

SALAGA IN 1874

The defeat of the Ashanti forces by the British in 1874 was of fundamental importance for the whole of Northern Ghana, for it destroyed in one blow the military dominance that Kumasi had for long exercised in that region. The break-away of other Ashanti provinces and divisions which resulted meant the insulation of the northern states from what Ashanti power remained.

There was also a change in the direction of trade. The loosening of Ashanti control over the provinces and subject peoples to the development of routes that went round rather than through Kumasi, down the Volta on the east, and through Abron, Dormaa and Sefwi in the west. This in turn meant the rise of other market centres, such as Kintampo, Atebubu and Kete, which the newly independent authorities were anxious to encourage because of the revenues involved.

Such factors led to the gradual decline of Salaga, the greatest market town in Northern Ghana, and to the dispersal of its Moslem population throughout the forest region. But two local events hastened the process, the Salaga civil war of 1892, when the town emptied overnight, and the slaughter of Ashanti traders in 1874, which inhibited any attempt on the part of the Ashanti to re-establish the trade on its former basis, when Salaga was described as 'the market of Kumasi'.

The following account of the massacre of the Ashanti traders was collected by the German scholar-trader, G.A. Krause, who spent some two years and a half trading in Salaga and its neighbourhood between 1892 and 1894, and was in the town when it was entered by the rebel forces in December, 1892. The Hausa text was published in the Mittheilung des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, 1928.

THE EXPULSION OF THE ASHANTI FROM SALAGA IN THE 1874
(24. S. 35-36)

During the reign of the Kpembe chief Sabulugu Sungungu Doti (Doshi) Lepo Darahamani Kanyasi and the Limam Abudu the Gurma, merchants came from everywhere.¹ From many parts came the caravan leaders;

among these were Usmani dan Sharubatu (lit. the son of "the drinker of writing",) Danbawa the Tall, Kurtinga the Gurma, Sulemana the Tall, Yahaya Nakinba, Baku Namaishatu, Abdul Baki, Buhari Nawiya. Thousands of people came but for four months kola nuts were scarce and it was reported that the Ashanti were at war. Young men were hard-pressed and nothing seemed to interest them. One day, a message came from the Chief of Ashanti, saying he wanted a Hausa mallam who had been born in Hausaland, not one born here.² The Chief of Kpembe gathered the people together and told them about this (request). The headman, Labaran, stood up and asked the mallams but they were all afraid except for Mallam Ahmadu Batunbuce who agreed (to go). It was reported to the chief that the Hausa people were all afraid except for this one Mallam. The chief ordered the Mallam to be given a thousand (cowrie shells). The messenger set out at once and as soon as he arrived, the money was given to the Mallam who got ready and set off. On the way he met some fugitives who told him that the Ashanti had been defeated and that their chief had been killed. At this he turned back.

There were then many Ashanti in the town. Among these were merchants and important slaves of the chief, like Amachi, the head weaver, and also the town warden (mai irangari). Uncertainty continued until one day the chief's messenger arrived with the priest of a local shrine (sarkin turu) whose name was Afadi.³ People had come to Kulipi with an army in order to round up the Ashanti and cut them into pieces. Then Chief of Kpembe called the people together and told them what was happening. The people said, "We went to catch them and revenge ourselves". The king's men said, "Is that what you intend?" And they replied "Yes". Then he said to them, "Well, if a person who is your master falls into trouble and you do not offer him help, then at least you should not try to catch him". Then he sent for Amachi who was at the house of Albarka and told him that there had been fighting in his home town, and the enemy were at Kulipi, he should flee. Amachi asked the chief to help him fight the enemy. To which the chief replied, "But you have refused to allow me to buy guns and bullets. So where am I going to acquire weapons?",⁵ Amachi said, "Well, if they come to fight, you should leave them to me to deal with. I myself will do the bidding of the Ashanti chief. I shall not leave a single one of them. I am only worried about these unless infidels. But if they meet me tomorrow, they will meet with trouble". Then the

chief wished him God's help. When he returned home he told his host Albarka what had happened. Albarka advised him that the enemy's army was getting larger and his own smaller, and since he could not engage, them, he should seek God's help and flee out of the town that night. Amachi refused to listen to his advice, but Albarka insisted and finally got Amachi to agree. He gave some money so that prayers could be said on his behalf and on the next day, he set out with thirty guns. Some Nchumbulung people waylaid and attacked him, but he cut a passage through their flank and managed to escape. When it was reported in the town that Amachi had fled, the remaining Ashanti were worried. The Kpembe chief managed to calm them. One day the people of Alfai (Kpandai) sent a message saying that "a powerful son of a chief was being killed, yet he was laughing". Then the Chief of Kpembe exclaimed, "What is this? What has happened? Now that my people have been able to kill a son of the Ashanti King, all my troubles are over. Let them all be rounded up". Whenever an Ashanti man was seen, he was caught. They began to flee and seek refuge in mosques and in houses. Whenever they were seen running, people would draw back and jeer at them. The big baobab standing in Ngwo Kuka had fallen down and they were tied to the trunk.⁶ Throughout the town one saw Ashanti bound and tied. When this took place, the Gonja called the townsmen and ordered that all the belongings of the Ashanti should be surrendered. Whoever hid any property would be punished. The townsmen began to surrender the property that they had. Force was employed until the Gonja had collected the lot. In the house of Albarka alone, Amachi had about 400 units of money. Besides this he brought out three hundred loads kola nuts which he had sold but hadn't yet bought a single sheep with them.

Amachi fled from the town on the Sunday night before the rioting (happened). When this took place, the merchants began to suffer. They searched everywhere for kola nuts. Finally they managed to procure some. There was a shortage in the town of Mallam Suhula, but they managed to find some. In Hausa land the kola nuts were spoiled by insects. Many animals died that year.

In Hausa land Giru was invaded and defeated; that was during the reign of Bubu Gudurega and during the reign of the Gwandu chief, Hanafi. In that year the Nupe chief Masaba died⁷ and Umaru Majigi succeeded him.

It was he who fought in the Giru war against the chief of Jega, Jadan Bukhari. Giru was taken on a Saturday. The merchants led by Baku Namaishatu passed through the camp of Giru and it was they who gave the news about it. In that year Ashanti was also defeated in battle and they did not rise again. Giru was conquered after six months fighting.

NOTES:

1. Sabalugu (Sabalwu) is the 20th Chief of Kpembe in the Liman's list (J.A. Braimah The Two Insanwurfos, in press). He had previously been Kanunkulaiwura Abudu, head of the Alfai (or Lepo) gate. He was succeeded by Doshi of the Sungbung gate (i.e. Singungu Doti), who was reigning when Bonnat, Bannerman and Gouldsbury visited the town in 1876 (J. Goody, Salaga in 1876, Ghana Notes and Queries, 1966). Sabalwu's death must therefore have occurred c.1875. It is not clear what the Lefu (i.e. Lepo) refers to here, since Doshi was the chief of Singbung not Lepo although the chiefship of this name is in fact not tied to the Lepo gate alone. According to Braimah (above), the head of the third gate, Kanyasi, at this time was Asumani, not Derimani.
2. In times of peril the Ashanti appealed to both Moslem and pagan sources (e.g. Krachi Dente) for help. In the present case they were apparently anxious to obtain the most learned Muhammedan assistance available, hence their request for a Hausa from Hausaland. Spiritual imports ranked high among Ashanti trade with the north.
3. This was presumably the Kulipi shrine, whose decorations are illustrated in H. Klose, Togo unter Deutscher Flagge, Berlin, 1899, p. 371. Its destruction at this time is referred to by Bonnat in his account of his visit to Salaga in 1876 (see J. Bonnat, Reconnaissance du Fleuve Volta, L'Explorateur, 3, p. 36, and J. Goody, Salaga in 1876, Ghana Notes and Queries, 1966).

- (4) The pursuers of the Ashanti appear to have been Nchumuru from Bajemeso who, like Nanumba and Krachi, were under Juaben influence. Juaben had of course rebelled against the authority of the Ashantihene after the defeat by the British in 1874 and now attempted to control trade down the Volta valley. It was the Juaben who instigated the Chief of Atebubu to prevent the passage of Bonnat to Salaga; the latter was acting as an agent for the Ashantihene after his captivity in Kumasi (see Theophil Opoku, *Eines Neger-Pastors Predigtreise durch die Lander am Volta-Strom, Evangelisches Missions-Magazin, Basel, 1885, pp. 270-1*; G.E. Ferguson, *Report on a Mission to the Interior, 9/12/1892, C.O. 96/230*; Jules Gros, *Voyages, aventures et captivite de J. Bonnat chez les Achantis, Paris, 1884*).
- (5) The Ashanti prohibited trade in weapons and powder to the north, which is how they maintained their military dominance of the area.
- (6) Ngua is a ward (Hausa). Ngua Kuku was the ward inhabited by the traders of Bomu origin, the Beriberi.
- (7) According to A. Burns, *History of Nigeria, 5th edition, London, 1955, Masaba died in 1872 (p.137)*.

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BRONG TRADITIONS

Nwaneme (Suma capital of the Nwaneme Traditional Area is situated at one hundred and fifty two miles from Kumasi on the Berekum - Bontuku road. The chief used in historical times to be the Nifahene (head of the right wing) of the Gyaman State and second in rank to that chief.