

## HORATIO ORISHEJOLOMI THOMAS: NIGERIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS PROFESSOR OF SURGERY

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### ABSTRACT

This biographic historical narrative chronicles the lifetime of Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas. He was the third Nigerian doctor to qualify as a surgeon (1949), first Nigerian to obtain the fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (1949), first indigenous professor of surgery in Nigeria (1962), the third indigenous Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan (1972-1975), second President of the West African College of Surgeons (1965-1967), and the first Nigerian Editor of a medical journal (West African Medical Journal; 1952-1979). He was one of the most prominent doctors in post-independence Nigeria, whose career spanned 1942 to 1979. Perhaps his most important contribution to nation building was the successful establishment of the University of Lagos's medical school and its teaching hospital in 1962.

**Keywords:** Biography; Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas; History; Nigeria; Surgery; Pioneer

### EPIGRAPH

*All the world's a stage,*

*And all the men and women merely players;*

*They have their exits and their entrances,*

*And one man in his time plays many parts*

[As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139-143 by William Shakespeare]

The exploits of notable individuals form the foundation of history. Their lives and legacies have captivated chroniclers and storytellers for centuries. The purpose of this article is to chronicle the lifetime of the second President of the West African College of Surgeons. As Dr Hiruluk observed: "*A man doesn't die when he's dead. He dies when he's forgotten.*"

### INTRODUCTION

Surgery is a medical specialty defined by its authority to heal through physical/corporeal invasion.<sup>1</sup> An academic surgeon is a surgeon who is a staff member of the surgery department of a medical school where s/he makes serious and systematic intellectual contributions to the surgical specialty, conducts and publishes scholarly research, and engages in active teaching and training of medical students and resident doctors.<sup>2</sup>

History and biography are intertwined in every person of importance. The late Prof. Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas (H. O. T.), who is the subject of this biographical article, was an African patriot, phenomenal academic surgeon, distinguished administrator, and a committed nation builder. He was the third Nigerian doctor to qualify as a surgeon, but was the first Nigerian doctor to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (FRCS Engl.) in 1949. Dr Richard Gabriel Akinwande Savage (December 1934) and Sir Samuel Layinka Ayodeji Manuwa (December 1938), who qualified as surgeons before Thomas, had obtained the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (FRCS Ed.).<sup>3,4</sup>

### EARLY LIFE

Prof. Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas (H.O.T.) (Fig. 1) was born at the Jathomas Rubber Estate in Sapele (now in Delta State), Nigeria, on 31st August 1917 to



**Figure 1.** Professor Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas (31st August 1917 – 2nd July 1979)  
MBChB (Birmingham) 1942; MRCS 1942; FRCS (England) 1949; OBE; CBE 1963; CON 1965; Honorary DSc (Ile-Ife) 1967; Honorary FRCSE (Ireland) 1970; FWACS

the aristocratic family of James Awadagin Thomas and Alero Ogedi Thomas.<sup>5</sup> James Awadagin Thomas was a rubber tycoon and industrialist who had large rubber plantations in Sapele, Jesse, and Warri (all in the present-day Delta State, Nigeria).<sup>6</sup> The name “Orishejolomi” means “God has made me/fixed me” or “God has put me on earth to do good works” in Itsekiri/Ishekiri language. His nephew, Dr Justin Michael Didi Uku, was the first Nigerian doctor to earn a postgraduate qualification (Diploma) in Histopathology/Anatomical Pathology – Prof. Thomas’s sister (Mrs Mabel Thomas Uku) was Dr Uku’s mother.<sup>6,7</sup> Throughout this article, his name is spelt as “Orishejolomi” (which was the spelling he used in his publications while alive) rather than “Oritsejolomi” (an alternative spelling).

## EDUCATION

A governess reportedly taught and cared for him as a preschooler, being raised as close to royalty as anyone could be expected to be in Nigeria at the time.<sup>8</sup> He had his secondary education at the Wesleyan Boys High School, Lagos (now Methodist Boys High School). Later, he moved to Igbobi College, as one of the first set of students, when it was founded as a boarding house counterpart of Wesleyan Boys High School in 1932. The celebrated Jurist, Justice Teslim Olawale Elias, was one of his classmates at Igbobi college.<sup>5</sup>

He studied medicine at the University of Birmingham, England (1939-1942), where he graduated with MBChB in 1942. In 1949, he qualified as a surgeon by obtaining the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England (FRCS), the first Nigerian to obtain this qualification (His FRCS identifier was RCS: E006995).<sup>5</sup>

He had subspeciality training in plastic and reconstructive surgery for six months at the Queen Victoria hospital in East Grinstead under the New Zealander World War II legend, Sir Archibald Hector McIndoe.<sup>9</sup>

## CAREER

He was a member of the academic staff of the University of Birmingham from 1943 to 1945, Lecturer in Surgery (plastic surgery in particular) at the University College, Ibadan (1949 – 1952), and Senior Lecturer in Surgery, University College, Ibadan (1952 – 1962).<sup>5</sup> In June 1962, H.O.T. was invited by Dr. Moses Adekoyejo Majekodunmi, the Federal Minister of Health, to set up a medical school and a teaching hospital in Lagos (**Figs. 2 & 3**).<sup>10-12</sup> He moved to Lagos as the Foundation Professor and Head of Surgery department, College of Medicine, University of Lagos, CMUL (1962-1972). He delivered the first inaugural lecture from the department of surgery,



**Figure 2.** The opening ceremony of the University of Lagos Medical School and Teaching Hospital on 3rd October 1962. From the left, First Lady, Mrs Flora Azikiwe; Prof. Felix Oladejo Dosekun (Vice Dean of the Medical School); Rt Hon. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (The Governor-General of Nigeria); Dr Moses Adekoyejo Majekodunmi (Hon. Minister of Health); and Prof. Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas (Dean of the Medical School). Picture reproduced from reference 18 with the kind permission of Chief Dr Moses Adekoyejo Majekodunmi Foundation (MAMF) and the Majekodunmi Family.



**Figure 3.** Prof. H. O. Thomas (Seated front row, third from right) with fifteen Nigerian Army doctors on 24th February 1968. Picture reproduced with the kind permission of Mr. Emeka Ed' Keazor.

CMUL, and the second inaugural lecture of the University of Lagos (UniLag) on 17th January 1968 (Prof. Felix Oladejo Dosekun, Physiologist, had delivered UniLag's first-ever inaugural lecture on 3rd October 1962). While in Lagos, he was at various/overlapping times the Dean, University of Lagos Medical School (1962-1967), Chairman, Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) Management Board (1962-66), and Provost, CMUL (1968-1972).

He delivered on the mandate of setting up the medical school (CMUL) and teaching hospital (Lagos University Teaching Hospital, LUTH) with the graduation of the first batch of students in 1967. Throughout his stay in Lagos, he was still actively in charge of the Department of Surgery. He was recalled to Ibadan in 1972 where he served as Vice Chancellor from 1972 to 1975.<sup>5</sup>

#### OTHER CAREER ASSIGNMENTS

He was the Vice President (1963-1965), and later, President (1965-1966) of the Nigerian Medical Council, (NMC). He became the second President of the NMC after the sudden death of NMC's pioneer President, Dr Simeon Olatunji Awoliyi.<sup>12</sup> The NMC is now known as the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), – the statutory regulatory agency for medical practice in Nigeria.

He contributed to the development of medical scholarship as the Assistant Editor, and later, Editor

& Chairman of Editorial Board (1952 - 1979), West African Medical Journal (now defunct). He also served as a member on the Editorial Board of the British Journal of Surgery.

The other offices he occupied on the professional and university administration turf include: President, Association of Surgeons of West Africa (now West African College of Surgeons), (1965-1967); President, Association of African Universities Board of Directors (appointed in 1973 to a three-year term); and First President, Association of Medical Schools of Africa.

#### AWARDS AND HONOURS

The following awards and honours were conferred on him in recognition of his multifarious contributions: Commander of the British Empire (CBE), by Queen Elizabeth II, in 1963; Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON) in 1965 (His CBE was converted to CON since Nigeria had become an independent Republic); Honorary Doctor of Science (DSc.) by the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria) in 1967;<sup>5</sup> Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland in 1970; and Fellowship of the Royal Society of Medicine (of England).<sup>8</sup>

#### MEDICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

##### Plastic Surgery

According to Elebute, H.O.T. was the first Nigerian surgeon to direct his energies to subspecialty training.<sup>4</sup>

He was also the first Nigerian to make major contributions to surgical research.<sup>4</sup> From 1953 through 1972 when H.O.T. became the Vice-Chancellor of University of Ibadan, he worked tirelessly to develop plastic surgery at both Ibadan and Lagos.<sup>4</sup> The history of plastic surgery specialty in Nigeria is incomplete without a specific acknowledgement of the contributions of Prof. Thomas.<sup>9,13,14</sup> After his six-months training at East Grinstead in 1953, he documented his experiences and thoughts on the development of plastic surgery in Nigeria as follows: *“Last autumn, winter, and spring, I had the good fortune of working under Sir Archibald McIndoe at the Queen Victoria hospital in East Grinstead. Six months there made me realise how specialised a field, plastic or reconstructive surgery is; and that its proper practice requires special training not only for the surgeon, but also for the anaesthetist, theatre staff, nurses, and other auxiliaries. Although in the present stage of the country’s development, we cannot of course, hope to rival East Grinstead, there is no reason why we should not do our best to emulate that famous institution. It would be a good start if in each large town like Kano, Ibadan, Lagos and Port Harcourt, there were to be stationed a surgeon who has had the opportunity of gaining some experience of plastic surgery. He could undertake such plastic surgery as comes his way until such time as we can afford to engage men who will devote their entire time to practising it.”*<sup>9</sup>

### Maxillofacial Surgery

According to the Nigerian Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (NAOMS), H.O.T. took particular interest in oral and maxillofacial surgery and operated on patients from all over Nigeria at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan. In the same vein, he was primarily responsible for surgery in the oral and maxillofacial region in Lagos as attested to by Prof. Akinwande Jelili Adisa (Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon) in his inaugural lecture: *“Though a General Surgeon, Prof. Orishejolomi Thomas demonstrated an extreme interest in the jaw-breaking words specialty. Indeed, he carried out many jaw surgeries to treat ameloblastoma, which is relatively a common tumour of the jaw bones.”*<sup>15</sup>

### Burkitt’s Lymphoma

Biographical accounts of the discovery of Burkitt’s lymphoma by Denis Parsons Burkitt acknowledge that other European pathologists working in Africa had encountered what later became known as Burkitt’s lymphoma prior to Burkitt’s comprehensive description.<sup>16</sup> Thomas had also noticed the tumour at UCH, Ibadan. As recounted by Adeloye, H.O.T.’s colleague, Dr J. G. Jackson (histopathologist), saw in the jaw tumours removed by H.O.T. “sheets and sheets of lymphosarcoma.”<sup>4,5</sup> After Dr. Burkitt’s “tumour safari” to 56 hospitals in East and Central Africa covering about 10,000 miles in 10 weeks, he eventually

visited Nigeria and Ghana to investigate the tumour distribution.<sup>16</sup>

### Scholarly Publications

**Book Chapters:** Chapters in Diseases of Children in Subtropics and Tropics, edited by Trowell H. C. and Jelliffe D. B., 1970.

**He had the following Journal articles to his credits:**

1. Thomas HO. Medical future of the colonies. *Br Med J.* 1946; 1(4451):663. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2058757/>
2. Thomas HO. Myosarcoma of Meckel’s diverticulum. *Surgery.* 1952; 32(4):667-672. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12984283/>
3. Thomas HO. Extraskeletal giant cell tumour of scalp: Report of a case. *West Afr Med J.* 1952; 1:29-34.
4. Thomas HO. Clinical notes on two cases of neurofibroma. *West Afr Med J.* 1952; 1:72 - 74.
5. Thomas HO. Giant neurofibroma of the great omentum. *Br J Surg.* 1953; 40:473 - 477.
6. Thomas HO. Idiopathic gangrene of the scrotum in West Africans. *Br J Urol.* 1953; 25(1):60-63. DOI: 10.1111/j.1464-410x.1953.tb05552.x. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13032405/>
7. Thomas HO, Jelliffe DB. Giant neurofibroma of the great omentum. *Br J Surg.* 1953; 40(163):473-477. DOI: 10.1002/bjs.18004016312. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13042112/>
8. Joly BM, Thomas HO. Non-infantile idiopathic intussusception in Western Nigeria; with a report of 33 cases. *West Afr Med J.* 1954; 3(1):3-16. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13169724/>
9. Thomas HO. Possible applications of plastic surgery in Nigeria. *West Afr Med J.* 1954; 3(3):127-129. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13205915/>
10. Thomas HO. Some uncommon limb fractures. *West Afr Med J.* 1955; 4(4):185-195. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13352981/>
11. Thomas HO. Traumatic aneurysm of the femoral artery; report of a case. *West Afr Med J.* 1956; 5(1):22-25. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13352989/>
12. Thomas HO. Guide to Housemen and other medical personnel. *Harmattan.* 1956; 1:10 - 11.
13. Thomas HO. Cervical teratoma. *Br J Surg.* 1957; 44(188):625-627. DOI: 10.1002/bjs.18004418818. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13510644/>
14. Thomas HO. The large goitre (notes on its surgical anatomy and operation). *West Afr Med J.* 1959; 8:89-93. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/13837976/>
15. Thomas HO. The Changing Pattern of Medical Education in Nigeria. *J Med Educ.* 1963; 38:1011-

1015. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14083198/>

16. Thomas HO. Health Professions Educational Assistance Act of 1963 and Construction of Medical Facilities. *J Med Educ.* 1964; 39:328-329. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14130664/>

17. Thomas HO. Training Surgeons in a developing country. *Lancet* 1965; 2(7408):383-385. DOI: 10.1016/s0140-6736(65)90359-4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14328807/>

18. Thomas HO. Training Professional and Subprofessional Personnel for the Health Services of Nigeria. *J Med Educ.* 1964; 39:325-327. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14130663/>

19. Omo-Dare P, Thomas HO. Acute appendicitis in Lagos. (An evaluation of the present situation). *West Afr Med J.* 1966; 15(6):217-220. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/5980470/>

20. Thomas HO. Planning a new medical school. *Lancet*. 1967; 2(7505): 35-38. DOI: 10.1016/s0140-6736(67)90074-8. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/4165452/>

21. Thomas HO. Planning new programs in medical education. Planning the new medical school. *J Med Educ.* 1968; 43(2):232-243. DOI: 10.1097/00001888-196802000-00013. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/5636589/>

**CONTRIBUTIONS OUTSIDE MEDICINE**  
 H.O.T. was one of the commissioners of the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) which was set up in 1958 to conduct the 1959 general elections.<sup>17</sup> In 1967, Major-General David Akpode Ejoor who was the Military Governor of the Midwestern state (now split into Edo and Delta states) setup a Higher Education Committee, headed by Prof. Orishejolomi Thomas, to coordinate efforts to establish a university in the state. However, because the secessionist Biafran troops took over the Midwest from 9th August - 20th September 1967, the committee was forced to put its activities on hold.<sup>18</sup> In late 1969, Lt. Col. Samuel Ogbemudia (successor to Ejoor) re-activated and re-constituted the University Planning Committee with a new Chairman but H.O.T. was still a member.<sup>19</sup> He was also the chairman of the Advisory Committee for the establishment of the Midwestern Medical Centre (now University of Benin Teaching Hospital) in 1969,<sup>20</sup> and Chairman, Regional Scholarship Board of Mid-Western Nigeria.

## TESTIMONIAL OF COLLEAGUES AND ASSOCIATES

Emeritus Professor Adelola Adeloye, Neurological Surgeon, said H.O.T. was “*an incisive and precise writer*” with a knack for “*summarizing situations and meetings in few pertinent and effective sentences.*” He further described

him as punctual, frank, fearless, disciplined, always well-dressed, and did not countenance mediocrity. His stern exterior belied a charming and friendly personality.<sup>5,21</sup> Professor Emmanuel Adeyemo Elebute (surgeon) remembered him as “*a man of great courage and tenacity of purpose*” with academic and professional merits of the highest possible standards as a surgeon.<sup>4</sup> Dr Saburi Biobaku, historian, with whom he collaborated on the establishment of Lagos University’s College of Medicine, said that Thomas excelled as “*a surgeon amidst the academics.*<sup>5</sup>”

In an Inaugural lecture delivered on 6th November 1996, Prof. da Rocha Afodu (surgeon) thanked H.O.T. as follows: “*The time is opportune to pay glowing tribute to my senior colleagues... Professor H. Orishejolomi Thomas, that illustrious surgeon, employed me when he held the triple portfolios of Head of Surgery department, Dean of the Medical School, and Chairman, LUTH Management Board, but according to Majekodunmi’s booklet, he refused bluntly to wear the fourth cap when Dr Majekodunmi (the then Honourable Minister of Health) suggested to him to be the Vice Chancellor. “No” he says, I’d rather stay and develop the Medical School that we have planned.*<sup>22</sup>”

Prof. G.O.A. Sowemimo (plastic surgeon) wrote these lines of appreciation in his inaugural lecture: “*I am greatly indebted to the late Professor Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas...an excellent plastic surgeon who inspired me to take up plastic surgery. It is this great mind who gave the motto “In deed and truth” to the University of Lagos which adopted it from the College of Medicine for whom he had initially composed it.*<sup>23</sup>”

Prof. Abiodun O.K. Johnson (Paediatric Gastroenterologist/Hepatologist) gave this assessment of his former teacher (Thomas) in his autobiography: “*Professor Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas was the most senior Nigerian in the Department of Surgery at the University of Ibadan in 1960... Long before I became aware of his outstanding professional reputation and academic laurels, he struck me as a most dignified Nigerian, always impeccably attired, though rather stern-looking.*” He continued: “*I got to see Professor Thomas many a time as he strode through the corridors at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital as an exquisitely attired colossus with an aura of respectability and unassailability! He was highly regarded and respected by most who knew him. To me and many of my contemporaries who knew him, Professor Thomas was who every young doctor wanted to emulate. He was described by one of his younger surgical colleagues at LUTH as “an extraordinary man - impeccable in his manners as in his appearance, a strict disciplinarian, an energetic and dynamic personality par excellence, a ‘workaholic’ even before that word became fashionable, and a leader of men.” He was held in awe by those who met him, his medical colleagues and his students alike.*<sup>8</sup>”

H.O.T. was also full of wit as exemplified by an anecdote recounted by Prof. Nimi Briggs (O & G). According to him, H.O.T. was once asked by an admirer if he was also the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ibadan prior to moving to the University of Lagos. Thomas retorted: “*The University of Ibadan was not that lucky*”.<sup>24</sup> On another occasion, he was asked why he married a white woman at an interview for a Lagos state civil service position, he promptly rebuked the query as impolite - he was not employed for the position.<sup>5</sup>

Prof. Kayode Adesogan (Chemist) also testified of the sterling qualities of H.O.T.: “*I am particularly thankful for my happy memories of the late Professor Oritsejolomi Thomas, under whom I had the privilege of working as Warden of Kuti Hall. He was, in my view, one of the most successful VCs Ibadan ever had. He appeared to know that the buck stopped on his table and behaved as such. He was in charge, knew that he was and had to continue to be in charge.*<sup>25</sup>”

Thomas was conscious of the personal, social, and political challenges confronting Black African students in the defunct British Empire as exemplified by his articles in the West African Review of December 1936 and April 1937, where he reflected on the financial sleight-of-hand that African students pulled on their parents back home and the social dynamics of interracial relationships, respectively.<sup>26</sup>

On the professional front, he publicly denounced the sophistry deployed in defense of the wage chasm between Colonial/African doctors and European doctors employed by the (British) Colonial Medical Service.<sup>27-30</sup>

## CONTROVERSIES AND CHALLENGES

As noted earlier, H.O.T. was appointed a Lecturer at UI in 1949 and became a Senior Lecturer in 1952. The oddity was the stagnation of his academic progress at Senior Lecturer rank for 10 years. Indeed, he only became a professor when he moved to Lagos. Elebute attributed this involuntary academic immobility to “*the discriminatory practices rampant in pre-independence Ibadan University College*.<sup>4</sup>”

Nigeria languished under military rule for 33 years during which high-handedness, arbitrariness, human rights violation, unlawful incarceration, extrajudicial killing, intimidation of the civilian population, and other wanton abuses were visited on the citizenry.<sup>31</sup> Forced mass retirement and summary dismissal “*with immediate effect*” were the order of the day during one of the military regimes.<sup>32,33</sup>

Unfortunately, public indignity was meted out to H.O.T. by the military authorities on at least two occasions. At the inauguration of the Clinical Sciences building, University of Ibadan, in 1975, the military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, took off the Vice Chancellor’s (Thomas’s) mortarboard and passed it round as a begging bowl to collect donations for the medical school’s endowment fund!<sup>34,35</sup> Prof. Oladipo Akinkugbe (Fig. 4) recalled this inelegant and cringeworthy display with incredulity in his memoirs.

Later in 1975, after the toppling of Gowon’s government, a more reprehensible public embarrassment was visited on H.O.T. by the General Murtala Mohammed regime. The military junta announced the



**Figure 4.** Undated photograph of Prof. H.O. Thomas (centre) with two of his former students (at the UI medical school): Dr. Benjamin Oluwakayode Osuntokun (left; later a Professor of Neurology) and Dr. Oladipo Olujimi Akinkugbe (right; later a Professor of Nephrology). *Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Prof. (Mrs) Olabopo Osuntokun (widow of late Prof. B.O. Osuntokun)*

Vice Chancellor's dismissal with immediate effect over national radio while he was hosting a luncheon for the university's guests after a convocation ceremony. His aide had to inform him so he could leave the luncheon quietly. This was Professor Thomas' last public appearance at UI.<sup>8,36,37</sup> Although the government gave no official reasons for their egregious action, it later became known that the government's edict was impulsive. H.O.T. served as a trustee for the Asaboro Estate. He was sued in his capacity as trustee of the estate, and the lower court ruled against the trustee, not against H.O.T as an individual. At the higher court, the initial judgment was overturned but he could not be reinstated.<sup>8,36</sup> Chief Olusegun Osoba, a former Executive Governor of Ogun State, reflecting on the part he inadvertently played in this debacle (as the Editor of the newspaper which published the inaccurate story), said "*we went ahead to use the story... that led to the removal of an innocent, decent, respected Nigerian – Orishejolomi Thomas from the University of Ibadan as Vice Chancellor... we had fallen into the hands of a corrupt reporter to end the career of an amicable Nigerian in the calibre of Oritsejolomi Thomas.*<sup>36</sup>"

Following his unconscionable and unceremonious removal from office, he relocated to Jathomas Rubber Estate in Sapele, where he established the St. Thomas's Clinic. In Sapele, he enjoyed gardening, water skiing, reading, and publishing monographs. Further afield, he was a member of multiple boat clubs in Lagos (Metropolitan, 400, and Lagos Motor Boat Clubs).<sup>5</sup> Prof. Thomas died on 2nd July 1979, at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, aged 61. He was buried at his family's compound in Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria.

## FAMILY LIFE

In 1940, he married an English woman, Dorothy Irene (nee Williams). They had one son (Victor) and two daughters. The son (Victor Awadagin Thomas; BSc Chemistry 1963) is a business man, while one of the daughters was a medical doctor.<sup>5</sup> The daughter who was a doctor (academic and clinical pathologist), Dr Jean Alero Thomas, was born in 1945 and died of lung cancer on 3rd January 2015.<sup>38</sup>

## IMMORTALISATION

The following prizes, memorial lectures, scholarships, public spaces/buildings have been instituted or named after H. O. T.

1. The H. Orishejolomi Thomas Memorial Lecture was set up in June 1983 by the University of Lagos and its College of Medicine. Annually, guest lecturers are selected from amongst distinguished academics (especially in the medical sciences) from any part of the world. The first lecture (*Man and*

*his Destiny*) was given by Professor Adeoye Lambo.<sup>8</sup>

2. Oritsejolomi Thomas prize for the best candidate in Part I FMCS examination of the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria (NPMCN).
3. Orishejolomi Thomas Hall for male medical students, College of Medicine University of Lagos (CMUL).
4. Orishejolomi Thomas Crescent, University of Lagos, Akoko, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
5. Oritsejolomi Thomas Conference Hall (5,000-seater Banquet/Theatre) at the University of Ibadan International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.
6. Professor H. O. Thomas Scholarship (annual scholarship of £2,000 throughout the duration of medical school) to a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic undergraduate medical student at the University of Birmingham. His son, Victor Awadagin Thomas, also a University of Birmingham alumnus, endowed the award in his late father's honour.<sup>39</sup>
7. The Horatio Oritsejolomi Thomas Foundation which was established in 2006 by his family. The Foundation aims to help indigent students at CMUL who have completed or are nearing completion of 2nd MB or equivalent. Such students must have exceptional exam results and present proof of financial hardship certified by CMUL.
8. The Thomas-Bassir Biomedical Foundation (TBBF) was set up in the University of Ibadan in recognition of the enormous contribution to modern medicine by these two eminent teachers and experienced administrators of the University of Ibadan and its teaching hospital (H.O.T. and Prof. Olumbe Bassir). It was established as Wellcome Nigeria Fund in 1974 and renamed The Thomas-Bassir Biomedical Foundation in 1994. The Foundation awards the TBBF research grant in support of projects that can be completed within two years.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Horatio Orishejolomi Thomas came, saw, and conquered despite a relatively short sojourn on Earth. He left indelible footprints in the annals of surgical practice and public administration in Nigeria. His life is a testament to this apophthegm: "*And, in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.*"

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