

NOTES ON ASHANTI HERALDRY*GOLD COAST POLITICAL SERVICES

The following note on Ashanti Heraldry was written by Captain A.W. Norris, twelve years ago with the idea of encouraging District Commissioners to observe the emblems used by the various Chiefs and so trace the history and the seniority of the Stools. It has since lain lost in a pigeon-hole, from the dignified obscurity of which the Editor thought it deserved to be withdrawn and Captain Norris has kindly given his consent.

From ancient time we find that kings and rulers were in the habit of granting to their principal generals and warriors, some distinguishing mark, sign or emblem in order to distinguish them from those of inferior rank and to act as an incentive to others to emulate the deeds of those who had been granted such honour.

The first mention we have of this is Alexander the Great who gave to some of his most eminent generals the right to place distinguishing marks on their shields, but doubtless the practice was in use long before.

Coming to more recent times we have the history of the middle ages from Henry II to Richard II when Chivalry was at its height and to uphold the dignity of ones crest, coat and war-cry was the aim of every man of Coat Armour.

Honours in those days were not bought or sold, and even those of humble birth could by distinguished leadership and bravery become one of the glorious group who surrounded Edward III and the Black Prince.

The only difference that money made was in the case of a knight, who if he could pay a certain number of horsemen, bowmen, hobblers etc., to follow him was allowed to cut his forked pennon and become a Knight.

In this connection it is curious to note that Field Officers of the Army have the right to wear gold spurs, they ranking as knights with a certain following.

* Culled from the Gold Coast Review published by the Gold Coast Government: Vol. No.2, July - Dec. 1926.

Officers junior to them only being Esquires and wearing silver spurs.

It is of interest to notice that the Tchi speaking races especially the Ashantis had and have as complex a system of native heraldry, distinctions and honours as in the days above-mentioned.

As in the case of European races, the King or Ashantihene was the fount of all honour, and without his leave no distinction or emblem could be made, worn or used.

Such distinctions as were allowed were highly prized, and any one not entitled to the use of the same, who arrogated such distinction to himself, knew that it would mean war with either the Head Chief or one of the (present) Amanhene who had permission to use such emblem.

All distinctions given were only allowed to be used at the pleasure of the Ashantihene and as a disgrace could be and were sometimes confiscated.

It might be of interest to mention a few of the distinctions used by the Principal Head Chiefs from old times.

STOOLS

Only the Amanhene of Mampong had the right to cover the stool with silver or to use silver nails. This right was given by Osei Tutu to Chief Mampong Boatin for his bravery as War Captain when the Ashantis fought the Denkyeras.

Elephant skin mats for stools may only be used by the Amanhene of Mampon and Wam.

Little round gold plates on the Black Stool are allowed to Juaben, Kumawu, and Aguna - these were made by the Head Fetish man Anokye as medicine before the Denkyera war.

The Queen Mothers of Mampon, Juaben, Kumawu and Nsuta have the right to put silver bands on their stools. This right was given by Opoku Ware after the death of Osei Tutu for help given in capturing Ntim Gyakari, Chief of Denkyera.

Brass bells on stools could be used by all Amanhene, big Kumasi Chiefs and Chiefs of big towns - only the Ashantihene had the right to use silver bells.

UMBRELLAS

From old time the following Chiefs have the right to use silk state umbrellas - but the actual cloth had to be first shewn to the Ashantihene for him to decide that the pattern was not the same as his:- or those of

- Mampong
- Juaben
- Nsuta
- Kumawu
- Bekwai
- Kokofu
- Aguna and the Chidomhene of Kumasi.

Aguna also had the right to use a certain sort of linen Umbrella.

The Chiefs of Nkoranza and Wam were given leave to make silk umbrellas by Kofi Kakyiri, (Karikari) and Prempeh gave leave to Ejisu and Offinsu.

EMBLEMS ON TOP OF UMBRELLAS

- Mampon, a silver war horn and a gold nut tree
- Juaben, a gold war horn and gold human jaw
- Ejisu, a silver horn and gold nut tree
- Kumawu, a wooden horn and gold nut tree

HORNS

Juaben sounds "Amofo" meaning "from high rank"
Mampon sounds "Kotokosfo" from Mamponhene of the name of Saffo who was father to Osei Kwami.

- Mampon)
 - Juaben)
 - Nsuta)
 - Bekwai)
 - Amoafahene)
- Two horns called "Asokoben" which sound the names of all the past occupants of the stool.

Mampon)	
Juaben)	
Nsuta	)	A band of twelve big horns called "Ntahira".
Bekwai)	
Kumawu)	

DRUMS

"Prempe" Drum	.....	Juaben and Akwamu
"Ntahira"	.....	All Amanhene
"Fontomfrom"	.....	Two big drums, used by Mampon, Juaben, Nsuta, Bekwai and Kumawu
"Boma"	.....	One drum similar to above, Offinsu, Ejisu, Kontanase, Nkoranza, Techiman, Berekum, Kokofu, Adansi, Aguna, Bankami; Esumaja.
"Fa asafo koko"	.....	"Take your men and fight" Ashantihene only.
"Sika Kukuwa"	.....	Covered with a sort of lizard skin, Juaben (6), Nsuta (3) Kumasi (2) Mampon (2), Bekwai (3) Ejura (1).
"Mirie"	.....	Juaben and Bekwai, used when the Chief is going to Court.
"Aferé"	.....	Juaben, Mampon, Bekwai, Kumawu and Nstua.

GOLD CAP

Nsenefokye	.....	Juaben
Nkankaramu	.....	All Amanhene

GOLD SANDALS

Juaben, Mampon, Nsuta, Kumawu, Bekwai and Kokofu, Offinsu and Ejisu given by Prempeh.

Then there are such things as Message swords and the emblems attached to same, such as the Gyegyetyiri of Juaben, Fanfanto, meaning "go, fight and die".

A land-tortoise, a snail, a snake, - "Onanka" an axe a fish "Adwen".

The right to use the few emblems, honours, etc., mentioned, has been gathered mostly from Chiefs in the Ashanti-Akim District and must not be read as absolutely accurate, it being possible, if not probable, that they wished to aggrandize their own divisions.

EAST AFRICAN STUDIES

During the Long Vacation three pupils of the Institute will visit Kenya and Tanzania to carry out field work in connection with their M.A. theses. They will be the first pupils of the Institute to have worked in East Africa.

Mr. Charles Darkwah will first visit Mombasa to collect original material for an account of the history of the Mazrui family, who ruled Mombasa as governors appointed by Oman from 1741 to 1837. Some epitaphs in their family cemetery were published by Charles Guillain as long ago as 1856, but it is known that his collection was incomplete.

Mr. G.O. Ekemode is writing a history of the Kilindi Kingdom of Vuga in Northern Tanzania, and will first visit Vuga before proceeding to Dar-es-Salaam to work on German material in the university library there. At Vuga he will meet the hereditary sultan who keeps a pack of hunting dogs who are descended from the pack of hunting dogs founded by the first of the Kilindi dynasty in the early eighteenth century.

Mr. G.A. Akinola will be doing field work in southern Tanzania, visiting Kilwa Kisiwani and Lindi in connection with a history of French trading activities in this area in the eighteenth century. For this he is also using a hitherto unknown collection of French documents I discovered in the French National Archives last year.

I have received permission from the Vice-Chancellor to accept the invitation of Columbia University, New York, to be Visiting Professor of African History for the fall semester, 1965-66.