

Henry Beaufoy MP and the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa

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Henry Beaufoy MP
and the
Association for Promoting
the Discovery of the Interior Parts
Of Africa
1788-1795

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Abstract

Henry Beaufoy MP (1750-1795) was one of the primary founders and first secretary of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa. The Association sponsored several expeditions to the Western Sudan and North Africa during the late 1780's and 1790's including the famous Mungo Park expedition of 1795-97. Beaufoy, as a Member of Parliament, was a key figure in the nonconformist movement as well as an ardent supporter of abolition. His work in recruiting and directing the Association's explorers helped set the stage for nineteenth century British involvement in Africa. The history of the Association's early expeditions and Beaufoy's mix of humanitarian and commercial motivations in founding the Association provide revealing witness to the nature of British interest in Africa at the end of the eighteenth century.

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Introduction

European exploration of Africa has attracted significant public and scholarly attention over the past century and much has been written on the major expeditions of the nineteenth and late eighteenth centuries. Some of this attention has been focused on the motivations and sources of support for these expeditions, especially in the period before government funds were allocated for this purpose. Mungo Park's well known 1795-7 expedition to the Niger stands as the starting point for the high period of nineteenth century European exploration, however little is mentioned of his immediate predecessors who tried unsuccessfully to reach the same goal and about the Association which funded this program of exploration. The Association to Promote the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, which sponsored Park's expedition along with a half dozen others from 1788-1832, rarely gets the credit it deserves for inaugurating this new era of British interest in Africa. Instrumental in the founding of this organization, and serving as its first secretary, was a Member of Parliament named Henry Beaufoy. Beaufoy has received little historical attention, especially in light of his involvement in a variety of the most pressing issues in 1790's England, from the abolition of slavery to the Test Acts and the French Revolution. The neglect of Beaufoy and his role in the Association led to the development of this investigation into Beaufoy's biography, his place in the Association, the motivations of the Association, and the Association's expeditions themselves.

Fortunately the Association published their proceedings on several occasions, most importantly in 1790 and 1810 and these are highly accessible. Most of the Association's other records have also been published in a helpful compilation by Robin

Hallett. While the whereabouts of Beaufoy's papers are unknown, many of his letters are included in the records of the Association as well as in the archived correspondence of other figures of the period. Here at Boston College, the Burns library collection contains two manuscript notebooks owned by Beaufoy containing various material on Africa, detailed in an appendix to this paper. While the Association's records have been published and much has been written about the Park expedition, this is the first examination of the Association that focuses on Henry Beaufoy and what he can tell us about the motivations behind the Association's mission.

Chapter I

The Formation of Henry Beaufoy

Humanitarian and Politician

Henry Hanbury Beaufoy was born to a Quaker merchant family south of London in November 1750. His father, Mark Beaufoy was a prominent member of Quaker and merchant circles and the Beaufoy family as a whole traced its origins to the Norman conquest. Henry had two younger brothers, John, and Mark, who would gain fame as one of the first Englishmen to climb Mt. Blanc and who would join the African Association shortly after its founding. Henry Beaufoy's early life is not known in any great detail, yet a few formative events can be established and explained.

Around 1743, Mark Beaufoy the elder moved from Bristol, where he was an apprentice in a distillery, to a run down part of Lambeth, across the Thames from London in order to establish a vinegar brewery.¹ Over the next twenty years he bought the leases to most of the area known as Cuper's Gardens where he built a large distillery complex. Shortly after Henry's birth, in 1756, the elder Beaufoy acquired the lucrative royal navy contract to supply vinegar for "ship's stores... [as] a fumigator, an antiseptic and preservative."² This business, which produced hundreds of thousands of gallons of vinegar a year gave the Beaufoys a certain amount of personal wealth, which served Henry well in his quest for a seat in parliament. While Henry became a partner in his father's firm in 1775, there is little to indicate that he was actively involved in the

¹ Rachael Gaunt, "The Beaufoy's Vinegar Yard" 1979. Reproduced at <<http://www.vauxhallsociety.org.uk/Beaufoy.html>>

² Idem

business, which was passed down through his brothers, and which survived well into the 20th century under the Beaufoy name.³

It is not clear when the first Quaker Beaufoys appeared, yet the elder Mark Beaufoy was certainly an active Quaker who chose vinegar brewing over gin distilling in part because of the unsavory reputation of the gin business.⁴ In any event, the young Henry Beaufoy was sent to his father's hometown of Bristol at an early age to study under Dr. Andrew Kippis, an ardent Quaker and abolitionist, who perhaps figured quite prominently in Henry's commitment to the abolition cause.⁵ It is uncertain how much time Beaufoy spent at Bristol under Kippis, however it seems that he was well prepared for his next level of schooling at the Warrington nonconformist academy. Nonconformist academies were first established in the late seventeenth century in response to the passage of the test acts which largely prohibited those not affiliated with the church of England from teaching or studying at the great universities.⁶ Because of this, many highly qualified nonconformist thinkers and educators were forced to restrict their teaching to private academies supported by the nonconformist population.⁷

Warrington was one of the more prominent academies of the second half of the eighteenth century in part due to the role of one of its more famous tutors, Dr. Joseph Priestly. Beaufoy was at Warrington during the mid 1760's until at least 1768, at the high point of Priestly's influence on the curriculum – one which emphasized elocution, the classics, drama, and oration in general, skills that undoubtedly assisted Beaufoy in his

³ Gwendolyn Beaufoy, *Leaves from a Beech Tree* (Oxford: Basil Blackwells, 1929), p. 137; Gaunt

⁴ G. Beaufoy, p. 133.

⁵ Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754-1790*, Vol. 2, *Members A-J* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1985), p. 72.

⁶ For a further discussion of Beaufoy and the test acts see below, chap. 2.

⁷ See H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts: Being the History of the Nonconformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931) for a lengthy discussion of the academies in general.

later career.⁸ Further, Warrington was a hotbed of enlightenment ideas and general non-conformity (Priestly is often associated with Unitarianism). Near the end of his time at Warrington, Beaufoy gave an oration on “An enquiry into the effect of civilization on the real improvement and happiness of mankind; in which the principles of Mr. Rousseau upon the subject are considered.”⁹ Beaufoy’s immersion in enlightenment ideas must have influenced his thought on subjects of religious liberty and abolition as well as his passion for scientific exploration and discovery, exhibited through his role in the African Association. He certainly felt a great affinity to the nonconformist academies, seen through his generous donation toward the founding of Hackney academy in 1786 which recruited Dr. Kippis as one of its head tutors, as well as his continuing support for Warrington.¹⁰

Along with the spirit of enlightenment inquiry, Beaufoy seems to have also acquired a rebellious streak during his time at Warrington. Around 1770, shortly after his time at the academy had ended, Beaufoy began courting Elizabeth Jenks a non-Quaker heiress from Shropshire. Although he failed to secure permission to marry her from either his own father or her uncle on account of their difference in faiths, they were eventually married in September 1778.¹¹ This dispute may have led to Beaufoy’s joining of the Church of England, of which he was clearly a member by his parliamentary days.¹² In any event, the couple seems to have entered the mainstream of English society— having their respective portraits painted by Gainsborough prior to 1784.¹³ It also appears that

⁸ McLachlan, pp. 216-8.

⁹ McLachlan, p. 217. (Delivered 30 June 1768).

¹⁰ Namier & Brooke, pp. 72-3.

¹¹ The letter (to Elizabeth’s uncle) is printed in G. Beaufoy, pp. 135-6: “But I well knew that my father would never consent to my marriage with a lady of a different faith from his own.”

¹² Throughout his speech of 8 May 1789, Beaufoy refers to himself as a member of the Church of England.

¹³ G. Beaufoy, p. 134.

any severe disagreement with his father in regards to his marriage was resolved, as he inherited Mark Beaufoy's fortune upon his death in 1782, and this unconventional marriage did not seem to affect his parliamentary career.

That Beaufoy was interested in matters of geography and culture can be deduced from his role in the African Association, yet there is precious little evidence of his amateur interests outside of the Association. The Royal Society, founded by Isaac Newton and others, was perhaps the premier association in which gentleman scholars could discuss the latest scientific discoveries and inventions as well as network politically. Entrance into the Society was restricted to the scientifically well known and to the socially upstanding with scientific interests. Beaufoy was elected into the Royal Society in July 1782 with the support of a dozen prominent members. His certificate of membership unfortunately does not mention any specific scientific interest but cites him as "...a gentleman well versed in various parts of Natural Knowledge and polite Literature."¹⁴ Nonetheless, Beaufoy's connections in the Society would serve the African Association well, as a number of its members were gleaned from the Society's ranks.

The early 1780's marked the beginning of Beaufoy's political career, a career like most others in eighteenth century England, in that it depended on social connections. Beaufoy's parliamentary ambition seems to have begun at an early age, as noted by his tutor, Dr. Kippis, in 1780 "From his earliest youth it has been his ambition to make a distinguished figure in Parliament, and to this end have all his studies been directed."¹⁵ The convoluted and frequently corrupt system by which MPs were elected in the eighteenth century would not appear to favor a young Quaker turned Anglican with

¹⁴ Archives of The Royal Society <<http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/DserveA/>> The Royal Society has reproduced most membership certificates from the 18th century online.

¹⁵ Namier & Brooke, p. 72.

vinegar-brewing connections. However, through a network of acquaintances from his academy days he was able to procure a seat. He first attempted to find a seat in the elections of 1780 through the agency of Dr. Kippis and John Petty, the Earl of Shelburne, who was also educated by Priestly and who had connections in the Unitarian world.¹⁶ Apparently, he also considered approaching an election agent to facilitate the purchase of a seat. He later wrote of this experience “Many were the offers I received from men who pretended to have such connexions in a borough, and for a small sum immediately bestowed...would ensure success.”¹⁷ Later, in a parliamentary speech, Beaufoy spoke of how he was hindered in his pursuit of a seat by the “smallness of my fortune, which...afforded but £1,600 a year.”¹⁸ In support of his campaign, Dr. Kippis extolled Beaufoy’s public speaking abilities, his knowledge of all matter of commercial and constitutional subjects as well as his nature as “...a true friend to religious and civil liberty,” and the fact that he “...wholly disapproves of the present Administration.”¹⁹ It seems that the Earl of Shelburne did recommend Beaufoy for one of the notorious Cornish boroughs in 1780, yet for whatever reason he failed to acquire the seat and was left to find another method of entrance to Parliament. His chance came in 1782 when he inherited his father’s vinegar fortune and the Government changed leadership from North to Pitt. In July 1782, Dr. Kippis again wrote a glowing letter to Shelburne in support of Beaufoy,

¹⁶ Namier & Brooke, pp. 72-3, 270.

¹⁷ E.A. Smith, “The Election Agent in English Politics,” *The English Historical Review* 84, no. 330 (Jan. 1969): p. 22.

¹⁸ Namier & Brooke, p. 72.

¹⁹ *Idem.* Namier & Brooke do not cite a source for this letter from Kippis to the earl of Shelburne – yet, judging from subsequent citations, it seems to be from a MS collection related to Shelburne.

Since I had the honour of introducing him to your lordship he hath acquired a large accession of fortune by the death of his father and another relation, so that any expense attending an election would be a matter of no consequence to him. By the happy change of his Majesty's counsels Mr. Beaufoy would be an active and cheerful supporter of Government...I would pawn my reputation on Mr. Beaufoy's making a figure in the House, both as a speaker and as a man of business.²⁰

Shortly afterward, in early 1783, Beaufoy paid the MP from Minehead £3,000 to leave his position, which Beaufoy assumed on March 11th.

Beaufoy sat as member from Minehead only briefly - until 1784, at which point he was persuaded to stand for Great Yarmouth in the general election, and ran unopposed on the support of "a party of independent townsmen who were mostly dissenters."²¹ Beaufoy's early Parliamentary career was focused on Pitt's reform proposals especially the reform of the excise system and a whole host of commercial reforms. Based on the testimony of contemporaries and his parliamentary record, it seems that while Beaufoy was a personal friend of Pitt and often supported his government's measures, he was considered one of the more independent members of the house.²² Otherwise, Beaufoy had the reputation of being a rather theatrical orator who was always well attired.²³ Wraxall makes note of one of Beaufoy's more compelling orations on the subject of excise abuse, in which he kept the house's attention through a dramatic recounting of a recent incident

²⁰ Namier & Brooke, p. 72.

²¹ Ibid., p. 73.

²² See Ch. 2 below for his independence concerning the test acts.

²³ William Wraxall, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall*, ed. Henry Wheatley, vol. 4 (London: Bickers & Son, 1884), p. 139, "Few persons appeared so attentive to the aids of dress as Beaufoy, who rarely or never took his seat except attired with more than the ordinary care."

of Tobacco smuggling.²⁴ Beaufoy's oratory style, "measured, grave, and sonorous," and his general position in Parliament led to this verse of popular satire

Lo! Beaufoy rises, friend to soft repose,
Whose gentle accents prompt the house to doze
His cadence just a general sleep provokes.²⁵

In 1785, Beaufoy received his first major parliamentary role, as chairman of a committee to investigate the state of fisheries in Britain, especially Scotland. His report to Parliament on this occasion was his first major speech and seems to have been well received, it also appears that Beaufoy's interest in commercial matters and the Scottish fisheries in particular extended throughout his life. After his committee work on the fisheries, he compiled six volumes on the "Navigation, Commerce, and Revenue of Great Britain 1771-1783" and became involved in the British Society for extending the Fisheries, which included, coincidentally, William Wilberforce among its members.²⁶ During this time Beaufoy also conducted a correspondence with Adam Smith on the merits of various excise regulations and Beaufoy's plan to relieve the sufferings of poor Scottish fishermen.²⁷ As detailed below, Beaufoy became involved in the movement to repeal the test acts as well as the abolitionist cause during the late 1780's. At the same time, in 1788, he became the founding secretary of the African Association and it is around this period that Beaufoy reached his peak of activity, becoming secretary of the East India Company board of control in 1791, a position which he held till 1793.

²⁴ Wraxall, vol. 4, p. 140-1.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁶ G. Beaufoy, p. 138; *Times* [London] 17 Feb. 1786, p. 3.

²⁷ David Raynor, "Adam Smith: Two Letters to Henry Beaufoy, MP," *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 43, no. 5 (Nov. 1996): pp. 579-589.

The future and governance of the British East India Company was one of the hot parliamentary topics of the 1780's. Due to a series of events, much too complicated to be enumerated here, the company was put under the supervision of a board of control, which was largely appointed by the prime-minister.²⁸ Thanks to Beaufoy's friendship with Pitt and despite their recent split over the test acts, Pitt appointed him in early 1791, to serve as the secretary of the board of control for the Company. According to Phillips, the previous occupant of the secretaryship was too forward in providing his opinions about the Company instead of deferring to the leadership of Henry Dundas, the most powerful voice on the board, and thus perhaps a less obnoxious voice was sought.²⁹ It appears that Beaufoy was a good candidate for the job as "a personal friend of Pitt with no pretensions to a knowledge of India affairs."³⁰ In theory, this position as secretary was quite a powerful one, as the board of control held the power of war, commerce, and diplomacy in all Company controlled India.³¹ In actuality, as the *London Times* stated "...through the indefatigable exertions of Mr. Dundas – the place [secretary] is merely a sinecure."³² Indeed, despite any hopes that there might be some direct link between Beaufoy's work with the African Association and his role on the East India board of control, it appears that the position was really just a sinecure, and it is even unclear if Beaufoy attended board meetings.

The end of Beaufoy's life, outside of his activities with the African Association, is difficult to trace. He died unexpectedly in May 1795 at the age of 45, and while it is not

²⁸ For a thorough discussion of the governance of the East India Company during this period see C.H. Phillips, *The East India Company 1784-1834* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

²⁹ Phillips, pp. 70-1.

³⁰ *Idem*

³¹ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (New York: Longman, 1992), p. 124.

³² *Times* [London] 4 May 1791, p. 2.

clear what the immediate cause of death may have been, the common opinion seems to be that he was under a great deal of stress because of the trial of John Horne Tooke. The details of Beaufoy's involvement in the Tooke trial are spotty, but it is known that Beaufoy was called to testify against Tooke. Tooke was a radical reformer and former MP who supported many dissenting causes (as well as the American Revolution) and who was tried for high treason in 1794 amidst a climate of fear engendered by the French revolution. Many high powered witnesses, including William Pitt, the Prime Minister at the time, were called to give witness to Tooke's revolutionary sympathies and radical activities. Beaufoy, as a proponent of parliamentary reform attended some of the same societies, including the Constitutional Society, as Tooke, but there is little evidence that they were in any way close. However, during the trial, Beaufoy was asked about a particular meeting of the Constitutional Society at the Thatched-house tavern (incidentally the tavern where the African Association met after 1793), the dress of the members, and the substance of the resolutions passed. In response, Beaufoy placed Tooke at the meeting but was unable to recall any details about the resolutions or any peculiar dress, he did note, however, that he had seen Tooke only once in the six years since the meeting. Tooke seems to have taken offense to this statement, and in front of the assembled crowd of dignitaries asked "Pray do you never recollect a time when you were unfortunate? Did you not meet me at Waghorn's coffee house, and complain to me, that after all the support you had given to Mr. Pitt, he refused to return to you the civility of a bow?"³³ It is not clear whether Pitt was in the court at the time, but this remark was

³³John Newton, "The Trial at Large of John Horne Tooke Esq. For High Treason Before the Special Commission at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey began on Monday, November 17, and continued Saturday 22, 1794 With the Whole proceedings of the Attorney Solicitor General on the Part of the Crown

uncouth enough that the court went on record to say that the question was improper, and allowed Beaufoy to say that "...he did not recollect any thing of that nature." The *Times* of that week even included the incident in its news summary, writing:

Mr. Horne Tooke, in his cross-examination of Mr. Beaufoy, departed from that gentlemanly manner which might have been expected from the Citizen of the World. It was betraying the unguarded moment of a confidential conversation, to answer not one good purpose of the defense, even supposing the thing had really happened.³⁴

While this incident may have had nothing to do with his death less than six months later, it came at a time of high stress for Beaufoy as he was also deeply involved in Association and Parliamentary business at the time. The cause of his death is unknown, but he was unable to attend Association meetings in the spring of 1795 and he eventually died near Bristol on May seventeenth 1795. His wife later remarried, and the Beaufoy family along with the Beaufoy vinegar plant would continue in prosperity throughout the nineteenth century.

This brief account of Beaufoy's life shows his development as a liberal minded orator anxious for reform and interested in commercial and scientific subjects. This commitment to reform and the ideas of the enlightenment would direct him in his opposition to the test acts and the slave trade and his inquisitiveness in commercial and scientific matters would lead him to be one of the founding members of the African Association.

and Mr. Erskine and Mr. Gibbs for the Prisoner." (London, 1795), p. 68. A contemporary publication of the complete transcript of the trial.

³⁴ *Times* [London] 28 November 1794, p. 2.

Chapter II

Henry Beaufoy the Humanitarian

Abolition and the Repeal of the Test Acts

What accounts for Henry Beaufoy's interest in Africa and African exploration and what motivated him to play such an important role in the founding of the African Association? While the exact reasons for his involvement in the Association may never be known, it is clear from the evidence available that he had an interest in humanitarian and commercial concerns throughout his parliamentary career. His concern with humanitarian matters should be considered as quite broad, as he was involved in a number of "radical" causes throughout his career. However, of these, he dedicated the most time and energy to the movement for the abolition of the slave trade and the campaign to repeal the test and corporation acts.

While Beaufoy's involvement in the campaign to repeal the test acts might seem tangential to the greater discussion of the African Association and its mission, it reveals how this well connected Member of Parliament developed his deep convictions and a passion for challenging the status quo. As mentioned above, Beaufoy was born a Quaker and certainly had both personal and mercantile connections to the greater Quaker community. As a Quaker, under the Test and Corporation Acts of 1661, 1673, and 1743, he could not have held any civil or military office in England, as all office holders were required to prove their status as a member of the Church of England, through the proper reception of communion according to the accepted rite. While Beaufoy became a member of the Church of England to facilitate his career in parliament, his immediate family was Quaker and he clearly retained much sympathy for dissenting causes, as seen

in his support for several dissenting academies and it follows that he would be concerned with their inequitable treatment under the acts. It is evident that Beaufoy's strong feelings on the subject and other reform issues may have played a role in his desire to gain a Parliamentary seat. In a letter from his tutor, Dr. Andrew Kippis, recommending him for the general election of 1780, Beaufoy is described as "...a true friend to religious and civil liberty and wholly disapproves of the measures of the present administration."³⁵

It is uncertain when exactly Beaufoy became involved in the organized movement to repeal the acts, but it was his aforementioned tutor, Andrew Kippis, who headed a delegation to Prime Minister William Pitt the younger in 1787 to convince him to support repeal.³⁶ While British parliamentary politics of the late eighteenth century cannot be reduced to pure party or government affiliation, an issue like the repeal of the test acts was likely to be extremely divisive, given that it dealt with the established Church on whose existence many members of Parliament depended for their seats, as well as for their livelihood. The revocation of the tests acts may have been a popular enough cause in dissenting circles throughout the late eighteenth century, however, in the period 1787-90, when the issue was considered in Parliament, only six members of Parliament claimed to be dissenters.³⁷ In order to overcome their lack of numbers in Parliament the dissenters needed to raise a broad coalition of concerned MPs in order to secure the repeal of the acts. Prior to 1787, no Parliamentary measure had been successfully introduced for the purpose of repealing the test acts, so it is difficult to gauge Beaufoy's interest in the movement considering the lack of Parliamentary discussion.

³⁵ Namier & Brooke, p.72.

³⁶ *Idem*

³⁷ G.M. Ditchfield, "The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790," *The English Historical Review* 89 (Jul. 1974): p. 553.

However, it is certainly significant that it was Beaufoy whom the dissenting lobby asked in 1787 to propose a measure to repeal the test acts.³⁸

In late March 1787, in an apparently affecting and eloquent speech which does not survive, Beaufoy moved that the test acts be repealed.³⁹ While the test acts stood little chance of passing a House of Commons with few actual dissenters and with many more closely allied with the Church of England, the fact that such a motion was introduced did worry many conservative figures of the day.⁴⁰ Part of the reason for worry on the part of the Church party and royalists, including George III himself, was the friendship enjoyed between Beaufoy and Pitt. John Moore, the archbishop of Canterbury at the time, was concerned enough about the connection between Beaufoy and Pitt that he expressed his anxiety, about what course of action Pitt would take, to a member of the House of Lords.⁴¹ Even though Pitt and Beaufoy were friends, he was, in Wraxall's words, "...rather a friend than a follower of the minister," the same of course can be said of Pitt, who could never risk the anger of the established Church by voting for repeal.⁴² In fact, Pitt had surveyed the bishops of the Church of England in February of 1787 in order to gauge their opinion on the Test Acts. Only two bishops were in favor of repeal, the more notable of the two being Richard Watson, the bishop of Llandaff, a future founding member of the African Association whose name appears often in reforming

³⁸ Namier & Brooke, p. 73.

³⁹ Wraxall, Vol. 4, p. 436. Wraxall, a parliamentary contemporary of Beaufoy, had high praise for his speech, writing "I have indeed seen few more luminous displays intellect in Parliament."

⁴⁰ Ditchfield, pp. 551-4 contains a good assessment of contemporary opinion about the bill.

⁴¹ Ditchfield, p. 552. Moore writes "The Dissenters are about to move for repealing the Corporation and Test acts, which occasions much dilemma to the Minister [Pitt], for he must take a part. Beaufoy moves it, whence many suppose Mr. Pitt means to support it."

⁴² Wraxall Vol. 4, p. 139.

causes.⁴³ Despite Beaufoy's impassioned oratory, the 1787 motion was defeated 176 votes to 98, yet Beaufoy did not give up on his cause.

Twice more, in 1789 and 1790, Beaufoy was involved in the campaign to repeal the acts. In 1789, Beaufoy was again the mover of the motion, giving another impassioned speech filled with examples of how the dissenting community had come to the aid of England in her times of need. Beaufoy's criticism touched on all manner of points concerning religious liberty and, at the same time, points of religion itself. He was particularly incensed that the British government had subverted the Eucharist, by making it "...a qualification for gauging beer barrels and soapboilers' tubs; for writing custom house tickets and debentures, and for seizing smuggled tea."⁴⁴ This time around, Pitt again rallied his supporters and the measure was defeated again, much to the pleasure of George III who had declared in 1787: "I did not suppose that 98 persons could have been found there, willing to support so ill-advised a proposition."⁴⁵ When the motion was again brought up for a vote in 1790, this time by Charles Fox, but with Beaufoy playing a leading role, it was defeated by a large margin due to its lessening popularity in the wake of the French Revolution and the equation in England of radical causes with those of the revolution.

While Beaufoy's activity in opposition to the test acts was largely independent of his interest in Africa, the connections which he made in reform circles through his involvement in the dissenters' campaign were important in his later tenure with the Association. Among those who supported the repeal of the test acts were several future

⁴³ Ditchfield, p. 553,

⁴⁴ Henry Beaufoy, *The debate in the House of Commons, on Mr. Beaufoy's motion for the repeal of such parts of the Test and Corporation Acts as affect the Protestant Dissenters. On Friday the eighth of May, 1789*, (London : J. Johnson, 1789), p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ditchfield, p. 552. This time, however, the measure was only defeated by a 20 vote margin, 122-102.

members of the Association including Bishop Watson and William Smith MP, who was associated with Beaufoy in a newspaper article for being a “friend of repeal.”⁴⁶ Yet, despite these connections, it is also important to note Beaufoy’s brave independence in this matter. He was one of the few MPs closely aligned to Pitt to vote for repeal, and the fact that it was he who presented the measure speaks to both his personal connections with dissent and his deep personal feelings about religious liberty.⁴⁷ This ability to move across party lines according to personal conviction did not hurt Beaufoy in Pitt’s eyes, for, during the height of the test act debate, Pitt selected Beaufoy as Secretary of the Board of Control for the East India Company, and they continued to be allied during the same period on other legislation.⁴⁸ Thus, the importance of Beaufoy’s zealous pursuit of greater religious freedom lies in the greater context of his humanitarian resolve.

One of the most important pieces of legislation that demonstrated this resolve was the 1789 act introduced by Sir William Dolben to regulate the slave trade. While Beaufoy’s fame rests primarily on his speeches and impassioned work in spearheading the movement to repeal the test acts as well as on the various commercial measures that he supported, his involvement with the movement to abolish the slave trade is perhaps of greatest importance to this discussion. The origin of Beaufoy’s attachment to abolition is unknown, yet his connections to the Society of Friends must have played a role in this concern. Thanks to these connections, he often socialized with noted abolitionists and others who would become interested in the cause, including William Smith, Bishop

⁴⁶ Ditchfield, p. 562.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 560-3.

⁴⁸ John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Reluctant Transition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p.69. Ehrman has found a note in Pitt’s hand in the public record office written during the debate on the last repeal motion in 1790, in which the PM suggests Beaufoy for the East India position.

Watson, and William Wilberforce.⁴⁹ Further, his younger brother, the adventurer, amateur scientist, and Quaker, Mark Beaufoy was at least indirectly linked to abolition and was petitioned on the issue of abolition as early as 1773.⁵⁰ It is most likely that that the humanitarian outcry against the slave trade, begun by the Quakers and evangelicals of this time, appealed to Beaufoy's sense of justice and equity, which figured so prominently in his condemnation of the test acts. There is evidence that he had a good knowledge of the recent history of the slave trade, especially from one of his personal notebooks, in which he records the observations of other authors on the slave trade.⁵¹ In copying down these observations he took care to underline a particularly interesting passage about the dietary requirements of Africans on board slaving vessels and the subsequent deadly consequences of not providing a proper diet for African slaves.⁵²

Other than these connections, and a MS note of uncertain date, there is little evidence of his activity in the cause of abolition until 1788. This is partly due to the fact that the Abolition Committee, which was the predominant and most effective abolition group of the time, was not formed until 1787, and did not openly claim any MPs as members until 1788.⁵³ The only evidence for Beaufoy ever being an actual member of the

⁴⁹ William Smith was a Unitarian, opposer of the test acts, and an influential member of the Constitutional Information Society along with Beaufoy, Anstey, p. 261; Black, p. 215. Bishop Watson was a social acquaintance who supported the repeal of the test acts. William Wilberforce served on several committees with Beaufoy including as a governor on Beaufoy's "British Society for extending the fisheries", "Universal Register," Times [London], 15 Aug. 1786, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1975), p. 222.

⁵¹ The details of this notebook are discussed in Appx 1.

⁵² Beaufoy MS, pp. 106-7. The underlined section reads: "NB: A ship that loads 500 slaves should provide above 100,000 yams, for which however it is difficult to find stowage, as they take up a great deal of room; yet it is necessary to have that quantity, the slaves brought here [Bandi] being of such a constitution that no other food will keep them. Indian Corn, Beans, Mandioca or manioc disagreeing with their stomachs, so that they sicken & die as happened on board the Albion Frigate as soon as their yams was (sic) spent, which was the case at the end of the 1st fortnight. For all the ships that loaded Slaves, the Albion Frigate at Calabar lost some ½ or 2/3 of them before they reached Barbadoes."

⁵³ Anstey, p. 261.

committee is contained in Granville Sharp's introduction to the printed version of Beaufoy's 1788 speech in support of William Dolben's bill.⁵⁴ Otherwise, Beaufoy is mentioned in Thomas Clarkson's contemporary history of the abolition movement, and was generally acknowledged as a friend of abolition by virtue of his speeches and votes in favor of Dolben's 1788 measure to regulate the trade and the abolition bill of 1792.⁵⁵ While Beaufoy's abolition activities prior to 1788, if any, remain hidden, he certainly made his name known in abolition circles after this date, with his fervent support for Dolben's regulation proposal.

By early 1788, the Abolition committee had gained enough support to press their parliamentary supporters to raise the issue of ending the slave trade in Parliament. The Committee sent out delegations to canvass the country for witnesses to support a motion to end the trade and Wilberforce, among others, rallied his friends in Parliament to be prepared for an eventual vote. Finally, in May 1788, the parliamentary supporters of Abolition, including Prime Minister Pitt, brought the issue to the floor of the commons and secured a minor victory. Parliament voted without objection to consider Pitt's motion in the next session. Yet, as Anstey notes, the defenders of the trade offered little opposition knowing that their tactics could delay any action for a considerable period of

⁵⁴ Henry Beaufoy, *The speech of Mr. Beaufoy, Tuesday, the eighteenth June, 1788, in a committee of the whole House, on a bill for regulating the conveyance of negroes from Africa to the West-Indies. To which are added observations on the evidence adduced against the bill*, (London : J. Phillips, 1789). This edition of the speech contains an unpaginated introduction by Sharp, who was chairman of the Committee to abolish the slave trade. In the introduction he thanks the members of the society for allowing their speeches to be published by the committee. Beaufoy's speech is the first in the collection.

⁵⁵ Thomas Clarkson, *The history of the rise, progress, and accomplishment of the abolition of the African Slave-trade by the British parliament*, vol. 1, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), pp. 537-8. Clarkson refers to Beaufoy in several places in his history with a familiar manner but unfortunately gives few details about any earlier involvement in abolition.

time.⁵⁶ Yet, at the same time, many who had interests closely tied with slave trade also welcomed the inquiry, for it offered them an opportunity to present their own evidence in favor of its continuance.⁵⁷ Into this morass of parliamentary maneuvering, Sir William Dolben, one of the MPs from Oxford University, introduced a bill of his own. He proposed, not to rule on the legality or desirability of the slave trade, but rather to improve the immediate conditions on British slaving vessels. Dolben was an acquaintance of Wilberforce and friend of the Abolition Committee, who had accompanied other supporters of Pitt's motion to inspect a slave ship in the Thames shortly before the debate began.⁵⁸ His first-hand examination of the horrid conditions on the ship gave him the immediate cause and rhetorical ammunition to raise such a potentially divisive issue so near the end of a parliamentary session. Fortunately for Dolben, there was a broad base of support for his motion, and thanks to the evidence of depravation, disease, and maltreatment on board British slave ships, which he was able to accumulate, the bill passed the commons in the summer of 1788.

This debate, on whether or not the trade should be regulated, hinged on the testimony of expert witnesses and the rhetorical skills of those that questioned and interpreted their responses. It is unclear how closely Dolben and Beaufoy were connected prior to the introduction of this bill, as Dolben traditionally voted in favor of royalist and Church bills to which Beaufoy was traditionally opposed.⁵⁹ They were, however, appointed to serve together on the board of control of the East India Company in 1786,

⁵⁶ Anstey, p. 269. Anstey, pp. 265-281 contains a detailed account of parliamentary action on the slave trade 1788-91.

⁵⁷ James W. LoGerfo, "Sir William Dolben and 'the cause of humanity': the passage of the slave trade regulation act of 1788," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 6, no. 3 (1973): p. 435.

⁵⁸ LoGerfo, pp. 437-440 contains a good summary of what can be gleaned from contemporary records about Dolben's exposure to the abolition movement.

⁵⁹ LoGerfo, p. 438. Dolben followed long Oxford support for the established Church in voting against the repeal of the test acts.

and may have met earlier through social connections.⁶⁰ Whether or not they were close friends, Beaufoy offered his services in support of the bill and proceeded, along with William Smith, to bear the burden of cross-examining witnesses, an action which earned him much credit with his abolitionist associates, including Clarkson who praised him for his “conspicuous part” in effecting the passage of Dolben’s bill.⁶¹

After the introduction and examination of the witnesses on both sides, Beaufoy rose to give the final oration on behalf of the bill, which would set out strict provisions for how slaves were transported and treated while on British vessels from Africa to the West Indies. On June seventeenth 1788 he delivered his remarks and by the next week, the bill had secured enough support to pass the commons.⁶² Beaufoy’s speech was full of florid prose and is quite substantial in length, much longer, a contemporary noted, than the final oratory of his opponent on the issue, Lord Penrhyn.⁶³ He set out in his remarks to systematically examine the claims of the witnesses for the opposition, as to the relative comfort and happiness of slaves during their voyage across the Atlantic. He confronted the assertion of one witness that the Middle Passage was the “happiest period” in the life of a slave, citing testimony from the same witness and his compatriots that each slave was allowed five feet by sixteen inches on a typical slave vessel.⁶⁴ He also presented evidence, proudly extracted from a recalcitrant witness, to the effect that on one recent voyage, upwards of a third of both the sailors and the slaves on board had perished due

⁶⁰ *Times* [London], 17 Feb. 1786, p. 3.

⁶¹ Clarkson, v.1, p. 537. Clarkson also praised Beaufoy for his skills at cross-examination and his rhetorical energy.

⁶² Wraxall, v. 5, p. 142. Not all the credit can be given to Beaufoy for the bill’s passage, as Pitt used his substantial political clout to ensure that the recalcitrant members of his party voted for its passage.

⁶³ *Idem*

⁶⁴ Beaufoy *Conveyance*, pp. 9, 3.

to disease, accident, and other causes.⁶⁵ He went on in this rhetorical vein to describe the effects ship-board mortality rates, deemed trivial by some witnesses, would have on the population of England, declaring that in ten years the whole world would be depopulated given these mortality rates.⁶⁶ His opposition maintained that an MP could not possibly speculate on the feelings of the slaves during their sea journey, and further that "...the circumstances of the voyage are not inconsistent with their comfort and happiness," given the "hardening influence of the African sun."⁶⁷ To refute this general attitude, Beaufoy demonstrated his liberal humanitarianism with a brief satiric discourse on universal human liberty,

...if a man, be his complexion what it may...be violently wrenched from his native soil his suffering must be great; and that that if to these afflictions be added the permanent loss of freedom, his misery must be intense...I should almost be tempted to conclude from the evidence presented at the bar, that the fetters on the hands and feet of the Africans...are intended to check the wild expressions of tumultuous and frantic joy, rather than to counteract the gloomy purposes of despair.⁶⁸

While his speech focused primarily on undermining the arguments of those who would resist regulation of the trade, he also made clear his true position on the trade in general. Near the end of his oratory, he set out several suggestions as to how abolition

⁶⁵ Beaufoy *Conveyance*, pp. 4-5. The ship in question, the "Tartar" did indeed lose the numbers suggested by Beaufoy.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8. He uses the figure of 43 deaths in a hundred per voyage as a "comparatively low" figure to demonstrate his depopulation argument.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9. Beaufoy quotes the opposing counsel: "You form your opinion of the feelings of the Negroes by those that belong to yourselves; a mistaken and impossible task: for though in their situation you might be miserable, yet to them the circumstance of the voyage are not inconsistent with comfort and happiness."

⁶⁸ *Idem*

might be satisfactorily accomplished. He suggested that provincial assemblies would be well equipped to handle to dismemberment of the trade, notably in the area of encouraging higher survival and reproduction rates for slaves already in the West Indies as well as by levying taxes on every new slave imported.⁶⁹ He ended his argument with this assertion: “To the provincial assemblies who shall thus destroy the asserted necessity, and therefore the traffic in human beings, immortal honor will be due.”⁷⁰

This impassioned speech before the assembled House impressed contemporaries with its concern for the condition of the Africans involved in the trade and the “rights of humanity.” Yet, it did earn him some contemptuous sneers from his opposition who felt that he unwisely downplayed the threat played by commercial rival France if the British slave trade were restricted. Beaufoy asserted in his speech that the slave trade would not last long among the French, and in remarks made after his speech, went so far as to claim that “its existence amongst the French cannot long be perpetuated...two of her most enlightened ministers Turgot and Necker have recorded their detestation of its cruelty and guilt.”⁷¹ This thinly veiled jab at those un-enlightened enough to support the slave trade is a good indicator of Beaufoy’s strong feelings in regards to abolition as opposed to mere regulation, a conviction which he was to affirm when abolition itself finally came before the House in 1791-2.

After Dolben’s bill was successfully passed in 1788, it took more than three years of Parliamentary wrangling before a vote could be attempted on the issue of abolition itself. The machinations that brought about the vote seem to have little to do with

⁶⁹ Beaufoy *Conveyance*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ *Idem*

⁷¹ Wraxall, v. 5, p. 142. In an interesting sidenote, Beaufoy shows his radical stripes in this verbal exchange with Lord Penrhyn and the opposition, as he asserts (almost a year before the Bastille) “Is he [Lord P] ignorant that at this very hour the voice of freedom has penetrated the recesses of Versailles.”

Beaufoy, who was secretary of the East India Board of Control and also secretary of the African Association during this period. However, his interest in supporting abolition does not appear to have waned at this time, as he also served as the chairman of the House committee to “consider further the measures to be taken for the abolition of the trade carried on by British subjects for the purpose of securing slaves from Africa.”⁷² While this role as chairman was largely symbolic, he almost certainly voted for abolition as stipulated by the committee he chaired:

“That, from, and after a Time to be limited, it shall not be lawful to carry any African Negro from the Coast of Africa, or any African Negro from the Coast of Africa, or any African or Creole Slave from any of His Majesty's Islands or Plantations in the West Indies, to any of the Dominions of any Foreign Power, in any Ship owned or navigated by British Subjects.”⁷³

After this bill failed, there is little to document any further involvement Beaufoy may have had with abolition before his death in 1795.

However, Beaufoy’s connections with abolition suggest a jumping off point to explain one possible reason for his interest in the African Association. Beaufoy’s passion for dissenting causes led him into conversation with some of the leading radical and humanitarian figures of the day, his esteemed oratory and noted independence in Parliament gained him the respect of Pitt and other figures in the upper echelons of British society, and his involvement with abolition connected him with Africa in a direct way.

⁷² *Commons Journals*, v. 47, p. 755. This committee was at least extant in 1791-2.

⁷³ *Commons Journals*, v. 47, p. 755; Clarkson, v. 2, p. 451 contains high praise for Beaufoy’s involvement in this committee. However due to the lack of documentation as noted in Anstey, pp. 282-4 it cannot be absolutely verified that he voted for the bill.

Chapter III

Beaufoy and the Rationale for the

African Association

On June 9 1788 a collection of gentleman, known as the Saturday's club, met at the St. Alban's Tavern in Pall Mall and resolved to form a novel society, to be known as the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa. This association, complete with charter, officers, and regular dues, would have as its purpose the gathering of knowledge about parts of Africa hitherto unknown by Europeans. This group of gentleman included some of the best known figures in contemporary politics and science and it is no surprise that they chose Africa to be their target of inquiry. The eighteenth century had seen explosion of popular interest in Africa, largely through the proliferation of travelers' accounts of the continent and the enthusiasm for exploration engendered in the wake of James Cook's expeditions in the 1760's and 70's. However, the century had seen almost no new valuable information on Africa reported and the men gathered at St. Alban's were acutely aware of this problem. While European voyages to the south and west coasts of Africa had long been fairly regular occurrences, little was known of the regions only 100 miles inland. It was to the end of expanding European, and more specifically British, knowledge of inland areas that the Association dedicated itself. The Association's plans for exploration would be long range and ambitious, encompassing nearly all of Africa.

That many in elite Britain had a knowledge of and interest in Africa during the second half of the eighteenth century can be attested to by the sheer volume of African travel narratives and Africa related materials published and purchased. Several

collections of travelers' accounts became must-haves in any gentlemanly library, most notably Thomas Astley's 1745-7 volumes which collected material from dozens of earlier English and other European sources. Interest in African exploration was not restricted to expensive multi-volume works; a number of less costly and more abridged collections were published in the later half of the eighteenth century for the growing merchant class.⁷⁴ Beaufoy himself owned the Astley collection and dozens of other narratives of European expeditions to Africa in several languages and took copious notes on their contents.⁷⁵ However, while each of the voyages contained in these collections brought back new information about a particular part of the coast or even the course of a river, such as the Gambia, almost every scrap of information about the interior of the western Sudan came from one of only a few sources. Whether in Astley's collection, Jean Baptiste Labat's 1728 series on West Africa, or any number of other travel accounts, many details about the interior were derived from the works of long-dead Leo Africanus and the Sherif al-Idrisi. These writers, living in the 16th and 12th centuries respectively, had related stories of vast wealth and sophistication in inner Africa. Yet, their information was hundreds of years old, if accurate at all, and the lack of geographical precision in their works offered little to the eighteenth century scientific geographer. The Association's founding statement laid out this problem

...the circle of our knowledge with respect to Asia and America is gradually extending itself, and advancing towards perfection...

⁷⁴ Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa to 1815* (New York and Washington: Frederick Praeger, 1963), pp. 40-1; Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 11-13.

⁷⁵ A list of these publications appears in Beaufoy's MS notebook; see the Appendix.

But notwithstanding the progress of discovery on the coasts and borders of the vast continent, the map of its interior is still but a wide extended blank, on which the geographer, on the authority of Leo Africanus, and of the Xeriff Edrissi the Nubian author, has traced with a hesitating hand, a few names of unexplored rivers and of uncertain nations.⁷⁶

The lack of geographical information in Europe about inner Africa was certainly fairly complete, yet this had been true for centuries, why then did the Association find its start in 1788 rather than 100 years earlier?

One factor, which almost every scholar who has examined the Association has cited as the primary cause for its foundation, was the rise of scientific exploration and scientific interest in the climate of eighteenth century Enlightenment Europe. Linnaeus, the legendary Swedish botanist, is often credited with starting this trend towards scientific exploration, as he commissioned his best students to travel the world in search of new species, some of whom made it as far as Syria, South Africa, China, and Java.⁷⁷ Even more than Linnaeus, it was the Cook expedition of 1767 that brought scientific and geographical exploration to the attention of every literate Briton. One of the great successes of the expedition was the scientific work done by Linnaean disciple and founding treasurer of the African Association, Joseph Banks. Banks, who figures prominently in any account of the Association, became famous for his zeal in identifying new plant and animal species on his trip around the globe. This interest in botany soon intertwined with exploration, and throughout his life Banks commissioned scientific

⁷⁶ Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, *Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa*, 2 vols, (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1810), p. 7. Idrisi was Moroccan not “Nubian” – his geography was published in Latin in 1619.

⁷⁷ Hallett *Penetration*, p. 151-2; A.A Boahen, “The African Association 1788-1805.” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* V (1961): pp. 48-51.

expeditions to far-flung locales including Africa.⁷⁸ The majority of the founding members of the Association, including Beaufoy, were members of the Royal Society and others were known for their botanical or agricultural interests. Thus, it seems likely that one of the reasons that the Association was founded when it was, and why it was able to find a good number of members willing to part with five guineas a year, was due to the contemporary popularity of scientific exploration.

Though the possibility of finding new plant species must have excited some members of the Association, the majority were probably more excited by the prospect of new geographic and political information about the interior of Africa. The last significant European expedition into West Africa was undertaken in the 1730's by a merchant in the Royal African Company who wrote about his travels on the Gambia, but even he relied on extracts from Leo and Idrisi to add details to his book.⁷⁹ More recently, in 1773, James Bruce, a Scottish gentleman with an interest in languages, had returned from a successful journey to the source of the Nile in Ethiopia. While he had reached the source of the much shorter Blue Nile and while he was not even the first European to do so, it was still a remarkable accomplishment, one mentioned specifically in the founding statement of the Association.⁸⁰ The controversy and excitement generated by his expedition must surely have contributed to the sense that Africa was the next great area for European exploration.⁸¹ In fact, the Bruce expedition is cited by Beaufoy as a hopeful omen the

⁷⁸ Robin Hallett, ed. *Records of the African Association 1788-1831*, (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), p. 13, 274. Banks sent Francis Masson to South Africa in 1772, William Brass to the Gold Coast in 1780, and Afzelius to Sierra Leone in 1792 – and received an offer from Paul Isert to explore the interior from the Gold Coast in 1785.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45. His name was Francis Moore and his *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* was published in 1738.

⁸⁰ *Proceedings* 1810, p. 7. In short titles *Proceedings 1810* refers to vol. 1

⁸¹ There was fierce debate about the veracity of Bruce's account, few believed his story completely and others doubted that he ever journeyed past Cairo.

Association, in that his journey proved that a lone man could successfully accomplish substantial African exploration.⁸² And, as European government's of the eighteenth century did not often support African expeditions, any lone explorer would have to be well supported and financed. This emphasis on the interior of Africa as the last frontier for British exploration, as well as the Association's bold plan to fund a series of explorers must surely have attracted the attention of a significant number of the most involved gentleman of the time.

Yet, Beaufoy's own life and career (as well as those of other members of the Association) exhibit certain commonalities of interest other than geography. In particular, some commentators on the Association have pointed to the abolitionist and humanitarian interests of certain members of the Association as being significant clues as to the reason the Association was founded. While the Association grew out of the extant Saturday's club, it is probably significant that in the spring of 1788 the issue of African exploration was raised and a society devoted to such endeavors. For several members of the club, including Beaufoy, were then engaged in the Parliamentary debate surrounding William Dolben's bill to regulate the slave trade. In the week prior to their June 9 meeting, the parliamentarians in the club had heard arguments from opponents of the bill, as well as slave traders themselves, stating again that "the Middle Passage was the happiest part of a slave's life."⁸³ In a week's time Beaufoy would give a speech in support of the bill challenging the slave traders' assertions. In the meantime however, he and the eleven other members of the Saturday's Club concluded, that, in regards to Africa, "the map of its interior is still but a wide extended blank," and resolved to rectify this through

⁸² *Proceedings* 1810, p. 8.

⁸³ Logerfo, p. 443.

privately financed expeditions. While the precedent for such an association as well as the state of African exploration has been discussed earlier, the motives of the Association and its members remains much more obscure.

Considering the role that radical politics and abolition played in Beaufoy's professional life it is perhaps useful to discuss how typical this was of the other founding members of the Association. Beaufoy's interest in African matters and African exploration, while firmly grounded in commercial and scientific interest, undoubtedly also had a humanitarian component. As few of his letters have been published, we must rely on the official reports of the African Association, which until 1795 were written by Beaufoy, for insight into any connection he might have perceived between abolition, humanitarianism in general, and African exploration.

The best evidence of this comes from the first published proceedings of the Association in which Beaufoy sets out some of the benefits which might result from exploration sponsored by the Association. Amidst a long discussion of mercantile and scientific benefits, Beaufoy included this rather general statement about the purpose of exploration "...the energies of the cultivated mind, and the elevation of the human character, may in some degree be imparted to nations hitherto consigned to hopeless barbarism and uniform contempt."⁸⁴ While this reference does contain general humanitarian sentiments towards African depredations, it does not offer any firm evidence that Beaufoy shared the same sincere evangelical ambitions for the people of Africa as Granville Sharp and other abolitionists.⁸⁵ It must be remembered however, that

⁸⁴ Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, *Proceedings of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa*, (London: C. Macrae, 1790), p. 207.

⁸⁵ Curtin, pp. 105-6. All of his chapter four contains a good discussion of some of the earliest European missionary ambitions in West Africa.

Beaufoy was deeply committed to Enlightenment ideas, and thus any endeavor, however commercial on its face, would surely also have humanitarian significance. While preparation for his support of the Dolben bill probably led Beaufoy to take an immediate look at the information available on Africa, it seems abolitionist interests were probably not paramount in Beaufoy's mind when he helped found the Association. It is notable that gleaning information on the slave trade was not part of the mission of any of the early explorers whom Beaufoy recommended to the Association.⁸⁶

In contrast, William Wilberforce, who became a member of the Association at Beaufoy's invitation, actively used travelers' reports from Africa to bolster the case for abolition. Wilberforce kept track of travel narratives that proved one or more of his abolition debating points, such as his assertion that the slave trade "corrupted morals" in Africa or that slaves were treated worse in the West Indies than in Africa.⁸⁷ Despite the lack of evidence for the direct influence of abolitionist sentiment in the official undertakings of the Association, the fact remains that four of the fifteen founding members of the Association, including Beaufoy, were ardent abolitionists. The three abolitionists besides Beaufoy were Richard Watson, who was also a supporter of the repeal of the test acts, the Earl of Carysfort, who was an evangelical Irish lord, and the Earl of Galloway, also an evangelical abolitionist.⁸⁸ Yet, at least two of Association's officers in the 1790's were ardent anti-abolitionists, Sir William Young and Bryan

⁸⁶ While some of the early explorers sent by the Association incidentally collected information about the trans-Saharan slave-trade, it is clear that this information was not the purpose of the expeditions.

⁸⁷ Homer Vincent Rutherford, "Sir Joseph Banks and the Exploration of Africa, 1788 to 1820," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1952), p. 148.

⁸⁸ Hallett, pp. 288-299 (in short titles "Hallett" refers to his *Records*); Rutherford, p. 149 cites the Earl of Moira and Joseph Banks as abolitionists, however, in 1806 Wilberforce doubted Moira's support for abolition (Anstey, pp. 361-2) and Banks maintained a skeptical attitude about abolition, at one point stating that slaves were better off in the West Indies than in Africa (Boahen *African Association*, p. 45).

Edwards.⁸⁹ If anything, the inclusion of these two opponents of abolition indicates, that the Association was a society with diverse enough interests that it lacked the kind of partisanship that one would find in a society rooted in something as controversial as ending the slave trade.⁹⁰

In fact the idea that the Association was founded primarily for anti-slavery and humanitarian reasons has been rarely espoused and has been challenged quite vociferously on occasion. However, it is possible that the commercial goals of the Association were embraced by its abolitionist and humanitarian members because of the growing movement to establish “legitimate commerce” in Africa as a way to combat slavery and spread European civilization.⁹¹ The Sierra Leone Company, perhaps the first example of British efforts to establish legitimate commerce was founded contemporaneously with the Association, and had on its board of directors several members of the Association. However, neither Banks nor Beaufoy were among the nearly 2,000 subscribers to the company.⁹² While Beaufoy’s failure to join Wilberforce, Sharp, and others as subscribers is significant, the Association did occasionally correspond with the Sierra Leone company, especially in regards to the occasional expeditions launched by the company into the interior.⁹³ It is unclear why Beaufoy did not involve himself in the Sierra Leone venture, but he surely must have welcomed their idea of opening up greater trade with Africa. For it was Beaufoy, who, through writing the proposal for the

⁸⁹ Rutherford, p. 149; Boahen *African Association*, pp. 45-6 makes much of the anti-abolition stance of these two who served as officers (1796-1807) well after the founding of the Association.

⁹⁰ In comparison, the Sierra Leone Association, which was rooted in evangelical and anti-slave trade sentiment, would not have attracted such a broad base of support. Curtin, ch. 4. esp. pp. 100-105.

⁹¹ A.A. Boahen argues strenuously against any attempt to paint the Association in a humanitarian or abolitionist light in his 1961 article as well as his 1964 monograph *Britain, The Sahara, and the Western Sudan 1788-186* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 1-6.

⁹² Hallett *Penetration*, pp. 272-4.

⁹³ *Idem*

Association and in helping steer its course, gave the Association its dual mandates of commerce and geography.

The problems of geography and African exploration up to 1788 having been already considered, it is important to take a brief look at some of the commercial reasons for the Association's founding. While the slave trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas is perhaps the best known inter-continental trade, trade in other goods between Europe and Africa was just as old and in some cases more valuable. Gold had long been an export of West Africa, either across the Sahara in the middle ages or via the coast after the 16th century. In the seventeenth century the English gold trade in West Africa outvalued that of the slave trade, and even in Beaufoy's time there was a gold trade, though seriously diminished.⁹⁴ Numerous other products were regularly acquired from Africa in the years prior to the Association's founding, and the Association's own reports speak of ships trading to the Gambia for beeswax, senna, and ivory. Yet, while too much can be made of the lust for gold on the part of the Association and its more commercially-minded members, the apparent presence of the metal in the interior certainly generated great interest in the work of the Association. Perhaps for this reason, the founding resolution of the Association provides for secrecy on the part of its members upon "...the receipt of any interesting intelligence" about the interior.⁹⁵ Further, the Association was able to gain members and valuable subscription fees through the commercial appeal of the interior, mostly through the promise of plentiful gold in exchange for goods. In the first published report of the Association's expeditions in 1790, Beaufoy writes

⁹⁴ On the seventeenth century gold trade: Richard Bean, "A Note on the Relative Importance of Slaves and Gold in West Africa," *Journal of African History* 15 (1974), pp. 351-53.

⁹⁵ *Proceedings* 1810, p. 11.

...their mines of gold (the improveable possessions of many of the inland states) will furnish to an unknown, and probably boundless extent, an article that commands, in all the markets of the civilized world, a constant and unlimited sale.⁹⁶

Even those interested in the full array of commercial possibilities presented by the opening of the interior to trade, often returned to gold as the basis for their interest. Sir John Sinclair, a founding member of the Association recalled

On Saturday the African Club dined at the St. Alban's Tavern. There were a number of articles from the interior parts of Africa, which may turn out very important in a commercial view; as gums, pepper, &c...If we could get our manufactures into that country [Timbukto specifically] we should soon have gold enough.⁹⁷

Yet, while there were a few members of mercantile persuasion in the Association, including perhaps Beaufoy, who briefly ran his family's vinegar concern, the vast majority of the members, including Sinclair, possessed immense wealth and had little knowledge of the intimacies of international trade. Making any suggestion that the members were interested in direct investment to exploit vast goldfields somewhat implausible. It seems, rather, that the Association urgently wished to open up British trade with the interior for national and political reasons rather than for any direct prospect of profit. The parliamentarians and aristocrats in the Association well realized the problems facing British trade and perhaps anticipated the great cost of any war with France and thus wished to foster such a valuable trade through the best way they knew,

⁹⁶ *Proceedings* 1790, p. 204.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Anthony Sattin, *The Gates of Africa* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), p. 87.

exploration. Those, who like Beaufoy were abolitionists and reformers, could hope to foster legitimate trade in the interior, which might have a civilizing effect on the interior. Perhaps no better proof can be offered for this than Beaufoy's closing remarks on what he hopes the effects of commerce with Africa might be

...and while the contemplation of national interests, and of the still more extended interests of philosophy, directs their efforts [the Association's] and animates their hopes, they cannot be indifferent to the reflection that in pursuit of these advantages...the conveniences of civil life, the benefits of the mechanic and manufacturing arts, the attainments of science, the energies of the cultivated mind, and the elevation of the human character, may in some degree be imparted to nations hitherto consigned to hopeless barbarism and uniform contempt.⁹⁸

Thus, while gaining commercial benefit for Britain may have been one of the most important goals of the Association, its members had various reasons for pursuing this commercial agenda.

Yet, despite the varying reasons given for the founding of the Association and the possible motivations of many of its most famous members, whether scientific, geographic, humanitarian, commercial, or some convoluted mixture of the above, perhaps the only true test of the Association's aims is to examine the expeditions themselves.

⁹⁸ *Proceedings* 1790, pp. 204-5.

Chapter IV

The First Expeditions

The Association for Promoting the Exploration of the Interior parts of Africa was founded on June 9, 1788 and the first meeting of the committee was convened as soon as the thirteenth.⁹⁹ While there was clearly much enthusiasm for African exploration among the founders of the Association, the initial membership of the Association, as seen above, was quite small and its methods of achieving its goals quite vague. Thus it is amazing that in just its first seven years the Association was able to marshal the resources and recruit the travelers to fulfill its mission of exploration.

The subject of the first Committee meeting was the prospect of the Association's first explorer. Simon Lucas, an interpreter in the Royal court, offered his services as a traveler to the Association if he could maintain his £80 a year pension. Hallett mentions that Lucas was the son of a London wine-merchant, who may have known Beaufoy through family connections. Otherwise it is unknown how Lucas could have possibly offered his services so soon after the formation of the Association.¹⁰⁰ In any event, the committee resolved that Banks should entreat the Secretary of State to obtain for Lucas a leave of absence with pension from his court position. By the seventeenth Banks had already contacted the Secretary of State (Lord Sydney) who promised that the issue would be brought to the King's attention.¹⁰¹ In the meantime, the committee resolved to sponsor an expedition by Lucas into North Africa by way of Tripoli and agreed to raise quite substantial funds to facilitate his journey. They allotted Lucas £100 in order to

⁹⁹ Hallett, p. 26, 48. This meeting like many other committee meetings was held at Sir Joseph Banks's house.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49. Most of the information cited here is from the minute books of the Association reproduced in Hallett.

purchase “Presents for the Bashaw of Tripoli and his court, as well as to defray the expense of traveling to that place,” and in addition they gave him permission to draw up to £250 upon the Association while in North Africa.¹⁰² Lucas’s background was fairly remarkable. Training to be a merchant in Cadiz, he was captured and enslaved in North Africa where he learned Arabic and formed a variety of friendships with local notables. On his release he became a British diplomat to the Moroccan court, the same place where he had been enslaved. He later returned to England to become a court translator and due to his connections and knowledge of the “manners, customs, and language of the Arabs,” he seemed like a good choice for a fact finding mission to North Africa.¹⁰³ The rapid decisions by the committee and the large sums offered to Lucas indicate how ambitious, eager, and optimistic the Association was in its early days, as the Association’s annual dues were only five guineas and substantial additional support would have to be received from the membership in order to pay for such a journey.

In a surfeit of good luck, by the seventeenth of June, little more than a week after the founding of the Association, a second traveler had been found to launch a concurrent expedition. While Lucas may have been Beaufoy’s connection, John Ledyard was brought to the Association by Joseph Banks. John Ledyard was born in Connecticut, attended Dartmouth College briefly, lived with the Iroquois briefly, served in the Royal Marines briefly, was on board ship with Banks on the famous Cook expedition in the late 1770’s, had crossed the entire length of Eurasia from Paris to Siberia over several years,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰³ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 20-21.

and had arrived in London in 1788 just in time for an expedition to Africa.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Ledyard was a friend and acquaintance of Thomas Jefferson, then resident in Paris and the two corresponded even after Ledyard reached Africa.¹⁰⁵ Ledyard, while an extraordinary adventurer, had almost no financial resources to his name, and as such had taken the liberty of drawing sums of money while in Russia on Joseph Banks's name without Banks's knowledge.¹⁰⁶ When Ledyard confronted Banks and confessed to his financial irresponsibility, Banks seems to have taken no offense and instead gave him a letter of introduction to Beaufoy. Beaufoy writes in the *Proceedings* of the Association, published in 1790, of his first encounter with Ledyard:

Before I had learnt from the note the name and business of my visitor, I was struck with the manliness of his person, the breadth of his chest, the openness of his countenance, and the inquietude of his eye. I opened the map of Africa before him, and tracing a line from Cairo to Sennar, and from thence westward in latitude and supposed direction of the Niger, I told him, that was his route, by which I was anxious that Africa might, if possible, be explored. He said, he should think himself singularly fortunate to be entrusted with the adventure. I asked him, when he would set out? "Tomorrow morning" was his answer.¹⁰⁷

While this was written after Ledyard's death and may be somewhat eulogistic it does show both Beaufoy's direct involvement with the expedition as well as his flowery yet highly readable writing style. Of course, Ledyard was also advanced money, although

¹⁰⁴ Larzer Ziff, *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing 1780-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), Chap. 1; *Proceedings* 1790, pp. 14-20; An excerpt from Beaufoy's biographical description of Ledyard can be found, interestingly enough, in the *New Hampshire Magazine* June 1793.

¹⁰⁵ *The Jeffersonian Cyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Collection of the Views of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), no. 4562.

¹⁰⁶ *Idem*

¹⁰⁷ *Proceedings* 1790, pp. 16-17.

through a rather more complicated system than Lucas. It is remarkable that an Association, no more than two weeks old, was able to entreat its members to contribute to the cause so immediately. In all, by the end of the month, £430 had been raised for the two expeditions.¹⁰⁸ A great deal of this was Beaufoy's own money, as he paid 50 guineas with the other members of the committee for the Lucas expedition and then advanced 30 guineas to Ledyard upon their first meeting.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the final resolution setting out the breakdown of funds to be available to Ledyard was passed at a committee meeting on June 26 attended by only Beaufoy and Banks.¹¹⁰ Regardless of forebodings of financial management troubles to come, the Association's first month was an incredible success – Ledyard left for Cairo on the thirtieth of June and Lucas for Tripoli soon after him (although delayed by illness until the sixth of August). Expectations must then have been high for these first two attempts at exploring the African interior.

Before examining the outcome of the expeditions, it is worthwhile to examine the exact tasks that Ledyard and Lucas were assigned. As mentioned above, the Association knew from other accounts that caravan routes stretched across the Sahara from the kingdoms of West Africa to the Mediterranean. In their consideration of Lucas, the Committee reasoned that his knowledge of Arabic and coastal North Africa would allow him to penetrate to one of the main caravan depots in the interior and there learn of the more interior districts by interrogating merchants and traders.¹¹¹ Though Fezzan, a few hundred miles south of the Mediterranean, is given as the site from which he would collect his intelligence and transmit it to London, the Association had somewhat more

¹⁰⁸ *Proceedings* 1790, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Hallett, p. 50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1

¹¹¹ *Proceedings* 1810, p. 22.

grandiose plans for Lucas once this data gathering was done. The Committee decided that after Fezzan Lucas was to make his way home "...by way of the Gambia, or by that of the coast of Guinea."¹¹² Thus, even in their well-reasoned plan of intelligence gathering the Association displayed some of its flair for the adventurous and the ill-conceived (although they most certainly had no conception of how far removed were Fezzan and the Gambia). If this plan was a bit ambitious, then Ledyard's mission was close to impossible. Given his well known prowess as a daring sojourner, Ledyard was given the task of following Bruce's footsteps up the Nile to Darfour and Abyssinia. He was then instructed to take a quick jog over to Mecca where he would inquire after Muslim traders headed for West Africa - whom he would then join for the trip across the breadth of Africa.¹¹³ Given that little was known about relative distances in the interior of Africa at the time, the fact that some West Africans did make the Hajj to Mecca, and the fact that Ledyard had traversed the entire Eurasian land mass by himself, this plan of action would not have seemed quite as farfetched as it does in today's light.

Nonetheless, Ledyard arrived at the British consulate in Cairo with little chance of succeeding in his task. After a stop in Paris where he saw Jefferson, Ledyard arrived in Cairo on the nineteenth of August 1788 and immediately began, with the help of the British and Venetian consuls, to gather information on all matter of topics. In his dispatches to Beaufoy that were later printed in the *Proceedings* of the Association he offers a great number of cultural, political, and economic observations based on his meanderings through the marketplaces and interviews with traders and caravan leaders. Ledyard noted the names and approximate locations of several kingdoms and obtained

¹¹² *Proceedings* 1810, p. 22.

¹¹³ Hallett, pp. 49-50; *Proceedings* 1810, pp.23-26

rough information on the travel time of caravans from Cairo to other parts of Africa, but little of groundbreaking importance.¹¹⁴ On several occasions, in October 1788, Ledyard attempted to gain passage with caravans headed south for Sennar but each time the caravan was delayed or other problems interfered.¹¹⁵ Finally, at some point in early November, Ledyard began suffering from “a bilious complaint,” his letters ceased to arrive in London, and news soon reached the Association that he had died of an overdose of vitriol taken as a medicine.¹¹⁶ Beaufoy did little in his report to the Association to disguise the “severe disappointment” of the Committee that this expedition had failed, although Beaufoy did include praise for Ledyard’s resourcefulness and character, at the end of his report.¹¹⁷ However, a much dimmer view was taken of the utility of the information that Ledyard did convey, as Beaufoy wrote in the *Proceedings* “...preceding travelers have obtained whatever knowledge, either ancient or modern, the lower Egypt affords, Mr. Beaufoy observes that his [Ledyard’s], descriptions generally speaking would add but little to the instruction which other narratives convey.”¹¹⁸ This disappointment was probably tempered somewhat by the fact that Lucas had just arrived in Tripoli on October 25th and was beginning his mission.

Due to illness, Lucas was not able to leave England until much later than Ledyard but once in Tripoli Lucas was able to take advantage of much more powerful connections than Ledyard had in Cairo. Having known both the English consul in Tripoli and the

¹¹⁴ Hallett, pp.60-1 discusses some of the places and kingdoms cited by Ledyard including Wangara, Sennar, and Darfur.

¹¹⁵ Ledyard’s correspondence had difficulty reaching London although he apparently wrote Jefferson at this time. In a letter from 1789, Jefferson wrote “My last accounts of Ledyard were from Grand Cairo. He has just been plunging into the unknown regions of Africa, probably never to emerge again.” *Jefferson*, No. 4563.

¹¹⁶ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 43-46.

¹¹⁷ *Idem*

¹¹⁸ *Proceedings* 1790, p. 30.

Tripoline foreign minister when they had been in London, Lucas was granted an almost immediate audience with the Bashaw to discuss his travel plans.¹¹⁹ At this audience, Lucas presented the ruler with a set of silver pistols, undoubtedly bought with Association funds, after which he mentioned his desire to visit Fezzan. According to his account sent back to Beaufoy and published in the *Proceedings*, the Bashaw was surprised by this request, as he believed that the journey to Fezzan "...had never been attempted by a Christian." In response, Lucas shied away from stating his purpose as given by the Association, instead stating that "...he had heard of various Roman antiquities in different parts of the kingdom."¹²⁰ Satisfied, the Bashaw promised Lucas safe passage. Unfortunately for Lucas and for the Association, a revolt in the hinterland of Tripoli threatened the caravan routes to Fezzan and Lucas was informed that he could not travel safely until an army was raised and so, much like Ledyard, Lucas was doomed to wait until such a party could be formed.

Fortunately for Lucas, a party of distinguished merchants arrived from Fezzan and offered to escort him on their return journey. These merchants, whom Beaufoy and Lucas referred to as Shereefs because of their title,¹²¹ attempted to secure permission to take Lucas with them as a kind of present to the ruler of Fezzan, who according to the Shereefs, had never seen a Christian.¹²² After much wrangling with the Bashaw over the risks involved in traveling through the restless countryside, it was agreed that Lucas could travel safely with the Shereefs' caravan. Held up for almost four months, Lucas finally set out for Fezzan in early February 1789; his journey, however, was short lived.

¹¹⁹ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 47-52

¹²⁰ *Idem*

¹²¹ Sheref or Sharif in today's spelling means both a descendant of the prophet, specifically a member of some ruling families in North Africa who claim such descent.

¹²² *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 47-52.

After taking the coastal road some 100 miles and arriving at a depot at the head of the Fezzan road, he was informed that there were not enough camels to make the journey due to the revolt.¹²³ However, all was not lost, and even though Lucas himself would never reach Fezzan, he was enterprising enough to interrogate one of his traveling companions, the Shereef Imhammed. According to Lucas, the Shereef had been an agent of the king of Fezzan dealing in slaves in Bornu and other southern states and thus possessed a wealth of knowledge on all manner of geographical, economic, and anthropological subjects. During the long wait for the rebellion to cease, Lucas recorded much of what the Shereef reported, transmitting the information back to Beaufoy and the Association.¹²⁴ After spending over two months collecting intelligence, Lucas left Tripoli in April 1789 arriving in London in July. While neither Lucas or Ledyard even approached their intended goals and while the Association had spent over £400 in its first nine months for ineffectual expeditions, both men had found a much cheaper source of information about the interior which could be used to aid future expeditions, namely the knowledge of local merchants, officials, and travelers.

While Lucas made his way back to London, an announcement was placed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of London by the Association in an attempt to put the best possible face on the disappointing results of the Ledyard and Lucas expeditions. The announcement read in part:

A general meeting of the subscribers to the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was held at the St. Alban's Tavern, when an account...of the interesting intelligence which had been received in the course

¹²³ *Proceedings* 1810., pp. 74-6

¹²⁴ *Idem*

of it, particularly from the late Mr. Ledyard, was submitted to the their consideration. By this intelligence every doubt is removed of the practicability of the object for which the society was instituted; and as several persons have offered themselves as candidates to succeed the late Mr. Ledyard...there is reason to suppose, that the knowledge already obtained will soon be followed by more extensive discoveries.¹²⁵

While not supported by evidence, this optimistic announcement may have led to one of the Association's greatest successes. For, a month later, a new source of information on the interior of Africa appeared. In June 1789, an English merchant with North African connections brought a knowledgeable Moroccan trader by the name of Said Aben Ali to the attention of the Association.¹²⁶ Ben Ali, as he was referred to by the Association, proved to be an invaluable source of intelligence on all manner of commercial and geographic issues. The Committee, consisting of only Banks, Beaufoy and Lord Rawdon, on this occasion, was impressed by Ali's claim to have traveled extensively in the interior of Africa, including several trips to Bornu and Timbuktu.¹²⁷ The first idea of the Committee in regards to Ali was to fund a trade expedition into the interior with Ali as a guide for suitable European explorers.¹²⁸ To this end, Ali was given a rather generous allowance of £3 a week and it was resolved that an additional £300 was to be spent on buying trade goods for the expedition. This expedition was planned to proceed on very different lines than the previous Ledyard and Lucas fiascos. First, the expedition would not start from a well-known North African locale but via the Gambia

¹²⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine* May 1789 p. 569, quoted in Sattin, pp. 63-4.

¹²⁶ Hallett, pp.70-1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2. For convenience sake the variant spellings of African locations have been standardized where their reference is clear.

¹²⁸ *Idem*

river.¹²⁹ Secondly, while one of the objects of the expedition was to procure geographic and political knowledge, the overarching purpose was commercial in nature.

In a letter sent in late July 1789, Beaufoy wrote to Banks suggesting a suitable candidate to accompany Ben Ali on the expedition, an Austrian-Swede named Swediaur. However, the letter also mentions a debate between Beaufoy and the Arabic translator employed the Association to interview Ali. The debate seems to have revolved around the commercial purposes of the expedition and Beaufoy refers to the infeasibility of the translator's unknown plan as "...inconsistent with our funds and with the common maxims of Mercantile prudence."¹³⁰ Further, in the final proposal for the expedition, decided on by Banks and Beaufoy in early August, commercial goals are paramount. The approved proposal reads like a speculative commercial adventure with some geography on the side:

Whereas the Committee have received authentic information, that large quantities of European and Indian Goods are annually conveyed from Morrocco, Tunis, Tripoli and Cairo across the great desert of Zahara to the town of Timbuto on the River Niger, which town is one of the pincipal marts for the supply of the Interior of Africa...and that such an intercourse may eventually prove of the greatest importance to the Commercial Interests of Britain...That they [the Association] will subscribe Five hundred pounds to be expended in the purchase of such commodities as they imagine will sell to most advantage at Timbuto.¹³¹

¹²⁹ The Committee's interview notes with Ben Ali do not survive and there is no mention of whose idea it was to launch an expedition via the Gambia in the general committee notes or in the Proceedings, however Sattin, p. 69 without citation states that this was Ali's suggestion.

¹³⁰ In Hallett, p. 73.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 74-5

The resolution also provides for the hiring of a supercargo to oversee the shipment of the trade goods as well as a salary for Swediaur. Unfortunately, while the above resolution had been passed on the eighth of August, Ben Ali disappeared on the sixth amidst allegations that he had fathered several children by various women.¹³² Ali's departure not only ended all immediate plans for a Timbuktu expedition but exposed the Association (for all intents and purposes Beaufoy and Banks, who were the most involved in the Ali situation) to all manner of monetary claims. The super-cargo hired by Swediaur and the merchant who had introduced Ali to the Association both appealed to the Committee for funds and were granted rather substantial sums (20 guineas in the supercargo's case).¹³³ Yet, the Ben Ali affair did not end in total disaster, for Beaufoy had interrogated Ali on a number of subjects, and when this was combined with the Shereef's information from Lucas, a very useful picture of west-central Africa emerged.

The very specific, detailed information, which Beaufoy collected from Ben Ali and the Shareef via Lucas was printed in the first edition of the Association's proceedings in 1790. Beaufoy made every attempt to assure the reader of the Proceedings as to the accuracy of the intelligence acquired from the North Africans – noting on several occasions that the information printed in the Proceedings was verified by the British consul in Morocco and the governor of Tripoli.¹³⁴ In keeping with the voracious interest in all new information from the interior of Africa, the majority of the 1790 Proceedings is taken up with Beaufoy's country by country summary of north central Africa. Beaufoy presents details on the flora, fauna, economy, manners, military, and politics of each state or region. Notable is the attention that Beaufoy gives to the commercial and social life of

¹³² Hallett, pp. 75-6.

¹³³ *Idem*

¹³⁴ *Proceedings* 1790, p. 80; Hallett, p. 79.

each of these areas. For instance, in his description of Bornu, based largely on Ben Ali's information, he is careful to emphasize the civility and sophistication of the population even to the extent that they follow proper English gender roles:

In their manners, the people of Bornou are singularly courteous and humane...the most violent of their quarrels are only contests of words; and though a part of the business of their husbandry is assigned to the women, yet, as their employment is confined to that of dropping the seed in the furrows...it has more of the amusement of occasional occupation, than of the harshness of continued labor.¹³⁵

Further, and perhaps more importantly to the Association, he takes great pains to spell out possible commercial opportunities in his account of the economies of the various states.

In his discussion of Bornu, Beaufoy notes that the few local manufactured goods included textiles, and that the blue dye used in their production was "...preferable to that of the East Indies."¹³⁶ He does note, that the other main exports from Bornu were gold dust, slaves, horses, ostrich feathers, salt and civet."¹³⁷ He is slightly more optimistic about the potential for commerce in the region further to the south, noting the vibrant textile industry in Ashanti, which, he wrote "...announce the rudiments of future manufactures, and perhaps of an extensive commerce."¹³⁸ While the theme of commercial possibility runs throughout the accounts, Beaufoy does make mention of the slave trade on several occasions. His account of the trade, is however not sensational, except for a passage or two about avaricious princes warring to capture slaves. Rather, his tracing of the slave route between West Africa and Tripoli seems more concerned with the geography and

¹³⁵ *Proceedings* 1810, p. 157.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

economics involved -- how many days journey from the interior to Bornu, the low price paid in Fezzan, and the eventual destination of the slaves in the Levant.¹³⁹ On the whole, in his official remarks, Beaufoy's humanitarian concerns were greatly outnumbered by commercial and geographical references. In no place can this be seen better than in Beaufoy's concluding editorial remarks.

Beaufoy begins these remarks, entitled "conclusions suggested by the preceding narrative," with an account of how parts of the interior of Africa, Bornu in particular, appear to have changed a great deal since the time of Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century. Beaufoy notes that the residents of Bornu "Tempered by the courtesy of commerce, and the conciliating interchange of important benefits, the ancient barbarism of the people is softened by habits of kindness."¹⁴⁰ Yet, this brief section on the progress of civilization is trumped by his extensive discussion of the geographical and commercial possibilities of these unstudied regions of Africa. In a somewhat farfetched and amusing section, Beaufoy speaks of the potential for Africa to become the next destination for the Grand Tour. He suggests "the luxurious city of Tomboctou," "the ruins which shadow the cottages of Jermah and Temissa," or perhaps "the temple of Jupiter Ammon" in the Egyptian desert.¹⁴¹ However, in his opinion, while European travelers might derive some benefit from the new geographic discoveries, the most important beneficiary of the Association's work is Britain and British industry:

¹³⁹ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 154-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-8. Beaufoy here quotes a passage from Leo in which Leo mentions that the inhabitants of Bornu live "after a brutish manner."

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

But of all the advantages to which a better acquaintance with the inland regions of Africa may lead, the first in importance is, the extension of commerce, and the encouragement of the manufactures of Britain.¹⁴²

As part of this encouragement of manufactures, Beaufoy suggested that Britain should expand her trade in firearms to more areas in the interior, writing that "...it is owing that the sale of one of the most profitable manufactures of Great Britain is still in great measure confined to the scanty tribes which inhabit the shores of the Atlantic."¹⁴³ He went on to assert that the restriction of the firearms trade had harmed further economic opportunity in the interior and that "Englishmen should form caravans" in order to best exploit this economic opportunity.¹⁴⁴ According to Beaufoy, not only firearms, but English textiles would be profitable in an area inhabited by "more than a hundred millions of people." He also encouraged perspective merchants, who might be reading the *Proceedings*, by noting that if the Gambia route to the interior were determined practical then English traders would most certainly be able to offer goods to the interior at a lower cost than those of the overland caravans from the Mediterranean.¹⁴⁵ In return, the states of the interior would "...furnish, to an unknown, and probably boundless extent, an article that commands, in all markets of the civilized world, a constant and unlimited sale [gold]."¹⁴⁶ This flowery rhetoric seems characteristic of Beaufoy, although it is impossible to know whether he wrote this sensational tale of gold out of sincerity or from some desire to increase the membership and funds of the Association. As if in an attempt

¹⁴² *Proceedings* 180, p. 201.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁴⁴ *Idem*. It is not clear what restriction on the firearms trade he calls "the anxious policy which prohibits the conveyance of fire-arms to the inland tribes." Although he may be referring to the policies of north African traders mentioned in *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁴⁵ *Idem*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

to cover all angles of interest that readers might have in Africa, Beaufoy closes with a broad statement of justification for this mercantile venture citing its ancillary humanitarian benefits of science, manufacturing, and the “elevation of the human character” to “...nations hitherto consigned to hopeless barbarism, and uniform contempt.”¹⁴⁷ While this is a bit strange in light of his earlier insistence on the progress of African states, it emphasizes how intertwined humanitarian thinking was with the overtly commercial and geographic missions of the Association.

¹⁴⁷ *Proceedings* 1810, p. 205.

Chapter V

West African Explorations

Despite having sponsored the disappointing Lucas and Ledyard expeditions in quick succession and the recent collapse of the Ben Ali mission, the Association was not inclined towards caution or pessimism and within a few months a new expedition was sponsored. Much like Lucas, Daniel Houghton was skilled in the languages of Africa and had prior experience in Morocco; unlike Lucas, Houghton had valuable experience in the region of Africa that the Association most wanted to explore. Houghton, an Irish army officer, had been fort-major on Goree off the Senegalese coast for three years during the most recent war with France at the time of the American revolution. During this time, he apparently learned several local languages and became interested in the interior of the continent.¹⁴⁸ This interest in the interior, combined with his seemingly irrevocable financial distress, led him to propose, to the English government in 1783, an expedition to the source of the Gambia and its possible gold mines. The government rejected this geographic/commercial mission and little is known of Houghton until his introduction to the Association in 1790.¹⁴⁹ In July 1790, a year after Lucas's less than triumphant return to London, Houghton submitted a proposal to the Association "...to explore the Interior of Africa from the Falls of Baraconda on the River Gambia to the Cities of Houssa and Tombuctoo." The Committee of the Association resolved to accept his offer, and more importantly, his estimate of £260 expenses for the journey. So enthused were the Committee members (at this meeting, Beaufoy, Banks, and Stuart) that they suggested that a planned fund raising appeal be postponed until after correspondence from

¹⁴⁸ Hallett, p. 120, Sattin, p. 92.

¹⁴⁹ Idem

Houghton was received, “as in all probability the ardor of the Association will be increased (sic) by the first dispatches.”¹⁵⁰ Before the Committee could meet again, Houghton found passage on a ship bound for the Gambia and Beaufoy was forced to draw up a list of objectives for the expedition on behalf of the Association. This list is particularly instructive as to what the Association actually desired from its expeditions, and the answer is certainly not confined to the collection of geographical minutiae. Unlike the Ledyard and Lucas expeditions, Houghton was instructed to pursue a rather political mission. His first objective, as stated by Beaufoy, was to open diplomatic channels with the kingdom of “Houssa”:

The Committee having reason to believe that a considerable Empire, distinguished by the name of “Houssa,” has long been established in the neighborhood of the Neel el Abeed [Niger]... and being desirous, for a variety of reasons, that a communication with the said Empire may be opened from the British possessions on the Gambia, the Major cannot more effectually fulfill the purpose of his mission, than by traveling from the falls of Baraconda to the Capital of this Kingdom.¹⁵¹

Along with this commercial/political mission, Houghton was inveighed to take note of the “course and termination of the Niger as well as of the various nations that inhabit its borders.” After he has solved this mystery, the Committee “naturally entertain the hope” that he will stop by Timbuktu to gather observations on its wealth and population.¹⁵²

While Houghton is also asked to inquire into the “animal, vegetable, and mineral productions of the Inland Countries,” mention of the slave trade or of any other

¹⁵⁰ Hallett, p. 120-1

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 123.

humanitarian concern is rare. In fact, slave trade routes in Africa are mentioned as good conduits through which Houghton's letters may reach England and the Association.¹⁵³ Included in Beaufoy's objectives was a lengthy list of questions to be asked to anyone in the interior who has visited Houssa or the great cities. This list consists of more than 50 queries on the subjects of government, administration of justice, regulations with respect to property, revenue of the state, agriculture, trade, religion, language, music, manners, gold, and the Niger. These questions reveal much about the Association's and Beaufoy's ideas about the interior. While the questions about goldfields, trade, and what imported articles might be lacking are perhaps the most practically important to the Association, Beaufoy's questions about government, justice, and agriculture betray almost no condescension. Few European explorers or colonial associations fifty or one hundred years after Beaufoy would bother to ask such questions as "Is there any appeal in Civil or Criminal suits to the King, or the King in Council?" or "Are there watchmen, or any other guard appointed to preserve the peace of the town in the night?"¹⁵⁴

This curiosity and sense of expectation about the interior would unfortunately not be much satisfied by the Houghton expedition. Houghton left England in October 1790 with £200 in trade goods along with a good deal of the ephemera that Lucas had purchased for his expedition and then returned to the Association, including "a crimson cloth waistcoat" and a "crimson and blue sash."¹⁵⁵ From the beginning, Houghton's expedition teetered on the brink of disaster. Near the mouth of the Gambia he acquired a translator/guide and several asses and set out for the kingdom of Wuli. Unfortunately,

¹⁵³ Hallett, p. 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁵ A complete list of Lucas' leftovers that Houghton acquired was included in the Committee minutes of the Association and reprinted in Hallett, p. 128.

according to Houghton, some local merchants feared that the introduction of these European goods would ruin their commerce and thus they conspired to kill him. He managed to ford the river and “avoid the parties who were sent for his destruction” and eventually reached the capital of Wuli under protection from its ruler.¹⁵⁶ Further ruin befell Houghton at Medina, the Wuli capital, according to a letter written to his wife and printed in the *Proceedings*. The city of hundreds of dwellings caught fire and Houghton found himself without much of the trade goods on which he depended to support himself and provide introductions to interior potentates.¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Houghton suggested that a site just outside of Medina on the Gambia would provide an ideal spot for a fort and trading center where profits upwards of “eight hundred percent” could be expected.¹⁵⁸

Unlike Lucas, Houghton decided to press on despite adversity and he found a slave trader who was willing to journey with him as far as the kingdom of Bambuk. From this point on, however, misfortune was to follow Houghton’s expedition – resulting in part from a war in the Bambuk region and his loss of valuable trade goods, which would have provided him with more bargaining power. In short, Houghton was given an icy reception from the ruler of Bondu, the slave trader with whom he was traveling decided to remain on his rice plantation because of a food shortage, and Houghton was forced to make his own way inland.¹⁵⁹ On the new moon of the fourth of July 1791, Houghton lost his way in the forest and contracted a severe fever. Fortunately, he managed to reach Bambuk and was received cordially by the king, whom he attempted to convince that a trading agreement with the British would enable him to receive English goods as well as

¹⁵⁶ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 242-4.

¹⁵⁷ Houghton’s dramatic account of the fire was printed in the 1810 *Proceedings*. pp. 318-22.

¹⁵⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁵⁹ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 245-55.

weapons with which to fight his current war with Bondu. According to Houghton, the king seemed well disposed to this suggestion, and as will be seen, the Association was excited by this prospect.¹⁶⁰

At this point, Houghton took passage with an elderly merchant to Timbuktu, promising to pay him £125 for the journey to Timbuktu and back to the Gambia and Houghton reported that they were meant to embark on a masted vessel at Jenne for the journey to Timbuktu. This was the last the Association heard of Houghton for several years and the place and reason for his death are still unknown, but it was assumed that he was murdered for the few goods he was carrying, or perhaps for stumbling into a local conflict of which he had no knowledge.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, the Association observed that “...the miscarriage of Major Houghton furnishes no proof that the difficulties of proceeding to Tombuctoo, by the way of the Gambia, are insuperable.”¹⁶²

While plans for a journey to Timbuktu were put on hold for the time being, the Association was encouraged by Houghton’s report of the favorable disposition of the king of Bambuk towards British trade. In May 1792, the Association resolved to render “...the late discoveries of Major Houghton effectually serviceable to the Commercial Interests of the Empire.”¹⁶³ To this end, the Association, and Beaufoy in particular, helped facilitate the appointment of a British consul to the Senegambia for almost purely commercial purposes. The story of Beaufoy’s involvement in this consulate is largely one of disaster, yet in early 1793 the idea of a consulate elicited excitement among the Association and the government.

¹⁶⁰ Proceedings 1810, pp. 245-55.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 300-4

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁶³ Hallett, p. 142.

A year after the Association's resolution to promote commerce, in May 1793, Beaufoy received an unsolicited offer from James Willis, a governor of the Turkey company, to establish a consulate in Bambuk at a site suggested by the now deceased Major Houghton. In a private letter to Banks, written during "the interval afforded by a dull speech," Beaufoy communicated the particulars of the offer. Willis's hopes rested upon an unnamed government friend who would lobby to establish a consulate at Fattenda in Bambuk paid for by government monies and who could guarantee trade through the post on behalf of influential London merchants.¹⁶⁴ Beaufoy seems to have gained a very favorable impression of Willis, noting that "His habits are Commercial...but his attainments Classical & in some degree Scientific; and his Understanding, as far as I can judge, is of no ordinary class."¹⁶⁵

Seemingly enthused with this idea of public funding for a commercial venture in line with the Association's objectives, Beaufoy pursued the idea, taking time to personally talk with Dundas and Pitt about his desire to see a consul appointed. According to Beaufoy, Dundas and Pitt agreed that at least a temporary consul should be appointed, and Dundas told Beaufoy that he would write when the King officially approved the plan.¹⁶⁶ In early 1794, Beaufoy drafted an official proposal for the consulate scheme, insisting that a consulate and fort would allow British merchants to divert lucrative trans-Saharan commerce, a trade he claimed "...to be much under rated at a

¹⁶⁴ Hallett, p. 143; According to Hallett, this unnamed influential friend was Alexander Brodie, a Scotsman with political ties to Dundas and Pitt, he became a member of the Association in May 1793.

¹⁶⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁶ Rutherford, p. 74.

Million Sterling per annum,” from the Barbary states to the Gambia and its faster route to Europe.¹⁶⁷

In addition to this optimistic generalization, Beaufoy mentioned the supposedly abundant gold mines of Bambuk, by means of which its rulers could purchase all manner of British goods. He also maintained that a greater British presence on the river would surely provide enough security to induce more merchants to engage in trade with the Niger region through the Gambia. However, Beaufoy, in his proposal to the abolitionist-friendly Pitt administration, mentions that the kingdom of Bambuk has no interest in the slave trade and further, that with a greater British presence the slave traders of the Gambia would no longer be a threat to other merchants like they were to Houghton’s expedition.¹⁶⁸ At this time, Willis submitted an estimate for his expenses in establishing a consulate in Bambuk, his estimate included funding for two sloops, more than 50 men, provisions for six months, and tools with which to build a mud fort – his final total being £3000 for the first year, £600 of which was earmarked for his salary.¹⁶⁹ Undoubtedly swayed as much by the commercial benefits of the scheme as by the political and military blow to any French ambitions in the Senegambia, the government accepted Willis’s estimate and appointed him provisional consul for two years.

Willis’s appointment in April 1794 was the high point of the Senegambia consulate scheme, as almost immediately the plan began to fall apart. The greatest problem with the campaign for a consul was the enormous price of mounting such an expedition. Shortly after Willis’s £3000 estimate was approved, he revised it upwards to £3,800, and even then he petitioned for more funding. Beaufoy was the Association’s

¹⁶⁷ Hallett, pp. 144-6

¹⁶⁸ *Idem*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7; Rutherford, p. 75.

leader in the Senegambia venture and Willis came to him with all kinds of problems related to supplies, finance, and recruitment. In addition to the high cost of the proposal, Britain had just entered into war with revolutionary France and thus was loath to spend too much time and energy on schemes with only peripheral importance to the conflict. For this reason, Beaufoy found himself empowered by Henry Dundas and Evan Nepean, the under secretary of state, to make certain financial decisions on behalf of the government in regards to the consulate.¹⁷⁰ This would prove a minor disaster for the Association and a minor nuisance for the government. In a letter sent to Banks in October 1794, around the time that Willis was supposed to have already set sail, Beaufoy laid out all the difficulties surrounding the scheme. His first complaint was with the hassle of government bureaucracy and the countless forms and applications which had to be filed in order for Willis to sail. Willis, in apparent eagerness to sail, advanced his own money to buy a 65-ton armored schooner and contracted a military acquaintance to recruit the 60 men needed to establish and maintain the Senegambia outpost.¹⁷¹ It is this problem which was to vex Beaufoy and delay the expedition indefinitely. To solve this labor problem, Beaufoy received an offer from the government for free military deserters or “20 rogues of comparatively fair character” from the Portsmouth jail on the condition that 30 or 40 upstanding men accompany them as a guard.¹⁷² These upstanding men may have been recruited if it were not for the efforts of Willis’s military acquaintance. According to Beaufoy, this unsavory captain had declared the impossibility of finding recruits without paying a premium of some 25 guineas a man. Beaufoy accepted this condition on authority given him by Nepean, but soon after, Willis failed to procure any men, even

¹⁷⁰ Hallett, pp. 148-9; Rutherford, p. 78.

¹⁷¹ Letter reproduced in Hallett, pp. 148-50.

¹⁷² *Idem*

with the bonus, and Beaufoy had him replace the captain. Fortunately a new recruiter was able to find all the men necessary in a matter of days. However, Beaufoy did have to dissuade Willis from enacting certain questionable schemes, the first "...for raising a corps of Cornish miners on the idea, though dubiously expressed, of their being eventually useful at Bambuk...and the other for enlisting French prisoners who were considered good engineers." Beaufoy squashed these prospecting ambitions on the grounds that "...the employment of Cornish miners would enable the Slave merchants of the Gambia to inculcate the suspicion that the gold Mines of Bambuk were the principal object of the consular appointment."¹⁷³ Yet, the troubles continued, with further problems in finding a suitable sailing date, and more importantly the purchase of a second, larger schooner to fit all the men and supplies necessary for the journey. By the end of the fiasco in 1796 Willis had spent nearly £6000.

Perhaps fortunately, Beaufoy did not see the outcome of the Senegambia project, as he died in May 1795 while the expedition was still in disarray. After his death the project was cancelled, not because of its high price tag but rather due to Willis's insistence on a naval escort for his two-schooner fleet, a request based on reports of French privateers operating off the African coast. In the end, Willis was asked by the government to account for his spending and return all purchased goods and unused funds. He was unable to do so satisfactorily and further claimed £900 in salary for the nearly two years he had spent in preparation. This financial impropriety on Willis's part caused a good deal of embarrassment for the Association, which convened a committee to specifically investigate the matter.¹⁷⁴ While, under Banks's direction, the matter was

¹⁷³ Letter reproduced in Hallett, pp. 148-50.

¹⁷⁴ Hallett, pp. 150-6.

finally resolved without serious turmoil, it was clear that Beaufoy deserved some of the blame for the failure of the venture. Beaufoy not only was the one to suggest Willis to the Association, but he had approved the allocation of certain funds to Willis's expedition on behalf of the government and the Association. Furthermore, during the investigation, there was some question as to the purchasing of the two schooners on behalf of the government and whether Willis was rightfully allowed to do so. When asked, Willis placed responsibility in Beaufoy's hands, reporting to the committee that his actions had not only been "...made with the knowledge of Mr. Beaufoy but at that gentleman's express desire."¹⁷⁵ To make matters worse for the Committee, Beaufoy's family, perhaps fearing for his reputation, refused Banks's request that Beaufoy's papers be handed over to the Association.¹⁷⁶ However, amidst all of this controversy about financial impropriety, some good did arise, for prior to Beaufoy's death and the collapse of the Willis plan, Beaufoy presented the Association with a new explorer willing to follow in Houghton's footsteps.

This young Scottish surgeon, Mungo Park, was to be the Association's greatest success story, a victory that Beaufoy would not be able to share, as he died the very month Park set out for Africa. Park was encouraged to apply to the Association by Joseph Banks, who had earlier found him a job as ship's surgeon on a voyage to Sumatra. Beaufoy had a good opinion of him as well, noting at an interview in July 1794, his talents and suitability for the proposed mission.¹⁷⁷ Because, in the spring of 1794, word had just been given of Willis's official appointment as consul to Senegambia and Houghton had been formally declared dead by the Association, it was decided by

¹⁷⁵ Hallett, p. 155. Quoted in Hallett's précis of the March 1796 Committee meeting.

¹⁷⁶ Rutherford, p. 175.

¹⁷⁷ Proceedings 1810, p. 302-4.

Beaufoy and Banks that Park should accompany Willis to Senegambia. From the to-be-constructed fort at Fattenda, he would follow Houghton's instructions and proceed to the Niger and then to Timbuktu, observing everything and taking careful notes. In addition, Beaufoy and Banks thought Park sufficiently trained in the surveying arts, the use of "Hadley's quadrant," and general natural science, that they looked forward to receiving solid geographical data from which much cartographic good could come.¹⁷⁸ Park was to receive a modest salary and £200 with which to buy supplies, but on at least one occasion Beaufoy was forced to write to Banks to ask permission to supply Park with additional funds.¹⁷⁹ In contrast with the financial bungling, graft, and government delay that characterized the Willis scheme, Park's preparations went smoothly, and little correspondence between the surgeon and the Association is recorded for almost a year, until the interminable wait for Willis to leave forced Park to ask for an immediate departure. In an April 1795 committee meeting, which Beaufoy did not attend, the decision was made to allow Park to depart without Willis and begin his expedition as soon as possible. On May 22nd Park left Portsmouth for the Gambia and on May 25th Beaufoy died, leaving the other members of the Association to reap the rewards of the highly successful Park expedition.

The story of Park's journey to the Niger and back is well known, thanks to his bestselling narrative of the trip. While his trip has been cited as a great achievement in the field of geography, it is clear that his mission also fell well within the commercial interests of the Association. His narrative is filled with descriptions of trade, commodities, and vibrant city life. Further, he viewed perhaps his most famous

¹⁷⁸ *Proceedings* 1810, pp. 305-8.

¹⁷⁹ Rutherford, pp. 173-4.

geographical discovery as no great achievement, writing “The circumstances of the Niger’s flowing towards the east, and its collateral points, did not, however, excite my surprise...as I knew that Major Houghton, had collected similar information.”¹⁸⁰

Certainly few in the African cities he visited could believe that it was for purely geographical purposes that he traveled, he was required to pay commercial taxes whenever he crossed territorial boundaries and was always suspected of concealing his true purpose.¹⁸¹ Nonetheless, his expedition fit into the pattern of other Association sponsored endeavors, except that he survived and returned to England, having accomplished his objectives save reaching Timbuktu and the other cities of the Niger.

Park’s expedition can be seen as a culmination of the early period of the Association, only seven years, but by far the most productive of the Association’s existence. Without the disastrous Ledyard mission, the feeble Lucas sojourn, the knowledge of Ben Ali and the Shareefs, the unfortunate Houghton journey, or the embarrassing Willis scheme, Park’s acclaimed expedition might never have occurred. It was thus because of the stubbornness, curiosity, and perseverance of Beaufoy, Banks, and the Association that Britain entered the nineteenth century with a new window on Africa.

¹⁸⁰ Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, Ed. Kate Marsters (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 194.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 89, 105-6, 199.

Chapter VI

Conclusion: Mungo Park and the Legacy

Of the African Association

In 1788 British interest in Africa may have been reaching its peak before a decline during the turbulent years of the Napoleonic wars, however the Association's success with Mungo Park as well as other expeditions helped to inaugurate a new age of British interest in Africa. While Park's return to England in 1797 gave the Association its first real success, the greatest impact of his expedition was not to be felt until the publication of his book *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* in 1799. The book was prepared from Park's travel journals with the assistance of Bryan Edwards, the notable opponent of abolition, as well as Beaufoy's successor as Secretary of the Association. The book was wildly popular in learned circles and helped keep African topics some of the most talked about of the day. Besides its engaging style and heroic narrative, Park's *Travels* dealt with a subject which occupied the minds of many in the late eighteenth and early eighteenth centuries: slavery and its future. Park could not help but discuss slavery and the slave trade, as he witnessed both in practice during his journey to the Niger, however, in his *Travels* he rarely editorialized on the future of the slave trade. He did dedicate one chapter of the book to "Observations concerning the state and sources of slavery in Africa," in which he laid out a brief account of all he knew regarding the causes of slavery in Africa, concluding that

It probably had its origins in the remote ages of antiquity...How far it is maintained and supported by the slave traffic, which for two hundred years, the

nations of Europe have carried on with the natives of the coast, it is neither within my province, nor my power, to explain.¹⁸²

This emphasis on the antiquity and ingrained nature of slavery in Africa was adopted by those who opposed abolition, as well as Park's subsequent comment that

If my sentiments should be required concerning the effect which a discontinuance of that commerce would produce on the manners of the natives, I should have no hesitation in observing, that, in the present unenlightened state of their minds, my opinion is, the effect would neither be so extensive or beneficial, as many fondly expect.¹⁸³

It is unclear how much Edwards influenced the sections on slavery in the *Travels* but debate has raged ever since, what is clear however, is that Park's descriptions of the horrors of slavery had an equal if not greater impact on the abolition debate. In several places in his narrative he discussed the facts of the trade and commented on the harsh treatment and sorry state of slaves heading towards the coast.¹⁸⁴ Even his opinion, stated above, that would seem to be opposed to abolition, inspired abolitionists to propose a greater presence in Africa in order to educate the "unenlightened" minds of Africans, in order to bring about an end to the slave trade.¹⁸⁵ Whether or not Park approved of the slave trade or believed it impractical to stop, his description of the customs, economies, and locales of Western Africa allowed parties on both sides of the abolition debate to use his narrative to bolster their claims.

¹⁸² Park, p. 263.

¹⁸³ Idem

¹⁸⁴ See esp. Park, p. 83.

¹⁸⁵ Intro to Park, pp.13-14

Park's rich primary evidence about the interior led to new concern over what Britain's role should be in Africa. Evangelicals and abolitionists, long interested in Africa and recently disappointed by the experiment in Sierra Leone found in Park's narrative confirmation that their efforts at Christianizing and "civilizing" Africans were necessary. Yet, even without the Association's expeditions, the humanitarians would probably not have stopped in their quest to end the slave trade and bring Christianity to the continent. On the other hand, the Association and its expeditions had a profound effect on the way the British government would deal with Africa. Besides the garrison at Goree island, the factories on the Gold Coast, and periodic raids against French outposts, the British government had little presence in West Africa, and at times just as little interest. Shortly after Park's successful return, Joseph Banks and other members of the Committee put together a strategic plan for "...sending a sufficient force to take possession of the banks of the Joliba [Niger]," which required heavy government commitment and the first substantial British military presence in West Africa.¹⁸⁶ Soon after this resolution was passed, Banks wrote to a prominent administration official, setting forth the Association's proposal for a large crown colony in the Senegambia-Niger region. This grand plan "...to secure to the British throne, either by Conquest or by Treaty the whole of the Coast of Africa from Arguin to Sierra Leone" would probably not have occurred to Beaufoy and the rest of the Saturday's club in when they began the Association in 1788.¹⁸⁷ The popularity of African topics in the wake of Park's book as well as the politically fashionable causes of abolition and evangelism provide the context for this new direction

¹⁸⁶ Hallett, p. 211 from the minutes of the 1799 general meeting of the Association.

¹⁸⁷ Letter to the Earl of Liverpool quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 212.

in the Association's interests. In his letter, Banks justified this drastic plan of action with common humanitarian reasoning

...I have little doubt that in a very few years a trading Company might be established under immediate control of the Government, who...would govern the Negroes far more mildly and make them far more happy than they are now under the tyranny of their arbitrary princes, would become popular at home by converting them to the Christian religion...and by effecting the greatest practicable diminution of the Slavery of Mankind, upon the principles of natural justice and commercial benefit. That these effects are likely to take place may be deduced by the whole tenor of Mr. Park's book.¹⁸⁸

The details of this trading company are unknown and the Association's appeal to humanitarianism may have been only a convenient cover for deeper commercial ambitions. However, it is certain that Banks's sentiments about the necessity of good Christian government in Africa were shared by many in the Association, especially Wilberforce and other supporters of the similar experiment in Sierra Leone.

The Association's plan was never carried out in full, and no crown colony or massive military campaign was launched, yet the government's interest in West Africa did increase as a result of the political situation at the height of the Napoleonic wars. In the early 1800's several French plans for colonizing West Africa were published in London, despite the fact that the French had lost nearly all of their possessions in the area and could not realistically hope to launch a serious African campaign.¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Banks's proposal was joined by several additional plans for British forts and protected

¹⁸⁸ Letter to the Earl of Liverpool quoted in Hallett., p. 212.

¹⁸⁹ Curtin, pp. 146-8

trade routes in response to the French as well as in an attempt to encourage legitimate commerce.¹⁹⁰

While these grandiose plans for government intervention were never acted upon, they served as the harbinger of things to come. In 1805, Park was sent by the British government with a party of 25 soldiers and a gunboat to find the termination of the Niger and establish trading posts along the river. The expedition failed and Park was killed, but the story of his fateful last journey also brought public attention to West Africa. In 1808 the financially troubled Sierra Leone settlement was turned over to the British government as a crown colony, the first in West Africa. With the abolition of the slave trade in the same year the Royal Navy began tentative patrols to enforce the ban, and by the middle of the century a squadron had been permanently assigned to West Africa. While, much of this government intervention could be said to stem from the efforts of abolitionists and the suppression of the slave trade, it is also true that the Association's expeditions, Park's in particular, helped promote the area as an area of interest for every sector of British interest: commercial, humanitarian and scientific.

When Henry Beaufoy helped found the African Association in 1788 he could not have imagined the British role in Africa over the next century. At the same time, he represents the end of pre-nineteenth century European interest in Africa, with its emphasis on eldorados, vast civilized kingdoms, and the promise of a trade to rival that of the Indies, as well as the beginning of nineteenth century colonialism with its concern with Christianization, civilization, and legitimate commerce. The African Association paved the way for further British expansion in West Africa not only by producing geographical discoveries but by raising the profile of Africa. And while its commercial

¹⁹⁰ Curtin, pp. 146-8

ambitions may have been disappointed by the lack of gold and precious minerals, their success in providing information and rhetorical ammunition to evangelical and abolitionist groups helped shape British policy in the area for the next 100 years. Beaufoy himself was instrumental in the establishment and direction of the Association and serves as an excellent example of the kind of learned and politically involved gentleman who made up the Association's membership. His interest in Africa, like many others in the Association, stemmed from his humanitarian convictions, his interest in the expansion of knowledge, and his commitment to the interests of Britain. Unfortunately his early death prevented him from realizing the success the Association had achieved. Yet his contributions were not unappreciated at the time, he was eulogized in the appendix to Mungo Park's *Travels* by the geographer James Rennell:

The public cannot but recollect the obligations due this gentleman [Beaufoy], on the score of his preserving industry, and laudable zeal, in the work of extending our knowledge of the interior parts of Africa. Accordingly his loss to society, in this department, is likely to be felt for some time, if not for ever; the researches in Africa being a path of his own choosing; a path which, more than any other person, he has contributed to open, and to render smooth; and in which he seemed destined to succeed!¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Park, p.335.

Appendix

A manuscript owned by Henry Beaufoy, referenced several times above, provided the impetus for this paper and is worthy of special discussion. The manuscript is currently in the Williams collection at the Burns library at Boston College, however its provenance is a bit murky. Fr. Nicholas Williams S.J. a student of Africa and the Caribbean, owned the manuscript previously. Although it is unclear where he obtained it, it is probable that he purchased it at some point from a Beaufoy family member. The library of Beaufoy's descendant H.B.H. Beaufoy was sold at Christie's in 1908, although the manuscript is not listed in the auction catalogue.¹⁹² There are in fact two copies of the manuscript, virtually identical and varying only slightly in handwriting, each contains approximately 280 pages with numerous empty sheets between chapters. The majority of the manuscript consists of excerpts taken from Thomas Astley's collection of African travels although there is also material from Count Volney's *Ruins of Empires*. In addition, there is information about various North African caravan routes including those to Timbuktu provided by several European and African travelers. The first 145 pages contain Astley's observations on African subjects divided including "European Forts and Settlements," "Writers upon Africa," and several chapters covering the cultural and physical geography of Senegal, Biafra, Gold Coast, Slave Coast, Madagascar, Benguela, Congo, etc. The remainder of the manuscript deals with Islamic North Africa and includes a timeline of Islamic history from Simon Ockley's *History of the Saracens*. The final six pages of the manuscript contain a list of more than 100 books on Africa, ranging from a 1746

¹⁹² *Catalogue of a portion of the valuable library of books and manuscripts, formed during the last century by Henry B.H. Beaufoy Esq* (London: Christie, 1909). Some 3,000 books are listed in the catalog including several rare books on Africa and a first folio Shakespeare.

pamphlet on “The National Advantages of African Trade” to Lopez’s 16th century “Relatione de Congo.” Each entry includes the name of the book, author, publisher, year, and price and could be a catalog of Beaufoy’s library on Africa. Besides this catalog, the most interesting parts of the manuscript are the reports on Saharan caravans. The first of these is given by a “native of Fez” named Abdelazir el Gardiz who is said to have arrived in London in spring 1788. He gives an account of Moroccan caravans as well as those from Tripoli including his reckonings on the distance of these routes. His observations are followed by those of a Mr. Antis of Cairo who relates what he knows of caravan routes south of Cairo. These two figures are not mentioned elsewhere in other sources on the Association, but it is probable that the manuscript dates from 1788-1795, after the foundation of the Association, given Abdelazir’s arrival date and the section on caravan routes to “the Interior Parts of Africa.” Unfortunately, it appears that the manuscript does not contain any of Beaufoy’s personal notes except the occasional underlining. It seems most likely that Beaufoy had this manuscript written by a scribe as a compilation of notes on Africa for reference and if nothing else it shows Beaufoy’s insatiable interest in all things African.

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