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‘RENEWAL’ BY RETROSPECTION THE ASANTE ANOKYE TRADITIONS¹

Novelty is no less novel for being able to dress
up easily as antiquity (Hobsbawm 1983, 5).

The theme of the Second International Conference of the Danish Association for the History of Religions, ‘Religion: Tradition and Renewal’, from 14th to 17th May 1987 at Aarhus University calls for a comment. The use of ‘renewal’ instead of ‘change’, and in opposition to ‘tradition’, suggests that ‘tradition’ is taken as a thing of the past which is maladjusted to the present, and that believers adapt their religion to ‘modern’ times by doing away with tradition. A secular(ist) or liberal(-theological) bias seems to underlie this view. Examples abound in the history of religions of believers adapting their religion to new circumstances by returning to ‘tradition’, or by inventing it. Adaptation to new circumstances by the reinterpretation, elaboration, or invention of tradition occurs also in preliterate religions. In this contribution, I discuss one example of adaptation to altered, and altering, circumstances by the ‘retrospective invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm 1983: 1-6; TrevorRoper 1983: 15): the Asante traditions about the priest Anokye. I outline the use which the Asante as a nation made of them since 1874, and the special use to which they were put between 1874 and 1880 by the ‘Anokyeists’, more usually known as the *Domaŋkoma* (Wilks 1975: 519-521; McCaskie 1981: 129-138) or *Abonsamkómfo* (Rattray 1927: 28-30). I will dwell especially on the political and socio-psychological circumstances under which this traditionalizing option was pursued.

The 1874 crisis

In the late afternoon of February 4, 1874, British troops entered Kumase, the capital of Asante, ransacked it for a day, and blew up the stone treasure house of the *Asantehene* (‘ruler of Asante’). Having set fire to the town during the night, they hastily withdrew on the [150] morning of February 6th. This sack marked the end of the rule of Asante for over a century over most of present-day Ghana and the beginning of the decline of Asante power. But it was not until 1902 that Britain proclaimed the status of colony over Asante itself.

Asante had incorporated the coastal Akan states as provinces into its empire between 1707 and 1765 (Baesjou 1979, 9 n. 13). Throughout the 19th century, the British had fanned disaffection with the central authority at Kumase in these states. It had resulted in ten milit-

¹ This article is a revision of an earlier version, entitled ‘The Return of Anokye: The Ideological Use of a Political Myth by the *Domaŋkoma/Abonsamkómfo* Movement in Asante in 1879-1880’. I am grateful to Dr. Paul Jenkins at Basle, Dr. W. van Beek and Prof. H.U.E. Thoden van Velzen at Utrecht, and Dr. T. McCaskie at Birmingham for suggestions and help. Dr. McCaskie’s article on Anokye (McCaskie 1986) has greatly helped me to develop the earlier version into the present one.

ary clashes with the Asante in that century and the gradual increase of British influence in many of the coastal states. In most of the military engagements, the Asante had been victorious. In two, however, the British carried the day, because they happened to possess the newest weaponry. They had won the battle of Katamanso in 1826 by the use of Congreve rockets (Wilks 1975: 183; Baesjou 1979: 9). And in 1874, the British managed to break through the Asante defenses and take Kumase because they possessed the newest Gatling machine guns (Gundert 1875: 239).

The defeat at Katamanso had forced the Asante to accept a treaty in 1831, which implied a *de facto* acknowledgment of a British protectorate over several southern provinces of the Asante empire. In 1844, moreover, Britain had concluded a treaty with these coastal states in which they ceded authority to it in criminal matters. The British position had been further strengthened by the withdrawal of Denmark from the Eastern half of the Gold Coast in 1850. Frictions over the interpretation of the 1831 treaty had led to an Asante invasion into Akyem and Fante in 1863 by which it meant to reassert its claims over the states under British protection. The British had made preparations in 1864 to retaliate by an invasion into Asante. They assembled West Indian and local troops at Praso on the southern border of Asante. Disease, however, had so heavily decimated the British forces that the invasion had to be called off. It had caused Kwaku Dua, Asantehene from 1834-1867, to remark: 'The white men bring many cannon into the bush, but the bush is stronger than the cannon' (quoted in Baesjou 1979:11).

The British had, however, strengthened their position further by exchanging 'possessions' (the trading castles as seats of proto-colonial administration) with the Dutch on January 1st, 1868. The scene for the 1873-1874 confrontation had, however, been set when the Dutch left the Gold Coast in April 1872 and ceded all their 'territory' on the coast to the British (cf. Baesjou 1979: 14, 28-46). The war-party in Asante² had not been ready to accept the loss of its loyal ally on the coast, the [151] town and state of Elmina, over and above the loss of the southern provinces, and of its staunch European trading partner, the Dutch, who had maintained their headquarters at Elmina since 1637. The war party had, moreover, insisted that the 'right' of the British over at least some of the former provinces should be contested. It had hoped to reassert Asante sovereignty over the Twi-speaking peoples nearest to the Asante border: the Akyem, Assin, Denkyera and Wassaw (Gundert 1875: 181), and over the coastal states to the west of Elmina (Wilks 1975: 236). Three Asante armies had, therefore, crossed the river Pra in early 1873. Though suffering heavy casualties, they were victorious at first (Wilks 1975: 236-237). The turn of events had come on June 13, 1873, when an Asante army assisted the townspeople of Elmina in their attempt to dislocate the British from the fort and throw off their newly imposed authority. Their combined forces were repulsed by the British (Baesjou 1979: 49-52). The decimated Asante armies withdrew into Asante by early December 1873.³

After the return of the army, many Asante soldiers had publicly stated that they would not go back and fight unless the Asantehene himself accompanied them. They justified this insubordination by pointing out that 'the whites have bullets, one of which shoots down time and again five Asante', causing the slain to lie around 'as maize scattered on the ground' (Gundert 1875: 184, 212; Wilks 1975: 505-506, 682). On January 2, 1874, two Asante messengers arrived at Praso on the Asante border where the British had again begun

² On the war- and peace-parties in Asante politics in the 19th century, cf. Wilks 1975.

³ Ramseyer states that about half the army (of 80,000) perished and some 200 'chiefs' (Gundert 1875: 214-215; cf. also Wilks 1975: 82-83).

to assemble an invasion force. They had been commissioned to convey the readiness of the *Asantehene* to negotiate a peace. The British commander, Wolseley, chose to disregard that message and, instead, ordered that they be given a demonstration of the firepower of the Gatling machine-guns. They were horrified. One of them stated that Asante could not be defended against it. When his fellow messenger rebuked him for his lack faith in the military strength of Asante, he committed suicide the following night (Gundert 1875: 219-220, 239).

The mood of gloom in Kumase was further deepened by two other ‘untoward’ events which were believed to spell doom for Asante. Asante’s most famous general, Asamoah Nkwanta,⁴ had lost his war charm which was reputed to be invincible, in the river Pra when his army recrossed it in late 1873 (McCaskie 1986: 317). And on January 6, 1874, the ancient *Kum* tree in Kumase’s Great Market, from which Kumase (‘Under the *Kum*-(tree)’) derived its name and which, it was believed, had been planted by Anokye, had been uprooted (by a rainstorm?) (Gundert 1875: 223, 240). As the destinies of a [152] town or nation were believed to be closely linked to that of its central *gyedua* (‘tree of reception’) (Platvoet 1985), the ‘death’ of this tree was felt to forebode dire events for Asante and its ruler.

When a month later Kumase was sacked, this was widely felt to be due not only to a gap in military technology, but also to other, ‘religious’ – though for the Asante hardly less mundane – causes. The search for those causes had already begun in 1873 when fear had begun to spread that Asante would suffer the ignominy of an invasion. It continued for several years, producing elements of an ‘answer’. In its final shape, which had been codified into accepted tradition by early colonial time, that answer was given in protological terms in the form of myths about the role of Anokye in the foundation of Kumase and Asante.

Post-1874 events

The sack shook Asante severely. It set in motion a train of political events that seemed to forebode the collapse of the empire and the disintegration of the nation. The consequences of the sack were at least threefold.

The first consequence was that the southern part of the empire and, more importantly, the dependable trading outlets, Elmina and other former Dutch ‘possessions’, were irretrievably lost. The British followed up their success with the proclamation of the Crown Colony Gold Coast on August 6, 1874. As it comprised the whole length of the coast from Keta in the East to Half-Assini in the West, Asante was forced to develop the more westerly trade routes to Assini and Grand-Bassam in ‘French’ territory (now Ivory Coast), and the more easterly smugglers’ route over the Keta Lagoon into Ouidah, also a ‘French possession’ to the south of Dahomey. European entrepreneurs, British, French, and Danish, were taken into Asante service for that purpose on the advice of ‘Prince’ (*óheneba*) John Owusu Ansa.⁵ He returned to Kumase in late 1875 to become the foremost adviser in matters of

⁴ *Anantahene* Asamoah Nkwanta was the most experienced, beloved, and famous of the Asante generals at that time. He supported the peace party because he was thoroughly aware of the superiority in military technology of the British at that time. (Gundert 1875: 175, 249-250; Berberich/Johnson 1975: 7-9; Wilks 1975: 498, 509, 682).

⁵ Owusu Ansa (1822-1884) was a son of the *Asantehene* Osee Bonsu (1800-1823) and as such debarred from the throne according to the Asante matrilineal system. He had been entrusted to the British under the terms of the 1831 treaty for schooling in Cape Coast and in England from 1831 to 1841. He was baptized into the Anglican Church in England, but joined the Methodist Church after his return to the Gold Coast in 1841. He first went to Kumase with the Methodist missionary T.B. Freeman (1844/1968:,97, 125-126, 137-141, 146-150,

modernization of the new *Asantehene*, Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883). Between 1875 and 1880, he designed the reform of the civil service, the army, and the traditional penal code (Wilks 1975: 606-630).

The second consequence of the sack was that the northern half of the empire immediately prepared to shake off Asante shackles. The Dagomba had already killed most of the members of an Asante party in August 1873 (Gundert 1875: 193-194; Wilks 1975: 239). In the northwestern provinces, with Gyaman as its centre, a period of [153] uncertain loyalty ensued. A secessionist party, headed by the *Gyamanhene* Agyeman, made shows of asking for British 'protection'. It was opposed by a strong loyalist party which favoured the continuation of ties to Asante. Mensa Bonsu refrained from military action. Instead, he sent diplomatic missions to Gyaman in 1875 and in 1878 and managed to keep the secessionist forces in check (Wilks 1975: 287-295).

However, the northeastern part of the empire was lost to the Asante. It had Krakye, the home of the famous Dente oracle, as its centre and included the biggest market in the Asante empire, Salaga (Wilks 1975: 244, 262, 279-282, 611; Maier 1981: 230-233, 242; 1983: 89ff.). Also here, Asante refrained from attempting to re-impose its power by military means. It responded by withholding the all-important trade in kola nuts from Salaga. It developed a new market for it at Kintampo in Nkoranza territory which had long been its most faithful ally in the northern parts and was much nearer to Asante itself than Salaga (Wilks 1975: 282-287). Some of the new regiments, equipped with the latest guns, were, moreover, posted along the Volta to prevent the development of a direct trade route from Salaga over Kete Krakye to the coast and in the northwest to deflect trade between Gyaman and Salaga to Kintampo (Wilks 1975: 284, 286).

The third and most serious consequence was the immediate danger of the disintegration of the Asante nation itself. Dwaben, one of the founding states of Asante, rebelled against the *Asantehene* in February 1874, persuaded the northeastern districts led by Krakye to rebel, and seceded from Asante in an attempt to become itself the leader of an eastern confederacy of states between Asante and the Volta.⁶ When Kofi Kakari failed to take action against Dwaben, he was deposed in October 1874 and replaced by Mensa Bonsu (1874-1883). In August 1875, the new *Asantehene* tested the loyalty of the remaining confederates by convening an extraordinary *Asantemanhyiamu* ('meeting of [the heads of state of] the Asante nation'). All voted for war against Dwaben. After heavy fighting and serious losses on both sides, Dwaben was defeated in early November 1875. Most of the Dwaben fled southwards into the Colony and were settled in Akyem Abuakwa territory (Wilks 1975: 511-516).

178) in 1841. He returned to Cape Coast in 1844 because opposition to Western and Christian influences had increased markedly in Kumase (Wilks 1975: 591-592, 597). He was back in Kumase again from 1850 to 1854 as a diplomat in Asante service, and from 1867 to 1872 as secretary and adviser to Kofi Kakari (1867-1874). He was sent to Cape Coast as agent of the *Asantehene* in May 1872. His house there was attacked by an angry mob on April 13, 1873, when the Asante armies were camping within an hour's distance from Cape Coast. The mob lynched seven of his Asante servants, and his life was saved by the militia taking him into custody in Cape Coast Castle. The British administration then sent him into exile to Sierra Leone. But he was allowed to return to the Gold Coast in 1874. He visited Kumase again in October 1875, shortly after the Kofi Kakari had been replaced by Mensa Bonsu (Wilks 1975: 596-605).

⁶ For the long term reasons for this defection, cf. Gundert 1875: 51; Wilks 1875: 115-119; Maier 1983: 83-89; Platvoet 1985: 185, 194-196.

The search for explanation

The events of 1873-1875 plunged the Asante into a period of deep uncertainty with respect to their national identity. A nation-wide search was set in motion by these events. A whole gamut of answers was given, ranging from a 'modernist', rational one at one extreme [154] to a 'mythical', religious one at the other, with most being a mixture of the two.

The 'modernist' answer was a sober analysis of the relative political and military strengths of Asante and the British. The gaps in Asante military technology and organization, bureaucratic organization, infrastructure, and penal code had caused the Asante setback in 1873-1874. Owusu Ansa embodied this type of analysis. His answer was to set political and other processes in motion by which the gaps could be narrowed as quickly as possible in order that the encroachment of British power could be resisted, the unity of the nation safeguarded, and the remnants of the empire retained. These attempts at redress proved fairly effective at first. The unity of the nation was maintained at the cost of the secession and migration of Dwaben. A measure of control was maintained over the north-western and central northern parts of the empire, and the kola-trade was rerouted. The northeastern parts were lost, but the British were prevented from establishing a direct trade route along the Volta from the coast through Krakye to Salaga. The army and its weaponry were modernized, and, in 1881, the threat of another British invasion was averted (Wilks 1975: 284-286, 290-292, 525-527, 606-631).

The success of the 'modernist' measures proved, however, to be a temporary remedy only, as is apparent from the events of 1883-1888, when Asante slipped into a civil war. The more fundamental issue of the balance of power between Kumase and the other federates had not been addressed. The constitutional supremacy in a confederate Asante of the *Asantemanhyiamu* (the 'meeting of the Asante nation') over the 'Kumase Council' had not been reasserted (Wilks 1975: 409-411). This *de facto* supremacy of the Kumase Council seems to have inspired the broad wave of explanation of the 1873-1874 'disasters' in terms of the Anokye traditions. These opted for positions ranging from federalist-conservative to extreme traditionalist.

The earliest explanation had not, however, been in terms of Anokye, but of the war party's refusal, in 1870-1873, to release without ransom the Whites who had been held captive since 1869.⁷ In February 1873, one of them wrote: 'It is certain that many believe that we are the cause of their misfortune' (Gundert 1875: 175). Asamoia Nkwanta and Owusu Ansa had both warned Kofi Kakari that he better release the White captives or risk losing the war (Gundert 1874: 175, 179). So had some religious authorities. The first had been an oracle obtained in early February 1873 'from the interior' (the northern parts of the empire) through a Muslim.⁸ It read 'The war will go against you as long as you hold captive the

⁷ They were the Basle missionaries Friedrich August Ramseyer, his wife Rosa, their baby son Fritzchen (born on 17 September 1868), and Johannes Kühne, and the French trader Marie-Joseph Bonnat. They had been taken prisoner in Ewe territory east of the Volta in June 1869 (Gundert 1875: iv, 6, 54; Wilks 1975: 225). Fritzchen did not survive the hardships of the long marches from the trans-Volta area into Asante. He died on August 1, 1869, in a village near Dwaben (Gundert 1875: 43-47). The others arrived in a village close to Kumase on April 22, 1870 (Gundert 1875: 63). On December 5, 1870, they were permitted to take up residence in Kumase itself in the Wesleyan mission house (Gundert 1875: 86). In Kumase, two children were born to the Ramseys, a daughter, Röschen, on September 2, 1871 (Gundert 1875: 115, 117-118, 125-126, 145, 158) and a son, Louis Immanuel, on November 21, 1873 (Gundert 1875: 208, 215).

⁸ Two other oracular events on the fortunes of this war had already preceded this one. The *Asantehene* had sent messengers to Dente, the famous oracle at Krakye – even though Dente had a subsidiary at Kumase itself (Maier 1983, 117) – probably in late 1872. The god had strongly advised against the war (Wilks 1975: 279-

whites who pray [155] constantly to God; free them and you will be victorious' (Gundert 1875: 175; Wilks 1975: 239, 317). The pressure to release them had increased since mid-July 1873 when warning had been received from Kwankyeabo, a southwestern ally, that the British were planning to march on Kumase by Christmas 1873. It added the urgent advice to release the war captives, White as well as Fante, immediately (Gundert 1874: 194-195). In mid-October 1873, intelligence was sent to Kumase by its southeastern ally Akwamu that many troops, White and Hausa, were landing in the ports and that the British were planning an invasion. Akwamu also urged that the captives be sent to the coast. At the same time, exceptionally heavy rainfall for late October had caused considerable damage to the royal residence and the stone treasury house. When the Asantehene sent for a female *ókómfo* to explain the cause of all this misfortune, her god replied through her that it was because of the strangers, White and Fante, who were being held captive. Only if they were released could the war be won. Kofi Kakari had her put in irons for it (Gundert 1875: 203-205). By mid-November, however, the *Asantehemaa* (Queen-Mother), Afua Kobi, sided with this opinion. She stated in council on November 20th that all Asante were in danger of being destroyed by this war because it was unjust. The British had offered ransom, but the captives had not been released. She moved that the Whites be sent off in order that God might again 'be on our side' (Gundert 1875: 208; Wilks 1975: 507).

The intervention of the Afua Kobi had clinched the issue, and the armies were recalled. On January 9, 1874, Kühne was sent to Wolseley, who was assembling his forces at Praso, in the company of messengers sent to sue for peace. Wolseley had, however, sent them back with a letter in which he demanded that the other prisoners be released at once. He also wrote that 'it is essential that Your Majesty and your people should learn that you can no more prevent an army of white men marching into your territory [...] than you can stop the sun from rising every morning' (quoted in Wilks 1975: 508). So, after the other prisoners had been released on January 21st-23rd (Gundert 1875: 229-223, 229-236), Wolseley marched on Kumase. He entered it on February 4th after five days of fierce fighting. As Asante resistance under Asamoia Nkwanta had nearly disproved his boast, he withdrew from Kumase on the 6th. He retreated southwards so hastily that the Asante had to plead with him to stop and wait for them at Fomena for the conclusion of a peace treaty on February 13, 1874, on his terms (Wilks 1975: 510). [156]

The Anokye explanation

On July 29, 1873, Owusu Ansa published an outline of Asante history in the *The Times of London*. He made no mention of *Ókómfo* Anokye in it (McCaskie 1986: 332). The earliest dateable reference to Anokye, though not by name, is in Gros (1884: 257). In it, Bonnat describes how he had been taken prisoner at Attebubu in September 1875 at the time when Asante forces had made their first attacks on secessionist Dwaben (Wilks 1975: 515). Bonnat had been captured at the orders of the rebellious *Dwabenhene* Asafo Agyei, had seen his fifty Asante attendants massacred, and had himself been taken to Dwaben for trial. There, many had clamoured for Bonnat's beheading for he was a man of the *Asantehene* by having entered into Asante civil service (Wilks 1975: 606). It had been objected, however,

281; Maier 1983: 38-39). On January 26, 1873, when the first news of heavy Asante losses were received, the king had some fifty *akómfo*, priests, assemble in the great marketplace. The gods taking possession of them had foretold that the Asante army would subject the Akyem, Assin, Fante, and Denkyera peoples. 'The great god' (Tano?) is said to have stated: 'if the white man [the British governor] interferes, I will kill him in his castle and put someone else [a Dutch governor] in his place' (Gundert 1875: 173-174).

that the ‘religious law of the nation’ had always unequivocally forbidden the violent death of a White man in Asante or in its dependent nations. No traditional priest would contradict, it was said, that if that ever came to pass, ‘all the people of our vast territories would be destroyed at once’. This argument had been accepted by all. Bonnat was escorted into the British colony instead of being beheaded.

Anokye is not mentioned by name in the speech which had saved Bonnat's life. Yet it seems certain that everyone present had understood the counterargument to refer to Anokye by the combination of references to the law of the nation, religion, and priests, and to a prediction about the future of the Asante nation that served both as a sanction of the law and as an explanation of Asante's decline. From 1875 onwards, it became commonly held that virtually every law and binding custom had been instituted by Anokye. He came to be regarded not only as the Solon and Manu of Asante⁹ but also as the foremost founder of the Asante nation (Rattray 1929: 73, 270). All the important political institutions of Asante were said to be the ‘laws of Anokye’. Among them were *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the ‘Golden Stool Friday’,¹⁰ the shrine of the ‘soul’ (*sunsum*) of the Asante nation; and the ‘law of Anokye’ that no other state in the Asante nation or empire could possess a gold-embossed stool. Other ‘laws of Anokye’ decreed that all lower Asante rulers (*ahemfo*, ‘chiefs’) must swear fealty to the *Asantehene* and bravery until victory or death before a war; that they must attend the week long annual *Odwira* (‘cleansing’) rites at Kumase; and that they must attend the *Asantemanhyiamu*, ‘meeting of the Asante nation’, which was held in conjunction with it. He is said to have instituted the Asante version of ‘indirect rule’, by which a tributary nation is ruled by a cooperative ruler from its own ruling [157] house under the supervision of a Kumase notable who acts as its *adamfo* (‘friend/patron’) in the court of the *Asantehene*; to have devised the Asante judicial system and the central position in it of the *okyame*, ‘court speaker’; and to have decreed that an *ókómfo* who utters a false prophecy be put to death, (Rattray 1929: 35n2, 40, 82, 273-280; Kyerematen 1969: 4-5, 8).

Anokye, the statesman, is only one aspect of the post-1874 Anokye traditions. They also tell about his birth and youth in the Kyerepon-Guan town of Awukugua, his training there as a *ókómfo*, priest, and how he and Osee Tutu met and became friends in Akwamu or Denkyera, the two most powerful states in the Akan area in the second half of the 17th century. They detail his military and political role in throwing off Denkyera overlordship and in the constitution of Asante, his prophecies about future political fortunes;¹¹ and how, at the end of his life, he retired in order to search for the medicine against death. Traditions say he found it, but could not pass it on to his fellow men because his injunctions had not been obeyed.

A number of elements in these traditions strike the eye as relevant for explanatory purposes for the events of the post-1874 period. Anokye's political, military, and other roles in the decades around 1700 are cast in those of a traditional priest and not of an Akan military

⁹ On Anokye as lawgiver, cf. Rattray 1929: 179-180, 271; Kyerematen 1969: 4; Fynn 1971: 30; Wilks 1975: 484; 1979: 4; McCaskie 1986: 319, 320, 329, 331

¹⁰ Asante traditions say that it was brought from heaven by Anokye in a cloud of white dust and black smoke, descending gently upon the knees of Osee Tutu in the assembly of the leaders of the ‘five single states’ (*amantóónum*) confederating into the Asante nation (Rattray 1923: 288-230; other versions in Rattray 1929: 276-277; Kyerematen 1969: 2-5; Anti 1971: 39-40, 60-70).

¹¹ E.g., the tradition that Anokye, on being asked as a traditional priest to cause the conception of Ntim Gyakari, the future *Denkyerahene* and overlord of Asante, predicted that he would ruin Denkyera (Reindorf 1895/1966: 52). For other such predictions, cf. Rattray 1923: 289-290; 1929: 133n3, 274, 277, 283; Anti 1971: 18, 20, 53.

and political leader, even though traditions say that he was, or was made, *Agonahene*, ‘ruler of [the town and state of] Agona’. He is depicted as being involved in the events in extraordinary ways. E.g., whenever the forces of nascent Asante were on the verge of being overwhelmed by the enemy, he is said to have saved them from defeat by some military miracle, or by defeating, in spiritual combat, the traditional priest supporting the other side. His feats of statemanship, e.g., the selection of Kumase as Asante’s capital and of Osee Tutu as *Asantehene*, are described as events in which he involved the meta-empirical realm heavily. The traditions depict him as having founded Asante by his possession of powers which transcend the ordinary and which he used to create the secure foundation of Osee Tutu’s Asante. He securely legitimated the confederation in the eyes of post-1874 Asante. They believed him to have provided full legitimation to the ‘Asante’ of his own time.

Though he is stated to have performed miracles of all sorts,¹² one special power that is often attributed to him is that of ‘vanishing’ and ‘causing to vanish’ (*ayera*). Traditional connotations of *yera* are ‘to be lost in the forest’ (in a first possession, or as a hunter), ‘to be off on long travels to faraway places’, ‘to change into the form of someone else or of some animal’ and ‘to fly’ (witches ‘vanish’ from their bodies [158] at night and fly to the meeting place of their coven), ‘to practice witchcraft’ (witches cause their victims’ blood to ‘vanish’), and ‘to be killed’ (‘people who happened to be out on the streets at night when a ruler had died, were said to have ‘vanished’) (Christaller 1933: 588). *Ayera* evokes dense associations with the meta-empirical, particularly in its ‘wild’ (undomesticated), fearful forms.

The Anokye traditions constantly touch upon the theme of *ayera*. Anokye is said to have disappeared for days on end from infancy onwards; to have withdrawn to solitary places all through his life; to have travelled much, e.g., to *Obi*, ‘somewhere’, an [unknown] country, from which he brought back a new god (as priests often do). Traditions say that he flew through the air as a child and caused a man to fly over the battle lines in the war against Denkyera in order to cause confusion there. They also say that he changed into the shape of a woman in order to steal literally the heart of the ruler of Denkyera, Ntim Gyakari; that he caused an albino and seven pythons to ‘vanish’ into the Golden Stool, and the *Kumawuhene* Tweneboa Kodua into the earth. He is said to have ‘vanished’ from this life in a peculiar way:

At last Anotche informed Osai Tutu that he was about to set out in quest of a medicine against death. He asked Osai Tutu to call his nephew, Kwame Siaw, and all the Elders of Agona Akyempim to come to Kumasi. When they did so, he informed them that he would be absent seven years and seventy-seven days and nights, and that during all that time no one must weep or fire a gun, or mourn for him, although he appeared to be dead. He returned to Agona Akyempim, and entered his house [...], and there he ‘died’. Before he did so he gave orders that he was not to be disturbed for seven years and seventy-seven days and nights. The town was placed in charge of his elders. For seven years and seventy days his orders were obeyed, when his nephew at length declared that his uncle was really dead, and that people should weep and that guns should be fired. The door of the room was opened; the chamber was found to be empty.

On that very day, a man from Mampong was passing Agona, when at the place called Abetene he was addressed by a man who inquired what was happening at Agona Akyempim, as guns were being fired and people wailing. He replied that they were holding the funeral custom of

¹² Such as tying a knot in an elephant's tusk; obtaining water from a rock; leaving his footprints on a rock; causing a cooked plantain to germinate into a tree and harvesting from it the same day; causing a tall oilpalm to spring from the dregs of palmwine, climbing it with his sandalled feet, and leaving their prints on it for proof; etc. (Rattray 1929: 270-284, *passim*; Anti 1971, 15, 23, 35-36; Sarpon 1971, 30, 77n12).

Komfo Anotche. The man then said that he was Komfo Anotche, that he had obtained the medicine against death, and was returning with it, but as his kinsfolk had disobeyed his orders, he would go away for ever, and the Ashanti would never find the medicine against death, whose great taboo¹³ was the holding of a funeral custom (Rattray 1929: 279).

[159]

The point of this myth is that the Asante were made to suffer for the disobedience of a ruler. Anokye's successor had declared his uncle dead and himself ruler of Agona a week too early. Because he had disobeyed an injunction of Anokye, the Asante continued to die. Life without death as men had enjoyed 'long ago' (*tète*) before God withdrew up on high, was not restored to men.

In the post-1874 traditions, disobedience of the laws of Anokye by rulers is given as a major cause of the 'ruin of the nation' (*amaɲseè*). It was held that Anokye had prophesied at the time of the constitution of *Sika Dwa Kofi* itself that Asante would be ruled by seven powerful kings, after which its strength would wane. These seven kings were all the pre-1867 rulers of Asante who had achieved full ancestral status.¹⁴ In the Anokye prophecy which saved the life of Bonnat in Dwaben in September 1876, the destruction of Asante was linked to the violence towards the White captives. It continues the tradition of the prophecies in 1872-1873 which put the blame of defeat on Kofi Kakari because he had not released the captives. The Anokye prophecy which most explicitly links royal disobedience to the laws of Anokye, to British military ascendancy, and to Asante becoming a British colony was registered in 1925 by Rattray. That was on the occasion of his visit to Agona when he witnessed a rite performed by the *Agonahene* and heard him address his predecessor in office in the following words:

*Kwame Boakye, Boakye Tenten
Boakye Yiadom
wo nsa ni o
wo ne Englis abrofo
namteye
Wo nana Komfo Anokye
na obeye Asanteman
na okykye mara horow
a ese se ye fa so ye bu man
Ohyee nkom
se Asantehene ato mera a
onipa koko obeba
obefa Asanteman
na nso aba m'
(Twi text in Rattray 1929: 283n2; my translation.)*

Kwame Boakye, Boakye the Tall One,
Boakye, Vanquisher of armies,
here is wine for you.
You and the English white men
have walked together well.
Your grandfather, Komfo Anokye,
he made the Asante nation!
He made many laws
by which we might rule the nation!
He was possessed [and foretold] that,
if the Asantehene broke the laws,
the red [i.e., White] man would come
and take the Asante nation.
Which is what happened.

¹³ In Twi *akyide*, 'thing hated/abhorred' (Rattray 1929: 279n6). It is better rendered as 'a rule of respect', observed by a believer in order not to offend the sensibilities of a 'meta-empirical' being, than as 'taboo' (Platvoet 1982a:230).

¹⁴ Two Asante rulers had not attained that status because they had not died in office. They were Kusi Obodom (1750-1764) who had abdicated (Wilks 1975, 332), and Osee Kwame (1777-1798) who was deposed for his leanings towards Islam and executed at his own request in 1803 (Fynn 1971: 131-139; Wilks 1975: 252-253, 256). Nor were Kofi Kakari (1867-1875) and Mensa Bonsu (1875-1883) to achieve that status, as both were deposed (Rattray 1927: 144-145).

The Anokye traditions are a post-1874 retrospective ‘renewal’ of [160] Asante religion. The Asante developed after 1874 a political ‘protology’, with Anokye as their political charter, at the expense of the primacy of Osee Tutu, who was a ruler, though one of the seven wise and powerful ones. By that body of traditions, the past glory of the Asante nation and empire was given (religious) legitimation, and the present decline was explained. By protologizing Asante identity at a time when it was severely shaken, they considerably strengthened it. They glorified and ‘sacralized’ a past which was slipping away by inventing traditions about it which enabled them to face an uncertain future and, after 1902, to fit into the British colonial empire.

Anokye traditions and history

What proof can be adduced that the Anokye traditions, as we now know them, date from after the sack of Kumase? There are three different types of proof. There is some evidence in the Anokye traditions themselves. Some fail to fit into the political geography of the late 17th century when Asante emerged. Others fit closely to some of the post-1874 political facts. Then there is Anokye's ‘publicity gap’. Finally, we happen to possess a lost tradition about Anokye from the early eighteenth century which shows very little continuity with the modern ones.

The modern Anokye traditions contain at least two anachronistic elements. One is that Osee Tutu is said to have crossed the river Volta when he was called home to assume leadership after the death of his uncle Obiri Yeboa, ruler of Kwaaman (Rattray 1929: 272; Anti 1971: 55). This is very unlikely since the bulk and the capital of Akwamu lay west of the Volta, above Accra, in Osee Tutu's lifetime. There was no need for Osee Tutu to cross the Volta. The crossing reflects, however, the political situation from 1731 onwards, when the Akyem and Akuapim had destroyed Akwamu power west of the Volta and had chased it across the Volta. By 1874, the Asante seem to have associated Akwamu exclusively with a position to the east of the Volta. Therefore, the modern traditions have Osee Tutu cross it. The same goes for the tradition which credits Anokye with the foundation of the Akwapim town Akropon (Anti 1971, 36). It came into being only after 1731, i.e., after the life-time of Anokye (Kwamena-Poh 1972: 41).

I have already pointed out that Anokye's prophecy about the seven powerful kings matches the ancestral statuses of previous Asante kings in the reigns of Kofi Kakari (1867-1875) and Mensa Bonsu (1875-1883). As mentioned, the disobedience of these two rulers was [161] believed by many Asante to have caused the change of fortune for Asante. The Anokye traditions also describe the emerging Asante confederacy as time and again on the verge of defeat in battles with local groups, which were reluctant to join (Domaa, Amakom, and Tafo), and with the Denkyera – sometimes because a ‘ruler’ failed to observe a rule of respect which Anokye had instituted¹⁵ – and insist that it was saved from destruction only by the military miracles of Anokye.¹⁶ The Anokye traditions also emphasize that Asante

¹⁵ E.g. the failure of *oheneba* (‘ruler's son’) Saben to observe the respect rule *akyide* (palmwine) of the miraculous shield during a battle with the Domaa. Anokye had assured them of victory as long as Saben presented it to the Domaa and did not drink palmwine (Rattray 1929: 273-274).

¹⁶ He is said to have directed swarms of bees against the Denkyera troops, to have caused night to descend upon them, a forest of oilpalms to spring up when they were pursuing the Asante troops, and a silkcotton tree to expand into a fence which absorbed all the Denkyera bullets, and, alternatively, to have directed the Denkyera bullets by the power of his flywhisk into a big tree far away. He even caused the body of a dead Asante ruler to rise and join his men in their flight when murderous fire prevented them from dragging his corpse off the battlefield (Rattray 1929: 278; Anti 1971: 41-43).

victories over Denkyera were won because three of the confederate rulers had volunteered before the battle to sacrifice their lives for the sake of victory.¹⁷

The second argument for the assumption that the Anokye traditions were produced after 1874 is the publicity gap of Anokye between 1704 and 1876. Anokye is not mentioned in any of the pre-1876 archival or published sources on Asante society and history. David van Nyendael travelled to Kumase in October 1701 and returned in October 1702, but was terminally ill when he came back to Elmina, and his letters and reports were lost (van Dantzig 1974: 104, 108 n.7; 1976: 99; 1978: 83, 86, 101, 106). He may have been the only European to visit Asante in the 18th century. Much information about developments in Asante at that time was obtained, however, by Europeans from Asante traders and ambassadors who came down to the coast and from coastal Negroes and Mulattoes who had visited Asante as traders or were sent there on missions by the Europeans. In the 19th century, however, Kumase was regularly visited by Europeans. Some of them, like Bowdich and Dupuis,¹⁸ had a great interest in Asante society and its history and discussed these with many knowledgeable informants. They never even allude to a role of Anomie in the foundation of Asante in their extensive reports on Asante history.

The last argument is derived from a comparison of an early 18th century tradition about Anokye and the modern traditions about him. Bosman¹⁹ reported that traders from the interior told 'exceptional stories about a great traditional priest living in their parts in a big house' who had 'command over the weather'. He was able to cause the rain

to come down heavily or softly, and to stop [it] again, as he pleases. His house is without a roof and open but always free from rain. The past is no problem at all for him, for he predicts the future as if it were present. He cures all the sick and [all] diseases. [...] All his countrymen must appear before him after [their] death and be examined by him. If they are found to have lived well, he allows them to go in peace into [their] bliss; however, if not, then he beats them to death for the second time with a piece of wood which has [162] been expressly made for that purpose and is placed in front of his residence in order to have it always ready at hand (Bosman 1704, 147-148).

Though the name of this "prodigious priest" is not given, it seems certain that this is a report about *Ókómfo* Anokye (McCaskie 1986, 321). If this is so, it corroborates that Anokye was a historical person and that his fame had already spread far and wide during his life-

¹⁷ Traditions say that they were *Kumawuhene* Kwabena Tweneboa Kodua, *Edwesohene* Duku Pim, and *Bonwirehene* Bobie. The *Kumawuhene* is said either to have volunteered to be the first one to die in battle (Rattray 1929: 219-220, 277) or to have been struck on his head by Anokye, after which he 'immediately vanished' into the earth, the spot being known after that as *Tweneboanna*, '[where] Tweneboa rests' (Anti 1971: 40-41). The *Edwesohene* volunteered, according to these traditions, to be cut to pieces for the preparation of a war medicine. The *Bonwirehene* is said to have consented to die in battle as a representative of the Kumase Oyoko (Rattray 1929: 277), or to have been decapitated, after which 'he was seated in the pit [of a big hole] and his body firmly fixed in it with a sharp instrument; the cut-off head was then re-adjusted on the trunk in such a way that the face turned backwards' (Anti 1971, 41). For another example, see Anti 1971: 41. As his collection is the youngest one, it contains the most recent elaborations.

¹⁸ Bowdich (1819/1966: 31-148) was in Kumase from May 17th to September 22nd, 1817; Dupuis (1824/1966: 68-180) from February 28th to March 24th, 1819.

¹⁹ Willem Bosman served as factor in the castles of the Dutch West Indies Company on the Gold Coast from 1680 to July 1702. The first edition of his book was published in Amsterdam in 1703 and also in Utrecht in 1704. I have used the Utrecht edition. An English translation was published in 1705. For a critical revision of it, cf. van Dantzig 1974, 1976, 1977.

time. It was the fame of a traditional priest who was very successful in his two most important trades: divination and healing. The two other elements, the management of the weather and the examination of the deceased, pose problems however. Rain being abundant and the weather fairly steady in the Akan area, weather management has never been prominent in the trade of Akan traditional priests. It may either have been attributed to him by believers from non-Akan areas who were used to associate priesthood and weather management, e.g. by Muslim traders from the Sahel, or by Akan believers in order to mark Anokye off in a special way from other priests, which is less likely.

The element of beating some deceased to death for the second time with a wooden club has probably either been garbled in the transmission or, more likely, been misunderstood by Bosman. He concluded from it that the priest [Anokye] was taken for a demi-god in his lifetime already (Bosman 1704, 1: 148). However, in Akan terms, Anokye seems to have acted also as also the *ókyeame* ('court-speaker')²⁰ of Osee Tutu in order to be able to pronounce the verdict of guilty or not guilty in *post mortem* trials for the purpose of assessing what death duties (*awunyadie*) were due. If the deceased were found not guilty, the relatives would receive permission to send him or her off to *asamanɔ* (the realm of the ancestors) in the proper way (cf. Platvoet 1982b). Which qualified them to inherit a sizable part of his or her liquid assets. However, if the deceased were found guilty, the corpse was condemned to capital punishment, decapitated, and thrown into the 'thicket of the ghosts' (*asamanyɔpow*). The relatives were then forbidden to celebrate that person's funerary rites, and his or her property was confiscated by the ruler.²¹

There seems to be no historical continuity between this early tradition about Anokye and the post-1874 ones. None of the elements of the early tradition have a prominent place in the modern traditions, and those typical for the modern traditions are not found in the early tradition. The divinatory ability attributed to Anokye around 1700 is the general one which is attributed to any traditional priest. It also fits into the traditional pattern of being used mainly in relation to illness.

[163] In the modern traditions, Anokye exercises the very specific power of predicting political fortunes and sanctions correct political behaviour by them. In the early tradition, Anokye cured the sick of all diseases. In the modern ones, he is not portrayed as a healer at all, except in two very special ways. By curing the barrenness of women who happened to occupy crucial matrilineal positions in Akan political history, he caused them to produce key political figures, e.g., the *Denkyerahene* Ntim Gyakari (Reindorf: 1895/1966: 52) and the *Mamponhene* Amaniampon (Rattray 1929: 277; Anti 1971: 39). And by preparing war

²⁰ The *okyeame* plays a central role in the Akan judicial system as the alter ego of the ruler (*ohene*) in all public proceedings (cf. Rattray 1927: 276-278). The wooden club, which Anokye is said to wield in the death penalty for the deceased in Bosman's report, is probably a distortion of the legal formula by which an *okyeame* pronounces someone guilty:

<i>nti wamfa mma ha</i>	because you did not bring [your case] here,
<i>amma yamfa asopa ntie</i>	that we might listen to it well,
<i>na wo fa aba de bo Akyeame</i>	but took a club [to strike] the Speakers,
<i>wu ku yen a</i>	by [thus] killing us,
<i>wu di yen aboa</i>	you treat us as [if we were] beasts
<i>wu di to</i>	you are guilty.

(Twi text in Rattray 1929: 295, 300, 383; my translation.)

²¹ On post mortem trials, cf. Rattray 1929: 124-125, 299-301, 335-336, 375, 386; Wilks 1975: 695; 1979: 4; on the confiscation of property of those condemned to death, cf. Hagan 1968: 27-29; Fynn 1971: 137; Wilks 1975: 671, 702.

medicine, he assured the victory of the Asante forces (Reindorf 1895/1966: 56; Rattray 1929: 279, 282; Anti 1971: 38, 41). Weather management is not completely absent from the post-1874 traditions, but it has only a small part in them (e.g., Anti 1971: 35, 37). Lastly, the modern traditions hold that the pivotal position of the *ókyeame*, court speaker, in the court and in public political procedures was instituted by Anokye, but never attribute that function to him. It may, therefore, be concluded that the modern traditions about Anokye have lost touch with this early tradition about him in the intervening 170 years. McCaskie suggests that this was so because there was no need to mention Anokye's name before 1874: 'a secure, expansionist political order does not rehearse publicly its ideological validation' (McCaskie 1986: 332).

The Anokyeist version of the Domaŋkoma Movement

The modern Anokye traditions have not, however, only lost touch with an early tradition about him. An unacceptable tradition about him has also been suppressed. That was the more extreme, even extremist, version propagated by the Anokyeist or *Domaŋkoma* or *Abonsamkómfo* movement in 1879-1880.²² It represents a striking case of Asante politically inspired amnesia. Those who were unsuccessful in their bid for power must not be remembered, the more so as they were associated with *bayi*, 'witchcraft' (Wilks 1975: 520-222; McLeod 1975: 109-110; McCaskie 1981: 130).

The leader of that movement was one *Ókómfo* Kwaku of Adwumakaase Wadie, a small town eight miles to the North of Kumase. He claimed that he was 'the risen Komfo Anokye': Anokye had returned to earth by way of a shooting star and had taken abode in him. The movement claimed that the return of Anokye to earth had been confirmed by a message from *èfoó* for *Ókómfo* Kwaku, which had been received through a hunter. The hunter had met *èfoó*, the white-bearded [164] black monkey (*Colobus caudatus*), in the forest. It sat there on a royal stool, as do chiefs, and wore gold-studded royal sandals. The message was taken not only as an affirmation of a royal commission for Anokye *Redivivus*, but also as a confirmation of the belief, held firmly by the movement and many others, that Anokye, like the Colobus monkey, had been present at the creation of the world and, therefore, had power over the destinies of single persons as well as whole nations. It was also believed that the historical Anokye had been the incarnation of the god (*óbosom*) Anokye. Another important belief was that the traditional companions of (the historical) *Ókómfo* Anokye, the priests Odomankama, Dabe, Owu, and Kyerekye, had also returned in some of the other leaders of the movement, as had some of the 'wise rulers' of Asante, Osee Tutu and Kwaku Dua Panin (Ramseyer 1880a; 1880b: 4; McCaskie 1981: 130-131).

The witchfinding element of this movement has only become apparent to later investigators.²³ Cleansing the nation from witchcraft is not an organic part of the canonical Anokye traditions. Yet, witch hunting is a perfect complement to the *Domaŋkoma* version of the Anokye tradition. It enabled the movement to develop a power base at the grass roots of the Asante towns and matrilineages before bringing its political claims to bear at the nation-

²² *Domaŋkoma* expresses the protological basis of the movement. *Domaŋkoma* ('copious') is the traditional name of God as the 'abundant' Creator. Anokye was present at creation, they believed, in a pre-human form. *Abonsamkómfo* refers to their being priests of *Sasabonsam*, the fearful forest god, and to their role as witch-hunters. Owusu Ansa refers to them as 'these Anokyeists' (quoted by Ramseyer in BMA D-1,32.159).

²³ To Rattray in 1923, Wilks in 1959, and to Lewin and McCaskie in the 1960's and 1970's. They interviewed people with a personal knowledge of the movement and studied Kumase court records from the 1920s and 1930s in which witnesses referred to the *Domaŋkoma* movement.

nal level. For, in Asante tradition, witchcraft (*bayi*) was believed to operate within matrilineages.²⁴ It was perceived as a virtually insoluble moral problem: death operating by the greed for life of one's closest relatives in what should be the stronghold of life. Witchcraft was thought to involve the stealing of the lifeblood (*mogya*) and lifeforce-soul (*okra*) of especially the young and weak in a matrilineage by those in that same matrilineage who should be producing, transmitting, feeding, and protecting life. It was regarded as the very inversion of the moral and social order. Asante witchcraft beliefs are full of images expressing that inversion. The craft of witches was viewed as a nocturnal, vampiristic, and cannibalistic activity. At night, witches' were said to slough out of their sleeping bodies and fly, head backwards or feet upwards, emitting fire from their anuses and armpits, to the meeting place of their coven in a big tree in the marginal area around their town. There they were believed to cook and eat those whose lifeforce-souls (*akra*) they had stolen.

Witches also represent the wild, fearful world of the 'forest' (i.e., the undomesticated gods, ghosts, and imps) within the cultured, orderly world of men in towns. The forest is epitomized in the god of the deep, dense forest, Kwaku Sasabonsam. He is the sole god in Asante religion who is represented in anthro-po-theriomorphic form. He is believed to have a huge apelike body, covered with long reddish hair, to have fierce red eyes, and [165] to live in the tops of the huge trees in the most dense part of the forest. His long, snakelike legs, with feet pointing both ways, were said to dangle down from the tree tops in order to catch and devour those who ventured into his domain. Witches were believed to be in league with him.²⁵ However, witches resemble Akan society in one respect. Their covens are said to be organized after the pattern of Akan political organization. Each coven has its *ohene* (ruler), *ohemmaa* (queen-mother), *okyame* (court speaker), and other traditional functionaries (Rattray 1927: 29; Ringwald 1952: 96-105).

Compared to other Akan *abayiyi* ('witchcraft removal') cults,²⁶ the *Domaŋkoma/Abonsamkómfo* movement was, or was perceived as, special in several ways. First, by organizing its core of over 1,000 *abonsamkómfo*, witchfinding priests, and devoted followers into a tight system of local cells. These operated with the secrecy of witch covens. Nation-wide, they were organized on the political model of the Asante nation, but with Adwumakaase Wadie as its capital instead of Kumase, and *Ókomfo* Kwaku as its ruler instead of the *Asantehene* (Wilks 1975: 519-520). Secondly, the movement had Sasabonsam, the patron of the witches, for its god. It was held that he enabled the *Domaŋkoma abonsamkómfo* to 'see' who were witches when he took possession of them (Rattray 1927: 29-30). Thirdly, witches were traditionally seen as 'destroying the nation' (*amansee*) and might, therefore, be handed over to the ruler for execution.²⁷ In the *Domaŋkoma/Abonsamkómfo* movement, however, they were arraigned before the court of *Ókómfo* Kwaku at Adwumakaase Wadie, even when the accused appealed to the court of the *Asantehene*. Which appeal was disallowed, for the movement saw the *Asantehene* himself as guilty of 'ruining the nation' by his

²⁴ Cf. Christaller 1933: 11, 55; Rattray 1927: 28; Bleek 1975: 319, 335-336.

²⁵ Cf. Bosman 1704, I: 150; 1705/1967: 159; van Dantzig 1977: 253; Rattray 1916: 47-49; 1927: 27-31; Christaller 1933: 429; Ringwald 1952: 87-105; McLeod 1981: 40; Ross 1983: 97, fig. 116.

²⁶ On these cults, cf. Platvoet 1973; McLeod 1975; McCaskie 1981.

²⁷ In pre-colonial times, 'witches' who had been 'exposed' by a possessed priest or by 'carrying the corpse' (*afunsoa*) were sometimes handed over for execution to the ruler. Since they were believed to have sucked the blood of others, their blood was not to be shed. Therefore, they were strangled, drowned, or clubbed to death. Witches could, and did, appeal to the poison oracle (*odomwe*) in order to clear themselves of the accusation. Cf. Bosman 1704, ii: 11; 1705/1966: 228; Bowdich 1819/1966: 260; Cruickshank 1853/1966, ii: 179; Rattray 1927: 29-31, 167-170; Ringwald 1952: 95-105.

failure to obey the laws of Anokye. Fourthly, Okomfo Kwaku, upon finding someone guilty of witchcraft, followed the set practice of Asante rulers of using the court of law as an instrument for extracting wealth from the *sikafo*, the well-to-do, mostly by imposing heavy fines on them. If he imposed the death penalty, he usually allowed them to ‘buy their heads’ at a heavy price. However, if the death penalty was executed, the *abonsamkómfo*, like the traditional rulers, seized all the property of the victims (McCaskie 1981: 113).

As a result of these practices and because of the many gifts which they received, Owusu Ansa wrote to Ramseyer that by 1879 the *abonsamkómfo* had become quite rich. This not only made them very proud in Owusu Ansa’s eyes, but it also made them attractive prey for an Asantehene in dire need of money (Wilks 1975: 438, 681-683, 699-705). However, the king Mensa Bonsu seems to have been well disposed towards the movement in 1879, probably because he was attracted [166] its ideology – the restoration of Asante’s power –, its prominent position in the upsurge of Anokye traditions, its broad following, and because the full implications of its ideology for his position as *Asantehene* had not yet become clear to him and his advisers. But they evidently had become clear to Owusu Ansa. He had warned the King not to encourage ‘these impostors’. Events in late 1879 and in early 1880, however, further clarified their position towards Asante rulers in general and Mensa Bonsu in particular.

In November 1879, messengers sent by *Ókómfo* Kwaku from Agogo – the town which Anokye had ruled – arrived in Abene, the capital of Kwawu. The core of their message was that ‘the tree which Komfo Anokye had felled’ had been ‘set upright for them’ and been given life again by Anokye (Ramseyer 1880a; 1880b). As the tree of reception, the state, and the ruler were intimately linked in Akan political thinking (Platvoet 1985), the message elliptically referred to the ‘death’ of the Kumase central *gyedua* on January 6, 1874, the sack of Kumase a month later, and the role of the *Asantehene* in these events. It implied that Anokye, ordainer of the destinies of nations, had allowed the British to defeat Asante in 1874, because the *Asantehene* had disobeyed his laws – especially by not releasing the White captives. Like the witches, the rulers of Asante were regarded as guilty of wrecking the nation (*amanseè*). Anokye *Redivivus*, however, had ‘set upright’ that ‘tree’ again and given life to it. That is, Anokye *Redivivus* was rebuilding the Asante nation and was restoring its power. Therefore, the vassal state Kwawu was invited to reaffirm its allegiance to Asante. By sending out these messengers, *Ókómfo* Kwaku was arrogating to himself another of the political privileges of the *Asantehene*: that of testing the loyalty of parts of the Asante empire and of attempting to bring them back into the Asante fold.

By these actions, the movement fundamentally questioned Mensa Bonsu's title to his position, which was, moreover, dynastically weak (Wilks 1975: 368-373) and politically weakening (Wilks 1975: 518-519, 674-683; McCaskie 1981: 131). He was deemed to have contravened, as *Asantehene*, the laws of Anokye by his programme of modernization. In their eyes, Mensa Bonsu was as guilty as Kofi Kakari, because he had failed to restore the ‘ancient’ order of Asante as established, in their view, by Anokye. The movement proclaimed that Anokye had returned himself now to restore that order as well as the power and glory of Asante.

By early 1880, the movement had become a force on the Kumase political scene by aligning with the conservative party against Mensa Bonsu whose rule was becoming increasingly oppressive and autocratic. This shift from a liberal, presidential monarchy towards an [167] autocratic one (Wilks 1975: 527-530) was in itself already seen as a violation of the proper political order (cf. Platvoet 1985) as laid down in ‘the laws of *Ókómfo*

Anokye'. Enjoying the active political support of some 'royals' and court officials (Wilks 1975: 521; McCaskie 1981: 132-133), the movement began to manifest an active presence in Kumase in early 1880 through a display of musketry in the great market (*Adwaberem*) in which the *Kum* tree had stood. Owusu Ansa reported to Ramseyer that they by then gradually became so impudent that one morning they had forced their way into the palace, allowed themselves all sorts of liberties, then – suddenly – one of them fired a shot at the king, but failed to hit him (BMA D-1,32.159). In the fracas that ensued, some *Abonsamkómfo* were killed, and the others were captured and put in irons. This attempt on his life caused Mensa Bonsu and his advisers to reverse their tolerant position towards the movement. A purge was ordered. *Ókómfo* Kwaku and some two hundred *Abonsamkómfo* were arrested, tried, and executed in 1880 at *Diakómfoase*, 'under [the tree which] eats priests'. All their wealth was confiscated.

Conclusion

Three groups of Anokye traditions have been surveyed in this article. One is forgotten. Another has been suppressed. And a third has been canonized as the charter of Asante political organization. In colonial times, the third group of Anokye traditions was represented as having been handed down since the foundation of the Asante nation around 1700 and as having guided its political affairs ever since. Actually, it was developed only after 1874, at the tail-end of Asante's history as a sovereign nation, when it had suffered a devastating blow.

In this third group of Anokye traditions, an idealized reconstruction of Asante precolonial political organization was undertaken in the face of the disintegration of the nation and its empire. It took the form of a body of political myths with protological overtones and a religious basis. It served several purposes: that of explaining the decline; that of restoring a modicum of former cohesion and strength; that of explaining the final demise; and that of articulating and supporting Asante identity in times of adversity and in the colonial period when sovereignty had been lost. These Anokye myths, therefore, represent an important chapter and process of change in Asante religious and political history. That change, however, was a highly traditionalizing event that addressed the present through developing a past.

That is even more true of the second, suppressed body of Anokye [168] myths propagated by the *Domaŋkoma/Abonsamkómfo* movement. They represent an even more radical attempt at Asante identity management in the face of the decline of the nation's fortunes. That movement drew the radical political conclusion from the general thesis of the post-1874 Anokye myths that the Asante rulers were a primary cause of the decline of the nation. In this respect, the use of the Anokye myths by the *Domaŋkoma* appears as a normal event in Asante traditional political processes. These consisted of constant shifts in the balance of power between the ruler and the ruled. By these processes, rulers were both brought to power and removed (Platvoet 1985). The *Domaŋkoma* leaders attempted to remove a nation-wrecking ruler, but failed to bide their time. When they made the attempt upon the life of the *Asantehehe*, Mensa Bonsu still had enough political support and the means to be able to deal speedily and fatally with them.

The post-1874 Anokye traditions may be seen as the product of cognitive dissonance.²⁸ The Asante had developed an identity by building a nation and an empire, but that identity

²⁸ Festinger 1957; Festinger, Riecken & Schachter 1956; cf. also Platvoet 1982a: 74-83.

had remained inarticulate as long as Asante prospered as a nation and ruled its empire. It was articulated in a body of myths when the political framework by which it had been produced began to disintegrate. At that moment, the myths began to ‘protologize’ Asante identity, thereby enabling it to continue to function as identifier even after Asante had disappeared as an independent polity. It enabled the Asante, as a people, to live with the dissonance of being Asante with a proud history within colonial and post-colonial polities. It enabled them to accept a position within a colonial system of Indirect Rule under the British Crown as Imperial Monarchy.²⁹

This articulation by means of protological myths, in Asante and in other preliterate societies, seems a parallel to the articulation of ethnic or regional identities in European societies in recent times. When a region was absorbed into a larger polity, people often began to collect, preserve, and study items and customs deemed typical of the[ir] past. In that process, an unarticulated identity took articulate shape. Such identity development was often supported by the invention of traditions (cf. Trevor-Roper 1983; Morgan 1983).

However, also in religion proper, many such products of ‘cognitive dissonance’ are found. It seems to me that new religious movements, new cults within religions, and reformulations of religions, may be fruitfully studied as articulations, or re-articulations, of earlier beliefs in the face of, and for the sake of, coping with crises in orientation caused by drastic processes of change which transform the context of a religion.

[169] *A note on the pronunciation of Twi words*

ó is open, as in French *tonne*; o is full, as in French *mot*; è is open, as in French *belle*; e is full, as in English ‘prey’; ŋ is nasalized, as in English ‘gang’; ky, e.g. in Anokye, is pronounced as tj, as in Czech; and gy, as in *gyedua*, as dz, as in John

The endnotes of the original publication [169-173] have been replaced by footnotes in this version.

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²⁹ British ‘Imperial Monarchy’ was invented at the same time as were the Anokye traditions. It was mystified by ceremonial aggrandizement after the British Crown had been shorn of all real political power (Cannadine 1983: 120-138). From this mystique, a common sentiment developed in early colonial time that was shared by both British administrators and African traditional elite. Myths about African monarchies ruling ‘tribes’ within the framework of the British Empire developed well in that context (Ranger 1983: 229-246). Rattray’s enthusiasm for Anokye and his contributions to the elaboration and codification of the Anokye traditions seem to fit into that context.

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