

SEARCHLIGHT ON AKWAPIM

Akwapim Handbook, edited by David Brokensha,
Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972.
310 pages — £6.50

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As stated in the introduction, the idea of an Akwapim Handbook was mooted in 1961 by Mr. Thomas Hodgkin, then Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. The aim of such a handbook, was "to bring together in an inexpensive and clearly written form, some of our basic knowledge about Akwapim and its people." I must start by congratulating the editor, the publishers, the printers and the contributors on achieving the aim as outlined in the introduction for the book under review has eminently succeeded in bringing together in clearly written form a great deal of information about Akwapim and its people. Above all, judging from its size, the quality of the paper and printing, and the rising cost of books, the book under review is relatively inexpensive.

The handbook is certainly very comprehensive in its coverage dealing as it does with the ecology, the history, the social organisation, the economy and the art and culture of Akwapim. Moreover, most of these topics are treated not in a static but in a dynamic way. As the editor points out and as is borne out by most of the chapters, the authors were all concerned not simply with the past but also with the present, "with change as well as with tradition," as one would expect in a work of this sort, the articles are of varying lengths, comprehensibility and originality. They range from two-page to twenty-four page articles, and from scholarly, authoritative and exhaustive pieces such as those by Nketia on Music, Cole on Fauna, Kwamena-Po on history, John Stewart on the Language and Eric Ayisi and David Brokensha on Political Institutions to rather surprisingly brief pieces such as those on Relief Drainage and climate by K. B. Dickson, Society by David Brokensha on Demography by Marion Johnston and on the Arts by Oku Ampofo.

However, what makes this pioneering effort even more welcome still is the wealth of information it brings together in the appendices which take up about half of the entire book. This section contains information on such topics as bye-laws of Akwapim Local Council 1961. Local Government wards Property rates some Akwapim State Council Bye-laws governing funerals, divorce, etc., passed in 1940. It also contains extracts from Paul Isert's letters of 1786, Governor Winnietts' Journal of 1850, an interesting biographical sketch of Ofori Kuma II, Omanhene of Akwapim from 1914-1918 and 1932-1942 as well as a very comprehensive bibliography of Akwapim. The last

appendix, Appendix XVI, is the most fascinating and the most up-to-date of the lot containing as it does information on education, population, shopping facilities, market days, postal facilities, clinics, cemetery, lorry Parks, Churches, Traditional Organization, names of Quarters, special festivals, shrines, stool regalia and relics, and the title of each of the Akwapim towns. We learn from the introduction that this valuable document was compiled by Kofi Asare Opoku of the Institute of African Studies. The industry, patience, and diligence that went into this compilation must have been truly phenomenal and I would like to associate myself with the editor in expressing my indebtedness to Mr. Opoku for this labour of love and for the wealth of detail he provides for the reader.

This work is a pioneering effort, and like all such efforts, it has certain handicaps which I intend to point out here not in any censorious spirit but with a view to making it an even better model 'for scholars from other parts of Ghana, or even of other African countries.' In the first place, I think a number of the chapters could easily have been combined partly to avoid repetition and partly to facilitate comprehension. For instance, chapter 17 on strangers and 18 on Akwapim abroad could surely have been combined with chapter 14 on Demography; chapters 19 on Agriculture and 20 on Economy General could also have been combined; the rather brief note on Education (23) could easily have been incorporated into the chapter on Churches (9). Secondly, and more seriously still, I find the division into sections rather unsatisfactory. Why for instance should Music, Arts, and traditional arts be grouped under Recent Events or why should a topic like Akwapim traditional legal systems or institutions be left out? Instead of the five divisions outlined on pp. IX and X, I would like to suggest the following:—

- I Ecology and National Resources,
- II History
- III Social Institutions and Social Organization
- IV Political and Legal Institutions
- V Economy
- VI Art and Culture
- VII Recent Events.

Under Social Institutions and Social Organization, besides the topics listed I would add marriage, birth, naming and death as well as traditional architecture and traditional medicine. I am sure Dr. Oku Ampofo could have written an excellent and authoritative chapter on the last topic. I would also have liked to see the section on Economy begin with a chapter on traditional economy and surely there should have been a whole chapter on land tenure — a very hot issue at the moment. Under the section on Culture which is completely missing from this book, I would discuss not only Music, Arts and Crafts, but also weaving, dancing and festivals.

Finally, I would like to appeal to the present Director of the Institute to follow up this excellent pioneering effort of his predecessor by setting up a whole secretariat in the Institute charged with the responsibility of producing such handbooks on the other states or even regions of Ghana. The Secretariat should consist of a full-time Editor-General and a supporting staff. The duty of the Editor-in-Chief would be to appoint Editors who would plan each volume and suggest possible authors or contributors to edit each volume as it comes in to ensure a uniform standard, and to see to its publication.

To end as I began, the Editor and his team have done an excellent job and I cannot but also make a special mention of the excellent printing work done by the Ghana Publishing Corporation. If that Corporation can produce and sustain such a high standard of publication, there certainly will be no need for many Ghanaian authors to publish their works abroad. I only sincerely hope that this excellent example will be followed and that in the not-too-distant future, we shall see a series of Handbooks on the various states and regions of Ghana.