

Chieftaincy and the Implantation of Christianity: An analysis of the Contact between the Chiefs and the Activities of the European Missionaries in Ghana, 1482-1969



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ABSTRACT

Chieftaincy as an institution was in existence before the advent of the Europeans in West Africa in the second decade of the fifteenth century. The Europeans first arrived on the coast of modern Ghana in 1471. Christianity, on the other hand, started in the Gold Coast in 1482 when Don Diego d'Azambuja came to the country with some European Christian missionaries, (E.C.M.) specifically, the Roman Catholic priests from Portugal. As foreigners, the E.C.M. needed to contact the indigenes. The Chiefs, both political and religious leaders, were the first point of call by these missionaries as custom demands. As custodians of the land, the Chiefs provided places for the construction of chapels and other social amenities set up by the various Christian missions which operated in Ghana. This meant that there was an interaction between the Chiefs and the E.C.Ms. in Ghana. This paper, which is multi-sourced, uses archival data, interviews and scholarly secondary sources in the form of books and journal articles, to examine how the E.C.M. fared in the hands of the Chiefs in Ghana (the Gold Coast). To this end, the paper offers an overview of the position of the chiefs in pre-colonial and colonial Ghana, the historical interaction between the chiefs and the E.C.M. The paper argues that the efforts of the E.C.M. in Ghana would have been fruitless had it not been the support they received from the host communities led by their chiefs.

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INTRODUCTION

The Europeans first arrived in West Africa during the second decade of the fifteenth century. Portugal was the first European nation to take such initiative.² The Portuguese, however, reached the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1471. Apart from Portugal, other European nations such as Spain, Britain, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Germany also came to West Africa. It is a known fact that even though several reasons such as introduction of Christianity and scientific curiosity motivated the coming of the early European merchants to West Africa, trade was the principal driving force that brought them.³ It was largely due to the tremendous benefits they derived from their commercial enterprise with the indigenes that made them to have a permanent settlement in these areas. This explains why they built several forts and castles in West Africa, which did not only offer them protection but also served as warehouses where they kept their goods.

In the case of the Gold Coast, now Ghana, the first castle known as the Elmina Castle was built by the Portuguese in 1482. It was, in this castle, that Christianity began in the Gold Coast. The first Christian mass was held on Sunday, 20th January, 1482 in Elmina.⁴ This mass heralded the missionary activities in the Gold Coast. The early missionary inroads into the Gold Coast had the blessing of the chiefs. This study is thus premised on the assumption that the activities of

² Albert Adu Boahen, Jacob Ade Ajaye & Michael Tidy, *Topics in West African History*. Second Edition (UK: Longman Group Ltd., 1986), 102.

³ Henry McWilliam, and Michael Kwamina-Po, *The Development of Education in Ghana*. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1975), 17.

⁴ Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816* (Leiden: E. J Brill, 1986), 4 ; Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*. (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 17 ; Ralph M. Wiltgen, "Gold Coast Mission History, 1471-1880." (Illinois: Divine Word Publication, 1956), 1.

the E.C.Ms. in Ghana could not have been possible without the help of the chiefs otherwise they would have to wait for official colonization.

The missions sent missionaries to the field and some relied on indigenes for the propagation of the gospel to the West Africans.⁵ In their endeavour to spread the gospel across the length and breadth of the Gold Coast, the missionaries could not work in isolation. They had to engage with the chiefs on whose lands the missionaries carried out their activities.

This article assesses the interaction between the chiefs and the missionaries in the latter's activities in Ghana. It also discusses the chieftaincy institution before its encounter with the E.C.Ms., colonial and the post-colonial periods. For the purpose of this article, the Akan chieftaincy institution would be used but where necessary examples would be cited from other Ghanaian societies to enhance the analyses of the study. The arrival of the E.C.Ms. and their activities is also discussed. The role of the chiefs in the activities of the E.C.Ms. is examined to show how the missionaries fared in the hands of the traditional rulers in carrying out their activities. The article ends with a conclusion. An understanding of chieftaincy in the activities of the E.C.Ms. in Ghana requires a deeper historical insight. To this end, efforts are made to historicize how the chieftaincy institution fared before, during and after colonial rule.

Chieftaincy in pre-colonial era

As earlier pointed out, chieftaincy as an institution was in existence before the arrival of the Europeans in the Gold Coast.⁶ As Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX noted, every village, town, city and society had its own leader who supervised and championed the welfare of the people.⁷ It is thus important to explain the terms 'chieftaincy' and 'chief' in the context of this study. Chieftaincy, according to S. A. Brobbey, which resonates with us, "is the institution through which the system of African traditional rule was conducted."⁸ This definition implied that chieftaincy is the act of ruling, governing or steering the affairs of a specific area.⁹ A chief, on the other hand, denotes a leader of a group or clan installed according to the customary laws of a specific traditional area.¹⁰ As Pobee points out, a chief was "once judge, commander-in-chief, legislator, and executive and administrative head of the community."¹¹

It must be stated here that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana is an age-old institution that has been clothed with religious and political powers. Prior to the annexation of Ghana, the authority of the chiefs evolved in correspondence with changing conditions that reflected in almost every aspect of the people.¹²

Religiously, the chiefs and their female co-rulers were the bridge between their communities and the royal ancestral spirits from whom the chiefs received their legitimacy and favours. Politically, the chiefs controlled all authority. They had executive, legislative and judicial powers.¹³ This is corroborated by Justice Acquah who notes that "the various indigenous states had a well-organized system of governance constituted by the chief and his council of elders."¹⁴ This also explains why the chiefs had their own courts in which cases were adjudicated for peace and tranquillity in the community.

The chiefs and their female co-rulers were thus the pivot around which their communities revolved.¹⁵ They wielded such powers that they could even impose the death penalty on offenders, war captives and slaves. This action largely enabled the chiefs to keep their people in subjection. A former Asantehene, Kwaku Dua Panin, confirmed this when he pointed out that: "If I were to abolish human sacrifices, I should deprive myself of one of the most effective means of keeping my people in subjection."¹⁶

Economically, in the pre-colonial era, the chiefs and their female co-rulers were custodian of all farmlands which were believed to belong to their ancestors.¹⁷ The chief had certain rights and responsibilities as the custodian of the land. According to Busia, the chief was "responsible for the defence of the land by law or by arms. He had also certain

⁵ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 18; O. I. Maureen, *Theophilus Opoku-Indigenous Pastor and Missionary Theologian, 1842-1913*. (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2014), 22.

⁶ K. B. Dickson, "Chieftaincy, Chiefs and National Development", (A Seminar Paper delivered at the National House of Chiefs, Kumasi, on Thursday, 11th December, 1986), 2.

⁷ Interview with Nana Kwesi Agyeman IX, Omanhene of Lower Dixcove Traditional Area, aged 55, at the House of Chiefs, Sekondi-Takoradi on 24-01-12.

⁸ Stephen Alan Brobbey, *The Law of Chieftaincy in Ghana*. (Accra: Advanced Legal Publications, 2008), 2.

⁹ John. S. Pobee, "Church and State in the Gold Coast in the Vasco da Gama Era, 1492 – 1947." In the *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Oxford University Press, 1975), 219.

¹⁰ Brobbey, *The Law of Chieftaincy in Ghana*, 2.

¹¹ Pobee, "Church and State in the Gold Coast", 219.

¹² B. N. Arhin, "Chieftaincy, An Overview." In *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*. Edited by Irene K. Odotei and Albert K. Awedoba (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006), 27.

¹³ Louise Muller, *Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana: An Explanation of the Persistence of a Traditional Political Institution in West Africa* (Munster: LIT VERLAG, 2013), 19.

¹⁴ J. K. G. Acquah, "The Judicial Role of the Chief in Democratic Governance." In *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*. Edited by Irene K. Odotei and Albert K. Awedoba (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006), 66.

¹⁵ Muller, *Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

defined rights which were co-existent with the rights of lineages and individuals in his division.¹⁸ The chief was entitled to be served by their subjects. The people were required to work on the chief's farm for several days. Any treasure found on the land was considered the property of the stool and, as such, must be sent to the chief.¹⁹

The chiefs and their female co-rulers during the pre-colonial period were the final arbiters in the administration of justice. Their courts were used to deal with all manner of offences ranging from criminal offences to religious offences. Citing J. E. Casely Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions*, Acquah throws light on the nature of the judicial system in the pre-colonial period:

The King is the Chief Magistrate of the Community and ... there are minor Courts exercising concurrent, but not coordinate, jurisdiction with the King's Court. You have first the Courts of Headmen, then Chief's Courts and finally, the King's Court, which is both a Court of first instance and a Court of Appeal. In suitable cases, the King's Court can require a matter before a minor court to be brought up before it for adjudication.²⁰

Offences against the state that could attract sanctions from the chief included but not restricted to murder, sexual offences, assaults, stealing, treason and cowardice.²¹ The chiefs could impose punishments on all offenders including severe punishments such as death and banishment from the community. The powers of the chiefs were whittled down considerably when colonialism was imposed on the Ghanaian society. It is therefore necessary to discuss how the traditional rulers fared during the colonial period.

Chieftaincy in the colonial era

The view that the Bond of 1844 that heralded colonial rule in the Gold Coast is still an ongoing debate among scholars and historians. Scholars of law and some historians trace the origin of colonialism in Ghana to the signing of the Bond of 1844. This school of thought is of the view that by signing the bond, the chiefs surrendered their sovereignty, including their judicial powers to the British. Acquah, for example, asserts that "the coastal chiefs signing the Bond of 1844 ... claimed protection from the British and agreed to abide by British jurisprudence."²² This, they say, explains why the British proclaimed these areas as their colony after the defeat of Asante in 1874.

Some historians, on the other hand, have debunked this claim. As Albert Adu Boahen argues, "it [the bond] cannot be said to be the Magna Carta of Ghana or the legal basis of British rule in Ghana."²³ In his opinion:

the bond was not even a treaty between the British and the Fante and their allies, but a mere declaration on the part of the latter, and the British who prepared it never considered themselves bound by it. ...the signatory chiefs were merely recognising the power that had already been exercised.²⁴

Going by the view of Adu Boahen, by 1874 when the British defeated Asante and subsequently annexed the Colony, the Bond of 1844 had long become obsolete. Be that as it may, the Bond of 1844 was part of the measures which contributed to the growth of British power and jurisdiction in Ghana. The British used this method to impose its pre-eminence on the people which finally culminated in the annexation of the Gold Coast.

Historically, the signing of fraudulent treaties by the European powers during the era of partition represented one of the significant methods they used to impose their sway on the people of Africa. It is conspicuous from the available literature on the European partition of Africa that the two main methods that the European nations used to annex the African countries were the signing of treaties and military conquests. It is thus argued that even though treaties were signed in the Gold Coast such as the Peace Treaty of 1831 by Captain George Maclean and the Bond of 1844 by Commander Hill, it was through military conquest, in this case, the Sagrenti War of 1874 that led to the British colonization of the Gold Coast.

Having seen the circumstances that led to the annexation of Ghana, it is now time to discuss how the institution of chieftaincy fared during this era. The roles of the chiefs were altered drastically during the colonial era. Its functions and organizations were shaped by the political activities of the colonizers such as British Ordinances.²⁵ Such ordinances included the Provincial Council of Chiefs and the Native Administrative Ordinance introduced by Sir Gordon Guggisberg in 1925 and 1927 respectively.²⁶

These developments, undoubtedly, made the chiefs agents of the colonial government. They were used as the main tool of administering the Gold Coasters. This practice known as the indirect rule saw the chiefs being the conduit

¹⁸ Kofi Abrefa Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1968), 44.

¹⁹ Ibid, 48.

²⁰ Acquah, "The Judicial Role of the Chief in Democratic Governance", 66.

²¹ Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, 66.

²² Acquah, "The Judicial Role of the Chief in Democratic Governance", 67.

²³ Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Arhin, "Chieftaincy, An Overview", 28

²⁶ Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 115-116 ; Arhin, "Chieftaincy, An Overview", 28.

that the British colonial authorities used to rule the people.²⁷ The colonial authorities found this policy favourable. This explains why they appointed chiefs in acephalous communities in areas such as present day Upper West Region, Upper East Region, Volta Region and Savanna Region of Ghana that did not have traditional rulers.²⁸ This was done to ensure easy administration of these communities. During the colonial period, the powers of the chiefs to adjudicate on matters were limited. They became a mere sub-unit of the British judicial system. To this end, the chiefs could adjudicate on limited cases such as breaches of bye-laws that had been sanctioned to them by the colonial authorities.²⁹ They could also adjudicate cases that were civil in nature and could impose some fines. Under colonial rule, in spite of their incorporation into the colonial judicial system, chiefs were not only divested of many of their traditional powers but in some cases, were destooled for obstructing the conveyance of colonial justice arrangements. More profound to this issue was the fact that enstoolment or enskinment of chiefs in the colonial period required the approval of the British administration.³⁰

Politically, the powers of the chiefs were whittled down with the passage of various ordinances between 1874 and 1941. These ordinances placed the chiefs under the colonial administration.³¹ They thus lost their sovereignty to rule the local communities to the British. In spite of the foregoing, the colonial authority did not interfere in the religious functions of the chiefs. They were allowed to observe religious activities though most Ghanaians who have become Christians did not participate in the rituals as they deemed them to be 'idolatrous'.

Chieftaincy in post-colonial era

The 1951 Constitution of Ghana provided the country internal self-government and Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became the Leader of Government Business.³² This position was, however changed to Prime Minister in 1952. When the country attained its independence, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became the president of the republic. To this end, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah ruled alongside with the British Colonial Government, as a prime minister and later as an autonomous president of the republic. It is, thus, significant to interrogate the position of the chiefs in the era of internal self-government and independent Ghana.

It is significant to note that Nkrumah's era of Ghana did not treat the chieftaincy institution any better than its immediate colonial masters. It was even poorer than the era of colonization. This explains why as early as 1954, the Asanteman Council and the chiefs played crucial roles in the National Liberation Movement (N.L.M.) that was formed. Indeed, as Mary Owusu points out, the chiefs fought the cause of the National Liberation Movement.³³ The N.L.M. demanded for constitutional measures to protect the position of the chiefs in the early stages of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's administration.³⁴ Even though this demand of the N.L.M. yielded some results in the Independence Constitution of 1957 that "guaranteed the institution of chieftaincy in accordance with customary law and usage, provided for regional assemblies, mainly with local government functions, and provided for House of Chiefs in the regions,"³⁵ truly, the chiefs did not fare well under Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's administration.

The position of the chiefs in Ghana became worse from the mid-1950s. Richard Rathbone, attributes this situation to the extreme tension that ensued between the government and the traditional authority.³⁶ This epitomizes itself when the minister of local government was persuaded by the C.P.P. branch of Akyem to relocate the Akyem native court from Kyebi, which was the then capital of the kingdom to New Tafo, on the grounds that it was controlled by Okyehene and his elders.³⁷ Consequently, in 1954, the C.P.P. government moved the Akyem native court from Kyebi to New Tafo.³⁸ This act, which Richard Rathbone describes it as "a controversial political decision"³⁹ marred the relationship between Okyehene and Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah throughout the administration of the latter. Again, it reduced the hegemony of Okyehene, Nana Ofori Atta and set out the chain of events that finally culminated in his derecognition by the C.P.P. government.⁴⁰ The Asantehene was also asked by the C.P.P. government to explicitly declare his position towards party politics which he declined on the grounds that it was against his role as the father and traditional head of his subjects.⁴¹

²⁷ Arhin Brempong, *Transformations in traditional rule in Ghana (1951-1996)* (Accra: Sedco Publishers, 2001), 28 ; Dickson, "Chieftaincy, Chiefs and National Development", 6.

²⁸ Arhin, "Chieftaincy, An Overview", 28.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 3

³² Mary. A. S. Owusu, *Prempeh II and the Making of Modern Asante*. (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2009), 108.

³³ Ibid., 118.

³⁴ Arhin, "Chieftaincy, An Overview", 29.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-1960* (Oxford: Ohio University Press, 2000), 89.

³⁷ Ibid, 89-90.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁴¹ Ibid., 111.

From the above discussions, it is obvious that the Nkrumah regime did not have a cordial relationship with the chiefs. It is, thus, argued that the regime saw the chieftaincy institution as an extension of the colonial authority and treated it with contempt. Many chiefs were destooled because the regime perceived them to be anti C.P.P.⁴² These issues, largely alarmed the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs, so at its meeting held on 18th October, 1957 at Dodowa to deliberate on the position of the chiefs in Ghana, the Council noted that “the future of chieftaincy was at the present in the balance”⁴³ and that they were convinced that “there has been no evidence that the future of the chiefs is assured.”⁴⁴ Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah drastically reduced their judicial and political functions, broke their sources of funds and made them passive appendages of his government.⁴⁵

Nkrumah is quoted to have said that those chiefs who were not with the C.P.P would be chased until they run and leave their sandals behind. It must be said that despite Nkrumah’s antagonism towards the chieftaincy institution, he nonetheless appropriated some of its symbols. He took the name Osagyefo, the saviour, as his title. He instructed to be made for the president, the use of a state stool as chiefs sit on as a symbol of their authority. Thus, by 1966 when he was overthrown, Nkrumah had fully incorporated chieftaincy usages and nuances into governance even more than the colonial administration had done.

The post-Nkrumah regime saw a restoration of some of the powers that were taken away. The 1969 and 1979 constitutions all insulated the chieftaincy institution from state interference. The 1992 constitution placed the chieftaincy institution in the entrenched part of the constitution. The constitution made it impossible for parliament to enact a law to abolish the chieftaincy institution. The chieftaincy institution has proved to be a great ally of the state whether it be the colonial regime or the post-colonial regimes. This attitude of the chieftaincy pre-dated the colonial era. Having delineated into the chieftaincy institution during the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial periods, it is therefore expedient to attempt a discussion of the political and religious institution of chieftaincy in Ghana using the Akan example.

Chieftaincy as political institution

Before the coming of the colonialists, the chieftaincy institution was the main political institution of the Akan. The Akan political structure has the chieftaincy institution as its main pillar. The Akan political system has at its base the villages headed by an Odikro, while at the apex is the Omanhene who is assisted by his female co-ruler, the Obaahemaa. The Akan chief, before he performs his political duties, must first be enstooled. The enstoolment processes begin with the selection of a royal by the Obaahemaa assisted by the kingmakers.⁴⁶ The Obaahemaa has three chances to nominate a royal to sit on the vacant stool of his ancestors. If all the three chances are rejected, the kingmakers will be called upon to nominate a royal for the vacant stool.

Thus, by custom and tradition of the Akan, it was the sole prerogative of the Obaahemaa to make the nomination when a vacancy occurs. If she is not in a position to do so, she must delegate her authority to the kingmakers. Any nomination without her consent will be deemed to be null and void. This position was affirmed in a Supreme Court ruling on the Wenchi chieftaincy dispute.⁴⁷ Having been nominated and accepted by the kingmakers, the chief-elect is taken through the enstoolment rituals. The rituals begin with his confinement for a period of time. The period may range from seven days to forty days. The chief-elect during the period of confinement is taught the dos and don’ts of the stool he is to sit on. After the period of confinement, the chief-elect is led to the stool room to go through its rituals. It is in this room that he is introduced to his ancestors and on the stool of one of the ancestors, he is placed three times.

Having completed the stool room rituals, the chief-elect takes a public oath to complete his enstoolment rituals. The chief-elect is required to state before the people his willingness to serve them and not to turn his back on them. An example of the public oath among the Assin of Ghana states:

Me ne Nana Tibu	I am Nana Tibu...
Adere bu a wεpoma	If the machete breaks, it is replaced
Deε me mpanyimfoɔ dii kan beyee no	That which my elders came to do
εno na me nso merebetao so	I promise to come and continue
Se ɔman frε me anɔpa, awia anaa anadwo	Any time you call me, be it in the morning, afternoon or night
Mesuae yi yare	Save for being sick

⁴² Convention People’s Party which was the ruling party led by Kwame Nkrumah

⁴³ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 114.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Arhin, “Chieftaincy, An Overview”, 30.

⁴⁶ Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, 9.

⁴⁷ Vincent Assanful, “The Obaahemaa’s stool: symbol of political and religious authority in an Akan state,” *Oguua Journal of Religion and Human Values*, vol2, (2012): 75-85.

Sɛ mamma a	If I fail to respond
Meto ntam	I break the oath.

The political importance of the public oath is to tell the new chief that he is to serve the people according to their wishes and not his personal wishes. Having sworn the oath of office, the new chief, now clothed with political powers, is expected to lead his people in bringing development to his community. As a link between the spirit world and the physical world, it is imperative to briefly discuss the religious functions of the chieftaincy institution as well.

Chieftaincy as a religious institution

Chieftaincy is not only a political institution but also a religious one. An Akan chief is the religious head of his community and leads them to worship the sacred. The stool on which the Akan chief sits is a sacred one since the stool belongs to his ancestors on whose benevolence he rules his people. On sacred days such as the Adaye celebrations, the chief together with his female co-ruler, the Obaahemaa and the elders of the community go into the stool room to offer libation to the ancestors. As the religious leader of his community, he leads in all the rituals that are performed during the annual festival of his community. It is the responsibility of the chief to ensure that expiatory sacrifices are performed to cleanse the community of any dirt that would have been brought on it by the activities of some members of the community. A chief who fails to perform his religious roles may be destooled by his people if he is not able to defend himself. An example of such action can be said of destoolment charges against the chief of Assin Adubiase in the Central Region of Ghana. The case was brought against the chief by the Abusuapanyin of Assin Adubiase, the Obaahemaa and ten other family heads of Assin Adubiase. Among the destoolment charges against the chief was:

Nana Kese Tare II has locked up the palace. The queen mother, Abusuapanyin and the entire elders of Assin Adubiase have no access to the palace. This has made it impossible for us to pour libation during his absence on Akwasidae and other Adaye days. When confronted, his answer was that even church buildings are locked so he will never open the palace during his absence.⁴⁸

It is apparent from the destoolment charge above that the failure of a chief to allow stool room rituals to be performed by his elder could lead to his destoolment if found guilty of such charge. The Akan chief being the political and religious leader of his community has played and continues to play important roles in the life of his community. These roles of the chiefs made it possible for them to receive the European Christian missionaries when they brought Christianity to the Gold Coast in the 15th century. The next section discusses the role of the Akan chiefs in the missionary efforts of the Europeans.

E.C.M. Activities in the Ghana

As mentioned earlier, even though the fifteenth century marked the beginning of E.C.Ms. activities in the Gold Coast, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a flurry of their activities in that country. It is pertinent to throw light on the objectives for the activities of the E.C.M. in Africa. They came principally to introduce and spread not only Christianity but also Western civilization to Africans. This is confirmed by David Morrison who notes that the main objective for the work of the Missions in Africa was their desire to uplift the moral and material standards of the people of Africa by offering them the true religion and civilization.⁴⁹ This is also corroborated by S. K. Odamtten who states that the E.C.M. arrived in Ghana to mainly spread Christianity and Western Civilization.⁵⁰ This explains why evangelization became the significant method for the acquisition of converts. Ekow Evans-Budu points out that E.C.M. came to the Gold to “offer the Gospel to Africa as some recompense for the iniquity of slave-dealing and passionate pity for the people regarded as debased and brutalized by gross superstition and wicked practices.”⁵¹

Having seen the main aims for the coming of the E.C.M. to West Africa, it is pertinent to discuss the work of some of the missionary groups and the part played by the chiefs in their activities.

As has already been discussed, the Roman Catholic priests were the first to operate in the Gold Coast. This was when they came with Don Diego d’Azambuja of Portugal and served the first mass. The venue for this mass was Elmina where the Elmina castle now sits. The mass was made possible due to the warm reception granted the Portuguese expedition by the chief known in their records as Caramansa.⁵² This confirms that assertion by Pobee that:

⁴⁸ Destoolment proceedings of the Judicial Committee of Assin Attadasu Traditional Council.

⁴⁹ David. R. Morrison, *Education and Politics in Africa: The Tanzanian Case*. (London: C. Hurt & Company Ltd., 1976), 44.

⁵⁰ S. K. Odamtten, *The Missionary Factor in Ghana’s Development up to the 1880’s*. (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1978), 45.

⁵¹ E. E. Budu-Arthur, “The Effect of Missionary Activities on Some Akan Institutions from the Portuguese Settlement on the Mina Coast (1482-1916),” (Unpublished PhD Thesis presented to the University of Oxford, 1959), 444

⁵² Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 3

Obviously, the chief was an important king pin in the society. Thus not only was it inevitable that the missionary at one stage or other should meet the chief to pay his respects to him and to get his blessing for this foreign venture in his kingdom but also it was desirable for the missionary to make him his target. To win him over might facilitate the mission; to antagonize him might pave the way to failure and set-backs.⁵³

This does not repudiate the fact that the chief and his people resisted the initial attempts by the Portuguese and Catholic priests to have a permanent settlement at Elmina. At first, the chief did not want to give the Portuguese a land for a permanent settlement as he reasoned that friends always live better if they stay apart and occasionally visit one another. It, however took the perseverance of the Portuguese and the hospitality of the people of Elmina for the former to acquire land for the establishment of the castle. This occasioned the statement that: "The sea and the land being neighbours are continually at variance and contending who shall give way, the sea with great violence attempting to subdue the land, and the land with an equal obstinacy resolving to oppose the sea."⁵⁴ The fact that Nana Kwamina Ansa allowed the Christian mass to be said at his jurisdiction confirmed the fact that he was not against the introduction of Christian religion to his people. Again, he gave the Portuguese a land for the construction of the Elmina Castle in 1482.

Apart from these pioneer priests, in 1572, four Portuguese Augustinian priests, also known as Order of Hermits of St. Augustine, namely; Father Gasper dos Anjos (leader), Father Pedro da Graca, Father Jose de Moraes and Father Jeronimo da Encarnacao arrived at Elmina.⁵⁵ They took charge of the work of evangelization and education and hence spread their activities to Komenda, Efutu and Abakrampa. Father Domingo de Santa Maria and Father Atanasio da Cruz came to join the four Augustinian Fathers at Elmina. In 1576, Father Marting Goncalvez, who was a Catholic Chaplain of the Elmina Castle, taught the Mulatto children Reading, Catechism and Mass.⁵⁶ In all the areas that they worked, the chiefs gave them their support such as providing them with accommodation, protection and liberty to operate.

Even though the missionaries were not successful in their endeavours in the early period of their activities, especially those who came with the European merchants, they nonetheless persevered and achieved their main aim of evangelising Africa.⁵⁷ Missionary activities in Ghana picked up in the eighteenth century through to the twentieth century with the coming into the country missionary societies such as the Moravian Mission (M.M.), Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), the Basel Missionary Society (B.M.S.), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (W.M.M.S.), the North German (Bremen) Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Mission (R. C. M.), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Mission (A.M.E.Z.M.) and the Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A.).⁵⁸

Basel Missionary Society (B.M.S.)

In this section, the author gives an overview of the work of the Basel Mission in the Gold Coast. In 1828, the Mission sent its first missionary to the Gold Coast.⁵⁹ The B.M.S. mainly concentrated in the Ga and Twi speaking areas.⁶⁰ The B.M.S. sent four pioneer missionaries to the Gold Coast, namely; Gottlieb Holwarth, Karl Ferdinand Salbach and Johann Gottlieb Schmidt and Johann Philipp Heinze.⁶¹ With the exception of Heinze, the other three missionaries died a year after their arrival.⁶² Heinze also died in 1831 thus all four pioneer missionaries died within four years of their stay in the Gold Coast. Undaunted by the death of the pioneer missionaries, the BMS sent three other missionaries to continue from where the earlier four had ended. These were Peter Peterson Jaeger, Christian Friedrich Heinze and Andreas Riis. Jaeger and Heinze, a medical doctor died within four months of arrival. Riis almost died but was saved by a traditional medicine man.⁶³ On this issue, Riis was reported to have said: "I have no words to describe how I felt when I entered the house deprived of my colleagues and still sick in body... There was no-one I could have poured out my heart to... I shall never forget the blessings the Lord has poured on me so abundantly during the whole time we were together."⁶⁴

Upon his recovery from near fatal illness, Riis' moved to the Akropong-Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana in 1835. Riis relocation to Akropong according to Sundkler and Steed, "dissociated the mission from the possibly worldly milieu of the towns, and built the Church in an agricultural environment. This rural foundation allowed the

⁵³ Pobe, "Church and State in the Gold Coast", 219.

⁵⁴ Owusu, *Prempeh II and the Making of Modern Asante*, ix.

⁵⁵ Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History 1474-1880*, 21-22; Ekow Evans Budu-Arthur, 124 and F. L. Bartels, *Roots of Ghana Methodism*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 2.

⁵⁶ Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History*, 121-124.

⁵⁷ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 9.

⁵⁸ Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 79-81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 79-81.; Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 63; McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 29.

⁶⁰ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *History of the church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶¹ Peter Boakye, "A History of Politics in Education in Ghana: 1852-2008." (PhD thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, 2017), 82.

⁶² Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 63

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ F. L. Bartels, *The Root of Ghana Methodism*, 5; Peter Boakye, A History of Politics in Education in Ghana, 83.

mission to play a dominant role in raising the standard of agriculture and in introducing new crops.”⁶⁵

The choice of Akropong was significant. The humidity was lower and the weather was cooler.⁶⁶ Abgeti confirms the importance of the choice of Akropong by describing it as hilly and that Riis enjoyed better health there than in the coastal areas.⁶⁷ The first twelve years of the Basel missionary work in the Gold Coast could best be described as a failure. Of the nine missionaries sent, only one survived and one convert made. The B.M.S. adopted new measures to ensure that they achieved their vision. To this end, they brought Negro missionaries from Jamaica to the Gold Coast. They were to help revitalise the missionary enterprise. These missionaries arrived in 1843 and were sent to Akropong. This attempt of revitalisation did not yield much result as the West Indians could not achieve the much-needed break through due to language barrier and superior attitude of the West Indians toward the indigenous people.⁶⁸ The failure of the West Indian experiment did not daunt the efforts of the B.M.S. More missionaries from Switzerland and Germany were sent to augment the work of the mission. Among these were Rev. Johann Gotlieb Christaller and Rev. Johann Zimmermann. Christaller was responsible for developing a Twi dictionary while Zimmermann did same for the Ga dictionary.⁶⁹

At this juncture, attempts will be made to discuss the role that the chiefs played in the activities of the B.M.S. Mention has to be made that the work of the B.M.S. in the Gold Coast could not have been successful without the chiefs. As stated earlier, the arrival of Andreas Riis saw a new impetus injected into the work of the B.M.S. after their initial setbacks. His relocation to Akropong-Akuapim did not only affect the indigenes in the area but also the success of the B.M.S. activities in the country. The Chief of Akropong, Nana Ado Dankwa I, became a friend of Riis and through this relationship, he was able to convince the Basel mission to send Negro missionaries to the Gold Coast to help in the missionary efforts since Nana Ado Dankwa I, had told Riis that his people would embrace monogamy and consequently accept the white man's religion.⁷⁰ As pointed out by Pobe, “the Rev. Andreas Riis first called on Chief Ado Dankwa, who was well disposed toward him and his mission and permitted him to settle in his kingdom. Thus, Akropong became the stronghold of the missionary effort of the Basel Mission.”⁷¹ It is important to point out that the Jamaican Christians who returned to the Gold Coast and worked under the aegis of the Basel Mission from 1843 to 1918 also played a key role for the success of the aforementioned mission.⁷²

The Basel mission expanded to other parts of the country and in 1855 the Mission opened its Krobo mission field. The Krobo mission was given an impetus with the friendship that developed between Rev. Johann Zimmermann and the chief of Odumase, Nene Odonkor Azu. Through this interaction, the twelve-year-old son of the chief, Teye, was trained as a Christian by Zimmermann.

Wesley Methodist Missionary Society (W.M.M.S.)

The first missionary of W.M.M.S., the Rev. Joseph Rhodes Dunwell, arrived in Cape Coast in 1835.⁷³ The pioneering role of Rev. Dunwell was short-lived as he died six months after his arrival. He, however, set the stage for the work of the W.M.M.S. Dunwell had succeeded in reconciling two feuding Bible study groups led by Smith and de Graft respectively. While Smith became Dunwell's interpreter, de Graft became his special assistant. The work of Dunwell was important to the success of the W.M.M.S. as it set the stage for the expansion of the missionary endeavour of the W.M.M.S.

The W.M.M.S. sent out new missionaries to replace Dunwell. Notable among these was Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, the son of an African father and an English mother. He arrived in 1838. Rev. Freeman helped to expand the work of W.M.M.S. to other parts of the country such as Kumasi and the northern territories of the Gold Coast.⁷⁴ He worked tirelessly to plant Methodism in Ghana. Sanneh described the efforts of Freeman thus:

The man who became the architect of Methodist expansion in Ghana was the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, an indefatigable pioneer who was not afraid to push ahead and confront new problems. His energy for work was matched only by his vision, and the limits he set to both exceeded the normal.⁷⁵

The W.M.M.S. also received support from the indigenous communities led by their chiefs. Though Ashanti was considered a difficult terrain for the missionaries, Thomas Birch Freeman was able to penetrate and evangelise. It must be pointed out that it was not easy for Rev. Freeman to introduce and spread Christianity and western education in Kumasi. He

⁶⁵ Sundkler and Steed, “History of the church in Africa,” 206.

⁶⁶ Wiltgen, “Gold Coast Mission History,” 109.

⁶⁷ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 63

⁶⁸ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 65; Sundkler and Steed, “History of the church in Africa,” 207.

⁶⁹ Sundkler and Steed, “History of the church in Africa,” 207.

⁷⁰ Peter White, ‘Religion, Mission and National Development: A Contextual Interpretation of Jeremiah 29:4–7 in the light of the activities of the Basel Mission Society in Ghana (1828–1918) and its Missiological Implications’, (*Verbum et Ecclesia*, 2015) 36(1).

⁷¹ Pobe, “Church and State in the Gold Coast”, 220.

⁷² Abraham N. O. Kwakye, *Returning African Christians in Mission to the Gold Coast*. (Edinburg University Press,), 25.

⁷³ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 55.

⁷⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The religious impact* (New York: Orbis, 1983).

⁷⁵ Ibid.,120.

was questioned by Nana Kwaku Dua I on the grounds that western education, for example, would make the people rebellious.⁷⁶ Again, the ordeal of Ramseyer and Kuhne, two missionaries, who were captured by the Ashanti under Adu Bofo underlie the Ashanti use of brutish force to subjugate their perceived enemies.⁷⁷ John S. Pobe also recorded that: The state of the work of God in Asante is rather discouraging at present, from the circumstances of the people being afraid to expose themselves to the ire of the king, whose frown is indeed death for people becoming Christians. Many Asantes are wishful to embrace Christianity, but they are afraid to come forward. . . . They always do whatever the king sanctions, whether good or bad, so that, the king himself being pagan still, they all remain pagans still.⁷⁸

Be that as it may, through perseverance, Nana Kwaku Dua I, the then Asantehene allowed Rev. Freeman to open a school in Kumasi.⁷⁹ This aside, the king assisted the ECMs because before the coming of Freeman to Ashanti Kingdom, Nana Kwaku Dua I had given audience to a Fante trader, Hayford to organise a Christmas service in the presence of the Asantehene and the royal household.⁸⁰ When Freeman returned to Kumasi after he had visited his mission headquarters in London, he was given a royal welcome by the Asantehene Kwaku Dua I and Freeman was acknowledged by the Asantehene as a preacher and allowed to work among his people as a missionary.⁸¹ The chiefs of Kwahu, Agogo, Efiduase and Dwaben also demonstrated great kindness to the missionaries in the course of their work in Ashanti Region.⁸²

Bremen Missionary Society

The Bremen Mission unlike their predecessors, settled on the Ewe territories for their missionary work. The Bremen Mission activities in Ghana may be described as an accidental. This is because the initial target of the Bremen Mission was Gabon. It was because they could not get direct route to Gabon that made them to come to Cape Coast in 1847. Four missionaries on the ship, namely; James Graff, Luer Bultman, Lorenz Wolf and Karl Flato arrived in the Gold Coast.

Wolf and Graff in consultation with the Basel Mission turned their attention to the East of the Gold Coast. They met Prince Nyangamagu, the son of Togbe Kwadwo Dei V, chief of Peki. Having consulted his father, the Prince led the two Bremen missionaries to Peki on 14th November, 1847, where they were given a warm welcome by the chief of Peki. Wolf established the first Bremen Mission station at Peki. The initial work of the Bremen Mission was not successful as very little was achieved. Despite the challenges, the mission did not give up. With the death of the first four missionaries, more missionaries were sent to the mission field. With Peki proving a little difficult to operate from, the Bremen Mission opened a new station at the coastal town of Keta. This helped the Bremen Mission to expand its mission work to other parts of the country. The period 1855 to 1893 saw remarkable progress by the Bremen Mission. The main stations at Ho, Keta and Amedzofe with their outstations numbering over 20 were opened.⁸³ By 1912, the work of the Mission had expanded by leaps and bounds with the opening of more stations in Ghana and neighbouring Togo. The Bremen Mission made a lot of inroads in the Ewe territories and succeeded in making a lot of converts by the onset of the First World War in 1914. Agbeti sums up the efforts of the Bremen Mission thus: "During these 72 years, 1847-1919, the Bremen Mission achieved much for the advancement of Eweland. The Gospel was preached, churches were built, schools were established, artisans were trained."⁸⁴ Wolf was given a parcel of land to put up a mission house which was completed in 1848. Thus, Wolff began his work among the Peki first with the opening of a school.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

This study, using primary and secondary data, has demonstrated how the E.C.Ms. fared in the hands of the chiefs in their attempts to implant Christianity in the Gold Coast. The chiefs were, to some extent, cordial to the early European missionaries. This explains why even though Christianity opposed the African Traditional Religion, the chiefs allowed both to co-exist. The chiefs also ensured that the E.C.Ms. were protected and had the liberty to operate. Not only these, but the lands that the missionaries used to build their churches, mission stations and schools were all granted to them by the chiefs. Hence, the chiefs and the E.C.Ms. were allies in the missionary work that was why the latter could do its work before formal annexation of the Gold Coast. This does not negate the fact that some of the chiefs opposed the work of the E.C.Ms. Indeed, from the available literature, some of the chiefs were antagonistic towards the E.C.Ms., and

⁷⁶ David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism 1850-1928*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 74.

⁷⁷ Kwame Arhin, "The missionary role on the Gold Coast and in Ashanti: Reverend Ramseyer and the British take-over of Ashanti 1869-1894 (Michigan State University Library), 3.

⁷⁸ Pobe, "Church and State in the Gold Coast", 221.

⁷⁹ Joseph M. Y. Edusa-Eyison, *The history of the Methodist in Ghana* (<http://archives.gcah.org/bitstream/handle/10516/1318/History-of-the-Methodist-Church-Ghana.pdf?sequence=1>). Accessed August 20, 2020.

⁸⁰ Moses Antwi, The contribution of the Asante kings to the growth of Methodism in Asante: 1839-2002 (unpublished Mphil thesis KNUST, 2011)

⁸¹ Antwi, "The contribution of the Asante kings to the growth of Methodism in Asante: 1839-2002", 68.

⁸² Arhin, "The Missionary Role on the Gold Coast and in Ashanti: Reverend F.A. Ramseyer and the British take-over of Ashanti 1869-1894."

⁸³ Agbeti, *West African Church History: Church Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1816*, 90.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 85.

banned them from operating in their communities. But, on the whole, even though some of the chiefs did not readily accommodate the missionaries, overwhelming number of them welcomed the E.C.Ms. in the Gold Coast, thus making it possible for the spread of Christianity in the country.

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