

A NOTE ON TRADITION AND THE HISTORY OF ART IN
WESTERN GHANA

Two brief oral histories were recorded by the authors during a tour of Western Ghana. The traditional histories were collected from the Omanhenes of Aowin and Sefwi-Wiawso Traditional areas.¹ The histories are interesting because they both give Takyiman as a major point of rest in their migrations. Further, the Aowin history refers to the Nzima in such a manner that it would seem that they too had resided in Takyiman. Finally, during a visit to Dunkwa in Fanti to record a masking tradition we were told that the shrine of Yaw Dunkwa had been established at the completion of their migration from Takyiman.

Neither the Aowin nor the Sefwi-Wiawso tradition gives datable references. However, the move from Takyiman to Dunkwa was reported to have taken place during the reign of Osei Tutu, the founder of the Ashanti Union.

It is possible that these traditions record the break-up of the Bono Kingdom whose fall - before the forces of the Ashanti under Opoku-Ware (and not Osei Tutu) - is dated by E.L.R. Meyerowitz to the year 1740.² The Gonja Chronicle more accurately dates

¹ These histories, translated by A. Quarcoo from tapes made in April, 1967, are appended to this note.

² Akan Traditions of Origin, 1952, p.134. She does report that Fanti refugees left Bono after its defeat, pp.82-4.

it to 1722/23. If this were true we would have evidence to date the dispersion of the peoples, and indeed could explore the possibility that the regalia and other arts of these peoples may have had their sources in Bono.

Unfortunately the case is not that simple. Not only could the peoples of Aowin, Sefwi-Wiawso, Nzima and Fanti have begun to use Akan regalia of leadership later (obviously this is a point to be checked through the recording of the regalia and the traditions of its origin) but references to them in the literature open alternative possibilities: that their dispersion was somewhat earlier, and/or that Akan regalia of leadership has a history more complex than a simple derivation from Bono.

J.K. Kumah states that both Sefwi and Aowin states existed during the expansion of the Denkyira.³ His authority is Bosman (Eng. trans. 1705), who describes the late seventeenth century expansion of Denkyira to take over a major trade route to the coast. Denkyira was vanquished by the Ashanti under Osei Tutu in 1701. Thus the states of Aowin and Sefwi would seem to predate the fall of Bono.

3.

"The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Denkyira", G.N.Q., 9, 1966, pp.33, 35. The Denkyira are said to have resided in Bono thus not eliminating Bono as the ultimate source for Denkyira and Denkyira-influenced arts including Ashanti regalia.

Now, the Dutch map of 1629⁴ gives no name that can confidently be linked with the Aowin or the Sefwi. Goody suggests that the Incassa recorded on the map "might refer to one of the Akan-speaking kingdoms of the present Ivory Coast (i.e. "jaman", Bayle or Agni)"⁵ Both the Aowin and the Sefwi traditions refer to associated groups who today live in the Ivory Coast. Further, Meyerowitz offers evidence to equate the Nzima with the Agni (or Anyi) and calls the Aowin State Anyin and the people Anyii whose origin she places near Takyiman.⁶ Finally, Stewart divides the Tano language into Bia and Akan (Twi-Fanti). Bia subsumes both Agni and Nzima.⁷ He does not refer to Sefwi or Aowin; however they are associated with Agni-Baule by other linguists.

It would seem worthwhile to explore the following possibilities.

- (1) That Sefwi, Aowin and/or Nzema are Agni related, that they have a common origin and should have related art styles and types.

4. A copy is reproduced in G.N.Q., 9, 1966.

5. "The Akan and the North", in G.N.Q., 9, 1966, p. 19, n.1.

6. Op. cit., pp.84, n. 2 and p.117

7. "Akan History: Some Linguistic Evidence", G.N.Q., 9, 1966, p.55.

- (2) That 'Takyiman' (that is, the Bono Kingdom and its capital Bono-Mansu) had a long range effect on the arts of regalia among the Akan and Akan related groups. This must include the study of alternative complementary sources: pre-Bono, Denkyira, Akyem and/or Akwamu.

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BRIEF EXTEMPORE TRADITIONAL HISTORY OF
SEFWI-WIAWSO

Nana Kwadwo Aduhene II, Omanhene of Sefwi-Wiawso Traditional Area.

The people of Sefwi-Wiawso settled at their present site a few years ago. As far as it is remembered they have lived in Africa. One land mark of their history is their settlement at Takyiman with other Akan tribes. After sometime the great forefathers of the people of present Sefwi-Wiawso broke away and fought their way south westwards. One 'transit quarters' on their way to the present site was "Afiemo" which is today in Wasa Amanfi. Other principal points at which the people stopped and actually settled for some time were Asaaman and Koguso. It is believed that from Koguso the people settled around present Sefwi-Wiawso.

Tradition has it that the first man who actually acquired this land by 'discovering' it was Obrumankama. He was a hunter and he used the present Wiawso site as his hunting grounds. It was however, the nephew of Okodom who actually first stayed at Ahwiam, the land

adjacent to present Sefwi Wiawso. When his uncle died, Okodom moved and stayed in Wiawso which has become the seat of government of the Sefwi Wiawso 'state'.

It happened that the people of Sefwi lived here with others called the Ebinbono. There was a lot of disagreement between the Sefwis and the Ebinbonos, so there was strife between them. War resulted and the Ebinbonos were driven away from the land. Although this happened the 'kinship' relationship which existed between them is still alive. It is believed the present social distance between Sefwis and the Ebinbonos would have been narrower but for the advent of the European who brought about lines of demarcation, by way of boundaries.

The people of Sefwi, through Nana Aduhene the paramount chief therefore claim that the present vast land that they occupy was acquired through settlement and warfare.

Recorded by A.K. Quarcoo & Roy Sieber.

BRIEF EXTEMPORE TRADITIONAL HISTORY

by

Nana Attah Kweku II, Omanhene of Aowin Traditional Area - Enchi.

In very ancient days the Aowins lived in Egypt. From Egypt they came to Senegal and made the way Southwards through the Sahara desert and arrived at Tokuso.

In present Ghana the Aowins remember settling in Takyiman. According to Nana Atta Kweku, the people then kept on fighting their way to arrive finally at the present site of the Aowins. Many places were passed and a number of camps were pitched during the march downwards. At Anyaayan the Aowin parted ways with the Nzimas with whom they had a common origin.

One point to be noted is that the Aowins on the other side of the Ghana Ivory border are Aowins. When the Aowins moved downwards, the 'Ivory Coast Aowins' fought for the land they occupy, and the Ghana Aowins also got theirs through warfare. What happened was that the 'Ivory Coast Aowins' announced their 'booty' to their Ghana counterpart and asked them what they should do. So they were advised to stay there and keep the land whilst their Ghana kin kept the present traditional area of the Aowins in Ghana. As far as the entire group was concerned, the whole land acquired by both sides was one indivisible piece for Aowins.

Then came the historical fact of the world wars and the artificial boundaries between Ghana and Ivory Coast resulting in the creation of a separate community over the border. Although this boundary is still there all the Aowins regarded themselves as one unit. Bogor, Chanchago, and Amperegro, are all Aowins.

Nana Atta Kweku, the present Omanhene of the Aowin traditional area claims to have crossed the boundary twice, since he became the paramount chief, to see his people over in the Ivory Coast area. Much as he desires to have a reunion of the Aowins over the border with his people in Ghana, the "artificial boundary" has made this wish unrealizable.

Nevertheless, the idea of a union someday is not abandoned.

This in brief is how the great grand sires of present Aowin arrived where they are today. Their original home as far as is remembered, was Egypt. They trekked down to Senegal, Tokuso, then down through the Sahara desert to Ghana (Takyiman) and later they arrived at the present site.

Recorded by A.K. Quarcoo & Roy Sieber.