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THE ASANTE CONQUEST OF AHAFO IN THE 18TH CENTURY: A HISTORICAL LEGACY

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Ahafo at the moment is part of the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana. Until the creation of this administrative region in April 1959, the area constituted part of Asante politically, administratively and traditionally. This paper seeks to examine how the Ahafo territory was captured and annexed by the Asante in the eighteenth century.

The land which the Ahafo occupy today originally belonged to the Aowin. Fynn states that "by 1715, Aowin, had overrun Sefwi and Ahafo and had also begun the conquest of the area around 'Socco' [Nsoko].¹ Fynn's claim is indeed borne out by the observations on Ahafo country made by a British official in 1899. The official states: "The land on which the Ahafo now live formerly belonged to the kings of Awoin, [sic] or at least to one of them called Abirimuru Akwojan."² The official goes on to say that the territory at that time seems to have been "almost uninhabited."³ Wilks⁴ and Arhin⁵ also note that the Ahafo country was a thinly populated forestland and had earlier been claimed by the Aowin.

¹ J. K. Fynn, "The structure of Greater Ashanti: Another View," in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* Vol. XV No1, Legon, June 1974, p.6.

² National Archives of Ghana, Accra, ADM11/1137: Notes on the Country of Ahafo 10th July, 1899.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the Structure and Evolution of a political Order*. London, Cambridge University Press.(C.U.P), 1975, p.51.

⁵ Kwame Arhin "The structure of Greater Asante: A Re-statement". Institute of African Studies, Legon, unpublished, dd 17th January, 1977, p.17.

A contrary view is that “unlike other Akan areas, Ahafo has no autochthones”.⁶ This view points out that most Ahafo people concede that they are all strangers, thereby acknowledging that settlement in the area is only a little more than two centuries old.⁷ This implies that pre-Asante Ahafo owned by the Aowin was virtually an uninhabited land. This view appears to be correct. The reason is that the origins of all settlers in Ahafo today can be traced to places outside the district. The British account on Ahafo, already referred to above asserts that “people from Kumasi and other towns and even from Denkera came and settled on the land...”.⁸ It may therefore be concluded that pre-Asante Ahafo was probably without much human population, even though by 1715 the Aowin had acquired it and incorporated it into their country.

The Aowin acquisition of Ahafo was, however, short-lived. The Asante seem to have conquered the land and annexed it, sometime between the 1720s and 1750s. Political and economic interests are held up as the main consideration for the Asante –Aowin clash in Ahafo.⁹ If by 1715 Aowin had over-run Ahafo as is claimed by Fynn, then when did Asante wrest it from the Aowin? Some historians claim that the Asante conquest of Ahafo occurred in the reign of Asantehene Opoku Ware I, during the Abirimoro war. Ward¹⁰, Fuller¹¹, Fynn¹² and Osei Kwadwo¹³ do agree that Opoku Ware fought two wars against the Akyem, (that is Akyem Kotoku) and it was during one of the Akyem campaigns that Abirimoro, an Aowin chief, invaded

⁶ John Dunn and A.F. Robertson, *Dependence and Opportunity; Political Change in Ahafo*, London, C.U.P. 1973, p.12.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ N.A.G, Accra, ADM11/1137: “Notes on the Country of Ahafo” 10th July, 1899.

⁹ J.K Fynn, “The structure of Greater Asante: A Re-statement” in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, vol. Xv, no.1, p.6.

¹⁰ W.E.F. Ward, *A History of the Ghana*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1948, p.130.

¹¹ Francis Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty: Ashanti*, 2nd Ed. London, Frank Cass and Co Ltd, 1968, p.26.

¹² J.K. Fynn, *Asante and its Neighbours 1700-1807*, London, Longman, 1971, p.61.

¹³ Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*, Kumasi, Monarch Publication, 1994, p.12.

Kumasi and sacked it; that it was this invasion of Kumasi which sparked off the Abirimoro war culminating in the Asante conquest of Ahafo. On the basis of this, one can extrapolate the date or time of the Asante conquest of Ahafo by carefully examining when the Asante-Akyem wars were fought during the reign of Opoku Ware I.

The first important issue is to determine the dates of Opoku Ware's reign. One estimate is that the enstoolment of Opoku Ware I must have taken place between 1718 and 1722,¹⁴ because there is incontrovertible evidence that Osei Tutu died in 1717.¹⁵ His death came about as a result of a war between the Asante and the Akyem.¹⁶ His death threw Asante into confusion.¹⁷ Therefore, it would definitely take some time before his successor could be enstooled. Going by this premise, then, it was possible that Opoku Ware may have been enstooled in either late 1717 or early 1718.

Shortly after his enstoolment as Asantehene, Opoku Ware decided to continue the war against the Akyem, to avenge the defeat of the Asante under his immediate predecessor.¹⁸ He therefore took arms and went to engage the Akyem in another encounter.¹⁹ This means that the first Asante-Akyem war under Opoku Ware must have taken place in either 1718 or 1719. With respect to the second war, both Fynn and Arhin contend that it took place in 1742.²⁰

With the dates of the two Asante-Akyem hostilities now established, the task now is to find out which of them was associated with the Aowin or Abirimoro invasion of Kumasi. It can be argued

¹⁴ Fynn, *Asante*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Adu Boahen, "When did Osei Tutu Die?" *Transaction of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. XVI, No 1, Legon, June 1975. p. 92; J.K Fynn "The Structure of Greater Ashanti," in the *Transaction of Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. XV, p.7. See also Affrifah, K. *The Akyem Factor*, p.37. Affrifah relies on Bowdich and Dupuis.

¹⁶ Kofi Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor in Ghana's History 1700-1875*. Ghana Universities Press (GUP) 2000, p. 37.

¹⁷ Fynn "The structure of Greater Ashanti" *Transaction of Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. xv, p.7.

¹⁸ Osei Kwadwo, *Asante*, p. 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Kwame Arhin "the Structure of Greater Ashanti 1700-1824". *Journal of African History*, Vol. viii, no.1, published in Britain (1967) p.73; Fynn, *Asante* pp 61-62. cf also Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor*, p.37.

that if the said Abirimoro invasion of Kumasi took place during the first Asante-Akyem war, then, the Asante conquest of Ahafo may have occurred between 1721 and 1722. This date seems to be supported by Fynn who writes that “between 1721 and 1722 the Asante and the Aowin fought many bloody battles in which the gold-rich Aowin suffered its greatest defeat”.²¹

On the other hand Fuller thinks that the Abirimoro invasion of Kumasi was linked with the second Akyem war in 1742. He states that “the Akims rose up in arms again, and Opoku’s second and last invasion occurred. He invaded Akim, and while the army was there, Ebrimoro, king of the Sefwis...took this occasion to pounce on Coomassie and sack it...”.²² Going by this account, then, the Asante conquest of Ahafo might have taken place in 1744 –1745 as has been suggested by Arhin.²³ Of these two suggested dates, the former seems more probable. This is because it is based on contemporary European documentary evidence. For example, Fynn quotes one of such pieces of evidence to substantiate Asante defeat of Aowin. It states that “in March 1719 the Dutch reported that although the protracted war between the Asante and the Akyem had ended, there was no prospect of a lasting peace in the country because the Asante would most certainly revenge themselves on the Twifo, the Wassa and the Aowin who had sacked two or three Asante villages and had stolen a number of Asante. The Asante however appear to have decided to leave the Twifo and the Wassa alone for the time being and to concentrate on the Aowin....The gold-rich Aowin suffered its greatest defeat....The Asante sold large numbers of the Aowin whom they had captured at Cape Coast, Anomabo and Elmina”.²⁴

From the above evidence it may be suggested that the Asante conquest of Ahafo occurred between 1719 and 1722. The three years duration seems to square up with the Amakye Bari tradition which

²¹ Fynn *Asante* pp 61 –62.

²² Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty*, p..26.

²³ Kwame Arhin, “The Structure of Greater Ashanti: A Re-statement”, I.A.S Legon, unpublished, p.22.

²⁴ Letter from Director-General W. Butler and Council, Elmina Castle, 27th March, 1719, WIC104, cited by Fynn, *Asante* pp. 61-62. cf also Affrifa, *The Akyem Factor*, p.41.

states that 'the Abirimoro war lasted for three years'.²⁵ It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Asante conquest of Ahafo took place sometime in the 1719 –1722 period.

Who undertook the conquest for Asante? The conquest has been attributed variously to Osei Tutu,²⁶ Opoku Ware I²⁷ and Amankwa Tia,²⁸ the Bantamahene and the commander of the Asante army. Dupuis and Wilks for example attribute the conquest of Ahafo to Osei Tutu. Dupuis states that Osei Tutu subdued "a great extent of country beyond the Tando: [Tano] river."²⁹

Another writer or opinion ascribes the conquest to Amankwa Tia.³⁰ With the exception of Ward who indicates that it was the first Amankwa Tia³¹ who undertook the expedition, the others just simply mention Amankwa Tia without tagging him, thereby making identification very difficult, since there were several Bantama chiefs with that name.

Yet a third opinion is that the expedition was carried out by Opoku Ware himself. According to this view: 'the king Opoku Ware started in forced marches to pursue the invaders. At Korowa-daso he overtook, attacked and completely conquered them'.³² A fourth view attributes the conquest of Ahafo to Kumasi wing chiefs, adding that "the Asantehene dispatched his Kumasi wing chiefs in pursuit through the Western forest".³³

²⁵ Institute of African Studies, Legon IAS /AS/ 175: Amakye Bari Stool History, recorded by J. Agyemang Duah, 3rd March, 1966.

²⁶ Joseph Dupuis *Journal of A Residence in Ashanti*, 2nd ed, London, Henry Colborn, 1824, p. 230. Wilks, *Asante*, p.51.

²⁷ C.C Reinderf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1966, p. 82 ; see also Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty*, p.26.

²⁸ Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty*. p. 26. Ward, *Ghana* p. 130; Fynn *Asante* p. 61.

²⁹ Joseph Dupuis *Journal of A Residence in Ashanti* 2nd ed, London, Henry Colborn, 1824, p.230; Wilks, *Asante*, p. 61.

³⁰ Fuller *A Vanished Dynasty*, p. 26; Ward, *Ghana*, p. 130; Fynn *Asante*, p. 61.

³¹ Ward, *Ghana*, p. 130.

³² C.C Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1966, p. 82.

³³ A.F Robertson, "Histories and Political Opposition in Ahafo Ghana" in *Africa*, vol XLIII, No 1, 1973, p. 51.

All these views “are fraught with misconceptions, and therefore need to be corrected.”³⁴ In the first place, the claims of both Dupuis and Wilks that Osei Tutu conquered and annexed Ahafo is incorrect and impossible. This is simply because he died in 1717, therefore, it could not have been possible for him to conquer Ahafo, if the event occurred between 1719 and 1722 as we have suggested. Similarly, Reindorf seems to have erred by crediting Opoku Ware with the conquest of Ahafo.

As for Robertson’s version, it is misleading though much nearer to the truth because the names of the specific wing chiefs are not mentioned.³⁵ By the blanket term, he makes all the wing chiefs of Kumasi share the honour of the conquest of Ahafo. It cannot be gainsaid that Opoku Ware I went to the Akyem war with all his wing chiefs. But it could not have been feasible to delegate all of them to carry out the pursuit and conquest of Abirimoro. Naturally, he would only send some of them from the Akyem front to perform the task.

Finally, the claim of Ward, Fuller and Fynn that Amankwa Tia undertook the expedition is also not correct. The conquest of Ahafo was not executed by Amankwa Tia, the Bantamahene who was also the Kontihene of Kumasi. As intimated earlier, Ward states that it was the first Amankwa Tia who was appointed by Opoku Ware to pursue Abirimoro. But Fynn suggests that the first Amankwa Tia was killed in the civil war that followed the disastrous death of Osei Tutu in 1717. Quoting contemporary European sources in support of his claim, he writes: ‘in October, 1718, it was learnt at Axim that the Asjantese are very much at variance amongst themselves, that Aman Coya [Amankwa Tia] had died there; and that the Country was in great confusion’.³⁶ If Fynn is right, it can be argued that at the time of the outbreak of the fresh Asante-Akyem hostilities in either late 1718 or early 1719, the Bantamahene was the second Amankwa Tia and not the first, as Ward would have us believe.

If the campaign in Ahafo was not undertaken by Opoku Ware or Amankwa Tia or the Kumasi wing chiefs, then who did? Both the traditions of Ahafo and Asante as well as documentary evidence

³⁴ Kwame Osei Kwarteng *A Political History of Mim, 1896-1966*, B. A. Long Essay, U.C.C., History Department, 1991 .p.2.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.3

³⁶ Fynn “The Structure of Greater Ashanti” p.7.

conclusively agree that the chiefs of Akwaboa,³⁷ Nkawie-panin,³⁸ Nyinahin,³⁹ Ofenano or Amakye Bari,⁴⁰ Assuowin,⁴¹ the Buaso Odikro (Headman) and the Hiahene⁴² undertook the Abirimoro war and conquered Ahafo for Asante.⁴³ The sources relate that whilst Opoku Ware was engaged in a war with the Akyem, the terrible news of Abirimoro's invasion of Kumasi reached him at the battlefield in Akyem. He instantly dispatched Akyempimhene, Owusu Afriyie and Bantamahene Amankwa Tia to pursue the invaders. The Akyempimhene accepted the request but deputed his younger brother, Oheneba Sabin-Hiahene, Nyinahinhene, Nkawie-paninhene and the Buaso Odikro to carry out the assignment. In like manner, Amankwa Tia delegated the chief of Akwaboa, Brefo Apaw, Ofenano Barihene, Gyedu Kumanin, and Assuonwinhene Kofi Akyena, to undertake the expedition for him.

These Asante warriors, after two initial skirmishes at Mpassaso and Mamfo, (in the Ahafo-Ano District of Asante Region, where Abirimoro pitched his camp), chased Abirimoro and his forces across the Tano and Bia rivers to as far as the bank of river Manza in what is now La Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). At this point the Asante soldiers decided to return to Kumasi⁴⁴ to inform the Asantehene and Asanteman of the outcome of the campaign.

Offiano-Bari tradition stipulates that the war lasted three years. During that time the Asantehene became apprehensive, because he

³⁷ I.A.S/AS/17: Akwaboa Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah, April 1963, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon.

³⁸ IAS/AS/39 Bantama Stool History, part I, recorded by Agyemang Duah, November 1962, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon.

³⁹ IAS/AS/107: Nyinahin Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah, January, 1964, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon.

⁴⁰ IAS/AS/175 Amakye Bari Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah.

⁴¹ IAS/AS/188 :Assuonwin Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah, 17 November 1966, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon.

⁴² IAS/AS/154 :Hia Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah, 2 February, 1965, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon.

⁴³ IAS/AS/205: Pomaakrom Stool History, recorded by Agyemang Duah, 7 July, 1967, Institute of Africa Studies, Legon. See also IAS/AS/211:Kwaku Nyuma Stool History recorded by Agyemang Duah 25 November 1967, Institute of Africa Studies Legon.

⁴⁴ Kwarteng, *A Political History of Mim: 1896-1966*, p.5.

was not hearing much from the war front. Accordingly, he dispatched the Oyokohene of Kumasi to go and find out what was happening. The Oyokohene and his group met the returning Asante warriors at a place, which became known as Akyerensua.⁴⁵

Finally, when the Asante fighters returned to Kumasi and reported their military exploits to Asantehene Opoku Ware I, he presented the newly conquered territory to them as a gift. Each of them was asked to take care of or control the area he had conquered.⁴⁶

It was from this time that the Kumasi wing chiefs, both the Abirimoro war veterans and non-Abirimoro warriors became involved in the colonization of Ahafo. They settled people of Asante, Akyem and Denkyira backgrounds in Ahafo to perform various duties to the Asantehene and his wing chiefs; the most outstanding of them was hunting. Hence the name Ahafo (hunters) given to the area. In all, twenty-eight colonies were established. These were Acherensua, Hwidiem, Goaso, Kukuom, Mim, Kenyasi I and II, Gyedu, Ntotroso, Mehame, Sienna, Kwaku Nyuma, Asufufuo, Sienchem, Dadiesoaba, Ayomso, Fawohoyeden, Noberkaw, Kwapong, Wamahinso, Nkaseim, Sankore, Dantano, Anwiam, Etwineto, Akrodie, Pomaakrom and Abuom.

From the pieces of evidence adduced so far it can be concluded that greater part of Ahafo land was captured and annexed to Asante between 1721 and 1722 through the instrumentality of the chiefs of Akwaboa, Hia, Bari-Offinano, Nyinahin, Assuowin and Nkawie-panin as well as the Buaso Odikro. Again the conquered territory was systematically colonized by the Kumasi-wing chiefs.

⁴⁵ IAS/AS/175: Amakye Bari Stool History, Agyemang Duah.

⁴⁶ Kwarteng, *A political History of Mim: 1896-1966*, p.6.