

SUCCESSION AND GOLD MINING AT MANSO-NKWANTA

by Kwame Arhin*

Introductory

Manso-Nkwanta town lies 41 miles south-west of Kumasi on approximately Latitude 6° 28' North and approximately Longitude 1° 59' West of Greenwich. The Manso-Nkwanta chiefdom is a sub-unit of the Akwamu division (of which the head is the chief of the Asafo quarter in Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti) of the Kumasi State. Manso-Nkwanta borders on Ashanti Bekwai in the West and on Sehwi Wiawso in the south-west. It is administered as part of the Bekwai district.

I went to Manso-Nkwanta to investigate Ashanti traditional gold mining because information from both written and oral sources indicates that it was at least in the late 19th century a place of concentrated mining. Brandon Kirby, a Special Commissioner of the Gold Coast travelling in Ashanti in 1884, records that the chiefdom was the first to revolt against the Ashantihene, Mensa Bonsu, because of its 'close proximity to the Protectorate / Adansi / and also through gold mining, the principal industry, bringing large numbers of educated natives / from the Gold Coast / amongst them'.¹ With regard to the oral sources of my information, an old informant at Ashanti Mampong who, in his youth had traded in gold dust for grey baft on the Gold Coast slaves, grey baft for slaves from Samory's war camp and slaves for rubber in the Ahafo district, north-west of Manso, stated that most of the Ashanti gold dust used in trade with the Europeans at Cape Coast and Saltpond was obtained through trade with miners at Manso-Nkwanta. Manso-Nkwanta appeared to be as good as any place in Ashanti for investigating the social aspects and the technology of Ashanti traditional gold mining. The report is the result of conversations with the chief and his elders, the older ones among whom took part in gold mining. Though my main interest was in gold mining, I thought it of some interest to link it up with the oral history of the town. This report, then, is in two parts. Part one is concerned with the founding and settlement of the town, and part two with gold mining.

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I. HISTORY OF MANSO-NKWANTAThe founding and settlement of Manso-Nkwanta

According to the Manso-Nkwantahene, the history of the town goes back to the immediate period following the Ashanti-Denkyira war of 1699-1700.² Following the Ashanti victory of Denkyira, Osei Tutu, the Ashantihene, decided to settle some Ashanti warriors close to the borders of Denkyira, south-west of Manso-Nkwanta. The present site of Manso was selected because, though there was no settlement there about 1700, it was a place where four travellers' tracks met. One track led to Dormaa in the north-west, one to Adanse, south-east, one to Kumasi, north-east, and the last to Denkyira, directly south of Manso-Nkwanta. The site was obviously a strategic point whence one could watch movements of travellers from the potential enemies of Ashanti. The settlement itself is enclosed by hills, so that it was easy to defend.

The man selected as a leader of the settlers was Bofuor Bi, the chief of a small village, Ohweeso, the abandoned site of which lies north and within 12 miles of Kumasi. He was of the Asona clan and a nephew of the Akwamuhene of Kumasi, the link between Manso-Nkwanta and the Akwamuhene is still preserved in the rule according to which the Manso-Nkwantahene calls the Akwamuhene 'uncle'. The Ashantihene sent along with Bofuor Bi, a man called Aben, one of his soodofo, cooks, and a dom, group, of thirty gun men. Bofuor Bi was made a chief and given the title of Asanteman aso,³ the ear of Ashanti. That is to say, he was given the task of spying on the movements of potential enemies, particularly of the people of Denkyira.

Although the chief task of the people of Manso-Nkwanta was that of a group of sedentary and itinerant scouts, akwan-srafo, the settlement acquired further importance when it was discovered that gold was washed out from the soils, during rainfalls, and that the beds of the rivers at the bottom of the hills contained alluvial gold.⁴

The chief and his elders attribute the growth in the population of Manso-Nkwanta partly to the discovery of gold

in its vicinity. Gold diggers, blacksmiths and specialist makers of the various tools used in gold mining settled at Manso-Nkwanta itself or made scattered settlements in the search for areas prolific in gold.

The Chiefs of Manso-Nkwanta

Accompanying Bofuor Bi during his migration from Ohweeso to Manso-Nkwanta was one sister, (un-named) who had only one son Kofi Dwuma. Kofi Dwuma succeeded Bofuor Bi. But there were no more nephews so that on his death-bed Dwuma stated the stool was to be occupied alternately by his children of his two wives from Manso villages, Abronkase and Anyinase. After the death of the chief Kobina Atta of Abronkase a dispute arose whether another chief could immediately be selected from the Abronkase line. The Ashantiene then confirmed the practice since Kofi Dwuma by which succession had alternated between Abronkase and Anyinase.

The remembered chiefs and their villages are as follows:

<u>Chiefs</u>		<u>Villages</u>
Bofuor Bi)		
Kofi Dwuma)	...	Manso-Nkwanta
Antwi Panyin I	...	Abronkase
Antwi Kuma	...	Anyinase
Adu Kofi	...	Abronkase
Kyere	...	Anyinase
Kwasi Mensah	...	Abronkase
Yaw Amponsah	...	Anyinase
Kwakyie Nketia	...	Abronkase
Kwasi Ankore	...	Anyinase
Kobina Atta	...	Abronkase
Kwaku Dwomo	...	Anyinase

ChiefsVillages

Kofi Yeboah ...

Abronkase

Nana Antwi Panyin II ...

Anyinase

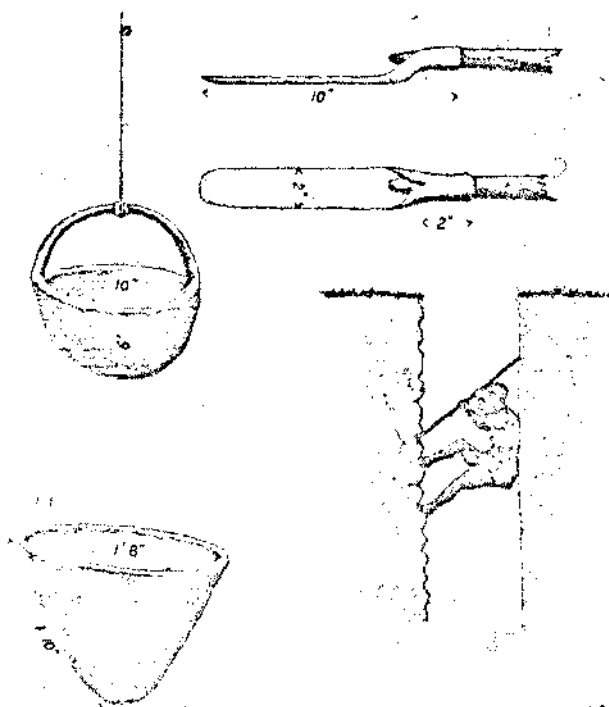
It ought to be noted that although his sons succeeded Kofi Dwuma, succession to the stools reverted to sisters' sons from the time of the sons: the rule that sons should succeed had only been made in the absence of possible matrilineal successors to Dwuma.

II. GOLD MINING

Concerning traditional gold mining the questions I asked the chief and his elders related to knowledge about sources of possible findings, tools and type of labour used in mining, kinds of gold and its distribution. By 'distribution' is meant the circulation of winnings through trade, taxation by the political authorities and lending by some individuals. What follows below is the sum of the answers to these questions, the chief and his elders stimulating their memories through discussion until they were agreed on correct answers. In the course of these discussions eye-witness amounts were given and authorities (fathers and mothers) cited.

I. Sources of gold, equipment and tools

Areas of possible finds were indicated during the rains when pebbles to which the sika futuro, gold dust, and the sika mpakowa, tiny nuggets, were attached, were washed out gleaming in the sun. The sands of the beds of certain streams were known from experience to contain gold. Thirdly, gold diggers, usually dug deep holes estimated at between 50 and 100 feet at places where gold nuggets were found in the search for gold. These deep holes were known as nkron some of which are still to be seen on the outskirts of Manso-Nkwanta.



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NATIVE MINING IMPLEMENTS.

1. Soso toa
2. Soso tupre
3. Small can with rope attached
4. Koro
5. Amenapeaa nkron

From G.E. Ferguson
 Report on Atebubu, 1891
 From PRO CO 96/215

The nature of the suspected source determined the method which in turn determined the equipment and tools employed in the search for gold.

Surface or shallow digging known as mmoaboa, and washing the pebbles to bring out the gold dust and tiny nuggets, was done at places where the gold was suspected to be only on the surface. The tools used were soso toa, a kind of narrow shovel and a board on which the soil was put before washing. Dredging of river beds, apoo, was done with soso tupre, a kind of shovel. The pebbles mixed with the gold were put on a koro, wooden receptacle and the two elements separated by a sort of winnowing process.

The more serious mining was digging the amenapeaa nkron, holes of about 3-4 feet in diameter and of depth ranging from 50 to 100 feet. Smaller holes for the feet were dug on the walls to facilitate up-climbing. To bring to the surface the dug up soils small cans to which strong ropes were attached, were lowered into the holes filled up by the man inside and pulled up by the man on the surface: nkron mining required co-operation between two men. Oil lamps in clay receptacles were carried into the holes to light up the darkness inside the nkron.

However obtained, the separation of the gold, dust and nugget, from the pebbles, with which it was mixed, was done by washing in four akoro, wooden receptacles, of various sizes. The winner started first with the largest, sika kurow, second largest, the apasia, third largest the apasia, and finally the nsonmu. Tabon, a hole with a broad end was used for stirring the sand and pebbles. Winnings were tied in etwa leaves and put together at the end of the miner's efforts.

Equipment and tools, both wooden and iron, were made by specialists who settled in Manso-Nkwanta to make them for the miners. Blacksmiths obtained daban, iron bars, from traders who brought them from the coast. It might be said that gold mining fostered the woodworker's and blacksmith's trade at Manso-Nkwanta.

There were four grades of gold: sika po, the larger nuggets, which were to be given to the Asantehene, and mpokowa or nsammaa, the lesser nuggets and sika futuru, gold dust, which the miner kept.

ii. Labour

Men went gold digging with their wife or wives and unmarried sons and daughters: the men did the digging and the women the washing. Boys of tender age accompanied their fathers though they did not descend into the nkron. Gold mining required secrecy since a man might want to keep the bigger nuggets, sika po which should be delivered to the Manso-Nkwantahene, who sent them to the Asantehene. To work close to another winner was to invite detection if a man found some nuggets and wanted to keep them. Men did not go mining with nephews or nieces. Although the latter were the heirs, it was suspected probably for that reason, that they might betray an uncle who kept nuggets. Slaves were employed in gold mining. Wives and sons were rewarded with part of the winnings. Also men paid the marriage expenses of their sons who struck out on their own on marriage.

It is remarkable that in spite of their matrilineal inheritance system, the Ashanti basic unit of labour in mining, trading and farming has always been the conjugal family.

iii. Distribution

Gold was used for buying the sinews of Ashanti warfare, for making the chief's regalia and for internal marketing and for ordinary external trading. Loans were extensively given for the settlement of debts incurred in litigation at the chiefs' courts, the origin of the large practice of pawning, awowa si, an arrangement by which maternal nephews and nieces were used as securities for loans, in Ashanti. Gold mined in Manso-Nkwanta and elsewhere in Ashanti got into circulation in these diverse ways.

There were no specific taxes on mined gold. But, as already mentioned the Asantehene was entitled to all sika po,

the larger gold nuggets. The inhabitants of Manso-Nkwanta, both indigenous and settler-miners also paid apeatop, a tax which followed every Ashanti war, and assessed by the Asantehene and his chiefs. Thirdly, there was an annual tax, apafram, payable by the miners.

The Manso-Nkwantahene who had a third share in the nuggets did not impose his own taxes on the miners. But he collected various sums for the purpose of buying sheep for ritual cleansing of the Earth when various taboos were broken and the Earth, so it was believed, concealed the gold from winners. No mining was supposed to be done on nnabone, sacred days, days preceding, or following, and on which the Adaye festivals fell. Men and women were not supposed to have sexual contacts during the nights preceding mining. The decease of a chief, or a diviner's revelation of a desecration of the Earth, was followed by a declaration of a moratorium on mining for a period. Sheep were slaughtered for purificatory purposes (asubo) and the Earth sometimes promised further sacrifices if there was rich mining. Miners shared the cost of the sacrificial beasts.

The miners obtained such articles as cloths, salt and drinks (gin) from akonkofo traders from the coast, and fish from traders from Lake Bosomtwi, south-east of Bekwai, in exchange for amounts of gold dust. The akonkofo carried their own scales, nsania and weights abrammop. Some miners took gold to the coast to obtain specific goods, if they themselves turned traders.

There were some 'wealthy' men famous for their hoards of gold and as money lenders. Kwadwo Ate of Akaase was famous for his wealth and his numerous slaves. Lending was a lucrative business; interest was charged on sums lent for a period of two months, while it was the source of pawns, who could be used as labour as carriers and in various economic roles.

SUMMARY

This report, which is based on the oral traditions and experiences of the chiefs and elders of Manso-Nkwanta, has been

concerned with the foundation and growth of Manso-Nkwanta and with the technical and social aspects of gold mining and the distribution of gold.

It has been seen that Manso-Nkwanta was settled soon after the Ashanti-Denkyira war of 1699-1700; the population of the settlement grew upon the discovery of gold in the area of the settlement. Types of equipment and tools which were locally made were related to the sources whence gold was discovered. The basic labour unit was the conjugal family. Mined gold got into circulation through taxation, internal marketing and external trading and through money lending.

NOTES

1. Brandon Kirby Report on his Mission to Kumasi and the interior provinces of the Ashanti Kingdom, January 3rd to April 2nd, 1884. Parliamentary Papers (C-) 4477.
2. The Ashanti-Denkyira war of 1699-1700 is well known to students of Ashanti. It marked the beginning of the rise of Ashanti as it became known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See R.S. Rattray, Ashanti Law and Constitution, Oxford, 1929, Ch. X, pp.75-80.
3. The chief and his elders say this is the origin of Manso; Manso-Nkwanta; Man aso, the 'nation's ear' settled at the junction (nkwanta).
4. Joseph Dupuis, Her Majesty's Consul and visitor to Ashanti in 1820 writes in his Journal of a Mission to Ashantee, London, 1824, p. VIII, of occupation for 'eight or ten thousand slaves' working for gold on the banks of some rivers in parts of the modern Brong district in Ghana.