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TRADE AMONG THE ASANTE OF GHANA UP TO THE  
END OF 18TH CENTURY

by Kwasi Boaten\*

Introduction

The Kingdom of Asante, before its fall at the end of the 19th century, relied on trade for its economic growth. From the defeat of Denkyira (1701) it sought to control the trade on the Gold Coast (Ghana) and by the beginning of the 19th century it had assumed the role of the greatest middleman state in the country. This achievement was possible because of the importance the Asante Kotoko Court attached to trade. Indeed, the politics and the trading activities of the Asante were inseparable.

The name Asante did not appear in any written record until Bosman<sup>1</sup> and Barbot mentioned it as a young but a strong nation at the beginning of the 18th century. (Asante had just defeated the Denkyira). Nevertheless, there is on the Dutch map of the Gold Coast 1629 (Fig. 1) a reference made to a tribe Acanij<sup>2</sup>, who were described as the "most principal merchants who trade gold with us". The area marked Acanij could unmistakably be associated with Adanse, where the Asante evolved as a people and later (c 1640's) started to migrate northwards<sup>3</sup> to occupy the areas marked on the Dutch map as Inta, western part of Akim or Great Acanij, Akan etc. It seems long before these Twi-speakers began to trade with Kankan-Abrofo, that is, the Portuguese, they had trade contacts with the northern markets. One cannot tell exactly how far north they reached, yet ideas and goods from the Great Empires of the Niger Bend might have

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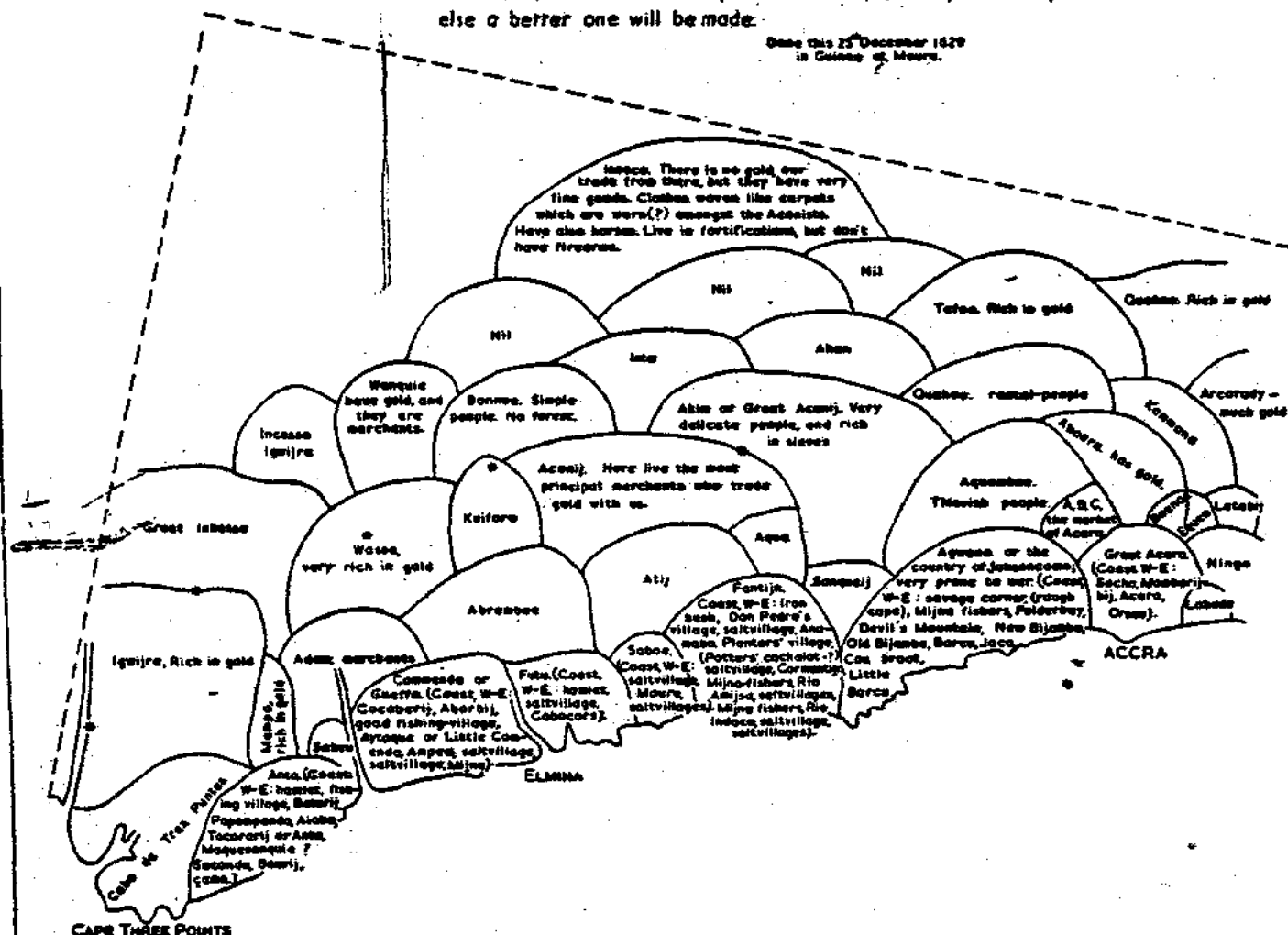
1. Bosman, W., A New Description of Guinea Coast (Lond. 1701) p.65.
2. There was an earlier reference made on Acany in the 16th century. See Pacheco Parriera: Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis, p.120.
3. Daaku, K.Y., The Tradition of Adanse (Legon 1969) passim.

## MAP OF THE GOLD COAST 1629

Map of the Regions of the G.C. in Guinea as we have enquired on various places on these coasts from the most experienced Blacks and so far as our nation visits here [this region] ordinarily and have ourselves also experienced (found)

This for the first time so gathered brought together in the interest of those who take speculation in her, till by somebody else a better one will be made:

Dated this 25<sup>th</sup> December 1629  
in Guinea at Moors.



reached them through the Mande traders, whom they met at places like Begho and Salaga.

### Patterns of Trade

The Asante evolved three different patterns of trade: these were the local, district and the inter-state trade. All these patterns of trade have long been with the Asante.

### Inter-state Trade

But by far the most important was the inter-state trade. Rattray observed that this trade was very lucrative.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the economy of Asante, until its annexation, was based on this external trade. This trade followed two main directions to the north and to the coast.

To the northern markets of the Dagomba, Gongye<sup>2</sup> and Gyaman, the Asante carried kola nuts.<sup>3</sup> From there they sent home slaves, livestock, crude iron bars, shea butter and coarse woollen clothes such as Nsaa, Kyemetam, Bonno etc.

In the northern markets the chief currency was cowrie; the Asante traders had to exchange the kola nuts for cowries with which they made purchases.<sup>4</sup> At first the Northern traders were not allowed to trade south of Salaga.<sup>5</sup> This measure had both economic and political repercussions. Economically, it helped to popularize the northern markets while the Asante traders dictated the tempo of this trade by being the sole carriers of the chief commodity, kola nuts. Politically, this measure strengthened Asante's position as it tried to engage the northerners in their native markets.

The Asante northern trade could be designated as the kola trade. This forest commodity was so highly priced that it was used

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1. Rattray, Ashanti Law and Constitution, p.109.
  2. Goody, J., "The Akan and the North" G.N.Q. No.9, Nov. 1966, p.25.
  3. Dutch Diaries and Correspondence Box 1815-1825, No.3, Furley Coll.
  4. Rattray, op. cit., p.110.
  5. Ibid.

as medium of exchange on the slave markets. A slave at Salaga was worth between 10,000 and 14,000 nuts.<sup>1</sup> Bowdich also says that "2,000 cowries or one basket of boosees was the highest price given for a slave".<sup>2</sup> Rattray's price of a slave was exaggerated, or probably, it was the price towards the latter part of the 19th century when slaves were gradually becoming a scarce commodity. On the contrary, the price quoted by Bowdich is what seems plausible to oral tradition on the slave trade. Indeed a man's full load was made up of about 2,000 nuts of kola called Apakan. And one Apakan could purchase a strong slave. Weaklings cost something less. Most of these purchased northerners entered into the Western slave trade, while a fair proportion were kept as domestic slaves in the homes of the Asante. The many domestic slaves found in practically all the Asante homes attest to the extent and popularity of the slave trade with the north.

This profitable trade was carried on right into the beginning of the twentieth century but not without fluctuations. The volume of the kola trade reduced with the inception of the civil wars that plagued Asante from 1875 onwards. The Asante kola trade transformed Kintampo into a large market (1880's), but it seems the volume of trade that flowed to Kintampo could not compare with that of Salaga a few years earlier.

Asante traders also went to the littoral to trade. The exports in this trade included gold, ivory, slaves, and shea butter; and the imports were gun and gun powder, European consumer goods such as drinkables, clothes and iron bars<sup>3</sup> and other coastal commodities such as fish and salt. (At home these exotic commodities, except guns, entered into the local/district trade).

Throughout the eighteenth century the Asante had, in some cases, to sell their goods through the Fante middlemen. This was true at Cape Coast. But the trade was so lucrative that the Asante were determined to have direct access to the whites, and thus eliminate the Fante middlemen. This idea, economically vital to Asante and politically desirable, had to be effected by force; and

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1. Rattray, op. cit., p.110.

2. Bowdich, T.E., op. cit., p.333.

3. Rattray, op. cit., p.110.

Daaku, K.Y., "Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1620-1720 (1964).

this led to the Asante-Fante war in 1806<sup>1</sup> and other subsequent encounters.<sup>2</sup> Indeed from 1807 onwards Asante was the dominant political power and most powerful middleman state and virtually controlled the trade in this part of West Africa. To maintain this role and make it effective, the Asante purchased at the coast firearms with which they clamped their power on the surrounding kingdoms. Bowdich observes that the Asante never permitted firearms to pass their country to the northern tribes.<sup>3</sup> This was an Asante court decision designed to strengthen the military might of the nation. Huydecoper recorded that the King of Asante could order from the coast in one instalment as many as "a thousand of the best guns".<sup>4</sup> The coastal states could not be prevented from purchasing firearms because of their nearness to the European Forts.

Kumase became the chief commercial centre, as all major decisions on commerce were taken there. At the same time it assumed the role of a great inland entrepot and route centre (Fig. 2).

#### The Organisation of the External Trade

It must be emphasized that both the chiefs and ordinary subjects undertook this trade. In the case of the paramount chiefs they had a special court officer known as Batahene, head of the traders, who was under the Gyaasehene (head of the chief's household).<sup>5</sup> When the chief wanted to trade then people of his household under the Batahene were sent with commodities either to the north or to the littoral. Other subjects freely gave up

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1. Dickson, K.B., "Trade Patterns in Ghana at the beginning of 18th century". The Geog. Review Vol.LVI No.3 July 1960, p.430.
  2. Adm. No.51/5/17 p.24 National Archives of Ghana, Accra.
  3. Bowdich, op. cit., p.110.
  4. Huydecoper's Diary.
  5. Daaku, K.Y., Trade and Trade Patterns Among the Akan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, A Paper in Hist. Soc.

## KUMASE: FOCUS OF ROUTES

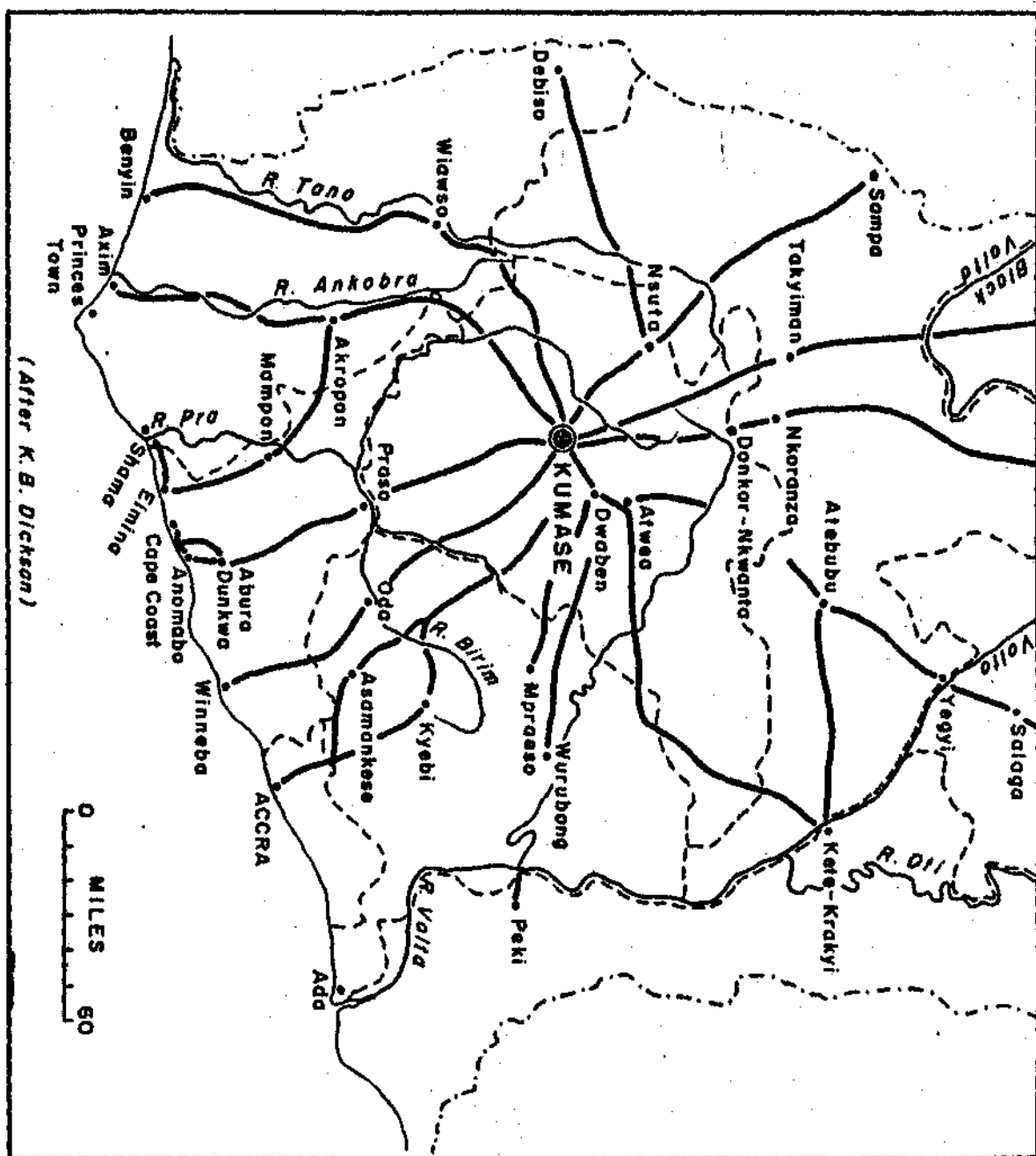


FIG. 2

their services to act as King's men. This was because such carriers were permitted to carry on their own private trade side by side with their official duties.<sup>1</sup> At the same time such traders enjoyed the protection and the privileges of being in the King's caravan. The Kings' or Chiefs' caravans were an occasional affair and that most of this external trade was carried out by individuals who became known as Batefoo.

Joining a caravan was so popular that by the 19th century it was a convention that every able-bodied Asante should once in his life time go to trade either in the north (for slaves) or on the coast (for guns). Even though individuals could trade on their own, the organization of the caravan trade as existed on the Gold Coast was so costly that, by and large, it remained in the hands of mainly the rich and partly the chiefs who, according to Rattray, had a kind of temporary monopoly.<sup>2</sup> Trading to not-so-far-away places as Kintampo and Atebubu (where northern articles and slaves could be obtained) could be undertaken by men who were not so rich since such a journey did not involve much cost. Normally individual traders set out with friends and relatives to try their fortunes in the distant markets where they sent their 'home' goods for sale in order to purchase exotic materials to be sold at home.

Because of the distances involved the external trade of Asante was well organised. Danger from attacks of brigands and wild animals made it unsafe for the traders to travel in singles or even in small numbers. To ensure safety on the routes therefore, the traders organised themselves into larger groups which could be as large as forty carriers or more. The caravan might include both men and women carriers. The traders then walked along the trade routes, sometimes led by a well-known trader. The personal powers of such a man would only be over his carriers. But others might only join him for the protection they might enjoy from his presence. William Hutton and Huydecoper in their travels to Asante met many traders with gold dust and elephant teeth to the coast.

When the Asantehene's caravan was going to the coast, it was often led by a special court official which the Dutch, called

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1. Ibid.

2. Rattray, Ashanti Law and Constitution, p.109.



the "Thie-thie of the Zaay".<sup>1</sup> This official was the traditional court crier who travelled with the traders carrying his insignia of office, which was sometimes a gold hilted sword, and with the presence of such a man trouble makers were often sacred.

#### Asante Court and the External Trade

The Asante court had interest in this external trade. In the first place, when individuals in the nation were well-to-do, it meant they could pay their occasional taxes such as the apeato, war taxes. Secondly, each able-bodied, responsible Asante male should own a gun, indeed the gun was the sign of one's maturity. For this reason men travelled to the coast to purchase firearms, thus resulting in a saying enye Praso na yeto otuo, one does not buy firearms at Praso. The need for firearms therefore forced many people from Asante to go to the coast as occasional traders specifically to buy them.

The wealth of Asante rested on this external trade; the court, therefore, sought to control it. Indeed it was the duty of the court to ensure the safety of Asante traders.<sup>2</sup> The court did this by several means. Firstly, the court established what could be called customs houses at the fringes of Asante proper on the main trade routes. Here the roads were blocked and heavily guarded. All traders reaching these posts were detained until enquiries had been made about them. After they had given a good account of their political activities they were allowed to go on their journey. Even though the primary purpose of these customs houses might have been political<sup>3</sup>, their economic importance must not be lost sight of.

The Asante stools were partly maintained through taxes and tolls. Rattray wrote that the tolls could either be paid in gold dust (coastal trade) or kola nuts<sup>4</sup> (northern trade). It seems the tolls imposed on Asante traders were not a regular feature. Collection of tolls might have been done only during certain emergency cases,

1. Letter from Factor Landman at Axim dated April 11, Vol. 11 p.36, Legon.
2. Reindorf, C.C., (op. cit., p.131), The History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti, p.131.
3. Daaku, K.Y., Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720, Oxford, 1970.
4. Rattray, Ashanti Law and Constitution, p.111.

when the Asante court needed money. To encourage people to trade, the court did not saddle them with tolls. No individual had the right to impose tolls on traders except the Asantehene, who did it through those chiefs whose settlements were customs houses.

In the 19th century Adwera<sup>1</sup> on the Salaga route and Donkro-Nkwanta on the Kintampo route (Daboya) were the customs houses of the northern routes. On the Wenchi and Nsoko routes, Akomadan and Nsuta served as customs houses respectively. On the Kwawu/Accra route, Ramseyer and Kuhne testify that: "Sokoree near Afigyase was the customs house"; while Kusa was the customs house on the great Fante route (Fig. 3). Since the Asuo Firaw, River Volta, was the river of the Asantehene, the court established customs house on it; the purpose of which was both political and economic. Political because, so far away from the centre, Bono/Guan traders could stealthily send guns to the northern tribes yonder so long as they could get money. This move was economic, because the volume of trade going up and down the river must be known so that tolls could be collected; here collection was said to have been rigid since it did not involve Asante traders.

Secondly, the royal court of Asante stationed on all major routes at vantage points, such as crossing points of big rivers and important road junctions, court officials (the Adamfo). Some of the known points where these officials were stationed were Yegyi on the Volta, Tanoso on Tano along the Gyaman route, Praso on Pra River on the Fante route, Mamfe on Accra route. These officials had to see that the routes were kept open at all times. Furthermore, on the coastal routes there were often stationed at known trouble centres Asante soldiers<sup>2</sup> to protect the vital trade with the Europeans. The Asante had no standing army to be able to make this a regular feature. The Asante soldiers were posted to such centres when those vassal states rebelled, and also whenever there were troubles in any state under Asante, soldiers were sent there to impose peace. Nevertheless, traders themselves were not known to have carried firearms during their trips, because trading was known to be a peaceful venture.

Though the British at the coast did not like the Asante they knew trade could only be effective when the Asante were at peace

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1. Ibid.

2. Letter from Factor Landman at Axim, Vol.1 p.199 F.C.

# OLD MARKETS AND CUSTOMS HOUSES

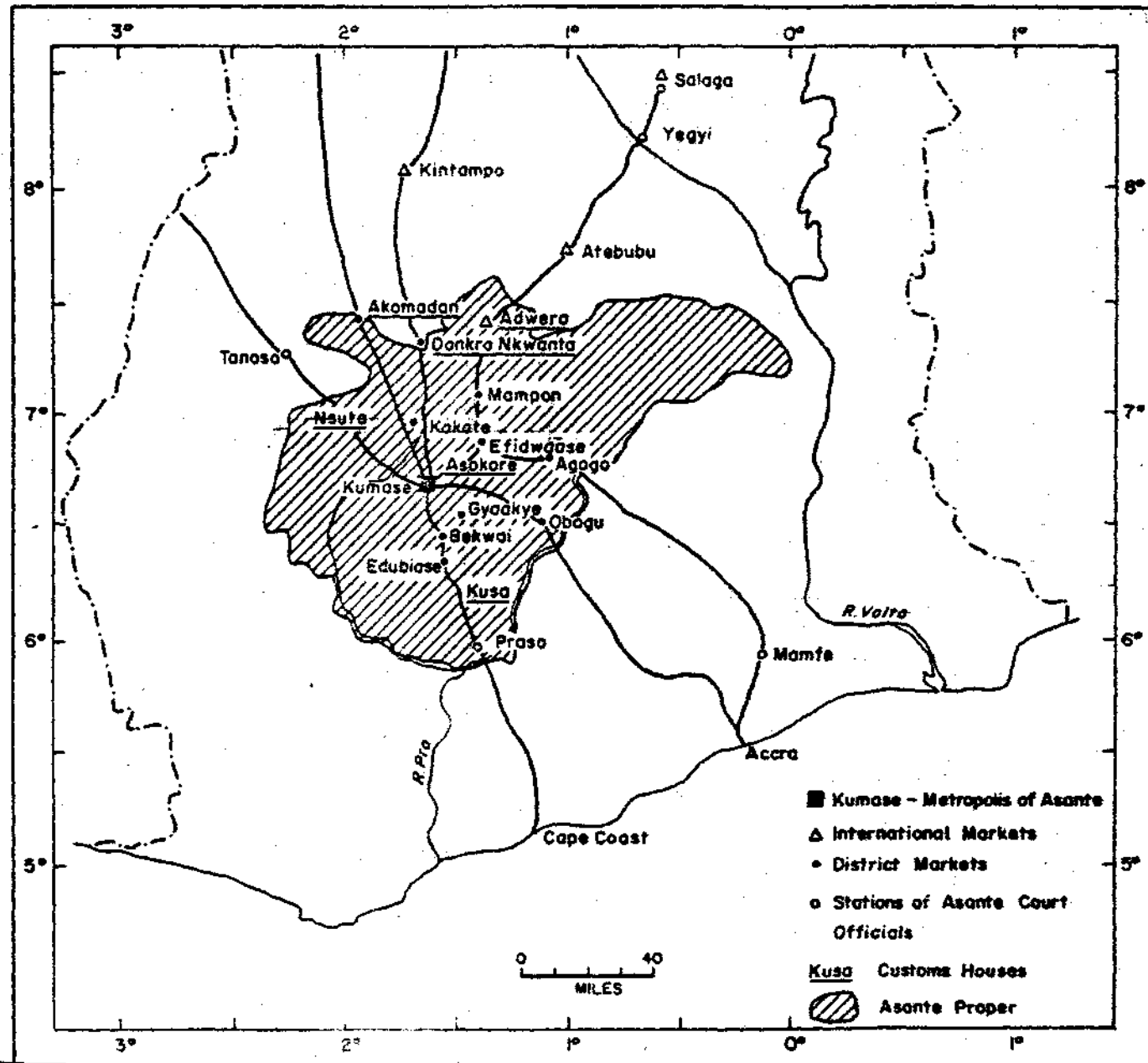


FIG. 3

with the people on the Gold Coast. Reindorf noted in 1833 that when there was peace, the merchants obtained a large scale of their goods for pure gold and ivory. As a result a single trading house could ship by one vessel more than 1,000-10,000 ounces of gold.<sup>1</sup> But any time the Asante were in the field on a punitive campaign against a contumacious vassal state, trade along the affected route was virtually disrupted. It must be emphasized that since the wealth of Asante rested on this external trade, it was the great concern of the Asante court to keep open these "trajectories" along which the vital trade flew. When the Asante political power was broken in 1874, the British administration provided escorts for the Asante traders to the coast<sup>2</sup> passing through former vassal states. The British did this for the obvious reason of encouraging the Asante traders to the coast, without whom the volume of trade would probably have diminished.

After 1875 Asante became saddled with civil wars, while at the same time it was not safe<sup>3</sup> for the Asante traders to go to Fanteland because traders from Kumase area were molested by the Adanse and the Assin. It was not very safe on the Ga route either. Indeed by the 1800's, because of insecurity of long distant trading to the coast, the number of traders to the coast had diminished markedly. Secondly, people could obtain all their needs at Kumase so that it was no longer necessary to travel to the coast. The nature of the northern trade had also changed. Traders did not travel as far as Salaga to trade because the great northern route was not safe throughout. The Bono at Atebubu had rebelled and closed the route.<sup>4</sup> The Asante therefore only went to Kintampo market which by 1884 was the largest inland market. Just north of Mampon, the Adwera market was considerable and therefore attracted traders from other parts of Asante. It was the only 'international' market in Asante proper.

The Asante trade after 1874 changed markedly. In the first place due to the inability of the central authority to control the trade, liberalization entered it. From this time on trade fell into

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1. Reindorf, C.C., op. cit., p.13.

2. Adm.11/1731 - Affairs of the Gold Coast, 1888, p.5, N.A.G. Accra.

3. Ibid.

4. Adm.11/1733 - Note by Brandon Kirby p.86, N.A.G. Accra.

the hands of some Akonkofo. These people were interested in making the maximum profit from what they sold. There is no wonder, therefore, that many of the raw materials that were sent to the coast were adulterated, and for example, pure gold dust was adulterated and became the odutu. Rubber, which became important in Asante as from the last decade of the century, also suffered the same fate, which contributed to the decay of the rubber trade.

Secondly, the emphasis on the trade also changed. The Akonkofo were not interested in the gun trade, as the chiefs and old traders had been. They were interested in the general European goods such as tinned foods, clothes, and tools for farming, to mention only a few.

Trade and trading activities of Asante on a scale discussed above had nearly become a tale only a decade after the annexation of Asante; and this was because cash crop farming had replaced trading as a major economic activity.

#### Methods of Conducting Trade

Throughout the time of Asante trade, there seemed to have been employed two or three ways of conducting the trade. The first system seemed to have been barter in which case traders simply exchanged their different commodities. But this did not seem to have been the practice by the 18th and 19th centuries in the external trade. In the northern markets for example, the Asante traders could directly buy slaves with kola, but apart from this exception they had to change the value of their kola to the value of cowrie shells (the currency).

On the coast the trade was known as the 'Ounce Trade'.<sup>1</sup> The ounce trade represented an attempt to introduce a monetary system into what had hitherto been a barter trade. In this trade the price of slaves (or any African commodity) could not be accurately determined except in terms of the trade 'ounce', and this unit account was made up of assorted European goods e.g. cloths,<sup>2</sup> beads, guns, powder, tobacco, and iron bars, valued locally in ounces<sup>2</sup>

1. Polanyi Karl, "Sorting and Ounce Trade in the West African Slave Trade", Journal of African History Vol.3 (1964) pp. 381-393.
2. Newbury, C.W., The Western Slave Coast and its Rulers (OUP 1961) p.22.

at about 100% the cost of price at home. Polanyi agrees that the prices of commodities were 'traditional' and accepted as unchangeable with the king or trader taking note rather than negotiating them.<sup>1</sup> Thus some people became agents because they had acquired the complicated technique in the trade.

In Asante itself gold dust was the main currency used. In the large district markets such as Kumase, Adwera, Ofinso Kokote etc. there were always present those who weighed the gold. These had the Fotuo and all that it contained. These then weighed for the buyers the amount of gold dust the latter wanted to use. Not all Asante knew the weights therefore money weighing became a specialised job in the markets. In the second decade of the 19th century about 800 ounces of gold was discovered in the sand in the Kumase market when the sand was washed.<sup>2</sup>

#### Local and Inter-District Trade

Throughout the period in question there were the local community marketing places where most of the local foodstuffs, crafts and a few necessities were sold. Except the crafts and other necessities, trade on this level involving mainly foodstuffs and meat was the affair of the women. Among the Asante and other Akans, women were known to be responsible for the sale of foodstuffs and other food items. It is not surprising therefore that these local markets were invariably controlled by the women.

On these small markets barter was practised extensively even as late as the end of the 19th century. True exchange practices with currency were on a very small scale.

But in addition to these ubiquitous local markets, there grew up districts and regional trading centres, which provided higher order of services. On these important markets exotic goods could be obtained. These markets were normally weekly fairs. The traditions collected from Efidwaase and Edubiase are full of the praises of their chiefs during whose time the markets grew in importance.

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1. Polanyi, K., op. cit., p.384.

2. Bowdich, op. cit.

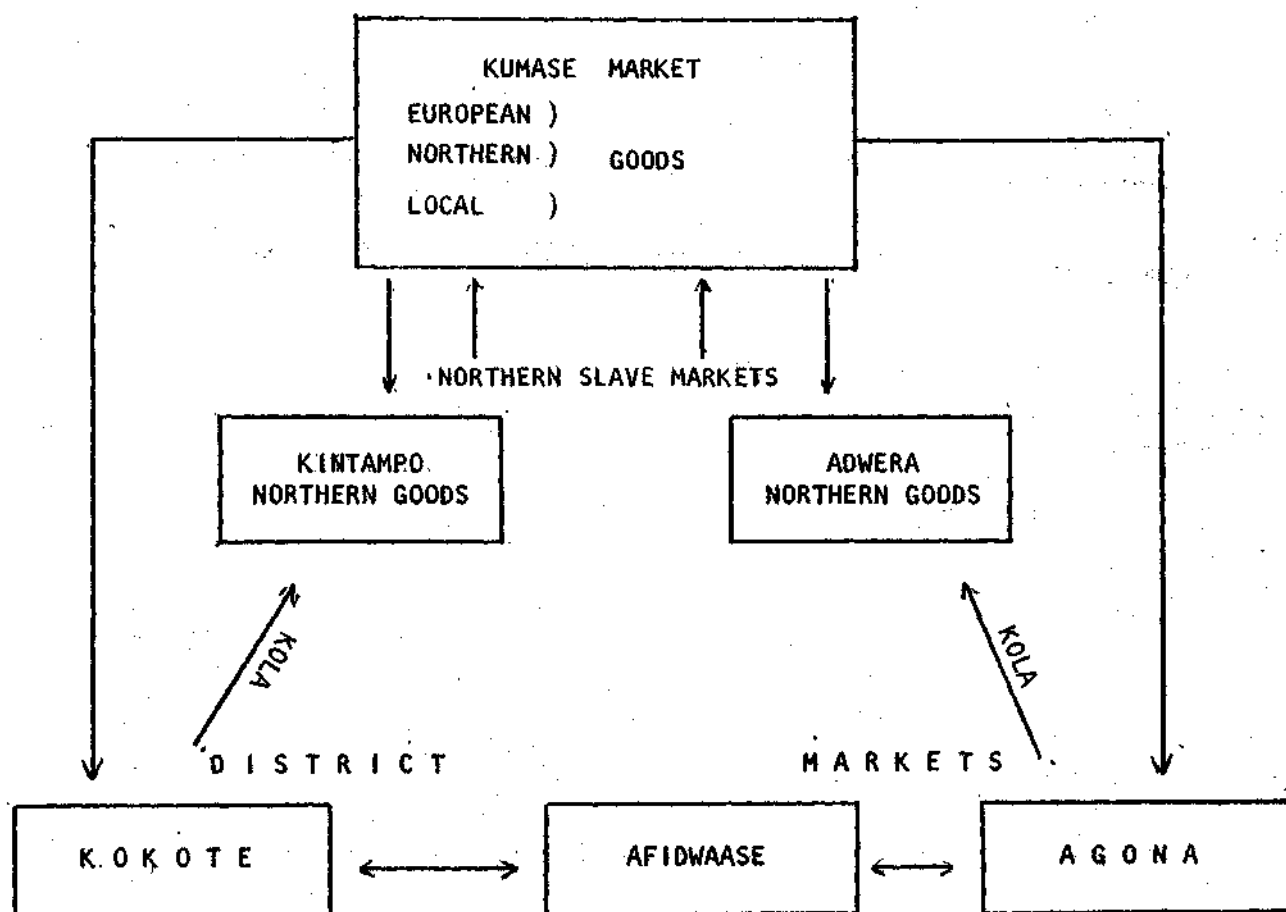
MARKET HIERARCHY

FIG. 4

Such weekly markets were well organized. It was the responsibility of the local rulers to maintain law and order during market days. One important rule was that no one should attend the market armed with any dangerous implement.

Market tolls, adwafie, were collected from those who came to sell. Those who should pay in kind did so while others, like cloth or craft merchants, had to pay in cash. The collectors were the Nhenkwaa, court servants, who collected for either the queenmother or the Gyaasehene, the head of the chief's household.

The most important market centre in the whole of Asante was Kumase, whose humble beginning dated as far back as the 17th century. By the 18th and 19th centuries Kumase had become the great emporium of Asante. Curiously enough there was no collection of tolls at the Kumase market because those who kept the market clean and supervised it, the Dwabisofofo, the Kumase retail traders, wanted it to be so. Gold was the medium of exchange. On the Kumase market commodities ranged from foodstuffs to exotic materials, such as shea butter and clothes from the north, and European goods, such as drinkables, clothes etc. from the coast.

Surrounding this market were two regional markets and several district markets. The regional markets were Adwera and Kintampo now in the Brong Ahafo Region. Nearer Kumase were the district markets of Efidwaase, Mampon and Ofinso. Other market centres in Asante were Agogo and Obogu in Asante-Akyem, Gyaakye near Lake Bosomtwe, Edubiase in Adanse and Bekwai in Amansie (Fig. 3). On these markets, like that of Kumase, gold was used as currency.

#### MARKET HIERARCHY

In the 19th century it was possible to arrange the markets in Asante in the order of their importance. Unfortunately such an arrangement cannot be based on any numerical data since figures are not available. Nevertheless, this can be done by using the sphere of influence and the estimated importance of the various markets.



The criteria which could be used in this exercise should be based on oral tradition. Factors such as the nature of the predominant goods sold; exotic or local goods; whether market was a slave market; currencies used and the apparent sphere of influence must be considered.

A more rigorous analysis of these factors should be desirable for this exercise:

The nature of the predominant goods sold:

(a) Exotic or local goods:

The exotic goods in this context were those commodities foreign to Asante, so that all European manufactured goods which entered Asante from the coastal trading centres and those northern goods such as the woven cloths, shea butter and livestock fell under this. The greater the quantities of these goods the more important was the market, as against the local goods which were invariably seen to be ubiquitous in all the markets.

(b) Slave Market

In those days great importance was attached to the trade in slaves. Traders travelled to distant slave markets purposely to purchase the slaves to make them into domestic slaves. Markets specialized in this commodity used to be extremely important in those days.

(c) Currencies Used

In some markets only barter was practised; such markets had not developed the complicated monetary system and were, therefore, economically not important. Two major currencies were predominant in the 19th century and these were gold dust and cowrie shells. By far gold dust was more precious and more complicated because its use demanded a knowledge in weighing, whilst the use of cowrie shells did not demand any complicated numerical knowledge. The predominance of gold dust currency therefore should over-ride cowrie shells in importance. Furthermore gold dust was more universal as currency since its use extended to the castles and forts

where the trade was known as the 'ounce trade'.

(d) The apparent sphere of influence

The sphere of influence of a market could be measured by knowing the hometowns of the people buying and selling at the market. This demanded a more intimate knowledge of the buyers and sellers on these markets, but because of the gap in our knowledge of this, we shall deal superficially with this factor. In this regard, the more cosmopolitan a market was the more important it should be regarded.

With the above criteria, markets in Asante could be graded in the order of importance. There were three grades of markets: namely, markets of the first order, second order and the third order. The first order of market possessed most of qualities of the criteria discussed above and as one went down the tiers so also did the importance and influence of the markets dwindle.

The only market that topped the hierarchy was that of Kumase.<sup>1</sup> It had aptly been described as the metropolis of the Kingdom of Asante. Indeed, the influence of this market overshadowed all the other markets in the Kingdom. The only factor which the Kumase market did not possess was the slave market. Apart from this, the market had all the other factors. In the case of currencies, for example, both cowries and gold dust were used at Kumase. Finally it was traditionally regarded as the most important market centre in the Kingdom because it was an international market attended by people from the Kingdom of Asante and by Muslim traders. The large Zongo which was found in Kumase testifies to this.

The next group of markets were the slave markets of Adwera and Kintampo.<sup>2</sup> These markets attracted a large number of people both from Asante and the north. The chief currency in these markets were the cowrie shells; while kola from the forests of Asante was an important commodity. These markets

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1. See Fig. 4 on page 46.

2. Kintampo a Bono town is now in Brong Ahafo Region but its market was the creation of Asante.

had wide spheres of influence. The Kintampo and Adwera markets, in addition to the metropolis of Kumase, were by and large international in outlook. The third in the tier were the regional markets. Each district market was important only in its own district. On such markets gold dust, cowrie shells and barter were employed.

The centrality of the markets in Asante was also important. The Kumase market was centrally placed. It was connected with major trade routes to the two savannah markets of Adwera and Kintampo. It was also connected with the regional markets. These regional markets surrounded that of Kumase within a radius of twenty to thirty miles. At this distance it seemed desirable that there should be a reasonably large market where the inhabitants around could purchase their goods without coming all the way to Kumase. Such goods as salt and shea butter were important commodities on the district markets.

### Evolution of Currency

The idea of barter, di nsesa, was first employed in trade. Trade by barter was at times impracticable and cumbersome, and this led to the development of a medium of exchange i.e. currency.

The first currency employed in Asante was either Nnabuo or Ntweaa. This type of currency was made from iron bars. Oral tradition seems to have forgotten the various denominations of this currency. Nevertheless, it remembers that it had been used. One cannot tell how widespread the use of this currency was. It seems it was used in purchasing very precious commodities.

Then came the Dutu, brass currency. Brass was beaten into dust and used as currency. Once again one cannot give a precise date when this currency was in use, but it might have proceeded the use of gold as currency and was later used side by side with gold.

The greatest sophistication came into the trade when gold dust became the medium of exchange. Eva Meyerowitz's assertion that gold was first used as currency in 1660's does not seem to be right. The Asante knew gold as the most precious stone before they left Adanse area and might have used it as a token but not as

a currency, as the word implies. The Asante evolved their own idea of weighing gold dust and giving it definite values. The Asante used the complicated system of calculations. There were always available at the regional and district markets those who weighed the gold dust on their standardised scales. The Asante had names for the various denominations of money e.g. takufa 5np., takuo 10np., doma 70np., Suru N£1.00, Dwoa N£3.00, Predwan N£16.00. The use of gold dust as currency continued in Asante up to about 1926.

Side by side with gold currency was the cowrie. The idea of cowrie as currency came from the north. The Asante traders to the north came across this currency and it became an accepted currency on any market where there were Northern traders. Later the Asante used this among themselves as a medium of exchange. In Asante it was used for the purchase of ordinary goods such as foodstuffs and vegetables. The cowrie currency also had denominations e.g.

nkronkronum	-	5 cowries
toko	-	20 cowries
oban	-	30 cowries
mman-nan	-	120 cowries.

As late as 1900 cowrie shells were used as currency in parts of Asante. The end of Asante political system saw the end of these traditional currencies.

#### The Influence of Asante Trade on Other Areas of Ghana

It was the Asante who dictated the tempo of trade on the Gold Coast (Ghana). During this period some settlements were catapulted into prominence, while others shrank in size and importance as a result of Asante court decisions on trade and politics. This influence was mainly felt in the North where the Asante had trade monopoly. It was the Asante traders with their precious commodity, the kola, that led to the phenomenal growth of Salaga, which the Asante called Sraha. Everybody went to the Salaga market where the Asante had stationed a court official whose

duty was to see to the smooth running of trade. This market also attracted the Asante traders because of its high supply of slaves. But Salaga dwindled in importance when the Asante traders withdrew with their kola nuts, in favour of Kintampo further south. After 1874 the Asante court deliberately established Kintampo market. Therefore the Asante traders re-routed their course to Kintampo. The town then suddenly became an important market centre which attracted the northern traders. Soon Kintampo assumed a metropolitan status as the northern traders met their counterparts from Asante to exchange their goods. Kintampo lost its importance as a result of the interplay of several factors: one being that the kola trade ceased to be an important economic venture among the Asante, when they shifted to cocoa.

### Conclusion

It seems clear that Asante played a no mean role to become the greatest middleman state in Ghana trade up to its fall at the turn of this century.

Had it not been for the political change and the introduction of cocoa, it is likely that there would have been some modifications in the pattern of contemporary trade of the Asante from what has been discussed above.