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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOME AKAN TITLES

J.C. de Graft Johnson

An Introductory Note

The following paper by J.C. de Graft-Johnson, Assistant Secretary for Native Affairs, was published in *The Gold Coast Review* Vol.2, No.2, July-December 1929, pp. 208-223. The colonial Government of the Gold Coast encouraged the publication of the *Review* in 1925 in order to promote research on "the antiquities, traditions, rites, manners and customs of the Gold Coast", in particular, by officers whose duties brought them into close touch with the people.

J.C. de Graft-Johnson's paper on "The significance of some Akan titles" is reproduced here because it appears to have lasting academic and practical significance. His views of the origin of the Akan states, on the bases of legitimacy, and the levels of authority of rulers within an Akan state are very sound and ought to be known more widely among students of Akan society, than it presumably is.

It is doubtful that "feudalism" fully developed among any of the Akan peoples as the writer suggests. But it is certain that aspects of it were present in nineteenth century Asante. Again, the normative principles of Akan government may have been "democratic". But, clearly, again at least in the case of Asante, there were obtrusive elements of patrimonialism in ruler-ruled relations and a system of patron-client relationships was evident there. "Democracy", in the sense of ultimate control of the rulers by the ruled, belonged more to the beginnings of the Akan states than to the complex states of the nineteenth century. But these are all matters for research which have been engaging the attention of students of Akan society since the 1960's.

The section of the paper that is of the most practical significance is the last paragraph in which as if, anticipating present-day "hectic" competition for "chiefly" positions, especially by those with highly dubious claims to stools, Mr. de Graft-Johnson pointed out that one could render service to one's community in other and more useful ways than by becoming a chief. He wrote:

But whether among the Akans or non-Akans, thanks to the pax Britannica, the prospects of inter-tribal or ultra-tribal wars are very remote; but the ambition to attain unto fame by the glory of the cannon-ball is not after all the noblest impulse of the human heart. Other times, other manners; and peace has its own peculiar problems. The field in which useful and beneficial service can be rendered [to] one's country and race is still very extensive. There are industries waiting for the master-mind to organize and control in order to afford honest work for many youthful hands. There are public and private schools in want of financial and moral support by the award of scholarships and the founding of chairs or the building of more commodious premises. What nobler example can be set by the well-to-do than the selection for training abroad for national work of one or more youths, particularly as doctors, nurses and teachers? To be an Ohin is good, a Safukin admirable, an Obirempon excellent: but what permanent good can one in such a position do if one cannot help his people in the march of progress in these days of industrialism? The true significance of Akan Titles is the ability to look ahead and to cease to be always looking a descendant.

Kwame Arhin.

Be whatever else one may, one cannot conscientiously claim to be the African's best and true friend if one pretends to regard African institutions as static. Certainly, among peoples commonly believed to be very conservative, particularly in matters affecting their ancient institutions, the constitutions, offices, nomenclature, etc., connected with such institutions must all be kept in a state of rigid conservation and in the supposed interests of such peoples themselves, carefully handed down intact to their posterity; otherwise the latter may not be safely expected re-act to the previously unknown combinations of circumstances in the spirit of those traditions that gave birth to such institutions. [Even so] such attitude would only seek to deny to the African a natural capacity for development - a rather unwarrantable presumption in these days. Though absorbingly interesting, this subject would raise controversial points not altogether suitable for discussion in these pages. It can only be hoped that the consideration herein of some small and innocuous aspect thereof, namely, the significance of a few well-known offices in some Gold Coast States, will not fail to inspire a few of those who have the time and necessary educational equipment to put forward, in a permanent form, ere long, their fully considered views, based on well-tested facts; while it may at the same time urge the merely philologically inclined and perhaps also the simply inquisitive to a higher perception and a more profitable appreciation of the subject, and may also prove useful to the educated Gold

Coast youth who are often without proper information as to the *raison d'être* of the customs and traditions of their country.

One may be permitted to state very clearly at the outset that Gold Coast national institutions were not wafted into being as if by magic, nor received by succeeding generations as fully developed and perfect gifts from the hands of their originators, but are today the net results of the travail of the souls of many generations; that, although the same democratic spirit has been pervading every domain of them, it has been finding expression in various external wrappings suitable to its subsequently acquired experiences - wrappings which it has been throwing off time and again when no longer required - ever since the first coming into contact of the peoples of this country with western civilisation; and that inevitably, such institutions will not and cannot now remain unaffected by the trend of human thought and modern progress. In short, African national institutions are not the rigid things they are erroneously supposed to be, and all that the young Gold Coast [citizen] asks of his country's avowed sincerely well-wishers is a little chance and a fair one to develop his ancient heritage on his own natural lines, begging that in the meantime Gold Coast national institutions should not be placed in water-tight compartments. For proper understanding and mutual sympathy he pleads. Therein alone lies the way of beneficial co-operation - believing, as he does, that it is a far greater pleasure helping to build up a tradition than being obliged to live on the memory of one.

The early policy of the Europeans who, from the fourteenth century [2] onwards, succeeded in securing some foothold in these parts and built trading posts, bastions, forts or castles, at first for the purpose of protecting their trade only, in their relations with the indigenous authorities, seems to have been one of *laissez faire* of, alternately, a studious attempt to placate every small local potentate by addressing both him and his tribal or feudal superior as kings and their principal men as chiefs. (Perhaps, it is not generally known to the Gold Coast youth that among Europeans the word "king" did not always have the meaning which it connotes today. In the days of the early Saxons, and even later, it seems it simply meant a wise and able man who belonged to the tribe, hence a leader). This policy was particularly noticeable among the chief men who lived on the coast and near the European settlements. In subsequent years when quarrels ensued between the chief men of the coast towns and those in the interior, the former naturally expected and often received the support of the European settlers to beat off the latter. Thus gradually began the breaking-up of the tribal unit. Later on, and particularly

during the height of that infamous traffic in human chattels, it was no uncommon occurrence to find one's hand suddenly reaching out against one's next neighbour, sometimes resulting in that beneficial practice, now happily long obsolete, known locally as panyarring [3]. Later still, the breach got so wide that it became quite the fashion to see people living in the same town, such as Komenda [4] or Accra [5], who were fully persuaded to regard and treat as enemies their fellow-townsmen simply because they had contracted commercial ties with, and their houses were situated within the gun-range of a different European power. (Those were the days of the "interloper" [6] - many decades before the various diplomatic understandings were reached and the partitioning of Africa as a "preserve" became a settled European policy).

The pernicious effects of those days are still felt in spite of the fact that almost the whole of that part of the Gold Coast called the Colony has now been under British rule for over fifty years and that since then some noble efforts have been made and are being made by some patriotic sons of the soil and by the Government to neutralise the evil results of such undue discrimination - a state of affairs for which the African no less than the European was responsible.

One of the results of such discrimination - or, shall we say, lack of proper discrimination - was that not only were the heads of certain portions of the same tribesmen styled and regarded as kings, but that in some cases there were two authorities living in one town recognised as kings; while instances were not lacking where certain native authorities had been styled kings on one occasion and on other occasions chiefs by the same European power without any apparent reason. All these brought about unnecessary rivalry which tended to arrest the natural growth of the people's political idea.

Since the beginning of this century the tendency has been "to go Fantes", and every local potentate is now addressed by his proper native title, or simply as Head Chief or Chief. The question therefore arises, what is the native title which has been variously interpreted as king, caboceer, head chief, chief, or even headman? Owing to the absence of correct and reliable information, or to improper grasp of local traditions or unhealthy rivalry, or sheer adoption, there still appears to be some confusion or vagueness in the use of some of these titles.

The Gold Coast, it has been said, is a congeries of small independent states, which to a large extent are also inter-dependent and inter-related, the inhabitants speaking a variety of languages and dialects, each group having a significant word for "king". The three important language groups are: [7] 1) the Fanti-Akan who call him Ohin or Ohene; 2) the Ga-Adangbe,

Mantse; and 3) the Ewe, Fia. Now, Mantse simply means "father of a town or village" and very probably at one time corresponded to the old meaning of the Saxon word "alderman" before his office was superseded by Canute's Danish "jarl", now the English earl. Fia means "one who shows the way", hence a director. And Komor, which is the highest office among the Krobo, a section of the Ga-Adangbe tribes, means "shoulder" and signifies that the chief is one who is carried on the shoulders, high above his people. But it is into the origins of some of the organizations of the Fante-Akan group, which is admittedly the most highly developed, politically, that it is the purport of this paper to enter. Among these people the word "ohin" is generic and used as a suffix it modifies the meaning of the annexed word; thus it may be applied to the paramount ruler or king of the whole state, such as Asantihene or Okyihene, [8] or to a leader or a small company or band (Asafu or Fekuw) or even to a petty head domestic servant, such as Nkomsonhin or Dabehin. The head of a fully organised Akan state is called Omanhin or Omanhene.

The history of the growth of the state on the Gold Coast differs from that of state in other countries only in opportunities. It began as a village community - the gens of the ancient

Romans - originally founded by one family with its senior male head known as Egya (father) [9] a person who always consulted the interests of the various members of his household or family group, [10] and one whose office was at first simply patriarchal both in character and function. As other family groups sprang up from the parent family or joined the original settlers, either claiming common ancestry with them as belonging to the same clan or tribe or merely with the friendly intention of casting in their lot with them, or by becoming dependent upon them from one cause or another, the Egya of the first family now became Egya Panyin or shortly Panyin (Akura), Nukpa or Onukpa, Nokotoma, or Amega [11] whose privilege as first settler was not only to apportion building sites to late arrivals, but also to show them places to make farms, etc. and to confer with the other Egyamu [12] on all matters affecting the interests of the whole village. At such consultations another person, one of the Egyamu or a senior member of the Panyin's family, would be appointed spokesman or deputy. This person is now called Kyiami, [13] a word the origin of which is now probably lost in antiquity, though some think it is from an old Fanti or Efutu word "kyia" meaning to say or speak and that "kyianyi" meant one who speaks for another hence "kyiami"; while others think it comes from "kyiremu" (to make clear, explain or expand) or "kyiamu" (to guarantee or support). Be that as it may, the kyiami is today the spokesman (not linguist, although this officer in olden times had to be versed in other languages besides his own) of the **ghin** [14] or even a family group and functions as such in the latter's domestic palavers. His office was hereditary, but generally through the male.[15] But to resume.

In course of time, the homely article, namely, the stool or **chiar** which had been in constant use by the first Panyin or one of his great successors in his life-time was specially consecrated by the kyiami and the person holding the hereditary position of the first Panyin for the time being now came to be distinguished from the other Mpanyimfu in the village community and was referred to and styled as Odsikro [16] (owner or holder of the village). Other family groups there would now have their Mpanyimfu, with their seconds or spokesmen, but no matter what the number of the latter might reach there would be only one Odsikro, and his duty among others would be to preside over the village council composed of all the Elders or heads of family groups and some old men.

As the community began to increase in population and their cultivations became extensive, there would now appear many tiny settlements (farmsteads and hamlets, at first formed only for the temporary convenience of farming) all keeping in close touch and communion with the parent village, until with the march of years these hamlets in their turn reached a state to require their separate **Adsikrofu**. Hunters from the many villages or hamlets scouring the forests for game would report the presence of strangers in another part of the land, and owing to the system of shifting cultivation every year, a system which served its purpose in the old days by allowing the soil to recuperate and retain its fecundity but which now seems inadequate owing to changed conditions and the very large extent of land under cultivation simultaneously by members of one village, questions would arise respecting game preserves of hunters or the extent of each family's cultivable holdings or the limits of the tribal or community land and reference would be made to the first settler or Panyin's successor who would decide the **ohi** (boundary) between the various groups farming on lands commonly reputed to be under his control; or, if the dispute was with an alien tribe and could not be amicably arranged, he would be expected to take the lead in settling the **ohi** by the argumentum baculinum; in this way the first Panyin, now Odsikro, became the "prefect or the marches." It then became necessary for him as the head of the parent village to assume another office, namely, that of settler of boundaries, and all the heads of the several later villages, offshoots of the parent village, would assemble in the latter place on a favourable day for the purpose of publicly acclaiming and installing him as their **ohini** (the boundary) by solemnly swearing by the spirits of all his and

their dead ancestors loyally to accept his decision in all boundary and other questions. This eventually came to be regarded as "swearing allegiance to the stool," which is the material symbol showing that spirit ancestors were witnesses, thus affirming the people's religious belief that no one is really dead, and that the dead, when properly invoked, could be present in an invisible form and take part in all matters of serious import to the tribe on occasions. This "stool" now became the *Ohin's* stool, that is distinct from those of the other *Adsikrofu*. All forest lands, whether acquired by settlement or part thereof in the name of the whole or as a result of conquest, that is, by driving out those who were previously in occupation thereof, which had not been already apportioned to the various family groups or under cultivation by any family or clan, were now held generally to belong to the whole community and were regarded as "stool lands." There are today three distinct classes of land - stool lands, family lands and individually-owned lands. But so far as the community or stool land was concerned, no one would start a new clearing in any part thereof, generally a primeval forest, without giving the *Ohin* some drink (not necessarily foreign imported liquor) to offer a libation to the ancestral spirits, some of whose mortal remains may have been interred therein or some of whom may have met their death fighting for it and to any elemental spirits inhabiting the locality. Thus the occupant of the *ohin's* stool became also the medium (*ohi*) of propitiation between the living and the dead and the tribal priest of his people. Indeed, it is fully believed by all who have studied the subject that from the patriarchal the Akan constitution passed the priestly period before reaching the kingly, that at one time the ruler was also the priest, but that for convenience of administration the office of the ruler was eventually divorced from that of the priest. In any states the ruler is today the nominal head priest of his tribe.[17]

In this way, circumstances might favour the descendants of the first *Egya* (who made for the convenience of his own small family a modest clearing in a virgin forest) to grown very numerous and become great in the course of time and spread over and occupy a large tract of land; or untoward circumstances might arrest the growth of this family, whose activities might be hemmed in and confined within very narrow limits; or the direct line of descent might become quite extinct when some other powerful offshoot thereof would take its place; or the whole of that family might become degenerate when some worthy representative of some later settlers would be chosen to take their place or supersede them, in order to keep the tribal community distinct.

But all things being well, with growth in population, increase in wealth (including the control by the first family and its collateral branches or off-shoots and by others of domestic servants and pawns and their descendants), extension of territory, and what power, prowess or fortune in war might bring, the *Ohin* of this tribe could now make his influence felt by his neighbours far and near. With the arrival of such recognition and respect beyond his own territorial confines, and the advancement of his *Adsikrofu* to the dignity of *Ahimfu*, [18] and when there was little or no longer any fear of the people being surprised and annihilated by war, or their liberty endangered by internal treachery, steps would be taken to consolidate the position of the tribe and an "Oman" (state) would now become evolved by the unanimous consent and co-operation of all the subordinate "stools" acknowledging the seniority and leadership of the first stool. (For, it must be presumed that, *ceteris paribus*, the heads of each town or important village would have now consecrated their own stools; and there are stools which are acknowledged by a whole tribe, or by a section of the tribe, or clan or family; while even today there are some *Adsikrofu* without "stools", whereas some *Mpanyimfu* have their ("stools"). And the head or the occupant of this first or principal "stool" of the Oman, hitherto tacidly or expressly recognised as *Ohin Panyin* or *Ohinkan*, would now assume the title and dignity of "*Omanhin*".[19]

Owing to the importance attached to "stools" a word about the same at this point may not be out of place. Now, certain stools are spoken of as *Abogyagua* [20] and others as

Abanyingua, but it should be borne in mind that all stools are first and last **Abogyagua** (blood stools). In this respect the suffix "bogy" (or "mmogya") appears to have three distinct meanings:

1. blood - because blood, animal or other, forms an essential part during the consecration of a stool (egua) and at the annual or other periodical ceremonies connected with stools;
2. relationship: because the stool is the visible sign of the relationship, by blood, lineal or collateral or by purchase or adoption, existing amongst the several members claiming descent from the common ancestor who founded the stool or ancestress who founded the family. (Akan stools usually have male names, and sometimes "strong names" besides, but relationship thereto is generally through the female - mother or sister of the original founder. In Ashanti there are a few stools known as "Mmammagwa" to which succession is through the male - father. Among non-Akan tribes relationship is through the father or grandfather, but among these tribes the stool does not appear to play the same indispensable part. There are again a few other stools to which succession is erratic, but

these are usually minor stools, not paramount ones);

3. Daring: because during actual hostilities or immediately after a fierce engagement with the enemy the blood of a bold enemy of rank, who had been captured at some risk by members or people of the stool, was shed over such stool (hence it is the emblem of authority or power - **Tum** or **Tumi** - over one's enemies and subordinates or dependents). It may be added in parenthesis that the blood of a criminal was never shed over the **Abanyingua** - the more innocent and bolder the victim the better.

So, from the above, it will be seen that there is only one kind of stool, but of course in practice there are distinctions. Even as the village unit is the origin of the **Oman**, and remains an inseparable part thereof, so is the "family stool" (**Ebusuagua**) the origin of the political stool, sometimes also called public stool (**Amangua**); but this political stool remains in the possession of a particular family, for it is the family stool which has attained and been accorded public recognition and sanction and thereby become, properly speaking, the **Ahingua** (royal stool) or **Asafuhingua** (nobleman's stool) of the **Oman** or state. The occupant of such a stool has therefore a recognised political status. Generally speaking, such stools fall into two classes, major and minor "political stools."

As no doubt it has been gathered from the foregoing, the paramount stools of today have not always necessarily remained in the family of those who originated the state. In some cases paramouncy was obtained as a result of a crucial test, that is, by the ability of a particular family at a great sacrifice in coming to the rescue of the whole state - in money, or men, or the supply of munitions of war and leadership at a time of national crisis. Instances of this kind are numerous. At such a national crisis, commonly an imminent invasion by a powerful enemy, an **Obirembe** (**Obarima**) **Obanyin**, **Osagyifu**, **Okwabran** - a really able man, in more senses than one, representative of some family or political stool, was in quest. If the brave man offered himself, not unlike a David against a Goliath, and returned victoriously from the undertaking, he claimed to be and was acknowledged the **Obanyin** of the state and his stool became hence the **Abanyingua** of the **Oman**. Indeed, all stool-holders are expected to be bold men, as cowardice is an insuperable disqualification, but the occupant of the **Abanyingua** is the man par excellence of the **Oman**. Sometimes in an already well-established state, such a risk was undertaken by a junior member of the ruling family, and if successful, he thereafter sat on the **Abakuma** stool (from **oba**, **ku** and **ma**). Thus certain stools acquired strong names; for instance, the stool of the **Aburahin** [21] is often referred to as "**Abankur Akongwa**", i.e. the stool of the one brave champion, while the **Omanhin** of **Akyem Abuakwa** sits on the

"Abaningwa" (the brave man's stool). The Abanyingwa alone (or as it may be otherwise locally called) had the power of life and death in the Oman, but at the same time the occupant paid great heed to the entreaties of any of his principal chiefs who might intercede for the victim.

To resume. The Oman is regarded as a body politic of which the Ohin Panyin or Omanhin carries the head (Korenti or Etsifi) while the next senior Ohin supports the foot (Akumu or Anafu), hence the title "Osumangyawa" or "Osumananan" in some states. At the inauguration ceremony of the full Oman several minor potentates would be promoted and minor offices created, then the foundations of the Oman (the state) might be said to have been laid and its "constitution" both with regard to its internal social organisations and government and to its political relations with the neighbouring Aman to have been settled. But it must be borne in mind that so far only the foundations have been laid and that thenceforward it became the duty of all to help rear up the whole structure of the Oman. And so, at the time of the Annual Stool Festival [22] each succeeding year, efforts would be made to improve on the constitution.

For social purposes, each town or village was divided into two or more wards or quarters each of which would organize an Asafu [23] at first only a dancing band, composed of the young men and women, with drums and distinctive flags and other paraphernalia. These Asafu would have leaders (Asafuhimfu and Asafunkyireba) who would be charged with seeing that the village was kept clean and sanitary, and entrusted with overseeing the young people at play and keeping order among them. In course of time there would be a definite number of Asafu - in some cases about seven or even ten - with sections or ramifications scattered over the whole state or chiefdom. In the early days wars and rumours of war were current, and to obtain greater efficiency and to provide for a more effective supervision in times of hostilities all the male members in the state, division, town or village, capable of bearing arms, were organized into fighting groups led by their Asafuhimfu. Thus originated the present Asafu (people who go to war) into which membership is obtained through the father - a useful institution, which now through want of proper employment has degenerated into a perfect nuisance in some of the coast towns. The most senior or influential and wealthy Safuhim of each Asafu (company) was appointed Supi (pillar) and he had charge of the ammunition, usually gunpowder and lead bars, flags and other accoutrements of his company. Some companies have more than one Supi. Each Asafu had flagbearers, each of whom would be supported by twelve or twenty-four picked

and smart young men, called Asikammafa, who were expected to defend with their lives the flag, the symbol of the honour of the whole Asafu. Where there were many Asafu, the Asafuhimfu would choose from among the Ahimfu or others a Tufuhim (leader or commander of all who bear arms in the town or state), one who must be a brave man and able to provide some arms and ammunition. His appointment was originally by popular choice, and a case is known where a woman was chosen to hold such an office; but the office now tends to become hereditary and in one state, at least, the post is held by a hereditary Ohim of a division.

All the fighting units in the state would be under the ultimate control of the Omanhin and his Ahimfu and Elders, and the Omanhin may personally take the lead or remain in the rear or with the main body, according to his inclination. In certain states his position in the line of battle is defined in the constitution. For military purposes therefore the whole state is like an army having five or less divisions, namely, Adontem, Nimfa, Benkum, Nkyidom and Gyasi, over each of which would be an Ohim, and under each of which are several Asafu. In some states there are only two divisions - Adontem and Gyasi [24]. The head of the Adontem generally is the next important Ohim after the Omanhin, but the head of the Gyasi is the Gyasihim, whose office arose in this manner. As a matter at first merely of domestic arrangement, the Ohim, in the larger or smaller sense, would have some people - relatives, sons,

servants and others who were maintained by him. These formed his Gyase (i.e., under his hearth and were originally fed from his table). Sometimes this body became too numerous and had to be established in one or more villages, some of their number still remaining with the Ohin. But they all continued to be regarded as belonging to the general body of Gyasidom, and the section that remained with the Ohin would be called Ankobia (those who go nowhere). With the Gyasi would be the Bogyadom (members of the stool family unless they are so numerous, as by themselves to form another fighting group) and among this latter the most important was the Ohimba - stool mother, who might be the actual mother, aunt, grandmother, grandaunt, sister or cousin of the Ohin. This personage in certain states had the final voice in all matters concerning the stool family, and in public assemblies usually sat at the right hand of the Ohin or Omanhin and was addressed as Nana. She was virtually in charge of all the females of the state.

From the smallest to the biggest person in the state all would submit to the one head - the Omanhin - in all public matters, but the Omanhin himself would in the stool family defer to the wishes of the stool mother and the stool elders. This submission to the Omanhin was not due to the fact that everyone in the Oman was his servant, far from it, but because they all have a common interest and claim relationship with one or another of the founders of the first or later important stools in communion with the principal stool, of which the Omanhin was representative.

In other words, the office which is now called Omanhin was in its inception first only Egya, then Egya Panyin, then Ofie Panyin, then Ebusua Panyin, then Kuro Panyin, or dropping the first title in each case, simply Panyin or Opanyin, then Odsikro, then Ohin Panyin or Ohin-kan, and lastly Omanhin. So that the Omanhin is the head of the Native State - *per tot discrimina rerum* - having weathered the storm and survived as such, with its full complement of towns and villages with their respective Ahimfu and Adsikrofu, each having its own council of elders - representatives of the principal family groups and of the Asafu (where they exist) in the Oman, division or community. It will thus be observed that the Oman is the highest stage of development which the original gens or the village community, which is the political unit and is self-contained as regards all purely local affairs could or did reach so far as the southern part of this country is concerned, and that the word "Oman" may be used in a narrower sense in the phrase Koromantsiman or Aburiman, or in a broader sense such as Mfantisman or Asantiman.

Again, confident in the natural belief that in cooperation and combination lay strength, several small independent states having only Ahimfu over them might sometimes join forces together temporarily or permanently for the purpose of fighting against a common enemy, when the most powerful of them, that is the Ohin with the largest following of fighting units, by general consent, took the lead and became in effect *primus inter pares*, the rest in other respects retaining their independence. In such a case the *primus* was only Sahin (war leader) during the progress of actual hostilities, and became Sagyifu [25] (Deliverer) if he returned victorious from the war, but could not claim to be "overlord" in the sense of having the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the other Ahimfu unless he was specially invited or appealed to to adjudicate upon such matters as might be submitted to him and his councillors.

As might be expected, such combination of forces and interests, in course of time, produced its own problems in native state etiquette, which has not escaped abuse and confusion with consequent bitterness, as the conditions on which combination was effected were not always observed by succeeding generations of Ahimfu, some of whom did not scruple to take

advantage of their comrades in arms. Conquest of one state by another appears to have been originally the one ground on account of which overlordship was acknowledged. Later on, feudalism [26] became another ground; but now it seems that friendly combination for allied action has come to be regarded as an acknowledgement of inferiority. It is in this last case that discontent and friction are often met with, rendering peaceful administration and essential progress very difficult and barring the way to real federation.

In very rare cases several **Amanhin** for reasons of protection from or defence against a common enemy, as was contemplated by the "Fanti Confederation," or for the purpose of aggression or domination, as was actually the case with the late kingdom of **Asanti**, [27] might become federated, when the **Omanhin** of the senior or the most powerful state assumed the singular title of "Osei." [28] But in the southern part of the Gold Coast such a combination never became permanent and no **Omanhin** appears to have borne such a title.

When for any reason the growth of the **Oman** was arrested, its parent village deserted without another being subsequently founded elsewhere and renamed after it, and its members transplanted and scattered, it could not claim recognition as a distinct **Oman** in the larger [use] of the term; but if it actually reached full growth and its distinctive tribal name had been preserved and its organization otherwise remained whole and unimpaired, it might appear to be a miserable *tertium quid* but it would still be an **Oman**. Or, the growth of the original village community might only reach the stage of "**Kuroman**" (a corporate town with or without any dependent villages); or it might stop at "**Omansin**" (a tetrarchate) though able to maintain its independence somewhat; or a full-grown **Oman** might be broken into two or more pieces through external wars or internecine strife or rivalry - in such a case the head of such a state or of each of such fragments thereof could hardly justify a claim to be more than an **Ohin**.

Owing also to the fact that every **Ohin** was expected to take the command of the fighting men in his division or town in time of war (apart from being the custodian of the land in his territory - being the hereditary "prefect of the marches") he was regarded as the protector of the lives and properties of his people and as the "**Safuhin**" of the **Omanhin**. If any grave misfortune befell him or his people it was commemorated by an oath - such a common disaster tending to knit the members of the community or tribe more closely - which everyone, friend or foe, was expected to respect, on pain of death or fine. This oath was quite different from the solemn invocation of the dead previously mentioned, but gradually it superseded the former and so, latterly, allegiance came to be sworn by "taking the oath." It should be observed that allegiance in its inception was only tribal; afterwards it tended also to be territorial, and all persons living in the town or state were expected to respect the **Ohin's** authority, although, except over the land reputed to be particularly attached to his stool and over the members of his **Gyasi** and others living in towns or villages directly under him, the **Omanhin** did not exercise immediate control. His **Ahimfu** and **Adsiakrofu** were the immediate trustees of the land for their respective peoples. And it may be here interposed that it is to the wrongful application of principles of land tenure and to the insistence of abject subordination, which may be alright in one state but absolutely unjustifiable in another, that are due most of the causes of internal disruption and strife. Therefore, in studying aboriginal institutions, as Mr. Sarbah observes in his **Fanti National Constitution**, "one has to guard himself against misleading and erroneous analogies, plausible generalizations, hasty deductions and faulty conclusions. Former travellers, from what they saw in the trading forts and settlements, essayed to describe Fanti and **Asanti** national institutions, and in many instances, what were observed in the coast town were erroneously taken to be applicable in their entirety to the whole country, without any attempt to find out the principles governing them." The converse is equally true.

Despite the fact that communities were broadly divided into **Adihyi** (freeborn) and **Nkuwa** (servants) and the rulers into **Ahimfu** and **Abiremponfu** (not **Amanhim** and **Ahimfu**, as

might be supposed the Gold Coast is, everything notwithstanding, a very democratic country. There are no classes in the western nor castes in the eastern sense of the term; and no one is obliged for ever to remain a servant simply because he descended from a slave, nor does the accident of being born an Odihyi count for much. The thrifty servant could as easily purchase his freedom as could the thriftless Odihyi lose his status. Any worthy man could become a *Safuhin* and the servant not unfrequently succeeded his master on the stool to the chagrin, or sometimes with the full sanction, expressed or tacit, of the heritable blood. In certain circumstances the domestic servant was specially selected by the stool family to be the "caretaker" of the stool and to receive the *revednue* thereof without being liable to account therefor.

Rank in the body politic was obtained in various ways, namely:

- 1) by founding a village of which one eventually became the *odskro* or *ohin*. The *Ohin* might become *Omanhin* and be addressed as "Nana" (ancestor) as regards both his stool and his stool-name, but the *Omanhin* would still be the *Ohin* of his own town;
- 2) for conspicuous bravery on the battlefield, particularly if it succeeded in turning an imminent defeat into a certain victory, or for tact in covering at great personal risk the retreat and thus saving the life of the *Sahin*, or *Ohin*. Such a person was created *Oman Sahuhin* (as distinct from *Aaafa Safuhin*) and was addressed as "Barima" or "Obiremba." He could become a *Van* or *Wing Chief*;
- 3) by using acquired or inherited wealth for the public good, particularly in providing the sinews of war or buying off a powerful enemy. He was accorded the dignity of "Obirempon" and was referred to as "Odeefu." He became *Oman Safuhin* and had a seat in the *Bagua* (state council).

The foregoing may be taken as a brief description of some of the offices in the state organization of the Akan-Fanti tribes of the Gold Coast. That of the tribes occupying the south-eastern portion is different to a more or less extent from the above in that they follow the [less developed system] and in some instances they have merely copied the Akan system without fully understanding the principles underlying it. That accounts for the very many ranks, all of which claim to have political importance. Among these peoples succession to offices is through one's father or mother's father, and in some cases the order is very eccentric.

But whether among the Akans or non-Akans, today, thanks to the *pax Britannica*, the prospects of inter-tribal or ultra-tribal wars are very remote; but the ambition to attain unto fame by the glory of the cannon-ball is not after all the noblest impulse of the human heart. Other times, other manners; and peace has its own peculiar problems. The field in which useful and beneficial service can be rendered [to] one's country and race is still very extensive. There are industries waiting for the master-mind to organize and control in order to afford honest work for many youthful hands. There are public and private schools in want of financial and moral support by the award of scholarships and the founding of chairs or the building of more commodious premises. What nobler example can be set by the well-to-do than the selection for training abroad for national work of one or more youths, particularly as doctors, nurses and teachers. To be an *Ohin* is good, a *Safuhin* admirable, an *Obirempon* excellent: but what permanent good can one in such a position do if one cannot help his people in the march of progress in these days of industrialism? The true significance of Akan Titles is the ability to look ahead and to cease to be always looking backward - learning to be an ancestor instead of being satisfied with being a descendant.

Notes by Kwame Arhin

1. "Gold Coast" must be understood to include the then "Gold Coast Colony," the present Western, Central, Greater Accra; and Eastern and Brong-Ahafo Regions, the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions and the Volta Region.
2. "Fifteenth" is more accurate than "fourteenth" century as marking the period of European intrusions into what is now Ghana.
3. "Panyarring" was the practice of seizing a kinsman of a debtor in payment of a debt. The seized person was usually sold to the European slave traders.
4. Kommenda, a trading town west of Cape Coast.
5. Accra became the seat of the colonial government in the Gold Coast Protectorate (southern Ghana) in 1876, and of modern Ghana on the attainment of independence on March 6, 1957.
6. European traders who did not belong to the authorised trading Companies of Great Britain or Holland.
7. Mr. de Graft-Johnson apparently left out the Northern Territories, that is the present Northern, Upper-East and Upper-West Regions.
8. "Asantihene" and "Okyiihene" are more appropriately rendered "Asantehene" and "Okyehene."
9. The usual variant among the non-Fante Akan is "Nana."
10. The Anthropologist/Sociologist would use "lineage" in place of "family group."
11. Akura (Akora) is Akan;
Nukpa or Onukpa is Ga;
Nokotoma is Krobo;
Amega is Ewe.
12. Egyamu is pl. of Egya.
13. "Kyiami" is wide-spread among the Akan-Twi speaking peoples; it is pointless to derive it from any Fante or Efutu word.
14. "Ohin" (Fante) is "ohene" among the non-Fante Akan.
15. Among the Asante the major Kyeame (sing.) akyeame (pl.) stools have matrilineal succession.
16. Among the non-Fante Akan-speaking peoples "odsikro" (sing.) is "Odekro" (sing.); Adsikrofo (pl.) adekrofo (pl.)
17. See for example, R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, O.U.P., 1929.
K.A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, O.U.P., 1957.
18. Ahimfu or Ahemfo, (pl.) of Ohim or Ohene.
19. Omanhin is Omanhene among the non-Fante Akan-speaking peoples.
20. It is possible that Mr. de Graft-Johnson means by "Abogyagua" adehyegua, royal stool to be distinguished from asomdwa, service-stool occupied by the head of a group of palace functionaries; service-stool is usually a mmammadwa, stools for sons or daughters to which Mr. de Graft-Johnson refers below.
21. Aburahin is the ruler of Abura in the Fante area in the Central Region.
22. See Busia, "Ashanti", in D. Forde (ed.) *African Worlds*, International African Institute.
23. How widespread the Asafo organisation was among all the Akan sub-groupings is a matter for further research.
24. As in the case of Wassa Akropong.
25. Sagyifa is Osagyefo among the non-Fante speaking Akan people.
26. It is doubtful that "feudalism" did in fact develop anywhere in Ghana.

27. The Asante Kingdom was dissolved by the colonial authorities on 1st January, 1896, but restored on 1st January, 1935.
28. The Golden Stool or the stool of the Asantehene, King of Asante is known as Osei ne Poku Adwa, named after the first two Asante Kings, Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware.