease land and produce rubber, just as they had produced kola for the northern markets. They could trade rubber on the coast. By virtue of these activities, and with the increasing subordination of the local rulers—who had acted as disincentives to commoner enterprise (Arhin 1970)—to the colonial rulers, there was triggered off an economic and social transformation which culminated in cocoa production with all its concomitants.

The rubber industry marked the end of the traditional household economy which had been subjected to the demands of the local State, and the beginning of the dominance of the cash economy in which commoner enterprise came into its own. It thus deserves detailed investigation.

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