

D.E.K. Amenumey: The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times.

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In 1975, D.E.K. Amenumey published an article entitled 'New Myths in the History of Ghana: Anlo-Asante Relations', in which he strongly contested what he considered to be the myth of Asante political and military domination of the Anlo-Ewe, who are located in the south-eastern corner of Ghana. This same concern about Ewe/non-Ewe relations is also one of the major concerns of his most recent publication, and the subject of this review, **The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times**. According to Amenumey, one of the purposes of **The Ewe** is to rectify 'certain ideas and pieces of information about the Ewe past [that have gained] currency in general works produced by authors who have no special knowledge of Ewe history'.¹ In this most recent publication, Amenumey explores in greater depth than his earlier article, the history and external relations of the Anlo as well as other Ewe-speaking communities located in Ghana and Togo.

The volume itself is rather a slim one, having only 101 pages of text, and it focuses almost exclusively on the political and military history of three communities: the Anlo, Ge and Krepi. Even in the discussion of the history of these areas, sources of information are limited. The history of pre-colonial Krepi, for example, is based almost solely on two sources. This is a reflection of the amount and focus of the historical research conducted on the pre-colonial Ewe up to 1978 when it appears the author concluded his research for the book; given this situation - ameliorated only slightly by more recent studies on the pre-colonial social and economic history of certain Ewe groups² - it is hoped by both the author and this reader, that the appearance of this study will stimulate additional interest in research on the history of the Ewe.

The Ewe is organized into seven chapters: the first is concerned with an examination of the migration of the Ewe into their present homeland, while the remaining chapters are concerned with the political and military affairs of the three areas mentioned above. Organizing themes for the latter chapters include questions about the source of disunity and the lack of large states among the Ewe, as well as the issue of foreign (non-Ewe) intervention in Ewe affairs. In chapter two, for example, Amenumey examines the history of Ge, its military conflicts with Dahomey and Anlo, and then he explores the question as to why this expansionary state was unable to expand by political and/or military means to create a single political entity embracing most, if not all of the Ewe. Political disunity and economic reasons are mentioned, but according to Amenumey 'a more crucial factor that was to contribute to the irresolution

of the process of aggregation was that of foreign political and military intervention.³ In chapters three and four, the history of the coastal state of Anlo is examined in terms of their relations with Akwamu and Denmark. The disunifying influence of these powers is also emphasized. Chapter five examines the history of Krepí and its relations with Akwamu, where the latter conquered the former. Chapter six explores the later pre-colonial history of the Ge state which was torn asunder by competing political factions.

In all of these chapters, a blizzard of details about wars, political alliances and economic relations is presented. In support, for example, of his contentions about the disruptive nature of foreign intervention in Ewe affairs, he cites the following account by the late seventeenth century author, William Bosman. '[Ge and Anlo] were pretty even in force and Aquanboe (Akwamu) who would keep them both on foot takes care that neither be destroyed by sending assistance to the weakest side.'⁴ In this way Akwamu was able to thwart the expansion of both Anlo or Ge control over the lower Slave Coast. Where problems arise is when Amenumey continues with this same line of reasoning for the period after 1730 when Akwamu had been defeated and had relocated east of the Volta in a much reduced position vis-a-vis the other states on the lower Gold Coast and upper Slave Coast. He states that after 1730 'the Akwamu-Anlo relation was one of a politico-economic alliance ... Akwamu was assured of regular supplies of salt and dried fish [as well as] the coastal markets to which she could take her slaves for sale ... Anlo was assured of military assistance ...'⁵ This assistance was necessary as Anlo fought numerous wars with the Ge and others. According to Amenumey, the conflicts between Ge and Anlo 'derived from a clash of competing political and economic interests. Both parties attempted to attain territorial boundaries of such size as would provide security and power, and also confer on them economic well-being'.⁶ In other words, alliance between Anlo and Akwamu was built on political and economic relations of benefit to both parties, while the hostilities between Anlo and Ge emerged out of conflicting interests. In his conclusion, however, Amenumey notes that Akwamu 'helped ... to split the Ewe into rival divisions.'⁷ That rivalry existed is undoubtedly true, but to suggest that Akwamu after 1730 was in a position to do anything but be a partner with the Anlo who willingly joined forces with the Akwamu against other Ewe-speaking peoples, is to read more into the situation than can be justified. It pits Akwamu against the possibility of Ewe unity where there appears to have been no political and economic bases for such an intra-Ewe relationship. Amenumey takes a similar tack in his discussion of the post-1730 Akwamu domination of Krepí. He states that 'Akwamu had

been able to maintain her hold on Krepi not only because of her superior military power ... but also because of the lack of cooperation between the various Krepi towns... Some like Peki ... actually fought alongside Akwamu to subject the defiant towns.¹⁸ The historical details are correct, but the tone in which they are discussed suggests that the Peki association with Akwamu (like that of Anlo's association) against other Ewe-speaking communities was somehow an unnatural one. Ultimately, this interpretation rests on the idea that the Ewe should have been able to unite. But it is obvious, at least to this reader, that people do not unite simply because they share a common language. Rather, they do so because they have interests that overlap, or one party is able to dominate the other, and has a desire to do so, not for linguistic or cultural reasons, but for economic and political reasons. Amenumey recognizes this when he discusses the various histories of the three Ewe communities, but he is continually drawn back to the ideal of Ewe unity in his conclusions. The result is a significant discontinuity between the historical reality and the implications he would like to draw from the same.

Another troublesome area is in those sections in which Amenumey attempts to engage in a debate with some of the authors on whose work he is relying. In discussing, for example, the pre-1730 Akwamu domination of Anlo, he notes that Akwamu did launch an expansionary campaign across the Volta in 1702, that this state was certainly capable of conquering Anlo, and that four different historians state that Anlo was, indeed, conquered. Presumably, these historians were not creating facts out of whole cloth. Yet Amenumey states that 'there is no positive evidence' that Akwamu did conquer Anlo. He states this without investigating for the reader, the sources of information used by the other historians, or providing additional information to support a reasonable doubt about the conquest. It would appear then, that his assertion on this matter was made not because evidence exists to support such a view, but because other interests are given priority over conclusions that he perhaps finds less palatable. This approach, evident throughout the book, is troubling as it mars what is otherwise a laudable effort to bring to the general reader, information about a people who have played and are playing a significant role in the history of Ghana and Togo.

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NOTES

1. Amenumey, D.E.K. **The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times**. p.vii.
2. See for example, Sandra E. Greene, 'Land, Lineage and Clan in Early Anlo', **Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute**, 51. 1. 1981; 'Conflict and Crisis: A Note on the Workings of the Political Economy and Ideology of the Anlo-Ewe in the Precolonial Period', **Rural Africana**, 17 (Fall) 1983; 'The Past and Present of an Anlo-Ewe Oral Tradition', **History in Africa**, 12, 1985; and Ansa, K. Asamoah, **The Ewe in South-eastern Ghana and Togo on the Eve of Colonialism**. (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1986).
3. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.29.
4. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.30-31.
5. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.34.
6. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.35.
7. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.101
8. Amenumey, *op. cit.* p.77-78.