

**Martin Staniland**, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (African Studies Series, No. 16), 1975, xiii, map, charts, 241 pp., \$ 22.50.

"Lions of Dagbon" refers to the praise-title of the paramount chiefs – the "Ya-Nas" of the Dagomba people. Numbering well over 250,000 (1960 census) the Dagomba constitute the largest ethnic group in the north and until the Acheampong military coup of 1972, they controlled six out of the 140 seats in the National Assembly.

In the ten interesting chapters that follow, Staniland reconstructs, using primarily archival materials, the political history of the Dagomba, an important pre-colonial "cavalry state," from its rise in the 15th century in the Asante "hinterland". A noteworthy flaw of the historical description is the Anglicization of the Dagomba kingdom.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4, clearly the best, recount in some detail the consequences for the Dagomba, specifically for the Yendi ruling class, of Euro-colonial rule beginning in 1899 with the partition of Dagomba between the British and the Germans, and the re-unification of the kingdom after 1917 by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and by the British Government Order-in-Council of 1923, making Dagomba a District of the Protectorate of the Northern Territories.

In chapters 5 and 6, the author provides a lively discussion of the effects of British colonial administration and policies, particularly the controversial "ideology of indirect rule", on pre-colonial structures of power and authority in Dagomba. The post-1930 changes in local level politics resulting from colonial and post-colonial central governmental action – e.g., the reform of Local Government in 1946 and the establishment of the Dagomba State Council, and their impact on the very complicated rules of Yendi chiefly succession and dynastic disputes are competently and skillfully adumbrated.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 deal with the emergence of national party government and politics, and the latter-day military rule. They describe the complex operation of an Accra-based political patronage system, and the opportunistic self-interested manipulation and exploitation by politicians, partymen and national leaders of the violent and bloody Yendi skin affair. However political activities, national or local, not directly and explicitly concerned with Yendi dynastic politics are either completely ignored or treated only superficially, thus making the book's subtitle somewhat misleading. The author was not allowed, as he had hoped, to interview politicians and chiefs involved with political parties. Even so, the crucial importance of electoral victory in the north for the CPP government, faced in 1954 with a very serious political crisis precipitated by the rise of the NLM and the formation of an NLM-NPP alliance, and its implications for the political future of the country, does not receive the required treatment.

Staniland's theoretical excursions into "center-periphery" relations on the basis of partial and misleading lexical analysis are unconvincing. Ghanaian (Akan, Dagomba, etc.) notions and feelings about "power", "authority", "legitimacy", "social and political stratification," form *part* of a coherent system of vocabulary of government and politics which demand the type of symbolic and hermeneutic analysis that most expatriate Africanists are ill-prepared or

badly qualified to do. Staniland's self-imposed dichotomy between "tradition" which remains largely undefined, and "politics" (p. 172; p. 226 8n) and the consideration that the latter is not seen as a "permanent phenomenon" (p. 173) shows gross misunderstanding of contemporary Ghanaian *cultural* definitions of the political process.

Contrary to Staniland's contention there *are* Ghanaians who both "preach" seriously that *chieftaincy* ought to be abolished altogether ("normative sphere") and do in fact meddle in the chieftaincy affairs ("pragmatic sphere") indicating the well-recognized dependent status of chiefly authority throughout Ghana. But most feel strongly that chiefs, *qua* chiefs, have important specific roles to play in the national government system. They have a definite formal role in the new local government structure. They also have informal roles as leaders of community development. With the increased number of young educated chiefs they have a special role in explaining the policies of the national government at the local levels and as guardians of local traditions in spearheading changes in local custom to meet the challenges of modern times.

The use of the term "politics" in Ghana is not necessarily "restricted" and "pejorative" (p. 172). What seems to have pejorative connotation *is* bi- or multi-party politics. Hence the search for a system of government, whether or not it includes chiefs as ordinary citizens or as a governing aristocracy, which does not require *parties* – that is, the establishment of a "no-party" or "one-party" government.

The year of the return of the Asantehene from exile in Seychelles is 1924 as it appears on p. 82 and not 1925 as given on p. 75. General Kotoka and not Brigadier Afrifa was the leader of the 1966 coup (p. 151). The standard initials of the Northern Territories are "NTs" and not "N.T." as used throughout the book. It is significant to note that a year after the Government White Paper on the Ollenu Report mentioned by Staniland in his postscript the government was still trying to find a lasting solution to the skin gate system for the selection of Yendi chiefs. The Research Committee of the National House of Chiefs now hopes to evolve a unified system of enskinment and enstoolment for the country (see *West Africa* 8 September, 1975: 1965).

University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, U.S.A.

MAXWELL OWUSU