

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A tool for reassessment: using the archives of Frederick Lugard at Oxford and online

Dean Pavlakis 

Carroll College, Helena, MT
Email: pavlakis1@verizon.net

Abstract

The extensive archives of Frederick Lugard are an underused resource for reassessing Lugard himself, reconsidering his impact on specific places and issues, and uncovering African perspectives, refracted as they inevitably are by the perspective of an explorer, military officer, colonial governor, and elder statesman. Literature searches reveal that scholars seldom consult the Lugard papers. They will be of particular interest for scholars from Africa studying the effects on pre-colonial African states of British interference, the onset of foreign rule, and the efforts of African individuals, communities, and elites to resist or co-opt imperial power.

Resumé

Les vastes archives de Frederick Lugard constituent une ressource sous-utilisée pour réévaluer Lugard lui-même, reconsidérer son impact sur des lieux et des problèmes spécifiques et découvrir les perspectives africaines, réfractées comme elles le sont inévitablement par le point de vue d'un explorateur, d'un officier militaire, d'un gouverneur colonial et d'un homme d'État âgé. Les revues de littérature publiée révèlent que les chercheurs consultent rarement les articles de Lugard. Ils présenteront un intérêt particulier pour les chercheurs africains qui étudient les effets de l'ingérence britannique sur les États africains précoloniaux, l'apparition de la domination étrangère et les efforts des individus, des communautés et des élites africaines pour résister ou coopter le pouvoir impérial.

In the expansion, consolidation, and administration of the British colonial empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there are few 'men on the spot' who notably appear in more places than Frederick Dealtry Lugard. Lugard's colonial service, both for private companies and in government service, included postings in Sudan, Nyasaland, British East Africa (Kenya), Uganda, Nigeria, Bechuanaland (Botswana), and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as well as India, Afghanistan, Burma and Hong Kong. A person of many talents and interests, he acted by turns as a military officer, colonial administrator, informal advisor, and researcher. In the process, he achieved considerable fame in his lifetime (more, certainly, than most colonial administrators)

and earned the confidence of leading politicians as well as colonial businessmen, explorers and administrators. Retiring to Britain in 1919, he used his reputation as a colonial expert and his connections among British and colonial elites to continue to influence policy. In 1921, he finished a book intended to serve as an all-purpose manual for colonial administration, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Lugard 1926). He bolstered his reputation through his participation in government advisory bodies, the boards of educational institutions and several colonial enterprises, and organs of the League of Nations, not least the Permanent Mandates Commission and the Temporary Slavery Commission (TSC). For his many contributions, he was knighted in 1901 and raised to the peerage as Baron Lugard in 1928.

For much of his adult life, Frederick Lugard applied himself to the question of how imperial powers could end slavery, beginning at about age thirty when he instigated a close friendship with two men who had been Livingstone's companions and shared his goal of abolishing the slave trade and slavery itself: Sir John Kirk and Rev. Horace Waller (Perham 1956: 144).¹ This interest was occasionally occluded by other priorities and duties, but never faded, and, motivated him to join the League of Nations's Temporary Slavery Commission and initiate the Slavery Convention adopted by the League of Nations in 1926.

The scope of his activities over a long career meant that he was involved in decisions and controversies for many British colonies, all the post-Versailles mandated territories, and some of the imperial possessions of other countries. His firsthand experience during his active career in company and government service informed his approach to the international questions in which the League of Nations and the British government involved him. As a result, the Lugard archives have potential uses for a broad array of research subjects.

Scholars of all nationalities, but particularly African researchers probing the early decades of British colonial rule in the age of the new imperialism, will find useful material in the Lugard archives. Given his interest in anti-slavery from the moment he entered the service of the African Lakes Company in 1888, any study of the political economy of slavery, including its practices, expansion, and slow decline, would benefit from using Lugard's observations and actions as a valuable supplement to local documentary, oral, and archeological sources. For example, his first venture, under the auspices of the African Lakes Company on behalf of its own interests and those of British missionaries and over the objections of Lord Salisbury, required him to try to understand the dynamics of local societies as well as the intrusion of the Swahili-Arab slave trade (Perham 1956: 106–26). Similarly, his actions in the fraught history of the Buganda kingdom under Kabaka Mwanga led him to document his understanding of the African protagonists and well as the European interlopers. The structural changes Lugard made in his governorships in Nigeria had long-lasting repercussions: the congruities and dissonances between his intentions and the effects of his changes would benefit from engaging the facts on the ground with the Lugard archives. Finally, because he was a widely read and consulted colonial theorist,

¹ Sir John Kirk (1832–1922): British consular officer in Zanzibar, where he was instrumental in ending the local slave trade. Rev. Horace Waller (1833–96): English anti-slavery activist, missionary, and clergyman.

Lugard's words and actions affected a far broader geographic scope in Africa than the formal spatial limits of authority might suggest.

Studies of colonial issues in contemporary national histories would benefit from his papers. Among the issues with more relevance for current problems, perhaps, is the creation of the British colony of Nigeria in 1914 from the hitherto separate colonial administrations of Northern and Southern Nigeria. The impacts of this change continue to reverberate in scholarly literature as well as in the policy debates over whether modern Nigeria should be broken up (see, for example, Showole 2023). Similarly, Lugard's involvement in the creation of colonial Uganda has relevance for the development of that country.

As imperial studies have embraced new perspectives and approaches, Lugard's impact and ideas are still helpful in exploring new directions for research and context for other studies. It will be no surprise to readers of this journal that the study of imperial history has come a long way from its roots in the study of conquest and rule from a metropolitan vantagepoint. Historian Dane Kennedy has described this new imperial history as 'the reorientation of imperial studies from politics to cultures, from institutions to identities, from the intentions of imperial elites ("the official mind") to the experiences of colonial subjects ("subalterns" in all their variety)' (Kennedy 2018: 137).

Lugard, however, remains relevant to many of these new approaches, if no longer central. As new histories examine colonialism as it functioned within the colony, Lugard, as a particularly eloquent and impactful 'man on the spot', has much to contribute along with the subalterns, whose discourse can then be fully contextualized in dialogue with the colonial rulers. With new attention to connections between and among empires, Lugard's post-retirement career as a leading member of the League of Nations Mandates Commission (Pedersen 2015) and the Temporary and Permanent Committees on Slavery placed him in the centre of international networks of colonial experts and officials. His writing can assist in the study of questions of cultural change and representation in the colonies and in the circles in which he moved in Britain. Lugard was at the centre of the Western momentum to address slavery and abolition in his role as administrator and then as an international authority and activist who, perhaps more than any other person, was responsible for the creation, negotiation, and passage of the 1926 Slavery Convention. That momentum, however, is best understood as a dialogue with the colonial and autonomous societies that Western anti-slavery action was hoping to change. Lugard was a witness to and participant in the unexpected impact of local appropriation and transformation of Western culture and religion into local power dynamics, particularly in Buganda. As the chief theorist of indirect rule, his intervention in questions of governmentality also bears examination: how these ideas developed as the pragmatic administration worked with local authorities and cultures. His papers will be useful, though not central, in examining the constitution of racial, gender and class identities in the colonial sphere and their interaction with the racial, gender and class dynamics of the metropole. His marriage to Flora Shaw, the ambitious and public colonial correspondent, editor, and public intellectual, suggests an openness to a role for women in public life even while 'Miss Shaw' became 'Lady Lugard'.

As the new imperial history seeks to illuminate the experiences of the colonized, reading Lugard's observations can open areas for further inquiry, such as on the role

and experiences of itinerant African (as opposed to Greek or Lebanese) traders in West Africa. We can read the colonial record in reverse to understand how colonized people and their leaders shaped Lugard's conception of how indirect rule worked and how the colonized experienced the workings of the dual mandate in practice. Lugard's papers become here not simply the records of the influencer but show how the complicated negotiations between the rulers and the ostensibly 'ruled' affected the design of the influential policies. The documentation of colonial 'knowledge' and how it was gleaned in the Lugard papers shares a similar trajectory. The creation of these ideas did not spring fully developed from the imagination of explorers and administrators but represented an interaction of their preconceptions and experiences with the discourse and actions of the colonized.

At the same time, scholars of these places and/or events can improve their understanding by referring to Lugard's extensive papers, where his own correspondence, diaries, and notes give his own perspective and are often accompanied by hard-to-obtain reports and official documents. Scholars have undertaken such studies, and Lugard occasionally appears, but it seems to me that, based on the record of scholarly output, the papers are used infrequently and seldom along the lines discussed here.

Frederick Lugard himself is due for reassessment and reconsideration. Reassessment is long overdue because the most thorough scholarly treatment of his overall impact and career came in 1960 from Margery Perham, long before the academic innovations in imperial studies of subsequent decades. Perham's diligence and credentials notwithstanding, Lugard was her friend and mentor. She frankly admits her 'affection and admiration' and argues that history will recognize his 'greatness', even though she did not agree with his every action or decision (Perham 1956: v). In addition, the new approaches to imperial history should shed light on Lugard's role in ways not available seventy years ago. Is he someone who, on balance, improved colonialism for the better with his dual mandate, anti-slavery work, and other ideas and actions? Or does his deep complicity in colonial conquest, suppression of colonized peoples, and imperial rule mean that he had, on balance, a pernicious impact? To put it another way, if imperial rule was a malignant system with collateral benefits, was Lugard, weighing all his impacts, a malignant or beneficial force in colonial affairs generally?

By reconsideration, I refer to evaluating Lugard's impact on specific colonies and particular issues. Consider the brief summary of Lugard's service as a board member for the Huileries du Congo Belge (HCB) that appears in the recent short biography of the Lugards by Rory O'Grady:

He was also a director of the Huileries du Congo Belge, an off-shoot of Lever Brothers, involved in the development of palm plantations in the Congo. There had been many complaints about the exploitation of workers in the Congo by the Belgians and Lugard watched carefully to ensure everything was done correctly. (O'Grady 2018: 241)

This is merely a simplified version of Margery Perham's analysis, based on her own correspondence with Lugard (Perham 1960: 665–6), which concluded that his impact was salutary for the local workers. Yet Jules Marchal's study of the HCB,

Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts (Marchal 2008), makes the case quite strongly that the treatment of the workers was far from 'correct'; indeed, workers were exploited, if not to the murderous degree of the late, unlamented Congo Free State. Scholarly attention to squaring Marchal's analysis with Perham's, supported by additional research in other archives, would give us a better idea of the degree to which Lugard's twenty-two years as an HCB director were overall as helpful to the workers as he, Perham and O'Grady claimed, or if his presence could be better described as providing cover for exploitation, whether or not he was aware of it.

Published material, of course, can be useful. The biographies by Perham and O'Grady, previously mentioned, are an important starting point. Perham also published Lugard's East African (1889–92) and Nigerian (1894–9) diaries as *The Diaries of Lord Lugard* (1959). More recently, a few authors have addressed Lugard in articles (Finch 2018; Haig 2019; Home 2019). I was surprised to find the scholarship so limited, though my searches may have overlooked some scholarly work (apologies to those authors).

My own research has focused on how Lugard initiated the Slavery Convention of the League of Nations in 1926, and his role in bringing the idea and first draft through the Temporary Slavery Commission and finally to its adoption by the League. This research gave me a glimpse into the complex world of a man who, though retired, was determined to be an active player in colonial affairs. His energy and curiosity, not to mention his great confidence in his own expertise, led him to continue having an impact on colonial policy in many spheres right up until his death at the age of eighty-seven in 1945.

With a *curriculum vitae* so robust, joined with a reflective nature that led him to consider broad principles as well as pragmatic options for solving day-to-day issues, Lugard's extensive papers should be valuable for historians in many areas of research. Lugard's papers can be found in three collections in the Oxford Bodleian archives, comprising well over 30,000 pages, not counting folders of press cuttings and published documents available elsewhere. A subset of the papers related to his work in Africa has been digitized by Adam Matthew Digital in their collection *Africa and the New Imperialism*, which is available to libraries by subscription. (Disclosure: I served as a consultant for the digitization project by proposing documents for the collection.)

The largest and best-organized of the Oxford collections (over 22,000 previously unpublished pages plus many thousands more of book drafts and notes, press cuttings, photographs, and official reports and documents) appears under the shelfmark MSS. Lugard, and the catalog entry can be found here: <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/9982>. The online version provides high-level information, but one can download the full finding aid by clicking the 'PDF version' button at the top of the webpage. This collection is organized in seven rough sections:

1. Biographical material (MSS. Lugard 1–3)
2. Correspondence (MSS. Lugard 4–14)
3. Publications, including *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (MSS. Lugard 15–49)
4. Material concerned with particular territories (MSS. Lugard 50–97)

5. Material accruing from the major and minor committees and issues with which Lugard was concerned, mainly after his retirement from the Colonial Service (MSS. Lugard 98–158)
6. Miscellaneous papers, including press cuttings (MSS. Lugard 159)
7. Photographs and maps (MSS. Lugard 160–4)

This categorization is far too simple to be used as a guide. Correspondence, for example, appears in most of the files. While Lugard assiduously retained correspondence received, he was not consistent about maintaining copies of correspondence sent. Fortunately, some of his correspondents sent the letters they had received from him to Margery Perham, whence they became part of this archive.

A second collection of papers (over 15,000 pages) can be found in MSS. Brit. Emp. s. 30–99, also documented in the same finding aid available at <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/9982>. This collection is organized roughly as follows:

1. Early years, 1858–91 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 30–33)
2. Nyasaland, 1888–9 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 34–37)
3. Uganda, 1889–1901 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 38–49)
4. East and Central Africa, 1888–1917 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 50–53)
5. Bechuanaland, 1889–99 and 1–44 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 54–56)
6. West Africa, 1894–1905, and Northern Nigeria, 1898–1933 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 57–65)
7. Correspondence, press cuttings, and miscellaneous (MSS. Brit. Emp. 66–70)
8. Slavery and Liquor traffic (MSS. Brit. Emp. 71)
9. Nigeria, 1899–1940 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 72–7)
10. Reviews and Diaries, 1879–1919 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 78–96)
11. Maps and Photographs, 1879–1919 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 97–8)
12. Map, revenue estimates, papers about moving Nigeria's administrative capitals, and 10 books of outgoing letters, 1888–92 (MSS. Brit. Emp. 99)

Finally, additional papers relating to his experiences in Bechuanaland in addition to those in MSS. Brit. Emp. 54–6 and MSS. Lugard.52 are found at Bodleian Lugard papers on Bechuanaland 1896–1901 (separate from the main collection) MSS.Africa.s.2068. <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/1894>.

In using the archives, it is important to be aware, as with many other archives, that inbound and outbound correspondence are often in separate folders, that the sorting process may have put a letter containing a reference to one place in a folder for a completely different place because the letter addresses both. Finally, having the Lugard papers divided among several differently named collections means that one needs to keep all in mind.

The digitized Adam Matthew collection (2023), as part of its digitization of papers related to the Era of the New Imperialism from eleven different archives, digitized over 17,000 pages of the Lugard papers at Oxford, over a third of the unpublished material, plus 1,377 of the photographs. In recognition of the challenges faced by African scholars in obtaining funding for the ever-rising cost of transport and lodging in Oxford, Adam Matthew are providing access to the collection for free to all national libraries and archives and all universities in Africa except in Egypt and South Africa.

This should remove one of the main barriers to African researchers' use of these archives. To apply for free access, faculty and librarians can fill out the form at <http://link.amdigital.co.uk/cn/atnun/africa-new-imperialism> and work with Adam Matthew's customer support staff to have the institution sign a licence agreement to accept the terms of use. Those associated with universities elsewhere are obliged to ask their university libraries to pay for access to the collection. In addition, free four-week trials are available at <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/free-trials>. Questions about the database can be directed to info@amdigital.co.uk.

The robust search function makes up for the absence of detailed lists of contents in the Lugard catalogue and the occasionally confusing titling of the Adam Matthews folders. However, the search function is limited by the optical character translation of handwriting to text, which was not reviewed by human beings, and therefore is prone to transcription errors.

It should be noted that these collections do have shortcomings: they contain minimal correspondence from and to the subjects of colonial rule. We see the world through the well-informed but nonetheless limited perspective of a European bent on conquest, stabilization (as something Europeans did to African societies), and rule. Lugard wished African societies well, but he was an imperialist at heart. Within the limitations of the man and the collections, however, his archives remain an invaluable resource.

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Dean Pavlakis is Professor Emeritus of History at Carroll College (Helena, MT). His published works examine the Congo reform movement, reactions to genocide in the long nineteenth century, and a sexual abuse scandal in Victorian England. He has also taught history for Canisius College in Buffalo, NY, and for the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo.

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