EURO-AFRICAN COMMERCE AND SOCIAL CHAOS: AKAN SOCIETIES IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

KWASI KONADU
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Akokɔ nto nto, aduasa – the chicken should lay-lay eggs, thirty [plenty]
Akorɔma mfa mfa, aduasa – the hawk should take-take, thirty [plenty]
Akokɔ, mato mato bi awura – chicken: I have laid-laid some eggs owner
Akorɔma mmɛfa me na mabɛ – the hawk should come and take me, I am tired

Akan drum text

Anim guase mfa okaniba – disgrace does not befit the Akan child
[i.e., Akan-born]

Akan proverb

I

In the drum text above, the chicken and the hawk parallel the symbiotic relationship between the “slave trade” and the period of “legitimate trade” between the Gold Coast and Britain. The former “trade” paved the way for and nourished the outcomes of the latter, and as the uneven power relations between West Africa and European nation-states become even more explicit in a globalizing economy, Europe or Britain (“the hawk”) seized on the valued resources (“eggs”) of a tiresome and ravaged Gold Coast. To halt the disgrace (animguase) of impending colonial incursion and protectionism, several Akan societies (“chickens”) became hawk-like in domestic matters—for they had less control over international forces beyond their soil—and its internal conflicts had as much to do with their inner drive to maintain “order” in juxtaposition to the exigencies of their times. The key nineteenth-century relationship between Asante of the forest interior and Elmina of the coast provides a spatial parameter and a mnemonic for exam-

History in Africa 36 (2009), 265–292
ining key transformations between those two boundaries as represented by the coastal Fante polities, forest-based Asante, and the Bono, who occupied the northern forest fringe. I argue that the conflicts between and within Akan societies of varying orders were the product of multilayered factors occurring at the same time and in different places, such as power struggles and tensions born of conservatism and Christianity, that ultimately transformed all in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the Akan share a composite culture, spiritual practice, calendrical system, socio-political structure, and ethos, the transformations in Asante society were not replicated among the Fante or Bono, although the Bono offer a comparative case that diverged from much of the nascent colonial shaping of Asante and Fante society. This essay suggests that Akan societies, beyond the almost exclusive focus on Asante, are better approached thematically than in spatial or chronological isolation, since the themes of social dissolution and conflicts were shared by all in a context of Euro-African commerce, Westernization, and Christian proselytization.

Akan internal responses within respective polities and toward European and Euro-African forces prompted those social orders to reconstitute some of their constructs of self, state, and sovereignty in what became the Gold Coast Colony and then the Republic of Ghana. An important setting for looking broadly at those transformations in and of Akan societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the issue of commerce and control of key trade routes, which invariably led to much conflict between Europeans, their Akan coastal allies, and the Asante of the forest interior. The trade routes that facilitated commerce between the forest interior and the coast remained contested, especially between Asante and Fante, and the conflicts associated with those routes endured. The nineteenth century began with a shift from the “slave trade” to “legitimate trade,” international enslavement to forms of domestic servitude, and cultural fragmentation to social chaos and conflict within Akan settlements situated between the forest and the coast. The nineteenth century opened with Fante efforts to successfully resist Asante expeditions to the coast, in addition to similar incursions, and these encroachments on Fante territory would have been more disastrous if it were not for the help of Europeans established in their coastal forts.

The first nineteenth century Asante invasion of the Fante led to the destruction of the once prosperous town of Emperou as Asante marched toward the coast. Joseph Dupuis, the British consul to Kumase in 1820, suggests that this incident occurred in the forested hinterland and that the town had accepted an offer of military aid from neighboring Fante kinsmen. The Fante fled and the town was burned. The aim of this Asante invasion was to reopen trade routes between Kumase and the coastal towns of Cape Coast.
and Anomabu. Paradoxically, the Asante army was successful against Assin, Akyem, Wassa, and Fante, but was defeated by dysentery and smallpox after reaching the coast east of the Volta River. While on the coast, the Asante besieged the British fort at Anomabu with a Hausa officer from Katsina and his men; the British avoided total defeat only with a truce. Atia, the Fante leader at Abora, was taken captive and ransomed for a “large sum,” which was refused. By 1816, however, all southerly polities opposed to Asante rule were defeated. In 1817-19 Asante engaged in a military campaign against Gyaman, some years after a Fante attack on the town of Elmina that brought Asante military relief to the town, and Muslims were reportedly in the Asante army that invaded Gyaman.

At the start of the Gyaman campaign, Thomas E. Bowdich, as part of an 1817 British mission to Kumase, was able to ratify a treaty with the Asante-hene to allow for the establishment of a British resident in Kumase, but his and Dupuis’s treaties proved to be short-lived. In the 1820s Asante defeated a British-led force of mainly Fante and allied Wassa led by Charles McCarthy, the British Governor at Cape Coast castle, at Asamankow. Asante strategy and tactics, and its 10,000 men, defeated McCarthy and his European colleagues, who were captured and executed. The introduction of firearms tactically did little in forest warfare and local strategies proved advantageous in that environment, and this included women singing songs or dirges exhorted the abosom (“spiritual agents, emissaries”) to protect their relatives and loved ones during war. In 1826, however, another British led-force of Fante, Assin, Akyem, and Akwamu troops assisted by the Danes defeated an Asante army of 40,000 at Dodowa. Those Akan societies allied with the British and the Danes had revolted against Asante hegemony. Although defeated, Asante strategy, skill, and persistence were remarkable, as its spies moved by night and hid in trees by day in enemy territory. Yet, much happened in the span of a year or less in terms of the nature of warfare and peace and the treaties that lied somewhere in between the two processes.

5Kwame Y. Daaku, *Unesco Research Project on Oral Traditions: Denkyira, no. 2* (Legon, 1970), 202, 224. Kwadwom songs were also sung by women at the funerals of deceased men to recall their prowess in war.
In 1830 the treaty of Jarapanga between Asante and the defeated Dagomba allowed for the first *kunkuma*, a hostage taken by Asante who was made to protect Asante interests in Dagomba. Asante, in return, took two bodyguards from the Dagomba sovereign (Ya Na) to Kumase, where they were given ambassadorial status, although they later returned home. The following year the Anglo-Asante treaty was signed, and this allowed for peaceful relations between Asante and its former subjects, including Wassa, which was experiencing internal rebellion and a civil war that eventually led to two separate polities extant to this day. Treaties were, however, fragile and transitory, and an Anglo-Asante war broke out in 1863 in which the British were assisted again by their southern Akan allies. The close of Asante warfare and the nineteenth century forestalled the final British invasion and defeat of Asante and ended, militarily, with an Asante campaign against Mo and Nkoransa, where a reported 2000 women and children were taken at the end of Nkoransa’s failed rebellion. This latter event underscores two key processes: continuous rebellions against Asante hegemony and the transition from international “slave” trading to varied forms of domestic servitude in the nineteenth century.

II

In the Akan social order, nearly everyone had a place, and that person was someone’s *akoa* (“servant”), hence, an *akoa-awura* (“servant-owner”) relationship. This relationship had little to do with “slavery” and it existed at various levels of Akan society through somewhat of a pyramidal structure replicated at each level. In the process of forging a community-based settlement or *ɔmɔn* (“cultural group, nation”) that incorporated non-local groups or even clans within the same Akan constellation, identity as part of that new formation was key to a “national identity” and thus participants in that unfinished process were reminded, *obi nkyere obi ase* (“one does not show another’s origins”).

Here is the reasoning: *ɛfiri se ɣen nyinaa firi aman firi aman na ɣey ɔmɔn* (“it is because we all come from nations from nations and to create a nation”) and, therefore, *kyere ase, kyere ase, ye amamɔnɔe* (“to show one’s origins, to show one’s origins is the ruin or destruction of the nation”). In other words, if everyone inquired about the other person’s origin—including those of a “free” and “unfree” past—it would undermine the nation-building process, a place in the new social order and lead inevitably to the ruin of the *ɔmɔn*. In that process and in the context of an *akoa-awura*

---

Euro-African Commerce and Social Chaos 269

(“servant-owner”) relationship, everyone in Akan society possessed an *akoa* (“servant”) or a *barimá* (“servant” or “client”) and here the expression *me barima* (“my servant”) was equivalent to *m’akoa* (“my servant”). The concept and person of *bírempon* (*barima*—servant; *pën*—great, big), often held to be critical in Asante “state” formation, was a “great man” in one context, but in reality a “big servant” to the *mamhene* (“leader of the nation”). One could become wealthy and wield some political power as a “great man”—however, *wonya wo ho a, wonyé xéhye!* (“if you become rich, you will not be a ‘royal’ [or part of the ruling family]”).

Indeed, even the wealth and the acquisition of power that might engender greater levels of freedom were constrained by the *akoa-awura* framework, for freedom was not free and was tempered by accountably: *fawohodie ne year na enam* (“[too much] freedom and becoming lost go together”) and *akógye ne ho gya a, akóma kye ne awe* (“if chicken frees itself, hawk [will] catch [and] eat it [because the chicken was without an owner]”). In essence, *se woka se obi ye w’akoa a, xýeré se wohwe no* (“if you say someone is your servant, it means that you look after him or her”). In addition to these proverbs, Akan *ayan*—oral texts played on the *atumpan* drum—offer a range of examples of the ways in which power and authority parameterized Akan society and was shared and contested therein.

One *ayan* says, *akoa bi de kaka resée dwannam* (“a certain servant who has a toothache is destroying sheep meat”), which speaks to the idea that someone who does not have the power to do something ruins that thing. Another *ayan* says, *xéhye anko a, akoa dwane* (“when ‘royalty’ does not fight, the servant runs away”), and the idea here is that a ruler who does not fight or defend the nation, the servant or common peoples will not respect him or her. Concerning Akan social ordering, a third *ayan* says, *esonó ahene mma, na esono ahene mma, na esono frafra-ahene-mma* (“there is a difference between the children of rulers and there is a difference between those who associate with the children of rulers”).

But power is contested and the seemingly powerless can be victorious: *esonó kokuroko, Adowa na man wɔ no* (“the elephant is larger, [but] the nation belongs to the small antelope [who is clever]”) and *yeakyere kókobo na nkókɔ mmɔ hyire* (“we have caught the weasel and the chickens should apply white clay [as a sign of victory]”). The social order was also conceptualized as an extension of divine order, itself differentiated by power and

---

7J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi* (Basel, 1933), 8. Christaller defined *(a)barimá* as (1) a man entrusted with an office by one superior to him; and (2) a adherent, client, subaltern, follower, helpmate, companion, and servant.
place and thus the *ɔkɔmfo* ("indigenous spiritualist") served the *ɔbosom* and each person served the *ɔbosom* of their day of birth through period observances, and the *abosom* (sg. *ɔbosom*) served an Akan Creator.

In Akan society various categories of servile labor existed and, according to Basel Mission documents of the nineteenth century, elders and lower-ranking rulers kept enslaved persons for reasons of sociopolitical prestige, although "slavery" was not uniformly pervasive in the Akan region.\(^8\) The Akan employed several systems of cooperative labor and small kin-based labor units in agriculture, military emergency, or to build and repair roads. In places where domestic slavery existed, Muslim traders transported enslaved persons overland and Anlo traders used the Volta River and sold such persons to local buyers in coastal towns well into the late nineteenth century. In Kumase most worked on communal plots rather than estates, and probably the labor-intensive task of gold mining in earlier times, which was considered spiritually taboo for the Asante themselves, and a small number of enslaved persons under family control were used in traditional gold mining in the most of the Akan region.\(^9\)

In Akan society, the terms *akoa* ("subject"), *odonko* ("enslaved person of northern [Ghana] origins"), and *awowa* ("pawn"; person given as surety for the debt of a kin) were dynamic, and played key roles in assimilating a newly-enslaved person into his or her host society. Pawnage and judicial punishment were ways in which an Akan could be enslaved—even debtors sometimes pawned themselves—and it can be argued that international "slave markets" and associated mechanisms shaped pawning kinsmen in Akan society.\(^10\) In the nineteenth century, forms of social domination existed in Asante, and as the growth of large-scale plantation laboring around Kumase ended, the scope of domestic forms of social servitude, such as pawnage, increased through large numbers of unfree persons in Akan households as the descendants of *odonko* were assimilated into the Akan matrilineal order. Those enslaved and of foreign or northern origin could

\(^8\)Raymond E. Dumett, “Traditional Slavery in the Akan Region in the Nineteenth Century: Sources, Issues, and Interpretations” in *West African Economic and Social History: Studies in Memory of Marion Johnson*, ed. David Henige and T.C. McCaskie (Madison, 1990), 8, 12. The parliamentary reports of 1842 and 1865 about the British-controlled coastal districts generally suggest that the coastal Akan states were “loosely constructed network of patron-client relationships.” Governor Benjamin Pine of the Gold Coast Colony believed “domestic slavery” was universally pervasive. See The National Archives (NA): Colonial Office (CO), 96/41, no. 10218, “Benjamin Pine to H. Labouchere,” 13 August 1857.

\(^9\)D.J.E. Maier, “Military Acquisition of Slaves in Asante” in *West African Economic and Social History*, 126.

\(^10\)Dumett, “Traditional Slavery,” 11.
receive full membership within a family after a generation and personal property rights were extended to them and their descendants—safeguarded by the taboo against questioning one’s origins. This process included descendants of unfree women assimilated in Akan cultural life through a matrilineal conception linked to property, authority, and descent.

In the oral histories of Akan polities, peoples of distinct political and historical settlements independently and unanimously argued: “we took them [persons from northern Ghana] to enlarge our families,” “they were admitted into the clan to enlarge it,” and “they were considered as members of the clan.” Akan male “owners” married women procured from the north without the performance of specific rites (“I often married the females [whom] I chose”) and these female and male ɔnkofo (sg.odonko) were often integrated into the owner’s family. As such, the ɔnkofo, and possibly others among the servile ranks, could be enstooled in lieu of “royals” (adehyee), although the offspring of “free” Akan and “unfree” northern persons would be regents rather than occupants of a stool (symbol of political leadership) without the possibility of a blackened (ancestral) stool of their own.11

Gonja oral historical sources support these accounts on the trade in enslaved persons whom were procured largely through raids, on especially the Grushi people, and through the sale of Hausa war captives.12 In Asante, ordinary women and those of notoriety desired men from the north for their physical features or qualities and, thus, procreated with them for that purpose. Most of these men were probably secured at the infamous Salaga market in northern Ghana—and the majority of the oral historical sources suggest this was the case—while Assin-Manso, an equally infamous market to the south, where Asante and Fante merchants engaged in commerce, included the sale of ɔnkofo and other enslaved persons such as war fugitives and displaced populations.13 During the height of the international “slave trade” and Asante hegemony and expansion, an eighteenth-century Asante attack on Assin forced “many families with their friends [to seek] hiding places in the forest. The Dutch had come then and seeing us requested us to send our people on board their ship to be taken overseas to serve their King.

12 Kwame Y. Daaku, UNESCO Research Project on Oral Traditions: Oral Traditions of Gonja, no. 1 (Legon, 1969), 12-14, 51. Some interviewees (ibid., 68, 137, 158) described slave raiding and trading as Gonja’s main work while some informants noted failed raids put raiding armies in jeopardy of being enslaved themselves.
13 Daaku, *Denkyira*, 66, 102, 118, 181, 223, 251, 272; idem, *Oral Traditions of Assin-Twifo* (Legon, 1969). This text is un-paginated, and each set of interviews has their own pagination. Here I am citing the oral accounts of Assin Ekrofuom, 9, and Assin-Manso, 2-3.
There were wise ones amongst us so we refused and instead sought hiding places in Sefwiland, Nzimaland, and other places of safety.”

In the abolition of the overseas “slave trade,” commercial interest groups formulated all British policies related to commerce and the main tool for slave trade suppression was the Royal Navy squadron stationed off the Guinea coast. The “slave trade” ended largely due to the cessation of Brazilian and Cuban demand rather than abolitionist efforts. Domestic forms of servitude continued after the overseas trade ended and many in the former were used to produce items for “legitimate” trade beyond the production of salt and other commodities locally available.

Two of the largest African imports between 1500 and 1800 were metal and textiles, with cloth being the largest value item, as African imports of textiles and metals supplemented rather than filled a void in local commerce or non-existent markets. It would appear that textiles in West and East Africa, rather than firearms—though for different reasons—were perhaps the most attractive import among Africans of various social standing over large periods of time, and this was certainly true for the Akan and was a cornerstone of trade with European and Mande merchants alike. Though Africans from west and west-central Africa produced cloth of high quality, the “bark-cloth” was produced in both the Kongo and on the Gold Coast (known locally as kyênkyen). On the Gold Coast, Johann Müller described bark-cloth makers at Fetu and terracotta figures depicted wearing this type of cloth found at the seventeenth-century town of Ahinsan.

Jean Barbot also described bark-cloth making and selling in Assinie during the early eighteenth century. Although the plain or patterned (multicol-

14Ibid., Assin Nyankumasi interview, 17.
16Since the sixteenth century, salt industries had existed on the eastern bank of the Volta River and in the nineteenth century Asante and peoples further north consumed much salt form Accra, Ningo, and Songhor. Much of this salt moved up the Volta by canoe.
18Johann Wilhelm Müller, Die Afrikanische auf der guineischen Gold-Cust gelegene Landschafft Fetu, as translated in Adam Jones, German Sources for West African History, 1599-1669 (Wiesbaden, 1983), 277.
or) bark-cloth was more common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries among rural dwellers, commoners and those working around the ports in Assinie, for example, still wore this cloth in the early eighteenth century. In fact Assinie was a key area of bark-cloth production—along with other bark-cloth makers in the interior who would sell their cloth from village to village—and, in addition to cloths, commoners wore caps made of bark or animal hides.\textsuperscript{20} Seventeenth-century writers such as Pieter de Marees and Olfert Dapper mention “Quaqu clouts” made by a people bearing that name in eastern Ivory Coast that probably were woven in the interior, but was certainly sold on the Gold Coast, especially to the coastal “people of Mina” (Elmina) until the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{21} Paradoxically, as John Thornton remarks, “the regions that were the biggest producers of textiles were also importers.”\textsuperscript{22}

In the coastal towns, great quantities of liquor were imported at a rate similar to cloth and metals of the prior centuries. Liquor was greatly consumed and the cultural constraints weakened on the coast, perhaps more than elsewhere, due to nineteenth century colonialism, missionary activity, and increased commercial activities—with the Gold Coast as exporter of raw materials and tropical products—and migrants workers from northern Ghana and Burkina Faso. The social chaos occasioned by liquor imports and the rapid expansion of cocoa, gold, and rubber exports led to further social transformations. These historical processes paralleled a marked increase in imported European merchandise and luxury goods among a people absorbed into a cash crop economy. Although little work has been done of the origins of the European liquor trade with West Africa, some suggest that this trade was not pronounced until the nineteenth century. On the Gold Coast, the liquor trade between the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of the larger economic upsurge of rubber and palm product exports, railway-gold mining, and cocoa exports.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20}Ray A. Kea, \textit{Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth Century Gold Coast} (Baltimore, 1982), 299.
\textsuperscript{23}Raymond E. Dumett, “The Social Impact of the European Liquor Trade on the Akan of Ghana (Gold Coast and Asante), 1875-1910,” \textit{Journal of Interdisciplinary History} 5(1974), 76, 100. There was much rubber in the Bono—reportedly, more than the Asante possessed. This claim has some merit, for Asante traders did travel to the Bono region from Kumase.
was the favorite European alcoholic import in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with some competition from rum, although gin assumed a greater role in the nineteenth century.

The Akan consumed alcoholic beverages in conjunction with cultural practices such as marriages, rites, funerals (within the context of disciplined conduct and fasting for several days), libations (at every formal occasion as well as without formal need), festivals, spiritual observances, visits of important persons, sealing legal or business contracts, and the installation and funeral of leaders. Yet, distilled alcoholic beverages did not occupy a central place in Akan society, as the Akan were cognizant of alcoholic excess. Akan culture considered it improper for women and children to drink, while elders frowned upon young men who engaged in social drinking, and these constraints became even clearer the greater the distance from the coastal areas where European liquor was imported and consumed. 24 Raymond Dumett observed that “[t]he major portions of European liquor imported into the Gold Coast in this period were absorbed into the traditional religio-cultural system” or the “Akan traditional system of ceremonial, festival, and social drinking.” 25 Little is found in the documentary evidence of indigenous distilled alcoholic beverages (Gã, akpeteshie) until the nineteenth century; nonetheless, the imported European liquor was cheap and had a much higher alcoholic content than the indigenous gin. 26 At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, liquor shops and booths emerged in increased numbers, as did beer bars in the 1920s.

In the twentieth-century urban Gold Coast, alcohol came to represent power and freedom, in that male elders monopolized the ritual use of alcohol (linked also to their political power), while the young men and women in colonial towns expressed their “freedom” from elders in their substantive use of alcohol through wage labor. This expression of freedom paralleled the colonial government’s dependence on liquor revenues that paid for colonial rule and nationalist critiques of colonial liquor politics and therefore colonial rule. 27 In that context of economic dependence and sociopolitical upheaval, drinking for the colonial urbanite became a vehicle for individual control, largely on the coast.

24Ibid., 81.  
25Ibid., 84.  
26Ibid., 93.  
The greatest volume of liquor was sold to and heavily consumed by wage laborers and fishermen in densely populated coastal towns such as Elmina and the Fante settlements at Cape Coast and Anomabu. From the eighteenth century, the coastal town of Elmina remained independent of its Akan neighbors, due in part to the Dutch, and maintained a positive relationship with Asante, an ally of the Dutch and a foe of the Fante settlements on the coast. Gradually, Elmina began to view its history and institutions as distinct from other Akan societies, such as the Fante, although they followed the pattern of culture practiced by the Fante and experienced sociopolitical chaos and conflict in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in ways similar to Asante and Fante. Elmina was characterized by frequent destoolments, dissension within key political structures, and intense succession disputes. The Elmina sociopolitical experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a reflection of, rather than an anomaly among, other Akan societies, principally, Asante, Bono, and Fante society.

III

In Asanteman (“Asante nation”) the Asantehene managed the Kumase central government of key officeholders and main constituents of the polity. These officeholders included (in order of authority) the Asantehene, amantohene of outlying districts (amanto) beyond the capital of Kumase, Kumase nsafohene (military leaders), and the gyaasefoɔ (Asantehene’s household servants). Asantehene Osei Kavdwo (1764-77) ushered in a set of bureaucratic reforms that some have called a “revolution.” In those governmental reforms, the Asantehene created a new paramilitary personal bodyguard (the Ankobea), and brought new officials from his gyaasefoɔ and from among his sons into the government in order to weaken the authority of amanto heads and Kumase (hereditary) “chiefs” and enhance his power.

Most recruits for administration were sought from an officeholder’s patrikin and the Asantehene created “service stools” (esomdwa) or new offices to carry out his will more efficiently. George Hagan, however, argued that the emergence of stools reckoned by a patrilineal principle and stool occupants appointed by the Asantehene developed long before the

28 An Akan ɔhene (pl. ahene), and other levels of indigenous leadership, occupy a stool (a beautifully-carved wooden seat) that represents the unity of the community and ōman. The stool enshrines the spiritual and cultural identity of the people and links the living with their ancestry, who in fact “owns” the land and the stool, and entrust the use of the land and stool to the ɔhene or ōdekuro at the village level. Before a ɔhene is destooled or removed from this office, charges must be first brought against him to the traditional council, who in turn investigates the merits of those charges.
“Kwadwoan revolution.” Accordingly, key formal features of the new bureaucracy had their origins in the inception of Asanteman—a critique which Ivor Wilks, a proponent of the “Kwadwoan revolution,” did not address—since non-Kumase constituents of Asanteman were incorporated as powers subservient to the central government in Kumase and whose valued human and territorial resources continued to be appropriated into the twentieth century. That appropriation drove an increase in the number of offices created in Kumase in order to manage such confiscations well into the nineteenth century. The confluence of the so-called “Kwadwoan revolution,” its antecedents, and the patrilineal principle, as Thomas McCaskie notes, might have been rooted in antagonisms between the matrification that defined the “royal” dynasty of the *Oyoko*Kɔɔ̃ abusua (“clan, family”) and the patrification that became (more) explicit in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Asante.

The Asantehene had to descend from the *Oyoko*Kɔɔ̃ abusua and be a “royal” (*adehyee*) who was the paternal grandson of an Asantehene, which was accomplished by the son of an Asantehene marrying a female “royal” of the *Oyoko*Kɔɔ̃ abusua. Efforts were made by several Asantehenes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to structure succession or the dynasty to fit a resurrected paternal principle, which not only created competition and power struggles within the dynasty and among ahememma (Asantehene’s children) and *adehyee* (“royals”), but informed the centralizing and power related interests of those Asantehenes at the expense of others. The principles of succession by patrilineality and appointment (or removal) extended beyond Kumase and included the outlying districts (*amanto*), and the heads of each division of Asanteman “lost their decision-making leverage on the national level to the elite in the capital [of Kumase] who dominated the Council of Kumase.”

---

Leaders in Kumase, who benefited from these developments, supported such policies of the Asantehene, while those of the outlying districts and other influential interest groups stood against them. Such interest groups included the Kumase nkwankwaa or kwasafo (“young men”) without office, but with political aspirations; a small group of fewer than a hundred Asante nkromofoɔ (Muslims) who served under the Nsumankwaahene of Kumase; and Asante “shrine priests,” who numbered in the hundreds, and exercised significant advisory and spiritual influence.33

These “young men” had a parallel in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Elmina. The “young men” or mancebos (Portuguese, “youth, servant”) were an important group within the Elminan quarters or wards. They formed the core of the ward military (asafo) forces and the wards themselves, and ward and asafo membership by way of a patrilineal principle, although most in Elmina were matrilineal, gave these non-officeholders a chance to influence politics and realize their political aspirations.34

Europeans involved in Asante affairs of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century—such as Bowdich, Robertson, Dupuis, Freeman, Bonnat, and Hutchison—consistently noted the limitations on the power of the Asantehene.35 By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, as Ivor Wilks and Kwame Arhin have argued, Asante political organization was one in which elders were chosen as rulers, and involved little of the commoners; but commoner leaders, kwasafo (commonly referred as “young men” in nineteenth-century sources) emerged with the aim of entering the political process. As widespread unrest erupted among conscripted men, Asantehene Kofi Kakari was forced to abdicate the Sika Kofi Dwa (“Golden Stool”) in 1874, and Mensa Bonsu abandoned his attempt to hold on to power nine

33 The office of Nsamankaahene in Kumase was created to enlist foreign shrines to promote the well-being and success of Asanteman. The office supervised the practice of Asante akomfo of important abosom in Kumase. The latter guarded the indigenous spiritual order and “sacrosanct prophecies” that underpinned or shaped Asante politics, for these spiritualists mediated the spiritual world in which “Asante politicians acted, deliberated, decided, and solved problems.” Performing varied functions in the daily lives of commoners and leaders: “shrines” protected farms and farmers, hunters, and crafts persons by negotiating the forested (including plant and animal) and aquatic terrains and their non-human occupants. Many sought and used their talismans and medicines, and consulted their “shrines” on matters relative to crops and harvest, disasters and disease epidemics, success in war and trade, civil law and disputes, land litigation, and national festivals. For “[e]ach town, district, village, matriclan, and office holder in Asante and its own shrine and caretakers, while the Asantehene’s special priests resided within the confines of the royal palace.” See Lewin, Asante before the British, 38-40.


years later, after those “young men” invaded and looted the *ahemfie* (“palace”).

By the last two to three decades of the nineteenth century, some factions in Asante began to assume a more radical posture, as Asante fell into protracted civil war between 1884 and 1888, and the radicals who had exiled themselves to the Gold Coast Colony returned to an Asante court headed by Agyeman Perempeh. The conservatives led by the “chiefs” and the radical returnees who “envisaged the destruction of the traditional state” through “the agency of the British” clashed over the course of Asanteman.\(^{36}\) In this turmoil the British entered Kumase unopposed on 17 January 1896, seized the Asantehene, Asantehemmaa, and many council members, and exiled them. After the British had invaded Asante in 1874, tension arose between the Asante capital of Kumase and the outlying districts centered on the distribution of power as the key issue in the protracted civil war of 1884-88. This war had its origins in the reduced powers of Kumase officeholders; the sudden death of Asantehene Kwaku Dua Kuma and the assassination of ex-Asantehene Kofi Kakari in 1884; and the competition for the Golden Stool created in the void of Kwaku Dua Panin’s unjustly harsh politics.

Ironic or not, just as Asante was regaining political order and stability under Agyeman Perempeh, the British extended protection over it in 1896, in spite of futile diplomatic efforts.\(^{37}\) The internal issues were exacerbated by Asante involvement in the emergent international rubber trade in the late 1880s, the imposition of Wesleyan and Basel missionaries (whose misconstrued interpretations of Asante culture partly facilitated British aggression), and other factors. The Basel Mission started a school in 1828 at the Dutch Christiansborg fort, and the Wesleyan Methodist Society came to Cape Coast in 1835. By the 1850s these two missionary groups were the principal conduits for Western schooling in the Gold Coast Colony, with graduates who formed the core of civil servants, clerks, teachers, catechists, and preachers.\(^{38}\) In 1843 Asantehene Kwaku Dua I allowed the Wesleyans to open a school in Kumase; the school failed, conversions were abortive, and the missionaries left for the coast within a decade.\(^{39}\) On 10 April 1876 Wes-

\(^{36}\) Wilks, “Unity and Progress,” 54


\(^{38}\) William De Graft, a Fante and son of the ɔkyeame at Cape Coast Castle, became a pioneer in securing the presence of the Wesleyan Methodists on the Gold Coast after his conversion. Much of his account is filtered through his very strong Christian beliefs. He accompanied Thomas B. Freeman to England following Freeman’s visit to Asante in 1839.

leyan Rev. Thomas Picot arrived in Kumase and proposed to establish a station in the Asante capital of Kumase; after eleven days of deliberation, his proposal was rejected. Both the Wesleyan and Basel missionaries strategically located themselves in outlying districts beyond, but close to, Kumase and the numerous conversions that occurred in the twentieth century unfolded largely in these outlying districts rather than the capital. Eventually, the missionaries would establish themselves more firmly in the early twentieth century after the last Asante resistance effort—the Yaa Asantewa war of 1900. At the national level of Asanteman, discussions about the propagation of Western education and religions found little support, since both (as mutually-reinforcing constructs) conflicted with Asante culture and spiritual tenets. These debates were part of the transformation in the political structure of Asanteman under Asantehenes Osei Yaw Akoto (1823-33), Kwaku Dua I (1833-67), and Kofi Kakari (1867-74). 40

Asantehenes of the nineteenth century presided over decision-making bodies of the nation, the highest of which was the Asantemanhyiamu held at the annual odwira festival and which had its origins in the founding of Asanteman. However, the infrequent nature of this council, among other factors, allowed for the creation of the Council of Kumase in the early nineteenth century, presided over by the Asantehene. “By the late 1870s,” as Thomas Lewin notes, “the Council of Kumase had become, along with the Asantehene, the actual central government of the Asante Nation” and, generally but with variations, “senior officeholders of the Kumase district occupied seats on the council. These politicians were representatives of the main fekuo, or groupings of administrative offices, which constituted the principal divisions of central government.” 41 Asante’s highly centralized government had been convincingly rooted in Kumase since the eighteenth century and between 1720 and 1867 “the political history of Asante is that of the systematic aggrandizement of Kumase and its office-holders at the expense of the territorial divisions and provinces.” 42 That history was also one where the Asante polity persisted through the history of its people and by way of mechanisms built on consent and coercion. Between 1883 and 1888 these

40 Jacob Simons, son of an Elmina woman and a Dutch official, was fluent in Akan and he was sent on behalf of the Dutch on a special mission to Kumase in 1831/32. He must have witnessed or heard some of these discussions in the reign of Yaw Akoto. See the “Journal of Jacob Simons (1831-32),” originally archived at the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague, Archive of the Ministry of Colonies 1813-1850, and translated by Larry Yarak as an unpublished manuscript in 1985.

41 Lewin, Asante before the British, 33.

same Kumase officeholders squandered and dissolved their labor and land resources in often bloody and wide-ranging power struggles.

Power struggles were certainly not confined to Kumase or Asante in the late nineteenth century. In 1875 a group of provinces under the aegis of the Bron confederation seceded from Asante and remained free until British and German acquisition in the mid-1890s. Dente ɔbosomfoɔ Kwasi Gyantrubi of Krakyekrom and Kete-Krakye headed the confederation, which approximated a coherent polity, but was largely a mutual defense pact against Asante attack. Yet the confederation’s path stood in the way of the British and Germans, leading to the execution of Gyantrubi in 1894 and the exile of Agyeman Perempeh in 1896 since the political power of Gyantrubi in the confederation and Perempeh in reuniting the northern provinces of Asante was irreconcilable with European interests.43

From 1896 to 1924 Asante was weakened, ruled by Britain through the Gold Coast Colony, and entangled in the increasing popularity of the abosommerafoɔ (so-called “witch-catching cults”) and related ɔdomankama or abonsamkɔm movements.44 Asante was also leaderless, as evidenced by the defilement and looting of the Golden Stool by a group of nkwankwaa (“young men”) in the 1920s and the emergence of the akonkofɔ, who came to occupy an intermediary position between Asante officeholders and non-officeholders. The bloody civil wars between 1884 and 1888 were critical, for they signaled an end to the Asante “state” and its sovereignty, and therein the Asante political “hawk” (from our drum text) turned on Asante society (“the chickens”) in order to recover its political authority. However, this was without success and, paradoxically, the Asante “hawk” became the “chicken” for another hawk, the British, as British imperialism and overrule fed on Asante internal chaos and inertia.

Asante was annexed as a British colony in 1901 and areas to the north of Asante were subsumed under the Protectorate of the Northern Territories the same year. For the period of British colonial rule in Asante (1896-1957), the British colonial administration, like competing factions, attempted to limit severely the powers of the Kumase officeholders. In fact, in addition to Agyeman Perempeh, most of his senior officeholders in Kumase were

exiled to the Seychelles Islands, and some returned with Perempeh in 1924. This was the Asante that R. S. Rattray encountered, and what he wrote often excluded much of Asante’s recent and the then-present historical developments since he focused rather on matters that suited his temperament and idiosyncrasies. Perempeh returned in 1924 as a private citizen and, in 1926, he became Kumasehene (a hitherto unknown title). He was supported by the conservative Kumase officeholders, who sought their historic power, as well as the radicals who sought a “liberal regime” through a breaking or elimination of the power of “chiefs” from a man now “civilized” and “Christianized.”

Perempeh died in May 1931 and was succeeded by Osei Agyeman Perempeh II as Kumasehene, and at the restoration of the Asante Confederacy in 1935, Perempeh II became the first Asantehene under British colonial rule and created of several new stools, including the Nkabɔmu and Nkabɔmu Kyeame Stools. The Confederacy council’s second session included the abolition of all nkwankwaahene (“young men” leader) positions. In 1947 the Asante Youth Association (AYA) was created by nkwan kwaa or subordinates to “chiefly” authority without prospect of political office, and AYA became the driving force behind the creation of the National Liberation Movement (NLM) launched in Kumase in 1954, which struggled with Kwame Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP). The NLM was established on 19 September 1954, and it demanded Asante self-determination in the form of an autonomous Asante within the Gold Coast configuration or Asante secession. This demand clashed with the anticipated blueprint of a Ghana republic that did not afford Asante “special” parliamentary consideration, a blueprint worked out with the British government.

The apparent political clashes over the course of the republic had less to do with the NLM and Nkrumah’s CPP, but within Asante itself in terms of the late nineteenth-century conflict of interest and power between the “young men” and the established order or powers of Asante in the form of the Asantehene, officeholders, and intellectuals. Ironically, the latter soon usurped the leadership of the “young men” within the NLM and transformed it into a parliamentary party that reached a compromise solution with Nkrumah’s CPP; articulated the position of the amanhene in the republic’s constitution; and provided Asante with a semblance of regional autonomy. This marked a key victory for the established order within Asante, and the workers and farmers who supported NLM remained aliens to the contemporary state, muted and without political recourse. The next Asantehene, Opoku Ware II (1970–99), became a Christian amid the continued rever-

ence for the Golden Stool and propitiation of the *nsamanfoɔ* (ancestors) and *abosom* of the reconstituted Asanteman. Opoku Ware II managed to distance himself from party politics, although he created a new stool, *Nkosoɔhene* (a so-called “progress chief”). The new stool spread among all Asante *amanhene* and *adekuro* (“village leaders”), and *Nkosoɔhene* titles were awarded to Europeans and others in an effort to secure “development” funds for the “progress” of a reconstituted Asanteman.46

**IV**

Although predating Asanteman by centuries, the recent history of the Bono and their polity has been entangled with Asante on one hand and an abiding allegiance to their spiritual culture on the other. The Bono have occupied the central Ghana region from as early as the fifth century CE, and only the Bono of Takyiman and Wankyi (Wenchi) claim to be autochthonous.47 In fact, the term *bɔno* (*bɔ* – create; *no* – the) speaks to assertions of being the first (created) to occupy a region closely linked to Bono antiquity.48 Rivers and streams generally marked the limits of Bonoman (Bono nation)—established in the twelfth or thirteenth century—and its approximate boundary included Kete Krakye to the east, Mampon and Offinso to the south (now part of northern Asante), Bonduku and Banda to the west, and (what formerly was) Gonja and the Black Volta River to the north.49 Although some claim that “all subsequent Akan [polities] which got established to the south claimed association with [Bonoman or its capital of Bono-manso],” this argument was true only for some rather than all.50 The Denkyira polity founded by the Adawufɔɔ of the Agona clan and of Bono-manso established and maintained trade relations with Bonoman linked by a road that passed through the present town of Techimantia. The Fante and Efutu (Fetu) settled in the Manso-Takyiman area before moving to the coast in the 1400s, and the Akyem Bosome settled at Ejura, an area that was within the confines of Bonoman, before moving south.

46 Wilks, “Unity and Progress,” 67. Wilks suggests that much more needs to be known about the way Akan political concepts have shifted subtly in meaning as the political landscape has changed.


48 It is said that when a woman gives birth for the first time she is called *abonowoɔ*.

49 The border of Offinso was marked by a place referred to as *Mfutudwaneemu*, a stretch of marshy land near a stream that one crosses after passing Asuosu on the Takyiman-Kumase road.

At the start of the eighteenth-century, Bonoman’s demise began to unfold through a series of succession disputes, the arrogance of the governing family, excessive taxation, the immoral practices of Bonohene Ameyaw Kwakye, and the invasion by Asante in 1722-23 facilitated by the treachery of Bafo Pim. The reoccurrence of succession disputes, invasions, or immoral practices were thematic among many Akan societies between the eighteenth and twentieth century, and owing to factors internal to and among themselves, as well as external forces. In the 1722–23 Bono-Asante war, nine villages were taken by Asante and placed under the jurisdiction of specific Kumase ahene to collect taxes or tolls for the Asantehene. Known as akurotuokron (“nine separate villages”), the villages in question included Tuobodom, Tanoboase, Buoyem, Offuman, Nkyeraa or Nchiraa, Braman, Nwoase, Subinso, and Tanoso. The nine villages are also sites of some of the oldest and most powerful Atnɔ (Tanɔ River) abosom among the Akan, such as Taa Kora at Tanoboase and Taa Kora’s third offspring, Taa Mensa (Taa Keseε) of Takyiman.

After the defeat and destruction of Bono-Manso, which became totally abandoned in the second-half of the eighteenth century, Takyiman, the second largest Ḫman of Bonoman, became the new capital. The emergence of Bono-Takyiman as the successor of Bonoman underscored the popular notion that a real Bono was one who came from Takyiman. The conflict between Bono and what would later become Asanteman existed, however, since the time of Kwamanhene Obiri Yeboah, who died in 1680 and was succeeded by Osei Tutu, the Asantehene who founded Asanteman with Kwame Frimpon Aŋkye Kotowbere (Aŋfo Aŋkye).

Obiri Yeboah’s fights with Dormaa or Domaa (part of the Gyaman settlement) and the Abron (Bono) were picked up by the first and second Asantehene, Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware. Asante’s interest in the Bono area during the early eighteenth century included, but was not limited to, the kola-producing areas of Ahafo and as a buffer zone between Aowin and Sefwi; the main route to the Salaga (Gonja) “slave market;” and the gold-fields in western Bono once controlled by Bono-Manso. The defeat and

---

51 Accounts of the events, and particularly the actions of Bafo Pim, who was awarded the Nkoransa settlement by the Asante for his deeds, can be found in Fynn, Asante and its Neighbors, 37.
52 One-third of the tolls, which went to the Asante National Fund, were collected from the nine villages and paid to Asante.
53 After the 1722-23 defeat by Asante, Bono-Takyiman had to provide soldiers to fight on Asante’s side against the Gonja in the Bote war, and against Banda, Gyaman, Fante, and the Ewe in subsequent wars. Taa Kora of Tanoboase and Taa Mensa of Bono-Takyiman were taken to war to facilitate Asante victories.
destruction of Bono-Manso allowed the Asante to confiscate its royal treasury, which was a key to Asante’s initial wealth and the reform of its fiscal and bureaucratic system. The Asante (and other Akan) share and probably obtained knowledge of fiscal and bureaucratic systems from Bono archetypes of an earlier date, as well as traditions of kingship, the rituals and panoply of sacred kingship symbolized by golden regalia, the umbrella and swords of the ŋman, the palanquins and stools of the ŋman. Other cultural practices of likely Bono origin or innovation include goldsmithing, blacksmithing, brass-casting technology, kente cloth weaving, and the system of weighing gold by inscribed symbolic weights of stool authority. Indeed, the northern forest fringe, where the Bono were situated, was significant as a population dispersal area and a center for the transmission of defining cultural institutions of the Akan as well as allowing for the northern extension of Asante to markets in the northeast.

After the second defeat by Asante in 1877, most of the Bono-Takyiman people and Takyimanhene Kwabena Fofie migrated to the Gyaman (Abron) polity in the Ivory Coast through self-imposed exile for 25 years. After the British defeated Asante in 1896, the people of Bono-Takyiman returned and rebuilt their ŋman, and perhaps in celebration thereof instituted the annual Apɔ festival. The defeat of Asante allowed Bono-Takyiman to take advantage of the Asantehene Agyeman Perempeh’s exile to the Seychelles Islands, British anti-Asante sentiments and the invasion of Kumase, British interest in the northeast trade once controlled by Asante, and convinced the colonial government to return the nine villages. This ruling was overturned in 1935, and the nine villages were incorporated into Asante’s territory under the auspices of the Asante Confederacy, which was inaugurated in that same year. R. S. Rattray’s Ashanti Law and Constitution (1929) provid-

54 Bonohene Ati Kwame is credited with introducing the stool; Bonohene Boakye Tenten is credited with introducing the titles found in indigenous Akan sociopolitical discourse (e.g., Adontenhene, Nifahene, Bɛnkumhene, Akwamuhen, Kyidomhene, Ankobeahene); and Bonohene Obunumankoma is credited with introducing the gold weights system, sanaa (state treasury) and gold dust as a currency prior to the use of cowries shells. At the time when only Bono-Takyiman and Banda engaged in clothing weaving, the ancestors wore a tree-fibered cloth called “kyenkyen.” In the past, the indigenous political leaders wore an old indigenous cloth called gagawuga.

55 Asante’s access to markets in the north, such as Dagomia (Yendi), provided them with access to savanna goods and natural products, livestock, salt, and smelted iron.

56 Contemporary Gyaman is divided into two districts: one in the Ivory Coast at Bonduku and the other in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana at New Drobo.

57 It is said the Takyiman “state” ñbosom Taa Mensa advised the organization of the Apɔ festival, sometimes referred to as atemdie (insults), through the act of public criticism, settling of disputes, and supporting the ŋman and Taa Mensa.
ed a blueprint for British “indirect rule,” which experienced a crisis in the 1920s, and prompted officials to restore the Asante Confederacy along “traditional” lines in 1935. Yet, “indirect” colonial rule also perverted or subverted indigenous bases and structures of authority.

Indeed, “indirect rule” contributed greatly the morass of succession disputes and destoolment cases. The case of Adanse will suffice. For Adanse, the *afenakwa* sword (symbol of leadership and political authority) was passed from father to son and through various clans. However, it did not enhance the prestige of any particular clan, unlike the *Sasatia* that enhanced the power and prestige of the Agona clan in Denkyira, or the *Sika Dwa Kofi* (“Golden Stool”) that was permanently vested in the Oyoko clan of Asante. This situation changed in the twentieth century when British colonial rule in Asante and on the Gold Coast elevated Fomena’s political leadership and stool (vested in the *ɛkona* clan) above all others and, since then, the leader of Fomena have been the Adansehene. Before the elevation of Fomena, the Adansehene was exiled at Elmina and others were killed during the colonial era, and the British enstooled the Adansehene’s nephew, Kwabena Fori, for what they thought was his contribution to their efforts. Constant destoolment became the norm rather than the exception after Kwabena Fori. A common denominator of these cases were the claims of political aspirants who viewed themselves as more “civilized” and “modern” during an era of cocoa cultivation, social anxiety, and cultural ambiguity.

Although most people of the Bono region do not consider themselves to be Asante—rooted in the historical interactions noted above—ambiguity existed then as it does now. Much of the *Apoɔ* songs of insults are still directed at Asante for matters that preceded many of its singers a century or more, and although the Bono variant of Akan (Twi) is spoken in Bono-Takyiman, and a preference for its use would support notions of Bono identity, many still consider the Asante variant “much sweeter” than their own. During the 1930s and 1940s, being Bono became synonymous with denying political allegiance to the Asantehene and, by extension, the Asante Confederacy, and was the impetus for the *Bonokyɛmpem* movement that began in 1935 with Takyimanhene Nana Kwasi Twi. A year later, Nana Kwasi Twi

---

59 For numerous destoolment charges and cases in Takyiman, see volumes 5-7 under “Techiman Traditional Council Affairs,” 8 January 1964-12 June 1975, BRG 2/1/10, National Archives of Ghana at Sunyani (NAG-S).
62 Bonokyɛmpem derives from the phrase, *bono kye ampem dua ne kwa* (“the first created divided into a thousand and planted itself every where in the country”), which affirmed the Bono as pioneers in Akan culture development.
conceded his destoolment. Nana Kwaku Tawia or Kyeremeh (1937-41) became the new Takyimanhene and continued the struggle to reclaim the nine villages, but was also destooled. Nana Kwaku Gyako III (1941-44) succumbed to the same fate as his immediate predecessor. Nana Akumfū Ameyaw III (1944-61), who was then enstooled as Takyimanhene, continued to fight for the nine villages, and was later succeed by Nana Kwakye Ameyaw II (1962-90s). Unlike Asante, the youth and elders of Bono-Takyiman worked together and supported the struggle marshaled by Nana Akumfū Ameyaw through a number of meetings, which produced several petitions. Petitions were dispatched to the Gold Coast government and the British parliament declaring Bono-Takyiman’s withdrawal from the Asante Confederacy due to the nine villages, mistreatment of Bono leaders, unfair tax collection practices, and the treaty signed with the government assuring the return of the nine villages (which had earlier been given to Bono-Takyiman, but returned to Asante in 1935).

Bono-Takyiman was allowed to disengage from the Asante Confederacy in 1948. In 1951 the Bono Federation was established by several Bono ahene who joined Bono-Takyiman after seceding from the Asante Confederacy. The struggle became one of Bono unification rather than reclaiming the nine villages. Ghana’s new government created the Brong-Ahafo region and the Brong-Ahafo House of Chiefs in 1960. The Ahafoɔ (ahal(ye)–hunt;

---

63 Despite his efforts toward reclaiming the nine villages and Bono unification, Nana Akumfū Ameyaw III was destooled, and the people of Bono-Takyiman rebelled against him seven times. His successor, Nana Kwakye Ameyaw II, also met rebellion and (unsuccessful) attempts to destool him a month after his enstoolment. He had difficulty uniting the people, as well as enemies who supported Nana Akumfū Ameyaw III. After eight years of litigation concerning attempts to destool him in the 1980s, he was finally destooled in the early 1990s. See, for example, NAG-S, BRG 2/1/10, “Humble Petition of the Elders and People of Techiman Traditional Area to the Right Honourable Dr. K. A. Busia,” 19 March 1970, 1-3.

64 For a series of relevant correspondence and petitions, see files in NAG-S, BRG 2/2/44 and BRG 9/1/19. The most notorious and offensive of all the insults from the Asantehene and Kumase ahene was the “feet on the head ritual,” wherein the Asantehene would remove his sandals and put his left foot on the crown of the Takyimanhene’s head. While the Takyimanhene squatted before the Asantehene, the Asantehene rubbed his foot three times on the crown of the Takyimanhene’s head while the Kumase ahene gave the epiteth, Safroadu! Safroadu! See Owusu Brempong, “Oral Tradition in Ghana: the History of Bonokyempim and Techiman Politics,” Research Review 13(1988), 10. For the Asantehene, this was a ritual of superiority since no Bono shene was considered equal to him. The ritual was an insult to the Bono shene and Bonoman because it not only undermined the prestige and authority of the Takyimanhene, but was also regarded as a taboo since nothing should touch the head of a Bono shene once he had been enstooled.

foɔ—people), who were the hunters for Asante, followed the other Bono aman in creating the region that bears the name of both.

The Brong-Ahafo House of Chiefs and the National Chieftaincy Secretariat, both established by the government, were authorities that were and are politically superior to the Takyiman Traditional Council. Moreover, the indigenous political structures of the Takyiman Traditional Council and its leadership have less political authority than the parallel governmental structure of the District Assembly and the District Secretary. Yet the Bono have maintained a unique set of cultural allegiances rooted in the spirituality and practices associated with Taa Kora (specifically, Taa Mensa) as embodied by the sacred Tano River and held as the first child of an Akan Creator.

Despite shifts in Akan society and spiritual practices, in terms of the popularity and use of the abosommerafoɔ and talismans (asum an) procured from northern Ghana and Christian missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Bono have remained steadfast to their ancient Tano river-derived abosom. For Takyiman in particular, Taa Mensa and Boɔkyerewa, the guardian of the sacred Tano River in the village of Traa, remain integral. In fact the abosomfoɔhene for Taa Mensa, the “state” abosom of Takyiman, is a position of authority above all individuals, including the Takyimanhene. The Bono regard the matrilineal-based position of abosomfoɔ as senior to the more mobile yet junior position of ɔkɔmfoɔ and, as result of these allegiances, the Bono have been able to resist in varying degrees the type of Christian and commercial incursion that invaded Asante and Fante society.

V

In the period under discussion, Mfantseman (“Fante nation”) was a nexus of capitalism, Christianity, and conflict. Nineteenth-century Fante settlements were invaded and perhaps taken over by elements of Euro-African capitalism, as opposed to Asante, where the Asantehene directly influenced or controlled a greater part of the economy and discouraged economic individualism through regulations, taxes, payment levied on goods brought into the polity, and laws intended to limit personal spending on moral or spiritual grounds. All accounts testify that the Fante came from Takyiman to the coast between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century and those accounts do the same concerning the importance of the abosom of Nananom Mpow in Fante history between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.66

66T.C. McCaskie, “Nananom Mpow of Mankessem: an Essay in Fante History,” in West African Economic and Social History, 133; L. F. Römer, Tilforladelig Efterretning om Kysten Guinea (A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea), trans. and ed. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford, 2000), 95; Fynn, Asante and its Neighbors, 2. The Etsi, now distributed throughout several coastal settlements, claimed to have left Takyiman well
The Fante emigrants from Takyiman came to be known as Borbor Fante, and they founded and organized a settlement at Mankessem into five quarters after leaving an original site named Kwamankese (“Great Kwaman”). The Kurentsi Amanmfu at Mankessem became the primary quarter due to seniority and leadership in the move to Mankessem, and on the outskirts a grove was established for the ancestors who led them to Mankessem. Population growth in the mid- to late seventeenth century and protracted intra-Fante struggles between quarters led to the creation of new settlements, such as those at Anomabu and Akatakyi, and subsequent Fante political and cultural domination of the southern Gold Coast.

Most of the new polities went their own way in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, representatives of each new polity resided in an appropriate quarter at Mankessem, and this evolved into a federal assembly of Fante settlements, and thus elected “Braffoes” were the agents and servitors of the authority represented at Mankessem—a site where the assembly met to resolve disputes and create policy in the eighteenth century—and of Nananom Mpow. The “Braffo” (ɔbrafoɔ) at Mankessem was a military leader who served the akɔmfoɔ or abosomfɔɔ of Nananom Mpow at Mankessem.

In the early nineteenth century, a period of extreme uncertainty and social disintegration, European criticism of Nananom Mpow’s corruptness in particular, and hostility towards the ɔbosom in general was well sustained. This attitude toward the ɔbosom at Nananom Mpow was due in part to Europeans who confused spiritual authority with political power in the context of European rivalry on the coast and the quest for African allies and trading profits. On the distinction between spiritual and political authority, the Fante, however, were clear: “[i]n any conflict of interests the Fante states privileged their own political and material advantage over the advice of warnings of Nananom Mpow.” Fante society and cultural identity were traumatized by Asante defeat and occupation, harsh internal rule, demographic dislocation, declining wealth of Fante middlemen in concert with the British abolition of the “slave trade,” and the advent of British protection.

before the Borbor Fante, and these Borbor Fante encountered the Etsi at Mankessim. See GNA/Cape Coast, Tribal Histories, K. Sekyi, “The Downfall of Tekyiman and the Subsequent Emigration of the Mfantsis,” and “The History of the Immigrants from Takyiman,” ms., n.d., Manhyia Record Office at Kumase.


68Ibid., 142. If the position of the five senior akɔmfoɔ for Nananom Mpow was hereditary, those akɔmfoɔ were abosomfɔɔ, and this would make sense, since the latter are hereditary and matrilineal positions are senior to the akɔmfoɔ in Takyiman, and the Fante came from Takyiman.
In 1868 a group of Fante polities assembled at Mankessem to create what became known as the “Fante Confederation” and crafted its founding document, the “Constitution of Mankessem,” which provided an organizational structure premised on “promoting economic and educational progress” for those within the confederation. Included among the signatories of the constitution were leaders from Mankessem, Abura, Assin, Ayan, Edgimaku, Inkosokoomper, and Komenda; absent were Anomabu and Cape Coast, then the capital of the Gold Coast Colony. By 1873 the confederation dissolved. Beyond, but inclusive of the confederation movement, Fante politics, like that of Elmina and other Akan societies, was acutely marked by destoolments and protracted succession disputes, and dissension within the more powerful asafo groups during late nineteenth and twentieth century Fante and Elmina societies.

The social chaos in Fante society facilitated and was aided by increased individual capitalism through imported goods in the context of “legitimate trade,” the Wesleyan Methodist mission from 1835 onward, and the hesitant compromise of “chiefs” and elders to these dynamic transformations and their ambiguous support of indigenous ideas and institutions. Soon after the Wesleyan Methodist mission was established, the akɔmfoɔ of Nananom Mpow condemned any connection with Christianity; but the forces of the British, local and foreign missionaries, Christianized Fante merchants at Anomabu and Cape Coast, and a Fante nation divided proved overwhelming for what Nananom Mpow represented. Nananom Mpow was a symbol of Fante cultural identity and social order, and it constituted a challenge to British authority, Christianity, and the new patterns of economic advancement. The abosom, such as the one at Nananom Mpow, were part of the process of maintaining existing social and political structures in the context of Akan social order through restraints on human conduct, and many akɔmfoɔ and abosomfoɔ served the community. Nevertheless, the Fante of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century “have internalized the British and Christian orthodoxy of the 1850s,” and the issue of cultural identity endures.

69 G. E. Metcalfe, ed., Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History, 1807-1957 (London, 1964), 332-38; Wilks, Asante in the Nineteenth Century, 230-32. Denkyira refused to be placed under Dutch protection and played a significant role in the formation of the Fante Confederation, as well as the blockade by the Confederation of Elmina. In 1945 Twiɔɔ and Heman federated with Denkyira. See Daaku, Denkyira, 9.

70 See Feinberg, Africans and Europeans in West Africa.


72 McCaskie, “Nananom Mpow,” 147.
VI

Rapid, uneven, and enduring transformations characterized the so-called “long nineteenth century” (ca. 1750-1950) in world history, but these changes are vaguely perceptible through a range of common “–isms”—nationalism, imperialism, communism, totalitarianism, and colonialism. This statement is no less valid for the history of West Africa in general and the Gold Coast in particular, and the significant transformations between Akan societies of the coast to the northern forest fringe provide an equally important localized perspective on thematic issues shaping the global landscape of the “long” century. The conflicts between and within Akan societies of varying orders were the product of multilayered factors occurring at the same time and in different locales—much like power struggles and tensions born of foreign incursions and local responses in other parts of Africa and Asia—ultimately transforming social and natural orders in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Although the Akan share a composite culture of spiritual, ideational, and material constituents, the thematic transformations in Asante society were not be replicated among the Fante or Bono. The Bono offered a key comparative and divergent case from the Asante and Fante experiences, for they yielded less to Westernization and Christianization on account of their distance from the coast and the colonial government, and, more significantly, maintained an allegiance to a spiritual culture that exercised much weigh on its people and indigenous political structures.

Beyond the almost exclusive focus on Asante as one of these most studied West African polity, Akan societies are better served by approaching them thematically, since encounters with, and responses to, Westernization, Christian proselytization, commerce, social conflicts and dissolution were shared by all. Yet Akan internal responses within the respective polities and toward European and Euro-African forces prompted those social orders to reconstitute some of their constructs of self, state, and sovereignty in nuanced ways. For example, the bloody civil wars between 1884 and 1888 signaled an end to the Asante “state” and its sovereignty, a reality affirmed by British imperialism and overrule shortly thereafter. Looking thematically and comparatively in spatial terms, however, we move beyond exploring Asante as a synonym for, and in exclusion of, other Akan societies and arrive at more textured interpretations that offer students and scholars in African or world history comparative material. Thus, if strong centralized polities precluded warfare and prolonged instability facilitated missionary penetration, then the social and cultural chaos of the nineteenth and twenti-

The foregoing proposition compares well with other parts of Africa and even Asia. In his comparative study of missionary encounters in China and West Africa, David Lindenfeld suggests a correlation between strong centralized “states” and little missionary headway and thus Westernization.\footnote{Lindenfeld, “Indigenous Encounters,” 349.} Though both had early and sustained contact with Europe, the Akan did not become Christianized like the Kongo soon after their encounter with the Portuguese, or at the rate of Yoruba conversion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the Akan, unlike the Kongo polity, did lack a singular and centralized polity. Yet the factor of centralization might not be the most important variable, for the Akan resisted Christianization well into the twentieth century with centralized polities of varying strength, even though they have had a larger number of Europeans on their coast and for a longer duration than any other West African cultural group. The Akan have had even longer contacts with Islam, but never become Islamic; less than five percent of Asante, for example, were Muslim in the 1980s. It seems, therefore, that strong centralization of a polity—or lack thereof—may be a necessary, but not a wholly sufficient condition for mitigating Christianization and Westernization. Even in China, where Christian missions were present since the late seventeenth century, Christianity made headways in times of centralized political breakdown, but never assumed a significant place in Chinese religious life due to its inability to adapt to local beliefs and contexts.\footnote{Morton H. Fried, “Reflections on Christianity in China,” \textit{American Ethnologist} 14(1987), 94-106.} The latter marks the most significant explanation for the Akan and perhaps for the larger African landscape as well.

For the Akan, Yoruba, and Bakongo, two related key factors were clear in all three cases: the role of African merchants in Euro-African commerce and African converts who become proselytizing missionaries. The success of African and African-descended converts—unlike their European counterparts—hinged on their degree linguistic and cultural competency in local settings, and, in some cases, their genetic or phenotypical qualification. The persistent internal revolts over the control of trade, servitude and forms of domestic enslavement, importation and consumption of European consumer goods and (religious) ideas and their effects all have Euro-African com-
merce and African religious or westernized converts as the common denom-
inators. The issues of cultural identity and social reconstitution affected
Fante, Asante, and Bono society in varying degrees of intensity and those
minimally seduced by Christianization and Westernization were the ones
with the least successful African converts and the greatest allegiance to a
spiritual culture that rationalized society—the Bono at Takyiman and to a
lesser extent the Asante in Kumase. Although the peoples of former polities
remain and maintain a sense of their identity—as Asante, Bono, Fante,
Akyem, and so on—and the cultural-historical transformations that under-
pin that identity in the twenty-first century, much of their lives are now
transacted as citizens within the republic of Ghana.