

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Learned Societies, Knowledge Production, and Public Engagement in Colonial and Postcolonial Ghana, 1930–90

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(Received 25 January 2024; revised 21 September 2024; accepted 12 November 2024)

Abstract

This paper constructs the intellectual histories of learned societies in Ghana to illuminate African agency in pursuing knowledge production and dissemination. Academics and politicians founded some of Africa's first scientific societies in Ghana. Previous scholarship on scientific research and higher education in Africa has overlooked the role of disciplines-based learned societies and national academies. This paper contributes to that literature using a historical comparative approach to construct the histories of learned societies that emerged during the colonial and postcolonial periods to understand how such scientific associations contributed to research productivity. I advance two arguments based on case studies of three scientific societies. First, there is linearity in the evolution of learned societies. Second, the institutionalization of scientific communities along interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lines provided flexibility and enabled learned associations to contribute relevant knowledge to the “developmental state” that the political leaders were constructing.

Keywords: Ghana; West Africa; research; historiography; education

On 30 May 1934, Dr. Neville Alexander Dyce Sharp, a member of the West African Medical Service (WAMS), convened a meeting at the senior medical officer's bungalow in Cape Coast for “people interested in the history of the Gold Coast.”¹ The meeting resolved to establish a learned society. The *Cape Coast Historical Society* (CCHS) became public on 20 June 1934. The society's goal to study, research, document, and reconstruct the history of the Gold Coast from the African perspective fit well with nationalist thoughts in the country. The 1934 *Annual Report of the Gold Coast* provided the *raison d'être* for the society's agenda when it claimed that “little is known of the history of the people of the Gold Coast prior to the first recorded contact with Europeans.”²

The contact between Europeans and Africans birthed Western-style higher education institutions (HEI) in the latter part of the twentieth century. Independence quickened the spread of scientific ideas

¹Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) Cape Coast, ACC No. 391/64, Minutes of the first meeting of the society, 30 May 1934. Dr. N. A. Dyce Sharp, was a British Medical Officer with the West African Medical Service. He was a prolific writer who contributed to tropical medical science research through several scholarly articles. See, for example, N. A. Dyce Sharp, “Filaria perstans; its development in *Culicoides austeni*,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 21, no. 5 (1928): 371–88.

²*Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast, 1934–35* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), 2.

as well as knowledge production and dissemination with the establishment and expansion of universities in Africa. Nevertheless, previous scholarship on scientific research, higher education, intellectual productivity, and dissemination in Africa has overlooked the role of disciplines-based learned societies and national academies.³ Few studies exist on the subject.⁴ However, Ghana was a leader in Africa in several educational areas, including establishing the first scientific societies in independent Africa. The crucial roles learned societies play in knowledge creation, dissemination, nurturing the next generation of researchers, and institutionalizing a professional culture among scientists are not widely known.

By learned societies I mean academic associations/scientific groupings that drew together a plurality of forms of knowledge, the knowledge producers, and the overlaps, clashes, and fractures within them. This paper contributes to the literature by constructing the histories of some notable learned societies that emerged during the colonial and postcolonial periods to illuminate African agency in the creation and spreading of original knowledge. I advance two arguments. First, there has been linearity, linkage, and overlap in the evolution of learned societies. I argue that linearity is evident in the progression of learning as an idea and as transformational. Still, there are variations in the trajectories, roles, and functions of learned societies in Ghana. I use linearity in the philosophical sense to mean the evolution of learned societies from different intellectual traditions that developed within time and space. Individuals with distinct but overlapping educational trajectories and interests coalesced around shared intellectual projects. The older scientific societies provided the personnel and experience for others to emerge when the colonial government introduced higher education at the end of the Second World War. Second, the institutionalization of scientific communities along interdisciplinary lines provided flexibility and enabled learned associations to contribute knowledge to the developmental state that the political leaders were constructing. It enabled the crisscrossing and transnational flows of knowledge production and dissemination. Significantly, the knowledge produced in Ghana during this period served as a basis for developing or expanding African history and politics in universities in the UK and the US.⁵

As a scholarly organization, the modern learned society performs several functions, including promoting excellence in scholarship, advancing their field through creating and disseminating knowledge, and mentoring and nurturing the next generation of specific discipline knowledge producers. Their membership comprises professionals and amateurs with shared interest in a given discipline or subject. Members primarily include academics based at higher education institutions, research institutions, postgraduate students, teachers of the subject, and members of the public.⁶ The National Academy, on the other hand, is the country's leading think tank and a transdisciplinary group of eminent scientists. As a statutory body, membership in the National Academy is by nomination,

³There is a long list of excellent publications on Kwame Nkrumah, yet his pioneering role in the establishment of the National Academy has not attracted much scholarly attention. See Akilagpa Sawyerr and Takyiwaa Manuh, eds., *Kwame Nkrumah Century Colloquium – Proceedings* (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2012); E. A. Haizel, "Education in Ghana, 1951–1966," in *The Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah*, ed. Kwame Arhin (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd, 1991), 74–77.

⁴Only two studies of relevance exist on the subject. See Felix Kojo Eshun, "A History of the Historical Society of Ghana, 1952–2007" (MPhil. thesis, Accra, University of Ghana, 2022); Letitia E. Obeng, *The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences: A Historical Perspective* (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2009).

⁵John D. Fage established the Centre of West African Studies (CWAS) at the University of Birmingham with the experiences he gained in Ghana. See Fage, *To Africa and Back: memoirs* (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 2002). Similarly, William Tordoff taught African politics at the University of Manchester and in other universities after leaving Ghana. Furthermore, Ivor Wilks' research in Ghana contributed greatly to the African Studies program at Northwestern University in the US. See also Bright Gyamfi, "From Nkrumah's Black Star to the African Diaspora: Ghanaian Intellectual Activists and the Development of Black Studies in the Americas," *Journal of African American History* 106, no. 4 (2022): 682–705.

⁶John Heilbron, "Academies and Learned Societies," in *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. John Heilbron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); James Hopkins, "The Role of Learned Societies in Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination: The Case of the Regional Studies Association, 1965–2005," *History of Education* 40, no. 2 (2011): 255–71.

rigorous review, and election. While the disciplines-based societies existed to create and promote original knowledge, the Ghana National Academy promoted learning.

Claude Ake, Thandika Mkandawire, and Mahmood Mamdani have argued that the mission of the newly independent state was primarily developmental.⁷ Yet, most postcolonial developmental state studies focused on mega-developments, neglecting ideational processes such as philosophical and scientific ideas that created a vision of how society and economy were transformed in the immediate postindependence period.⁸ Nevertheless, governments expected African researchers to use their scientific and technical knowledge to engineer the transformation of national economies. Indeed, Mahmood Mamdani reminds us that “at independence, every country needed to show its flag, national anthem, national currency, and national university as proof that the country had indeed become independent.”⁹ The African leaders established the “developmental university,” an institution whose agenda was to be the vanguard for the socioeconomic transformation of the new state.¹⁰ The university became part of the parastatals, and the central government was the sole funder of this important public institution.

Learned societies within institutional settings are of recent origins in Black Africa; they are a legacy of Western colonialism. The establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast (now the University of Ghana) encouraged the formation of disciplines-based learned societies. In 1951, academics at the university founded the *Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society* (GCTHS).¹¹ The GCTHS was the first learned society founded by scholars and politicians in Black Africa.¹² This period saw several academic disciplines establishing learned societies. For example, in March 1955, academics in the geography department established the Gold Coast Geographical Association “to further interest in, and promote the study of, geography with special reference to West Africa.”¹³

These disciplines-based societies, among others, laid a foundation for the emergence of the National Academy after political independence. They provided a pool of leading scientists, albeit small, for Ghanaian Prime Minister (and later President) Kwame Nkrumah to nominate to constitute the foundation fellowship of the Academy. Acts of parliament established the National Research Council (NRC) and the Ghana Academy of Learning in February 1958 and November 1959, respectively.¹⁴ The government merged the two institutions to form the Ghana Academy of Sciences in November 1959. The Academy initially combined the functions of learning and scientific research. Further reforms in 1968 separated the scientific research and learning sections into the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The government renamed it the National Academy as the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS).¹⁵

⁷Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1996); Thandika Mkandawire, “Thinking about Developmental States in Africa,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25 (2001): 289–313; Mahmood Mamdani, *Scholars in the Marketplace: The Dilemmas of Neo-Liberal Reform at Makerere University, 1989–2005* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2007).

⁸Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African Studies: Knowledge production, agency, and voice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2022); Paul Zeleza, *The Transformation of Global Higher Education, 1945–2015* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); J. F. Ade Ajayi, Lamerck K. H. Goma, and G. A. Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996).

⁹Mahmood Mamdani, “The Importance of Research in a University,” *MISR Working Paper* no. 3 (2011): 2, <https://miser.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/publications/3The%20Importance%20of%20Research%20in%20a%20University.pdf>; Mamdani, *Scholars*, 256–57.

¹⁰Mamdani, *Scholars*, 257.

¹¹B. M. Hamilton, “Inaugural meeting of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society, 12th and 13th January 1952,” *Transactions of the Gold Coast & Togoland Historical Society* 1, no. 1 (1952): 30–31. See also, “Historical Society,” *Gold Coast Weekly Review* (Accra), 28 Jan. 1953.

¹²South Africa had some of the continent oldest scientific societies established in the nineteenth century. Cape Town was the birthplace of many professional associations which were exclusively White.

¹³Ghana Geographical Association, *Bulletin of the Ghana Geographical Association* 6, no. 2 (1961).

¹⁴Obeng, *The Ghana Academy*, 1–18; Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS), *Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences: Annual Report 2011* (Accra, 2011), 5–6.

¹⁵GAAS, *Proceedings of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences* 6 (1969), 7–10.

Kwame Nkrumah, founder and first president of the Academy, famously declared that “the Ghana Academy of Sciences belongs to our society. It belongs to an African revolution. It is one of the valuable organs for our society and it must work to assist and improve our general welfare. The Academy can justify its status in our society only by the contribution which it makes to the *progress and development of the nation*.”¹⁶ Nkrumah intended the Academy to be the most prestigious institution for the country’s leading men and women of science to share ideas, diagnose, and provide policy alternatives to its development challenges. The learned societies were beneficiaries of generous government subventions.¹⁷ Indeed, the Academy became one of Nkrumah’s babies.¹⁸

The arguments of the paper unfold across three sections. The first part introduces the social and political context in which the societies were situated: it begins in the 1930s — a period which Albert Adu Boahen points out gave rise to several significant developments in colonial Ghana — and ends in the 1990s, which saw the rebirth of electoral politics.¹⁹ It details the institutional histories of the *Cape Coast Historical Society* (CCHS), the *Historical Society of Ghana* (HSG), and the *Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences* (GAAS). The final part examines the intellectual and socio-political environments in which the scientific societies evolved, their inner workings, and how their roles complemented the developmental state.

The analysis draws upon archival and oral history data. The learned societies do not have official archives within their institutional settings. However, the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (hereafter PRAAD) Head Office in Accra and regional offices at Cape Coast and Kumasi contain relevant primary information. The *Proceedings* of the Ghana National Academy and the *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* published annual reports and minutes of the societies. They included original accounts of conferences, lectures, and achievements of members and fellows, as well as the essential newsworthy items of the organizations in a particular year. I also consulted the private papers of the late Adu Boahen, the highly respected Ghanaian/African historian, a former president of HSG, and a fellow of GAAS. Finally, I interviewed thirty members of the societies — ten in GAAS and twenty in HSG — who were active at different periods of the societies’ history.

The intellectual and associational life of the learned societies in Ghana

Social and economic developments in twentieth-century Ghana prepared the grounds for the emergence of learned societies. Locating Cape Coast within a social context helps to explain why it took an experimental approach to historical research. Ray Jenkins notes that “the years from c.1889 to 1917 may be described appropriately as the first and arguably as *the* formative phase in the local African production of literacy versions of the history of what became the British Gold Coast.”²⁰ Three localities — Cape Coast, Accra, and Akropong — dominated intellectual productivity of this period because of their early embrace of Western education. Therefore, Jenkins concludes that “the southern coastal

¹⁶Emphasis added, see GAAS, *Proceedings* 3 (1965), 4.

¹⁷The Adu Boahen papers are housed at the Department of History’s Adu Boahen Memorial Library and Archive (ABMLA), University of Ghana. ABMLA, AAB/15 Official Governments Papers and Correspondence, Letter to the Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Coast, “Subvention for the Historical Society of Ghana-Appeal,” written by D. E. K. Amenumey, Acting Head of Department, University of Cape Coast, 2 Nov. 1976.

¹⁸The Prime Minister is credited with mooted the idea for establishing the Academy. See Obeng, *The Ghana Academy*, 3–11. On some of Nkrumah mega projects, see Stephan F. Miescher, *A Dam for Africa: Akosombo Stories from Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).

¹⁹Albert Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1975).

²⁰Ray Jenkins, “Intellectuals, Publication Outlets and ‘Past-Relationships’: Some Observations on the Emergence of Early Gold Coast – Ghanaian Historiography in the Cape Coast, Accra and Akropong ‘Triangle’: c.1880–1917,” in *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa*, eds. P. F. de Moraes Farias and Karin Barber (Birmingham: Centre of Western African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), 68.

historiography had a profound impact upon the future political, social and economic development of the British Gold Coast and independent Ghana.”²¹

The Cape Coast township developed a literacy culture when business people established and maintained “the strongest newspaper tradition in the coastal towns.”²² Broadly, the 1930s ushered in developments in the educational sector.²³ The collaboration between the Christian missionaries and the colonial state produced a sizable number of scholars whom Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola describe as “homespun historians.”²⁴ The people of Cape Coast prioritized learning, intellectualism, and careerism. Therefore, it was unsurprising that the town was the birthplace of the first scientific society on the Gold Coast.

The *Cape Coast Historical Society* was the first learned association to emerge on the Gold Coast.²⁵ Announcing the establishment of the Society to its readership and the world, the International African Institute’s journal noted that:

This attempt by educated Africans to study the history of their people and country is to be welcomed, and it is to be hoped that the Society will have a long and fruitful life. Most African peoples have a large store of historical traditions, and this is particularly so on the Gold Coast, where, as a result of the Ashanti kingdom and the general cultural level of the inhabitants, political life was highly developed and interest in political matters always strong. If the Society succeeds in making this material available by collecting and publishing it, it will render an important service to all who are interested in African history and in particular to future generations of sons and daughters of the Gold Coast.²⁶

The society’s objectives of researching, writing, and documenting African history aligned with the prevailing thinking of the country’s intelligentsia. The histories of important kingdoms remained unconstructed and largely unknown to the reading public.

As already noted, the importance of the town the society was named after was unsurprising as it was the cradle of Western education in the country.²⁷ As a result, Cape Coast had a vibrant intellectual tradition, a sizable African literate population, and was home to several prestigious educational institutions and thriving newspapers. The society’s broad aims were to undertake historical research relating to the Gold Coast, collect and publish essential records, establish a reference library of rare books, papers, and manuscripts of significance to the country, and document the country’s oral history.²⁸ The professional backgrounds of the ten gentlemen who met and resolved to establish the society are important. N. A. Dyce Sharp, Justice Robert Strother Stewart, Kobina Arku Korsah, W. Ward Brew, W. Esuman-Gwira Sekyi, Rev. Gaddiel R. Acquah, Sam Baidoo, Ishmael Minnow, S. Richard Seaton Nicholas, and W. S. Johnston²⁹ were all educated within the British system. Eight

²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²² *Ibid.*, 75.

²³ Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*.

²⁴ Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola, “Homespun Historiography and the Academic Profession,” in *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa*, eds. Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 5.

²⁵ There was a proliferation of literary clubs in colonial Ghana. See Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: “How to Play the Game of Life”* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

²⁶ Cape Coast Historical Society, “Notes and News,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 11, no. 2 (1938): 238.

²⁷ Philip S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “Disrespect and Contempt for Our Natural Rulers’: The African Intelligentsia and the Effects of British Indirect Rule on Indigenous Rulers in the Gold Coast c. 1912–1920,” *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 2, no. 1 (2006): 43–65.

²⁸ PRAAD-Cape Coast, ACC. No. 391/64, “Minute of the First Meeting of the Society,” *Transactions of the Cape Coast Historical Society* 1, no. 1 (1936): 3. See also Cape Coast Historical Society, “Notes and News,” 237–38.

²⁹ A. L. Casely-Hayford, “A Genealogical History of Cape Coast Stool Families” (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1992); PRAAD-Cape Coast, ACC. No. 391/64.

were indigenes of Cape Coast and Elmina. Justice Stewart, an Englishman, took up an appointment in the Colonial Legal Service and served in several colonies. In 1932, he was a Maltese Privy Council member and became an examiner in History and English literature at the University of Malta. Stewart came to the Gold Coast in 1933 as a puisne judge of the Supreme Court. In this position, he worked in the law court in Cape Coast.³⁰ Sekyi, Korsah, and Brew shared similar professional backgrounds in law; they were practicing attorneys.³¹ Acquah, Nicholas, and Baidoo were educationalists from the local secondary schools. These men shared a common interest in learning and promoting research about Africa and her peoples.

Consequently, on 20 June 1934, a meeting was held to consider the proposals and adopt the objectives and rules of the society. The society was open to all persons interested in the country's history. It created two categories of membership: founders and honorary members. Governor of the Gold Coast, Arnold Hodson, a friend of Dyce Sharp, was the society's patron. The Cape Coast elites included several women, yet no women were named among the founders and honorary members.³² Therefore, no female member was registered in the early years of the society. Members paid five shillings (5/-) as annual dues.³³ Consistent with the functions and practices of learned societies, it created a production outlet for disseminating the country's written histories.³⁴ The *Transactions of the Cape Coast Historical Society* was the society's house journal for publishing scholarly research. We can see the influence of the Royal Society of London on the choice of name for the society's journal.³⁵

As a scientific association interested in the country's past, history papers were read and discussed at the society's annual meetings. The surviving documents from the archives reveal that members debated various historical topics. However, as "homespun scholars," their research was self-motivated and framed within the intellectual traditions of the era. On 29 August 1934, the society held its first general meeting, and many members attended it. The first paper read at the society's general meeting was entitled "Cape Coast: A Historical Sketch, from 1610 to 1725," presented by Dyce Sharp.³⁶ In the opening statement of his eight-page presentation, the doctor noted, "It seems fitting that the first paper to be read before the Cape Coast Historical Society should concern the old historical town of Oegwa [*sic*], better known as Cape Coast."³⁷ The paper attempted to reconstruct the history of Cape Coast based on European written accounts. The presenter lamented the non-existent "local tradition whatsoever referring to its early days."³⁸ By training, Dyce Sharp was a medical scientist. His foray into historical research would have been criticized by nationalists like J. B. Danquah and Nnamdi Azikiwe, who disapproved of W. E. F. Ward teaching African history at Achimota College.³⁹ Dyce Sharp was aware of his limitations, and in his conclusion, he expressed the hope that:

Members will follow up my half told tale with papers, which in the aggregate must materially add to the sum of our knowledge of the conditions of life, the habits and doings of those persons,

³⁰"News in Brief," *The Times* (London), 11 Nov. 1933, 11.

³¹D. K. Baku, "An intellectual in nationalist politics: the contribution of Kobina Sekyi to the evolution of Ghanaian national consciousness" (DPhil dissertation, University of Sussex, 1987).

³²See Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "Aspects of Elite Women's Activism in the Gold Coast, 1874-1890," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 463-82.

³³Baku, "An intellectual."

³⁴Cape Coast Historical Society, "Notes and News."

³⁵In 1665, Henry Oldenburg, the secretary of the Royal Society started *Philosophical Transactions*. See Marie Boas Hall, *Henry Oldenburg: Shaping the Royal Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁶N. A. Dyce Sharp, "Cape Coast: An Historical Sketch, from 1610 to 1725. A paper read by Dr. N. A. Dyce Sharp before the Cape Coast Historical Society on August 29th, 1934," *Transactions of the Cape Coast Historical Society* 1, no. 1 (1935): 7-15.

³⁷Dyce Sharp, "Cape Coast."

³⁸*Ibid.* It was common in that era, see Dr. W. Walton Claridge, a senior medical officer published a two volume history of the Gold Coast. W. Walton Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: From the Earliest Times to the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*, vols. 1-2 (London: John Murray, 1915).

³⁹Ray Jenkins, "William Ofori Atta, Nnamdi Azikiwe, J. B. Danquah and the 'Grilling' of W. E. F. Ward of Achimota in 1935," *History in Africa* 21 (1994): 171-89.

both African and European, whose enterprise hundreds of years ago have made Cape Coast the fine old historic town it is today.⁴⁰

On 10 October 1934, the society met for its second general meeting. Justice R. S. Stewart read a paper entitled “Anamabo, its castle and its people” at the society’s meeting.⁴¹ Like Dyce Sharp’s presentation, the paper’s focus was the history of Europeans at Anomabu, another coastal town. Again, the author’s source materials were based on secondary accounts of European traders who came to Anomabu for trading purposes. While the first two papers attempted to reconstruct the histories of important coastal towns, B. Y. Owusu — an Asante history teacher — introduced a new subject with the third paper, read at the society’s January 1935 annual meeting.

Owusu’s paper, “The Rise of the United Ashanti,” traced the origins of the forest kingdom of Asante.⁴² The presenter issued a disclaimer to provide context for the sources used in writing the paper. Owusu stated that his writing was based on the collection of oral traditions. He added, “my only authorities are but a handful of illiterate men who, in the opinion of their countrymen, are well versed in Ashanti history.”⁴³ The presenter’s approach to reconstructing early Asante history during this period was revolutionary. Owusu’s approach to reconstructing the past is comparable to the Yoruba historian I. B. Akinyele, who drew on hitherto distinct literary genres (songs, riddles, and narratives) in his 1911 book on the history of Ibadan.⁴⁴ Indeed, until Jan Vansina’s pioneering work on ethnohistory was published, few professional historians had used oral accounts to reconstruct pre-colonial African history.⁴⁵ In this context, Owusu emphasized African agency in understanding the past. These three papers are the only surviving evidence of the presentations of the society’s meetings.

Within a relatively short period, the society achieved recognition in Europe and the United States that surpassed what it enjoyed in Cape Coast and other principal towns in the colony.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the little domestic recognition, interest in the society’s work spread beyond the coastal localities to Accra and Kumasi. Members of the public wrote letters to the society’s secretary inquiring about historical information.⁴⁷

The secretary reprinted correspondence of great historical value in the journal under the “correspondence and communication” section. On 1 August 1935, B. P. E. Bulstrode, a lawyer based in Accra, wrote to the secretary of the society asking for information about the life of William Topp, who he stated, “acted as President of the Gold Coast about 100 years ago.”⁴⁸ The writer indicated that “there is very little mention to be found of Mr. Topp in any books, beyond the fact that he appears to have been a respected resident of Cape Coast.”⁴⁹ Enquiries from members of the public enabled the society to fulfil its goal of researching the history of the Gold Coast. The secretary circulated copies of letters to all members of the society for those with the relevant information to assist the society in responding to the writer. With Bulstrode’s inquiry, two members of the society, Gaddiel R. Acquaaah and B. Y. Owusu, responded with fascinating historical information on Topp. Members of the society carried

⁴⁰ Dyce Sharp, “Cape Coast.”

⁴¹ R. Strother Stewart, “Anamabo, Its Castle and Its People. A paper read before the Cape Coast Historical Society on October 10, 1934,” *Transactions of the Cape Coast Historical Society* 1, no. 1 (1935): 16–25.

⁴² B. Y. Owusu, “The Rise of the United Ashanti. A paper read before the Cape Coast Historical Society in January 1935,” *Transactions of the Cape Coast Historical Society* 1, no. 1 (1935): 26–32. See also, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴³ Owusu, “The Rise of the United Ashanti,” 26.

⁴⁴ Karin Barber, “I. B. Akinyele and early Yoruba print culture,” in Peterson and Macola, *Recasting the Past*, 31–49.

⁴⁵ Jan Vansina, “Recording the Oral History of the Bakuba-I. Methods,” *The Journal of African History* 1, no. 1 (1960): 43–53.

⁴⁶ From a 1939 press report republished as “A Page from the past – The Cape Coast Historical Society Honours Dr. Dyce Sharp with a farewell party,” *The Gold Coast Observer* (Accra), 16 May 1952.

⁴⁷ PRAAD-Cape Coast, ACC. No. 391/64.

⁴⁸ PRAAD-Cape Coast, ACC. No. 391/64, “Correspondence and communications.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

out research using various data collection methods, including interviews, reviews of newspapers, and official reports.

Acquaah and Owusu's research in Cape Coast involved interviewing close family members and merchants and researching the local Methodist church marriage and death registers. The two researchers found that Topp was a successful merchant who "married" a local Cape Coast woman named Awura Akua Fanny. The union produced a son. Topp was also connected with local politics and the Methodist church. Owusu's research confirmed Bulstrode's information and revealed that Topp's "position as one of the prominent merchants gave him a place on the Council, and he several times acted as President when Mr. George Maclean was absent, and he ultimately became known to the natives as Armadu Topp (Governor Topp)."⁵⁰

In 1938, the society took part in the Glasgow Empire Exhibition, thus becoming the first learned society from the Gold Coast to exhibit at an international trade fair.⁵¹ The Empire Exhibition was held in Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, Scotland, from May to October 1938. The society's exhibits included rare manuscripts, historical records, and relics from Cape Coast. The society's other achievement included securing rare manuscripts such as the "The Minutes of the Council of the Association of Merchants."⁵² This book chronicled over a century of the activities of the merchants that governed Cape Coast.

The surviving archives of the Cape Coast Historical Society do not tell us what led to its demise. The shift of intellectualism to Accra and the retirement and movement of key members to other parts of the country contributed to irregular meeting attendance and, eventually, its decline.⁵³ Dyce Sharp, founder and chairman of the society, retired from the colonial service and returned to England in May 1939.⁵⁴ The society elected W. Ward Brew as the new chairman and continued its activities, but interest declined during the war years. By 1947, the society was defunct, and the historical records and relics in the possession of the honorary secretary, A. J. Hughes, were transferred to the newly established Monuments and Relics Commission based at the Achimota College near Accra.⁵⁵

The British colonial office prioritized higher education after the end of the Second World War. Africans' demand for university education compelled the colonial authorities to establish a university college for the Gold Coast. Consequently, the decline of the Cape Coast Historical Society interrupted the linearity in the evolution of learned societies. Nevertheless, the intellectuals carried forth the ideational principles of the learned society with the establishment of academic disciplines in the new college of the Gold Coast. The introduction of tertiary education birthed new disciplines-based learned societies at the university level.

The University College of the Gold Coast was founded with departments of geography, history, chemistry, and physics, among others, in 1948. Most faculty and senior administrative staff were expatriates from Britain and other parts of the Commonwealth. In 1953, there were only twelve senior members of Ghanaian extraction.⁵⁶ In 1951, some academics and statesmen, including Bernice M. Hamilton, John D. Fage, J. H. Nketsia, Alexander A. Kwabong, J. B. Danquah, Kobina Sekyi, and Nana Kobina Nketsia, founded the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society as a learned society.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ From a 1939 press report republished as "A page from the past – The Cape Coast Historical Society Honours Dr. Dyce-Sharp with a farewell party," *The Gold Coast Observer* (Accra), 16 May 1952.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ A search at PRAAD Departments in Accra and Cape Coast did not reveal any additional information beyond what is currently contained here.

⁵⁴ *The Gold Coast Observer*, "A Page from the past."

⁵⁵ PRAAD-Cape Coast, ADM 32/1/995, letter of the District Commissioner, Cape Coast, 23 Sep. 1947.

⁵⁶ Alexander Kwabong, who became the first Ghanaian Vice-Chancellor of the university, was one of the original members of the faculty in the early 1950s. See Alexander Kwabong, *A Life in Education: A Memoir* (Accra: Sub-Sharan Publishers/University of Ghana, 2016), 94.

The society was the first discipline-based scientific association at the new university college.⁵⁷ It drew together “all the people who practice the craft of either studying, teaching or writing history” under one umbrella.⁵⁸ The society was registered as a non-profit organization.

On 12–13 January 1952, Bernice M. Hamilton, the acting head of the department of history, presided over the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society’s inaugural meeting at Achimota.⁵⁹ Subject to payment of subscriptions, membership was open to professional historians, scholars in ancillary disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and ordinary public members with a passion for history. Members were categorized as foundation fellows or associate members, and the society was led by a council comprised of six elected officials. Keen to attract members from beyond the country and academia, the council created additional “corresponding,” “corporate,” and “honorary” membership categories.⁶⁰ J. W. de Graft Johnson was the inaugural president of the society.⁶¹ After independence in 1957, the society’s name changed to the Historical Society of Ghana (HSG).

Scientific research to advance Ghana’s development was high on the agenda of the Nkrumah administration. A year after independence in July 1958, the government tabled a research bill in parliament. In the parliamentary debates that ensued after the reading of the bill, the opposition United Party (UP), supported it. Contributing to the discussions on the bill, Chief S. D. Dombo, leader of the opposition, stated that when established, the research council would help the country “to develop our economy.”⁶² A. W. Osei, from the opposition bench, further argued: “I think this Bill is one of the most progressive bills ever brought into the House... Many nations have become great through the results of their research organisations.”⁶³ From the government side, Mumuni Bawumia expressed hope “that the Ghana Research Council will, within a short time, take the lead to remove our fears by making it possible for atomic energy to be used for peaceful purposes.”⁶⁴

Despite their ideological differences, political elites of different parties agreed about the potential benefits of scientific research. Parliament passed the Research Act of 1958 (No. 21) without a dissenting voice. The National Research Council (NRC) became operational on 14 February 1958, strengthening Ghana’s position as a pioneer and powerhouse for research in Africa.⁶⁵ Nkrumah assumed the chairmanship of the research council. He emphasized that “scientific research should take its proper place in our country’s development.”⁶⁶ The NRC was tasked with “the organisation and pursuit of research related to national economic and social development.”⁶⁷ It was also to act as the coordinating agency for the annual research programs of the various institutes established under it. After two years of operations, the government realized that scientists and scholars under the NRC were not collaborating to promote scientific development.

Furthermore, Ghana’s scientific community was small. Therefore, the bureaucrats argued that a merger would ensure the “maximum use of the limited local manpower resources and experience in the field of science.”⁶⁸ As a result, the government proposed the creation of the Ghana Academy

⁵⁷ It is the oldest in British West and East Africa. The Historical Society of Nigeria was established in 1955. See Yakubu A. Ochefu and Chris B. N. Ogbogbo, “The role of historical societies in Nigeria’s development,” *Afrika Zamani* 13–14 (2006): 73–85.

⁵⁸ ABMLA, AAB/15 Official Governments Papers and Correspondence, Letter to the Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Coast.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, “Inaugural meeting.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Hansard, Parliamentary Debates Official Report, 22 July 1958, 728.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 739.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 729.

⁶⁵ Obeng, *The Ghana Academy*, 13–14.

⁶⁶ GAAS, *Proceedings* 3 (1965), 1.

⁶⁷ PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG 2/13/1/25, National Research Council; Obeng, *The Ghana Academy*, 13–18.

⁶⁸ Hansard, Parliamentary Debates Official Report, 22 July 1958, 729.

of Learning. It was established by an act of parliament and inaugurated by Prince Philip, the visiting Duke of Edinburgh, on 27 November 1959 at “an impressive ceremony” at the Great Hall of the university college.⁶⁹

The Ghana Academy of Learning and the National Research Council were merged in 1963 to become the Ghana Academy of Sciences. The Academy was the first of its kind in Africa.⁷⁰ It was established as a statutory corporation to promote the study, extension, and dissemination of knowledge in all fields of science and learning.⁷¹ It aimed to maintain the highest standards of scholarship and “recognise outstanding contributions to the advancement of learning in Ghana.”⁷²

Unlike other learned societies established through private initiative, Ghana’s Academy was conceived by Prime Minister Nkrumah. In addition to the developmental imperative, Nkrumah’s aim for establishing the Ghana National Academy was to control and discipline a potential zone of dissent as several of his political opponents were intellectuals. As a result, the Academy was oriented towards Nkrumah’s political ideologies based on socialism and Pan-Africanism.⁷³ As a learned society, it provided a common meeting place where scholars and scientists with different interests and backgrounds could exchange ideas.⁷⁴ Twenty distinguished intellectuals from various disciplines and professions were elected to the foundation fellowship of the Academy.⁷⁵ Missing from the list of distinguished academics on the Academy membership list was Kofi A. Busia, the first Ghanaian professor of sociology and the first African chair of a university department. He had fled the country into a self-imposed exile and was critical of the Nkrumah administration.⁷⁶ Of the twenty foundation fellows, one woman (Susan Ofori Atta) and thirteen men were Ghanaians. Five other expatriates and one London-based female academic were foundation members of the Academy.⁷⁷ Linearity in the trajectory of learned societies is evident in the personalities who simultaneously were members of the HSG and the Academy.

Fellows of the Academy were also active participants in the HSG. J. B. Danquah, a member of the HSG, was one of the founding fellows of the Academy. J. N. Nketia and Alexander A. Kwapong were HSG and GAAS founding members. Similarly, Kobina Arku Korsah, a former Cape Coast Historical Society member, was one of the twenty original fellows of the Academy. Furthermore, the transnational membership of the Academy showed that Nkrumah was willing to tap into the international pool of intellectuals to promote scientific development in Ghana.

The National Academy reflected Nkrumah’s philosophy of science for socioeconomic development. He saw the Academy playing roles beyond Ghana when he said: “It belongs to an African revolution. The Academy can justify its status in our society only by its contribution to the nation’s progress and development.”⁷⁸ The Academy established working relations with international academies such as the British Academy, the International Academic Union, and the International Science Council (ISC).⁷⁹ Nkrumah created a National Academy that many industrialized and industrializing sovereign nations already had. Yet, he also tried to steer its goals to the African revolution as he envisioned it. The Academy forged close links with ten of the country’s learned societies, including the HSG.⁸⁰ Designed

⁶⁹ GAAS, *Proceedings* 5 (1967), 1; Obeng, 24; GAAS, *Annual Report 1964* (Accra: GAAS, 1964).

⁷⁰ At the time of its establishment there were no other national academies in Tropical independent Africa.

⁷¹ Obeng, *The Ghana Academy*.

⁷² GAAS, *Proceedings* 6 (1968), 7.

⁷³ The Secretary of the Academy toured Eastern Europe. See GAAS, *Proceedings* 2 (1964), 92–94.

⁷⁴ GAAS, *Proceedings* 1 (1963), 7.

⁷⁵ PRAAD-Kumasi, 2/13/1/25, The Recorder of the Ghana Academy of Sciences, 15 Jan. 1963.

⁷⁶ He returned to Ghana after the fall of the Nkrumah regime and won the general elections of 1969. He became Prime Minister of the short-lived Second Republic (1969–72). He was elected a Fellow of the Academy in 1969.

⁷⁷ GAAS, *Handbook* (Accra: GAAS, 2017), 5–6.

⁷⁸ GAAS, *Proceedings* 1 (1963), 4.

⁷⁹ GAAS, *Proceedings* 8 (1975), 7.

⁸⁰ GAAS, *Handbook*, 20–21.

as a transdisciplinary scientific society, Nkrumah emphasized his preference for interdisciplinary research when he said:

Whatever other services the Academy may render to the intellectual life of our nation, I feel sure that it will more than justify itself if it succeeds in fulfilling this particular function. The current tendency for knowledge to become increasingly fragmented and specialized is not altogether healthy for the ultimate well-being of human society, and I think some emphasis should obviously be laid on the basic unity of all knowledge. Otherwise, instead of producing balanced and responsible citizens, our educational systems will turn out myopic technicians, unaware of their cultural inheritance and incapable of applying their knowledge to the solution of the more complex problems that face their own societies.⁸¹

Throughout the years of its existence, the organizational structure of the Academy has constantly been under review. In 1965, a year before Nkrumah's presidency of the Academy abruptly ended, there were thirty-eight fellows — thirty-five males and three females. In February 1966, the National Liberation Council (NLC) toppled the Nkrumah administration through a military coup. The NLC administration decreed that Nkrumah's name should be forbidden in public and proceeded to set up a commission of enquiry to investigate the activities of the Academy.⁸² Nkrumah's name was deleted from the register.⁸³ Ideologically, the Academy appeared to have jettisoned Nkrumah's socialism. It embraced conservative/liberal values. Qualification for nomination went through a rigorous review process before the election.⁸⁴

In 1968, the Academy undertook far-reaching reforms to ensure efficiency in its operations. The government engaged the Nobel laureate and British physicist John Cockcroft to study the processes of the Academy and advise the government. The Cockcroft report recommended the separation of the learning functions from the research division of the Academy. All the research institutes came under the new organization, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).⁸⁵ The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS) continued to play the function of a learned society. Another vital reform introduced in line with the prevailing liberal ideology of the post-Nkrumah era was the institution of the "J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures series." After the overthrow of the Nkrumah regime, the government instituted measures to honor and rehabilitate J. B. Danquah, a foundation fellow of the Academy.⁸⁶ Danquah was a political prisoner and died tragically in the state-run Nsawam prison in 1965. The Academy instituted the memorial lectures to be delivered in February each year by an eminent academic from Ghana or abroad in the fields of law, history, philosophy, and literature.⁸⁷

Knowledge production, dissemination, and recognition of excellence

The reasons for establishing learned societies were to contribute to new knowledge production and dissemination, train the future generation, and recognize outstanding scholarship. The country developed quality human resources through the activities of learned societies. As Nkrumah stated: "We are, as it were, jumping the centuries, using the knowledge and experience already available to us. What others have taken hundreds of years to do, we must achieve in a generation."⁸⁸ Ghanaian scientists

⁸¹ GAAS, *Proceedings* 1 (1963), 7.

⁸² Republic of Ghana, *Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the Ghana Academy of Sciences Final Report* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1969).

⁸³ GAAS, *Proceedings* 6 (1968), 1.

⁸⁴ Interview, Accra, 15 May 2023.

⁸⁵ Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, *1968 First Annual Report* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1971).

⁸⁶ GAAS, *Proceedings* 6 (1968), 7–10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ GAAS, *Proceedings* 3 (1965), 1.

conducted advanced research to fulfil the agenda of the developmental state. The HSG and GAAS programs aided the agenda.

Between 1952 and 1983, the HSG hosted 31 conferences until the economic difficulties the nation experienced interrupted its programs. By 1960, the society's membership had increased from 98 in 1952 to 241.⁸⁹ It opened branches in Cape Coast and Kumasi and had representatives in all secondary schools and teacher training colleges throughout the country. General meetings demonstrated African agency in the discussions on historical scholarship, including teaching and research.⁹⁰ Debates were lively, controversial, and, at times, raucous. Issues of interpretation and sources about the emerging field of African history dominated the discussions. Nevertheless, Ghanaian historians and expatriates cooperated to advance the field of African historical scholarship.

The significant thing to note is that the annual meetings allowed the society to fulfil its goal of disseminating new research findings. For example, at the tenth annual general meeting in Kumasi, the Asantehene, Agyeman Prempeh II, was the special guest of honour. The Otumfuo expressed interest in the society's work in his address and "revealed that he was engaged in the writing of the history of Ashanti."⁹¹ The HSG created an academic conference culture at these annual gatherings. The conference culture accorded researchers the opportunity to present papers and receive feedback.⁹² The conferences ushered emerging scholars into professional networks that helped their academic growth. History teachers at secondary schools and training colleges had the opportunity to learn the new developments within the field. From the development perspective, some of the human resources for national development were cultivated and nurtured at these scholarly gatherings. The generation of Ghanaian historians produced after independence — K. Darkwah, I. Odotei, D. E. K. Amenumey, B. G. Der, W. J. Donkoh, R. Addo-Fening, and A. Perbi, among others — were all mentored at the society's annual meetings.⁹³ This generation of historians' scholarship, work ethic, and professionalism differ from those of the later generations.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the HSG became defunct under the leadership of this generation of Ghanaian trained historians.

As components of the developmental state, generous government subvention supported scientific research at the universities. The immediate post-independence period up to the mid-1970s appears to be the most productive era in Ghana's intellectual history. President Nkrumah, a scholar-statesman, had a powerful sense of the centrality of knowledge to power and the transformative potential of knowledge.⁹⁵ He used state power and resources to promote science, aiming to build an industrialized and knowledge-based society and economy.⁹⁶ The learned societies were the direct beneficiaries of government support for higher education. The HSG promoted cutting-edge research through its academic journals. The house journal of HSG, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* (THSG), became the leading mainstream academic journal for historical scholarship on the continent of Africa.⁹⁷ With the assistance of grants from public universities, the *Transactions* became an essential outlet for disseminating knowledge on Ghanaian and African history. In the 1960s, African

⁸⁹ A. Adu Boahen, "Minutes of the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the Historical Society of Ghana held at the Queen Elizabeth II Hall, Kumasi College of Technology, on Friday, 16 December 1960, at 8p.m," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 5, no. 1 (1961): 70–71.

⁹⁰ Interview, Accra, 16 Apr. 2023; interview, Kumasi, 20 June 2022.

⁹¹ Boahen, "Minutes." The study the Asantehene was referenced has been edited and recently published. See T. C. McCaskie, *'History of Ashanti' by Otumfuo Nana Osei Agyemang Prempeh II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

⁹² Interview, Kumasi, 23 June 2022; interview, Accra-Legon, 9 Oct. 2023.

⁹³ Informal discussion with Prof. Irene Odotei, former President of HSG, 18 Feb. 2022.

⁹⁴ Interview with a historian, Accra, 15 Aug. 2022.

⁹⁵ See "Speech Delivered by Osagyefo, The President at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of Ghana's Atomic Reactor at Kwabena on 25th November, 1964," *Ghana Journal of Science* 5, no. 1 (1965): 1–5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Transactions* is older than many of the mainstream international history journals dedicated to publishing African histories, e.g., *The Journal of African History* (1960), *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1968), and *African Economic History* (1974).

history as a field for scholarly inquiry was in its embryonic stages. Eurocentric views dominated what constituted African history and teaching at secondary schools and universities. *Transactions* gave historians a publication outlet for rigorous and cutting-edge scholarship to thrive in independent Africa. Scholars, including A. A. Boahen, A. E. Afigbo, J. D. Fage, and I. Wilks, among others whose works would later define the field of African history and politics, published their works in the *Transactions* pages.

Similarly, emerging scholars such as Polly Hill, Walter Rodney, Benedict Der, A. A. Iiasu, William Tordoff, and Agnes A. Aidoo, among others, published their research in the *Transactions*. I argue that *Transactions* was the place to publish for recognition as a humanities and social sciences research scientist. Several seminal studies that would delineate the various subfields of history and related disciplines, such as political science and social anthropology, were published in the *Transactions*. For example, Polly Hill's study on the political economy of cocoa production in Ghana first appeared in the *Transactions* as "The History of the Migration of Ghana Cocoa Farmers" in 1959.⁹⁸ William Tordoff, a political scientist, published his most famous article entitled "The Exile and Repatriation of Nana Prempeh I of Ashanti (1896–1924)" in the *Transactions* in 1962.⁹⁹ The Guyanese Marxist historian and political activist Walter Rodney's article "Gold and Slaves on the Gold Coast," published in the *Transactions* in 1969, would later find space in his more extensive and groundbreaking study on the impact of colonialism on Africa's development.¹⁰⁰ The *Transaction's* prestige spread to all corners of the scholarly publishing world. In the 1970s, as submissions to the editor increased, it necessitated the publication of two issues, in June and December each year.¹⁰¹

The merger of the Historical Society of Ghana with the Ghana History Teachers Association occasioned changes in the society's publication policy. In 1960, the organization commenced publication of the *Ghana Notes and Queries*. The bulletin addressed a "long-felt need for a less scholarly journal than the *Transactions* in which professional historians and ordinary laymen can publish short notes, oral traditions, descriptions and historical explanations of festivals, oaths, and custom."¹⁰² The distinction between the *Transactions* and *Ghana Notes and Queries* was to cater to two groups of researchers — professionals and amateurs. Nevertheless, the *Ghana Notes and Queries* soon acquired a reputation as the platform where both professional and amateur historians tested their ideas.¹⁰³ At its annual general meeting in 1972, the members voted to end the publication of the *Ghana Notes and Queries*. A new specialist journal, the *West African Journal for History Teachers* (WAJHT), was launched. The WAJHT scope covered three broad areas: pedagogical research, the history syllabus of schools and colleges, and research into oral traditions.¹⁰⁴ The golden era of scientific publishing in history ended in the early 1980s. The *Transactions* became defunct in 1983 partly because the Ghanaian economy had collapsed.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) military administration was hostile towards academia and the public universities were closed in 1982. Flt-Lt J. J. Rawlings loathed ivory tower intellectualism. For Rawlings, "Academic advancement must be earned not just

⁹⁸Polly Hill, "The history of the migration of Ghana cocoa farmers," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 4, no. 1 (1959): 14–28. The expanded ideas into a book have become a classic. See Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

⁹⁹William Tordoff, "The Exile and Repatriation of Nana Prempeh I of Ashanti (1896–1924)," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 4, no. 2 (1962): 33–58. He taught at the University of Ghana from 1950 to 1962. He used a substantial part of this article in his book, *Ashanti under the Prempehs 1888–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

¹⁰⁰Walter Rodney, "Gold and Slaves on the Gold Coast," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 10 (1969): 13–28. See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and Dar-Es-Salaam: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications/Tanzanian Publishing House, 1972).

¹⁰¹Vols. 12–15 of *Transactions* (1970–73) had two issues each.

¹⁰²Boahen, "Minutes."

¹⁰³ABMLA, *Ghana Notes and Queries* 1–12 (1960–70).

¹⁰⁴S. K. Odamtten, "Contribution to the Symposium on Methods of Teaching History in Secondary Schools and Training Colleges," *West African Journal for History Teachers* 1, no. 1 (1974): 1–5.

¹⁰⁵The journal was revived in the early 2000s and hosted on the digital library JSTOR database.

by study and research, but by practical service to the people, by concrete solutions to real problems and needs which affect the lives of Ghanaians, especially the less-privileged.”¹⁰⁶ Such was the administration’s dislike of liberal intellectuals that when Professor Daniel A. Bekoe’s term ended in 1983, the position of Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana remained vacant for nearly two years until Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr, a Marxist intellectual, filled it in 1985.

In contrast, the nomination and election of distinguished academics to the fellowship of the Academy was a major function during the period under examination. It continued to identify and accord the necessary recognition to worthy achievements in the field of learning in Ghana and internationally. In that context, the Academy gave scholars the essential incentive and inspiration. Some of the nation’s leading scientists from the universities, research institutes, and the Ghana Bar gained fellowship of the Academy through a rigorous and laborious process. However, the election process was irregular and delayed. While there was regularity in the election of fellows between 1959 and 1965, it ceased in the year the NLC toppled the Nkrumah administration. No new fellows entered the register of the Academy in the three years between 1965 and 1969, or in the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

A consistent pattern emerged from the analysis of the fellow’s election that coincided with periods of political uncertainty in Ghana. With a membership of 88 from 1959 to 1990, only five were females. The considerable gender disparity reflected poorly on the image of the Academy. Nevertheless, as one respondent remarked, “the environment of the 1970s right to the 1990s did not encourage female scientists to aspire for excellence... those few females in the male-dominated academia faced all manner of discrimination which hampered their professional growth.”¹⁰⁷ These challenges were not unique to Ghana’s Academy.¹⁰⁸

As the most prestigious of the learned societies in Ghana, the Academy promoted knowledge dissemination. The outreach programs of the Academy included lectures, symposia, and the Academy Awards. It contributed to policy making and offered policy alternatives to the government in health, education, urbanization, environment, and local government, among others.¹⁰⁹ Local and foreign scholars presented their scientific research to the public. The cross-fertilization of ideas enhanced scholarship and lifted the image of the Academy. The house journal of the Academy, *Proceedings of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences*, published cutting-edge research of the fellows and visiting scholars.¹¹⁰ The administrators of the Academy distributed publications to all institutions of higher learning and government ministries. They gave it for free to citizens.

The Academy’s programs engaged and educated the public. In November, they celebrated the anniversaries of the Academy. The fellows usually rounded off the celebration with sumptuous banquets at a location in the nation’s capital. The presidential speeches at the dinners were exhortations and acknowledgements of the Academy’s relevance to national development. The “Academy Awards” preceded the dinner. The Prince Philip Gold and Silver Medals rewarded learning. Whereas the Gold Medal was awarded for the most “distinguished contribution to knowledge” by a Ghanaian scientist, the Silver Medal was awarded to the “most promising work” in science by a student at a public university. In addition, the Academy awarded prizes for excellence in literary works and best undergraduate students’ essays.

¹⁰⁶ See Flt-Lt J. J. Rawlings, quoted in the *People’s Daily Graphic* (Accra), 5 Feb. 1988.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a retired female academic, Accra, 22 June 2022. The challenges that female academics face have been well documented. See Amina Mama, “Restore, Reform but do not transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa,” *JHEA/RESA* 1, no. 1(2003): 101–25.

¹⁰⁸ The Academy now counts among its fellowship distinguished young female academics.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Accra, 26 June 2022; interview, Kumasi, 18 Apr. 2023.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, GAAS: “The Future of Our Cities,” *Proceedings* (1989); “Sustainable Development and the Environment,” *Proceedings* (1992); “Notion of the State in Contemporary Africa,” *Proceedings* (1998); “Some Crucial Development Issues Facing Ghana,” *Proceedings* (2001); “National Integration,” *Proceedings* (2003); “Gender: Evolving Roles and Perceptions,” *Proceedings* (2004).

President Nkrumah's caution that the "Academy must not become purely honorific, a social club in which members pat one another on the back when they meet and engage in endless debates and arguments" was apparently not heeded.¹¹¹ Like other state institutions, the fortunes of the Academy declined in the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹² Membership fees, annual contributions, and government subvention to the Academy declined. Besides, the aged fellows of the Academy turned it into a retirees' social club.¹¹³ As one respondent pointed out, "GAAS was a gated academic community of very old, greyed hair men who decided who to let in... It was not attractive to young achievers."¹¹⁴ Indeed, the "intellectual and scientific centre of the nation's vigour" that Nkrumah envisaged for the Academy failed to materialize.

In contrast, unlike the HSG, which became defunct in the early 1980s, the Academy survived. Outside the university's campuses, the Academy provided the only space for articulating independent thoughts and dispassionate diagnoses of the nation's development challenges. Under the J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures platform, several insightful and, at times, provocative lectures were delivered by scholars, statesmen, and politicians.¹¹⁵

Since the inception of the lecture series in 1968, various speakers have addressed themes that cut across all knowledge traditions.¹¹⁶ On 20–22 February 1968, Justice W. B. van Lare delivered the first lecture, "The Law, Human Rights and the Judiciary."¹¹⁷ The lecture focused on the person of J. B. Danquah, his contributions to legal education, and his deep belief in human rights as the bedrock of any modern society. The public's participation in this maiden lecture was impressive after the Nkrumah regime's overthrow. Other speakers lectured on a wide range of topics, including science and technology (F. T. Sai 1976), African unity (E. A. Boateng 1978), and environmental management (L. E. Obeng 1980). Two public lectures in the mid to late 1980s probably pricked the nation's conscience. William Ofori Atta's lecture, "Ghana, a nation in crisis," delivered in 1985, was appropriate at this period of the country's development.¹¹⁸ This lecture prepared the stage for Professor Albert Adu Boahen's 15–17 February 1988 lecture titled "The Ghanaian Sphinx: reflections on the contemporary history of Ghana, 1972–1987".¹¹⁹ Boahen seized the opportunity to respond to Rawlings's appeal to Ghanaians to break the "culture of silence" that had engulfed the nation.¹²⁰

Boahen's lecture at the British Council auditorium in downtown Accra provided a rare opportunity for a scholarly critique of the nation's decline. In lectures over three days, Boahen analyzed Ghana's successive administrations since 1972. However, the second-day lecture entitled "The Era of the 'Culture of Silence': Ghana since the 31st December Revolution" resonated well with pro-democracy activists and liberals but unnerved the regime and its supporters. Adu Boahen criticized the press for the prevailing "culture of silence," saying that the media blocked opposing views from

¹¹¹GAAS, *Proceedings* 3 (1965), 3.

¹¹²For details on Ghana's economic decline, see Jonathan H. Frimpong-Ansah, *The Vampire State in Africa: The Political Economy of Decline in Ghana* (London: James Currey, 1991); Mike Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana, 1972–1979* (Accra: Tornado Publications, 1980).

¹¹³Interview, Accra, May 2023; interview, Kumasi, Feb. 2023.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵See Adu Boahen Memorial Library and Archive (ABMLA), AAB/2/6/1 J. B. Danquah Lectures; GAAS, J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures: Letitia E. Obeng, "Environmental Management and Responsibility of the Privileged," 13th lecture (1980); Emmanuel Lartey, "Technology for Development: The case of a Developing Country, Ghana," 34th lecture (2001).

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹¹⁷GAAS, *Proceedings* 6 (1969), 58–77.

¹¹⁸William Ofori Atta, *Ghana: A Nation in Crisis* (Accra: GAAS, 1988).

¹¹⁹The lecture was advertised in the state owned *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 5 Feb. 1988.

¹²⁰Adu Boahen had a score to settle with the PNDC administration. Apart from being ideologically opposed to leftist politics, he also bore a professional pain when the regime passed him over in the appointment of a new Vice Chancellor for the University of Ghana in 1985 even though the search party report recommended him highly for the position. See "Tribute by the University of Ghana," in *Celebration of the life and legacy of the late Professor Emeritus Albert Adu Boahen* (Accra: The Historical Society of Ghana/The Funeral Planning Committee, 2006), 23.

the public.¹²¹ Lt-General Arnold Quainoo, a member of the PNDC, disagreed with Adu Boahen's analysis of the military's role in destabilizing Ghana's democracy. Similarly, editorials and some citizens criticized the professor for his periodization of Ghana's contemporary history. He was accused of ignoring the NLC period because his political tradition was the primary beneficiary of the coup that toppled the First Republic.¹²²

Many commentators have credited Adu Boahen for breaking the PNDC-inspired "culture of silence."¹²³ Yet, his scholarly presentation best reflected the nation's mood in the late 1980s. Adu Boahen was conveyor of popular sentiments, and he mobilized his historical knowledge on Danquah's liberal ideas to make a particular argument about the significance of a "Danquah-Busia tradition" in twentieth-century Ghanaian politics. He couched his presentation intending to forge a sense of unity amongst citizens opposed to the Rawlings administration. Boahen was popular among the urban elites, and his courage in denouncing the Rawlings administration was one main reason his party nominated him. Rawlings was his primary opponent in the November 1992 presidential elections, which Boahen lost. Whether Adu Boahen's lecture contributed to the return to civilian rule in the early 1990s or not, it showed the relevance of the Academy in national development. The Academy guaranteed academic freedom and promoted independent thoughts, as demonstrated in several lectures by eminent scientists on its platform.

Conclusion

This paper examined the evolution and the institutionalization of learned societies in colonial and postcolonial Ghana. Ghana was a nation of many firsts, including the first country in Africa to establish learned societies and a National Academy. The Christian missions and the British laid the foundation for Western education, knowledge creation, and contesting established traditions. The post-independent state was developmental because it experimented with several development strategies to address the socio-economic inadequacies that the colonial state bequeathed. In analyzing the developmental state, scholars have focused on the mega-developments that neglected the ideas promoted by learned societies that contributed to enlightening communities and transforming national economies.

Kwame Nkrumah's developmental state put the pursuit of scientific research at the forefront of its transformational agenda. His socialist vision for transforming Ghana influenced GAAS activities and programs. Consequently, the HSG and GAAS fit well with the developmental state model promoted by Ghana's political elites. Members and fellows of the learned societies exercised African agency and challenged claims that Africa had no discoverable history before its contact with Europeans. The country's human resources developed when new knowledge created by scientists challenged the existing epistemologies. The HSG nurtured, mentored, and institutionalized a scientific research culture through its programs. As the first learned society in independent Africa, the HSG established linkages between the creators of advanced new knowledge (academics) and the producers of the consumers (secondary schools and training colleges teachers) of the new learning.

Similarly, the GAAS signaled that the country had come of age and desired an independent development path. More importantly, it provided a national space to recognize excellence in scholarship and to communicate it to the public. Like other projects of Kwame Nkrumah, the Academy led the "African revolution" in scientific research. Despite several institutional and logistical challenges, the Academy contributed to advancing scientific knowledge creation, dissemination, recognition of excellence, and public education in independent Ghana.

¹²¹ Nevertheless, his lecture made it on the front page of the state owned *Peoples Daily Graphic* (Accra), 19 Feb. 1988; see also Joe Okyere, "Adu Boahen blames press for culture of silence," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 18 Feb. 1988.

¹²² See "Yet another memorial lecture," *People's Daily Graphic* (Accra), 19 Feb. 1988.

¹²³ Mike Oquaye, *Politics in Ghana, 1982-1992* (Accra: Tornado Publications, 2004), 352.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank the editors of *The Journal of African History* and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on this manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge Takyiwaa Manuh, Franklin Obeng-Odoom, Manuel Jojo Manu-Osafo, and Ali Yakubu Nyaaba for commenting on versions of this paper.

Cite this article: Bob-Milliar GM (2024). Learned Societies, Knowledge Production, and Public Engagement in Colonial and Postcolonial Ghana, 1930–90. *The Journal of African History* 65(3), 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853724000458>