

## A RE-APPRAISAL OF MEYEROWITZ ON THE BRONGS - A REJOINDER

I read with great interest Warren's '*A Re-Appraisal of Mrs. Eva Meyerowitz's Work on the Brong*' in the Research Review, Michaelmas Term 1970, because he questioned in many cases the same people I worked with. However, our research techniques differ with the result that information received by us is not always identical. He apparently was quite unaware that there is such a thing as 'ownership' of a tradition, the owners, as you know, being those whose ancestors in important positions played a part in past events. To act on this knowledge is especially important in Tekyiman where one has to deal with two histories so to say, namely, that of the ancient Bono kingdom and that of the Tekyiman state. Thus, Nana Akumfi Arneyaw II was most anxious that I received information from elders who alone were entitled to disclose a tradition, and only when they did not remember it properly, which was often enough the case, that he or somebody he trusted, was allowed to correct it, or add material. Consequently, the elders never learnt history in the European sense of the word as Warren assumes. Moreover, one must not forget that especially the traditions of origin were kept secret until recently. I myself had often the greatest trouble to get the elders to speak, and in Tekyiman, I entirely owed it to Nana that I got any information at all. The term Bono, or Brong, the Ashanti term, by the way, describes people of various origin who were nationals of the former Bono kingdom.

I am writing to you today because I find it absolutely essential that the wrong type of information does not get into research and confuse the issue, and for this reason I feel it my duty to reply to Warren's criticisms of my work.

### P. 55. A. *The Sahara—An Oral Tradition*

Yes, but one which exclusively, in Tekyiman belongs to the Ayoko royal lineage. In my *Akan Traditions of Origin*, p.33 no. 1, I quoted Nana's exact words in Twi—*Eno nyinaa ye esre fitaa*, and Dr J. B. Danquah who obtained the same information from Nana, translated this to me as 'Everywhere around us was white desert.' I found this tradition confirmed on the coast by the Etsi who claimed that their chiefs were 'brothers of the kings of Bono,' by which they meant that they were 'brothers' of the predecessors of the kings of Bono who once ruled in the Timbuktu region of the Niger bend.

Warren found only two persons in Tekyiman who mentioned Timbuktu to him, the anachronistic name for Dya or Dyala. This is interesting in view of the fact that in a rite which takes place during the *Apo* festival each year the Fante ask the princes: 'From where did you come?' and they reply: 'We came from Timbuktu, we came from the barren Timbuktu, all tired and worn out we came, and settled where we know not.' (*Nananom Tekyimanfo, mofiri he na mobae, o? Yefiri, kra, kra, kra, yefiri Timbutu, yefiri ntomu Timutu, na ye abeda baabi, kra, kra, kra*).

Warren should have known better than to ask the Tekyiman elders whether they knew that their ancestors were of the white race, which means to them Europeans. He might have got a different reply than the categorical 'no,' if he had asked them 'What

was the skin colour of the ancients?' and they would have replied *tete honam* which means 'brown.' Brown is the skin colour of the Saharan peoples who largely belong to the Caucasian race to which also the Europeans belong. That their skin is brown and not white is solely due to intense sun burn.

Apart from this the Bono Ayoko royal lineage had a 'red' (coloured?) and 'black' line, the first black, or dark-coloured queenmother was Nana Aferanowa (1598-1604). In Ashanti the late Nana Prempeh II is said to have been of the 'red' Ayoko royal lineage, whereas the late Asante hemma Nana Kwaadu Yiadom, was of the 'black' and descended from the Bona-Nkoran ancestress Aduma Akosia who, with her people, became Ayoko in Oti Akenten's time in Kumasi.

#### *P. 56. I. Moon and Venus Cult*

Warren writes that the Moon cult is nowhere evident in the Takyiman State and that none of his fourteen outstanding historians (!) had ever heard of a time when women in general ruled. Quite so, I never stated that the Moon cult, and what it stands for, applied to the Bono whose ancestors were ruled by kings in the two kingdoms preceding Bono in Ghana, and also that this kingdom was ruled by kings from the very beginning. After long studies I have come to the conclusion that one can distinguish four stages of development in the religion and state organization of matrilineal peoples, to which also, among others, Bono and Akan belong. The first stage and the most primitive, was that dominated by the Moon, that is, the moon was not worshipped as such, but the *kra* of life-giving power of the moon was manifest in the clan god and his *akyeneboa*, and in the divine priestess-queenmother who ruled supreme with her council of women. Even as late as the beginning of the 17th century a section of the Beretuo and Tena clan people, emigrants from 'a rocky country in the north' still only knew woman-chiefs who were also leaders in war (information received at Ayaase, Abetifi and from the Mampong Queenmother).

The first Bonohemmaa Ameyaa and her women elders are said to have had far more power than Ohene Asaman and his men (see Kofi Antubam's manuscript which I am going to send to the Institute with the same mail as this letter). The queenmothers lost a great deal of their powers when the third Bonohene Obunumankoma introduced the Sun Cult, which meant that the king's life-giving *kra* was no longer derived from the moon, as in State II, Venus Cult, but from the sun. With this new view he made himself independent of the queenmother and created himself an equal in power in the state. People today have forgotten this, although the evidence is all there, because with the introduction of the *Ntro* cult more power accrued to the king and men in general. Among other changes, women were no longer desired to rule, although I suspect that this notion is far more due to the British who wanted to deal with chiefs, and that the Africans must have felt that they look down on men who let themselves to be dominated by women.

#### *P. 57. Tanoso*

When I wished to get the historical tradition of Tanoso, Nana Akumfi Ameyaw arranged that I was told it by *Okyeame* Pong who, apparently still knew it as it was handed down. The Tanosohene Yaw Mensa, from whom Warren got his story, was

present as a witness, and if he had any objections he could have let me know them either at the meeting or after it in private. He never did so. The list of the Tanoso rulers is incomplete and quite possibly not correct. But neither *Okyeame* Pong, nor the Tanosohene and other members of the family remembered at the time their names and chronological order. The stool-house at Tanoso was closed owing to the political situation in 1950, so the people were unable to refresh their memory.

P. 60. *The Sun and Ntro Cult*

See above. Warren alleges that Nana and Kwame Nyame both said at a meeting with him that the Bono had the *Ntro* cult since *Ohene* Asaman, that is, since the foundation of the kingdom. According to information given to me by them the cult was introduced by the fourth Bonohene and so I can only imagine that Nana at the moment did not feel inclined to go into lengthy explanations, and Kwame Nyame just did not remember anything about it anymore. After all, he is about 95 years old, he was already a prosperous trader when the first British Officer, Capt. Stewart visited Tekyiman in 1897, and moreover lost his memory some years back when he was beaten up by the police of the present Tekyimanhene. In 1964 he was still quite unable to recall any history, and in 1967 when his memory had returned, as he said, his information was quite worthless.

P. 62. *Minor Errors* (1)

Warren is positive that there was no battle at the Good Morning Rock near Asueyi between Bono and Ashanti (in 1722/3). I got my information from Nana who arranged that I visit the place in 1945. Taken aback that, according to Nana, he had no knowledge of this battle, I wrote to him a month ago, and he replied that, indeed, two battles have taken place there, the first between Bono and Ashanti, and the second, which is mentioned by Warren, after the outbreak of the Tekyiman-Ashanti War (in 1877).

P. 62. (4)

Warren seems to be unaware that the roads between Tekyiman and Wenkyi and Tekyiman and Nkoranza were considerably shortened in 1949-50.

P. 63. (9)

Taa Kuntun can be translated as Warren did as 'Tano on top of the bend of the Tano river,' and as 'Tano the Hyena' as I did. It is this Tano god's secret and sacred name because 'Kuntun,' which is the nickname for the hyena, is his *akyeneboa*

P. 64. (14)

Warren is quite right, the Bosommuru *Ntro* sword is in charge of the *Sanaahene* who has to look after it, but the *Sumankwahene* is the priest in charge of Bosommuru ('priest' here, of course, not in the sense of *okomfo*). The Sumankwahene Kwame Boto told me that on Tuesdays, Bosommuru's day 'he pours blood on his *suman*, as well as on all the 'fetishes' of the Tekyimanhene. I took it for granted that the

Bosommuru sword is included, because it is said to be of gold, but is black with encrusted blood. Perhaps somebody can go into this question.

P. 65. G. *Nyanku Sai*

Contrary to Warren the name of the first *Atumfohene* is known, it was Tumfo Sai Kofi. I forgot to mention this but it is in no way a major error of mine when I called him Nyanku Sai, because in the rite of 'opening the land' he personified the god as, by the way, also do the successors of the *Atumfohene*. In the Bono Kingdom the *Atumfohene* was a son of the king from the time onwards when the Bonohene married a woman from each family which owned a stool. Moreover, only a king's son would have been allowed to touch the divine king in the struggle which is a wrestling match. That this is not so any longer today is another matter. My concern, as always, was with the Bono kingdom and not with the Tekyiman State.

P. 65. H. *Death and Resurrection*

I can well imagine that these terms suddenly thrown at the Tekyiman are alien to them, but there is ample evidence that the *Apo* festivals centre on the death and resurrection of the dieties. The word 'death' on the whole seems to be tabu in connection with immortals, such as gods and divine kings; the gods go to 'sleep' and kings and queenmothers went to their 'village,' certainly in Bono. At the Taa Kuntun festivals the people sing: 'You (the god) are now going to sleep o, The fear is ceasing those who dance, You are going, Saviour Tano. But you shall come again, Saviour Tano.' And at another place: 'Remember me some time as you remember your Mother (here Nyame is meant). Great and forceful you will remember me on the day of your Death.' The god returns on his birthday reborn, his *kra* power renewed by Nyame, hence the lines—'small son of Nyame's *kra*' and 'Little Mother, Kodjo, King Kodjo, Kuntun Nsonsowa Kodjo, *be born anew*' 'Little Mother' probably refers here to the woman who 'gave birth' to the god, in other words established this cult. For the lines in Twi, see *Akan of Ghana*, p. 68, 69.

P. 66 I. *Bi-Sexual Gods*

According to Warren bi-sexual gods are unknown in Tekyiman. However, all the *abosom* have male and female powers but when they become state or city gods like Taa Mensa who has the title 'Abanmu Tano,' or war gods like Taa Kora who started his career as such, then they are envisaged as male. On the other hand, Tano envisaged as the deity of the earth, the river the dead, is addressed as 'Mother Tano.' In some cases the female aspect of the deity is also personified, note Ntoa—the god, but Ntowa the goddess.

P. 66. J. *God*

Warren unfortunately has understood nothing of which I wrote on the subject of Nyame, Nyankopon and Odumankoma. He should read J. B. Danquah's '*Akan Doctrine of God*' which is still a very good book. Actually I have to thank Dr. Danquah who drew my attention to the view of some people that Nyame originally was female (see Index in his book under Nyame). Actually Nyame was bi-sexual, her male aspect was personified as Nyankopon.

P. 67. K. *Ntoa*

Evidence that Ntoa was once state god (*Abanmu*) Ntoa of Bono, can be found in Kokoman, a village on the Kintampo-Nkoranza road, where the descendants of the Bono Ntoahene still live. Tano Twumpuduo was the first state god of Bono whose high-priestess Yaa Takyiwaa Firi received the Golden Key of authority and power. Against all popular belief Taa Kora came only to power after 1810. I did not state that Taa Kora usurped Ntoa's position. I only spoke of Tano. I spoke of Ntoa's worship at Asueyi as an example of Cult Type II, because the rites there have all the features belonging to this period. That has nothing to do with the recent introduction of his cult.

P. 68. M. *The Fanti at Tekyiman*

I nowhere stated that the Fanti, founders of Tekyiman, came from *sarem*. According to Nana Kofi Boandwo they came from Mande, but he did not want me to use this information which he wished to keep secret. The Fanti brought the worship of Tano with them, it was their national god, and when they came 'out of the hole' near Bonse re-established his cult. The first Tano god in Bono was Taa Kofi. The Fanti queenmother Yaa Takyiwaa Firi 'gave life' to Tano in the same way as a divine woman 'gave life' to a clan or state, that is, that apart from introducing the deity founded a royal lineage; here the lineage of high-priestesses, whose *kra* was the same as the god's. Owing to some disaster the cult of Tano Wumupudo was discontinued, but was revived when Anaa, co-founder of Tuobodom became 'possessed' by the spirit of the god.

P. 86. N. *Tanoboase*

I have to accuse the Tanoboasehene Kwabina Dwomo of falsifying the tradition in order to give his god Taa Kora a status overshadowing the other Tano gods. There is no evidence that Taa Kora was worshipped in the Bono kingdom, the Tanoboasehene's ancestress Yaa Takyiwaa Firi was high-priestess of Tano Twumpuduo, the state god of Bono. When he fell from power, see above, there were no longer high-priestesses. The priesthood lived somewhere in obscurity until, about 1810, the worship of Taa Kora at Tanoboase was instituted. Taa Kora came to power for services rendered to the Asantehene Osei Bonsu in his war against Gyaman (1818-19). The god received villages, etc. to serve him, and the Tanoboasehene was created Tanohene and given all the regalia of a great king. Succeeding Asantehenes favoured Taa Kora with the result that the Tekyiman really came to believe that Taa Kora was senior and that this has always been so.

Tano was a 'rice god' because when the Fante arrived, and for a long time after, gave him his favourite food which was rice. Naturally 'rice god' is not an appellation of the deity, but a term in use for this in ancient Mediterranean cultures, or in the Ancient East.

P. 68. O. *Chief's Nomenclature*

Warren got the information that the introduction of the current nomenclature of chiefs (e.g. *Adonten*, *Nifa* etc.) was not brought into use in the Bonohene Boakye

Tenten's time, as I was told by Nana, Kwame Nyame and the Akwamuhene Kwasi Tabiri, but is of recent date. The position seems to have been the following: In the Bono kingdom this nomenclature only existed for about 30 years, and when the Bono Tekyiman state was founded some 20 years later Tekyiman contingents had to serve in the Ashanti army. What titles their war chiefs had nobody knows, nor how their army was organised when they fought the Ashanti in the 1870's. The army ceased to exist when the Tekyiman government went into exile to Gyaman and a guerilla force took its place. On return from Gyaman Tekyiman came under the British and wars belonged to the past. Finally the nomenclature was re-introduced or—if the question was when it was first introduced in the Tekyiman state—introduced, when a British Officer suggested it for the purpose of administration.

P. 69. P. *Stool Lists and Dates*

According to Warren, Kwame Nyame claims that he never gave me, nor my interpreter Kofi Antubam information on Bono queenmothers and chiefs nor that he, Nana, and Kofi Boandwo and Kofi Antubam met to give me further material on the subject. It seems completely to have slipped his mind that he, indeed, gave me information and that the meeting with Nana, Kofi Boandwo and Kofi Antubam actually did TAKE place in 1947. Evidence is Kofi Antubam's manuscript which records this fact, and of which I have given the original to the Centre of West African Studies in Birmingham and a faithful copy of it I am going to send to your Institute\*, as stated already.

I, moreover, gave the Centre a letter written by Kofi Antubam to me in 1948 in which he describes the counting of the gold pieces in the stool-house, each nugget, representing a year of reign of the Bono kings. I can well imagine that the elders in charge of the stool-house had removed all this gold and other valuables before Warren insisted upon checking up on this. They had no interest that it gets known that such wealth is kept there; also these things are sacred, and it would have been sacrilege to have them handled by a stranger. Nana, by the way, showed me in the courtyard before the stool house the Golden Stool of Nana Gyako I (1463-75), but I was not allowed to photograph it.

P. 70. O. *Aduanafo from Kumbu*

I nowhere stated that the family of the Aduanahene of Tekyiman came from Kumbu. His ancestress was a queenmother of Gyaman who, a refugee, settled with her followers in Bono-Manso and married the Bonohene Akumfu Ameyaw II (1649-59). However, the kingdom of Gyaman was founded by Abrade-Aduana from Kumbu about 1530 or 40 who, after the destruction of Kumbu in the 1470's had settled first in the Drobo district of western Ghana.

P. 70. R. *Gyaasehene and Asueyi*

Warren says that the first *Gyaasehene* was the son of the first Tekyimanhene; quite so, but he did not seem to have asked who was the first *Gyaasehene* of the Bono

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\* In the Director's Office.

kingdom. As people did not forward this information which was admitted to me in private by the late *Gyaasehene* Yaw Atoa, he now guesses in order to make my information fit his, which of course impossible.

Further, Warren states that Asueyi was founded by a hunter, a member of the *Gyaase* family. Correct, but this hunter was the last Bono *Gyaasehene* Fa Kosakori whom he muddles up with the first Bono *Gyaasehene* Fa Kosa Kwaretoapie who settled in Bono-Manso in the reign of Akumfi Ameyaw I (1328-63).

According to Yaw Atoa the last Bono *Gyaasehene* lived in hiding after the Bono-Ashanti War of 1722-3 and after a while wondered whether it would be safe again to settle somewhere. To reconnoitre he took one of his sisters with him and left her finally in a cave near Asueyi to go on alone. When he did not return she feared him dead and committed suicide. To be near her grave and when he felt that it was safe, he founded Asueyi and lived there as a hunter with some members of his family until he died. When the Bono-Tekyiman state came into being years later, his nephew, son of the first Tekyimanhene succeeded him.

During the Tekyiman-Ashanti War in the 1870's Asueyi was deserted. The last chief was Kwasi Kramo, as stated by Warren and he died in Gyaman.

Warren seems to have no idea of the nature of the traditions, nor how to collect them, his so-called scientific method is excellent for cataloguing tribes, clans, gods and so forth, and present day conditions, but is quite unsuited for the discovery of the past

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