

DENKYIRA IN THE MAKING OF ASANTE c. 1660–1720

T. C. McCASKIE

School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London

ABSTRACT: This article examines the complex and fluid relationship between Denkyira and Asante in the period c. 1660–1720 that saw the former supplanted by the latter as the leading power among the Twi-speaking Akan peoples of the central southern Gold Coast (Ghana). Dense oral traditions supplemented by a range of other materials are used to identify the site of the ancient Denkyira capital of Abankeseso, and to give an account of the settlements that served it and the gold resources that supported it. These same sources provide a detailed understanding of the reasons for defections from Denkyira to Asante, and how this process contributed to the first Asantehene Osei Tutu's epochal military victory over Denkyirahene Ntim Gyakari at Feyiase (1701). Asante policy towards defeated Denkyira is then discussed, and the legacy of the events described is considered. At a general level, this article makes a case for looking in detail and depth at the local conditions that gave rise to particular – and particularly complex – sociopolitical arrangements, and argues that studies of this kind can advance understanding of the formation and nature of polity and identity in precolonial Africa.

KEY WORDS: West Africa, Ghana, Asante, state formation, settlement history, political culture.

INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN the 1660s and 1690s Denkyira was the dominant power among the Twi-speaking forest Akan of the Ofin–Pra river basin.¹ It was the most important inland supplier of gold and slaves to the Dutch at Elmina and the English at Cape Coast, and the wealthiest importer of European guns and munitions. Denkyira and the Europeans had a mutual interest in keeping open the 130-mile trading corridor between them. In 1692 Dutch, English and Brandenburger emissaries travelled to Abankeseso, the Denkyira capital, to hold talks with Denkyirahene Boamponsem (c. 1650s–1694) about trade. Boamponsem sent a resident to act as his representative on the coast. In 1698 this man died. His remains were sent back to Denkyira by the English with a gift of rum, cloth and gunpowder to celebrate his funeral.²

In the 1690s Denkyira fought wars with Asen and Twifo to its south to keep the trade route open. Akan and European sources make it clear that

¹ I follow R. A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982) in using 'river basins' to describe the catchment areas and drainage systems of the major southern Gold Coast rivers. In the period under discussion such 'river basins' were sites of intensified farming, settlement and commerce because of their rich alluvial soil, accessible gold deposits and convenience as trade routes.

² K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600–1720* (Oxford, 1970), 159; A. Van Dantzig, *Les hollandais sur la Côte de Guinée à l'époque de l'essor de l'Ashanti et du Dahomey 1680–1740* (Paris, 1980), 130; Kea, *Settlements*, 246–7.

the task of controlling the corridor to the coast stretched Denkyira's gold and manpower resources to the limit. This made its rulers more demanding and predatory towards their own people as well as their tributaries. Two developments tipped the scales against Abankese's struggle to maintain its authority. First, in or about 1694, Boamponsem died after a reign of some 40 years. Admired by Europeans for his valour, he was memorialized in Denkyira traditions as a successful if autocratic ruler. His successor was Ntim Gyakari (c. 1694–1701), a capricious young man of uncertain judgement according to the same traditions and European observers.³ Second, in the mid- to late-1690s Denkyirahene Ntim Gyakari's increased demands provoked resistance from a coalition of his northern tributaries, famously led by Osei Tutu of Kwaman (Kumase) and, so traditions recount, Komfo Anokye. In essence, this insurgency committed Denkyira to conducting military operations in the north while holding down the south. This placed a great strain on its resources. Abankese used exaction and force within Denkyira itself to sustain its military posture. This led to a growing rejection of its authority among its own people. At the end of the 1690s, when Abankese faced the Kwaman coalition that was to become Asante, it had many enemies and few friends.

The Dutch left the best chronological account of what happened.⁴ In August 1699 they reported that trade had dwindled away because 'the peoples in the interior' had 'war on their minds'. By June 1700 there were 'no goods more current than fire-arms'. Denkyira, whose plans were 'difficult to predict', was rumoured to be about to go to fight with 'the Asjantese' (Asante) or with Twifo, Wassa, Fante or others in the south. In May 1701 there was 'heavy warfare' reported between Denkyira and the Kwaman coalition ('Assjantee'). All the peoples along the trade corridor from the coast to Abankese interdicted Ntim Gyakari's supply of munitions, for the Denkyira 'have for long been very bellicose and proud of their victories, and so they have become insufferable to their neighbours'. The Dutch surmised that 'the Assjantese' might gain the upper hand, because they were 'much stronger in men and well provided with everything'. If that happened then all of Denkyira's neighbours would join in to attack it for being 'such a fearsome and warmongering state'. In November 1701 it was reported that the Kwaman insurgents had won 'a complete victory' over the Denkyira. The 'towering pride' of Denkyira was 'in ashes', and its people were in flight

³ W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1705), 76; I have made use throughout of the corrected text of Bosman in A. Van Dantzig, 'English Bosman and Dutch Bosman: a comparison of texts, I–IV', *History in Africa*, 2 (1975), 185–216; 3 (1976), 91–126; 4 (1977), 247–73; 5 (1978), 225–56. For relevant discussion, I. Wilks, 'Founding the political kingdom: the nature of the Akan state' in his *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens OH, 1993), 91–126. Denkyira traditions are recounted most fully in PRAAD [Public Records and Archives Administration Department; formerly Ghana National Archives], Accra, ADM 11/824, 'Tribal histories: Denkyira', recorded by Asst. District Commissioner S. R. J. Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 1946, Typescript history with enclosures.

⁴ Thus, O. Justesen (ed.), *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana 1657–1754* (Copenhagen, 2005), 1, 156, shows that the Danes at Christiansborg, 100 miles east of Elmina, were getting confused and misleading reports of events in Denkyira months after they happened.

from enslavement. Trade remained moribund, because the victors were engaged for 'fifteen days' in sacking Abankeseso and 'lustily' plundering Denkyira. They had too much 'rich loot' to be bothered with trade. The Dutch immediately sent an emissary to the victorious 'Zay' (Asantehene Osei Tutu). He saw the Asante ruler's 'personal booty', worth 'some several thousand marks of gold', displayed in his war camp in Denkyira.⁵

Denkyira and Asante traditions tell more or less the same story in exhaustive detail. The Denkyira forces advanced from Abankeseso north-east through Gyakobu, and in fierce fighting drove Asante forces north out of Adunku, Aboatem and Aputuogya. Ntim Gyakari set off in pursuit. A mile north of Aputuogya he encountered Osei Tutu's main force deployed at Feyiase. The battle that ensued was epochal, for it gave the nascent Asante polity (the Kwaman coalition) the beginnings of control over the Ofin–Pra river basin and so opened the way for it to become the dominant power in the precolonial Gold Coast. Ntim Gyakari was killed, and Denkyira traditions report that 'the remnants of Ntim's army' streamed south to seek refuge 'in their territory over the Ofin River on the south bank'. Osei Tutu directed his attention to Abankeseso, 'a large city with seventy-seven streets watered by seven streams, which was now undefended'. It was sacked of its gold, accumulated by Boamponsem 'and stored there against an evil day that had now, alas, arrived. The Ashantis took all this huge wealth in gold from its storage jars and strewed it all through the streets until calming down they recollected themselves and gathered it all up again and bore it off to Kumasi'.⁶ After Osei Tutu's return home the Denkyira crossed back over the Ofin and reoccupied the ruins of Abankeseso. In 1706–7 they rose up in revolt but were suppressed.⁷ Thereafter, they were truculent and intermittently rebellious Asante subjects until they joined the insurgency against Kumase that engulfed the Gold Coast between the 1800s and the 1820s. In the course of this war their position became untenable and they emigrated south of the Ofin–Pra rivers to establish a new homeland around Jukwa in the southern Gold Coast.

Today old Denkyira – the place ruled over by Boamponsem and Ntim Gyakari – has disappeared from historical view. The now long-abandoned site of Abankeseso is unknown to geography and archaeology, and the ancient Denkyira settlements that served it are erased, subsumed or supplanted by the palimpsest of occupation first imposed by precolonial Kumase and then revised by migrant colonial cocoa farmers.⁸ The first purpose of this paper, then, is to recover the detailed historical geography of vanished Denkyira. From that, discussion goes on to consider the why, what and where of Denkyira's great wealth and power in the mid to later

⁵ A. Van Dantzig (ed.), *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast 1674–1742: A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at The Hague* (Accra, 1978), 60–2, 70, 72–80; Bosman, *Description*, 72–7.

⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, 'Tribal histories: Denkyira', enclosing Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II to Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 20 Mar. 1946.

⁷ I. Wilks, 'What manner of persons were these? Generals of the Konti of Kumase', in his *Forests of Gold*, 248–52.

⁸ G. Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester NY, 2005), 236ff., discusses cocoa farming, including in the Amansie district, the southwest of which was the old Denkyira heartland.

seventeenth century. Thereafter, close attention is paid to the way in which the power of Kwaman (Kumase) waxed at Abankeseso's expense in the years leading up to the battle of Feyiase in 1701. Specifically, the paper looks at the causes and consequences of defections from Ntim Gyakari to Osei Tutu and assesses their significance. In what follows, European records play a part, but one that is secondary to the densely detailed oral histories preserved and transmitted by the Akan themselves. African oral history now asked questions of different and various kinds, laudably oriented towards the recuperation of the 'African voice'.⁹ Here that voice is listened to for a purpose less common than it used to be, that is as evidence for and reflection upon the distant historical past. Simply, this paper interrogates the staggering wealth and diversity of Denkyira and Asante traditions for what they – and often they alone – can tell us about the histories of forest Akan people in the Ofin–Pra river basin in the later seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries. These same traditions also permit the writing of an African historical geography, a study of a particular locality or *terroir*, of a sort that I have attempted elsewhere for Asante and that is a commonplace in other historiographies.¹⁰

ABANKESESO AND THE GOLD OF THE OFIN-ODA RIVER VALLEYS

In 1926 the DC (Bekwai) F. W. Applegate adjudicated a dispute in the southwestern part of the Amansie district of Asante. This involved the villages of Abuakwa and Datano and it concerned contested rights in cocoa-growing land along the Oda river. Unable to resolve the matter, Applegate went to inspect the site. He travelled to Datano via Manso Nkwanta. There he talked with the village authorities. Out of interest, he then walked 4 miles southwest to inspect the Ofin river at Miradani. There he was greatly struck by the evidence of 'old native gold mining', for both banks of the Ofin were 'honeycombed with narrow holes, some quite deep and proof of the great wealth that came out from here in the past for the King of Ashanti at Kumasi'. He walked upstream for a mile to Piaso where he was told that the floodplain of the river was named 'Suwirisika', i.e. 'the flood of gold' (*nsuyiri sika*).

Applegate returned to Datano and crossed over the Oda to Abuakwa near the river's eastern bank. He camped there for 2 days and gathered information about the disputed land. He also made enquiries about what he had seen along the Ofin. He was told that gold washing and mining went on 'everywhere' along the Ofin and Oda rivers in the past by order of the Asantehene, and that this was carried out by local villagers or sometimes by slaves settled for the purpose. However, the Asante were not the first to extract gold here. Washing and digging for gold 'flourished' when Denkyira

⁹ See L. White, S. F. Miescher and D. W. Cohen (eds.), *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington IN, 2001).

¹⁰ M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Oslo, 1931), remains an inspiration without peer for work of this kind. My interest in Bloch has been sharpened by reading C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), and by long conversations with its author. See T. C. McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village 1850–1950* (Edinburgh and Bloomington IN, 2000).

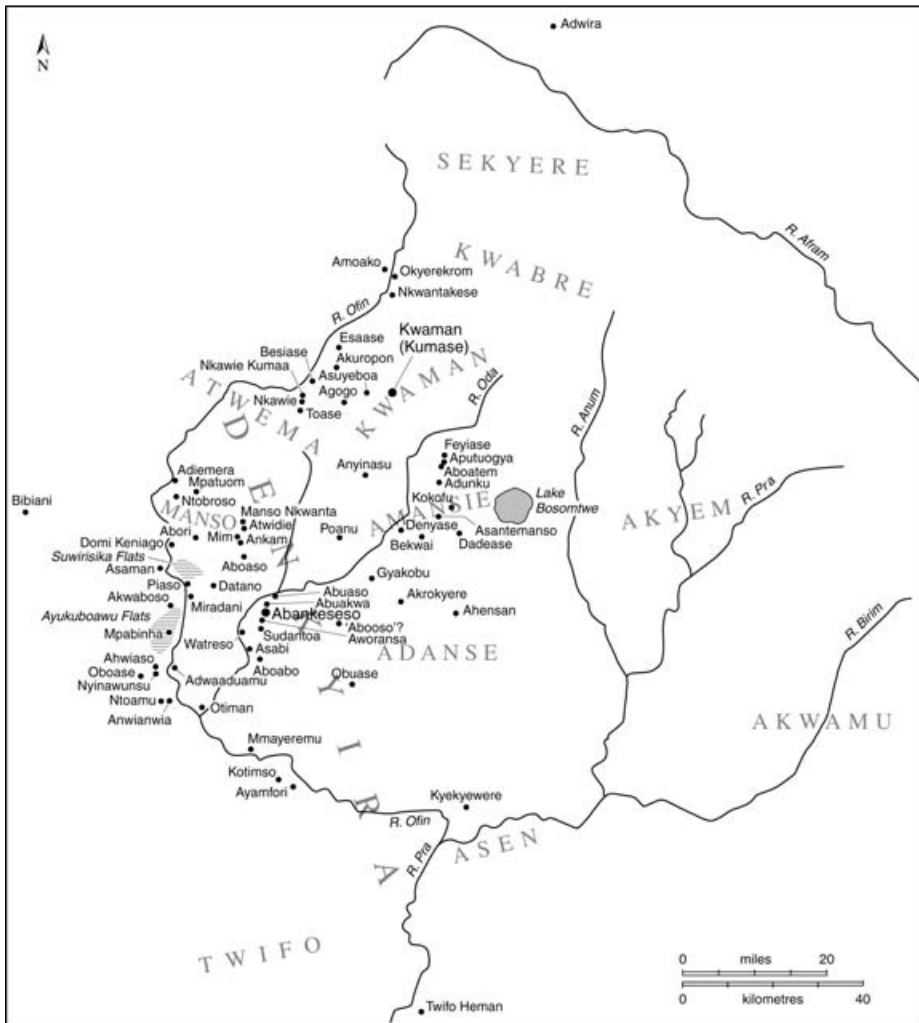


Fig. 1. Denkyira in the making of Asante, *c.* 1660–1720.

ruled over the Ofin–Oda river valleys until ‘that ancient kingdom was destroyed by the great Ashanti King Osei Tutu’. As proof of what they had said the Abuakwa villagers took their visitor ‘a mile or two to the south’, and there showed him ‘a big open place off the path’ that they identified as ‘Inti Bansoo, ancient capital of the mighty Kings of Denkyira’. Applegate felt unwell and so he did not linger, there being ‘little to see except for an expanse of broken grassy ground with bits of pottery all about but few trees’. In Denkyira tradition Ntibanso is another name for Abankeseso.¹¹

¹¹ MRO [Manhyia Records Office], Kumase, AM/779, Bekwai District, DC (Bekwai) to Commissioner Eastern Province (Ashanti), ‘Report of a tour of inspection’, Bekwai, 18 Jan. 1927. Applegate went on home leave in April 1927 and wrote nothing more about his trip to the Ofin river; see PRAAD, Kumase, ARG 1/21/47, ‘Personal service

The identification of Abuakwa with the site of the long-vanished Denkyira capital of Abankeseso (Ntibanso) is affirmed by Denkyira oral traditions. In 1946 Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II stated that his ancestors fled from the Adanse at Akrokyere to settle 10 miles away to the west. There, 'on the western border of the Adansis', they founded 'their famous capital of Abankesiesu by the Oda and near the present Abuakwa village'. Denkyira prospered from the gold 'from the Offin River' and vanquished Adanse, after which Abankeseso became 'larger than any other town of the district'. Then, 'about the middle of the 17th century', Abankeseso reached the pinnacle of its power when Denkyirahene Boamponsem became so rich that he appointed 'the first treasury head amongst the Akan peoples' to keep account of his personal wealth. This was stored in 'a great big house called Sikadan', i.e. 'the gold house' (*sika dan*). All this ended when Asante sacked Abankeseso and 'carried off the [Denkyira] King's gold in great amounts'. The old capital never regained its former glory, and it and the area north and east of the Ofin was finally abandoned by the Denkyira in the early nineteenth century.¹²

In 1966 Opanin Kwaku Kurankye of Abuakwa stated that his village was 'originally occupied by the Denkyiras'. It was 'an environ [*sic*] of Abankesieso which was the seat of the Denkyirahene'. After the Denkyira finally abandoned the site in the early nineteenth century, Kwaku Kurankye's ancestors came west from Bekwai to settle on and farm the land. It was then a 'dense' forest that attracted many more Asante incomers during the rubber boom of the 1880s-1890s. From the 1910s cocoa was planted and headloaded from Abuakwa to the railhead at Dunkwa-on-Ofin. Around Abuakwa, said Kwaku Kurankye, there were 'several middens' which had yielded up 'various antiquities of early tobacco pipes, fragments of pottery, querns, grinding stones and crude metal implements'. Aworansa and Sudantoa, pioneer cocoa-farming settlements just south of Abuakwa, were built 'on the one time ruins of Denkyira capital'. The spatial distribution of Abuakwa, Aworansa and Sudantoa lends some support to the claim of Denkyirahene Boamponsem III that Abankeseso 'extended some six miles radius from which "*osansa*" (the hawk) could not fly across'. Certainly the old Denkyira capital was a large and important settlement. Its name was derived from *abankese*, literally meaning a large, strong building (the *sika dan*?), sometimes made of stone like the European forts at Elmina and Cape Coast, and like them connoting the power and authority incarnated in an imposing central place and government.¹³

file: F. W. Applegate', Ag. Commissioner Eastern Province (Ashanti) to DC (Bekwai), Kumase, 26 Mar. 1927.

¹² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, 'Tribal histories: Denkyira', enclosing Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II to Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 20 Mar. 1946, and 'A compilation of notes on Denkyira history from accounts given at Obuasi, Kubi, Afrancho, etc.', n.d. (but 1940s).

¹³ IAS [Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana], Legon, KAG/8, 'Abankeseso and Abuakwa: material collected on the ancient Denkyira capital', recorded by K. Ameyaw, 15 Apr. 1966; and J. K. Kumah, 'The rise and fall of Denkyira' (MA thesis, University of Ghana-Legon, 1965). For *aban* and *abankesese*, see J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Chwee, Twi)* (Basel, 1881), 5. In O. Davies, *Ghana Field Notes: Part III Ashanti* (Department of Archaeology, University

Abankeseso was located at 6°17' N, 1°51' W in the vicinity of Abuakwa, Aworansa and Sudantoa. That is, it lay just to the east of the Oda river, 20 miles from its confluence with the Ofin river to the southwest, and about 11 miles east from the southward flow of the Ofin past Miradani. Seventeenth-century Denkyira was not a territorial entity with borders or frontiers clearly defined. Rather, Abankeseso presided over a constellation of settlements. Some of these identified themselves as Denkyira because of their lineage, migratory and other ties with the rulers and people of Abankeseso. The Denkyira were said to be *dankyirrafo*, that is clan and lineage kin who had banded together with others among the Nkyiraa (now in Bron Ahafo) before immigrating into the Ofin–Pra basin. A list of ‘old Denkyira towns’ that were abandoned and later reoccupied by the Asante maps the heartland of the area presided over by Abankeseso. This lay nearby to its south and west. Core settlements – Abuaso, Abori, Datano, Mpatuom, Watreso, Asabi – were within the Ofin–Oda watershed; others – Adiemera, Piaso, Asaman, Miradani, Akwaboso, Mpabinha, Oboase, Ahwiaso, Nyinawunsu (Efuonhumasu), Ntoamu, Kotimso (Kwanyako), Ayamfori – lined the Ofin river or lay close to its western and southern banks.¹⁴

Barely 15 miles east of Abankeseso lay Adanse Akrokyere with its famous *bona* shrine. The Adanse towns in the central Ofin–Pra basin were the dominant power in this area until the mid seventeenth century. Abankeseso was founded by refugees fleeing Akrokyere’s control. The roles were reversed in or about 1659, when Boamponsem vanquished the Adanse and supplanted them. So complete was this victory that Dutch reports of the fighting claimed that ‘Adansi had quietly disappeared’.¹⁵ Abankeseso now extended its control east and north. Akrokyere tradition suggests that the Kwaman people to the north were its tributaries and that Boamponsem inherited this relationship by right of conquest.¹⁶ Certainly, after *c.* 1659 the Kwaman and their neighbours were subject to Abankeseso’s impositions. As token of this, and in one of the most widely reported of Akan traditions, the youthful Kwaman royal Osei Tutu spent years in Abankeseso in the 1660s–1670s as a surety for his people’s behaviour. While he was there, Boamponsem extended his influence upstream along the Ofin and Oda rivers, settling people to clear farmland and look for gold. At the same time he embarked on a series of interventions and wars to secure the trade corridor to the coastal European trading posts in the south. However, the source of Boamponsem’s power lay in the Ofin river valley and in the Ofin–Oda watershed extending eastwards towards Akrokyere and the other Adanse

of Ghana-Legon, 1972), 4, the entry for ‘Abuakwa’ says only that 1 mile to the west ‘is the site of a village with 3’ of habitation earth’. To the best of my knowledge no excavation has taken place.

¹⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, ‘Tribal histories: Denkyira’, enclosing ‘A list of the old Denkyira towns and villages, given by Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II and his elders’, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 17 and 19 Mar. 1946. I have identified these settlements using the relevant map sheets of *Gold Coast Survey Department: Scale 1:250,000* (3rd ed., Accra, 1952) and *Survey of Ghana: Scale 1:125,000* (Accra, 1962).

¹⁵ Daaku, *Trade*, 147; see too his ‘Pre-Ashanti states’, *Ghana Notes and Queries*, 9 (1966), 11.

¹⁶ MRO, Kumase, ‘History of the immigrants from Takyiman’, n.d., ‘History of Akrokerri’, 22.

towns. The reason was the accessibility of gold there, 'coming to amounts that made the King of Denkyira and his traders rich indeed. The Bankam Dwa [the Denkyira stool, *abankamdwa*] was hung about with this gold such that the stool was extolled "Offin Ba! Offin Ba!" meaning A Child of the River Offin [i.e. *ofin ba*]'.¹⁷

In 1908 H. N. Thompson of the Southern Nigerian Forest Service undertook a survey of forests in the Gold Coast. At the confluence of the Ofin and Oda rivers he observed that the surrounding land was 'low-lying and subject to inundations during the flood season'.¹⁸ On its way south to this confluence the Ofin ran through a narrow channel fed by many streams. One result, noted by Thompson, was a seasonal floodplain. This reached its greatest extent on the Ayukuboawu flats west of the Ofin river between Miradani and Oboase. Another result was that the Ofin overflow drew gravels up from its riverbed to form mounded terraces and pebbly spill all along its banks. These gravels and the underlying rocks that produced them were both highly auriferous. Washing and shallow mining for gold along the Ofin yielded rich results without the labour-intensive requirement of driving exploratory shafts into very deep reefs. In 1922–3 the Gold Coast Geological Survey recorded the ubiquity of gold extraction in the past when it investigated 30 miles of the Ofin river valley between the old Denkyira settlements of Adiemera and Ahwiaso. Precolonial gold workings abounded. Near Adiemera there were 'many old native shafts' up to 25 feet deep from which 'much gold has apparently been obtained'. A few miles south, the river flats running east towards Ntobroso had 'many old native gold holes'. Further downstream at Abori, 2 miles east of the Ofin, the flats were again 'riddled with large numbers of old native gold holes', and near to the village itself were 'great numbers of shafts'. A few miles south opposite Miradani the river terrace gravels and floodplain on the west bank had 'great numbers of old native gold holes, from ten to fifteen feet deep'. From Akwaboso on this same floodplain, the track followed the west bank of the Ofin south via Ahwiaso to Oboase. This 5-mile stretch was 'highly auriferous', and 'a large quantity of gold must have been recovered' from the 'very many thousands of old native gold holes' that lay all about.¹⁹

What the colonial geologists saw were Denkyira gold workings from the seventeenth century that were annexed, exploited and enlarged by Asante throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Asantehene Opoku Ware (c. 1720–50) settled Manso Nkwanta miners at Oboase. These 'dug gold out from the same holes as Denkeria Twafuo before'. At Piaso the Denkyira gold workings were deepened by miners 'sent from Kumasi' who found three large gold nuggets that were sent to the Asantehene. Between Ntoamu and Kotimso, on both banks of the Ofin, 'the Asante drove the Denkyiras out' so as to take over rich gold deposits. Here Denkyira and then Asante prospectors dug shafts through 'the overburden covering alluvial

¹⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, Testimony of Ayanfuri [Ayamfori] Linguist Kwaku Bredwa.

¹⁸ *Colonial Reports – Miscellaneous: No. 66: Gold Coast: Report on Forests by Mr. H. N. Thompson*, Cd. 4993 (London, 1910), 56.

¹⁹ *Report of the Geological Survey for the period 1st January, 1922–31st March, 1923* (Accra, 1924), 5, 15, 28, 40–3.

deposits, which usually laid in gravel'. Kumase used slave miners here, and many were buried alive when the unsupported shafts caved in. Similar arrangements were in place at Kubi, lower down the Ofin. Moreover, in the early 1700s Asantehene Osei Tutu sent Denkyira miners from Nyinawunsu (Efuonhumasu) to prospect for gold at Adwira in Sekyere in north Asante. None was found, and in the 1720s the miners were sent back to Denkyira where they located gold and built the village of Atwidie (Atweri).²⁰ Ofin river gold made Abankeseso rich and then Kumase even richer. Control of it surely played a part in Kwaman's calculation to fight Denkyira at the end of the 1690s. Ofin river gold was extractable by artisanal mining. Further east from Abankeseso, at Obuase and Gyakobu for example, there were fewer accessible gold deposits and realizing the full reef potential of this area had to await twentieth-century deep mining technology. Most importantly, from Adanse Akrokyere north to Kwaman – the south Asante heartland from the eighteenth century – gold deposits were 'of little importance' and 'very poor'.²¹

ABANKESESO AND KWAMAN IN THE OFIN-PRA BASIN

Oral traditions and many academic historians describe seventeenth-century Denkyira and its forest Akan peers as 'kingdoms' or 'states'. These terms are misleading for they are anachronistic. They ascribe the more settled and stable administrative localities and identities of a later date to earlier circumstances of a more fluid and improvisational kind. Elaboration and routinization of state structures, supremely so in the case of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Asante, were not established features of the Akan political landscape in the Ofin–Pra basin in the seventeenth century. Instead, this was a time of shifting allegiances in the search for farmland, patronage and security. As such it was marked by a complex pattern of local or more distant migrations. These are memorialized in Akan tradition in all of their bewildering transitions of location and loyalty.

Wilks has argued that seventeenth-century 'kingdoms' or 'states' are more accurately to be understood as localized territorial 'estates', in which

²⁰ For Oboase, MRO, Kumase, CRB 21, Manso Nkwantahene vs. Bekwaihene, commenced 11 Aug. 1937; for Piaso, *ibid.* Concessions, No. 82, Nkawie Paninhene vs. A. Ntiful (Bibiani and Upper Ofin Gold Syndicate), commenced 27 Mar. 1926; for Ntoamu and Kotimso, RH [Rhodes House], Oxford, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.344, Papers of Sir Charles Henry Harper, 'Dunkwa on Ofin: some notes prepared for the Gold Coast Guide', 1922; for Kubi, *ibid.* 'The traditional history of Denkeria and Ashanti collected from native stories told to Jan. H. Koens at Dunkwa'; for Nyinawunsu, M. Fortes Papers (Cambridge University), History File 3, 'History notes of certain towns in the Bekwai District – Ashanti', Atweri, 5 Mar. 1939.

²¹ *Report of the Geological Survey Department for the Financial Year 1933–34* (Accra, 1934), 20. By the later nineteenth century, Asante miners at Obuase had excavated 50 feet into the bedrock. E. A. Cade of Ashanti Goldfields applauded their achievement which 'passes my comprehension'; see Cade Mss. (CWAS [Centre for West African Studies], Birmingham University), Cade to AGC Directors, Obuase, 30 Mar. 1898. Unlike in the Ofin river valley, precolonial mining of this kind in south Asante required large inputs of labour over a long period. The mature Asante state mobilized this effort, but it was beyond the resources available to those who ruled over seventeenth-century Abankeseso and Kwaman.

thrusting, skilful or lucky ‘big men’ (*abirempon*) – like Boamponsem and Osei Tutu – accumulated resources and followers at the expense of their less successful peers. Settlements like Abankeseso and Kwaman, residences of powerful ‘estate’ holders, acted as magnets for those looking for sustenance and protection. Consolidations of this sort, which first created and then institutionalized new levels of socioeconomic differentiation, led over time to ‘big men’ transforming themselves into territorial ‘chiefs’ or ‘kings’ supported by household retainers and legitimized through ritual practices and the possession of sacred objects. In the later seventeenth century, titled ‘big men’ ruled over ‘estates’ that were in transitional and uncertain but inexorable progress towards a larger and more fully realized form of polity and statehood.²²

Key to this process was warfare. So as to survive and prosper in conflict with others of his kind, the ‘big man’ was also a ‘lord of war’ (*osawura*) from necessity and choice. Kea has shown how ceaseless military competition amongst Akan ‘big men’ led to a revolution in warfare between the 1650s and the 1680s. Imported European muskets, paid for with gold and enslaved prisoners, took the place of bows and javelins and gave rise to a change from the shock tactics of the *mêlée* to the deployment of gun-bearing infantry in newly mobile formations such as right (*nifa*) and left (*benkum*) wings. The rulers of Akwamu, on the Birim river far to the east of the Ofin, were first among the inland forest Akan to adopt this new way of fighting. The Akwamu army used conscript subjects, but its core was a semi-professionalized body of gun-bearing title holders and retainers in the following of the Akwamuhene. Denkyira was the first ‘estate’ in the Ofin–Pra basin to import European firearms in volume and convert to the new mode of warfare. Abankeseso’s defeat of the Adanse in the late 1650s was probably achieved using newly imported muskets. By the 1680s–1690s Boamponsem’s gold and slaves were being exchanged for guns, powder and lead on an ever increasing scale. But this military revolution could not be monopolized. In the later seventeenth century it reached Kwaman. There it was encouraged and much accelerated by Osei Tutu. Between the 1660s and 1680s he observed military developments during his stays in Denkyira and then Akwamu. In the 1680s he returned home to assume the leadership of Kwaman. Authoritative Asante tradition recounts that he brought with him from Akwamu a contingent of gun-bearers (variously estimated to have been from 30 to 300 in number). These men fought for him against Denkyira at the battle of Feyiase (1701), and they did so as one element in a Kwaman army that was subjected to root and branch reorganization just before the campaign began.²³

²² I. Wilks, ‘Land, labor, gold, and the forest kingdom of Asante: a model of early change’, first published in 1975 and then revised in his *Forests of Gold* (1993), 41–90; and his ‘Founding the political kingdom’, 91–126.

²³ Kea, *Settlements*, 154–64; for Akwamu, I. Wilks, *Akwamu 1640–1750: A Study of the Rise and Fall of a West African Empire* (Trondheim, 2001); for the sequence of events leading up to Feyiase as reported in authoritative Asante tradition, see A. Adu Boahen, E. Akyeampong, N. Lawler, T. C. McCaskie and I. Wilks (eds.), ‘*The History of Ashanti Kings and the Whole Country Itself*’ and *Other Writings by Otumfuo, Nana Agyeman Prempeh I* (Oxford, 2003), 100–3.

Abankeseso had only a short period of supremacy after defeating the Adanse towns in about 1659. In 1681 the 'Dunkeries' appear for the first time in European records.²⁴ In 1701 Bosman reported that it was only 'in the last 15 or 16 years' that Denkyira, until then a small, thinly populated place, had 'so improved in power through warfare'.²⁵ That is, from the mid-1680s Boamponsem's gun-bearing infantry consolidated Abankeseso's grasp over the Ofin-Pra basin and waged war south along the trade corridor to the Gold Coast. Boamponsem is remembered in Denkyira tradition as a mighty ruler, but in his later years at least he was also an exacting one. Needing gold and slaves to maintain his position, he 'looted' far and wide.²⁶ He also ruthlessly exploited his own 'estate'. An instance of this is reported in the traditions of Nyinawunsu (Efuonhumasu).

King Boa Ponsem had a desire for gold to make his Kingdom strong. He sent to tell all the people saying 'I am the Great King and I command you fetch me all your gold'. It was done but when Boa Ponsem saw it he said 'It is not sufficient' so he sent to fetch more. We [i.e. the people of Nyinawunsu] could not bring it and so Boa became highly angry. He said 'Off with their Heads!' and so it was done and the headless trunks were thrown away into Ahumana [a stream that empties into the Ofin]. From then Boa Ponsem hardened his heart so whenever gold was lacking he cut off heads and the remains were cast off into the bush.²⁷

Ntim Gyakari inherited Boamponsem's arrogance but not his authority or his military skills. In the royal traditions of Kwaman (Kumase), an admittedly partisan recounting, the impetuous Ntim Gyakari is represented as bringing disaster upon himself by his overweening demands. Asantehenes Agyeman Prempeh (1888-1931) and Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (1931-70) both left accounts of what happened that differ in detail but agree in essentials. Returning home from Akwamu, Osei Tutu defeated the neighbouring Domaa who had fought and killed his predecessor Obiri Yeboa. Kwaman and Domaa were both tributaries of Abankeseso, but Osei Tutu had now repudiated this status by waging war without Ntim Gyakari's permission. He also offered sanctuary to Oduro Agyensamu of Asen, a man wanted in Abankeseso for questioning about the circumstances of Boamponsem's death. The Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II gave the following account of what happened next.

Dankyira messengers told Osei Tutu and his Elders that they had been sent by Ntim Gyakari, the King of Dankyira to tell the King of Asante and his people:

- (1) That because Osei Tutu had given protection to Oduro Agyensamoo who had committed a serious offence at Dankyira and escaped to Kumase.
- (2) That because Osei Tutu had ceased the payment of his annual tributes to the King of Dankyira since he became King of Asante, and

²⁴ R. Law (ed.), *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681-1699: Part 1, 1681-1683* (Oxford, 1997), 99.

²⁵ Bosman, *Description*, 72-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, Testimony of Nyinawunsu Agona 'Family Head' Charles Osei Nkansah.

- (3) That because Osei Tutu waged war against Adom Kusi of Domaa, his fellow subordinate Chief under Dankyira without his permission, the King of Dankyira demanded from the Asantehene the following:
- (a) To fill the Brass-pan [brought by the Denkyira messengers] to the brim with pure gold;
 - (b) To send to the King of Dankyira a long necklace of precious beads (Kyekyerekona) [i.e. *kyekyerekona*, the necklace worn by kings' wives as a sign of submission]; and
 - (c) That the King of Asante and each of his Provincial Chiefs must deliver his favourite wife to the King of Dankyira through the messengers in marriage; and
 - (d) That the King of Asante and each of his Provincial Chiefs must deliver his beloved child to be sent to the King of Dankyira.²⁸

Osei Tutu rejected these demands. Both sides prepared for the war that ended with the battle of Feyiase. Tradition claims these preparations took 3 years and, as noted, the Dutch records show a lengthy period of confrontation before fighting took place. In the interim Osei Tutu made his dispositions, reportedly under the supernatural guidance of Komfo Anokye. In the dense Asante traditions that surround this period of mobilization, Komfo Anokye is said to have made an announcement. Here is the account given by Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh.

But Annochi said "All the soldiers of the Ashanti Kingdom cannot be compared to the smallest wing of the Denkira King. So I will change the mind of half of their armies in such a way that during the fight, half of them will come to help you (Ashantis) and the other half I will discourage [*sic*] them so that you will be able to fight them and defeat them."²⁹

Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II gives the following variant.

Anokye further told the King that in consideration of the size of Ntim Gyakari's forces, he would do some miracles by which he would wean the allegiance of his subjects, and induce them to remove from Dankyira to come to settle in Asante to augment Tutu's army before the war opened. By some miraculous way, Anokye did exactly all what he promised, and many people removed from Dankyira to Asante just as he predicted.³⁰

These 'miracles' ascribed to Komfo Anokye are retold in histories whose overriding purpose is to show not only what happened, but also that what did happen was inevitable. The mystification of the sources of success is common to histories of this kind everywhere.³¹ The favour of the supernatural is a trope used to explain what took place, but also to proclaim the unassailable

²⁸ NMP [New Manhyia Palace], Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', manuscript prepared by a Committee of Traditional Authorities under the Chairmanship of Otumfuo, Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, n.d. (but 1937-46), Chapter 3, 'War with Dankyira'. Compare here Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 104-5, 185-90.

²⁹ NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', Chapter 3, 'War with Dankyira'.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

³¹ Compare G. Duby, *Le dimanche de Bouvines: 27 juillet 1214* (Paris, 1973), for accounts explaining King Philip Augustus of France's victory over the German Emperor Otto of Brunswick and the English King John.

legitimacy of unfolding events. It would be unwise to presume, however, that the presence of such a device means that the happenings it purports to explain never occurred.³² The account of Komfo Anokye's miracle-working that induced people to desert Ntim Gyakari and remove to Kwaman to offer support to Osei Tutu seeks to place the stamp of supernatural inevitability on Asante triumph, but this is rooted in actual happenings that are extensively documented in historical tradition. Sources show that in the period leading up to the Feyiase war, and even before that time, large numbers of Denkyira subjects fled or otherwise migrated to Kwaman to escape the demands of Abankeseso. When we align such materials with our understanding of the nature of the seventeenth-century 'estate', and the known behaviour of Boamponsem and Ntim Gyakari, then the switching of allegiances makes historical sense. Let us now turn to the detailed history and geography of this process of migrant flight.

DENKYIRA IN THE MAKING OF ASANTE: ATWEMA

In or about 1659 the Denkyira rose up and defeated the Adanse to become the leading power in the western part of the Ofin–Pra basin. Adanse tradition reports that the conflict was sparked by one Apea Brenya of Adanse Akrokyere who became infatuated with and behaved improperly towards a wife of a Denkyira title holder. Boamponsem seized the offender and cut off his beard and otherwise humiliated him. This was a customary declaration of war and it led on to the Adanse defeat.³³ Whatever the truth of this, there can be no doubt that the war was an unforgiving one, and that after it was over the victorious Denkyira behaved punitively towards their former overlords. 'Boa Ponsem took the Abooso people who served Chichiwere Bona [the Kyekyewere *bona* shrine] and he ordered them to serve him', Denkyira tradition recounts. It continues as follows.

Ntiamoah of Abooso offended Boa Ponsem. When the war was going between them [Adanse and Denkyira] this man the Abooso Chief took as prisoner certain of Boa's royals with all their Gold, Jewels, etc. and robbed them and killed them at the Oda [river]. Boa was in a rage to see his families all killed by Nti Amoah. He captured Aboosohene and cut his head [off]. All his people were kept to be slaves to Boa. When the Denkyira King needed people for Akyiri [*akyere*, i.e. ritual sacrifice] he sent to Abooso and the people were painted red to be killed.

³² For some discussion, T. C. McCaskie, 'Komfo Anokye of Asante: meaning, history, and philosophy in an African society', *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), 315–39.

³³ IAS AS [Asante Stool Histories] 89: Adanse, 1 May 1963. I note but do not discuss here the fact that traditions ascribe the source of many conflicts in this period to sexual transgression. Thus, Osei Tutu is said to have fled Abankeseso because of illicit sexual relations with one female royal or another. It is sometimes even claimed that Osei Tutu was Ntim Gyakari's real father. Such tales are rooted in Akan ideas about demonstrable superiority and inferiority between men expressed through *mpoatwa* ('setting at defiance'), in this case involving the theft of sexual and reproductive rights. They are also linked to male constructions of female sexuality and to the broader, often conflicted, realm of gender relations. For some relevant insights, see J. Allman and V. Tashjian, '*I Will Not Eat Stone*': *A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth NH, 2000), and McCaskie, *Asante Identities*, 159–78.

Abooso revolted but Boa crushed it. It continued they were used in the same way as before with others sent to Abooso by Boa from his own people who offended.³⁴

Adanse Akrokyere tradition tells the same story, but from the other side. Boamponsem fought with and defeated 'Ntiamua Naankuo' of 'Abusu' in Adanse, after which:

The inhabitants of this town was called Bontwimafu the red clay people because they were prisoners of war and was doomed by the law of the country to the most barbarous slaughter. When any royal personage died 100 men were sacrificed during the funeral and their blood was used as a red clay in painting some parts of the body of the deceased and their bodies were placed in the grave on which the coffin was laid.³⁵

The nineteenth-century Ga historian Reindorf heard a version of this same tradition about the 'red clay people' or 'Bontwumafu'.³⁶ Their name is derived from *ntwoma*, meaning red clay, earth or ochre, which was customarily used by the Akan to streak the face and body at times of death and mourning.³⁷ 'Bo' is clearly 'Boa', and is sometimes given in that form, and 'fo' is *fo*, that is 'people'. The sense of the term then is the derogatory 'Boa[mponsem]'s red clay people'.

'Abooso' has vanished. Evidently it lay in the vicinity of Akrokyere and Abankeseso which were scarcely 20 miles apart. The sources are agreed it was an Adanse settlement, but one into which Boamponsem also herded his own transgressive Denkyira subjects. All of these same traditions continue the history of the 'Bontwumafu' after Ntim Gyakari succeeded as Denkyirahene in or about 1694. Ntim Gyakari, a man famously interested in women, took an 'Abooso' wife. Then his mother (or sister) fell mortally ill. Learning of this, the wife went to 'Abooso' to alert her 'Bontwumafu' kin. When news came that the Denkyira royal woman was dead, the 'Bontwumafu' immediately fled to escape being immolated in great numbers at her funeral. Denkyira and Adanse traditions report that they sought refuge with Osei Tutu at Kwaman (Kumase).³⁸ At this point Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh takes up the story from a Kumase perspective, adding telling

³⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, Testimony of Denkyira Gyaasehene Yaw Tuntuni (given at Dunkwa-on-Ofin).

³⁵ MRO, Kumase, 'History of the immigrants from Takyiman', n.d., 'History of Akrokerri', 22, 62-3.

³⁶ Revd. C. C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante, Based on Traditions, and Historical Facts, Comprising a Period of more than Three Centuries from about 1500 to 1860* (Basel, 1895), 57-8. Yaa Hom, daughter of Asantehene Osei Yaw (1824-33), who was captured at the battle of Katamanso in 1826 and later married in Accra, may have been Reindorf's informant; see T. C. McCaskie, 'Asante and Ga: the history of a relationship', in P. Jenkins (ed.), *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century* (Basel, 1998), 135-53, especially 142.

³⁷ T. C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge, 1995), 315.

³⁸ Denkyira tradition (fn. 33) says 'the Abooso people fearing their death by the hundred at the burial ran away to Kumasi'; Adanse tradition (fn. 34) says 'the whole of these Tribes now fled to Ashanti for protection, in the time of Osei Tutu the Great'; Reindorf, *History*, says they 'fled for protection to the Asantes'.

details and dating it to the period of active preparation for the war between Osei Tutu and Ntim Gyakari:

The King of Denkira made ten classes of men and [are under A ...]. These men and women are there to offer their bodies as a sacrifice to the King whenever a royal family is dead and these men were called Abon Chuma Fuor [Atwomafo], and these headmen were called Ajae Bi [Agyeibi], Youdyayim [Yim Awere], and Kokobin [Kwakwa Bene]. And these 3 men decided that they are dissatisfied with the treatment they are receiving and so they will come and help the Ashantis when the battle is declared. So they left their land to come to Kumasi to help the Ashantis. When they were nigh to Kumasi, they sent a word to Ossai Tutu [Osei Tutu] that they are coming to help him in war and they sent their chief Kokobinny [Kwakwa Bene] to take an oath before the King and to ascertain before him that they are coming to help him with clean spirits. And they asked the King to send them one of his families to take an oath before them and to ascertain that the King will not kill them when they come to help him. The King sent his nephew Otié Cu Achulier [Otiéku Atwedie] to those men and they in return sent one of their men called Kwakwabin [Kwakwa Bene] to take oath. When oath had been taken on both sides, they came to Kumasi. Ajaebi [Agyeibi] came 8 days before Youdyayim [Yim Awere]. When they came, the King gave them a district called Kojokulom [Kwadwokrom, in Kumase] to live. It came to pass that the King asked those men to give him (Kwakwabin) Kokobin [Kwakwa Bene] so that he will name him after his birth day. These people agreed, and gave Kwakwabin [Kwakwa Bene] to him and they also in return asked Otié Cu Achulier [Otiéku Atwedie] to come and live with them at Kojokulom [Kwadwokrom, in Kumase]. This was given.³⁹

Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II adds to this account. He clarifies identities. He makes it explicit that the exchange of oaths between Osei Tutu and the immigrants was prompted by the former's demand for a proof of loyalty and the latter's need for a guarantee of safety. He states that Komfo Anokye worked the 'miracle' that brought the 'Bontwumafo' to Kwaman, and then made Kwakwa Bene a 'soul-washer' (*akradwareni*) to Osei Tutu (see above: 'so that he will name him after his birth day').⁴⁰

Variant accounts from the perspectives of Agyeibi, Kwakwa Bene and Yim Awere, the leaders of the 'Bontwumafo', are found in the traditions of the stools they came to occupy in Asante. These histories are circumspect in the matter of identifying the three men with the wretched, enslaved 'Bontwumafo', but they do relate a pattern of conflict with and alienation from Ntim Gyakari. Agyeibi was Denkyira Kontihene resident at Ntoamu ('Entuoamu'). Ntim Gyakari seduced his wife. Agyeibi expressed his outrage, but rather than submit to disgrace or death he fled to Kwaman with many who felt as he did about the Denkyirahene's excesses. In a like manner Kwakwa Bene was a Denkyira office holder resident at Asabi ('Sabi'). Fearful of Ntim Gyakari's 'despotic' rule, he removed to Kwaman. He was made a 'soul-washer' of Osei Tutu's *bosommuru amanyina* (the sword that unites the nation) because of the number of people he brought with him to

³⁹ Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 107–8.

⁴⁰ NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', Chapter 3, 'War with Dankyira'; for 'soul-washers', see McCaskie, *State and Society*, 293.

strengthen Asante. Yim Awere was a friend of Osei Tutu at Abankeseso when the young Kwaman royal lived there in the 1660s–1670s. He was a Denkyira royal who suffered at the hands of Boamponsem and Ntim Gyakari. He fled in the company of Agyeibi.

The stool histories that provide accounts of these three men intersect at all important points with the narratives given by the two Asantehenes. They also add detail. First, they say that the emigrants were pursued and had to fight their way out of Denkyira. Second, they say where Osei Tutu resettled these people. Agyeibi remained at Kwadwokrom (in Kumase). Kwakwa Bene left Kwadwokrom to reside at Asuyeboa 4 miles to the west (but now in Kumase), and then removed 5 miles further west where he founded Agogo on the road to Bibiani. Yim Awere also left Kwadwokrom to build Toase 15 miles west of Kumase. All three were confirmed in new titles by Osei Tutu. Agyeibi was made Atwemahene; Kwakwa Bene became Atwema Agogohene; and Yim Awere was confirmed as Toasehene in Atwema. The word ‘Atwema’ commemorated the changes of allegiance that strengthened Kwaman in its confrontation with Denkyira. It is derived from *twe*, meaning to draw, pull or drag, and *ma*, signifying the condition of being filled up. The district of Atwema, then, memorializes ‘those who drew lots of people [to Asante from Denkyira]’. It is also sometimes given as Atwoma, a deliberate punning confusion with *ntwoma*, meaning red clay, earth or ochre. This is because the ‘Bontwumafo’ fled Denkyira for Asante and became the ‘Atwomafo’.⁴¹

DENKYIRA IN THE MAKING OF ASANTE: ‘THE PEOPLE OF
DANKYIRA CONTINUED TO POUR IN’⁴²

Asante tradition says that when it was clear that the Atwema people were welcomed by Osei Tutu, others from Denkyira followed in numbers. Denkyira tradition in turn paints an image of emigrant flight. ‘Anwanawia [Anwianwia] ran away as did Sabi [Asabi]’ because of Ntim Gyakari’s ‘ruling over them with [a] despotic tendency. He sent men with whips to take whatever he required from them’.⁴³ Some ‘Sobis’ [Asabi] were resettled at Atwema Agogo, while others from ‘Anwanwenem’ [Anwianwia] eventually came to live at Gyedu in Ahafo.⁴⁴ Similarly, the ‘Dawu-Dawu’ [Awu Dawu], a group of Denkyirahene’s servants (*gyaase*), fled to Osei Tutu. They were placed under the authority of Amankwatia, himself a Denkyira who had been the young Osei Tutu’s personal servant during his stay in Abankeseso, but who was now a senior general with the titles of Kontihene and Bantamahene

⁴¹ Sometimes also ‘Atwimafo’ in modern Twi usage. For relevant stool histories, IAS AS 128: Toase, 14 Aug. 1964; 135: Atwima Agogo, 5 Oct. 1964; 184: Atwima, 29 Nov. 1966. Reindorf, *History*, 57, says simply ‘the Bontwumafo, now Atwomafo’, but conflates the derivation of both terms to *ntwoma*.

⁴² NMP, Kumase, ‘History of Ashanti’, ch. 3, ‘War with Dankyira’.

⁴³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, Testimony of Ayanfuri [Ayamfori] Linguist Kwaku Bredwa.

⁴⁴ Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 108; IAS AS 135: Atwima Agogo, 5 Oct. 1964; 291: Gyedu/Ahafo, 20 Mar. 1974.

in the Kwaman (Kumase) army.⁴⁵ Others of Ntim Gyakari's household servants also defected. These included Kyerema Di of Otiman (near present-day Mease on the Ofin–Oda river confluence), the Denkyira head drummer, who is said by Asante tradition to have removed with his sister Boatemaa Twum and many followers. He made ritual obeisance to Osei Tutu by asking for some boiled maize (*abete*), the common food of the servant, and so he was nicknamed Kyerema Di Abetia. Osei Tutu appointed him Nkukuwafohene. The brothers Akwadan and Nuamoa, hornblowers of the Denkyirahene, 'came on the side of King Osei Tutu' with their golden horn and followers. They were resettled at Akuropon, and later brought into Kumase when Osei Tutu created the Asokwa stool for them so that they might act as his traders as well as hornblowers.⁴⁶

Asante stool histories record numerous other flights from Denkyira. Thus, Domakwai in Kumase has links with Ntoamu and Ayamfori migrants; the first chief of Akumanten, once head of those who cleared the forest for Ntim Gyakari, left Denkyira with his people because he was 'indignant' at the treatment given him; the Atwema Besiase royals left Mmayeremu near Kotimso to side with Osei Tutu; the founders of Okyerekrom, north of Kumase, migrated from Denkyira because they 'disliked' its 'administration'; Okyerekrom's neighbour Amoako was also created by Denkyira emigrants; Nkwantakese was settled by people dissatisfied with Ntim Gyakari's 'despotic rule'; Ahensan, a very old settlement, is said to have gone over to Osei Tutu when Ntim Gyakari insulted its chief; the ancestors of the Bosommuru Fabem Linguist's stool quit Denkyira 'because of tyranny'; Nkwanta Esaase was settled by people who migrated from Denkyira Adwaaduamu; remote Ndwema in Ahafo was built by refugees who fled from Ayamfori.⁴⁷ This list is far from exhaustive. Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh himself observed that 'many others that cannot be mentioned came'.⁴⁸

Asante tradition states that the 'Bontwumafo' were the first to change allegiance from Ntim Gyakari to Osei Tutu. As noted, their example was widely emulated. Perhaps the most important among those who followed their lead were the 'Inkwayulaes' or Nkawie people.⁴⁹ Nkawie, 20 miles north of Abankeseso, was arguably the second most important town in Denkyira. It was a gold-mining centre between the Ofin and Oda rivers. It exercised authority over Abori, Ntobroso, Abuaso and the now-vanished

⁴⁵ Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 108; NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'War with Dankyira'; IAS AS 39: Bantama, Nov. 1962. For more on Amankwatia, Wilks, 'What manner of persons were these?', especially 243–55.

⁴⁶ Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 108; NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'War with Dankyira'; IAS AS 1: Asokwa, 3 Feb. 1963; 70: Fantomfrom, 22 Apr. 1963, drum history, stresses the miraculous in its sudden flight 'one night through the sky' from Denkyira to Asante; for horns generally, P. K. Sarpong, *The Ceremonial Horns of the Ashanti* (Accra, 1990).

⁴⁷ IAS AS 43: Safie and Amoanim (Domakwai), 28 Mar. 1963; 80: Akumanten, 2 June 1963; 105: Besiase, 30 Nov. 1963; 122: Okyerekurom, Mar. 1964; 134: Amoako, 10 Dec. 1964; 136: Nkwanta Kessie, 7 Oct. 1964; 164: Ahensan, 20 Nov. 1965; 174: Busumuru Fabem Linguist, 6 Mar. 1966; 176: Nkwanta Esaase, 19 Mar. 1966; 209: Okyerekurom (Part 2), 2 Nov. 1967; 211: Kwaku Ndwema, 25 Nov. 1967.

⁴⁸ Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 108.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

settlements of Obi, Atintim, Wuakrom and Nkyena. Nkawie was itself an 'estate' of some importance. It was ruled over by a lineage that occupied 'an old stool from which you become Omanhin of Denkera [Denkyirahene]'. Its female stool was occupied by Denkyirahene's 'nieces', women who were 'eligible' to become the Denkyira queen-mother. The male and female stool-holders resided at Abankeseso under surveillance, because 'Ntim and [his] predecessor Boa Ponsel were not from this royal line but from another'. Ayamfori tradition states that Boamponsem was 'a very strong man [i.e. an *obirempon*] who pushed off the proper heirs from the [Denkyira] stool to succeed them. He was a great King who lived for a long time and so the Oman gave the stool in turn to Ntim his relative'. Elsewhere Denkyira tradition adds that 'Boa[mponsem] was not the right heir but came up to take it [the Denkyira stool] as he was the famous fighting man'.⁵⁰ The suggestion here is of usurpation, or at least of a change in the succession. A possible further implication is that when Boamponsem succeeded (c. 1650s), power in Denkyira shifted from the northern Nkawie 'estate' to its southern Abankeseso counterpart. As noted, changes of this kind were an endemic feature of forest Akan history during this period.

In the 1660s the two royal stools that controlled the Nkawie lands were occupied by Asensu Kufuor and his sister Adoma Akosua. It is severally reported that in Abankeseso the detainee Osei Tutu had a child with Adoma Akosua, and then secretly married her with her brother's consent. Whatever transpired, the three principals were united in grievance against Boamponsem. In the 1670s Osei Tutu offended Boamponsem – the traditions mention sexual transgression – and fled from Abankeseso to Asamankese (or Nyanawase) in Akwamu to the east.⁵¹ In the 1680s Osei Tutu returned home to Kwaman to succeed Obiri Yeboa. Then, in or about 1694, Boamponsem died and Ntim Gyakari won out over Asensu Kufuor in the contest to succeed him. Nkawie tradition reports what happened next:

Then a certain case happened between Assansu [Asensu Kufuor] and the Denkerahin, it was about a stool. Assansu was living with Ntim [Gyakari] at the Denkera capital called Ebenso [Ntibanso, i.e. Abankeseso]. When this dispute arose Assansu separated from Denkerahin. He settled in a village called Awioso near Ntoboso [Ntobroso]. Awioso is now in ruins. He heard that his brother-in-law Osei Tutu occupied the [Kwaman] Stool. Then Assansu came to him. When he came several Denkera people followed. He was connected with the Denkera Stool and they must follow him ... Nkawie Stool was not made by the King of Ashanti. It came in full state with Assansu. It came with its Safohin [subordinate chiefs], and no chief has added more subjects ... My ancestors came to Coomassie direct to the Golden Stool.⁵²

⁵⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/834, Testimony of Ayanfuri [Ayamfori] Linguist Kwaku Bredwa, and Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II to Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 20 Mar. 1946. ⁵¹ For the problem of Akwamu capitals in this period, Wilks, *Akwamu*, 2, 37–8.

⁵² RH, Oxford, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.344, Papers of Sir Charles Henry Harper, 'Enquiry into the relations between the stools of Bantama and Nkawe', Testimony of Nkawiehene Kwabena Kufuor, Kumase, 12 June 1920.

Elsewhere, the same Nkawie source remarked that 'Assensu [Asensu Kufuor] quarreled with [Ntim] Gyakari and went to Ashanti for help to revenge himself'.⁵³

Tradition affirms that Asensu Kufuor was the single most important defector from the cause of Ntim Gyakari. He was a royal qualified 'to occupy the stool of Denkerá', and though worsted in the contest to succeed Boamponsem he remained a potent rival of Ntim Gyakari.⁵⁴ When he threw in his lot with Osei Tutu he took many followers with him and, so it is said, gold and guns.⁵⁵ Most significantly, Asensu Kufuor's shift of allegiance detached the largest 'estate' after Abankeseso from Ntim Gyakari's control, and called into question the reliability of much of northern Denkyira. After Ntim Gyakari was killed at Feyiase, Asensu Kufuor was confirmed in the title of Nkawiehene and went to live in that town. His lands were restored to him. Asantehene Opoku Ware (c. 1720–50) extended Nkawie's lands westward over the Ofin river as far as Bibiani. However, and paradoxically, if Nkawie became an Asante town then it also retained a vivid sense of its past identity as a seat of Denkyira royalty. We will return to this matter in due course.

Tradition describes one detailed case of Denkyira migrants reversing their decision to ally themselves with Osei Tutu. Aboabo was a settlement on the Nsutase tributary of the Oda river, about 10 miles southwest of Abankeseso. It was inhabited by Denkyirahene's shield-bearers (*akyamfo*), and by villagers who prospected for gold on the Ofin flats east of Watreso. A quarrel arose between the two groups over the ownership of a gold nugget (*sika boba*) and in the course of this the villagers killed some of the shield-bearers. Ntim Gyakari was told of the matter. He was incensed and summoned the villagers to appear before him. At the meeting, the village head Owusu Koanyama:

did abuse the occupant of Bankam Dwa [the Denkyira stool, *abankamdwa*] saying that the King's own servants [the shield-bearers] were ruffians who stole every thing from the people. Ntim flew in a rage and ordered that the man [Owusu Koanyama] should be killed forthwith together with all his family. This was done on the spot. The people were afraid and thought to run away to Ashanti. They did so until they crossed Aboabo river to Poano [Poanu]. They took council with themselves to return back to their home and beg the King to forgive them. Ntim was in readiness to fight the Feyiase War [against Osei Tutu] and he killed them. The Boaduru Suman [a charm, *asuman* called 'the hard stone', *obo duru*] was buried at the spot to mark it.⁵⁶

⁵³ MRO, Kumase, K10, 'Kumasi towns and villages: Nyinahin and Nkawie', Nkawiehene Kwabena Kufuor to Chief Commissioner (Ashanti), Kumase, 3 Dec. 1925.

⁵⁴ RH, Oxford, Mss. Brit. Emp. s.344, 'Testimony of Nkawie Linguist Kojo Kura, Kumase, 27 July 1920.

⁵⁵ IAS AS 102: Nkawie Kuma, Dec. 1963, argues that Asensu Kufuor died on the way to Kwaman (Kumase), and his sister Adoma Akosua agreed that a 'commoner' (*akwankvaaa*) named Maafo should take her brother's place. This is implausible, and is linked to Nkawie Kumaa's attempts to claim that it was not founded by settlers from Nkawie, so as to assert its independence of or even its seniority to its parent town; see too *ibid.* 107: Nyinahin, 6 Jan. 1964.

⁵⁶ MRO, Kumase, CRB 30, Asantehene's tribunal, Ampunyasehene Kojo Dakwa Ababio v. Manso Nkwantahene and Measehene, commenced 15 May 1939, 'Testimony of Abanyaso *odekuro* Yaw Afful, Kumase, 27 June 1939; at *ibid.*, 'Testimony of Manso

Among other things, this fugitive tradition helps explain why so many Denkyira people fled from the overlordship of Ntim Gyakari and sought the protection of Osei Tutu.

DENKYIRA IN THE MAKING OF ASANTE: FEYIASE
AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Kwaman 'estate' was itself created by migrants. Osei Tutu's Oyoko ancestors moved north from Asantemanso to Kokofu. About 1650 they moved north again to Kwaman. The whole process took decades and the total distance covered was barely 20 miles. The Amansie district, where Kwaman was located, together with the Kwabre and Sekyere districts immediately to its north, attracted immigrants from the whole arc of the Ofin–Oda–Pra–Birim watersheds to the south. This southern area, with its valley farmlands and accessible gold, was the crucible in which forest Akan warfare first welded together smaller 'estates' into bigger territorial entities: Adanse then Denkyira in the west, Akwamu and Akyem in the east. There was a consistent pattern of south to north emigration, away from new forms of control and predation and towards land still open for free occupation or seizure. Incomers sometimes faced a fight with earlier settlers, but even in the later seventeenth century this kind of warfare was of a lesser scale and intensity than what was emerging as the norm further south.

From the 1680s until the war with Denkyira and beyond, Osei Tutu's Kwaman fought a series of wars against its local Amansie peers and rivals.⁵⁷ These conflicts made Kwaman pre-eminent among its neighbours. In the larger scheme of things, however, it had not escaped from the political reach of the south. It was subordinated to Denkyira, the great power in the Ofin–Oda basin after the 1650s. Abankeseso increased its exactions to maintain its status, and in the mid-1690s Kwaman went into revolt. Osei Tutu created a local military coalition out of those like himself who wanted to be rid of Abankeseso's demands. Importantly, this alliance drew to it many people from Denkyira who also wished to repudiate Ntim Gyakari. In the event, Osei Tutu's coalition defeated and killed Ntim Gyakari at Feyiase in 1701. Osei Tutu (and Komfo Anokye) moved swiftly to consolidate this victory. The new Golden Stool (*sika dwa*) and Osei Tutu's installation as the first Asantehene and ruler over the coalition are the best-known symbolic expressions of the new order. Asante – most innovative and enduring of all forest Akan polities – had come into existence as heir to the seismic political and military transformations of the seventeenth century. However, the aftermath of Osei Tutu's success at Feyiase presented new problems.

Nkwanta Linguist Kojo Abayie, Kumase, 16 May 1939, it is said that this case was about 'the ownership of Subina and Kwatrem lands that were serving Denkyera before Osei Tutu defeated Jakari [Ntim Gyakari]'.

⁵⁷ For the most detailed account, NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, under 'War with Mpankrono'; 'War with Sepe'; 'War with Komire'; 'War with Takwa and Breman'; 'War with Domaa Kusi'; 'The surrender of Kyereme Sikafo'; 'War with Busufo Banka'; 'War with Adanse'; 'Wars with Tafo'; 'War with Kwakye Dopowa'; 'Wars with Kaase'; 'War with Amakom'; 'War with Wonoo'. See too Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 96, 101, 103–4, 110–12.

In the 1700s Asante quashed the last vestiges of Denkyira resistance and turned to the task of remaking and securing the Ofin–Oda basin – the Amansie, Atwema and Adanse districts – in its own interests.

In the 1700s Asantehene Osei Tutu told migrant Denkyira gold producers to go home. Mpatuom, for example, was a gold-mining settlement southwest of Kumase between the Ofin and Oda rivers whose people had fled Ntim Gyakari's control. Its traditions give a picture of Asante resettlement policy after Feyiase.

We were formally [*sic*] subjects to Denkyira and we went to serve the Asantehene; when Ntim Gyakari waged war against the Asantehene we removed from Mpatuom where we lived on the Denkyirahene's land to Kumasi and assisted the then Asantehene Osei Tutu to fight the Denkyirahene Ntim Gyakari. King Osei asked us to go back and live at our old place Bontefufuom (Mpatuom) as he had fought and conquered Ntim Gyakari the Denkyirahene who was owning the Bontefufuom land and we to continue our gold mining which was our only duty. The King dismissed us with two sheep as libation and purification of the land and our gods we had left behind; in order that the land may continue to be fruitful for gold. The King of Ashanti brought one sheep as libation to the land. When the Asantehene dismissed us to return to Mpatuom our old and former abode, Appia Kotoko, Ampati, and Amoah were sent by the then Mpatuomhene Asamoa Tia to brush, clean and clear a new site and made temporal [*sic*] huts for us to live in when we shall have arrived as our old houses or buildings were all ruined. They were told to make the huts at the junction of the four roads, i.e. Sehwi, Ahafo, Denkyira and Kumasi.⁵⁸

Mpatuom's obligations to Kumase were regularized. All gold nuggets mined there were sent to the Asantehene. Prospectors from elsewhere were charged a standard fee for digging shafts at Mpatuom, and a part of the revenues 'so collected' was forwarded to Kumase. Asantehene Opoku Ware (*c.* 1720–50) made Anantahene responsible for Mpatuom affairs.⁵⁹

Migrant Denkyira gold producers also petitioned to go home to support themselves. At Aboaso, some dozen miles southeast of Mpatuom, the people quit Denkyira 'to go to help' Osei Tutu who 'thanked and allowed us to help him in the war'. Then, after Feyiase:

we wished to go back to our old place at Abuoso [Aboaso], but the Asantehene did not allow that but told us to go and live at Enginasa [Anyinasu] between Peki and Trede. There we lived for three years. After that we returned to Kumasi and asked the Asantehene to allow us to go back to our old Abuoso as there was no gold to work on the land at Enyinasu. We were allowed to return. On our way in the middle of the Peki road one Nana Seni saw a 'Twie' (small leopard) and caught it with his hands. The Twie was taken to Kumasi to the Asantehene who gave Nana Seni the name Seni Kyeretwie [i.e. 'he who captured a leopard'; der. *kyere* (to seize), and *twie* (a leopard)]. For the catching of the leopard the Asantehene rewarded us with one keg of gunpowder and ten bars of lead. He then told us to return to our old Abuoso. When we arrived there we found the village in ruins, so returned to a distance of 3 miles and cleared the

⁵⁸ M. Fortes papers (Cambridge University), History file 3, 'History notes of certain towns in the Bekwai District – Ashanti', Mpatuom, n.d. (but 1930s).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

place and built a village which we called Ankam, because the man who cleared the site was called Kankam. He was a slave of Wirempehene Nana Fintini Amoryeh.⁶⁰

Osei Tutu resettled Mpatuom at a strategic road junction. He gave Aboaso (Ankam) gunpowder and lead. These are instances of the post-1701 reordering of Denkyira north of the Ofin. Stabilization was partly defensive. In 1706–7 defeated Denkyira insurgents fled south over the Ofin to Twifo Heman. Kumase moved to guard against their return north of the river. At the same time, stabilization was offensive. Effective control over Abankeseso's old lands north of the Ofin gave Kumase a springboard from which to launch operations south to wrest control of the trade route to Elmina and Cape Coast. In the 1700s–1710s this involved Asante in the affairs of Twifo and Wassa.⁶¹

Securing the Ofin–Oda basin and its gold involved measures other than repatriating Denkyira migrants. Bekwai, some 18 miles south of Kumase and a core member of the new Asante, was made responsible through its subjects at Ahuren for taking 'charge of the captured towns which formerly belonged to Dankyira' in Amansie and for policing the roads through the eastern part of that district.⁶² New settlements were created to strengthen control. People from Akyease near Antoa north of Kumase removed south to build Denyase, because 'after the war Asantehene called Denyasehene and told him to go and settle in Amansie and watch against Denkyira'.⁶³ Members of the Dwaben stool family were granted the Dadease lands near Kokofu so as 'to watch over the old Denkyira kingdom'.⁶⁴ To the west of these settlements, in Atwema and the Ofin–Oda watershed, Osei Tutu ordered people to create new villages or to go and live among the Denkyira in existing ones. Thus:

The King appointed various people to go and guard against the Dankyira. These encamped at Nkwanta-Dome [Manso Nkwanta], Kanniago [Domi Keniago], Atwere, Abori, Ofori-Kurom etc. These settlers found some alluvial gold in the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Notes on the history of Wirempe-Mim, n.d. (but 1930s); compare IAS AS 129: Manso Mim, 21 Aug. 1964.

⁶¹ For Denkyira flight south of the Ofin, PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/834, 'Tribal histories: Denkyira', enclosing Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II to Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 20 Mar. 1946. For details of Asante involvement south of the Ofin, Daaku, *Trade*, 165–81; Van Dantzig, *Les hollandais*, 124–88, 253–6; L. W. Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch 1744–1873* (Oxford, 1990), 117–32; Wilks, 'What manner of persons were these?', especially 246–55.

⁶² NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'The building of Bekwai'; compare R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford, 1929), 148–9.

⁶³ M. Fortes papers, 'History notes of certain towns in the Bekwai District – Ashanti', 'Status of Denyase in Asanteman', 22 Aug. 1940.

⁶⁴ These first settlers were joined by refugee Dwaben royals in the nineteenth century, giving rise to long and still contentious disputes about the relationship between Dadease and Kokofu. See *ibid.*, 'Notes on history of Dadease', 19 Dec. 1938; NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'The building of Dadiase'; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1324, 'Kokofu–Dadease affairs'; MRO, Kumase, 183/35, 'Dadiase native affairs, 17 April 1950 to 18 August 1954'.

land, and this attracted many more people to the place who formed the District of Manso.⁶⁵

The Manso district of southern Atwema was carved out of the old Denkyira gold-producing heartland. Manso Nkwanta had oversight of the old Denkyira villages westward to the Ofin river. Further south, the Denkyira miners who returned to build Ankam were joined by Asante immigrants. The two groups created the settlement of Manso Mim.⁶⁶ After this, according to Denkyira tradition, 'the Ashantis came down to River Ofin to join in with gold mining with the people who were there already'.⁶⁷

EPILOGUE: THE AFFAIRS OF NKAWIE

North of Manso, Nkawie guarded the approach to Kumase through Atwema. Here the new security arrangements were breached. In 1717 the aged Osei Tutu died while fighting the Akyem. His successor Opoku Ware and the army were still in the field when news reached them that Kumase had been attacked by Ebiri Moro ('Abiri Moro') of Aowin in the western Gold Coast. The Dutch in Axim reported that the Aowin took 'considerable booty', including gold from graves, together with an implausible 20,000 captives.⁶⁸ Asante tradition records the loss of Kumase royals amidst general devastation.⁶⁹ Asante troops hurried back from Akyem to chase Ebiri Moro far to the west through forested lands with few people. This was Ahafo, and Asantehene Opoku Ware divided it up between the generals who had seen off the Aowin threat. A major beneficiary was the Bantama (Konti) stool. Bantamahene Apraku, son and successor of Osei Tutu's Denkyira retainer Amankwatia, now charged Nkawie with having failed in its duty to protect Kumase from Ebiri Moro. He argued that Nkawie should be stripped of its Atwema lands as far west as Bibiani, with the implication that these should be reassigned to Bantama. The case was heard by Asantehene Opoku Ware. Apraku

declared before the King that Nkawe was a royal of the Denkyira stool and was nursing a hope of breaking off from the King that is to make himself the King of Denkyira in his turn. Nkawe was no true Ashanti Patriot. The King was angry at this turn of events. He fined Bantama as it had spoken to reveal the origins of

⁶⁵ NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'The building of Manso'; IAS AS 122: Okyerekurom, Mar. 1964; 150: Domi Keniago, 24 Feb. 1965.

⁶⁶ M. Fortes papers, 'History notes of certain towns in the Bekwai District - Ashanti', 'Notes on the history of Wirempe-Mim', n.d. (but 1930s-1940s); IAS AS 129: Manso Mim, 21 Aug. 1964.

⁶⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/824, 'Tribal histories: Denkyira', enclosing Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II to Kingston, Dunkwa-on-Ofin, 20 Mar. 1946.

⁶⁸ Van Dantzig, *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast*, 209.

⁶⁹ NMP, Kumase, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 4, 'Opoku Ware Katakylie' and 'War with Sahwi'; IAS AS 268: The Abirimoro War, n.d. For Ebiri Moro, C.-H. Perrot, 'Le raid d'Ebiri Moro contre Kumasi, la capitale Ashanti (1718)', *Cultures et Développement*, 16 (1984), 537-52; P. Valsecchi, *I Signori di Appolonia: poteri e formazione dello stato in Africa occidentale fra xvi e xviii secolo* (Rome, 2002), 233-53.

Nkawie which was forbidden by custom. So Nkawie stool was justified in this case and kept its lands as before up to now.⁷⁰

That is, the case collapsed because Bantamahene spoke publicly about the origins of another, something that was strictly forbidden in Asante law and custom. Tradition reports that this prohibition was prominent among the so-called 'Seventy-seven laws of Komfo Anokye', the rules enshrined after Feyiase to guide behaviour in the new Asante order.⁷¹

Asante was created out of and thereafter enlarged through the incorporation of men and women from many localities with different histories. It was not in the interests of Kumase to countenance discussion of earlier identities and older allegiances. Nkawie, with its origins in Denkyira royalty, was supremely a case in point. Yet memories of the pre-Asante past did survive in Nkawie as elsewhere. They resurfaced from time to time, but most pointedly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Asante suffered civil wars, the exile of its ruler and the loss of its independence to British colonial rule. These shocks occurred in rapid succession (1883–1901). By the 1900s the order created at Feyiase was fractured and many in Asante looked for ways and means to negotiate an adjusted identity within the new colonial dispensation. One such was the Nkawiehene Kwabena Kufuor.

In 1896 Nkawiehene Antwi Agyei was exiled with Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh, and died in colonial captivity in 1908.⁷² In 1901 the British appointed Kwabena Kufuor to the stool. He was an Nkawie royal who had made a great deal of money from the rubber trade. He spent the 1890s in the Gold Coast, for he disapproved of Antwi Agyei and his lending of Nkawie resources to support Agyeman Prempeh. In the Gold Coast, Kwabena Kufuor learned of the importance of colonial legal documentation. As Nkawiehene he made great use of the courts to defend his and his stool's interests. In 1906 he went to law in Cape Coast to secure title to the gold-mining concession on his land held by the Bibiani Company. From this he was paid an annual concession rent of £600, supplemented by discretionary payments that sometimes raised this figure to over £1,000 a year. He invested these monies and his income from other businesses in Kumase property. Kwabena Kufuor was probably the richest person in early colonial Asante.⁷³

Kwabena Kufuor was increasingly troubled as the twentieth century advanced. His problem was his wealth, for he spent much of his time defending his lands, businesses and properties from predatory fellow-chiefs (notably including Bantamahene). He was prominent among those who saw the 1924 repatriation of Agyeman Prempeh as presaging a return to the royal

⁷⁰ NMP, Kumase, Papers of the Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I (1888–1931), Nkawiehene Kwabena Kufuor to Agyeman Prempeh, Kumase, 1 May 1925.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 'History of Ashanti', ch. 3, 'War with Dankyira'; for context and discussion see T. C. McCaskie, 'Custom, tradition and law in precolonial Asante', in E. Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and W. Zips (eds.), *Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and Power in West African Societies: Perspectives from Legal Anthropology* (Hamburg, 1998), 25–47.

⁷² Adu Boahen *et al.* (eds.), *History of Ashanti Kings*, 179, 184, 191.

⁷³ Discussion of Kwabena Kufuor is much condensed from T. C. McCaskie, 'Apagyafie, Asante and the Kufuor government of Ghana' (draft); I am grateful to Paul Nugent for comments.

loans extracted from Antwi Agyei. Kwabena Kufuor's opposition to any restoration of the precolonial order led him to resurrect his historic Denkyira identity. In 1926 he astonished the British by declaring 'I am not a real Ashanti man', adding that he declined to contribute to the making of new ornaments for the Golden Stool because 'I am a stranger in Ashanti'. In any case, he continued, the Golden Stool was junior to and less distinguished than 'my own Stool of Denkyira'. When it became evident that the British did intend to restore the Asante kingship, Kwabena Kufuor abdicated from the Nkawie stool. Instead, he made much of his historic connection with the ancient Denkyira royal family. So much so, in fact, that he was offered the *abankamdwa* as Denkyirahene. The affairs of Nkawie had come full circle. In the seventeenth century, Asensu Kufuor repudiated Ntim Gyakari, Abankeseso and his Denkyira identity. In the twentieth century, Kwabena Kufuor rejected Agyeman Prempeh, Kumase and his Asante identity.

REFLECTIONS

It would be incautious to suggest that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century history of Denkyira and Asante is representative of precolonial African state formation. If this article has wider implications, then these lie in its intention and method rather than in the empirical case itself. What I have tried to show is that, by interrogating oral traditions so as to pay the closest attention to localisms of place and history, it is possible to go beyond a portmanteau concept like state formation and to furnish an altogether more complex, fluid, resonant and rewarding picture of precolonial African sociopolitical development. I have argued this case before, only to be met with the response that Akan oral histories are uniquely rich compared with materials available for most of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. This is a matter of debate, but there is another way of looking at things. The truth is that the intensive local study of precolonial Africa is less common than it once was, with the consequence that what might yet be possible in researching this period remains indeterminate.