

## OBITUARIES

### **ALHAJI ADAMU LIMAN CIROMA** (13 September 1940 – 23 May 2004)

Liman Ciroma, Nigeria's first qualified archaeologist and later a distinguished civil servant renowned for his honesty and forthrightness, died suddenly at the age of 73 in Kaduna on 23 May 2004. Though he was not a member of the Nigerian Field Society, he deserves to be remembered because he never lost his early interest in the work of preserving Nigeria's rich heritage and continued to support it during his administrative career.

He retired at the height of his administrative career after being Secretary to the Federal Military Government and Head of the Civil Service under General Obasanjo from 1977 to 1979 and had been awarded Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic and Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger. He was active in Nigerian public life until his death, especially as a leading member of the Arewa Consultative Forum, the northern establishment group.

Alhaji Adamu Liman Ciroma (always known as Liman: his nephew Adamu is also well-known in Nigeria) was a member of the royal family of Fika, a small independent emirate to the east of the great Hausa-Fulani emirate of Kano and west of the Kanuri emirate of Bornu. Though he spent most of his adult life away from Fika, in 1993 he was turbaned as Ciroma, second to the Emir in rank. These grandiose titles do not, however, reflect Alhaji Liman's engagingly no-nonsense personality.

Born in 1930, during the period of British administration, he went to school in his home town, Potiskum, and then to Borno Middle School in Maiduguri and Barewa College. When he was in the sixth form the archaeologist Bernard Fagg, then Assistant Surveyor of Antiquities for the Nigerian government, came to give a talk on the important role of archaeology in finding out and preserving Nigeria's history for the future. At the end of his talk he asked if any of the students was interested in training for this work and Liman volunteered. He was recruited as technical assistant in training in 1949. He worked with Fagg until 1953, during the building of Nigeria's first museum at Jos on the Plateau in central Nigeria, where the open cast tin mining industry was uncovering much archaeological material, and then at Ile-Ife, in the south, where urban regeneration necessitated rescue archaeology and the restoration of the granite monolith the Opa Oranyan, one of Nigeria's scheduled ancient monuments. He became a great friend of Bernard (brother of William Fagg, Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum) and Catherine Fagg and their family.

In 1953 Liman gained a Government Scholarship to go to Britain, where he stayed until 1959. He read archaeology and history at the Institute of Archaeology, University of



London, at the South-West Essex Technical College and at Birmingham University, where he took his degree. During this period he made lifelong friends, including John Lavers, later Professor of History at Kano, who married Liman's sister, and Murray Last, the historian of the Sokoto caliphate and later Professor of Anthropology at University College, London.

On his return home as the first Nigerian with an Honours degree in archaeology, Liman took up his post in the Federal Department of Antiquities, and worked throughout Nigeria, from Daura and Ruma to Bauchi and Benin. In his acknowledgements in his book on Igbo-Ukwu the British archaeologist Professor Thurstan Shaw gave thanks 'above all to my deputy Liman Ciroma, for his invaluable help on the excavation and his unfailingly enjoyable company'. But it was almost inevitable that Liman Ciroma would be lured from archaeology to administration after independence on October 1st 1960, since the north was short of people trained in Western technologies and skills.

He had already risen to be Acting Deputy Director of Antiquities when, in 1961, the Sardauna, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Region, head-hunted him for a senior post in the Northern Region Ministry of Local Government in Kaduna. After the creation of states during the civil war he went as a permanent secretary to Maiduguri. From 1968 he was Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministries of Industries and later Education in Lagos, and retired at the top in 1979, after being Secretary to the Federal Military Government and head of the civil service.

While he was in Britain Liman had been engaged by his family to a young girl, according to tradition. As an educated young man, he had not liked this idea at first, but he married Madiya, and never took another wife, unusually for a man of his position in northern Nigeria. They had five children and lived in a comfortable, but far from grand, family house with a big garden in Kaduna, the former capital of the Northern Region where he had started his administrative career. He loved the garden with its shady fruit trees and could often be found there playing with his grandchildren.

Liman Ciroma was one of the generation fast disappearing who viewed Britain with a sense of a special relationship, recalling the idiosyncrasies of British administrators of the 1940s and 50s with affection as well as critical intelligence. He was a devout Muslim, who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, but had many Christian friends, and viewed the polarisation of the two religions in Nigeria with concern. He was courteous, considerate and generous, and a fine public servant.

Liz Moloney with help from Mrs Angela Rackham, nee Fagg

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**Professor Kay Williamson  
1935-2005**

It is with the greatest regret that I have to announce the death of Kay Williamson, (born Ruth Margaret Williamson), my friend and colleague of quarter-century, in Brazil on the 3rd of January, 2005, as she was approaching her 70th birthday. She was recovering from a major operation in November and decided to go to Brazil to attend the wedding of a niece. She had just finished the wedding and was about to go home when she fell down and died instantly. Her family are all still in Brazil where a post-mortem and cremation took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January. A small Quaker-style meeting was held for her by family members present on the Friday afternoon at the Crematorium. Her autopsy gave 5 causes of death, including a heart attack, which we believe to have been the precipitating factor: the others obviously made her extremely vulnerable. The ashes will be brought back to England and further carried to Nigeria, where the University of Port Harcourt is anxious to arrange a memorial service. I will make a further posting as soon as I have any more details.



Kay Williamson was born in January 1935 in Hereford, England, where she lived for the first 18 years of her life. Her parents were Alfred Henry ("Harry") Williamson and Harriett Eileen Williamson, and she was the oldest of six siblings (two brothers and three sisters). Her father had shortly before established Wyevale Nurseries, plant-growers, which many years later spawned the Wyevale Garden Centre that subsequently fathered what is now the country's largest chain of garden centres. She was educated at a small private school, the Moor Park Preparatory School, until the age of 11, when she went to the local grammar school, the Hereford High School for Girls. Her interest in languages was already evident in her proficiency in French, German and Latin (the only languages that were taught at her school).

She went to Oxford in 1953, where she took a B.A. in English. After Oxford, she moved to Nigeria on a Leverhulme Research Scholarship, where she began research on the Ijo language cluster and later became an Assistant Lecturer in Phonetics at the University



College of Ibadan. She later studied linguistics at Yale University, where she received her Ph.D. in 1964. After further research on Ijo with a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, she then taught linguistics at the University of Ibadan, where she became a Professor in 1972. In 1977, she moved to the University of Port Harcourt, where she taught Linguistics and Nigerian Languages until she retired in 2000. She held the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria until her death.

With Nigerian colleagues she initiated the Rivers Readers Project, which encouraged students to study their own languages, to develop orthographies and reading materials. Through the Rivers Readers Project, primary school books have been published in all the languages of Rivers State. She is a founding member and has been a council member of the West African Linguistics Society and the Linguistic Association of Nigeria. Kay Williamson is a specialist in Nigerian languages and comparative Niger-Congo. She published on Ijo, Igbo, various other languages of the Niger Delta, and on the classification of Benue-Congo and Niger-Congo. She has left behind very substantial manuscripts on the Ijo and Igbo languages; it is hoped that these can be published in due course.

Kay was an eminent linguist and a very special person. Her two greatest contributions are in comparative West African linguistics and in local language development. This was very influential both for the products developed, and for the awareness and legitimacy it gave to many local languages. She inspired and taught whole generations of students to become linguists like herself: competent, kind and applying her skills to help new generations to a better image of themselves, their family, people and nation. One impressive testimony to this were the two Festschrifts prepared for her by her Nigerian colleagues, the latest one in 2003.

Kay Williamson was diagnosed with a leaking heart valve in 1991 and underwent a major operation for this condition in 1994. She was taking Warfarin to prevent blood-clotting and in December 2003 was rushed to England when a surge of bleeding in her leg threatened her health. She subsequently spent some four months in the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. After that she stayed in England, which gave her a chance to write up part of her lifelong study of the Ijo languages. In November, she underwent another major operation and was recovering in Cambridge during December.

Kay was brought up a Methodist, but became a Quaker in the early 1990s, and was subsequently very active, both among Quakers in Nigeria and in attending Quaker meetings in Cambridge. She took peace activism very seriously and often went down to London to protest at international arms fairs. During 2004, she went to a protest rally at an airbase near Cambridge, despite her health situation.

— Roger Blench

#### **Publications (excerpt)**



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- 2002 with E. E. Efere. *Crosscurrents and confluences: linguistic clues to cultural development*. Appendix in: Anderson, Martha G., and Philip M. Peek. *Ways of the Rivers*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.
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2004. The language situation in the Niger Delta. Chapter 2 in: *The development of ?z?n language*, edited by Martha L. Akpana, 9-13.

#### Honours

- 1992 Rivers State Silver Jubilee Merit Award
- 1996 Ikwerre Development Association Merit Award
- 1998 Linguistic Society of America: Honorary Member