

# ***Asanteman* in the Pre-colonial Phase in the History of the Asante State**

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I will discuss the following issues. First, I will criticise the historical sources that are often used by historians to describe the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state. I will examine which types of sources historians are using and to what extent these sources are reliable. I will also give a short overview of the ongoing debate among positivistic historians and historians of ideas on the question whether perceptible entities are cultural variables. I will also question the reliability of oral historical sources (§3.0). Second, I will focus on the origin of the institution of chieftaincy in Kumasi (§3.1). Third, I will discuss the political structure of the Asante state (§3.2). Fourth (§3.3), I will study in depth whether the pre-colonial institution of chieftaincy was legitimated or ruled by coercive force alone. Fifth (§3.4), I will go deeper into the research question of this paper which focuses on the extent to which chieftaincy in Kumasi has persisted. Sixth (§3.5), I will focus on the religious intermediary function of traditional authorities in the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state. Seventh (§3.6), I will study the role of the traditional authorities as religious peacekeepers. Eighth (§3.7), I will study to what extent the adaptive and adoptive nature of the Asante indigenous religion has caused the persistence of chieftaincy.

## **3.0 A Criticism on the Historical Sources of the Pre-colonial Period in the History of the Asante State**

In the *Tractatus* (1922), the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein (1889-1951) (1998) states that a meaningful utterance about reality is one in which the logical coherence of objects in a sentence corresponds with the logical coherence in reality. Language is thus nothing more than a representation of reality and sentences have a logical form, which gives them the possibility to describe a fact from reality. To know whether a scientific utterance (a sentence) is a fact, we have to determine whether the utterance is true or false by the method of verification. A fact is, therefore, information that is verified with reality and science is the knowledge of basic facts and of the combinations that follow from these facts, which together should give a complete description of reality. Consequently, utterances that cannot be verified should not be expressed in language. Wittgenstein states: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen” meaning, “one should not speak about what cannot be said.”

Historical events and experiences of people are not an object of empirical study, as they are not there anymore. The study of history is therefore concerned with the history of remains of the past, such as written sources (archives, eye-witness reports, diaries), oral sources, material objects and with the study of the mental archive consisting of memories of the past of living people. If we apply Wittgenstein’s positivistic point of view to the study of the past, meaningful utterances about the past

are only those utterances that are based on the remembrance of a perceptual experience. Until the 1960s, most positivists believed that only these remembrances could be called “historical facts.” In their eyes, perceptible realities, such as ideas, beliefs and desires were not cultural variables and historians should therefore remain silent about the existence of such realities. Historians speak in relation to the remembrances of the past about “historical sources.” Their profession is to study historical sources—the remains of history in the present—to form a picture of reality in the past. Because history is source based, historical knowledge is limited to what sources are available. Positivistic historians therefore only start studying a certain period in the past when they can answer the following question positively.

- *Are there enough remembrances of **perceptual experiences** of this period in the past, which make it possible to form a meaningful picture about the past’s reality?*

The main question for positivistic historians was what kinds of sources contain remembrances of perceptual experiences and are thus a source of historical knowledge. In the 1960s, most positivistic historians believed that one could only gain historical knowledge from either written sources or archaeological sources. In these days, however, due to the contribution of positivistic historians such as Jan Vansina, most positivistic historians agree that oral traditions are also valuable sources of historical knowledge. Oral traditions are transmissions of history, literature or laws from one generation to the next in a civilization without a writing system. What they do not recognise as a source of pre-colonial historical knowledge is “oral history” or the recording of eye witness accounts of historical events. Their main objection towards “oral history” is that it depends on people’s memory, which is both selective and discarding<sup>1</sup> (Thompson 1978:130).

Now, before a positivistic historian will start writing on the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state(s), he will have to ask him or herself: *Are the available historical sources reliable enough?* Then, in case of the study of the pre-colonial history of the Asante with a specific focus on religion, the positivist historian will discover that his tools, the historical sources he or she is to work with, are problematic as written, archeological and oral sources are of limited reliability. The reasons for the limitations of these sources are as follows:

Firstly, the historian’s written sources would not be completely trustworthy, because they are scarce and therefore they do not give a complete picture of the past. The historian would, however, be able to console him or herself with the idea that the descriptions of the Asante are richer than those in many other countries and regions in Africa. Another problem that the historian would encounter with written sources is that, in many cases, its nature is useless, because they concentrate on the political history of the Asante and their diplomatic relationship with Europeans rather than the indigenous belief. Another problem is that the written sources that do concentrate on the indigenous belief are

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<sup>1</sup> Immediately after an event we can remember most of it, but later on, the brain selects material and to a certain extent reconstructs it. The counterpart of selection is the process of discarding of which the initial part is by far the most drastic and violent. The more people who are involved in an event, the better they can remember it. The loss of memory during the first nine months is as great as that during the next thirty-four years.

produced by missionaries, whose motif was to proselytise to the Asante rather than giving an objective view of the indigenous belief in the pre-colonial period. As little as objective are the sources of traders and Arabic scholars, who also had their own interests in reporting about life in the pre-colonial past.

Second, these positivistic historians would find out that one cannot rely on the archaeological sources of the early history of the Asante either as they are even extremely scanty (McLeod 1981:11). Third, in these days the positivistic historian would acknowledge the value of oral tradition for historical research and therefore he would also look at “oral tradition” as a source of history. Some of them, such as Doortmont and Falola (1985:238-239) would, unlike Vansina, not let these sources speak for themselves, but would start analysing both the oral traditions and the social context of these sources with the help of research methods of the social sciences. They would also study the effect of commercialisation on these sources.

In the case of the Asante, historians have analysed oral traditions concerning the origin of the Asante and found out that these are complex, sometimes contradictory<sup>2</sup> (McLeod 1981:11) and murky<sup>3</sup> (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995:482) and that its content should certainly not be taken literally. According to the historian David Henige (1973:235), such contradictions are, among other reasons, caused by the uncritical and almost reflexive incorporation of available printed information into allegedly oral historical materials, which inclination is particularly strong when oral traditions attempt to cope with material more than a century old, such as is the case with the whole of the pre-colonial Asante history.

In conclusion, after reflecting on the available historical sources and their reliability, most positivist historians would conclude in line with the young Wittgenstein that the available historical sources do not deliver “historical facts” and therefore that the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state is a phase “one should not speak about.”

Historians of ideas, however, would conclude otherwise, as they handle a wider definition of historical facts. In contradiction to positivistic historians, historians of ideas believe that perceptible entities, such as historical perceptions of the past, are cultural variables. Positivistic historians and historians of ideas take thus diametrically opposite positions in the 1970s-1980s ongoing debate about the nature of cultural variables in the study of history. Positivists believe that only perceptual remembrances of the past are cultural variables. In the opinion of historians, ideas, beliefs, perceptions and desires are also a source of valid and reliable historical knowledge (Murphey 1994:263-307). Historians of ideas would therefore not immediately put their written sources and material objects aside, when they do not deliver a remembrance of a perceptual reality, but would try to understand what the sources tell them about the perceptible reality of the past. *What did people think and feel in*

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<sup>2</sup> See also: , ,

<sup>3</sup> See the special issue on the Akan of Ghana in the whole edition of: Ghana Notes and Queries, 9 (1966); and the papers on the symposium on the city of Kumasi in Research Review Supplement, 5 (1993).

*the pre-colonial Asante state? What were their perceptions of chieftaincy?* In addition, the historians of ideas use two other sources of historical knowledge of which positivistic historians are more sceptical: oral historical sources—which should be distinguished from oral sources—and the mental archive of people in the present of the past. Oral historical sources are different from oral sources because they do not form the basis of “oral tradition” but of “oral history.” The latter is created by historians who record the oral testimony of *men of memory*, elderly Africans who represent their communities and who have therefore gained a lot of knowledge on its history. In Akan culture, the representatives (*akyeama*) and the queen mothers (*ahemmaa*) of the chief (*ohene*) occupy this function. A great problem with oral history, however, is that people who are professionally responsible for handing down stories from the past are the representatives of the traditional culture. For this reason, the way in which the “men of memory” perceive pre-colonial history is coloured and they will be inclined to construct history in such a way that it will become a history of victory for their own kin-group. In addition, the history these men hand down is selective as it’s focus is on the history of those in power (Appiah 2003:115). The perceptions of history of the common Asante man in pre-colonial times have, however, been different from the representation of history of their chiefs. Ordinary Asante for instance did widely accept but in contradiction to their chiefs also highly feared the ritualized killing of human beings (especially of slaves and foreigners)<sup>4</sup> (Lewin 1978:62, 64-5, Anti 1996:15).

Another problem that I have experienced with collecting “oral-historical data” is that representatives of Asante history do not express themselves accurately about what happened in the pre-colonial past. They often used the phrases “in the olden days” and “when we came to meet it” when I asked them when the historical events they mentioned took place. Instead of referring to dates in the past they referred to historical events as if they had happened yesterday. I experienced that this way of dealing with history is so much a part of Asante culture that it is not limited to chiefs who legitimize their power on the basis of the presence of the ancestors in the present. Ordinary Asante subjects also deal with history as if it concerns happenings in the immediate past or in the present. Most of my respondents, for instance, talked about the notorious founders of the Asante nation—Okomfo Anokye and Osei Tutu I—as if they were buried yesterday.

In the interpretation of oral historical data, the historian should thus take the cultural differences in dealing with history into account and translate the emic data in an understandable academic etic discourse. To what extent this process of translation is reliable is debatable.

The wider definition of cultural variables of the historian of ideas and the greater amount of historical sources cause that I will not have to conclude, in line with the young Wittgenstein, that historians should remain silent about the pre-colonial phase in the history of the formation of African states, such as that of the Asante. Instead, in line with the older Wittgenstein, I can create a valid and

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<sup>4</sup> There are three types of deaths of human beings for religious purposes. The ritualized killing of human beings without trial should be distinguished from the ritualized killing of criminals and for the death of household personell who volunteered to be killed to be buried together with the Asante King and to accompany him in the afterlife , 56, 60.

reliable Gestalt of the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state by scrutinizing the sources on which this history is based. In the remaining part of this section, I will therefore reflect upon the most frequently used primary sources and the most cited secondary sources on the pre-colonial Asante history. But first, I will ask the following two questions:

- *What kind of written sources exist on the early phase of Asante history ?, and*
- *Are the written sources about this phase valid and reliable?*

The historical archives on the Asante history contain written scripts of African-Islamic traders and African-Islamic scholars and also of European traders, European missionaries and European scholars. In 1471, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to “discover” the gold rich region of West Africa’s coast. The Portuguese referred to the area as ‘The Gold Coast’ as they managed to trade with the indigenous population in spices, African artefacts but, above all, in gold. The first written sources of the Gold Coast date from 1482 and are from the hand of the aristocratic Portuguese Diego D’Azambuja (Nathan 1904:34), who in his desire for more gold and for the spread of Christianity, gathered about 200 soldiers, masons, carpenters and other artisans to build the slave fort Sao Jorge da Mina, which is today known as St George’s Castle in Elmina. The first map of Guinea (Corteseo and Teixeira da Mota 1962:67-9, plate 362) dates from 1602<sup>5</sup> and was based on details of the Gold Coast collected during a Portuguese mission to the interior in 1573. This map and the accompanying descriptions were, however, not all that accurate. So did the Portuguese comment on two interior states known as Acanes grande and Acanes pequenos and also applied it, like the Portuguese traders on the Gold Coast, as a linguistic term to Asante traders from the interior? There has never been, however, a state known, as “Acanes grande” or “Acanes pequenos.” The myth of “Acanes” became, however, widespread and on the maps of 1606, 1616 and 1729 did cartographers in different countries refer to this imaginative state as “Akanny.” In 1819, “Akanny” had been removed from the map (see appendix map).

The Portuguese traders remained at the coast until 1637, when the Dutch took over Elmina Castle. By 1641 the Dutch<sup>6</sup> had expelled the Portuguese from their last possessions on the Guinea coast (Anquandah 1999:52,55). The Dutch inheritance of descriptions of the Gold Coast include the works of Pieter de Marees’ (1602) “Beschrijvinghe ende historische verhael van het Gout Koninckrijck van onder de Gout-custe,” and the more well-known work of Olfert Dapper’s (1668) “Nauwkeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaanse Gewesten” and Willem Bosman’s (1702) “Nauwkeurige Beschrijving van de Guinese- Goud, Tand- en Slavekust.” The Dutch physician and writer Olfert Dapper, who had never been to any African country himself shamelessly plagiarized de Marees’ early-uncontaminated descriptions of the Gold Coast.

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<sup>5</sup>See also: [kaartencollectieUniversiteitvanAmsterdam:http://dpc.uba.uva.nl/cgi/i/imagex/imageidx?sid=615706eb0ax9eca318e1ea8dfedff0e32;q1=1602;rgn1=carto\\_all;size=50;c=carto;lasttype=boolean;view=entry;lastview=reslist;subview=detail;cc=carto;entryid=x260734225;viewid=OK132.TIF;start=1;resnm](http://kaartencollectieUniversiteitvanAmsterdam:http://dpc.uba.uva.nl/cgi/i/imagex/imageidx?sid=615706eb0ax9eca318e1ea8dfedff0e32;q1=1602;rgn1=carto_all;size=50;c=carto;lasttype=boolean;view=entry;lastview=reslist;subview=detail;cc=carto;entryid=x260734225;viewid=OK132.TIF;start=1;resnm)

<sup>6</sup> See for further Dutch, French and German sources on the history of the Gold Coast:

Bosman, late Chief Merchant on behalf of the Dutch West India Company on the coast of Guinea, was more original as his work was based on eyewitness accounts. His descriptions (*Naauwkeurige Beschryving*) of the Gold Coast were, however, discriminating and politically biased. Bosman wrote, for instance, that African people were unreliable, lazy and over-proud. Bosman's work includes a lot of crude jokes and remarks about his British rivals of the English Royal African Company. He wrote, for instance, that the British were such drunkards that many of them died from alcohol, were very greedy and were possessed by their services to Venus. He also criticized the British as well as the successor of Van Sevenhuysen, the director-general of the WIC de la Palma, for their, in his eyes, stupidity to trade in slaves, because he found that the gold trade was a much safer investment (Van den Heuvel 1981:13, 43, 54). These and other remarks have been omitted in the overall inaccurately translated English version of Bosman's work. Bosman, was however, also critical to his own West-Indian Company director-general Van Sevenhuysen, who in a very dangerous political climate sent 'Sub Merchant' David Van Nyendael as the Company's ambassador to the new Asante capital Kumasi. Van Nyendael's mission was no great success of the WIC and it has been a great misfortune for historians that he never had the chance to report on his life in Kumasi as he died a few days after he had returned back to Elmina (Dantzig 1974:104,106).

An important historical source concerning the diplomatic relationship of the Dutch with the Asante are the records of the mission of Akyempon Yaw to Elmina between 1869 and 1892, which are gathered and introduced by René Baèsjou (1979). There are also a number of unpublished written accounts of Dutch-speaking visitors of Kumase, such those of Willem Huydecoper in 1816-17, Jacob Simons in 1831-32, Jacobus de Bruijn in 1836-37, H.S. Pel in 1842, and David Mill Graves in 1857 (Yarak 1997:363).

Arabic sources on the Asante people and culture date from the midst of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Moslems had been part and parcel of life in Kumasi since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when African Islamized Mande people, known as the Dyula or Wangara from the North came south to trade with the Asante and Fante on the Gold Coast. These Arabic sources are, however, of later date, because between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Islamic traders did not really settle in Kumasi and therefore they did not take their imam's with them. The most important Arabic source from the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is the 'Kitabal-Ghanja' written by Muhammed ibn al-Mustafa Kamaghatay and ʿUmar Kunandi ibn ʿUmar Kamaghatay. This source is important because it treats the growth of the Islam in the Northern Territories of Ghana and the early expansion of the Asante to the North, through which they came in contact with Islamic traders known as the Gonja (Wilks, Levtzion and Haight 1986:61-71, Crowder 1977:61). From the eighteenth to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Mande-Dyula 'alim clerks from Gao and Hausa land wrote many interesting Arabic documents on the Asante.<sup>7</sup> The alim clerks were employed by the Asante court, because the Asante

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<sup>7</sup> These sources are translated and bundled by Hopkins, J.F.P & Levtzion, N. See:

King (*Asantehene*) needed people who could read and write and these could not be found among the own population, because Twi was an oral language (Hiskett 1984:131-135, Wilks 1989:346). Another pre-colonial indigenous author who contributed to the study of Asante culture was the missionary Carl Christian Reindorf (1966) (1834-1917), a Gold Coast African, who made a compilation of a large body of oral traditions that he had collected on the Gold Coast (Silverman and David 1989:330). At the end of the pre-colonial period, John Mensah Sarbah (1968:, 1968)(1864-1910) published two books on customary law and the native constitution.

The Danish, who were also active in the Gold Coast since 1658, have inherited some interesting reports of some of their chief colonial administrators, which they called ‘Opperhoved’ meaning ‘chief’ (*omanhene*). However, in 1850, the Danish had already left the area. In 1872, the Dutch also left the Gold Coast and the British won territory. Important British sources of information on the Asante are the journal of the British Governor William Winniett of his visit to Kumasi in 1848 (Yarak 1997:363), the agent of the British Company of Merchants Thomas E. Bowdich’s (1791-1824) visit to Kumasi in 1817 and the work of the Wesleyan missionary Robert A. Freeman (1839-1844).

The purpose of merchants, such as Bowdich, was to use the knowledge they gathered of the indigenous people for pragmatic reasons, such as exploring the area or to get to know how to convince the natives to buy European products. Missionaries, such as Freeman, were especially interested in the indigenous population as a source of potential converts. The reports of the Swiss Presbyterians Friederich Ramseyer (1842-1902) and Johannes Kühne (1840-1915) are also important sources<sup>8</sup> of information on the Asante culture. These missionaries were captured by an Asante force which had invaded Ewe territory and from December 1870 until the approach of a British military expedition in January 1874 they were held hostage in Kumasi. Ramseyer and Kühne shared a lot of their experiences with the independent French trader Marie-Joseph Bonnat (1845-1881) who was captured in the same month (Jones 1991:173). An important German source is the report of the missionary A. Riis (Yarak 1997:363).

All these written sources should be interpreted with a certain amount of healthy suspicion as each author had his own agenda and his non-academic purposes for writing on the people of the Gold Coast. Ramseyer, for instance believed that his capture and sufferings were part of a divine plan for him to bring Christianity to Asante. In addition, many of the presumed “primary” sources that have been consulted by historians are in actual fact “secondary” sources “as any comparison of manuscript reports from Africa with the versions that appeared in missionary journals or biographies will readily demonstrate—missionary officials in Europe at this time had few scruples about changing the wording of reports sent to them from overseas.” (Jones 1991:174)

Besides written sources, a Gestalt of the pre-colonial history of the Gold Coast should also be based on oral-historical sources consisting of the stories of royal Asante in today’s Kumasi Metropolis and the historical archive in the minds of Asante in the present. My original contribution in this paper,

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<sup>8</sup> Ramseyer and Kühne left a manuscript, two German editions, an English and a French translation.

besides my source criticism, will lie in the use of my oral-historical data on the pre-colonial period in the history of the Asante.

To sum up, in this section, I have sketched the ongoing debate since the 1970s and 1980s about the nature of history. Are ideas and beliefs cultural variables and sources of historical knowledge or not and thus can or cannot historians give a meaningful picture of the reality of the pre-colonial phase in the formation of African states? In this debate, positivistic historians, whose answer to the above question is “no,” and historians of ideas, whose answer is “yes,” are diametrically opposed. I consider myself to be a historian of ideas and thus I do recognise the existence of perceptible cultural variables and use beliefs, thoughts and perceptions to create what I believe to be a valid and reliable Gestalt of the early history of the Asante state.

In my source criticism, I have shown that the written sources on the pre-colonial history of the Asante have a limited reliability, as they are scanty and coloured. The main objection of most written history of this period is that the intention of the European Christian and African Islamic authors, such as traders, missionaries and imams, was not to give an objective view of the early Asante history. Their motives were commercial, political or religious and the purpose of their writing was therefore not to give an objective view on the reality of life in the pre-colonial past. Another problem was that most authors came from outside the Asante Kingdom, which contributed to the incompleteness and sometimes inaccuracy of their accounts, such as in relation to the “Akanny” state. I will use some oral historical sources to refer to the indigenous belief of Asante in the pre-colonial period but not without being aware of the fact that also oral history is of limited reliability. For, the human memory is selective and the function of *men of memory* is to represent the mainstream norms and values within the society and to show a healthy amount of cultural group chauvinism. Oral history, will be, however, one of the two pillars of the Gestalt on which my early history of the Asante is based.

### **3.1 The Origin of ‘Asanteman’**

To understand the working of *Asanteman* in the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state, one needs to study the origin of the Asante people. The Asante—a Niger-Congo linguistic group that belongs to the Akan—have lived in the West-African tropical forest as early as 930 ±130 CE. Since this early period, among the Asante most probably, not only forest dwellers but also agriculturists were found. The Asante settled in the North and East of the forest and developed quite independently from the areas further up north (Klein 1996:254). From the tenth century CE,<sup>9</sup> there is archaeological evidence comprising of house floors, faunal remains, slag and pottery that can be considered as linked

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<sup>9</sup> In my opinion, it is, however, necessary to make some reservations to this date. The investigation of the state of Asantemanso was part of an archaeological research project of Shinnie to the early Akan. The method that was used to find out until what century the ancestors of the Asantes should be traced back was that of carbon 14 (C14-dating). Shinnie presents it as if this is a method is very precise and that by using this method one can know the exact age of material remains of the past, while J. Shott notices that the method of C-14 or radiocarbon dating has a probabilistic character especially when we are dealing with “relatively” early history), 202 which means that the method is most probably not as precise as Shinnie makes it look like.



with the proto-agricultural “ancestors of the Asante” (Shinnie 1995:7-8). *Asantemanso*, currently a village twenty miles south of Kumasi in the territorial division of *Asumegya*, is an interesting archaeological site as the Asante oral history makes notice of seven ancestors (five women and two men) who in *Asantemanso* had crawled “out of a hole in the ground” (Shinnie 1995:6). McCaskie (1995:43) makes note of the central significance of *Asumegya* “in Asante myths of origin and early history.”<sup>10</sup> According to these myths and history, the founders of Kumasi (*Kwamen*) trace their origins to this site.

The Asante had a matrilineal social structure and there were seven or eight exogamous matrilineal clans (*abusuaban-ason*) that functioned as the fundamental social and political units (Platvoet 1979:6). Family advisors, such as grandfather (*nana* or *abusua panin*) and grandmother (*obaa panin*), ruled these units. In many Asante communities, one believed that wisdom was linked to age. This is understandable if we take into consideration that these communities were illiterate. The only way to become wiser was therefore by gaining life experience or by consulting a specialist, such as, for instance, a religious specialist (e.g. a traditional priest). Within the family, the oldest people were the first ones from whom one sought advice and they mostly had a lot of influence on their grand children and their way of life.<sup>11</sup>

Asante of old age (*panin*), who were “royals” (*adehye*) because they belonged to the local *abusua* which was said to have “owned” and to have founded a village, advised the Asante subjects in their villages together with a board of other elders and were therefore highly respected. The Asante institution of chieftaincy was thus born out of a royal kinship institute.

In the seventeenth century, the number of Asante and other local *musua* (plural of *abusua*) in the forest area grew and they developed their areas into states. On a map of the Gold Coast of 1629,<sup>12</sup> (see appendix for map) for instance, emerged many states that surrounded the state of “Acanij”<sup>13</sup> [or on the 1728 map “Akanny”], such as Dahoe and Inta, which by 1750 had been incorporated into the empire of Asante. Because of their size, these empires demanded another way of ruling as the leaders of the matri-kin groups could provide. The revolutionary demographical changes between 1500 and 1800 thus asked for the foundation of a new political institution. Therefore, by the foundation of the Asante Confederacy in 1701 the Asante established *Asanteman*. Since the early

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<sup>10</sup> In 1832 Simons heard that the old town of Kumasi would have been located in *Asumegya*. In addition, Rattray found “evidence of extensive settlement dating from “some remote period” in this place. There is, however, according to McCaskie no real historical evidence for these utterances.

<sup>11</sup> In his autobiography, the politician and lawyer Joe Appiah notes the important role of his grandparents in his life. He describes how difficult it was for him to leave to Sierra Leone for the United African Company<sup>11</sup> as his dominant grandmother did not want him to travel to that country. Had he not lied to his grandmother then he would have stayed in Ghana like others grandchildren who were more respectable according to Asante ethics as they listened to their grandparents’ advice.

<sup>12</sup> I refer to the earliest Dutch map of the Akan societies at the Gold Coast, which is entitled: ‘Caert van de Gout Cust in Gunea Waer in verthoont werden de afdeeling van haer Paercken, alsoo die vande Prinsi Palste Swarten hebben onder vracht, en sijn met Stipellen van een gescheyden en by onse volck op deese Mannier bevonden en bekent.’ The map was created in 1629 by Hans Propheet, a Dutch WIC factor on the Dutch trade post or castle in Moure, 14-15. See for map: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/Document/CadresPage.jsp?O=IFN-7759846&I=1&J=null&M=imageseule>

<sup>13</sup> On the map it says: “hier wonen de Princi: paalfre coopliden die met ons handelen in Gout.”

eighteenth century, the royal *oyoko* matri-kin group, though, delivered the greater number of the Kings, paramount chiefs and queen mothers that ruled this expanded political institution. During the following centuries, the royals appointed more and more Asante subjects as chiefs as an award for their contribution to *Asanteman*. Asante military commanders (*nsafohene*) could contribute by being victorious in a war with neighbouring states and assist in the expansion of the Asante Kingdom. Three leading *nsafohene* were together with the *bantamahene* commanders of the Kumase state army, and occasionally of the national levies. They were also given constitutional responsibility for administering the capital in the absence of the king. The *gyaasehene*, who commanded the strategic royal bodyguard, had charge of the huge domestic bureaucracy that was built on the basis of merit to serve the empire (Wilks 1967:226-227, Hagan 1971). Slaveholders (*ɔbirempon*, plural *abiremponfo*) contributed to *Asanteman* by getting an estate which made them rich. The Asante saw the growth of individual capital as a contribution to the state, because they believed that individual wealth also contributed to the wealth of the nation. This was partly true, for after someone's death the greater part of his personal wealth was automatically appropriated by the state (McCaskie 1983:31-32).

The Akan societies, including the Asante, developed a political system in which the offices of chiefs and priests were separated (see also section 3.0). The Akan differ on this point from certain non-Akan societies in the Gold Coast, such as the Nankanse, the Namnam, the Dagaba and the Kusase who did not have a separation of the office of chiefs and priests. Instead, chief-priests ruled over these groups (Rattray and Westermann 1932:602). This means that the chiefs were also the high priests of the clan god or goddess and the head of the community shrines (Kwamena-Poh 1973:20).

The Asante were originally hunters, gathers and traders of its natural products, such as gold, ivory and kola nuts. Until 1500, the Asante gathered kola, palm nuts in the forests of Northern Asante, and traded these nuts and palm oil with the people from the northern and western Sudan. Small villages came into existence because of trade in pieces of meat produced by hunters. The village Kwamen for instance, the early name for present Kumasi, was believed to be founded by a hunter from Yendi as a market centre for the sale of his elephant meat (Kwamena-Poh 1973:131). According to Davis (Klein 1996:254) some of the Asante founders of settlements were proto-agriculturalists but according to many West-African oral traditions, such as those of the Sisala and Dagara in Bukina Faso (Lentz 2000:196) hunters are often believed to be the discoverer and first settler of a new habitat. "This hunter is said to have found new, worthwhile hunting grounds, possibly with fertile land and rich water reserves, on one of his expeditions, built himself a temporary hut, and then fetched his family and brothers. This was often only after encountering bush spirits or neighbouring settlers, whom he subsequently met up with in the supposedly uninhabited new space, having to enter into an agreement with them concerning shrines and sacrifices to the earth god." In order to sacrifice to the earth god, the first settlers (the hunters) that arrived in an area had to erect an earth shrine. "Ritual control of the earth shrine simultaneously implied the right to distribute land and demand contributions for the required sacrifices. The earth priests—that is, the sacrifices responsible for the shrine—thus

distributed land to later settlers, sometimes in exchange for quite substantial gifts” (Lentz 2001:158). What often happened according to West-African oral traditions was that the new settlers of the same cultural group (in this case the Asante) appointed their own chiefs and then took over a shrine stone and the traditional priest who ritually controlled the earth shrine in order to acknowledge the fact that the land was already settled (Lentz 2001:159). Most probably, this explains why the Asante had separated the office of chiefs and traditional priests.

According to Asante oral traditions (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995:493) when the Oyoko clan members under the leadership of Oti Akenten, who were to found Kumase, migrated north from Asantemanso (in the Pra basin) to Kokofu and from there to Kwaman, in Kwaman there were already some clan communities. The new immigrants were pitched into a struggle for survival in Kwaman and in the long struggle to survive in this place; the role of the chief became a historical reality. Oral traditions thus indicate that among the early Asante the chief of a certain group was there to serve the interests of his subjects who were in rival with other inhabitants of the village. The priests did not fulfil such a role.

The *Asanteman* as a centralised institution goes back to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has its roots in the events of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this century, the trade with the Europeans in gold and slaves in exchange for firearms intensified. As a result, many clans, who developed little states (*berempon-doms*) (*edom*=army, *odom*=favour) as a result of their control over slaves and their exploitation of arable land and mines, settled along the Trans-Sahara trade route. The first inhabitants of the area, the *oyoko*, feared that these newcomers would also make claims on the resources of the area. The development of a hierarchical model of chiefs under a paramount ruler clarified who were the royals or early leaders. In 1660, these new states, such as the Kwaman state of the Asante royals of the Oyoko clan, formed the Asante Confederacy. This was a military union that enabled its members to resist attacks of clans outside the union and diminish the risk that isolated clans would again be incorporated into another kingdom or confederacy (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995:493-494).

The Asante confederacy consisted of an alliance of states (*aman*), which initially were independent and had the same rights. The confederacy was a loose union, and the villages were economically autonomous. Each state had its own *omanhene*, had its own internal politics and celebrated its own religious festivals. The clans inhabited the states of Mampon, Nsuta, Kokofu, Bekwai, Dwaben, Asumegya and Kwaman. The alliance protected the clans against the Denkyerahene; the ruler of Denkyera. In 1701, the Asante union captured the new capital Jukwaa of the Denkyera Kingdom after the battle, known as the “Battle of Feyiase.” The victory of the Asante in this war marks the beginning of the rise of the Asante Kingdom as a superpower on the Gold Coast. The battle changed the political balance in the alliance in favour of the Oyoko of Kwaman. After the subjection of the Denkyera and its vassal states, the military leaders of the Confederacy chose the successful

general Osei Tutu I as their king (*Asantehene*) and together with his relative and advisor priest (*Okomfɔ*) Anokye<sup>14</sup> he laid the foundation of the Asante-kingdom (Boahen 1975:17).

In the period 1701-1718, under the rule of Osei Tutu I, *Asanteman* was developed into a military machinery by the mobilisation of fighting men for offensive and defensive warfare (Arhin 1999:79). The Asante political system focussed on the annexation and incorporation of surrounding states. In this period, there was no room for enhancing the structures of the institution of chieftaincy necessary for governing in a more decentralised and democratic manner. Such an institution began to develop under Osei Tutu's successor, Opoku Ware I (1720-1750). *Asantehene* Opoku Ware I was a successful constructive ruler and his subjects credited him with the title 'empire builder' of the Asante Confederacy.<sup>15</sup> By 1750 the Asante ruled over most Akan-groupings. They incorporated, in addition, twenty other kingdoms, including Gonja and Dagomba (Tordoff 1962).<sup>16</sup>

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Asante Kingdom had expanded (see map). This happened, among other reasons, because the Trans-Atlantic slave trade network of the Europeans increased and became more important than the Mande-Hausa and Muslim trade network. The Asante were very keen on the export of slaves, which consisted mainly of the war-captives that the vassal states had to pay each year as a form of tribute to the *Asantehene*, and the import of firearms from the Dutch and the British. By the end of the seventeenth century, the slave trade heavily increased and so did the import of firearms. These firearms were used to annex more areas, obtain more war-captives who were sold as slaves and buy more firearms, which resulted in the enormous expansion of the Asante Kingdom (Daaku 1972:240).

### 3.2 The Structure of Asanteman

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<sup>14</sup> In many recent history books from indigenous authors, such as that of Kwamena-Poh, historians describe the priest Anokye as an eighteenth century historical figure that really existed. The priest Anokye did not however appear by name in any written historical source before the nineteenth century, although descriptions of the presence of a priest inside the royal Asante court are available. The historian McCaskie suggests that the priest *Okomfɔ* was a necessary element in the Asante interpretation of their history. In the Asante world view magical explanations of phenomenon are common. Anokye has been introduced by the Asante because this priest could explain the otherwise magically unexplainable in historical events, such as why the conquest of the Asante on the Denkyeria was successful. There is thus a difference here between an emic (Kwamena-Poh) and an etic (McCaskie) explanation of the role of Anokye in the Asante history. My respondents in Kumasi believed in the emic explanation, while other Akan specialists in the West (Platvoet) and also myself find McCaskie's explanation more plausible.

<sup>15</sup> During his rule, Opoku fought a few battles against Bono and was successful in defeating them in 1723. By 1726, he also conquered the Wasa tribe. Thereafter, between 1741 and 1744, King Opoku won battles against Akyem, Akwamu or Ga-Adangbe.

<sup>16</sup> The professor of Law in the United States and Northern Ewe chief Kodzo Paaku Kludze argues that the Asante borrowed their political institution from the Southern Ewe (the Anlo-Ewe) who live in the south-east of Ghana. The Asante would have come into direct contact with the Anlo-Ewe, because they had a close military alliance with this cultural group. After the Datsutagba war in 1866, this alliance became stronger and, according to Kludze, it was at this time that the Asante fully developed their institution of chieftaincy. Kludze's theory on the origin of *Asanteman* is, however, historically nonsense, among other reasons, because the end period of the Asante sovereignty endures from 1872 until 1900. If we have to believe Kludze, Asante would have achieved its full development just before its fall.

In the pre-colonial Asante worldview, power (*tumi*) is very important. An Akan proverb that illustrates its importance is: “*Wieon tumi a, tom wo mama, kogye. Wo nsa tumi a, wbetumi ede agye wo mama.*” “If power is to be sold, then sell your mother to buy it. And once the power is yours then use it to buy your mother back” (Ernestina Ama Brenya, nr 8). For an Asante, one’s mother is the most important person in his or her life, because s/he owes his or her body to this woman through her blood (*mogya*). The Akan being a matrilineal group, it is the blood principle that situates a person in the most important kinship unit, namely the matrilineage, or more extensively, the matriclan (Wiredu 1998:309). The Akan proverb mentioned indicates that if you get the chance to obtain power, you should give up even the most important relationship you have in life for acquiring it, because it will be worth the investment. In the Asante society chieftaincy was therefore in great demand. Moreover, in the Asante community power and wealth went hand in hand. A royal who was popular enough in the eyes of the queen mother (*ahemma*) and the commoners (*mmerante*) to become a chief, easily earned back his investment.

An ordinary *mmerante*, though, could not become a chief. In order to become a chief, one had to be a royal (*adehye*). Royalty in Ghana may be defined as an accepted lineal connection with the founder of a state (*oman*) or village (Obiri Asamoah, nr 13). The position of being the descendant of a founder validated the claim of a royal to succession to a stool. In the early eighteenth century, the Asante rulers altered the hereditary national political culture by inserting meritocracy into it. Between 1700 and 1750, the *Asantehenes*, who were ruling in those periods, Osei Tutu (ca. 1695-1717) and Opoku Ware I (1717-1750), appointed seven titled military commanders (*nsafohene*). They became commanders and chiefs because of their contributions to the Asante state (*Asanteman*). They had proved their worth as advisers, chief administrators, and members of the ruling national council in the early wars of conquest (Wilks 1967:, Hagan 1971). In addition, individual accumulators of wealth received public and social acknowledgement for their achievement on behalf of society. This happened ultimately and at the highest level when the *Asantehene* invested such a person with the title of *Obirempon* (McCaskie 1983:31-32).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Kumasi had grown expansively and inhabited between 15,000 and 25,000 people (Wilks 1989:374). The more subjects an *ohene* had, which means the more villages he owned, the more political powerful he became. Cities and villages were a measurement of a chief’s wealth and power. Chiefs or queen mothers who sold some of their villages mostly did this because they had serious debts. They could, for instance, have a debt to the *Asantehene*, because they had to pay him death duties (*awunnyadee*), which were levied by the state on an individual’s self acquired property, and were only able to pay by the sale of a real estate (Wilks 1989:106-110). The traditional authorities had to pay several tributes such as death duties (*awunnyadee*) or inheritance taxes (*ayibuadee*) to the Asante state (McCaskie 1995:48) and the annual revenue of the central government for much of the nineteenth century was not less than 20,000

peredwans and probably not more than 50,000: that is, perhaps between £160,000 and £400,000 on the nineteenth century rate of conversion (Wilks 1989:437-438). When these authorities were not able to pay these tributes, the traditional authorities could attempt to transfer land to other traditional authorities so that they would have enough money to pay their debt to the Asantehene. If they did not succeed, the state could claim whole villages and place them under a different stool. The inability of traditional authorities to pay tribute to the state was one of the reasons why the Asantehene had become and remained very wealthy and powerful. Another reason for the Asantehene's riches and authority was that all transfer of land and villages in the Asante kingdom had to be approved by the Asantehene, who had a pre-emption on all transfer of land. This means that every village was first transferred to the Asantehene, who received money for this transfer and then resold or in some cases granted to the third party to the transaction. Wilks (1989:106-110) cites the following example which appears to have followed standard procedures. The Asantehene imposed a fine upon one Aferi Awua of Breman, who was obliged to sell some of his land. He offered a parcel of 11/2 peredwanes to Kyerewa Mansa, paternal half-sister of the late Kwaku Dua I and sister of Akyeampon Tia (Akyampon Kwasi) and Akyampon Yaw of the Boakye Yam Kuma stool. Kyerewa Mansa decided to buy only part of the land, and paid for it ¾ peredwan and a small *ntrama* fee. She settled forty persons on the land. She then went to the Asantehene Kofi Kakari to present the land and the subjects, on oath, "through him" to her brother Akyampon Yaw, who "thanked" his sister, again "through" the Asantehene, with a sum of three peredwans, which Kofi Kakari deputed the Debosohene Ata Famtam to hand over to her. The Asantehene profited thus several times from a transfer of land, which was an easy way to lard the state's treasure and the increase his power. No wonder that an Akan proverb says: "*Otumi nyinaa wo asase so*," which means: "all power is in the land." One could interpret the profit of the Asantehene in such a way that with the transactions of land, the land was surrendered to the Asantehene. At least in 1942 members of the Confederacy Council had the opinion that in the pre-colonial time, all the land belonged to the *Asantehene* because the right to the land came with his office and his symbolic occupation of "The Golden Stool." The Asante King embodied the land because he represented the ancestors (*nananom*) who were believed to be the actual owners of the land. He then only "borrowed" the land to other *ohene* for which they had to pay a fee.

This growth of wealth was the cause for the fact that the power of the *Asantehene* (who is also the Kumasihene), who was in actual fact, *primus inter pares* among the *omanhene* of all the states in the Asante confederacy, became so great that in actual fact his position became far more important than those of the other *omanhene*. As a result, the economic conditions were there for the *Asantehene* to create a central government council (*Asantemanhyiamu* or *Asanteman Kotoko*). This council consisted of a senate of chiefs (*ahemfo*) of the five states that had allied with Kumasi in the late eighteenth century to form the original Asante nation (*amantoonum*). These *ahemfo* regulated the affairs of the government and came together twice a year, for the swearing of an oath to the King (see

section 3.6) and the celebration of the *Odwira* festival. The *Asantehene*<sup>17</sup> and *Asantehemma*, who were the rulers of the Kingdom but also of the city of Kumasi, sat also in the National Assembly (*Asantemanhyiamu*). The state or kingdom of *Kumase* consisted of the town of Kumasi and surrounding villages. The town (*kurow*) was divided in town quarters, each inhabited by a different local matrilineage (*abusua*) and ruled by its *abusuapanyin*.<sup>18</sup> The political structure was hierarchical and matrilineal. The nation (*Asanteman or Kumasi and the amantoonum or six states that formed Asantemanhyiamu*), the state (*oman*), the town (*kurow*) and also the town quarter were ruled by a royal male and female of the matrilineage which “owned”<sup>19</sup> that nation, state, town or quarter.

The elected chiefs (*omanhene*) and queenmother (*omanhemmaa*) ruled the state. The *omanhene* was the head of a council whose members were the *omanhemmaa* and the (male) rulers of the participating villages and towns (*ahemfo*). An elected male elder (*abusuapanyin*) and female elder (*obaa panyin*) headed the *abusua* in its town quarter (Platvoet 1985:176). A royal family was ruled by a grandfather (*nana*) advised by his wife (*obaa*) (Nana Ama Nyarko, nr 17).

Since the foundation of the Asante Kingdom, the highest conciliar body in Asante was *Asantemanhyiamu*. This national council consisted of all *amanhene* and certain senior Kumase chiefs. Provincial rulers were also represented. Because of the relatively slow rate of communication due to bad roads, the great size of the Asante Kingdom and the high costs for the provincial *omanhene* of travelling to Kumasi, the *Asantemanhyiamu* met only once a year during the *Odwira* festival. In situations of state emergencies, the *Asantemanhyiamu* met more frequent. Such a crisis occurred for instance in 1872-3 as the Asante armies carried out a reoccupation of the British protected southern provinces. The Mandate of the Council was then necessary for decisions which would involve *amanhene* and provincial rulers alike in considerable outlays of both men and money. In cases of crisis such as the one in 1872-3, the *Asantemanhyiamu* was required to be in almost continuous session. Many council members, however, did not make use of their right to come to Kumase for these sessions. The *Asantemanhyiamu* consisted of two bodies: a decision-making body known as the Great Sessions<sup>20</sup>, (*asetenakes*), and a small deliberative body known as the inner council (*agyina*). In the late eighteenth century, the *agyina* took over in an ad hoc fashion certain decision making functions from the *Asantemanhyiamu*. The *agyina* functioned, like the *Asantemanhyiamu* itself, as a court of justice and as a decision-making body. The Inner Council consisted of four functionaries, three senior counsellors and occasionally the *Asantehene*’s Moslem advisors were also present. The authority of the counsellors in comparison of that of the *Asantehene* differed in the various fields into with the

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<sup>17</sup> The *Asantehene* was also *Kumasihene* and *primus inter pares* among the male rulers (*ahemfo*) of the six states.

<sup>18</sup> The *Asantehene* and the *ahemfo* of the *amantoonum* formed *Asantemanhyiamu*. In the same way the *ohene* of a *kurow* together with the *mmusuampanyimfo* (and sometimes the *adekuro* of the surrounding bigger villages) together with the *kurowhyiam* form the board of government of the city state. In etic terms: on the highest level the *Asante King* and the other heads of the other states formed a board, on a lower level the city chiefs and the head of families formed a board of government of the city state.

<sup>19</sup> De-hye = ‘to possess / to stick’ = to be the acknowledged owner

<sup>20</sup> The *asetenakes* literally means ‘the great sitting down together’.

Inner Council extended its authority. In his essay<sup>21</sup> of 1821, the merchant Thomas Bowdich observed that in the sphere of foreign policy, the Asantehene made his decisions in common with the other members of the councils and the majority view prevailed. In the sphere of domestic administration and judicial and legal authority, by contrast, the power of the counsellors had been much restricted. Nevertheless, in the early nineteenth century, the decision-making functions had devolved *de facto* if not *de jure* upon the in Kumasi resided members of the Inner Council and some of the senior counsellors. In fact, in the 1820s the *Asantemanhyiamu* was already in the process of change from a body with two councils to one whose many of its functions were taken over by an independent Council of Kumase. In the early 1870s Bonnat<sup>22</sup> noticed that there was an independent council that functioned as a court of justice and of legislation. This council had evolved out of the Inner Council whose existence was observed by Bowdich. The eighteen official members of the Council of Kumase were widely recruited from the military and administrative elites of the capital and becoming a member was a matter of achievement. In the early nineteenth century, Kumase officials got more and more legislative functions and made important decisions, such as to enter into treaty relations with the British. Kwaku Dua I ruled, moreover, basically through executive government, but under his rule the powers of both the *Asantemanhyiamu* and the Kumase Council were reduced. Kwaku Dua had however created an institution potentially of considerable power that under his successors enabled to extend its functions and to make claims to being the effective central government of the nation. During Mensa Bonsu's reign then, the two councils came into conflict as the Kumase Council was ruling the country, even though their had not been any constitutional revisions neither was their *de facto* position formally defined. Consequently, the exercise of national decision-making functions by the Kumase councillors had no clear basis in law.

In the nineteenth century, while the *Asantemanhyiamu* remained under the constitution, the supreme council of the nation, its power had in fact become greatly eroded as the Council of Kumase had increasingly assumed the functions of the central government. At the end of the nineteenth century, Crowther, Secretary for Native Affairs, observed that Kumase had its own Council of central Government which in minor cases directed the Asante Kingdom as a whole. But although the conflict between the two Councils, *Asantemanhyiamu* and Council of Kumase, was never fully resolved, by the end of the nineteenth century ideological and class differences became more prominent (Wilks 1989:374-413: File D. 102: Memorandum on Succession to Chief Commissioner for Asante, dd. Accra, 20 October 1916).

Besides Kumasi, the government in Kumasi also maintained diplomatic relationships with the governments of their allies and conquered states. To what extent the government in Kumasi exercised control over these states depended on the political choices of the ruling *Asantehenes*. In 1883 for instance, a civil war broke out over the election of the next *Asantehene*. The two competing

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<sup>21</sup> The essay that is meant is: , p 21.

<sup>22</sup> , 126., source used by Wilks.



*Asantehenes* were Kwaku Dua Kuma and the de-stooled Kofi Kakari. The Mamponhene and Nsutahene supported Kofi Kakari, perhaps because Kwaku Dua Kuma appeared to be the candidate of the Kumase political clique, which was advocating stronger centralized control and a reduced role for the *aman* (Maier 1981:238). The Mamponhene and Nsutahene were allies of Dente-Bosomfo, a powerful oracle priest in the Bron state East of Kumasi who was the head of the Bron Confederation, which was a defensive alliance. According to Ramseyer, the Mampons and the Nsutas became allies of the Dente priest because this enabled them to trade with Salaga and the interior. Towns that remained under Kumase since 1874 had been forbidden by Dente Bosomfo to trade in this town and area (Ramseyer 1886:75). As members of the Bron Confederacy, the Mamponhene and Nsutahene tried to reduce the influence of the Kumasi government (Maier 1981:238) to which they had to pay death duties and non-inheritance taxes. Therefore, they were against stronger centralization and also against Asantehene Kwaku Dua Kuma. The organised middle class opposition against Kwaku Dua Kuma and his predecessor Mensa Bonsu was one of the major factors in the internecine struggles which brought the nation to the verge of collapse between 1884 and 1888, and which paved the way for the British military occupation in 1896 (Wilks 1989:699-705).

By August 1883, the supporters of Kofi Kakari were defeated, Mamponhene Kwame Adwetewa was killed, and Nsutahene Yaw Akoma committed suicide rather than surrender. Kwaku Dua Kumah was enstooled, and the new Nsutahene Kaku Denta agreed to go to Kumase to take the oath of allegiance to the *Asantehene*. But only after forty four days of rule, Kwaku Dua Kumah died (10 June 1884) and fourteen days later Kofi Kakari also died. Again, civil strife developed over the election of a new *Asantehene*. This time the competing candidates were Yaw Atwereboanna and Agyeman Prempeh. Major factions in Mampon, Nsuta, Agona and Kokofu supported Yaw Atwereboanna's candidacy, but again the more centralized minded candidate won the elections. By early 1888 Mampon, Nsuta and also Kokofu—another member of the Bron Confederation— withheld their recognition from *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh until the Asante army defeated them in 1888 (Maier 1981:238).

The pre-colonial history of the Asante state shows thus several wars on the question how influential the *Asantehene* in Kumasi was allowed to be over the outer provinces of the Asante Kingdom. There were thus limitations in the acceptance of the authority of the *Asantehene* in these provinces. To what extent subjects showed allegiance to their *Asantehenes* also depended on their style of ruling and their matter of control over the Asante Kingdom. The general ruling style and the individual style differences of the *Asantehenes* will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 Coercive Force and Consent: Respect and Fear for Kumasi's Ruling Elite?**

In this study, the central question is to what extent and why chieftaincy has persisted in Kumasi. In order to know to what extent chieftaincy has persisted, we have to know what elements of precolonial chieftaincy could have persisted in the colonial and post-colonial period. In other words,

we need to know on what type of authority pre-colonial chieftaincy was based. Chieftaincy, in the pre-colonial period was legitimated both by coercive force and consent. Although there was not enough consent to speak of a democratic society, no doubt there was, to a great extent, consent for the Asante state.

The main task of the Kumasi elite in the greater part of the pre-colonial period was to govern the states' subjects for the purpose of maintaining Greater Asante. This is the etic name that is used by most British authors for the extended *Asanteman* from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Asantehene* and his chiefs and queen mothers reached their goal in part by the use of coercive force, i.e. by espionage, detention, fining, confiscation, enslavement, mutilation, execution and exile of dissidents of the state (McCaskie 1995:82). The Kumasi ruling elite aimed to suppress the rural villages that surrounded Kumasi and the semi-autonomous vassal states and was relatively decentralised. The vassal states (*amantoo*) around Kumasi were governed by the Kumasi ruling elite, although the government of the states remained autonomous and maintained independent armies, treasuries, courts and festivals. They constituted states within the state, united in their recognition of the King in Kumasi as overlord, but possessing jurisdiction from which the King's administration was constitutionally excluded.

The outer parts of the Asante Kingdom consisted of vassal states which were ruled indirectly by the central government in Kumasi. The acting consul for Asante G.A. Robertson<sup>23</sup> observed that the Kumasi ruling elite did not enquire generally into the domestic affairs of the provinces, as long as the vassal state rulers regularly paid exactions (Wilks 1989:63). The rulers of all the vassal states helped the rulers in Kumasi generally by using the same coercive force, although there were also a lot of tensions between the rulers of Kumasi and those of the vassal states, because of the economic lopsided growth of the state Kwamen. Another source of tension between the centre and the vassal states was caused by the fact that in obedience of the laws of Okomfo Anokye (Kyerematen 1969:5)<sup>24</sup> the *Asantehenes* preserved some elements of this coercive force for themselves, such as the exclusive right to exercise the death penalty. The exclusive right on violence did not only create tensions between the vassal states and the Kumasi ruling elite but it was also a way for some *Asantehenes* to command respect from their subjects for themselves and the Asante state and to create fear among the population.

The image of the *Asantehene* as a fearful person was especially widespread during the reign of the *Asantehenes* Osei Kwame (1777-1803), Kofi Kakari (1867-1874) and Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883). *Asantehene* Osei Kwame was a tyrannical and disastrous ruler who killed his own brother, Osei Poku. In addition, this *Asantehene* killed another member of the royal family. Osei Kwame also sacrificed between 1,400 and 1,500 people during the funeral celebration to the shades of two royal princes.

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<sup>23</sup>, 231., cited in Wilks.

<sup>24</sup> One of the 77 laws of Okomfo Anokye states that: 'only the king has the power of life or death. Hence manslaughter or murder were challenges to his authority, punishable by death.'

During the reign of *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari, there were rumours in the whole of Greater Asante that people who had entered Kumasi never returned, because they had ended up as a victim of ritual killing. Especially during the evening and at night, the neighbourhoods of Kumasi near the palace were said to be dangerous places to roam. For at this time of the day, if the King was in need of a person that would bring a message to the ancestors or needed to extend his court personnel (*asasamdo*) he could decide to have a server pick at random a few subjects from the street and sacrifice them to satisfy the ancestors (*nsamanfo*) (Anti 1996:17). These were clearly rumours for the human victims of ritual killing were rarely free Asante. Slaves, servants, relatives, prisoners of war, and those who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time were decapitated during the *Odwira* festival and the other ritual days of the Akan calendar (*adae*) and at funerals. These were occasions when the living reached out to the dead and might despatch some of their number to join them. The killings at such occasions were by royal assent and had to be carried out by the king's executioners (*adumfo*). All killings in the Asante society were matters of the state (Wilks 1988:448) and the number of killings was a measure for the social status of the living or the deceased King. The killings were also meant to enable the *Asantehene* to control over life and death. Asante subjects who rebelled against "The Golden Stool" could be used for ritual killings (Wilks 1988:452). It is important to notice that unlike what is written down in many missionary and trading accounts of the nineteenth-century,<sup>25</sup> the term "human sacrifice" is inappropriate and one could better use the term "ritual killings." For the Asante did not offer human beings to their ancestors. They believed that their ancestors wished for company and servants, not that they desired blood (Wilks 1988:452). In fact blood (*mogya*) was only used to cool down the ancestral spirits, as the character of blood is that it cools down quickly (Nana Ama Serwah Nyarko, 41) Williams (1988) believes that some nineteenth century authors over exaggerated the amount of human beings who were ritually killed in Kumase. Jones (1991) writes that the authors, or the translators of the authors, of the account of Ramseyer and Kühne should be read with caution, because it helped them to legitimize their Christian religious mission. The over exaggeration of the number of ritual killings of human beings, however, is not an historical fact and to me Ramseyer's and Kuhne's descriptions (1875) of the Asante practice of killing humans seemed accurate and unique. What historians know for sure, however, is that some of the killings that visitors of Kumase regarded, as ritual killings had no indigenous religious background but were in fact cases of capital punishment.<sup>26</sup>

Anyhow, for King Kofi Kakari, both types of coercive force, the ritual killing of human beings and capital punishment, had the desirable psychological effect: throughout Greater Asante his subjects

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<sup>25</sup> Nineteenth century authors who speak of the Asante practice of 'human sacrifice' are for instance:., Although, much was written in the period 1807-1874 describing 'human sacrifice' practices in Asante, and particularly in Kumase, actual eye-witness accounts are few and far between. Authors frequently reported 'human sacrifice' upon the evidence of others, or mere hearsay, and the subject of 'human sacrifice' developed a mythology of its own , 434.

<sup>26</sup> Bowdich reported for instance on the practice of "human sacrifice" while Frederick James, in his journal entry for 22 June 1817, noted that this case was in fact a properly conducted case of capital punishment , 122.

feared him (Anti 1996:17) until the unsuccessful coastal campaign of 1873-1874 during which British troops had sacked Kumasi, when he was deposed.

After 1883, when his successor Mensa Bonsu was also deposed, he attempted to be enstooled again. The contest was, however, won by Kwaku Dua Kuma, who was enstooled in 1884, but whose reign lasted for only forty four days. Allegations were made that he was poisoned by Kofi Kakari, which gives some insight in the fear for this Asante King among Asante subjects. Two weeks later Kofi Kakari himself died, officially because of dysentery, but for the Asante subjects it was clear that he was killed as a punishment for killing his opponent *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Kuma (Wilks 1989:560). Both Kwaku Dua Kuma and his predecessor *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu developed themselves as tyrants. King Mensa Bonsu killed people who roamed about at night and murdered some (McCaskie 1995:70) of his twenty wives, because they had an affair with other men. Mensa Bonsu also murdered the young men involved and did this so brutally that it caused much consternation throughout the nation. *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu had the reputation of a wicked and cruel King who delighted in killing people. Even for an *Asantehene*, his behaviour seemed to be exceptionally cruel as the common Asante severely criticised his personality and deeds. Ordinary Asante subjects could criticise their King (or better his household matters) but the public airing of the household matters (*afisem*) of an *Asantehene* did not take place. This shows that there was a separation between the office of the *Asantehene*-an embodiment of the state, construed as timeless-and the *individual person* of any one or another successive *Asantehene*- a tenured incumbent, construed as a temporal actor in historical practice (McCaskie 1995:179-180). This also shows that, to some extent, *Asanteman* was a sacred (because uncriticizable) and not a fully secularized institution. Finally, it shows that *Asanteman* was ruled by fear for one person, which is not characteristic for a democracy.

McCaskie's (1995:10) opinion is that none of the *Asantehenes*, could, however, reign by the use of coercive force alone, not only because of the existence of a board of elders, but also because for commanding society solely by force the infrastructure and technology of the Kingdom were insufficient. Literacy, for instance, was non-existent and the great roads that radiated out from Kumasi were fragile and subject to recurrent seasonal disruption. In terms of technology, throughout the pre-colonial period, there was no innovation to maximize speed or carrying capacity of the great roads. This means that the roads were only strong enough for pedestrians, oxen and horses. These animals could, however, not be used because of the disease environment. Although in the nineteenth century, the Asante understood the principle of the wheel, they could not construct the roads that were necessary to make use of wheeled means of transportation. The Kumasi elite, therefore, must also have ruled by consent. Without consent of the subjects of the Kings and chiefs, again according to McCaskie (1995:9) it can also not be explained why peasant rebellion was not a feature of pre-colonial Asante history, despite the fact that Kumasi ruling elite systematically exploited a huge rural underclass of both free subjects and slaves. From the report of the Chief Commissioner Fuller about the character of the Asante army, it becomes, however, clear that the Asante fighters had not much of a

choice then to fight and that fighters did not participate in the Asante army out of consent with the Asante King. Fuller writes:

Non-compliance with orders resulted in courts martial. Each case was treated on its merits and the punishments meted out included death, degradation and fines. Cowardice on the field was invariably punished with death. Under a similar penalty it was strictly forbidden to disclose the number of deaths or casualties. Military service was compulsory. Evasion of service was punished with death. Age and infirmity alone allowed an adult male to remain outside the army. Discipline in the ranks was extremely severe. Obedience was ensured by the ease with which the death penalty was meted out (Fuller 1921:13).

That there was a realistic fear among soldiers to die if they would show any signs of cowardice or twinges of conscience was already noticed by Bowdich who mentions that one of the sentences of the most popular song in Coomassie is: 'If I fight, I die; if I run away I die, better I go on a die.' Bowdich also noticed that the general had his umbrella spread in the rear, and, besides his guard, he had several extra muskets ready and loaded for those soldiers who may be driven by him in case of reverse (Bowdich and Ward 1966:299). In addition, the description of the mulatto missionary Carl Reindorf makes clear that many Asante soldiers did not voluntarily join the army but were either captives or slaves. Reindorf:

'The Kings of Asante do not only appoint the captains over the army, but, in addition, they organise it, and also increase it as occasion arises. Before a captain is appointed, the King collects recruits in readiness for him to drill. They may be either captives made in a recent war, or his own subjects whom he bought as slaves when they failed to pay a certain fine imposed on them as punishment for an oath they had sworn, or they had been bequeathed to him by a deceased chief or captain. Over a number of 500 to 1,000 men thus obtained, the King appoints a captain, and then a grand public meeting was held, and the body of recruits was presented to the newly appointed officer as his soldiers and his slaves. The subjects bought have to remain in their own town, but the captives have to stay permanently in the town of the captain, and he himself stays at the capital.' (Reindorf (1966:111).

Rattray (1956:121) also writes that the early wars of the Asante were, as the missionary Carl Reindorf<sup>27</sup> stated, fought by slaves, recruited both locally and from the fighting tribes of the North who were organised and 'pushed' into the fighting line by their masters. The latter supplied the brain, the Staff supplied work. It seems that the only persons that were not forced to fight in the Asante army were Moslems as (Dupuis 1824:98) their appearance in the Asante army had happened to be problematic as this would mean that in the many wars of the Asante against Moslems they would fight against their own faith. For this reason, most Moslem captives and slaves were exempted from fighting in the Asante army.

For the exercise of the religious, spiritual and moral function of the Kumasi rulers, there might have been a basis for consent among both councillors and the Asante subjects. Religiously, the

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<sup>27</sup> , See Chapter VIII, p. 119.

traditional leaders and their subjects were inseparable and united by reciprocal rights and obligations. The Asante were a community unified by the principle of reciprocity. The chiefs had the duty to protect and advance the interests of their subjects. The chiefs' subjects were obliged to show allegiance to their chief and help him in performing rituals for the ancestors such as offering schnapps when pouring libation and feeding them with chicken. Indigenous Asante believed that obeying the ancestors was profitable, because they would grant good harvests and a high fertility to the women. Neglecting the wishes of the ancestors by not venerating them, on the other hand, was deemed disastrous for the community in terms of harvest and fertility.

The chiefs' subjects therefore believed that by giving authority to their chief the ancestors would oblige them with their wishes. An Akan proverb which illustrates this thought is *Dan wo na wo ama*- 'I depend on you, so you may give' (Arhin 1999:77). This proverb does not only show that Asante subjects were believed to depend on their chiefs (and through them on their ancestors) for their wellbeing but it also illustrates the expectations of the subjects towards their chiefs. Subjects assisted their chief in the performance of religious rituals for the ancestors, paid tribute and were obliged to offer other services for free, such as communal labour, to their chiefs but expected their chiefs to take care of them in return. The tribute that subjects paid to their chief for instance enabled him to offer public services, such as funerals. The chief's tribute was needed to cover the high costs of funerals, for the Asante regarded the burial of the deceased as a corporate responsibility for the community. Asante subjects rendered services for free and paid tribute to the chief because they believed they were working towards a common goal and the chief would make sure that eventually everybody would reap the fruits of their common effort (Gyekye 1998:317). Indigenous Asante believers considered these fruits as both material (e.g. good harvest) and spiritual. In a spiritual sense, to give and receive was to allow spiritual energy to flow between ancestors and men and between clans and individuals. To reciprocate is also a way to show that one accepts the bond of alliance and commonality with the other members of the community and conforms to the lineage as the unit through which an individual acquired rights to land and social status, to which he owed primary allegiance and from which he received assistance in case of need. Finally, by accepting the obligation to give and receive, an individual Asante could show that he understood the importance of, and subscribed to, the common values of the community such as generosity, compassion, mutual sympathy, cooperation, solidarity and social well-being (Mauss 1990:17, 25, Bell 1997:66).

In addition to the religiously based consent for *Asanteman*, the Asantehene could not rule by coercive force alone as on a local and national level. The *Asantemanyiamu* and the *Kumasi council* worked as a check and balance of the power of the King even though the councillors of the state of Kwaman were represented by their chiefs in the Kumasi council instead of all *amanhene* of the Asante Kingdom. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Kumase Council had taken over many functions of

the *Asantemanhyiamu*, so that by the early 1880s R, LaT Lonsdale of the British envoy, reported from Kumase:

The government of the [Asante] kingdom lies entirely in the hands of the Coommassie Chiefs [The aristocracy]. The King's counsellors cannot be called a representative body. The Provincial Kings, and with only very few exceptions, the important Chiefs, have not a word to say in the Government of their country, and, I should say, only asks to be let alone and at peace (Wilks 1989:409: 1821: C. 3386 Further Correspondence regarding Affairs of the Gold Coast (Accounts and Papers, XLVI), p 66: Lonsdale's report on his mission to Kumase, Salaga and Yendi, 1881-2).

The seats in the councils were however, occupied by chiefs who represented the ordinary Asante subjects. It was, therefore, most probably exaggerated by the missionaries Kühne, Ramseyer and the independent trader Bonnat (or their translators: see section 3.0) that were held captive in Kumasi to portray the then ruling *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari as a despotic ruler who had all power over the councils. In the translation of Ramseyer and Kühne's report of 1872-3, the following extract appears:

'It is the Kotoko council which rules the entire kingdom, and deals with the people, who must obey, whatever their own wishes or inclinations may be, in the most despotic way. In case of war the people have no voice, and to enforce obedience they must be ever under the consciousness that the king and his council are the arbitrators of their life and death. In important matters all the other chiefs of the kingdom are called together to discuss the case, but they are sure to vote in accordance with the view of the council, for who would dare to oppose the Kotoko?' (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:305).

It appears from the above translated extract of the report of Ramseyer and Kühne that if nobody dared to oppose "The Kotoko," which referred to *Asantemanhyiamu*, the *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari stood above the councils and above all politics. In actual fact, the relationship between the councils and the *Asantehene* was, however, a little more democratic. The *Asantehenes* could not rule without the consent of the councils, which means that they needed the consent of the ordinary people who had chosen their representatives (*ohenna*) in the councils. What mostly happened was that an *Asantehene* that was enstooled identified himself with a certain party and listened to the advice of the politicians in the council who represented the same party. The problems with the councils mostly came in when a party lost his power, while the *Asantehene*, who was, in principle, appointed for a life time remained on the stool. The *Asantehene* then often saw the need to change the composition of the councils. *But when that happened against the will of the majority of the council, would the Asantehene not be destooled?* De jure the answer to this question is no, but de facto the answer is yes.

De jure, one of the 77 rules<sup>28</sup> that Okomfo Anokye had given on the occasion of the descent of "The Golden Stool" had been that the *Asantehene* had the last right to speak and that his decision should never be challenged under penalty of death. In the late nineteenth century, the *Asantehene* could still make use of his right to veto a decision of the majority of his councillors. But de facto, from the later eighteenth century onwards, there had been no *Asantehene* who had been able to regularly make use of his right without being destooled. This shows that in actual fact the power of the

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<sup>28</sup> Some of the rules of Okomfo Anokye are broad moral injunctions, while others form a sort of civil and criminal code. Not all seventy seven rules have been described, but some of them can be found back in Ramseyer and Kuhne , 106 and , p 4,5 and the law mentioned in the head text can be found back in: , 236-237.

*Asantehene* was restricted and according to Wilks (1989:484) was indicative for the secularization and politicization of “The Golden Stool.”

Apart from the workings of *Asanteman*, the democratic calibre of the politics within the Asante Kingdom also depended on the character of the individual *Asantehenes* and the phase in which they were ruling. One could say, however, that some *Asantehenes* who ruled in the pre-colonial period had more democratic characteristics than others. Osei Tutu I and Opoku Ware were most of all divine Kings and they conducted the wars which established Asante as an imperial power. Osei Kwadwo (1764-1777), Osei Kwame (1777-1797) and Osei Bonsu (1804-1824) were constitutional Kings that reformed the administration of justice and transformed the military power that Asante was to a civilian state in which their own power became more restricted. Kwaku Dua I (1834-1867) was an autocratic ruler who attempted to minimize the power of the chiefs and ruled by the mandate of the people. Kofi Kakari (1876-1874), Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883) and Agyeman Prempeh (1888-1896) ruled as president-Kings (Wilks 1989:372-373).

Wilks (1989:477-479) also divides the *Asantehenes* that ruled during the nineteenth century into “hawks” and “doves,” depending on their diplomatic relationship with the British. Kofi Kakari and Osei Yaw were “hawkish,” Osei Bonsu, Kwaku Dua I, Mensa Bonsu and Kwaku Dua II were “dovish.” With this distinction, Wilks (1989:674) wanted to pay attention to the polarisation of the politics in the nineteenth century in war and peace parties. Peace parties including peace rulers concentrated on mercantilism, while the purpose of the war parties and rulers was to imperialise. No matter their character and policy, however, the individual Kings became powerful only after they had been enthroned (enstooled) as *Asantehene* for which they needed the consent of the *omanhene* in the councils. The success of their individual rule depended on their ability to use coercive force in order to create fear among their subjects.

In conclusion, in the light of this analysis of the process of state formation in the pre-colonial period, it is exaggerated to say that the *Asantehenes* were for a full hundred percent democratic rulers. This is a vision that is proclaimed by many recent Ghanaian intellectuals, such as Napoleon Bamfo (2000) and Wiredu (1997) whose work in my view should be understood as an utterance of cultural nationalism rather than objective historical analysis. On the one hand, in practice, the chances for *Asantehene* to develop as a full tyrant without being destooled were limited, which means that the way of ruling contained democratic elements. There was no unanimity among the Asante subjects in their feeling that as a matter of consent with the state they must fight bloody and devastating wars in order to protect their Kingdom. Surely the Asante were proud of their Kingdom and cowards among Asante men were publicly humiliated by their women, but the attitude of these women might be the result of pride for the Asante nation as well as fear and indoctrination from their queen mothers, who had a great influence on common decisions of the traditional authorities to decide go to war and who were the moral leaders of their subjects.



One of the queen mothers, Nana Yaa Asantewaa (1850-1921) of Ejisu (Edweso) started and became a woman warrior in the last war against the British (Afua Tweneboah Kodua, 19). Not all Asante fighting men primarily killed each other in case of desertion of their comrades out of pride for their Kingdom or due to the pressure of their women and the use of coercive force by the Kumasi ruling elite. Religiously, however, the belief of people in the Asante indigenous state religion also brought a certain degree of consent for the state. Incidentally, the state dealt with indigenous religious dissident movements, such as the Domankama anti-witchcraft movement of the late 1870s (see further section 3.5), but the state was strong enough to violently suppress their dissidents, who fought against the state in the spiritual realm (Allman and Parker 2005).

As I will elaborate on in the next section, in the colonial period, the Asante state ceased to exist. With the fall of the Asante Kingdom, the members of *Asanteman* could no longer make use of coercive force to legitimate their institution. The question that is left is what happened with the religious and moral consent for *Asanteman* after the collapse of the Asante state? *In the colonial period, did chieftaincy religiously become an empty shell, an institute for entertainment and pomp? Did only the superficial cultural characteristics of Asanteman persist, such as the umbrellas, the palanquins and the chief's staff that were carried around by the nhenkwaa? Or has the cosmology that legitimated Asanteman in the precolonial period persisted?*

According to the historian Ivor Wilks (1989:671-672, 353), the political myths behind *Asanteman*, the notion that the political order was timeless and unchanging, were already challenged by groups within the nation. When the apparatus became bureaucratic and merits were more important than hereditary qualifications, the traditional valued system became progressively outmoded. Another aspect of the major social transformations which were occurring within the nation was the increasing concern with achievement and the writing down of oral history in annals. The written word endangered the sacredness of chiefs, as it made it easier for the Asante to remember the Asantehenes' real achievements, which went at the cost of the mythological version of these achievements.

In this paper, I will, in contradiction to Wilks, take the position that the cosmology of the Asante and the political myths on which *Asanteman* was legitimated have, to a great extent, persisted. Wilks remarks that in the councils the myth did to some extent persisted, as participants in council debates in the nineteenth century might still continue to appeal to the body of political myths in support of their positions.<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, however, Wilks underestimates the great extent to which the political myths persisted outside the councils. For after 1901 for many Asante subjects "The Golden Stool" was still a shrine. This became for instance clear from the fact that Asantehene Prempeh I had to be deported further and further from the former Asante capital. After he was deported to Cape Coast, the British decided that it was better to send him to the Seychelles and later

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<sup>29</sup> In the debate which preceded the invasion of the southeastern Gold Coast in 1826, for example, the argument was apparently advanced that hostile acts should not be committed against the Akuapem since Okomfo Anokye (considerably over a century earlier!) had specifically forbidden such.

even to Sierra Leone as he was so popular that many Asante subjects refused to obey the British Chief Commissioner in Kumase who had taken over the position of the deported Asantehene. The reason for Asantehene's popularity even after his deportation was religious. Because their King Prempeh was never destooled, they kept perceiving him as the representative of the ancestral spirits and the embodier of "The Golden Stool" (Akyeampong 1999:280,289). These mythological symbols persisted as they went together with the persistence of a cosmological worldview, in which as late as during the First World War, a young inhabitant of the adjacent villages of Kumasi (*nkuraasefoo*) perceived a modernity such as a shop mannequin as a ghost in physical human form, the transportation of a spiritual being into corporeal form (McCaskie 2000:158).

### **3.4 To What Extent has the Pre-colonial Asante State Persisted?**

The many European traders and European Christian missionaries, who visited the Asante Kingdom throughout the pre-colonial period, wondered why the Asante Kingdom did not fall apart. Thomas Bowdich, a British writer in the service of the African Company of Merchants (1819:167) for instance, believed that the Asante adopted measures to inhibit the development of a mercantile class because they feared that any open encouragement of a merchant class would upset the nearly balanced socio-political system. Bowdich feared that the political influence these traders could exercise due to the wealth they had accumulated would undermine the position of Kumasi ruling elite in Asante society and thereby weaken the norms and values that they propagated. He thought that traders were a serious threat to the Asante Kingdom because they would accumulate private capital that would lead to capitalist initiatives that would inevitably undermine the existing tribute system. However, Bowdich did not know that most traders integrated well into Asante society and that they voluntarily paid two-thirds of their profit to their chiefs, as there was also no official fiscal policy. The idea behind the economic system of the Asante was that the state did not monopolise trade. Instead, the state provided protection to all its subjects in order that individual initiatives of accumulating wealth would be stimulated and trade would flourish. As chiefs were no landowners but only the custodians of the land, the land belonged to everybody, which enabled every individual to use land for instance for gold mining and accumulate wealth as long as one paid one's tribute to the state that obtained its wealth by the consent among its subjects that taxes should be paid. Although there are some instances where some powerful traders were indeed a threat to Kumasi ruling elite because Europeans supported them against the traditional rulers, in general their corrosive effect on the state was minimal.

In the colonial period (McCaskie 1995:56), the situation changed due to the insertion of a cocoa-based cash crop economy. In "this world", the increase in the variation of products introduced by European traders, such as cocoa, together with the introduction of money and the opportunities for Asante people to accumulate and consume private wealth deprived the chief of his authority. In the "other world," the insertion of the cocoa-based cash crop economy increased the appearance of anti-witchcraft movements, for these movements appeared especially in times with many uncertainties and

anxieties within the community due to social changes. Anti-witchcraft movements were dangerous because they could undermine the Asante indigenous belief that legitimated the Asante state and they formed an alternative source of power that could be a rival to that of the Asante state. In 1879, when the first anti-witchcraft movement, called “Domankama” (‘The Creator’) in the Asante Kingdom emerged, however, the Asante state happened to be strong enough to violently suppress this movement. “Domankama” emerged in Asante during the troubled reign of Asantehene Mensa Bonsu (1874-83). The movement appears to have spread rapidly, attracting hundreds and perhaps thousands of adherents. Domankama drew its ritual power from *sasabonsam*, a ferocious, part-human monster of the deep forest who was seen to be in league with witches and whose powers were to heal the terrible powers of witches were not derived from the established hierarchy of tutelary deities that defended the realm of human culture, but came from outside that realm. It seems, therefore, that in the belief of the Asante, only spiritual forces from outside the Asante Kingdom would be able to eradicate the climate of uncertainties and anxieties that had been created due to the military defeat at the hands of the British and the destoolment of Asantehene Kofi Kakari in 1874, the loss of the northern provinces, building political unrest, and the increasingly predatory actions of Mensa Bonsu himself. The Domankama’s anti-witchcraft movement fought a spiritual fight against the regime of Mensa Bonsu that was believed to be the source of Asante’s woes. At the time, the control and the mediation of the state were, however, strong enough to eradicate the Domankama cult in the year 1880, which was only one year after its emergence (Allman and Parker 2005:126-131).

Another danger for the persistence of chieftaincy was the many intertribal and Anglo-Asante wars that the Asante fought in the nineteenth century. During the battle of Nsamanko in 1824, for instance, the British lost the war against the Asante, among other reasons, because Sir Charles McCarty underestimated their military organisation and was wrong in believing that a cultural group without a standing army would not be able to defeat them. While McCarty’s chief of staff, Major H.J. Ricketts (1831:54) expressed concern about the exhaustion of the troops and their small numbers, Sir Charles said: “I am determined to see how the Ashantees like our balls.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the British Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy made the unwise decision to send a small force of five hundred men directly against the main Asante battle force of between ten and twenty thousand men. And even at the very moment that the Asante opened fire, MacCarthy was under the misguided impression that many of the Asante were eager to surrender to him, which shows that he had no idea of the quantity and quality of Asante soldiers.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Asante fought several wars against the Fante and allied coastal cultural groups in order to get direct access to the European (the Dutch, Danish and British) trade settlements on the coast. Later in the nineteenth century, a series of wars broke out against the British because *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu did not grasp the implications of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 by the British and the British reaction on the abolition of reverting to the

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<sup>30</sup> Most probably he was referring to musket balls.

traditional policy of support for the coastal peoples against the Asante (Fynn 1971:146). The Anglo-Asante wars from 1824, 1826, 1863-1865 and 1873-1874 made huge demands on the Asante fighters. Many of them died in these wars, which made it difficult for the survivors to continue to cooperate in their traditional tasks in the villages and to reap the fruits of their common labour. Therefore, some Asante citizens did indeed entertain doubt about their socio-economic investments in the political system based on Asante reciprocity. In addition, during some of the Anglo-Asante wars, such as the Sagrenti war of 1873, a handful of Asante fighters rebelled against their chiefs who were also their military commanders. These fighters broke the consent, for as far as this had ever existed, among the Asante men that they must obey and fight for the Asante Kingdom after they had learned what superior kind of weapons the British would use in later engagements, for the British rapid-firing, breech-loading rifles, were far superior to their own cumbersome and short-range muskets (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:187). However, rebellion of fighters against the Kumasi ruling elite and the Asante state was insignificant from the foundation of the Asante Kingdom in 1701 until the 1880s.

In conclusion, internal tensions within the Asante Kingdom, such as the fights against Asantehene Mensa Bonsu, were not enough for the Asante Kingdom to fall apart. The end of the Asante state was the result of a decision of the British government in London in 1896 that the independence of the Asante people was not in line with the new concept of the British Empire. This decision was a reaction on *Asantehene* Prempeh I after the civil war to reintroduce a central government and his attempt to rule independently from the British. Prempeh I resurrected the *Asantemanhyiamu* and tried to get rid of the office of a British consul that was introduced during the reign of Kofi Kakari to restrict the power of the *Asantehene*. The British did not like this idea and came with a military solution for the “Asante problem.” Under Governor William Edward Maxwell, the British deported Agyeman Prempeh I and introduced the “Native Committee for Administration.” This British government should take over some of the functions of the old Kumasi council and some of the competence of the central government, the *Asantemanhyiamu*. The committee appointed three experienced Asante<sup>31</sup> that in actual fact formed a marionette-triumvirate, because they were “advised” by a British government representative that guaranteed the colonial secretary Chamberlain a British granted politics and could not exercise their plan to plan the return of the Asante King. The 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1900 the British governor Frederick Mitchell Hodgson gathered all the chiefs and inhabitants of Kumasi and told them that their King Agyeman Prempe would not return and that the greatest power in Asante was the queen of England (Wilks 1989:660-661).

In the pre-colonial phase in the history of the Asante state, the Kumasi elite had succeeded in ruling over a Kingdom for over two centuries (1701-1900) that was greater than present-day Ghana.

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<sup>31</sup> The names of these experience men are Opoku Mensa, Gyasawahene since 1884, Kwaku Nantwi Kaakyera, who signed the Treaty of Fomena and Akapkade, who since 1877 sat in the council of elders.

The main reason the Kingdom did not fall was that the elite ruled by coercive force with consent of their subjects who had their representatives in the two councils, *Asantemanhyiamu* and the *Kumasi council* and who believed in the *Asantehene* as being a religious and spiritual leader. The approval these rulers received from the population and their readiness to be hospitable to, and integrate, foreigners (merchants) was great enough for them to overcome situations that might otherwise have led to the disintegration of the Asante Kingdom. Another reason for the persistence of *Asanteman* was that the institution had a complicated formula. It was a system with checks and balances on the power of the traditional authorities from two sides, in “this world” and in the “other world.” The complexity of the political institution explains why, though in a transformed form, *Asanteman* persisted even after the “this worldly” introduction of the system of *direct rule* in the colonial period and Nkrumah’s attempts to wipe out most of the chiefs and the “other worldly” emergence in the period 1900s-1920s of several anti-witchcraft cults that were a treat to *Asanteman*.

### **3.5 The Intermediary Function of the Traditional Authorities**

The King or *Asantehene* and his queen mother occupied the most important position in the Asante society and stood at the top of the political hierarchical pyramid. One level below the King, paramount chiefs and queen mothers were the centre of attention in the community. *Asanteman* was governed by both paramount chiefs and queen mothers. The chiefs functioned as religious intermediaries and performed all kinds of other tasks that directly or indirectly derived from this function. If a chief did not perform his duties properly, his subjects would destool (dethrone) him. The queen mother (*ohemma*) nominated the successor to the kingship, acted as the king’s principal advisor, and had the right to initiate his deposition. She was a member of the national assembly that governed the empire and had to attend all its major meetings and participate in the decision-making and judicial processes. The rules that applied to the chief counted also for the queen mother. If she failed to perform her functions well, this could lead to her deposition (Aidoo 1977:11).

The *Asantehene*, the chiefs and the queen mothers had religious, legislative, judicial, executive and military power. In this paragraph, I will concentrate on the religious power of the *Asantehene* and his queen mother and, at a lower hierarchical level, on that of the paramount and sub-chiefs and their queen mothers, for among the Asante, religious power was the basis of all other power.

The main function of the *Asantehene* was to guarantee the continuity of the Asante society by intercession with the ancestral spirits (*nsamanfo*) from whom he derived his religious power. Symbolically, the *Asantehene* was associated with coolness (*dwo*), a certain tree called *gyedua* and a huge umbrella (*kyiniε*) (Platvoet 1985:174-200). In the indigenous religious worldview of the Asante, “coolness” symbolised protection (against the sun) and someone in a condition of coolness was believed to be in spiritual peace and harmony. Ancestral spirits were believed to be “cooled down” and

brought in an harmonious relationship with the traditional authorities by the sparkling of blood (*mogya*) on the royal stools during the *Adae*.

The *Asantehene* and every other chief (*ohene*) were often associated with the *gyedua*: a tree with great leaves and many branches that stays in the shadow. When, for instance, the death of a chief was announced, the Asante use the expression ‘The great [and] mighty tree has fallen’ (*Dupon kese atutu*) (Rattray 1927:107, note 1). The Asante made this comparison because they felt that their King ought to be in a condition of coolness in which he could offer protection to his subjects just like the *gyedua* offered coolness in the form of shade for everybody who was resting or hiding under it for the heat of the sun.<sup>32</sup> For the same reason, they associated the *Asantehene* with the large red and yellow umbrella that the carriers, who usually and everywhere accompanied him held above his head continuous moving it up and down to create wind. Like the *gyedua* offered coolness in nature, the *kyinie* stood for the protection and “coolness” the *Asantehene* offered within the agricultural Asante society. Coolness here refers to a calm sphere and peaceful relaxed relations between everyone that meets under the tree- *gyedua*, *kyinie*, -and with everybody that is received under that tree. Due to his condition of coolness, the *Asanteman* could maintain a link with the spiritual beings which enabled him to take care of the continuation of the fertility of crops and of his subjects (McCaskie 1989:423-425).

To make sure that the ancestors would dispose themselves favourable towards him and his subjects, the *Asantehene* regularly performed rituals to feed the ancestors. In order not to forget these rituals, which were viewed as of utmost importance for the prosperity of *Asanteman*, the Asante created a ritual calendar cycle known as the *Adaduanan*.<sup>33</sup> (Literally ‘forty days’ *da*=day, *aduanan*=forty) cycle by which a year was divided into nine units of forty-two days. These units (*adae*)<sup>34</sup> were occasions for venerating the ancestors by pouring libations of schnapps and the sacrifice of sheep, chickens or goats. The ninth unit marked the end of the year and the beginning of the new harvest. This *adae*, known as the *Odwira* (to purify, to cleanse) festival was meant to commemorate the death of all *Asantehenes* and to perform their mortuary rituals. The performance of the *adae* throughout the year and during *Odwira* linked the *Asantehene* to the ancestral spirits (Gilbert 1994:103).

The *Asantehene* was connected spiritually to the (ancestral) spirits in the same way as every ordinary Asante, for by birth the king received two souls: (*okra*) and (*sunsum*). The reception of these souls marked his or her departure from the world of the unborn (*abrafo*) and entrance to the world of

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<sup>32</sup> What is important concerning the *gyedua* is not the type of tree but the fact that it stays in the abonten the big tree of every *kurow* as the only place of shadow and because of its function of place of meeting and place of reception. The *kyinie* is the removable “tree” and sometimes it is moved up and down to theatrically express the coolness of the *gyedua*.

<sup>33</sup> The forty-two (named) day cycle of the ritual Asante calendar, combined the nanson cycle (six days originating from the Guan) with the nawotwe cycle (seven days) (six times seven making 42). In the oral tradition the *adaduanan* was known as ‘forty days’

<sup>34</sup> There were two *adae* in every *adaduanan* cycle: *awukudae* (the ‘small’ or Wednesday *adae*) which took place on day 15, also termed *kurudapaawukuo*; and *akwasidae* (the ‘big’ or Sunday *adae*) which took place on day 33, also named *kurukwasie*.

the living (*wiase*). A baby derived the *okra* or life force from the Highest God (*Nyame*), which represents the sun.

Unlike ordinary Asante, the *Asantehene*, however, was linked to the ancestors both through his *sunsum* and to a communal *sunsum* that contains the individual *sunsum* of all subjects of the Asante Kingdom. This is because the *Asantehene* occupies a royal seat that bears the name “The Golden Stool” (*Sika Dwa Kofi*). The Asante believe that this stool contains communal *sunsum* and that there is a historical/mythical link between this *sunsum* and the *Asantehene*’s ancestors. For the *Sika Dwa Kofi* is created by *okomfo* Anokye for the first *Asantehene*, whose name was Osei Tutu I.

Because of his spiritual link with the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the Asante King is believed to be more knowledgeable than ordinary Asante, for anyone who occupies the *Sika Dwa Kofi* is believed to receive spiritual powers, which dwell inside the stool (Obogumanhene Nana Owusu Asiamah II (Konongo), 52). Because of his link with the stool, the *Asantehene* and any other *ohene* was often addressed with royal titles such as “the powerful one” (*otumfuo*)<sup>35</sup> or “wise person” (*onyansafo*). When the *Asantehene* died, the Asante used the proverb “A mighty tree has fallen” (*Odupon Kesie Etutu*). They believed that direct expression of the *Asantehene*’s death might bring misfortune and once more associated their King with a tree (*dua*). In addition to the *Asantehene*, the Supreme Being of the Asante (*Nyame*) is also associated with a tree (*Nyame dua*). The Asante thus use a tree (although different kinds, the *nyamedue* and the *gyedua*<sup>36</sup>) to address both their King and their Supreme Being. The Asante King, like any other *ohene*, does only indirectly derive his extra-ordinary power from the Highest God (*Nyame*) as he derives his power directly from the ancestral spirits.

To understand how and why the power of chiefs is derived from the ancestral spirits, it is necessary to elaborate on the Akan concept of power. The Akan make a distinction between two types of power (*tumi*): power that is publicly accessible and power that is available to royals only. The type of power that is publicly accessible is known as “natural power.” The Akan belief in this type of power dates from before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when most Akan were hunters and gatherers and forest dwellers. The Akan believed that everything (the High God, lesser gods, spirits, ancestors, men, animals, plants, inanimate objects such as rivers and rocks) in the universe contains spirit (*sunsum*) or “power” and that it is the essence of natural objects to possess power. In African philosophy this idea is called “panpsychism<sup>37</sup>.” This element of the Asante belief was also observed by Ramseyer and Kühne (1875:80), who during their stay in Kumasi, remarked that “The King was not a little surprised, like the South Sea Islanders, that a piece of wood could speak.” But there is also a hierarchical order

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<sup>35</sup> The royal title *Otumfuo* is derived from the Twi word *tumi*, meaning power and refers not only to the political-military power of the *Asantehene* but also to his link with the ancestral spirits. The King is also believed to be powerful in a spiritual sense and the decisions he makes are believed to be whispered in his ears by ancestral spirits (Rev Dr. Charles Kingsley Coffie: nr 4).

<sup>36</sup> The *nyamedua* is not the same type of tree as the *gyedua*. These trees are botanically different types that stay at different places (the *gyedua* stays in the public space of the abonten; the *nyamedua* in the shelter of one’s property) and with different functions.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Pan’ means ‘many’, ‘psychism’ means ‘soul’.

between entities. In this hierarchy, natural objects, such as trees and rivers are in fact lower than men, but because deities are dwelling inside these objects are actually higher than men and they are therefore venerated by men. For human beings, it is important to be in a good relationship with higher entities, because those entities can destroy all lower entities and not visa versa (Gyekye 1995:75-76). What is important here is that the deities that dwell inside natural objects, such as trees and stones could be consulted by every human being. The only condition to being able to derive power from natural objects is that one had to know the rules how to make use of it. The profession of priest and priestess came into being after some people had specialized in deriving “natural power,” for instance from rivers, such as the Tano or the Pra. The task of priests and priestess was to remain in good relationship with the powers in the universe (*abosom*) so that the natural deities would offer the Akan the right proportions of natural powers, such instance sun and rain. The early Akan thus attempted to remain a balance between the forces of nature rather than to conquer nature. Because of that, according to the Akan belief, trained human beings did not only attempt to contact the natural powers, but the natural powers could also come to human beings on their own initiative and speak to them through the mouth of a human being. This type of connection with the natural powers is known as “spirit possession.” Whether human beings made contact with spirits or visa versa, in both cases the function of the supernatural world in the Asante belief was to explain the “unknown” and the effect of natural forces on the environment, which could be good or bad. In addition to *abosom*, another source of natural or ritual power of the Asante is known as *Asuman* (singl *suman*). *Asuman* comprises a diverse range of powers that possessed less of an anthropomorphic “personality” and is typically manifested in the form of physical charms or amulets. *Suman* is also known as “take away spirit,” because it comprises of little packages of wood and leaves that one can buy at the witchcraft market and that one can easily carry with him or her. *Suman* are a lower order of spirit beings operating through little “jujus” which can be good or bad. Medicine (*Aduro*), finally are a source of ritual power that overlaps to some extent with *asuman* and ranges from herbal remedies to magical potions and charms (Allman and Parker 2005:Nana Ama Nyarko, 17).

The second type of power dates back from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when many Akan settled down in villages and became agriculturalists. This type of power that was derived from the ancestral spirits became only accessible to the traditional authorities. Because of the exclusive right on ancestral power of one family (the royals or founding fathers of the village) village dwellers became more dependent on their knowledge of the spiritual world than before when all power was accessible to everybody but some people were only more specialized in achieving natural power than others. An Akan proverb that illustrates the nature of this second type power is: *Deé ontumi dance deé ötumi*, meaning “He who has no power depends on he who has it” (Appiah, Appiah and Agyeman-Duah 2000:313). In addition, the following Akan proverb is illustrative for the exclusivity of ancestral power: “*Deé ewona pedie, na enyi ƆkƆM deno.*”. Literally, this means “It is the one who possesses who



eats, not the one who is hungry.” The symbolic meaning of this proverb is, however, that if you do not belong to a royal family, you can not be selected as a chief and therefore you can not inherit a stool and derive power from the ancestral spirits. The founders of the villages believed that the land on which they settled was sacred and was owned by a goddess known as ‘Asase Yaa’ (a female born on Thursday) (Rattray 1956:342). Now, the inheritance of the founders of the village believed that the spirits of the land on which they lived not only belonged to “Asase Yaa” but also to their own ancestors and that on certain ritual days (*adae*), both should be venerated by all the inhabitants of their village. The ancestral veneration legitimated the power of the traditional authorities as it made clear to the village dwellers who their leaders were and where their power was coming from.

The central effect of ancestral veneration among the Asante in Kumasi is and has always been to legitimate the power of the ruling elite. It was the method for rulers in an illiterate society to keep their families’ history alive, which was the history of the founders of Kumasi and other towns and villages in the Asante Kingdom. One of the effects of this history was that it could be used by the ruling elite to legitimize their power. The presence of the *sunsum* (ancestral spirit) inside their royal stools linked them directly to their ancestors and their royal history. Also, by pouring libation and saying prayers, the rulers kept their history and the justification for their claim to power alive.

The way of arguing of the rulers was twofold. First, they should be the ones in power because they were the founders of the community or later contributed significantly to the wellbeing of the community. Second, the royal rulers believed their power was legitimate because they were in good relationship with the ancestors. This relationship is very important for the community because the ancestral spirits were believed to be in a more powerful position than human beings. The Asante believed that ancestors would be willing to help only if they were in a good relationship with these spiritual beings. The royal rulers thus also justified their position by their presumed ability to maintain contact and keep in balance with the spirits in the other world.

Due to the exclusivity of the link of royals with the ancestral spirits, the chiefs’ stool transferred “natural power” into “political power.” According to the Akan belief, once a person occupies the stool, he receives extraordinary power, because he will receive the help of the natural powers within the stool which (Sarpong 1971:9) is made of certain trees, such as the *odum* tree and *sese* tree that possess spiritual powers that are able to attract ancestral spirits. Because only royals are allowed to occupy a stool, they have an exclusive right to the power of the ancestral spirits, which makes them politically powerful. If a chief remains enstooled until his death, certain aspects of the character of the chief dwell into the stool. Frazerian (1981) terms this process is known as “contagious magic.” After a chief has passed away—or better, “has gone to the village”—his subjects will pour libation and pray for the spirit of their chief to come and recite in the stool for good. After this, his stool is blackened and kept in the stool house whose stools symbolize the presence of the ancestral spirits. When, however, a chief is destooled and his sandals are removed during his life time, he loses his extraordinary powers and his sacredness as now his feet can touch the ground.

A chief could thus only derive power from the ancestral spirits after his enstoolment. In addition, he could only derive this power by performing certain rites, such as the pouring of libation. The Asante government performed a cycle of daily, weekly, six-weekly and annual rites, for communion with the ancestral spirits and state deities thought to be efficacious in “prospering” the land and the community. The daily and annual rites involved the Asantehene, the spokesmen (*akyeame*) and palace functionaries (*gyasefoo*) and were confined to *akrafieso*, “the abode of the souls.” The six-weekly rites were the *Adae* ceremonies. The officials included the Asantehene and the rulers of the Kumasi state. The annual *Odwira* festival was an all-Asante ceremony in which, when Asante power was at its peak (*omantease*) members of the Asante union and the conquered, protected, and allied heads of the territories within the greater Asante political structure assembled in Kumasi and paid homage to the deceased and living occupants of “The Golden Stool” (Arhin 1999:74-75).

A returning element in all rites was the chiefs’ and the Asantehene’s visit to the stool room. During a separate festival, called ‘death wake’ as part of the King’s visit to the Stool room in Bantama human beings were ritually killed. In 1819 Bowdich referred to this phenomenon when he reported that:

The Kings, and Kings only, are buried in the cemetery at Bantama, and the sacred gold buried with them; their bones are afterwards deposited in a building there, opposite to which is the largest brass pan I ever saw, (for sacrifices) being about five feet in diameter, with four small lions on the edge. Here human beings are frequent and ordinary, to water the graves of the Kings (Bowdich and Ward 1966:289).

Fifty six years later, Ramseyer and Kuhne made the following observations:

The most dreadful of the Ashantee festivals, Bantama, or ‘death wake,’ now approached. The King went early in the morning of February 5<sup>th</sup>, to Bantama, where the remains of his deceased predecessors were preserved in a long building, approached by a gallery, and partitioned into small cells, the entrances of which were hung with silken curtains. In these apartments reposed the skeletons of the kings, fastened together with gold wire, and placed in richly ornamented coffins, each being surrounded by what had given him most pleasure during his life. On this occasion every skeleton was placed on a chair in his cell to receive the royal visitor; who, on entering, offered it food; after which a band played the favourite melodies of the departed. The poor victim selected a sacrifice, with a knife thrust through his cheeks, was then dragged forward and slain, the king washing the skeleton with his blood. Thus was each cell visited in turn, sacrifice after sacrifice being offered, till evening closed ere the dreadful round was completed (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:117).

### **3.6 The Role of the Traditional Authorities as Religious Peacekeepers**

In addition to the role of the Asante traditional authorities as intermediaries with the ancestral spirits and their exclusive right to derive power from those spirits, they also played an important role in seeking advice of other spiritual mediums which included the adaptation and adoption of other religious believers and their beliefs. In this paragraph, I will give some examples of the religious role of Islam and Christianity for the Asantehene and the indigenous Asante belief.

To predict the outcome of an Asante war with neighbouring cultural groups or with the British or other war issues, the *Asantehenes* usually first consulted the ancestral spirits (*nananom nsamanfo*) and the deities (*abosom*) that were recognized by the Asante state. In 1818, Osei Bonsu did, for instance, consult the river god 'Tano' (alias Ta Kora), for several war issues (Rattray 1923:180, 188-191). Second, the *Asantehenes* sought the advice of the traditional priests (*Akomfo*) at the court, who "looked at the divinations from the flight of birds, track of particular beetles and insects, the creechings of the turkey buzzards and dreams" (Dupuis 1824:213). On the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1872, Asantehene Kofi Kakari, for instance, summoned his traditional priests to prophecy for six hours as to the result of the war.

Some fifty priests foretold that the army would conquer the Akem, Asen, Fantee and Denkyera tribes, and that many Akems would take refuge in Ashantee. The great Fetish declared 'if the white man interfered he would kill him, and put another in his place.' Other priests professed to drive away the evil spirits by throwing small packets of gold dust and crushed food into the air, and guns were loaded with papaw leaves, and fires aloft amid tremendous shouting'. The priests were compensated for their efforts and receive ten peredwanes, twenty charges of salt, twenty pieces of cloth, twenty sheep, seventy bottles of rum and fifty slaves' (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:208-209).'

This was a high compensation and therefore the spiritual help of the traditional priests formed a considerable part of the military budget of the Asante. In addition, however, the *Asantehenes* also spend peredwanes to consult the Asante *Nkramo* Moslems at the Asantehene's court as they were believed to possess ritual powers, which were also hidden in the lesser spirits (*asuman*) which these Moslem had for sale.

However, not only the Moslems at the court in Kumasi, but also those in the hinterland of Asante were consulted. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1873, the Basel missionaries Ramseyer and Kühne reported for example that Kofi Kakari sent a Moslem in the interior to consult an oracle on what to do with "the whites" (*obruni*). The oracle answered Kofi Kakari as follows:

This war will not end to your advantage as long as you keep the white men, who are constantly crying to God,-prisoners; let them go, and you will conquer (1875:210-211).

Most probably the oracle that the Moslem consulted on behalf of Asantehene Kofi Kakari was the *Dente* oracle at Krachi of the Dente *Bosomfo* (the Priest). This oracle that was located in the Bron region was consulted by the *Asantehenes* on matters of warfare and the security of the state (Maier 1981:230). In the war of 1873-1874, Kofi Kakari regularly consulted the Dente oracle, but the oracle gave him answers that did not satisfy him as it advised him to stop fighting against the British. This advice of the Dente oracle was far from multi-interpretable as an oracle should be and was a clear political message that was in the interest of the Dente *Bosomfo*, who was afraid that the Anglo-Asante

war would also affect the Bron states, who would be the next victims of a British attack (which indeed happened).

The Dente oracle is, therefore, a good example of a ritual power that slowly lost its religious function and became political. It is an example of what happened with many religiously based authorities that were less complex than the Asante. Due to the complexity of *Asanteman*, the Asante political institution did, however, not become political at the cost of its religious bases and until today both the "this worldly" and "other worldly" powers remained a source of authority for the Asantehene. This analytical remark aside, to Kofi Kakari, the outcome of the Dente oracle meant that he had to consult another source of ritual power and consequently he wrote to the King of Bariba,<sup>38</sup> people north of Dahomey, "asking for one fetish ointment made by one of his great fetishes, which had the reputation of possessing many virtues, amongst others that of misdirecting bullets, arrows, spears, etc., aimed at any individual smeared with it." (Lonsdale:88-89) In addition, he returned to seek advice of the Moslems at his court in Kumasi and asked them to make a "war medicine" that was powerful enough to kill all the inhabitants of the coast. The Moslems provided him a personalised *asuman* which he could wear on his battle dress in order to divert the weapons of his enemies. On another occasion at the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1873, the king sent messengers to the interior to a famous Moslem to ask him for hundred *peredwanes* to find the remedy for the destruction of the King's enemies. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1873, Kofi Kakari gave the Moslems of Kumasi ten *peredwanes* for using sorcery to hinder the British from marching to the capital (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:241,250).

Besides seeking the advice of the *nananom nsamanfo* at Bantama, the Moslem at the court and certain oracles, from the nineteenth century onwards the *Asantehenes* also sought the religious advice of Christian missionaries. Asantehene Kwaku Dua (1838-1867), for instance, had long discussions with the mulatto Methodist missionary Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman on the matter of faith and under influence of the in Britain converted Asante princes Nkwantabisa and Owusu-Ansa allowed him and his colleague Rev. Robert Brooking to begin missionary activities in Asante as he believed that Christianity would make him more powerful (Wilks 1988:, Owusu-Mensa 1974).

It has now become clear that *Asantehenes* allowed Islamic and Christian religious elements into the Asante indigenous belief, because they believed that the Islamic lesser spirits (*suman*), the wisdom of the *Dente* oracle or the Christian God might make them more powerful rulers. There was, however, also another reason of why some Asante Kings listened to Moslems at their court and others to European missionaries. They also believed that, to a certain extent, integrating Moslems and later Christians to their society, this would bring them peace. In the nineteenth century for instance, "the

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<sup>38</sup> The Bariba Kingdom (i.e. Borgu) lay in the far north of present-day Benin.

*Asantehene*'s bodyguards consisted of Moslems" which most probably was an attempt to solve the internal tensions within the Asante society (Wilks 1966). There were however, limitations towards the degree in which Kumasi was and wanted to integrate foreign influences. In 1798 for instance, *Asantehene* Osei Kwame (1777-1798) was destooled because he had planned to become a Moslem and make the Islam the only belief of the Asante society. For the Kingmakers, this decision of their *Asantehene* was one step too far. Kumasi's ruling elite saw his belief and its consequences as a threat to the community. For it would, among other things, mean that an important ritual festival of the Asante, the so called *Odwira* festival (see §3.7) would be prohibited, because it contained, in the eyes of Moslems, pagan elements like human sacrifices (Wilks 1966:334). The *Odwira* festival was organised yearly to legitimise the Asante state (McCaskie 1995:144-242). In the eyes of the King's chiefs and kingmakers, prohibition of the festival would weaken the position of the *Asantehenes* and therefore the *Asanteman* decided that it would be better to destool Osei Kwame now that he had converted himself into a Moslem.

Nevertheless, before and after Osei Kwame's destoolment, Moslems were welcomed to live and work in Kumasi and they also integrated in the town's community. From the 15th century onwards, the Asante in Kumasi were in contact with Mande-Dyula traders. These African Moslem traders came down to Kumasi from trade centres such as Begho and Bono-Manso (which are now part of the Brong-Ahafo region in Ghana), Daboya and Buipe where from the mid-fifteenth century (see map) they bought Akan gold from the forest in exchange from salt, cloth and brass bowls. Apart from the Mande, Borno and Hausa, Moslem traders were also exchanging goods with the Asante (Insoll 2003:334, 337). Although these Moslems from the North primarily came to Kumasi for economic reasons, they never came without their holy men or imams, who attempted to convert the Asante to Islam as long as it would not endanger their trade activities (Wilks 1966:334-336). Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was thus a considerable amount of contact with African Moslems who put the Asante in Kumasi in contact with other than their traditional beliefs, although the Asante only took elements from Islam and did not "identify" themselves with it nor converted to it. The Asante were allowed by the kingmakers to use elements of the Islamic religion (*suman*) to protect themselves against witchcraft but they also believed that the *Asantehene* had to make sure that they were not converted by the holy men that the Moslem had taken with them to Kumasi (Wilks 1966:334). The kingmakers put limitations on the functioning of Islamic religious leaders as part of a philosophy of accommodation and cooperation between Muslim and local-non-Muslim communities. Consequently, until at least the late 1840s, when *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua formed an official imamate in Kumasi, there is no record of a formal or Friday mosque (*jami*) in Kumase, the capital of Asante, at all. The absence of spatially ostentatious mosques in and around Asante may be attributable to a deliberate Asante policy of preventing their construction in an effort to check the Muslims' development of a physical base and presence. But an explanation may also lie in the ideology of the Suwarian tradition advocated by many of the ulama in the region. At least, it was not until 1948 that the Muslim community obtained a plot

of land in Kumase from the Asantehene and began the construction of a large Friday mosque (Maier 1997:323-325). The Asante Moslems (Asante *Nkramo*) were, however, well integrated in the society of Kumasi. They lived in the centre of the town in multi-ethnic communities and did not live in distinct areas of the town (Schildkrout 1970:255). Most probably many of the over one thousand Moslems in Kumasi spoke Twi, for they sold their cattle to the Asante (Wilks 1966:330,335 ). And by the first decade of the nineteenth century, Asante were familiar with writing in the form of letters, cabalistic formulae, and quotations<sup>39</sup> from the Qur'an (McCaskie 1972:32). They also had a considerable amount of political influence and economic power.

In the case of Christianity, the Asante princes Owusu-Ansa and Nkwantabisa had an important role in keeping peace between the Asante and the British with the help of the Christian faith and for this purpose Asantehene Osei Yaw Akoto (1824-1834) gave his permission to the British governor Maclean to take the Asante princes from Kumasi to Cape Coast, which then served as the British headquarters. In the period 1831-1836 there both princes were converted to the Christian faith under influence of Rev. Joseph Dunwell, the first Wesleyan Methodist missionary to the Gold Coast who had arrived at Cape Coast in 1834. In 1836, again with permission of the ruling Asantehene, Maclean took Nwantabisa and Owusu-Ansa to London, where they continued their education. During the five years that they stayed in Britain they were strongly influenced by Rev. Thomas Pyne, an Anglican clergyman, who served as their chief tutor, advisor and guide. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1841, they returned to Cape Coast with the Niger Expedition that was en route to Nigeria to explore the Niger River. Nkwantabisa was then about twenty years old and Owusu-Ansa had turned eighteen. The British government resided them in Kumase where they helped to promote Asante-British peace. In addition, still under influence of missionaries such as Freeman and Brooking, the princes also became the promoters of the Christian faith in Asante and the Gold Coast. They attempted to use the Christian faith to bring Asante and the British together and to remain peace between the two. In November 1841 a small Methodist school and congregation were started in Kumase and in the period 1840-1850 Prince Owusu Ansa became an active promoter of the Methodist domination up to late December 1862, even though soon after 1841 the Asante-British diplomatic relations became lukewarm for some time. His senior cousin Nkwantabisa had faded from the scene because of a blunder he had committed in Kumase in 1842, so that Owusu Ansa became the main link between Asante and Methodist hopes in the Asante Kingdom. Especially, after 1850 when the Asante-British diplomatic relations had become so troublesome that all European missionaries had left Kumase and the rest of the Asante area to become active at the coast. From then on, Owusu-Ansa was left to carry on single-handedly his missionary work and it was not until 1852 before Rev. Timothy Laing arrived in Kumase to help the prince with his religious task. In April 1853 Rev. Owusu-Ansa was stationed at Abakrampa, which was the capital of the Fante state of Abora, where he became a full-time Methodist minister in the

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<sup>39</sup> Written quotations were bought as amulets of the Mande-Dyula and Hausa malams as spiritual 'bullet-proof vests'. This shows that the Asante made use of the Islam by taking elements of their belief and not by conversion.

Gold Coast District of the Wesleyan Missionary Society and in August 1854, Rev. Thomas Freeman, who was the head of the Methodist Church in the Gold Coast appointed Owusu-Ansa “superintendent of the Cape Coast schools.” In 1862, from March 5 to April 29, he went on an eight-week mission to Kumase accompanied by his little son John, Rev. William West and Rev. Robert John Gharthey (later King Gharthey IV) of Winneba. Eight months after his return to the Coast for his Kumase mission, however, he resigned from the Methodist missionary. His separation belonged to the bigger picture of a wholesale resignation of African ministers from the work of the Gold Coast District of the Methodist Church in the 1850s and 1860s due to an unfair treatment of African workers. After his years as a pioneer of converting Asante to Christianity, he became more involved in Asante-British diplomacy until his death at Cape Coast on Friday, November 13, 1884 (Owusu-Mensa 1974).

Prince Owusu Ansa is a good example of an Asante royal who believed that the embracement of Christianity could bring peace between his people and the British. Due to racism and the *Asantehenes*'s fear for foreign influence most *Asantehenes* limited their permission to European missionaries in Kumase to the level that they would remain in peace with the British. Asantehene Kwaku Dua I (1838-1867) for instance welcomed Wesleyan and Basel missionaries in the 1830s until 1841 but was reluctant to grant the establishment of mission stations in Kumase (Freeman 1968).

Thus not only Imams and holy men, but also Christian missionaries were limited in their religious activities in Kumasi. In fact, foreign religious and technical experts, including Islamic scholars from the north and Christian missionaries from the south, were only allowed to enter under strict scrutiny and control. Those foreigners who settled were attached to the royal court, where their skills could be appropriated to enhance its power and status without undermining national loyalties (Clark 2003:90). Until the 1920s, Christian missionaries did not succeed in their attempts of massive conversion of the Asante. Before that time there was a situation of plural religious allegiance of the Asante rather than one of massive “*conversion*.”

In conclusion, in the pre-colonial period, the *Asantehenes* had two reasons in allowing the influence of foreign religions (Islam and Christianity) into the Asante indigenous belief and to accept Moslem and European missionaries into their society. (1) They believed that the adaptation and adoption of Islamic and Christian powers would strengthen themselves, the Asante indigenous religions and the Asante state. (2) They believed that by welcoming foreigners and allowing them to integrate in the Asante society, they would be able to remain in peace within their society. For this reason from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards Moslems were allowed to settle in Kumasi and since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European missionaries were also welcomed. The *Asantehenes* however restricted the extent to which Moslems and European missionaries were allowed to fulfil their religious duties. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Moslems were, for instance, not allowed to build schools and with the help of two Asante princes the Methodist Missionaries had to work to

stay in good relationships with the Asantehene to keep their missionary school open after its foundation in 1841. The influence of Islam and Christianity on the Asante indigenous belief remained at the level of the taking of elements from these foreign beliefs and did not reach the level of conversion. To sum up, influences of the world religions Islam and Christianity were thus allowed to the extent that these religions (1) strengthened the religious power of the *Asantehenes* and (2) contributed to the remaining peace within the Asante society.

With this conclusion, I have challenged McCaskie (1995:100) who makes the statement that the *Asantehenes* in consultation with the Asante kingmakers had a strict control over the penetration of foreign ideas in the Asante society. I believe that it is too instrumental to say that the state was in control of authorized religious ideas that moved from the ruling elite of chiefs and queen mothers (the top) to their subjects (bottom). For this would imply that the chiefs themselves would not fully believe in their indigenous religion as one of the characteristics of this religion is that the supernatural powers cannot be controlled and that one can only attempt to balance these powers by performing religious rituals. As I have shown in this section, this is not truth, because one of the reasons of the *Asantehenes* to embrace Islam and later Christianity was religious. The *Asantehenes* were curious to these foreign religions because they believed that it would make them more powerful. In my point of view, McCaskie thus underestimates the effect of the indigenous religion on the traditional authorities themselves. These authorities were (Akyeampong 1999) “deeply religious,” which is also proved by the fact that they were afraid that if they would not obey the ancestral spirits, they could be killed by the spirit (*sunsum*) inside the stool (Obogumanhene Nana Owusu Asiamah II (Konongo), 52).

The check and balance on the power of the chiefs (see scheme) thus did not only come from the side of the Kingmaker but also from that of the spiritual beings. The traditional authorities including the Asantehene, were intermediaries between “this worldly” and “other worldly” powers, rather than agents who are in full control of their powers. However, for the purpose of keeping peace and in consultation with the Kingmakers, to a certain extent, they attempted to control foreign influences. They were, however, very much aware that these influence belonged to the field of “this worldl” power, which was the only power of which they could be in control. As a consequence of this power, they could for instance decide to limit the possibility of Moslems and Christians to prostelyze their faith. The Asante Kings and kingmakers were, however, fully aware that in terms of “other worldly” power despite their sacredness and their extraordinary powers that enabled them to communicate with the ancestral spirits they were almost as vulnerable as ordinary human beings. They knew that they could not control any supernatural powers, no matter whether these powers belonged to the Asante indigenous religious, the Islam or Christianity.



### 3.7 The Legitimacy of Asanteman? “The Golden Stool”, the Swearing of Oaths and the Odwira Festival

Since its foundation in 1701, the Asante Kingdom suffered from internal political tensions. Not only were there tensions between the different cultural groups that created the Asante Confederacy, but since the rule of Opoku Ware (1720-1750), there were also two royal houses from where the rulers of the *oyoko* clan descended. All *Asantehene* were linked with each other because of the matrilineal system of kinship. From an ontological point of view, kinship seemed to be decisive for the structure of the royal clan's (*oyoko*)-dynasty, but from a phenomenological point of view, marriage seemed to be more important. Yet, there was no double descent system. Instead, in structural terms, a highly compact dynasty-defined by matrifiliation was created, within which three strongly individuated Houses—specified by patrifiliation—emerged (Wilks 1989::371-373). The *Asantehenes* Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware each came from one of these two different strong houses and since Opoku Ware's enstoolment these houses were involved in stool disputes with each other or with other weaker houses every time an *Asantehene* died or was destooled. Because of such internal tensions, there was a great need within the Asante Kingdom for symbols of unity whose function was to propagate unity to the outside world to reveal the internal frictions that could endanger the persistence of the Asante state. One of the symbols of unity and peace was “The Golden Stool” (*Sika Dwa Kofi*). In 1750 (Wilks 1989:331-332 , Kyerematen 1969:1-10, 5-6) the *Asantemanhyiamu* decided that “The Golden Stool” that was believed to originate from the sky and to consist of the divine power that the *Asantehenes* needed to rule their Kingdom should become the symbol of unity of the house of Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware. The *Asantemanhyiamu* made this decision, so that it would appear to the subjects as if there were no internal tensions among the *oyoko*, because “The Golden Stool” united the Houses of Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware.

The Asante elite thus ruled over their subjects by propagating myths, such as the myth of the *Sika Dwa Kofi* within the community and by creating stories to fostered belief in the legitimacy of their authority in their subjects. The elite were, however, also, although in a privileged form, part and object of these collective processes of the creation of meaning. The establishment of power and legitimating were part of the creation of meaning, but in a subtle and concealed form. The messages of the elite were so to say “hidden” in the rituals that were performed on their behalf. Catharine Bell formulates it as follows:

‘The strategies of ritualization are particularly rooted in the body, specifically, the interaction of the social body within a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment. Essential to ritualization is the circular production of a ritualized body which in turn produces ritualized practices. Ritualization is embedded within the dynamics of the body defined within a symbolically structured environment. An important corollary to this is the fact that ritualization is a particular ‘mute’ form of activity. It is designed to do what it does without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking’ (Bell 1992:93).

Rituals are a form of communication beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation. The elite brought the messages for their subjects to the ancestral spirits indirectly, in the form of proverbs, myths or religious rituals. The use of indirect communication was the elite's way to preserve the "sacredness" of the chief and to show their respect for the *nsamanfo* (ancestral spirits).

In addition to the myth of the Asante nation (*Sika Dwa Kofi*), the Kumasi ruling elite legitimated its power by the ritual of the swearing of an oath to the King and "The Golden Stool" and by the yearly religious ritual festival that was called "Odwira."

In the remaining part of this paragraph, I will explain how the so-called myth of "The Golden Stool" (*Sika Dwa Kofi*), the swearing of an oath and the *Odwira* festival functioned to legitimate *Asanteman*. I focus on these three ways of legitimating the state because they also play a part in the legitimisation of today's *Asanteman*. The presence of the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the oath and the *Odwira* festival are therefore important in the worldview of present indigenous believers in Kumasi. It is important to understand the worldview of these people because my research question is *whether chieftaincy in Kumasi and its surrounding villages has persisted* and my assumption is that the answer to this question can be found by studying the perceptions of subjects in Kumasi who belong to different religious groups of their chiefs.

In short, the myth of "The Golden Stool" explains why the *Asantehene* has sacred powers and therefore had a divine right to rule.<sup>40</sup> According to the myth Osei Tutu I, the first *Asantehene*, authority came from heaven, in the form of a Golden Stool (*Sika Dwa Kofi*). The stool was a symbol of political authority and represented the common soul (*sunsum*) of the Asante people. A famous priest called *okomfo Anokye* is said to have assisted Osei Tutu I spiritually in the destruction of the powerful state Denkyera of which Kwaman was a vassal. This was followed by the foundation of the Asante state by the union of six small states to protect themselves against further attacks from Denkyera.<sup>41</sup> Before, but especially after the victory on Denkyera, the alliance of states that was called *Asanteman* was formed, among other things, by destroying all earlier regalia, such as the existing stools of the *ohene* who ruled over their own states, and by replacing it by the *Kofi Sika Dwa*<sup>42</sup> which was one symbol of leadership of Osei Tutu in Kumase.

Priest Anokye is said also "to have brought down from heaven" "The Golden Stool". He received a message from the spiritual world that Osei Tutu I had a special mission from the God of the Sky (*Onyame*) to make the Asante into a great and powerful nation (McCaskie 1986:318). According to the Gold Coast government anthropologist, Capt. R.S. Rattray, the myth goes:

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<sup>40</sup> The myth of "The Golden Stool" is also known as the myth of foundation, because the major real historical figures in this myth, founded the Asante union.

<sup>41</sup> These states were Mampon, Nsuta, Kokofu, Bekwai, and Dwaben. These five independent states (amantoonum) together with Kwamen/Kumasi-under the leadership of Kumase-formed *Asanteman*. This was a military alliance in which the power of Kumasi soon became so dominant that it formed the unionstate of *Asanteman*.

<sup>42</sup> The *Sika Dwa Kofi*, Rattray (1923:290) already existed before the victory on Denkyera. The victory was obtained 'owing to the power of the "Golden Stool"'.

‘..... Osei Tutu I was informed [by Okomfo Anokye] and held a great gathering in Kumasi in the presence of the King and the Queen Mother, one Manu<sup>43</sup>, and the chief of Kokofu, called Gyami, and the Kokofu Queen Mother, Ajua Pinaman, and many others. Anotchi, in the presence of a huge multitude, with the help of his supernatural power, I stated to have brought down from the sky, in a black cloud, and amid rumblings, and in air thick with white dust, a wooden stool with three supports and partly covered with gold.<sup>44</sup> This stool did not fall to earth but alighted slowly upon Osei Tutu's knees.<sup>45</sup> There were, according to some authorities, two brass bells on the stool when it first came from above; according to others, Anotchi caused Osei Tutu to have four bells made, two of gold and two of brass, and to hange one on each side of the stool. Anotchi told Osei Tutu I and all the people that this stool contained the *sunsum* (soul or spirit) of the Asante nation, and that their power, their health, their bravery, their welfare were in this stool. To emphasize this fact he caused the King and every Ashanti chief and all the Queen Mothers to take a few hairs from the head and pubes, and a piece of the nail from the forefinger. These were made into a powder and mixed with ‘medicine’, and some was drunk and some poured or smeared on the stool. Anotchi told the Ashanti that if this stool was taken or destroyed, then, just as a man sickens and dies whose *sunsum* during life has wandered away or has been injured by some other *sunsum*, so would the Ashanti nation sicken and lose its vitality and power (Rattray 1923:289-290).

In this version of the myth of the foundation of the Asante nation, Rattray refers to “The Golden Stool.” In 1907, the ruling *Asantehene* nana Agyeman Prempeh I (1822-1932) in exile wrote down the myth of the creation of the Asante Kingdom. In his version of the myth, King Prempeh I referred to a talisman (*suman*<sup>46</sup>) instead of “The Golden Stool” which symbolised “the highest level at which political power was exercised” (Wilks 1993:144) and referred to questions of loyalty. Many Asante believed that all *suman* that Moslems brought to the court contained magical powers that would guard the unity of the Asante Kingdom. It is unknown why *Asantehene* Prempeh I did not refer to “The Golden Stool.” It could be that he deliberately avoided the word “Golden stool” in order to protect this royal seat against the British, who, since 1896, were looking for this sacred object that symbolised political authority at the highest level (Wilks 1989:331-2, Rattray 1923:292) because they believed it would enable them to take over power once they would sit upon the Asante’s royal seat, which was a terrible misconception. The British believed that “The Golden Stool” was a royal seat instead of a sacred object that contained the *sunsum* and the idea of taking place on “The Golden Stool” was so insulting for the Asante that in 1900 it led to the last Anglo-Asante war under the lead of queen mother of Ejisu Yaa Asantewaa.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Manu shows she was one of the two daughters born in succession. Many of these names I have verified from written histories.

<sup>44</sup> This rough sketch was made from an old *Abrammuo* or ‘Asante Weight’, which as Rattray had verified purported to be a model of “The Golden Stool”.

<sup>45</sup> “The Golden Stool” is supposed never to have touched the ground and it was never set in direct contact with it; on the rare occasions on which it was ever used, the skin off the back of an elephant was first placed on the ground; this was then covered with a cloth called *Nsa*, woven in the North, and sometimes like what we call ‘Kano cloth’, and the stool was set upon this. “The Golden Stool” was not to be sit upon as ordinary stools were.

<sup>46</sup> A *suman* is a concoction of leaves and wood which a believer can take with him or her to protect him or herself. The fact that Agyeman Prempeh I apparently find it a good strategy to refer to a *suman* instead of the *Sika Dwa Kofi* shows how common it was during his reign to make use of elements of the Islamic belief in the Asante indigenous religious symbols that were meant for the legitimization of *Asanteman*. I will come back to this in section 3.8.

<sup>47</sup> See for more information about this Queen mother:

The myth of “The Golden Stool” explains why ordinary people should rely on the *Asantehene* who controls the Asante subjects’ presumed individuality. Although the *Asantehene* allows his subjects to have their own character, he watches their behaviour and bases his judges on moral values. The Asante subjects perceive the *Asantehene* as their supreme moral judge. Not only is he regarded as having inherited supernatural powers from his ancestors but he is also viewed as the “owner” of the individual characters of his people (*sunsum*) that come together in “The Golden Stool.”

Besides making use of myths, such as the myth of the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the *Asantehene* and the chiefs used another symbol of unity to legitimate their power. The “oath” was a sign for the relationship between the living and the death. Every *ohene* had to swear an oath before he could be enstooled. As part of his rite de passage of enstoolment, a prospective chief came to Kumasi to swear that he would give military help to the King when he needed him. The religious meaning of the oath was that when the taker of the oath would turn himself against his King, the gods (*abosom*) would kill him (Rattray 1956:103-104, Busia 1951:54). Initially, the punishment that was exercised by the King was death; later, in some cases, it was modified by permitting the offender “to buy his head.” In addition, the Kumasi ruling elite visualised their sacredness by performing religious ceremonies such as *Adae* and the yearly *Odwira* (*dwira*=to cleanse) festival. The *Adae* are the ritual days at which the ancestors are believed to gather. The Asante held *Adae* ceremonies to venerate the ancestors and propitiate the spirits of departed rulers of the clan. The Asante believed that the ancestors would look after the living and bring them good harvest and fertility but only if the ancestors were duly venerated. The *Odwira* festival (Bartle 1978:83) referred to the ninth unit of the *adaduanan*<sup>48</sup> or forty-two days (*da*=day, *aduanan*=forty) cycle of the Akan ritual calendar. *Odwira* is as old as the Asante state and was already celebrated by *Asantehene* Osei Tutu I. Since then, the Asante celebrated the festival yearly till 1896 when the British deported *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I; an event which marked the informal end of the autonomous Asante state (see section 3.4).

The festival of *Odwira* had at least four functions. First, it was held to celebrate the change from a primarily hunting and farming community to a community of agriculturalists. In addition, the festival was an occasion to celebrate and later to remember the establishment of the first Asante village called “Kwamen” that later became known as Kumasi (Kwamena-Poh 1973:131, Gilbert 1994:105). Secondly, it was an occasion to celebrate the New Year according to the Akan ritual calendar; the *adaduanan* cycle. During *Odwira*, the Asante cleaned their environment and quenched all fires to kindle new ones. Thirdly, it was a time to recover relationships and to remember the deceased of the past year. The festival symbolised the homecoming of the ancestors (*nsamanfo*) for being fed with mashed yam (*oto*) which was the only popular staple food of the Asante (Gilbert 1994:103) and receiving tokens of gratitude for their contribution to the wellbeing of *Asanteman* in the past year (nana Ama Nyarko, nr 17). Fourth, it was also an occasion to thank the living for their

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<sup>48</sup> The *adaduanan* resulted from the fusion of a six day week (originating from the Guan) and a seven day week (six times seven making 42)

contributions to *Asanteman* in the past year and for the renewal of the allegiance of the household personell (*nhenkwaa*) and the subordinate rulers to their King. This thanksgiving ceremony was also symbolised by yam. The merchant Thomas Bowdich observed the ritual of the eating of yam by the royal household. Bowdich:

About ten days after the Yam Custom, the whole of the royal household eat new yam for the first time, in the market place, the King attending (Bowdich and Ward 1966:279).

At the beginning of the festival, the Kings' subjects threw away the yam of the past year and ate the yam of the new harvest but not before the *Asantehene* had eaten the new yam. The distribution of new yam symbolised the King's rebirth or the renewed allegiance of his subjects (Gilbert 1994:108, 115). The *Odwira* festival was thus also meant to legitimate *Asanteman* and to re-establish the power of the *Asantehene*. The political significance of the *Odwira* festival was well summarized by Freeman, who observed,

It is a kind of annual parliament wherein, towards the latter end of the festival, all matters of political and judicial administration are discussed by the King and Chiefs in Council, and where the latter answer all questions relating to their respective provinces, and are subjected to the consequences of appeals, form their local Judicial Courts, to the Supreme Court of the King in Council' (Freeman 1886).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, traditional priests washed this royal seat and the other stools during the *Odwira* festival with blood (*mogya*). Bowdich:

About twenty sheep are dipped (one sheep and one goat only are sacrificed at the time,) to be killed in the palace in the afternoon, that their blood may be poured on the stools and the door posts (Bowdich and Ward 1966).

After the abolishment of human sacrifices in 1844<sup>49</sup> it was officially washed with the blood of sheep. This rite of purification symbolised the unity between the living, the dead and the unborn. Once again, this rite also emphasised the importance of the *Sika Dwa Kofi* for the persistence of the Asante Kingdom. Just like the myth of "The Golden Stool," the purpose of the rite of purification during *Odwira* was to tell the Asante subjects that their Kingdom would persist as long as the Asante would keep safe the *Sika Dwa Kofi* and would continue to perform the rituals that came with the stool.

In conclusion, the myth of the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the swearing of an oath and the *Odwira* festival were three ways to legitimate *Asanteman*. They enabled the Kumasi elite to rule by coercion and in subtle ways, by indirect ritualised communication, gained "consent" of the population for the use of coercive force.

### **3.8 The Impact of Islam and European Christianity on the Indigenous Asante Religion and the Reaction of the Asante Traditional Authorities in Kumasi**

In the previous sections in this Paper, I have shown that although the Asante state has ceased to exist after the deportation of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I in 1896, the *Asanteman* remained

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<sup>49</sup> Although the custom of ritually killing of human beings was abolished in 1844, only in 1876 after debate in the Council of Kumase nad the *Asantemanhyiamu*, the decision was taken to cease carrying out mass executions on public occasions , 673.

legitimated by the use of religious elements of the Asante belief. In the indigenous worldview of the Asante *Asanteman*, it has thus persisted even after 1896.

In this section, I will investigate *why* chieftaincy in Kumasi has persisted. I will, therefore, look at the reaction of the traditional authorities on the introduction of Islam and Christianity in their Kingdom. Further, I will investigate to what extent the traditional authorities allowed the introduction of Islam and Christianity in the Asante Kingdom and I will elaborate on the question of to what extent they showed resistance towards these world religions out of protection for the persistence of *Asanteman*.

In the pre-colonial period, two world religions penetrated the Asante society, first Islam and later Christianity. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese traders reported that the Fante at the Coast traded with the Islamic Mande-Dyula from the North of present-day Ghana (Silverman and David 1989:326). The African Mande-Dyula came to the Akan zone for trade, not for imposing orthodox Islamic religion upon the Fante, the Asante and other cultural Akan groups. Even the jihads that Islamized Hausaland in the 1800s and Futa Toro, Segu and Masina in the 1850s and 1860s, did not significantly influence the Akan states. The Mande-Dyula traders traded gold from Bono, a town with a goldmine in the north of Kumasi that in 1722-3 had been defeated by the southern Akan and had become subject of the Asante Kingdom. The inhabitants of the town produced and distributed gold, for gold routes ran from Bono to Jenne, on the Niger Bend. The Mande Dyula traders from Bono carried the gold into Muslim Sudan and carried back Islamic ideas into Asante. Therefore, these traders were important for the spread of Islam among the Asante. Further, the Islam was introduced in the Asante Kingdom when by the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Savanna kingdom of Gonja came directly under Asante control; Dagomba and Mamprusi were also within its sphere of influence. Besides, the state had established diplomatic contacts with the Mossi kingdom of Wagadugu. The involvement of the Asante in the profitable trade of kola nuts developed further contact with the Moslems. *Asantehene* Osei Kwadwo (1764-1777) invited literate Moslems to work for him at his palace. At the time, there were already some literate Moslems in Kumasi, but most of them arrived in Kumasi on invitation of *Asantehene* Osei Kwadwo. In 1819, the British Consul Dupuis (1824), who came to Kumasi for negotiations and stayed a full year in this town observed that his successor *Asantehene* Osei Tutu Kwame (1777-1797) was also sympathetic towards Islam. *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu (1800-1824) continued to associate with Muslim advisors and during his reign the Asante established friendly relations with Ahmad b. Muhammad (Ahmadu Lobbo) a jihadist of Masina. There is, however, not much known about this jihadist as the records on him were destroyed in the fire after the British had sacked Kumasi in 1874 (Hiskett 1984:131-133).

The impact of the Islamic belief on the Asante was however limited as the Asante only took elements of this belief and incorporated these elements into their own indigenous religion. Around

1800, there was, for instance, a large Moslem quarter with a Qur'anic school in Kumasi where they taught a mild form of Islam, but the level of Asante that actually converted to Islam was very low. The efforts of imams of the more orthodox form of Islam were even less successful in proselytizing Asante in Kumasi. The more radical Moslems who settled in Kumasi came from Hausaland and their leaders were unpopular among other Moslems in Kumasi, who saw them as rivals. An example of a radical Moslem in Kumasi is Hausa *malam* from Katsina, who arrived in town in 1807. Another Hausa was there in 1818 and yet another, also from Katsina entered the Asante capital in 1820. The best-known of these Muslims, however, was Sharif Ibrahim, a Borno (ʿ-ʿalim) who was resident in Muhammad (ʿ-ʿAbd al-Salam al-Marawi). The Sharif Ibrahim maintained himself by the profitable business manufacturing charms and amulets and by offering his prayers in return for presents. Like most Hausa Moslems he was, however, unpopular among the other less radical Moslems in Kumase (Hiskett 1984:133-135). Most probably, the reason for the unpopularity of radical Moslems in Asante was not only related to their position as rivals in leadership of the Moslems in Kumasi, but also to their perception of the Asante indigenous belief. For orthodox Moslems, the indigenous Asante religion was a pagan cult. In their eyes, it was therefore better that they converted as many indigenous believers as possible to Islam. "Orthodox Moslems" had great problems with important elements of the indigenous belief such as human sacrifice and libation in honour of the ancestors. For the majority of the Moslems in Kumase, who adhered to a milder form of Islam, these elements of the Asante indigenous religion were less problematic.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Moslems who were adherents of a milder form of Islam settled in Kumasi. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabic sources report on the town Bighu<sup>50</sup> (which is recently again a town in the Brong-Ahafo region), as the place of origin of the non-orthodox Moslems who lived and worked at the royal palace (*ahemfie*) in Kumasi (Silverman and David 1989:326). *Asantehene* Osei Tutu Kwame and his successors had many Islamic clerics at work for them in the palace. He had asked them in person to come and work in *ahemfie* because the Moslems could read and write Arabic, which they had learned at the Sankore teaching mosque, an important centre of Islamic learning in Timbuctu.<sup>51</sup> This made Moslems useful as advisors in matters of trade and foreign affairs and as keepers of records and accounts in Arabic. Another function of the Moslems was to perform religious services for the protection of the *Asantehenes* with the help of talisman (*suman*) (Schildkrout 1970:256). In fact, the greatest source of influence of these Moslems in Kumase was the appeal of Islamic charms and Moslem prayers.

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<sup>50</sup> For the importance of 'Bighu' as a Mande-Dyula centre of trade of ca. 1450 until ca. 1720, see cf. Wilks 1989: 244-245.

<sup>51</sup> The Islamic learning centre in Timbuctu has sometimes been referred to as a university. The medieval usage of that term, meaning a collection of scholars and students living in a single community for the common purpose of religious teaching and learning, correctly describes Timbuctu at that time (that means in the 14<sup>th</sup> century). Intellectual influences came first from Morocco, later (after 1500) especially from Egypt with Azhar in Cairo as a role model (Hiskett 1984: 15, 40-41). The Moroccan conquest of Shonghai of 1528 brought a heavy toll to this centre of Moslem religious 'science' (Hiskett 1984: 41, 154-155). Between 1528 and 1800 it stayed a local centre of Moslem religious scholarship, but it was certainly not the leading centre for the whole of the Sahel.

Osei Tutu Kwame, for instance, had asked educated Moslem from Bighu to protect himself from evil spirits and to provide him protective medicine. These Moslems, who were known as 'Asante *Nkramo*' (*Nkramo*= those who can read) were placed under the *Nsumankwahene*, who was the chief of the medicine people, the accredited doctor of the *Asantehene* and the one who remained a key link between the *Asantehene* and the people of the savanna countries.<sup>52</sup> The *Nsumankwahene* was also a member of the Gyase division, the King's household officials. When a talisman was prepared by the *Nsumankwahene* for the King, it was the duty of the *Asante Nkramo* to consult the Qur'an to determine the genuineness and efficacy of the talisman in question. But, the religious services of the *Asante Nkramo* were not confined solely to protective medicine. When an *Asante* army was taking the field for war, it was their duty to ascertain whether the venture would be a successful one, and to pray for victory (Institute of African Studies). Other than religious and of minor important functions of the *Asante Nkramo* at the royal palace in Kumase were to look after the interest of the northern kola traders, for advice on politics in the north and to be a headman to represent their cultural group of Moslems from the Kingdoms in the North in Kumasi.

To sum up, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the nineteenth century, the traditional authorities in Kumasi stood positive towards the spread of the Islamic religion as long as the interaction between the Islamic and the Indigenous *Asante* religion did not exceed the level of taking elements. From the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Moslems were excluded altogether. Moslems needed the permission of the *Asantehene* before they could enter Kumasi. Most probably the *Asantehenes* feared the power of the Moslems in the North and understood well that orthodox Islamic teaching could be a threat to the survival of the *Asante* state. At that time, the successful jihad in Hausaland and its aftermath also caused tensions between *Asante* and Moslems in Kumasi and consequently the *Asante* wanted more control of the Moslem's kola trade in Kumasi in order to keep out orthodox Islamic influences. Until 1874, due to the restrictions on the free movement of Moslems, there was no significant Islamic presence in Kumasi. The relationship between Moslems in Kumasi and *Asante* became better at times when the *Asante* asked them to help them against their wars with the British, but overall there remained a situation of balanced tension between the two. The *Asante* received what pleased them from the Islam, but on their own terms and without surrendering their national or cultural identity. The *Asantehenes* accepted the Moslems but did not accept Hausa Moslems to introduce orthodox Islam. The *Asante Nkramo* in Kumasi, of whom most were adherents of a mild form of the Islam, were welcomed after they had been given permission of the *Asantehene*. The holy man *Seikh Baba*, for instance, who followed a milder version of the belief of "Uthman dan Fodio." who North of the *Asante* Kingdom initiated a *jihad*, experienced no problems of entering the

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<sup>52</sup> A growing number of these people also came to Kumasi to trade in *suman*, which in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was popular among indigenous *Asante* believers for private use as a remedy against witchcraft (*bayi*). The *Asante* believed that *Nsuman* would be able to prevent witches from doing evil, because *Nsuman* came from outside the *Asante* Kingdom. Most probably the way of reasoning of *Asante* believers was that witchcraft was a force that fell outside the realm of the state religion and therefore the remedie against these evil forces should also come from outside the established spiritual realm .



city of Kumasi (Wilks 1966:326). The Moslems that were allowed to enter Kumasi were mostly soon well integrated in the Asante community. A sign of their integration was, for instance, that the holy men who lived in Kumasi, like Sheikh Baba, were anxious to maintain amicable relationships with members of their host community, who practised the more radical form of Islam.

The *Asantehenes* did not welcome Moslems who practised a form of orthodox Islam, because according to this belief, the Asante would have to give up some in the eyes of radical Moslems “pagan customs” such as human sacrifices and the pouring of libation. The traditional authorities were afraid that abandoning these elements of their religion would undermine the Asante state, for the sacrifice of humans was part of the state’s method of control; and the pouring of libation was crucial for maintaining a balanced relationship with the ancestral spirits.

Because the Asante King profited from the services of the Asante *Nkramo* at the royal court (*ahemfie*) and from their trade in cattle and other goods from the North, he did, however, accept many elements of the mild Islamic tradition. So did he show understanding for the fact that the Asante *Nkramo* could not bow down to him, as this was forbidden by their religion. From the side of the Moslems, they perceived the *Asantehene* as a ruler who they must respect and obey in order to be permitted to live and work in Kumasi. However, the mutual religious integration of the indigenous Asante belief and Islam never exceeded the level of adopting elements of one another’s beliefs. Examples of taking elements are Moslem amulets that contain Qur’anic texts that are believed to serve as charms. *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu wore these amulets during the Dwamen war<sup>53</sup> of 1874 in order to protect himself. Two years later, he also wore a Moslem war cloth (*bata kari kese*). The Moslems of Kumasi in turn had Twi expressions for Moslem religious buildings or activities, such as *Nyame dan* (meaning small mosque) and the expressions “*mekofre Nyam*” (I will pray to God, I will go to the mosque), “*Onyame fre*” (to pray to god) and *Nyamefère* (God’s fear, godliness, *fere*=to respect) (Christaller 1933:357).

McCaskie (1995:135) remarks that the traditional authorities in Kumasi were very strict in keeping alien ideas outside their Kingdom, as the Kumasi ruling elite feared that these ideas would undermine their power. In my opinion, however, they attempted to limit the amount of foreign ideas as far as this belonged to their “this worldly powers” and at the same time they were well aware that in the field of “other worldly” powers they had no ability to control anything spiritual. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Asantehenes* thus had a policy towards the extent to which Moslem traders and Islamic influence were allowed in Kumasi, but were, at the same time, impressed by the power of the Qur’an and the religious knowledge of the Moslem religious specialists at the royal court. The *Asantehenes* were deeply religious, but they also had a “this worldly” policy towards foreign religious influences, which does to some extent explain the persistence of *Asanteman*, because as foreign religious

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<sup>53</sup> This is the war that Asantehene Osei Bonsu fought between 1811 and 1818 with the Gyamanhene Adinkra, after this chief illegally borrowed the idea of the Asante to make a golden stool, 271-273.

influences were kept outside or were adapted and adopted by the indigenous religious believers into their native religion, the religious legitimisation of the Asante state was not effected.

I will now look at the impact of Christianity and the reaction of the traditional authorities towards this world religion. Christians have introduced their faith among the Asante in two main strands, Missionary Christianity and African Christianity. From the late 15th century, Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries undertook the first attempts to convert the inhabitants of the Gold Coast.<sup>54</sup> The influence of these Catholics on the local Fante community was small, which caused the locals to perceive the Catholic elements in their belief as a distinctive traditional cult within the indigenous religion. The high degree of integration of the Catholic cult in the indigenous belief made the vicar in Elmina castle in 1632 remark in his letter to the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide at Rome that the four hundred Christians in Elmina-town (*Edena*) were Christians in name only. By 1872, when the Protestant Dutch, who had a policy of non-interference in the belief of the locals, left and handed Elmina over to the British, the Catholic elements had long been fully integrated into the indigenous local Fante religion of *Edena*. Therefore, it was not so remarkable that in 1880, two French Catholic priests referred to the Elminian *Santamariafo* (Fante for ‘people of Santa Maria’) as ‘Catholic pagans’ (Platvoet 1979:549-553).

The way of practising the Catholic belief these French priests encountered was very different from their own version of Catholicism. It is for this reason that scholars of religion make a distinction between the fifteenth century attempts of missionaries and modern Missionary Christianity, which started in January 1828 by the Basel Missionary Society (presently the Presbyterian Church). The Society of the African Mission, which later became known as the Roman Catholic Church was thus not the only church that sent missionaries to the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. The missionaries that were earlier active on the Gold Coast came from The Northern German Missionary Society<sup>55</sup> (less formally known as the Bremen Evangelic Mission) and the Wesley Missionary Society (The present Methodist Church). The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) which was a section of the Church of England (Anglican) was dormant<sup>56</sup> during most of the nineteenth century (Buah 1980:132-138). The Anglican Church itself appeared as a mission organisation (known as The Church of England Mission) in the *Gold Coast Colony* towards the close of the nineteenth century. In

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<sup>54</sup> The best overview, based on Roman and Portuguese archives is: Ralph M. Wiltgen 1956, *Gold Coast Mission History, 1471-1880*. Techny (Illinois): Divine Word Publications.

<sup>55</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1847, four missionaries of the ‘The Northern German Missionary Society’, landed at Cape Coast. Within four years, these missionaries all died. Only since 1881 The Bremen Missionary work, after 34 years labour showed distinct progress. In 1893 the Gospel had preached in 313 places, 238-243. The area worked by the missionaries of the small Bremen Mission lay in the coastal plain. Franz Michael Zahn, who led the mission, believed that any extension of the mission inland was impossible because of the Asante war and would also raise financial problems. This led to tedious differences of opinion with some of the Bremen missionaries, who wanted to go further into the interior. Zahn, however, kept to his conviction till the large number of baptisms in the interior (for instance around 1890) changed this view too, 139 and footnote 113.

<sup>56</sup> One of the few S.P.G. missionaries that was however credited with taking the gospel to Kumasi was John Mills. In 1839 Mills held service with the then ruling Asantehene, Nana Kwaku Duah I. But when in 1841 the S.G.P. proposed to send a man to Kumasi, the Governor at Cape Coast vetoed the plan on the ground that too many versions of the Christian faith would confuse the Asante, 7.

Kumasi, the missionaries of the The Church of England Mission were not very successful. In 1883, for instance, a Protestant minister that attempted to enter the town was not welcome. This has become apparent by a letter of Asantehene Mensa Bonsu to the Catholic priest Fr. A. Moreau in 1882, in which he wrote:

‘I do not refuse you [Moreau], and as for this minister [the Protestant minister], never fear; he won’t get in (Groves 1955:Annales de la Propagation de la Foi (Lyon 1883), lv, quotation, p 189).

Only in 1913, an Anglican church, a school and a chapel were established by ‘The Church of England Mission’ missionary G. W. Morrison (Arhin 1992:55-57). Apart from that, in the pre-colonial period, the Anglican Church in Kumasi also stayed of relatively little influence.<sup>57</sup> Their members were most probably not fanatic and did not rebel against traditional authorities.

Most missionaries started their activities on the Gold Coast and came only much later to Kumasi. The Roman Catholics, for instance, did not found a church in Kumasi until 1905, when James Anquanda a jailor from Winneba, took the initiative to build one. The first Roman Catholic resident missionary in Kumasi was Fr. Joseph Nuller, a Dutch, who arrived in 1910 and opened a station. In 1913 the first Roman Catholic Chapel was built (Arhin 1992:55-57, Kimble 1963:153, footnote 6).

Two nineteenth century missionaries are of special interest for the European Christian Church history in Kumasi: The Wesleyan missionary Thomas Birch Freeman (1809-1890), who laid the foundation of the Methodist Church in Ghana and Rev. Fritz. A. Ramseyer, who set up the beginnings of the Basel mission church in Kumase and who lived in the city for four years (1869-73) as a captive of the Asante.

The Anglo-Fante mulatto Thomas Birch Freeman was not the first Methodist missionary in the Gold Coast, but he was the first one who lived and worked in Kumasi. In 1838, the Church turned its attention to the most disturbing challenge it had ever known: the challenge of taking the gospel to Asante from which it had come to expect nothing but threats of invasion. Many of the mulatto members of the Wesley Missionary Society in Cape Coast were afraid to make the journey from the Coast to Kumasi, because they were often attacked by their Northern enemies. Their information about Asante consisted of:

‘tales of horror, wretchedness and cruelty’ (District Minutes 1961, Synod Letter).

Freeman also feared for his health while making the journey to Kumasi as he would have to travel to dense tropical forest with unknown diseases and he knew that the risk of dying was high. He knew, for instance, that the founder of the Methodist church in the Gold Coast Colony, the missionary Dunwell, had died the same year and that his successors had not lived very long either (Bartels 1965:19). The missionaries were sometimes killed by unknown<sup>58</sup> tropical

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<sup>57</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Anglican diocese was of some influence because it was seen as a typical British elitist church that was linked to the British crown and the colonial government. For this reason, Asantehene Prempeh I became an Anglican, which gave this church standing.

<sup>58</sup> Most probably many missionaries died of malaria, but at the time the cause of this disease was not known yet, and some missionaries believed that they died of bad air (mal=bad, aria=air). It would take until 1897 before Sir Ronald Ross discovered that malaria was transmitted by mosquitoes.

diseases, many times combined with a weak psychic condition due to home sickness and loneliness, which made the Gold Coast well-known as truly the “white man’s grave” (Curtin 1961:94). In addition, Freeman was afraid that Asantehene Osei Yaw (1824-38) would not allow him to enter the city (Bartels 1965:37). These last fears disappeared after he heard that James Hayford, one of a number of Residents whom George Maclean appointed from time to time, to represent British interests at Kumasi after the treaty of 1831<sup>59</sup>, had won the confidence of Kwaku Dua I (1838-67) and obtained his permission to hold in his presence, in the palace, a divine service. This service consisted of the singing of psalms and hymns, reading from the Bible and prayer (The Guardian (London), 25 Nov. 1961). With regards to his fear of unknown diseases, Freeman relied on God. He decided to make the journey from Cape Coast to Kumasi and at 1 April 1839 he arrived in this town. The same day he met and held his first service in the presence of Asantehene Kwaku Dua, who cordially welcomed him and arrangements were made to establish a mission in Kumasi. In November 1841, Freeman visited Kumasi for the second time. This time he came along with Robert Brookling and two Asante princes, Ansa and Nkwantabisa, who were returning home from missionary studies in the United Kingdom. They were well received by the Asante king and a piece of land was granted on which to erect suitable mission-premises. On the 23th of December 1841, Freeman wrote:

‘I also embraced the opportunity of informing him, that our special object, as Missionaries, was the introduction of Christianity into his dominions; and, for that purpose, we begged his protection, and the favour of permission to build a Mission-House in Kumasi: to which he answered, ‘I will protect you, and supply you with land, on which to build a house.’ (Freeman 1968:132).

At the end of December, the nucleus of a church was formed. Soon after, Freeman returned to the Gold Coast, where he was a successful head of the mission and left Rev Brookling in charge of the mission in Kumasi (Reindorf 1966:230-231, Arhin 1992:55-57). In 1843, Freeman went back to the Asante Kingdom and established a Mission station near Kumasi. Despite all the courteous exchanges between Freeman and the Asantehene from 1839 onwards, the station had, however, little success. Ten year later, Rev. T. Laing, who was residing in Kumasi therefore wrote in a report:

The state of the work of God in Asante is rather discouraging at present, from the circumstance of the people being afraid to expose themselves to the ire of the king, whose frown means death for people becoming Christians. Many of the Asantes desire to embrace Christianity, but fear to come forward. The Asantes are not a free people, they are fast bound in the chains of despotism, so much so, that no one dares to do what he thinks proper in his own eyes, how good so ever it may be. They always do what the king sanctions, whether good or bad, so that as the king is a pagan, they must all remain pagans too (Reindorf 1966:quotation, p 235).

In 1845, as General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Mission on the Gold Coast, Freeman returned to Kumasi for the fourth time and this time he took Rev. Henry Whaton along with him. In 1853, Methodism began to progress rapidly but not in Asante. Due to hostilities between the Gold Coast and Asante, Rev. Laing was shut off from every communication with the Coast till peace was

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<sup>59</sup> This treaty signed by the Ashantes, Maclean and his coastal allies, ushered in a thirty-two-year period of peaceful relation between the Ashante and the coastal people.

restored. He was then relieved by a Catechist, Watts, who was the last of the Society's servants, to come to Kumasi, who stayed until the war of 1863. Like Laing, Watts was a prisoner at large for years till peace was made and he was removed. All attempts of reestablishment were prevented by the Asante royals. In 1876, when the Wesleyans asked permission to resume residence and start schools, the Asante royals told them:

'We will accept the Mission, if you act as Mr. Freeman did to help the peace of the nation and the prosperity of trade, but you must understand...The Bible is not a book for us... We will never embrace your religion' (Findlay and Holdsworth 1921:quotation, p 175).

A Colonial Office official commented:

'Apparently not much hope of the Christianization of Ashantee!' (Minute of 8 June 1876, by A.W.L. Hemming; CO/96/118).

In 1876, the mission was again established into Adanse, Bekwae, and other chief towns, but after a few years working, it collapsed by the internal wars of the various cultural groups (Reindorf 1966:235-236). The Wesleyans returned in 1884, when the Rev. R. J. Hayfron was appointed to Kumasi. Some progress was made in outlying towns, such as Bekwai. But a real opportunity for missionary work did not come until the exile of Prempeh in 1896, when the Governor personally invited the Basel Mission to Kumasi (Schlatter 1916:121) and the Wesleyans were also to profit from the improved climate for missionary work. In 1904, a Memorial Chapel<sup>60</sup> and a Methodist church were built in Kumasi (Arhin 1992:55-57, Bartels 1965:154).

In 1839, the first evangelist of the Basel Missionary Society (presently the Presbyterian Church) to visit Kumasi was Rev. Andrew Riis, but after his impressions of the town, he did not have much hope of beginning Gospel work in Asante (Reindorf 1966:219). The birth of the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi is credited to Rev. F. Andrew Ramseyer, who in 1869 together with his wife and little daughter were taken from Anum and who were sent to Kumasi as prisoners (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:1-67). They stayed four years in Asante and did much missionary work, until the city of Kumasi was ransacked and then Rev. J.S. Kuhne and later Mrs. and Rev. Fritz. A. Ramseyer were released (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:67-290). After the fire of the city of Kumasi the Basel Mission was refused permission to settle in Asante, and although the Asantehene raised no objection to occasional visits, such as that of Rev. Ramseyer in 1881, these were attempted:

'all to no purpose; king and nation hardened their hearts' (Huppenbauer 1905 (4th edition):52-60, Mission 1928:ch. viii).

In 1896 Rev Ramseyer came back to Kumasi, yet as a free person together with the Basel missionary Perregaux, and they were successful in converting many Asante. The turmoil after the exile

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<sup>60</sup> Rev. William F. Somerville, was the first missionary to be stationed in Kumasi after the occupation of Asante by the British in 1874 to try to replant the Church in Kumasi. He died only six months afterwards on August 2<sup>nd</sup> (District Minutes 1905, The Gold Coast Annual, 1894-5, p12). On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1904, the Somerville Memorial Chapel, in memory of the Rev. William F. Somerville, was built. This chapel provided a place of worship and accommodation for a school for 166 full members, 431 Sunday school scholars and 377 day school pupils, and was a source of inspiration to the outstation churches at Obuasi, Bekwai, Old Juaben, Tekyiman, Abodom and Fomena.

of Asantehene, Prempeh I however made it impossible for them to establish a church for the many church members and scholars that had been converted by the Basel missionaries (Arhin 1992:55-57).

Now that I have given a short overview of the history of the Roman Catholic, the Methodist and the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi, I will focus on the reaction of the traditional authorities towards the introduction of these religions in the capital of the Asante Kingdom. In 1880, the Catholic priests August Moreau and Eugene Murat of the Society of the African Mission (SMA), which was actually the last religious society that established itself in Kumasi in the nineteenth century, were welcomed by the Asantehene Mensa Bonsu (Groves 1955:Annales de la Propagation de la Foi (Lyon 1883), iv, quotation, p 189). As the following quotation of the Roman Catholic Missionary Moreau's report indicates, this missionary was not afraid to travel to Kumasi. Moreau:

One day I expressed my desire to visit Kumasi. I asked him [prince Boakye] whether the king would agree to see me or order to have my head cut off. The prince answered: 'The king would be very glad to see you, and be assured he will do you no harm'. This happened in the month of July (1881) and since then I have been waiting for the favourable moment to go there (*Report*, 16 June 1882, in *AMA* 15/802.02 19.222).

One of the reasons that Moreau was welcomed by Asantehene Mensa Bonsu, in contradiction to his protestant colleague, might have been that Moreau, unlike his colleague, had done a lot of effort to learn Twi, the language of the Asante, even though until the Second Vatican Council, the Church's Latin liturgy of 1963, the Catholics did not encourage much contextualization of worship into the culture of the Asante and in general the church had not looked seriously into learning the language of the Akan (Fisher 1998:173-177). Moreau to his colleague of the 'SMA' Fr. Augustine Planque (1826-1907):

We must give continuous attention to the study of the language. They say it's a matter of six months. Once we know it we can think of spreading out and penetrating among the Ashantis (*Letter to Fr. Planque*, 23 May 1880, in *AMA* 15/802.02 19.180).

Four months later he writes to the same Mr. Planque:

I hardly have time to write. I spend it all studying the language without which we will never be able to do anything in this country. Unfortunately, there are so many difficulties; fever and other distractions have taken up so much of my time that till now I have made only small progress (*Letter to Fr. Planque*, 10 September 1880, in *AMA* 15/802.02 19.184).

While in Kumasi, Moreau experienced that the Asante appreciated his knowledge on healthcare, which might have also contributed to his warm reception by the Asante people. Moreau:

[...] Every time I passed the night in a village, I asked if there were any sick. In a short while I would be surrounded by dozens of individuals. A little medicine and ointment for the wounds were all they asked for, and I got the reputation of being a great doctor. On my return journey all who had already seen me did not fail to come and thank me. [...] I love the Ashantis with all my missionary heart, and my greatest desire is to consecrate my life to them. Pray with me that the light may dawn over this great people (*Report*, 16 June 1882, in *AMA* 15/802.02 19.222).

The first missionary of the Basel Missionary Society, A. Riis, experienced more resistance of the

Asante traditional authorities. When he visited Kumasi in 1839, he “came back with the impression that he had to wait for better hints from the Lord” (Letter of 18 Dec. 1877, from the Rev. F. Ramseyer to Freeling, referring to the journey to Kumasi in 1839 by the Rev. A. Riis; CO/96/122). Between 1839 and 1869, there were no missionary activities of the Basel Missionary Society. The first (forced) visit of a Basel missionary to Kumasi after Riis, was that of the Reverends Kühne and Rev. Ramseyer and his wife. King Kofi Kakari made time to hear the gospel from them and they got the King’s permission to establish a school with ten pupils. They were generally treated well by the Asante King. They received a small allowance to stay alive and goods in the form of presents<sup>61</sup> (Ramseyer, Kühne, Weitbrecht, Gundert and Christlieb 1875:73-74). Whereas Andreas Riis can be referred to as the founder of the Basel Mission Enterprise in Ghana, Friedrich August Ramseyer and his wife, Rosa Louise, stand tall as two personalities who consolidated the work on the Basel Mission in Ghana. The Ramseyers established many missionary stations in the Gold Coast and also the Kumase Station.<sup>62</sup> After his release in 1874, in 1881 Rev. Ramseyer came back and presented the Asantehene a Twi bible (Arhin 1992:55-57), which, just like the one that would be presented by the Wesleyan missionaries two years later, was not well received. Ramseyer enjoyed coming back to Kumasi, but had a difficult time in planting a Basel Church in this town. For he and his colleagues were in accompany of a military, Captain Armitage, who the Asante assumed was looking for “The Golden Stool,” the symbol of power of the Asante and the missionaries experienced the unfortune to be identified with this unpopular figure.

One of the reasons that Asante had been relatively apathetic to Christianity was that they had never been able to see the church as an agency with a separate existence, differing in purpose, from that of the other European agencies like trading firms and governments. This was because many missionaries,<sup>63</sup> such as Freeman, were accompanied with militaries and the Asante were suspicious towards these men, whose interest in peace was not always distinguishable from their interest in trade (Bartels 1965:112,113). In the Anglo-Asante war of 1900, almost all missionary work was destroyed (Gold Coast Annual 1900, p 12). The Basel Mission, however, extended in Asante after the exile of the King of Asante, Prempeh I, in 1896 and in 1901 they built a new mission station. In this year, the Rev. Frederick A. Lees, a Basel missionary, and John B. Baiden, Assistant African Minister, were given a most cheering welcome in Kumasi and at the end of 1902 there were thirty two Asante converts. From 1902 onwards, the story of the Asante mission was one of steady growth and development according to the usual pattern of chapels, Sunday schools and day schools.

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<sup>61</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1870, for instance Ramseyer and his wife received from the king a couple of sheep, and an old pair of Dutch military shoes, accompanied by a pair of boots for Mrs. R., of English make, and the finest leather. They had been presented by the Wesleyan missionary Freeman in 1842, to the reigning sovereign, and inscribed on the soles in gilt letters were the following words: -“To his Royal Highness, Quakoo Dooah, King of Ashantee, West Africa.”

<sup>62</sup> He also attempted to open a Basel mission station and a school immediately in Kumasi. Unfortunately, this wish was not granted by the Basel Mission Home Committee and he had to wait for some twenty years.

<sup>63</sup> In theory the establishment of the ‘Kingdom of God’ was perceived by the missionaries as a goal that stood above the European expansion, but in practice there are cases where missionary work and expansion went hand in hand and where missionary work actually became merely a legitimation for European hegemony and expansion, 124-148. So it was not so strange that Asante could not distinguish European missionaries from European militaries.

To sum up, the impact of the European missionary activities had not been great until the beginning of the nineteenth century. On the one side, this was caused by the attitude of the traditional authorities in Kumasi towards the European missionaries, who only took elements of the Christian religion to adapt them into their indigenous belief. What certainly also played a role was that many European missionaries had a destructive attitude towards the indigenous religion and no attempt was made to use any part of the traditional worldview of the Asante as a basis for the preaching of the Gospel or to 'fuse' Christianity with it. There was hardly any attempt (an exception was that of the Catholic priest Moreau, who learned Twi) to assimilate Christianity with, or "build it into," African indigenous religious and social life, and the Wesleyan Christian congregations came into existence in conscious opposition to the ancestral way of life and thought of the rest of the community. The reason for this was that the great majority of the missionaries stemmed from Pietistic circles in the Wurttemberg Church in which the primary emphasis was laid on personal devotion to Christ and on experimental religion. Basic principle was to work together with Christ and spread the Kingdom of God on earth, to bring individuals in touch with the saving grace of Christ and to build the converts into new Christian societies. Many missionaries felt superior to the Africans. They associated the Asante with cruel customs, the 'tyranny' of chiefs and the deceit of "fetish" priests. They felt not any desire to study this culture in depth and hoped that God would help the Asante. Freeman (1968:25) for instance wrote:

May thine everlasting Gospel speedily spread itself through the length and breadth of this land, and chase the demon from these dark abodes of cruelty !

And Governor Maclean, in a letter to Freeman wrote:

I do not despair of yet witnessing the peaceful triumph of the cross, even in that stronghold of Satan, Kumasi (Freeman 1968:71).

Reports from the 1850s of the Basel missionaries consist of an implacable antagonism to "fetishes" and "fetish-priests" who were regarded as agents of the devil and the main obstacles to the spread of the Gospel. In a report of 1881, the Basel missionaries urge the government to ban funeral customs, interment in houses and "fetish" worship. The Basel missionaries also showed little respect for the indigenous belief and its believers. The missionary Ringwald for instance wrote:

See this stupid man. He calls and receives no answer; he brings the fetish something and the fowls feed on it (Ringwald 1952:135).

On the other side, there is no record of missionaries who suffered personal hostility from the people. Ramseyers and Kuhne were treated tolerably well during their enforced stay in Kumasi. The Asante King remained friendly to them, sometimes came to the services which Brooking conducted, and gave a piece of land for the building of a mission house (Bartels 1965:53). There was some opposition to the activities of missionaries, but it was sporadic, unsustained and it was not on doctrinal grounds. Generally, the Asante saw Christianity as a "good and sweet" word as long as it was not a threat to the indigenous religion. For this reason, *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Panin (1834-1867) was for instance known to have some second thoughts about the work of missionary Freeman, even though



Freeman himself was on good terms with the *Asantehene*. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December 1841, the *Asantehene* was no longer sure about the building of a missionary school. Most probably Kwaku Dua Panin and his chiefs were well aware of the message of these missionaries and felt that their ideas of equality, personal faith and education posed a threat to their power. From Freeman's (1968:130) report, we know that Kwaku Dua's chiefs were sceptical towards the building of a school, because they suspected that a school, and the new ways it would teach, would produce a rift between the old and the young.

There were other forces also at work against the entry of the Church. A whispering campaign rapidly spread the rumour that nothing but evil could result from acceptance of the new ways, and three attempts were made to burn the city, probably by an incendiary who was trying to prove the truth of the rumour. When the missionaries helped to put out the fires and their quarters were untouched, several of the townspeople began to have second thoughts. Perhaps, said they, the gods were not angry with the missionaries after all and the traditional priests could easily tolerate the European god among their pantheon of Akan gods (Bartels 1965:52, 54-55). In 1843, Freeman experienced problems with his missionary activities as Governor Hill (1844-1846) had succeeded Maclean. Hill was not in good relationship with the *Asantehene*. Kwaku Dua Panin tolerated a limited measure of missionary activities in his kingdom between 1846 and 1873, because he believed that the missionaries might be useful in diplomatic relationships whenever another Anglo-Asante war would break out (Owusu-Mensa 1974). In 1850, however, the last European missionary left Kumasi, leaving London for missionary work educated Asante prince Owusu Ansah to carry on alone. The position became increasingly difficult and complete withdrawal of paid agents became inevitable. After the Anglo-Asante war of 1900, there were no Methodist converts left (Bartels 1965).

Both the missionaries' discriminating attitude towards the indigenous religion and some incidents that followed from missionary activities proved that *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua's fear of the Christians in his Kingdom was a well-founded apprehension. For the missionaries abolished features of the indigenous religion, such as polygamy but also the ritual killing of slaves at a chief's funeral and the ritual killing of human beings in connection with certain *abosom* (Smith 1966:86-108). The abolishment of these features caused that converted Christians began to form a separate community and withdrew themselves of the seventy seven laws of Okomfo Anokye that were used by the traditional authorities to regulate village life. The abolishment of ritual killing deprived the *Asantehenes* of their best tool for using coercive force towards their subjects. One of Freeman's conversations with Kwaku Dua's successor King Kofi Kakari about the subject of ritual killing clarifies that King Kakari was well aware that the ritual killing of human beings was a successful example of the use of coercive force to keep his people in control (Freeman 1968:164). In his 2<sup>nd</sup> journal, Freeman reports that King Kakari told him: "If I were to abolish 'human sacrifices,' I should deprive myself of one of the most effectual means of keeping people in subjection." The Asante King

thus believed that the abolishment of ritual killing, which was part of the Asante indigenous belief, as Freeman hoped him to do, would be a threat to the persistence of the Asante state.

In most cases, however, the Asante traditional authorities reacted respectfully towards Christian missionaries and were hospitable towards them. But only in the end of the nineteenth century, the European missionaries opened the way to the spread of Christianity. The conversion of Asante to Christianity was more rapid after the Gold Coast became a colony in 1874 and especially after the annexation of Asante in 1901. In 1894, there were well over 12000 Asante Basel missionaries in the Asante area. As mentioned before, a real opportunity for missionary work occurred in 1896. After three years' work, the Basel missionaries had opened sixteen centres in the Asante Kingdom, with a total of 164 church members and 451 scholars; the Wesley Missionary society then had 1,500 church attendants and 675 scholars (in Sunday and day schools) in eight centres and 7600 Asante converts. Then, in 1900 came the Asante revolt, in the course of which most of the churches were destroyed. A fresh start was made; but for a long time the Christian religion was regarded by the Asante as an alien influence (Kimble 1963:153-154, Wyllie 1980:5-6).

In 1910, the three leading missions in the Asante area-the Presbyterians, the Wesleyan missionaries and the Roman Catholics were well established (Allman and Parker 2005). Between 1905 and 1941, there were, however, occasionally open hostilities between Presbyterian (who had taken over the Basel mission church during the First World War) who had become fanatic Christians and their chiefs in Kumasi. The Presbyterian missionaries separated converts from traditional society and removed them from allegiance to their traditional authorities and the duties that go with it (Platvoet 1979:562). The Presbyterians and the traditional authorities had, however, a common goal in fighting the members of the anti-witchcraft movement (Allman and Parker 2005). In 1920, they regarded the local Methodist preacher Samson also as a leader of such a movement and would not let him preach in their Churches. The Methodists (the former Wesley Missionary Society), however, made use of Oppong's movement as a basis for more enduring evangelical work. The effects in Asante were so marked that the District Synod changed their plans, so that in 1924 their Wesleyan Training College was opened in Kumasi instead of in the Gold Coast Colony. For Oppong, highly profited from the fact that there had already been some anti-witchcraft movements in Asante and that his adherents identified him with such movements, which in less than two years delivered him more than ten thousand converts (Allman and Parker 2005:, Kimble 1963:165).

The Wesleyan Mission in Kumasi was, however, not on good terms with both the traditional authorities and the then ruling Chief Commissioner, C.H. Armitage. The Chief Commissioner complained of the friction that had been caused by Catholic converts refusing to work either for the Administration or the Chiefs and that the progress of their schools was unfavourable with those of the Government (Letter of 5 June 1912, from Armitage to Governor).

Most mass Christian conversion took therefore place outside Kumasi for instance in the Fante area, where the Prophets Harris and Swatson were active and where new educated elites emerged that

accumulated private wealth. In order to get power, these elite concentrated on the colonial masters and their life style and they hoped that becoming a Christian would bring them material benefits (Kimble 1963:86-108, Miller 2003:198, footnote 10). In the coastal areas, Christian converts and traditional authorities tolerated each other more continuously because in these places, in contrast to the situation in Kumasi, the new colonial rulers had already undermined the traditional structures. The process of change in cultural values had developed itself to the extent that both chiefs and converts had chosen to shed their traditional life style. Consequently, they adapted themselves to the British European (Christian) lifestyle and attended mission schools. They understood that the olden traditional days were gone and that finding an interesting job, building up a materially pleasant life and accumulating wealth in the emerging capitalist economy meant that they had to focus on the new leaders: the Christian chiefs that had obtained their position from the colonial masters, and the British themselves (Miller 2003:198).

In conclusion, the traditional authorities in Kumasi had a strict policy on which religious leaders of Islam and Christianity were allowed to enter the city. The Islamic traders that entered Kumasi in the 15<sup>th</sup> century understood well that they could only trade in Kumasi when they would not attempt to proselytize the Asante. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, King Osei Tutu Kwame invited educated Moslems to come to live and work at his palace and praised them for their unique religious and intellectual qualities. Until 1850, educated Moslems who practiced a mild form of Islam were welcomed, while radical Moslems were less popular. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the traditional authorities in Kumasi feared for the influence of “orthodox Islam” and therefore all Moslems needed permission of the Asantehene before they could enter the city. Non-radical Moslems were, however, in most cases allowed to enter. Because of the strict policy towards Moslems, there were not many Islamic influences in the town before the sack of the city of Kumasi in 1874 and the impact of Islam did not exceed the level of taking elements from the Islamic religion.

European Christian missionaries did not enter Kumasi before the nineteenth century. In order to reach Kumasi, the missionaries would have to travel through a dense forest (see map), which would be a difficult tour with high costs and high health risks. Because death rates among missionaries at the coast were very high, most missionaries, however, simply did not make it so far as Kumasi. Those missionaries who had a chance of entering the interior often feared for the Asante, who were believed to have “cruel customs.” Therefore, the city of the Asante Kingdom was not the first place that missionaries thought of for bringing the Gospel.

The first missionary to enter Kumasi was the Wesleyan Methodist Thomas B. Freeman, but his mission was eventually not very successful. Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panin had his reservations towards Freeman’s mission and the Anglo-Asante wars did not help either in creating a good climate for missionary work. The Basel missionaries, who built a school and succeeded in converting some Asante between 1869 and 1874, were not allowed to enter the town anymore for permanent stay until

1896. Then they booked some successes but after that year, their results were nil. In 1880, the Catholics were welcomed by Asantehene Mensa Bonsu, but also these missionaries did not have much success with their mission. Consequently, mass Christian conversion took place in Kumasi before the beginning of the twentieth century.

The missions became established only, after the Asante Kingdom had fallen and the country had been “opened up” by the traders and administrators, and made receptive to Western influences. Before that time, the traditional authorities controlled all foreign influence, because they were too afraid that the impact of the world religions Islam and Christianity would threaten the persistence of the Asante state. In addition, many Asante were also afraid to convert to Christianity, which for some issues meant that they had to disobey their King. For others, the chance of breaking out of the traditional communities and town rules was a reason to be converted to Christianity. This was especially interesting for those Asante whose status within the society was low and who had lived on the margin of the jural corporateness of their Kingdom. This was the case for slaves of whom many felt attractive to the Basel missionaries, barrenness women and also princes, such as the Asante Wesley missionary princes Ansa and Nkwantabisa, who could not become King according to the matrilineal Asante kin system. Many of these Asante converted to Christianity because they hoped it would increase their social status (Middleton 1983:4). The interference of the missionaries (especially those of the Basel and the Wesleyan mission) in the social stratification of the Asante society, their alternative set of living rules, the fact that Christians lived in a separate area of the town (*salem*) and the religious activities of the missionaries caused tensions between converts and the Asante traditional authorities.

In general, the tensions between European missionaries and the traditional authorities were greater than the tensions between Moslems and these authorities, as the Moslems’ first interest was trade and in the nineteenth century also the exercise of intellectual services for the Asantehene. For this reason, they did not want to jeopardize their relationship with the Asante for the sake of their religion. In addition, the Moslems that were allowed to enter Kumasi practiced a mild form of Islam that in essence was less threatening to the persistence of the Asante state than the doctrinal form of Christianity that the Wesleyan and Basel missionaries had introduced. Most Moslems were more integrated than Christians as Moslems did not live in separate living areas. The precautions of the Asante traditional authorities towards foreign religious influences and the adaptation of the foreign world religions into the indigenous religion caused that the Asante Kingdom persisted for almost two centuries (1701-1896) and was the last area of present day Ghana to be colonized by the British. Also, in comparison with other cultural groups in Ghana, the Asante showed a remarkable resistance against foreigners, who, due to the attitude of the traditional authorities towards foreign ideas in the pre-colonial period had relatively little impact on their culture and way of life.

## Conclusion

In this Paper, I have attempted to answer the question to what extent and why chieftaincy in Kumasi and its surrounding villages has persisted during the pre-colonial period. I have shown that in the pre-colonial period, *Asanteman* was legitimated by both coercive force and consent. In 1901, *Asanteman* lost its function as the political institution of an autonomous state. I have made it clear that the end of the Asante state did mean the end to the coercive force used by that state. In 1872, for instance, the practice of ritually killing human beings was abolished. The end of the Asante state, did however, not mean the end of consent for *Asanteman* as the indigenous state religion based political institution. Religiously, there was no reason for the fall of the Asante state as the Kumasi ruling elite had incorporated Islamic and Christian religious elements into the indigenous Asante belief that legitimated the Asante state. This way both indigenous Asante believers, Christians and Moslems agreed with the persistence of the Asante state in its pre-colonial phase.

In the legitimacy of chieftaincy in Greater Kumasi, indigenous religious symbols and rituals such as “The Golden Stool,” the swearing of an oath and the *Odwira* festival play an important role. The main question in this paper is concerned with the character of these symbols. The historian Ivor Wilks believes that since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Asante society is fully secularised, including its most important religious symbol that of “The Golden Stool.” McCaskie, instead, makes the statement that there was a great discontinuity between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Asante, due to the fall of the Asante state and the disappearance of religious control over the Asante society. The 1880s marked, according to McCaskie, the end of an integrated indigenous belief system, because of the introduction of European Christianity and European modern life styles. I disagree with both historians. Just like Ivor Wilks, I believe that there has been a continuity of life in Kumasi in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contradiction to Wilks, however, I do not believe that at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the indigenous worldview was secularised, because of the high degree of development of the political institution (*Asanteman*) and of the bureaucratization of the society. For even though the Asante society became more secularized, the Asante kept venerating their ancestral spirits, the Asante state deities and kept their respect for “The Golden Stool.” Just like McCaskie, I believe that the indigenous worldview can not be understood without knowledge of the indigenous religion that played a highly important role in the Asante worldview. In contradiction to McCaskie (1995:100), I believe, however, that religiously speaking, there was no discontinuity between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Asante society. For before the 1880s, the Asante were not in full control of all foreign religious influences. In terms of their “other worldly” power they *could* not be in full control because they were indigenous religious believers and being out of spiritual control is one of the main characteristics of the Asante indigenous religion. In terms of their “this worldly” power, I believe that McCaskie also overestimates the control that Asante rulers could exercise over their subjects as he characterises *Asanteman* as a centralised political institution, while in fact *Asanteman* was relatively decentralised.

To sum up, I have argued in this Paper, and will argue in the rest of this paper that *Asanteman* has persisted, because the ruling elite succeeded in integrating not only European Christian but earlier on also Islamic elements into the indigenous belief system, which from the beginning until the end of the pre-colonial period caused the relationship between Asante indigenous believers, Moslems and Christians to be one of “balanced tension.” By allowing Christians and Moslems to a certain extent to bring in elements to the indigenous belief, there was no strong reason for resistance among the subjects towards *Asanteman*. The early acceptance of the Kumasi ruling elite of religious elements of foreign beliefs explains why Christianity and Islam did not undermine *Asanteman* and *Asantemanhyiamu* even though Christian conversion caused tensions between Asante subjects and their traditional authorities in the nineteenth century. It also explains why massive conversion took place for the majority outside Kumasi, among the coastal people and Asante refugees. After all, indigenous believers as well as Christians and Moslems could continue to identify themselves with the Asante indigenous political institution.