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The Demise and Enthronement of the Asantehene: Political Aspects of Asante Kingship

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The systems of Asante succession to the throne are characterized by the queen mother (*Asantehemma*), who serves as an apparatus producing the kingship in the determination of the throne successors. On the death or dethronement of an *Asantehene*, the *Asantehemma* plays an important role in the succession of the throne, and decides the new king according to the Asante rules of succession. The principle of "blood" centered upon the *Asantehemma* functions in the systems of Asante succession. By the way, the principle of "soul" is related to the mode of Asante succession in the sense that they involve a centrifugal factor. Asante politics can be seen as stretched taut between opposing forces: the centripetal element of matrification and the centrifugal element of patrification.

To specify some of the enthronement and mortuary rituals according to the Akan calendar, it is significant to set two ritual frameworks. The first ritual framework is the one in which necessary procedures are taken by the *Asantehemma* and the *werempe* (kingmakers). The second ritual framework is the one in which the king is formally enthroned after the former king's funeral and attestation ceremony. In other words, the systems of Asante succession are regarded as a statement to the principle of "blood" of the first framework as well as to the principle of "soul" of the second framework.

In Asante history, kingship and gold have a close relationship, while functioning two as symbolic powers of the world. When the British invaded Kumase in 1874, the political aspects of Asante kingship turned at the transition period from a physiocratic one to a mercantilistic one.

1. MODE OF SUCCESSION TO THE THRONE

1) Mode of Succession of the Kings and Queen Mothers

Jack Goody proposed a system of succession to the throne collected extensively from Africa, Europe and Asia. According to his model for this system of hereditary succession, matrilineal succession systems are grouped into (a) lineal or vertical (filial) type and (b) lateral or horizontal (fraternal) type. The latter is classified further into four subtypes: (bi) collateral inclusion, (bii) collateral elimination, (biii) collateral circulation with elimination and (biv) collateral circulation with full dynastic eligibility [GOODY 1966: 32-33]. Succession to the

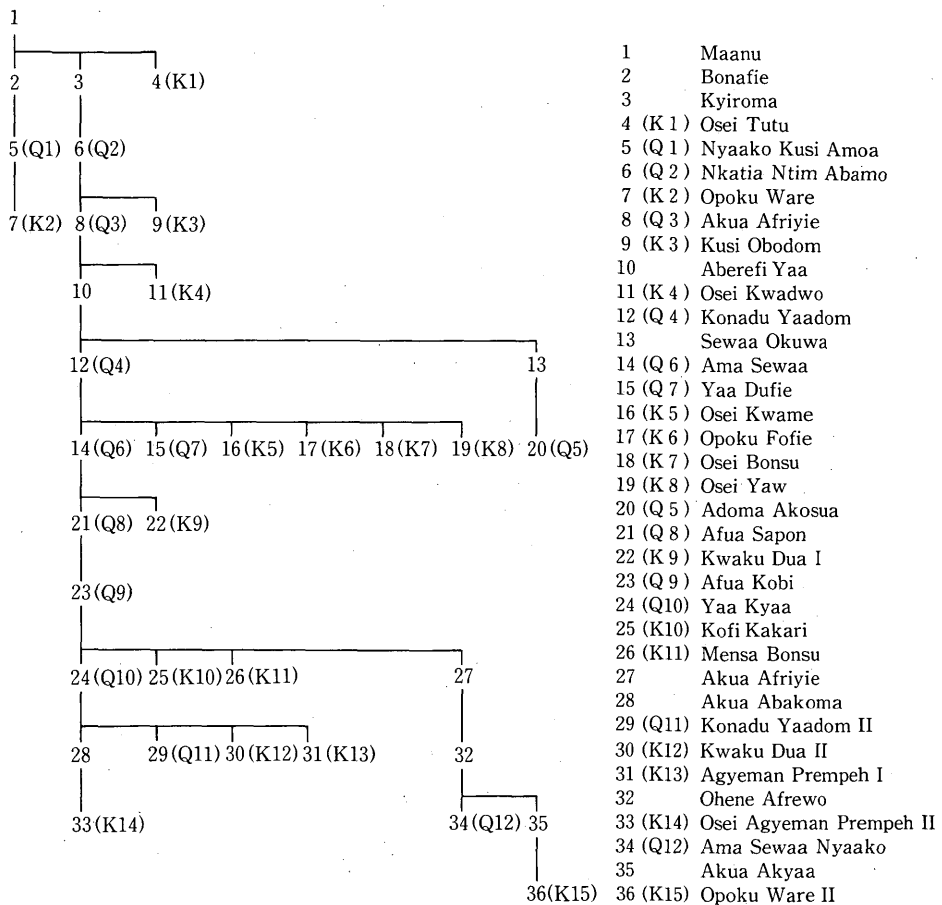


Fig. 1. The genealogy of the kings and queen mothers

throne is based on a delicate balance between two mutually opposing factors which could be seen as centrifugal and centripetal forces [KAWADA 1976: 90].

The systems governing Asante succession to the throne are complicated (Fig. 1). The genealogy of the Asante kings and queen mothers comprises a lineal descent from a woman called "Maanu",¹⁾ daughter of Abena Japae and granddaughter of Birempormaa Piesie. This genealogical structure, however, over-simplifies the lineage of the kings and queen mothers of Asante. With attention focused on the queen mothers (*ahemma*), the systems of succession are found to be subject to very rigid control. The kings and queen mothers are hereinafter referred to with the symbols (K) and (Q), respectively, to correspond to the table in Fig. 1.

(Q1) and (K2), (Q2) and (K3), (Q3) and (K4), (Q4) and (K5), (K6), (K7) and

1) Reindorf [1966] described the history prior to the establishment of Asante kingdom.

(K8), (Q6) and (K9), (Q9) and (K10) and (K11), and (Q10) and (K12) and (K13) are respectively filial in their relations. If (Q4) and (K5) had been in a quasi-filial relation, the royal genealogy of Asante would have been interrupted. Of the fifteen cases of throne succession of Asante, twelve can be represented by the lineal or vertical (filial) type model, as far as individual kings and their queen mothers are concerned.

The lateral or horizontal (fraternal) type model can apply to the three groups of kings (K5), (K6), (K7) and (K8), (K10) and (K11), and (K12) and (K13), all of whom were subject to the rules of succession according to their filial relation with their queen mothers (Q4), (Q9) and (Q10), respectively. Thus the system of Asante succession to the throne was characterized by the queen mothers, an apparatus producing the kingship, who serve as the key factor in the determination of the throne successors. In other words, the principle of "blood," centered upon the queen mothers, functioned in the system of Asante succession to the throne. However only limited descriptions of the succession to the queen mothers can be found in Asante ethnography. No historical documents found to date give us any clear information on this topic. It is, therefore, necessary to study the political background against which each of the queen mothers succeeded to her position.

Though the importance of female title holders, especially that of the queen mothers, is widespread throughout the state systems of Africa, it has been discussed in terms of a mutual-complementary relationship called "dual symbolism of African monarchy," or in terms of "decommunity" (in particular the principle of "royal incest" [HEUSCH 1962: 146-147]). He compares sacred kingship and royal incest customs among a number of African societies, concentrating however on the interlacustrine region where good data is extant on royal rituals, including those concerned with the role of the queen mother. For de Heusch, however, the actual role played by the queen mother is secondary. He is interested in describing how, then explaining, why these societies have developed real or symbolic "incest" at the level of monarchy, and why these constitutions require a royal mother-son at the apex of the state [COHEN 1977: 14-15]. In the relationship with the *Asantehene* (Asante king), the *Asantehemma* (Asante queen mother) was regarded as custodian of "custom". On the death or dethronement of an *Asantehene*, the queen mother was responsible for verifying the fitness of potential successors from the viewpoint of true descent from the founding ancestors/ancestresses. The *Asantehemma* and the *werempe* (kingmakers) decided who would be the new king in accordance with several rules. The *Asantehemma* plays an important role in succession of the throne, and maintains the order of Asante rules of succession [ARHIN 1983: 91-98].

Thus the succession to the throne among the Asante must be discussed in terms of power relationship between the centripetal pattern of matrification and the centrifugal pattern of patrification. The former is related to the attributes of royalty and the latter to the politics of kingship [WILKS 1975: 328-329].

The mode of succession to the throne of Asante must be explained based on a

semantic interpretation of the "political body" of a newly selected king. Generally, in Asante, a man was believed to consist of five elements: body (*honam* or *nipa dua*), blood (*mogya*), semen (*ntoro*), soul (*ōkra*) and spirit (*sunsum*) [AKWABI-AMEYAW 1982: 333]. The *mogya* is inherited from the mother and her clan (*nton*),²⁾ and the *ntoro* from the father and his clan (*nton*). The *ntoro* means "semen" or "the division of exogamy" (or more accurately, "a cluster of metaphysical and ritual concepts") [FORTES 1950: 266, 1969: 198]. Anthropomorphic spirits inhabiting natural objects such as rivers, caves and lakes were the objects of worship, and the day of purification for the *ntoro* was specified.³⁾ It was also believed that when a man is ill or frightened, the *ōkra* (soul) temporarily separates from the body. The state of being while the *ōkra* is separated from the body was called "*ōkra adwane*." Inherited from the Supreme God (*Onyankopon*), the *ōkra* separates from the body after its death, and returns to the spiritual world of the ancestors (*asamando*). The *sunsum*, on the other hand, is believed to be separated from the body while a man is asleep. In dreaming it is the *sunsum*, not the *ōkra*, that leaves the body. The departure of the *ōkra* from the body means the death of the person, whereas the *sunsum* can leave the body, as in dreaming, without causing the death of the person [GYEKYE 1987: 85-103]. Generally, a combination of the concepts of *ōkra* and *sunsum* corresponds to "soul."

As a precondition for the Asante succession to the throne, a newly selected king must meet the following requirements: (1) as a vessel, his body must be free from physical damage; (2) as concerns character, he must be intelligent, modest, tolerant and manly [BUSIA 1951: 9]; (3) he must be a son of a queen mother from a royal family called "Oyoko" and his father must belong to a specific *ntoro* group (in particular, Bosommuru *ntoro*);⁴⁾ (4) he must inherit the *ōkra* (soul) of his predecessors, excluding the kings who were deprived of their kingship. In other words, the soul which the newly selected king inherited from the Supreme God at birth is exchanged for the former kings' *ōkra* (soul) at the enthronement ceremony. The way in which each of these conditions functions must be explained by

2) Asante clans (*nton*) consisted of various lineages (*mmusua*, sing. *abusua*). The clans (*nton*) could be divided into the eight exogamic matrilineal clans of Aduana, Agona, Asakyri, Asenie, Asona, Bretuo, Ekoona and Oyoko. Oyoko was the clan of the royal family.

3) As regards the Asante *ntoro* groups, M. J. Herskovits conducted a survey at the Asante village of Asokore [HERSKOVITS 1937].

4) K. A. Busia and J. B. Danquah classified *ntoro* groups of Asante. K. A. Busia classified *ntoro* groups as follows: Bosommuru with subgroups including Adufudee, Akrudee, Asadofee (Asafodee) and Aninie; Bosompri with subgroups including Aboadee, Ankamada, Atwidee and Agyinadee; Agyaadefoe; Amoadee; Akankadee; Abankadee. J. B. Danquah classified *ntoro* into following twelve groups: Bosompri, Bosomtwi, Bosommuru, Bosompo (or Bosom-Nketea), Bosom-Dwerebe, Bosom-Akom, Bosomafi, Bosomayesu, Bosom-Konsi, Bosomsika, Bosomafam and Bosomkrete [BUSIA 1954: 198].

examining individual cases.

The Asante succession to the throne is thus based on the complementary relation between the principles of "blood" and "soul." The principle of "blood", particularly the third requirement of birth involving a queen mother from a royal family called "Oyoko" and a father from a specific *ntoro* group, is first discussed in this chapter, and the principle of "soul" will be referred to in relation to the king's funeral and enthronement ceremony. One of the keys to understanding the Asante kingship is presumed to lie in the mode of succession to the throne based on the principles of "blood" and "soul."

The distribution of *Asantehene* by matrification, shown in Fig. 1, may be compared with that by patrification, shown in Table 1. The genealogy of the *Asantehene* reflects a history of unification and decentralization. If the royal houses of Osei Tutu, Opoku Ware, Kwaku Dua I and others are referred to as H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄, the relation between the kings and the royal houses are as follows: (K1) H₁, (K2) H₂, (K3) H₄, (K4) H₁, (K5) H₄, (K6) H₂, (K7) H₁, (K8) H₁₋₂, (K9) H₃, (K10) H₃₋₄, (K11) H₃₋₄, (K12) H₃, (K13) H₃, (K14) H₁ and (K15) H₂. The matter of the royal houses is not one which is freely discussed in Asante, but the royal house of Osei Tutu (H₁) is sometimes referred to as the "red" Oyoko, and the house of Opoku Ware (H₂), as the "black" Oyoko [WILKS 1975: 371n]. The sphere of dynastic politics may be identified as that within which members of the houses and royals outside them, and their respective constituents, sought to maximize their advantages whether through conflict or accommodation. Thus the Oyoko rulers of Asante were distributed to the four royal houses based on their power relationship.

Table 1. The Oyoko rulers of Asante, and their distribution between the four houses

House of Osei Tutu (H ₁)	House of Opoku Ware (H ₂)	House of Kwaku Dua (H ₃)	Others (H ₄)
(K 1) Osei Tutu	(K 2) Opoku Ware I		(K 3) Kusi Obodom
(K 4) Osei Kwadwo	(K 6) Opoku Fofie		(K 5) Osei Kwame
(K 7) Osei Bonsu		(K 9) Kwaku Dua I	
(K 8) Osei Yaw Akoto			← (K10) Kofi Kakari
			← (K11) Mensa Bonsu
		(K12) Kwaku Dua II	
		(K13) Agyeman Prempeh I	
(K14) Osei Agyeman Prempeh II	(K15) Opoku Ware II		

Source: WILKS [1975: 372]

The way in which the throne succession mechanism functioned under the preconditions that the *Asantehene* must be born of an *Asantehemma* from Oyoko royal house and a father from a specific *ntoro* group is discussed with reference to two examples.

Case 1 Naming system for Osei and Owusu and the throne succession

Osei Tutu (K1; d. 1712 or 1717) belongs to Adufudee, a sub-group of the Bosommuru *ntoro*. Members of this sub-group were named "Osei" and "Owusu" in alternate generations. With Osei Tutu as the founder, the royal lineage of this sub-group descended through Owusu Afriyie (married Akua Afriyie (Q3)), Osei Kwadwo (K4), Owusu Ansa (married Konadu Yaadom (Q4)) and Owusu Afriyie (married Afua Sapon (Q8)) and subsequently Osei Bonsu (also known as Osei Tutu Kwame) (K7). In this royal family lineage, the marriage of a prince (*ahenemma*) and a queen mother (*Asantehemma*) took place in the subsequent generation of each king. Also named "Osei," the kings (K8) and (K14) were selected on an alternate generation basis.

Case 2 Naming system for Adu and Opoku and the throne succession

Opoku Ware (K2; ca. 1720–1750) was a member of Asafodee, a sub-group of Bosommuru *ntoro* descending from *Amakomhene* Adu Mensa. Members of this sub-group were named "Adu" and "Opoku" in alternate generations. Founded by Adu Mensa, this royal family lineage descended through Opoku Ware (K2), Adu Twum (married Akua Afriyie (Q3)), Opoku Kwame and Opoku Fofie (K6) and subsequently Adusei Kra and Adu (married a granddaughter of Konadu Yaadom (Q4), details unknown). In this royal family, marriages between a prince and a queen mother and between a prince and a granddaughter of a queen mother were reported.

From the findings of the study of cases 1 and 2, the succession system in Asante can be described as follows (Fig. 1 and Table 1): All of the kings (K1), (K4), (K7), (K8) and (K14) from the royal family of the lineage directly descending from Osei Tutu (H₁) were named "Osei." Since the members of Adufudee, a sub-group of Bosommuru *ntoro*, were named "Osei" and "Owusu" on an alternate generation basis, this royal family is assumed to have employed a system in which princes named "Osei" succeeded to the throne, with others named "Owusu" marrying to a queen mother (*Asantehemma*) to produce the kingship for the subsequent generation. In the royal family of the lineage from Opoku Ware (H₂), on the other hand, the kings (K2), (K6) and (K15) were named "Opoku." Since members of Asafodee, a sub-group of Bosommuru *ntoro*, were named "Adu" or "Opoku" in alternate generations, it is assumed that princes named Opoku succeeded to the throne and Adu married an *Asantehemma* or her direct descendant to give birth to an *Asantehene* for the subsequent generation. In short, in the throne succession in Asante, the *ntoro* groups (in particular Bosommuru *ntoro* group) were involved in the attributes of royalty through marriage with a queen mother or her direct

descendant. At the same time, the *ntoro* groups were related to the politics of kingship in the sense that they also involved a centrifugal factor. In ontological terms, it is descent which is important to the structure of the Oyoko dynasty. In phenomenological terms, it is marriage. But, in structural terms, from the viewpoints of the genealogical matrix and the pattern of marriage, the distribution of the *Asantehene* is regarded as attesting to the matrification of the attributes of kingship as well as to the patrification of the politics of kingship [WILKS 1975: 371]. Asante politics can be seen as stretched taut between opposing forces: the centripetal element of matrification and the centrifugal element of patrification.

2) Period of Reign of the Kings and Queen Mothers

As exemplified by classical history books *Ta'rikh al-Sūdān* and *Ta'rikh al-fattāsh*, West African kingdoms had a tradition of maintaining annals recording their royal genealogy. In the 1820s, in the royal town of Kumase, Joseph Dupuis made the acquaintance of a Muslim man known as "Kantoma"⁵⁾ to the Asante. Muḥammad b. al-Muṣṭafā Imām Ghunja was one of the Kantomas who made frequent visits to the court of Asante. Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā would seem to be the obvious person to have compiled the annals of the Asante dynasty based upon the model of the earlier annals of Gonja provenance [WILKS 1975: 347–348]. This historical record was reportedly destroyed in 1874 when the British invaded Kumase.

The genealogy of the *Asantehene* has been studied by all the earlier writers—Bowdich [1819], Dupuis [1824], Reindorf [1895], Fuller [1921] and Rattray [1929]. Joseph Dupuis, in particular, investigated historical records of the chronicle before it vanished, giving an account of the period of reign of the *Asantehene* from Sai Abuku (Opoku Ware (K2)) to Sai Tutu Kwamin (Osei Bonsu (K7)). Generally, the keeping of chronicle-type records is based upon either historic events or a calendar. In Asante, the written equivalent of the kind of oral recital of past events were chanted by spokesman (*okyeame*, pl. *akyeame*), although in this case the ordering of the chanted events was based upon the reign of the kings, and a chant was composed briefly describing events which happened in a certain reign [GOODY 1977: 91–92]. T. E. Bowdich transcribed the year of enthronement and abdication of the kings which appear in this chronicle. However, he is reported to have made some mistakes in the conversion from the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian calendar [WILKS 1975: 350]. It was in the 1960s that the genealogy of the *Asantehene* was definitely established. In 1960, in an article in the *Journal of African History*, Margaret Priestly and Ivor Wilks studied the years of enthronement and abdication of Asante kings in the eighteenth century through in-depth analysis of ethnological documents, and proposed a modification of the

5) The name Kantoma is a shortened form of Karamo Toghma, which means "scholar." Kantoma compiled a route book for the long-distance trade, covering the savanna area, forest area and Guinea Coast area encompassing the royal town of Kumase.

kings' genealogy [1960: 83–96].

As concerns the year of demise of Osei Tutu (K1), opinions were divided between 1712 and 1717, leading to a dispute between two Ghanaian historians — K. Y. Daaku [1968: 40–44] and J. K. Fynn [1971: 48–50]. In his earlier works Daaku accepted the 1712 date, while Fynn insisted on 1717. However, in his last works Daaku changed his view to 1717 without giving any definite reason [1976: 46–47]. The dispute between these researchers was detailed by Adu Boahen [1975: 87–92].

The period of the reign of almost all of the Asante kings can be identified, excepting that of Osei Tutu (K1) and Opoku Ware (K2). The reign of Opoku Fofie (K6) and Kwaku Dua II (K12) is short; Opoku Fofie (K6), who might have been poisoned, was king for two years, while Kwaku Dua II (K12), who might have been murdered or died from smallpox, reigned only for forty-four days. The kings who occupied the throne for thirty years or longer, include Opoku Ware (K2), who reigned for about thirty years, Kwaku Dua I (K9) for thirty-three years, Agyeman Prempeh I (K13) for forty-three years (in actuality, fifteen years, if a period of exile to Elmina, a place on the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Seychelles is deducted), and Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (K14), thirty-nine years. Forced to resign for various reasons including dethronement were Kusi Obodom (K3), who was king for fourteen years, Osei Kwame (K5) for twenty-one years, Kofi Kakari (K10) for seven years and Mensa Bonsu (K11) for nine years. Osei Kwadwo (K4), who died of unknown causes, ruled for thirteen years. The reigns of Osei Bonsu (K7) and Osei Yaw Akoto (K8), who died through illness and old age, respectively, continued for twenty-three years and nine years.

From the study of the kings' reign in Asante, it can be concluded that some kings ruled for a relatively short period and some for a long time, in other words, that the period of reign varied between kings.⁶⁾ The period over which the queen mothers in Asante were in their position is not known, excepting ten years for Adoma Akosua (Q5) and twenty-seven years for Afua Kobi (Q9). Written information about this topic is very limited, compared with the record on the reign of the kings.⁷⁾

The years of a king's reign were counted by Techiman (also called "keepers of

6) The average period of reign of the *Asantehene* was 18.77 or 16.62, if the case of Agyeman Prempeh I (K13) is considered. Assuming the number of the data to be n and the standard deviation of the period each king's reign to be s , the standard deviation of Asante kings' reigns is 23.06 or 20.16. Statistically, variation of the average years of reign of n kings can be expressed to be $\frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}$, using central limit theorem, the basic theorem. The variation of the average years of reign of the Asante kings is 6.405 or 5.592. However, neither the average years of kings' reign, standard deviation nor the variation of the average explains how the mechanism of the kingship functioned.

7) As statistic studies regarding the average years of the kings' and queen mothers' reigns, as cases of Akuapem kingdom [WILKS 1964: 390–411] and of Bono-Manso kingdom [FLIGHT 1970: 259–268; MEYEROWITZ 1972: 348–352] were reported.

Table 2. Period of reign of the kings and queen mothers

Kings	Period of reign	Year of birth	Year of demise
(K 1) Osei Tutu	?	?	1712 or 1717?
(K 2) Opoku Ware	ca. 1720–1750	?	1750
(K 3) Kusi Obodom	1750–1764	?	1764
(K 4) Osei Kwadwo	1764–1777	ca. 1735	1777
(K 5) Osei Kwame	1777–1798	ca. 1764	1803
(K 6) Opoku Fofie	1798–1799	ca. 1775	1799
(K 7) Osei Bonsu (Osie Tutu Kwame)	1800–1823	ca. 1779	1823
(K 8) Osei Yaw Akoto	1824–1833	ca. 1800	1833
(K 9) Kwaku Dua I	1834–1867	ca. 1797	1867
(K10) Kofi Kakari	1867–1874	ca. 1837	1884
(K11) Mensa Bonsu	1874–1883	ca. 1840	1896
Interregnum	1883–1884		
(K12) Kwaku Dua II	1884	ca. 1860	1884
Interregnum	1884–1888		
(K13) Agyeman Prempeh I	1888–1931	ca. 1873	1931
(K14) Osei Agyeman Prempeh II	1931–1970	1892	1970
(K15) Opoku Ware II	1970–	1918	

Queen Mothers	Period of reign	Year of birth	Year of demise
(Q 1) Nyaako Kusi Amoa	?	?	?
(Q 2) Nkatia Ntim Abamo	?	?	?
(Q 3) Akua Afriyie	?	?	?
(Q 4) Konadu Yaadom	?	ca. 1752	1809
(Q 5) Adoma Akosua	1809–1819	ca. 1765	1819
(Q 6) Ama Sewaa	?	ca. 1763	?
(Q 7) Yaa Dufie	?	?	?
(Q 8) Afua Sapon	?	?	ca. 1857
(Q 9) Afua Kobi	ca. 1857–1884	ca. 1815	1900
(Q10) Yaa Kyaa	?	?	1917
(Q11) Konadu Yaadom II	?	?	?
(Q12) Ama Sewaa Nyaako	?	?	?

the king's calendar" [RATTRAY 1923: 114]) in the northern Akan kingdom of Bono-Manso. Akan culture requires that the king produces a nugget of gold at a certain time determined by the change of seasons every year. A nugget of gold was put into a brass canister (*kuduo*) on the occasion of the new year festival, which was held every year to renew the kingship. When the king died, one nugget was taken out of the canister, used during the enthronement ceremony for his successor to begin a new reckoning of the years of his reign [FLIGHT 1970: 260]. In short, the period of reign of kings was measured by counting the gold nuggets added every

year and deducting one from the count. An extra nugget, over and above the nuggets which are added year by year, is thus carried forward from one reign to the next, so as to ensure the continuity of the record.

As mentioned previously, the *Asantehemma* is presumed to have functioned to produce the kingship and served as an essential factor in the determination of succession. If this holds true, it is important to clarify the ages of the *Asantehene* at the time when they were enthroned. Concerning Osei Tutu (K1), Opoku Ware (K2) and Kusi Obodom (K3), no estimation is possible since the year of birth of these kings is not known. The age at enthronement of other kings can be estimated at twenty-nine years for Osei Kwadwo (K4), twelve years for Osei Kwame (K5), twenty-three years for Opoku Fofie (K6), twenty-one years for Osei Bonsu (K7), twenty-four years for Osei Yaw Akoto (K8), thirty-seven years for Kwaku Dua I (K9), thirty years for Kofi Kakari (K10), thirty-four years for Mensa Bonsu (K11), twenty-four years for Kwaku Dua II (K12), fifteen years for Agyeman Prempeh I (K13), thirty-nine years for Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (K14) and fifty-two years for Opoku Ware II (K15).⁸⁾ Enthroned young were Osei Kwame (K5) and Agyeman Prempeh I (K13), who succeeded to the throne after about five years of interregnum. Osei Kwame became an *Asantehene* in 1777 when he was twelve years old. He was deprived of the throne in 1798, and died in 1803 when he was thirty-nine years of age. It is not certain whether he died as a result of suicide by poisoning, or a curse [McCASKIE 1989: 429] or execution [WILKS 1975: 343]. Agyeman Prempeh I was enthroned in 1888 when he was fifteen years old. He remained in power for a long time, if his period of exile under the British colonial policy is included.

As regards the age of the *Asantehemma* at the time of their succession to their position, only two cases were reported; Adoma Akosua (Q5) was enthroned at the age of forty-four and Afua Kobi (Q9) at the age of forty-two. However, since the *Asantehemma* plays an important role in selecting the throne successor after the death or abdication of a reigning king, including dethronement, the *Asantehemma* is presumed to have been of middle or advanced age. For example, Afua Kobi selected her son, Mensa Bonsu (K11) at the age of fifty-nine. She was deprived of her position as an *Asantehemma* almost at the same time, and died in 1900 at the age of eighty-five.

2. THE DEMISE OF THE KINGS AND POLITICAL BODY

1) Metaphor of "the Demise of the Kings"

In many societies in Africa, the demise of a king is publicly referred to using such expressions as "the departure of the king," "the fire has gone out," and "the curtain of night has fallen." In Asante, the expression, "the king is dead (*nana*

8) The average age of the *Asantehenes* at the time of enthronement is 28.33. The standard deviation is 30.25 and the variation of the average is 8.73.

asumasi awu),” was never used of an *Asantehene*. Indeed, it was a capital offence to utter any such phrase regarding him, or otherwise to make direct reference to his death [RATTRAY 1927: 108]. Many of these items were properties of belief about the afterlife, therefore, when the demise of a king was mentioned in public, a metaphor in expression, one such phrase, and seemingly the commonest—“a mighty tree has been uprooted (*dupon kesee atutu*),” was used. This mighty shade tree means the plant called *gyadua* (pl. *gyannua*; botanical name, *Ficus spp.*? [IRVINE 1931: 197]). This tree is sometimes called *omangyadua*, a name including a modifier of *oman* (sing. *aman*, meaning “state”). Thus, the demise of a king is expressed not with such a direct expression as “the king is dead,” but with a biological metaphor comparing him to a tree.

Following is a description by Mircea Eliade regarding the biological metaphor comparing the king to a tree and the symbolism of this cosmology: “The plant world embodies (or signifies, or shares in) the *reality* of which *life* is made, which creates untiringly, which is ever reborn in an innumerable variety of forms, and is never worn out. ...Life is manifested through a plant symbol. And so we are back at the idea of vegetation becoming a hierophany—that is, embodying and displaying the sacred—in so far as it *signifies* something *other than itself*. No tree or plant is ever sacred simply as a tree or plant; they become so because they *share* in a transcendent reality, they become so because they *signify* that transcendent reality. By being consecrated, the individual, “profane” plant species is transubstantiated; in the dialectic of the sacred, a part (a tree, a plant) has the value of the whole (the cosmos, life) a profane thing becomes a hierophany” [ELIADE 1958: 324].

In Asante, the mighty shade tree functions to implant visual memory of the power of “nature,” which is in a chaotic state comprised of production and destruction. Plants are the symbols of living existence and life which renews itself periodically. To the Asante these trees are believed to have potential spirit (*sasa*). Therefore, in felling a tree, it was a practice to conduct funeral rites, following the same procedures as for a person [RATTRAY 1927: 182–187]. In every Asante dwelling, branches were erected to form *nyame dua* (“God’s tree”) as a symbol of the “power” of life, a small altar that mediated relations between the human and belief system that was saturated in natural symbols [DOUGLAS 1970]. Such trees

9) Examples of Asante terminology collected in the royal town of Kumase are as follows:

household = *efie* (This also means “living space.”)

village = *akuraa* (pl. *nkuraa*)

town = *kurom*

royal town = *ahenkuro*

nation = *oman* (pl. *aman*)

The contrast between household and forest and that between inside and outside is expressed by *efie/wura'm*. This border between *efie* and *wura'm* is called *kurotia*. As regards the size of towns, large towns are called *kurokese* or *akuropong*, while small towns are called *kuroketewa*, *kurowa* or (*a*)*kura*.

function as natural symbols representing the prosperity of the state and good harvest of crops.⁹⁾ Most significantly, the morphological structure of Asante villages was marked out in a distributive geometry of large trees. For example, the spelling of Kumasi, which is the royal town of Asante, was officially decided by using Roman letters to express Kumase, the other name of the city deriving from *kum* (*kum* tree) and *ase* (under). In other words, the name of Kumase derives from an oral tradition that the city was established "under the *kum* tree." The name of Kumase has close relationship with biological metaphor. In Asante, there are many other towns which are referred to with biological metaphors named for a tree of foundation.¹⁰⁾

The relationship between biological metaphors and the names of the towns cannot be discussed here in detail. However, it is obvious that the biological metaphors and the concept of "hot/cool" form part of the cultural foundation of Asante. In Asante, in general, if expressed in colour, the *dwo* ("cool") as a condition of coolness is "white" which implicates being calm, easing, abating, tractable and protective, in contradistinction to the undesirable antithetical condition of the *ahohuru* ("hot") is "red" which implicates being violent, agitating, confrontational, disruptive and threatening [HAGEN 1970: 8-14]. Accordingly, the *dwo* as symbol, metaphor and representation, and as literal fact, came together in the equation of the *Asantehene* with *gyadua*, which is a mighty shade tree offering the *dwo* as actual shade, and as metaphysical protection and harmony.

The word *gyadua* originally means the root ((o) *gye* deriving from receiving or acceptance in this usage) and "trees" (*dua*). In other words, the *gyadua* was "a tree of receiving"; it conferred actual coolness and symbolic coolness. The common expression, "he tears the leaves of the shade tree," (*ɔtew gyadua ahaban*) has the same meaning as "he curses the king's life" (*ohyira ohene*). The equation of the *Asantehene* with *gyadua* was expressed through synonymous phrases. This shows that the *Asantehene*, biological metaphors comparing to trees, and the concept of "cool/hot" are closely related to each other. In the concept of "cool/hot," the *ahohuru* ("hot") means nature, being primitive and chaotic, while the *dwo* ("cool") means culture, civilization and cosmos. In other words, the "power" of the kings is the symbol of living existence and life which renews itself periodically, expressed in the concept of the *dwo* ("cool") in the same sense as biological metaphors comparing to trees. At the same time, for evident physical reasons the word, the *gyadua* also means "umbrella tree." Umbrella (*kyinie*; pl. *nkyinie*) is one of the regalia of Asante kingship. The umbrella remains an important political emblem [PATTON 1984: 64]. The largest and most elaborate umbrellas were used by

10) Dr. Meyor Fortes' data kept at Cambridge University and the data kept at the Institute of African Studies in Ghana University list the town names which use biological metaphor.

11) These plants are *anworomo* (botanical name is unidentified), *nkonkuro* (botanical name is unidentified), *borɔdee* (pineapples, botanical name is *Ananas stavius*) and *mankani* (cocoyam, botanical name is *Xanthosoma sagittifolium*).

Asantehene, and these had their own names, attendants and observances. Before umbrellas made in India and Europe were introduced, trees with large leaves were used to protect kings [KYEREMATEN 1964: 89].¹¹⁾

The death of a king indicates the removal of protection, symbolically expressed by a mighty tree which forms shade and an umbrella. This means that the country has been transferred from “cool” state to “hot” state. The funeral songs for the late *Asantehene* use such common biological metaphors as “the fallen tree,” and “absent umbrella.” These biological metaphors are found in funeral songs as follows [McCASKIE 1989: 424–425]:

Nana atu ne kyineye
Awia ne ebekuyen.
Womim dee wo gyaa me
Ya ma nsuo nto na ma so bi anom.
Se womane me a, mane me denkyembrebo
Mannya gya a mawe no mono.

Nana [the *Asantehene*] has removed his umbrella
 We shall be scorched to death by the sun.
 You know the condition in which you have left me
 See to it that there is rain so that I can collect some of it to drink.
 If you are sending me a parcel
 Send me a crocodile’s liver
 Which I can eat raw failing to get fire with which to cook.

The shape of an umbrella originated from the shape of a leaf suspended from a tree. In this song, an umbrella is used as a biological metaphor to protect the king symbolically.¹²⁾ The *Asantehene* is said to have been seated under a big tree made of gold with many branches and leaves. In a funeral celebration in general, members of the deceased’s lineage sit under a canopy of suspended heavy black cloth (urban areas), or under a large tree (rural areas) [PATTON 1984: 93].

Thus, under the sacred Asante kingship, biological metaphors and the concept of “hot/cool” form a cultural foundation. “Mighty shade tree,” “king” and “umbrella” mean the “cool” state. The expression “the king is dead” is replaced by idiomatic phrases like “the fallen tree” and “the umbrella has been removed.” In this sense, “mighty shade tree,” “king” and “umbrella” can be regarded as “the sacred canopy.” For this reason, the king’s corpse as the political body should be placed in the king’s tomb so that “the king’s body; the political body should never suffer cold nor heat nor frost” [ANTI 1974: 72]

2) Causes of Death of Kings

Extrapolating from the fact that such direct expressions regarding the death of

12) A. A. Y. Kyerematen described the symbols of Asante kingship [KYEREMATEN 1966].

Table 3. Causes of death of kings

Kings (<i>Asantehene</i>)	Causes of death	Notes
(K 1) Osei Tutu	battle	
(K 2) Opoku Ware	natural death	
(K 3) Kusi Obodom	disease or ?	abdicated*
(K 4) Osei Kwadwo	?	
(K 5) Osei Kwame	suicide or poisoning	abdicated*
(K 6) Opoku Fofe	poisoning	
(K 7) Osei Bonsu	disease	
(K 8) Osei Yaw Akoto	natural death	
(K 9) Kwaku Dua I	disease	
(K10) Kofi Kakari	poisoning	abdicated*
(K11) Mensa Bonsu	disease or poisoning	abdicated*
(K12) Kwaku Dua II	disease or poisoning	
(K13) Agyeman Prempeh I	natural death	
(K14) Osei Agyeman Prempeh II	natural death	

* abdication including throne deprivation

a king are strictly prohibited, it is obvious that his demise has an important political meaning. The issue as regards the cause of the demise of kings touches on the depths of Asante kingship. What kind of power politics were hidden behind the demise of a king? Table 3 shows the causes of the deaths of past *Asantehene*. Although the causes vary widely from battle to disease, suicide and poisoning, it

13) Opoku Ware (K2) has been described as an *Asantehene* with extremely unusual features. One of them concerns the birth of the king. His mother was a daughter of the former king's sister. It is said that the mother was pregnant for three years and was engaged in labour for fourteen days, while the baby was born with a quavering right hand and grew very tall and very fair in colour [FULLER 1968 (1921) 25; KYEREMATEN 1966: 251].

Opoku Ware was born with the psychopathological damage to his somatic image. This damage was caused by "a tumor affecting both the central nervous system and the pituitary gland" [WILKS 1975: 331]. Therefore, in a story orally inherited, the king has been said to have had "gigantism" in childhood and "acromegaly" in adulthood. This psychopathological fact shows a notable correspondence to the myth which describes "an impairment of the body" [NEEDAM 1980: 36]. Imagining the impairment of the body is a cultural phenomenon which is attributable to the psychological recognition about the original form. If the impairment of the body shows the original form appropriately and collectively, it becomes obvious that the peculiar form of the king in myths, which had a damage to the somatic image, has close relationship with the invasion and looting which took place in the Asante kingdom until the middle of the eighteenth century.

Thus, the *Asantehene* Opoku Ware was born with psychopathological damage to the somatic body. The "power" of the peculiar form was recognized as "positive" image connected with the establishment of the nation. He was recorded in the Asante history as a hero who had both forcefulness and wisdom.

can be easily imagined that there were political plots behind the scenes. Osei Tutu (K1) died in battle, and Opoku Ware (K2) died a natural death. Considering that the Asante expanded their territory in this period, they should have died heroic deaths in repeated battles.¹³⁾ The demise of a king following abdication including dethronement can be observed in the cases of Kusi Obodom (K3; d. 1764), Osei Kwame (K5; ca. 1764–1803), Kofi Kakari (K10; ca. 1837–1884) and Mensa Bonsu (K11; ca. 1840–1896). Kusi Obodom (K3) died in the suburbs of Kumase, several months after his abdication due to either deteriorated eyesight or his councillor's plot to put up a new king. Osei Kwame (K5), Kofi Kakari (K10) and Mensa Bonsu (K11) died due to poisoning or curse, thus ending their lives of vicissitudes.¹⁴⁾ The cause of death of Osei Kwadwo (K4) is unknown. Kings deprived of their throne were regarded as contaminated in the manner of ordinary people and were no more respected.

Although natural death and death by illness cannot be clearly divided, these two are separately listed according to historical documents. Only four kings, Opoku Ware (K2; d. 1750), Osei Yaw Akoto (K8; ca. 1800–1833), Agyeman Prempeh I (K13; ca. 1873–1931) and Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (K14; 1892–1970), obviously died natural deaths. Osei Bonsu (K7; ca. 1779–1823) fell ill, afflicted by a leg ulcer and chest ailment [WILKS 1975: 174]. Therefore, by mid-1823, he was unable to attend to government business, and shortly thereafter retired to a village outside the royal town of Kumase.¹⁵⁾ Among the causes of death of the kings, diseases and poisoning are most often observed. Certain plots, easily supposed to have been behind the demise of these kings, can be analysed from the funeral rites.

3) Secondary Burials of the Corpses and Sacrifice

In spite of the great volume of ethnographies on the Asante there is little in the way of a body of anthropological literature specifically directed to the topic, of demise of the kings because of the secrecy regarding the funeral rites. However, positions regarding death have always been closely related to the central issue of anthropology of political life. This is not only because the demise and the funeral rites reflect the social values, but also because they are an important force in shaping the political power which forms the social values. To understand funeral rites of the *Asantehene*, individual cases should be discussed. For example, the following describes primary and secondary burials, and the treatment of a king killed on a battlefield: "For the Akan in general the death of a king in battle was not a disaster of the first order. The body was usually smoked to preserve it and subsequently

14) How atrocious the curse was can be understood by the preventive method taken at the king's court when a man was sentenced to death. The method is that, before he was executed, the executioner (*adumfoo*) stabbed his cheeks and tongue with a knife.

15) The news of the death of the *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu was reported in a town on the Gold Coast in early November, 1823 [WILKS 1975: 174]. This indicates that the king died around October of 1823 as a result of illness.

carried back to the capital. There it was afforded the full customary rites given to any deceased king. The body was lightly buried and the grave regularly watered. After some time the bones were dug up, cleaned, wired together with gold and placed in a coffin in the royal mausoleum" [PRIESTLEY and WILKS 1960: 89].

Sometimes however it would happen that in battle an army was surrounded and had little chance of escape. In such circumstances it was customary for the king to kill himself: "Suicide is put into practice chiefly by men of rank, who are solicitous to preserve their remains from the brutal insults of their enemies". ... "No relic was more highly prized, for magico-ritual purposes, than the skull of an enemy's king" [DUPUIS 1966 (1824): 238n; RATTRAY 1927: 132].

An *Asantehene* was given both a "primary" and "secondary" burial. After the demise of a king, his body was laid in state in the royal palace, in the courtyard called the *patokrom*, for a period varying between three and fifteen days. When the sacrifice was reduced, this period was shortened to three or four days. The corpse was then removed at night, and transferred to the *barim kesse* mausoleum, which means "the great burial place," located in the *bampanase* ward named by a royal place deriving from the name of a tree of Kumase. The coffin containing the corpse was transferred to the *asonyeso*, which means "the place of droppings," by grave diggers (*asokwafo*) and court musicians who blew ivory horns. The corpse was transferred after eighty days. The remaining putrid meat was shaved off. The bones were connected at the joints and burnt with cow fat. Then the coffin containing the remains was placed in a room which was prepared in the *barimkesee* mausoleum [RATTRAY 1927: 112, 114-115; McCASKIE 1989: 427]. This is the process of the primary burial. After an Asante year, on the first anniversary of the death, the reigning *Asantehene* presided over the removal of his predecessor's remains to the royal mausoleum at the *bantama*, which was in the suburbs of Kumase. Every year, the incumbent *Asantehene* went to the *bantama* in state to perform the *afrinhyia* rite, which is a ritual inspection of the royal skeletons, and the fabric of the mausoleum containing them. The remains of the kings who were deprived of their kingship were never enshrined at the royal mausoleum [RATTRAY 1927: 118; TORDOFF 1965: 14n].¹⁶⁾

The number of wives and followers to be sacrificed after the *Asantehene's* death is recorded in detail in the description of the mortuary rituals of the *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua I (K9), who died in the night of 27 April 1867: "Through the night of 27-28 April, as was customary, no announcement was made of Kwaku

16) After abdication in 1764, Kusi Obodom (K3) spent several remaining months in the Ampabami village in the suburbs of royal town of Kumase, and then was buried in the Akyeremade village. The location where Osei Kwame (K5) and Kofi Kakari (K10) were buried is not known. Mensa Bonsu (K11) abdicated in 1883, was arrested in 1896 and taken to the Praso village, where he was buried. The cause of death was officially reported to be dysentery. However, the rumour said that the king was starved to death as a result of punishment, that he committed suicide or he was poisoned [WILKS 1975: 332, 539].

Dua Panin's death. ...Some two hundred were seduced into the palace on the pretext of assisting in measures aimed at recovery. Each carried a water pot. These were emptied on small fires set in the courtyards of the palace in a ritual attempt to assuage and expel the sickness. ...The palace doors were then locked, and all two hundred participants were killed" [McCASKIE 1989: 432].

This is the way that victims were killed after the king's death. The deceased king's princes (*ahenemma*, sing. *ɔheneba*) and the patrilineal grandchildren (*ahenenana*, sing. *ɔhenenana*) poured into the streets of the royal town of Kumase, and commenced killing whomever they met at random by shooting, stabbing, strangling and slashing. Those exempted from being killed were the *Oyoko koko adehyee* of the royals of the *sika dwa kofi* (Golden Stool), councillors, retainers such as executioners (*adumfoɔ*), drummers (*akyeremadefoɔ*) and hornblowers (*asokwafɔɔ*), who played important roles in the *Asantehene's* mortuary rituals. In other words, the princes and patrilineal grandchildren tried to control the mortuary rituals, competing for the deceased king. Accordingly, at the time of the *Asantehene's* mortuary rituals the confrontational relationship between the patrilineal and matrilineal principles was placed in extremely high tension.

All the sacrificial victims were decapitated.¹⁷⁾ The heads were carried to the royal palace in baskets. Customarily, such decapitation was conducted after the late *Asantehene* was transferred to the royal palace. The wives and followers to be sacrificed were killed in a certain place in Kumase, called the topography of death, which is described by such phrases as "in the midst of the blood (*nkram*)," "the witches' stone (*bonsambuoho*)," "where *akɔmfoɔ* are devoured (*diakomfoase*, which derives from the *akɔmfoɔ* (sing. *ɔkɔmfoɔ*))" and "the place of the great brass basin (*ayakesee ho*)" [RATTRAY 1927: 112–114]. After the coffin was transferred to the royal palace, twenty-seven wives repeated the phrase "I bid you depart for a certain place (*ma ka kyere wo se we ko*)," and were killed.¹⁸⁾

Following is data about the number of wives and followers sacrificed after the death of the *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua I (K9). The number totaled 1,436, consisting of 840 killed from 28 April until the celebration of the "eight day" custom on 4 or 5 May, 164 from 6 May until 19 July all the way through the "fifteen day" custom, the "twenty-two day" custom, and "thirty day" custom, and 432 in the week from 20 to 27 July at the climax of the mortuary rituals, which saw the celebration of the very important "eighty day" custom that marked the closure of the funeral rites [McCASKIE 1989: 434]. This sacrifice was intended to express a conscious and, above all, a deliberate stillness, a state of calm, through the violent act of murder. However, it can easily be imagined how the wives and followers were transfixed with fear of death even in this stillness.

17) Witches were never decapitated, since it was prohibited to let their blood run. They were strangled, clubbed, burned with oil, drowned or ousted to starve to death.

18) The wives of the *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua I (K9) were all executed except Afua and Kra Akyere, who committed suicide by taking poison.

3. FUNERAL AND ENTHRONEMENT CEREMONY OF THE KINGS

1) Akan Calendar

In Asante, the Akan calendar, called *adaduanan*, is used in addition to the Gregorian calendar. The word *adaduanan* consists of *da* and *aduanan*, meaning "day" and "forty" respectively. Accordingly, *adaduanan* means "forty days." This is why the Akan calendar is usually referred to as a calendar based upon a forty-day cycle [BARTLE 1978: 80-84; McCASKIE 1980: 179-200]. This calendar combines the traditional "six-day week" and "seven-day week".¹⁹⁾ Each day represents a certain combination of what which has its own particular meaning. In the combinations of the "six-day week" and "seven-day week", four days are known as unlucky days (*dabone*; *da* and *bone* mean "day" and "bad" respectively) out of the forty-two days of the Akan calendar. Two of the four unlucky days are called *adae*, when *adae* festivals are held to worship the ancestors who were related to Asante divine kingship. They are [15] *kuruwukuo*, a combination of *kuru* of the "six-day week" and *wukuo* (meaning "Wednesday") of the "seven-day week," and [33] *kurukwasie*, a combination of *kuru* of the "six-day week" and *kwasi* (meaning "Sunday") of the "seven-day week." On these days, rituals of Asante kingship called *Awukudae* (or *Wukuo-Adae*) and *Akwasidae* (or *Akwasi-Adae*) are respectively held. On these days, no funeral rites may be held and no news of death may reach the ears of the king. On the other two days are [6] *fodwo* and [24] *fofie*, when rituals to purify the magico-religious symbols and intervene anthropomorphic spirits in habiting natural objects such as in rivers, lakes and caves are held.

In Asante, rituals of kingship are held according to the two calendars. Based upon the forty-two-day cycle consisting of the combinations of the "six-day week" and the "seven-day week," the Akan calendar is repetitive and periodic. When a year, eight or nine times of the forty-two-day cycle, has passed, the *Odwira* festival is held on a certain day determined in accordance with their cultural tradition.²⁰⁾ For the forty-two days before the *Odwira* festival, all noisiness, songs, drums, dances and funerals are prohibited. These conducts are believed to "reverse the order of *adae*" (*adaebutuw*).

19) The six-day week consists of *nwona*, *nkyi*, *kuru*, *kwa*, *mono* and *fo*, while the seven-day week includes *dwo* (Monday), *bena* (Tuesday), *wukuo* (Wednesday), *yawo* (Thursday), *fie* (Friday), *mene* (Saturday) and *kwasi* (Sunday).

20) Until the 1860s' the *Odwira* festival was conducted between August and October of the Gregorian calendar. The *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari (K10) started to conduct the festival between November and January. However, since Agyeman Prempeh I (K13) was deported in 1896, the *Odwira* festival has not been carried out in Kumase.

21) The "chronicle" described in Arabic was lost in the 1874 invasion of the royal town of Kumase by the British.

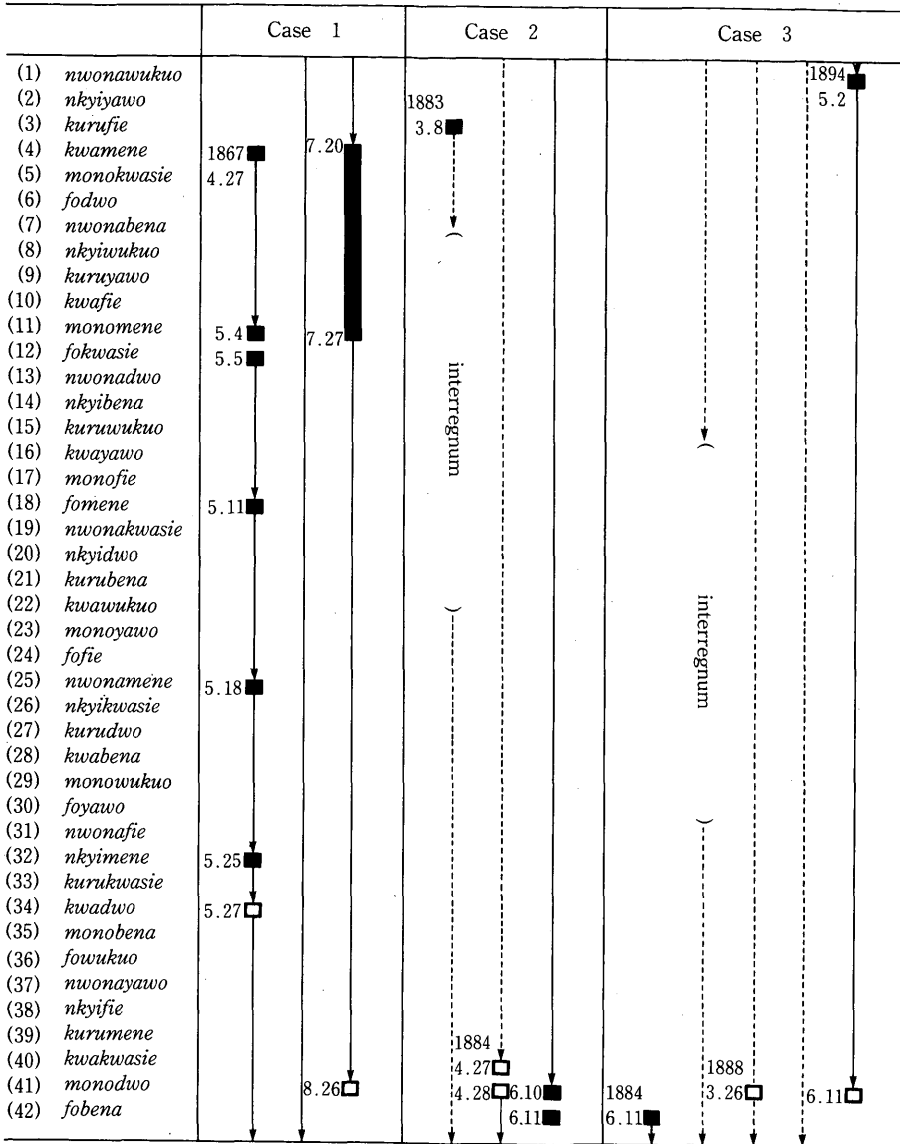


Fig. 2. Selecting the day of throne succession

2) Selecting the Day of Throne Succession

The Akan calendar was introduced to Asante in the reign of the *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu (K7). This king decided to approach the Islamic world and compiled "Asante annals" and the "Akan calendar".²¹⁾ By compiling Asante annals and Akan calendar, the king established an Asante king's ruling system. Among the past *Asantehene*, dates of funerals and enthronements can be identified for those

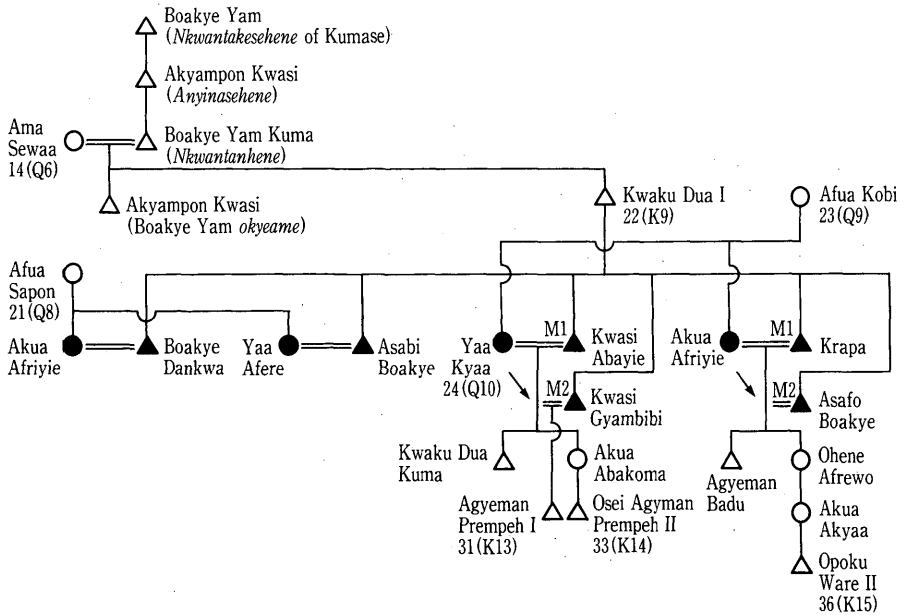


Fig. 3. Marriages between queen mother's daughters and king's sons

later than Kwaku Dua I (K9). Following are three cases taken up to discuss how the funeral for the dead king and the enthronement ceremony for the new king were held in relation to the Akan calendar. Examples 1, 2 and 3 respectively analyse the mechanism of the Asante throne succession, the meaning of the forty-four-day reign and the relationship between the king's demise and an attestation ceremony, in connection with the Akan calendar (Fig. 2.)

Case 1 Mechanism of the throne succession

The *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua I (K9) established a firm genealogical structure by uniting *Asantehemma's* daughters and *Asantehene's* sons by marital relations. This genealogy became more effective after the periods of interregnum from 1883 to 1884 and 1884 to 1888.²²⁾ Although the cause of his disease is unidentified, the king died at about midnight on 27 April 1867 [WILKS 1975: 495; McCASKIE 1989: 413]. This day fell on [4] *kwamene* of the Akan calendar. In accordance with the mode of succession to the throne, the *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari (K10) was selected as a successor. He was selected on 27 May 1867, after the king-selecting organization of the *Asantehemma* and the *werempe* (kingmakers) took necessary procedures. This day fell on [34] *kwadwo* of the Akan calendar. He was enthroned on 26 August of the same year, after undergoing the attestation ceremony.

This case clearly explains the mechanism of Asante succession to the throne.

22) Figure 3 shows genealogical structure of Kwaku Dua I, consisted of marriages between the *Asantehene's* sons and the *Asantehemma's* daughters.

The day of the king's demise was 27 April 1867, which fell on [4] *kwamene* of the Akan calendar. Generally, mourning rituals take place when eight, fifteen, twenty-two, thirty and eighty days have passed since the king's death. In this case, rituals took place on 4 May ([11] *monomene*), 11 May ([18] *fomene*), 18 May ([25] *nwonamene*), 20 July ([4] *kwamene*) and 27 July ([11] *monomene*). In other words, the rituals were held eight, fifteen, twenty-two, thirty and eighty days after the day of the king's death (Saturday, *mene*). In the mode of Asante throne succession, in general, a new king is selected within forty-two days of the death of the former king [BASSING and KYEREMATEN 1972: 30]. Accordingly, for the day of selecting the throne successor, the *kwadwo* [34] (27 May 1867) was selected from the "lucky days" in the Akan calendar. The new king formally underwent the attestation ceremony on 26 August 1867, which fell on the *monodwo* [41].

Case 2 Meaning of the forty-four-day reign

The *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu (K11) abdicated on 8 March 1883 [McCASKIE 1986: 4]. Considering that the king was imprisoned in the following year together with Afua Kobi, who was his queen mother and real mother, he must have been dethroned during a very tense situation [WILKS 1975: 538]. After the abdication of this king, conflicts for the position of throne successor occurred and interregnum continued for more than a year. After the interregnum, the new selection as king was Kwaku Dua II (K12), who was twenty-four years of age at that time. The correct date of this king's enthronement has not been determined, however as regards this king, only a few details are available. One says that "Kwaku Dua Kuma was enstooled, as Kwaku Dua II, in 1884. He died forty-four days later" [WILKS 1975: 368]. Another says that, although whether the king had fallen victim to the smallpox epidemic then raging or was murdered was unknown, he died on "10 or 11 June 1884," only forty-four days after his enthronement [WILKS 1975: 560]. From these records, the date of this king's enthronement can be assumed as follows in connection with the Akan calendar.

The king died on 10 or 11 June 1884, which fell on [41] *monodwo* or [42] *fobena* in the Akan calendar. From the record that "he died forty-four days later," the date of enthronement can be supposed to be 27 or 28 April, which respectively fell on [40] *kwakwasie* and [41] *monodwo* in the Akan calendar. From the classification of "lucky days" and "unlucky days" of the Akan calendar, this king is presumed to have been enthroned on 28 April 1884. However, it cannot be established whether the king was just selected on this day or he was formally enthroned after completing the attestation ceremony. It seems that here lies a key to the story of the "tragic king," who was enthroned at the age of twenty-four and died forty-four days later. It can be assumed that the historical fact that the king died forty-four days after the enthronement shows that, in the Akan calendar, forty-four days is the minimal necessary period for throne succession, which was a series of procedures from the abdication of the former king to the interregnum, the selection of the new king and the ceremony of attestation. Whether the king died

of smallpox or was murdered is not known. However, when the fact that Kofi Kakari, Kwaku Dua II's uncle, who died on 24 June, two weeks after his dethronement, is also taken into consideration, the death of Kwaku Dua II is unnatural. There is a possibility that some adjustments were made to set the forty-four-day period of reign.

Case 3 Funeral and attestation ceremony of the kings

The *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua II (K12) is assumed to have died on 11 June 1884. However, funeral customs for the king fell due on 2 May 1894 after almost a ten-year interval [WILKS 1975: 587]. This is connected with the critical condition of the Asante during the "interregnum" that continued from 1884 to 1888 due to the conflicts concerning throne succession [LEWIN 1978: 69-83]. As a result of the conflicts, Agyeman Prempeh I (also known as Kwaku Dua III) (K13) was formally selected as the new *Asantehene* on 26 March 1888, after necessary procedures were taken by the king selecting organization [WILKS 1975: 580]. The date, 26 March 1888, fell on the *monodwo* [41] of the Akan calendar. About six years later, on 2 May 1894, the funeral of the former king was held. Then on 11 June which fell on [41] *monodwo* of the Akan calendar, the new king was enthroned after undergoing a formal enthronement ceremony (attestation ceremony). In this case, the funeral was not held for approximately ten years, as the successor to the throne was not decided. In other words, it could be said that the funeral of the former king could not be held until the new king was selected. Accordingly, with the funeral of the former king over, the new king was enthroned, after selection of one of the "lucky days" of the Akan calendar.

Case 1 analyses the mechanism of throne succession in relation to the custom that the new king was selected within forty-two days (according to the Akan calendar, commonly called the forty-day calendar) of the death of the former king, while Case 2 analyses the meaning of the forty-four-day reign and Case 3 analyses the relationship between the funeral and attestation ceremony. When these examples are considered together, it becomes obvious that the concepts contained in these archaic rites were combined in a complicated manner. It is significant to set up two ritual frameworks for discussing the concepts contained in the archaic rites employed in Asante throne succession. The first ritual framework is that in which necessary procedures were taken by those responsible for selection of the king, that is, the *Asantehemma* and councillors according to the mode of succession to throne. The second ritual framework is the one in which kings were formally enthroned after the former king's funeral and the attestation ceremony. The procedures of selecting the king via the first framework represent accession and succession, ritual processes well known in European kingship theory. Accession involves the ceremony of transferring the power to the new king as soon as the king dies, while succession involves the ceremony of public announcement that the king has been succeeded. This ritual framework is a conceptual framework commonly employed in the European kingship system. However, the second framework can

not be integrated into the first framework. This indicates that very complicated problems are involved.

When Cases 1, 2 and 3 are studied, it becomes obvious that the second ritual framework is not an extension of the first ritual framework, which consists of accession and succession. The second framework may be understood when the connection with the deceased former king's funeral is considered, as is seen in Case 3. This approach comes from the idea based upon the prerequisite that the kingship is transferred to the new king after the death of the former king. Consequently, the second framework constitutes a dimension *heterogeneous* to the one constituted from the first framework. Tense relationships comprising tactics and confrontation are involved in the ceremonies related to the second framework. In other words, it is concerned with the relationship between the new king's attestation ceremony and the former king's funeral.

In the first ritual framework, the new king should meet the requirement of being a son of an *Asantehemma* from a royal family called "Oyoko" and a father who belongs to a specific *ntoro* group (in particular, Bosommuru *ntoro*). This means that the first ritual framework was based on the principle of "blood." Accordingly, before the funeral of the king, the deceased king's princes and patrilineal grandchildren rushed into the streets of Kumase, killing indiscriminately whomever they met by shooting, stabbing, strangling and slashing, with a view to controlling the funeral of the deceased king. Thus, they produced tense relationships comprising the tactics and confrontation of the patrilineal principle against the matrilineal principle in which a new king was to be selected.

However, needless to say, the ceremony of throne succession usually took place while the death of the former king was well remembered, except for such special cases as Case 3, which included a long interregnum. This is the attestation ceremony in the second ritual framework. Accordingly, the flow from the former king's funeral and the attestation ceremony was an incessantly consistent ritual process. These rituals were conducted after the treatment of the remains was completed. To complete the treatment of the remains means to separate the *ōkra* (soul) of the king from the remains, since the attestation ceremony was established on the concept that the new king took in the *ōkra* (soul) of his predecessors, excluding those deprived of their kingship, into the body. Attestation ceremony was nothing but a ceremony conducted to allow the separated *ōkra* (soul) to be reaccepted. In other words, the second ritual framework was based on the principle of "soul."

The essential factor of the throne succession of Asante was to create a succession of the *ōkra* (soul) of the eternal kings. This means that the *ōkra* (soul) which separated from the remains of the former king was charged into the body of the new king through the ceremony of the kingship. Therefore, in the funeral of the former king, separation of the remains and the *ōkra* (soul) was extremely most important. This was the essential part of ritual process to complete the throne succession ceremony of Asante. Thus, it can be said that the essence of the throne

succession of Asante lay in the mutual-complementary relations between the principles of "blood" and "soul."

4. DEATH DUTIES IMPOSED BY THE KINGS

1) Kingship and Money

The Asante saying goes, "money is king (*sika ne ohene*).” Another common expression, *sika sene biribiara nsen bio* means that nothing is as important as money. There are similar expressions such as "not nobility but money makes a person famous (*odehye nhyehye na sika na ehhyehye*)," "if gold was not made use of, then one would simply call it sand (*wonni sika a, anka wofre no nhwea kwa*)" and "money is not put out to come back with no profit (*sika nko adidi nsan mma kwa*).” In Asante, *sika* means gold, and in a broader sense, it means money. By 1889 law, the British abolished the circulation of gold as money along the Gold Coast Colony. In 1901, the law was applied to the Asante. Until then, gold-dust (*sika futuro*) was used as circulating money. However, there was a discrepancy between in Kumase and other large towns, where it was essential to the urban economy, and in the villages, where it was not essential to the rural economy still largely involved in production for use. At the same time, as money was scarce, people greatly depended on loans. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, interest rates were fixed as high as 33 1/3 percent per month of forty-two days in the Akan calendar. In the latter part of the century, the standard interest rate dropped to 50 percent per half a year. In Kumase, however, the rates soared up to 20 percent per ten days. This can be attributed to the depressed Asante economy following the occupation of Kumase by the British military.

At the same time, the endemic shortage of gold-dust was also due to the Asante circulation of counterfeit known as *sika bone* ("bad gold" or "bad money"). The counterfeit was a mix of gold-dust and fine filings (*dutu*) of either brass or silver. The Seventy-Seven Laws of Okomfo Anokye, promulgated at the very beginning of eighteenth century, included an article that those engaged in the circulation of counterfeit gold should be punished with the death penalty [WILKS 1979: 2-4]. The *Akuroponhene* Gyamfi Kwadwo made a great fortune through counterfeiting. Upon Gyamfi Kwadwo's death, however, it was found that his gold pots were in fact filled with brass filings or *dutu* (the circulation of which was specifically forbidden by one of the laws of Okomfo Anokye). The *Asantehene* Osei Yaw Akoto (K8) ordered the corpe of Gyamfi Kwadwo to be exhumed. Gyamfi Kwadwo was then tried, the charge becoming pronounced, and his body was decapitated [WILKS 1975: 695; 1979: 4]. In another case, a Kumase goldsmith had his ear cut off for counterfeiting in 1867 [WILKS 1979: 4].

Issuing money was a right monopolized by the king. The authority of kingship was reinforced by this right. The power inherent in money tempted people into counterfeiting. Any money not issued by the king was counterfeit, however exquisitely it was made. Counterfeits not only interfered with the

circulation of real money but profaned the divinity of the king. Therefore, counterfeiting was punishable as a form of disrespect for a god. Counterfeiting also meant a profanation of the king's power, however, the temptation of counterfeiting was very strong. Counterfeiting meant the secret usurpation of the throne and a way to realize the dream of oneself dominating the world.

Since gold supplies were insufficient, court goldsmiths and silversmiths mixed gold with brass and silver; however, they considered only gold to be of supreme value, irreplaceable by anything else, and thus, since the purity of the gold was thought to be symbolic of the king's power—for only true gold is gold, just as only pure royal blood should be considered king's blood—the adulteration of gold symbolized the decline of the kingdom. In other words, the lack of pure gold, which served as the foundation of the Asante economy, seems to have occasioned a crisis of the original Asante identity. The shortfall in the gold seems to have meant that the kings' blood was reduced in purity, and subsequently weakened the kingship. When the British looted the royal palace in 1874, they found "several bags of brass-dust." First, the soldiers took them to be gold-dust. Later, however, they discovered that they were counterfeit to be mixed with real gold-dust and to be granted as rewards [BRACKENBURY 1874, II: 267]. Nevertheless, money issued by the king was genuine, even if made from a mixture of gold and brass or silver. While the kingship was divine, it was not clean, being often involved in plots, tricks, lies and incest. Money was not clean, either, often being used for fraud, trickery, swindling and gambling. In this sense, the Asante proverb, "money is king," is much to the fact.

2) The Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail

Among the important symbols of Asante kingship established during the reign of the first *Asantehene* Osei Tutu were the Golden Stool (*sika dwa*) and the Elephant Tail (*sika mena*).²³ The *sika dwa* symbolized the highest level at which political power was exercised (*otumi*), and the *sika mena* symbolized the highest level at which wealth was appropriated (*ogye*). The *Asantehene* was thus both "the powerful one (*otumfo*)" and "the taking one (*ogyefo*)" [WILKS 1979: 17; McCASKIE 1983: 29]. In Asante, political and legal authority was thought to fall down from the Golden Stool, while wealth was recognized to rise to the Elephant Tail. The Golden Stool symbolized the degree of exercised political and legal power, while the Elephant Tail was the symbol of appropriated wealth. Therefore, the categories for officeholders (*amansohwefo*) and the wealthy (*asikafo*) were in the corresponding relationship, respectively meaning those people who became wealthy by holding public offices and those who obtained offices by using money. In other words, the Golden Stool indicates the basic concept of the political system, while the Elephant Tail indicated that of the financial system. Thus the hierarchy of political authority was systematized as a closed apparatus

23) Derivatives of *sika mena* are *sika mmara* and *sika mmra*.

symbolized by the Golden Stool. On the other hand, surplus wealth was systematized by another closed apparatus symbolized by the Elephant Tail. Accordingly, the Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail were symbols which expressed the phenomena in two different symbolic powers of the world, powers whose relationship can be compared to the close relationship between kingship and money. The closeness of the relationship between the two symbols is expressed in the Asante expression that the *sika mena* metaphysically enfolds the *sika dwa* [WILKS 1979: 17-18].

The relationship between the Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail corresponded to that between kingship and money. Therefore, the relationship between the Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail can be interpreted in the following three ways: (1) the closed systems of authority and finance were the two aspects of the king's inseparable sovereignty, (2) the physical structure of authority was the same as that of wealth, and (3) successive and combined interaction between offices and wealth compose the basic concept of Asante politics [WILKS 1979: 18].

Ivor Wilks postulated that the relationship between the Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail was static ideology. To this analysis, T. C. McCaskie was critical as regards the symbolic meanings of the Golden Stool and the Elephant Tail. The Golden Stool (*sika dwa kofi*) of Asante had two profound symbolic meanings, as follows. The first is that the Golden Stool fell down from the sky on Friday [KYEREMATEN 1969: 36]. As is also observed in the story by Ewe that blacksmith's instruments fell down from the sky, stories about something falling down from the sky can be heard not only in West Africa but all over the world. The Golden Stool was an embodied form of the essence or "spirit" (*sumsum*) of Asante existence. Therefore, the Golden Stool was a sacred object. The Golden Stool was "a construct that framed individual and collective identity, and that mediated-through its singularity, its uniqueness—the basic referents of cultural discourse" [McCASKIE 1983: 29]. Second is that the Golden Stool was neither a vessel of religious principles nor an objectified cultural identity. By direct extension of these features, "it was also promulgated as being essential to the translation of that identity into the historic structures of authority and power, the juridical calculus of differentiation" [McCASKIE 1983: 30]. According to T. C. McCaskie, anthropologists tend to interpret the Golden Stool in the first meaning, while historians tend to adopt the second meaning. However, it should be noted that these two meanings are in inseparable mutually-complementary relations. In addition, the word *nnuraho* (enfold) used in the expression that the Elephant Tail enfolds the Golden Stool, meant "helper," if interpreted accurately. In other words, the Golden Stool indicated "the shape of the completed building," while the Elephant Tail indicated "the most effective method of procuring the constituent bricks" [McCASKIE 1983: 31].

As regards the Elephant Tail, the meaning of the symbolism of the elephant cannot be fully understood in a modern context. However, it is certain that the size, weight, mass and outright existence of the elephant are extraordinary. The

tails of *Mammalia* have various forms and functions, used for maintaining balance, driving flies away, grasping and fighting. Structurally, the Elephant Tail presides over the discharge or production of excrement. According to the Asante recognition, the Elephant Tail means “the association between excrement and wealth” [McCASKIE 1983: 31]. The Elephant Tail is the symbol of discharge and wealth. In this sense, the expression, “life is like a chicken coop ladder”,²⁴⁾ appropriately expresses the close relationship between kingship and money. Thus, by interpreting the meanings of the Golden Stool and Elephant Tail, it becomes obvious that the Golden Stool indicates the degree of exercised political power and that the Elephant Tail indicates the degree of appropriated wealth.

It is the basic principle of Asante law that only the *Asantehene* had legal right to put sparkling decoration on to chairs and to make an Elephant Tail from gold. Any conduct in violation of this principle was regarded as treason (charge of disrespect for the kingship). This charge or treason was applied to Adinkra, the king of Gyaman. The news that *Gyamanhene* Adinkra had made a Golden Stool for himself reached Kumase in or about 1811. A mission led by Kwame Butuakwa—then an official of the treasury in Kumase—visited Gyaman and persuaded him into handing the Stool over. After a while, Adinkra made another Golden Stool. When all the negotiations ended in a stalemate, a military invasion took place from 1818 to 1819 to suppress the rebellion by Adinkra [WILKS 1975: 271–272].

3) The Hidden Gold

The Elephant Tail symbolizes the high degree of appropriated wealth. Measures to acquire wealth vary from taxes to transit taxes, fees, fines and national taxes. Among them, the basic structure which yielded “productiveness” was the system of death tax [RATTRAY 1929: 107–119]. Death tax was introduced to Asante during the reign of Opoku Ware (K2). Following are descriptions about death tax of Asante:

“The king is heir to the gold of every subject, from the highest to the lowest.....The king contributes to the funeral custom to validate his claim, and usually bestows ten periguins [*peregwans*] of the gold dust on the successor, (if of a rich man,) who is in all cases liable for the debts of the deceased, though the amount is generally made good to him sooner or later, if he has influence with those about the king, or recommends himself to his notice personally” [BOWDICH 1966 (1819): 254].

“When a chief dies, all his goods without exception become the property of the king. He names the successor of the deceased, who he selects ordinarily from the family, though he could just as easily choose from among strangers and even from outside the nobility. According to the position which the one elected is called upon to take, the

24) This phrase comes from the title “*Life is Like a Chicken Coop Ladder*” (Columbia University Press, 1984) written by Alan Dundes.

king adds to his inheritance a certain quantity of gold and slaves" [BONNAT 1875–1876: 623].

In the system of the death tax, the *Asantehene* collected tax on the movable properties which the deceased person had obtained, and he distributed to their successors according to their rank. This system is called *awunnyade*, while the tax on immovable properties such as houses and land is called *ayibaude*. Here, the *awunnyade* system "was not an inheritance tax, but rather the expression in legislation of the fundamental feature of the Asante concept of wealth—symbolized in the *sika mena*" [WILKS 1979: 20]. One Asante saying goes, "money is splendid, but heirs are rare (*sika ye fe na opegyafo ye na*)".

As regards Asante political history, great amounts of well-classified references are available for the period between 1867 and 1896. This period is notable for its ongoing tense conditions. During the reign of Kofi Kakari (K10) and Mensa Bonsu (K11), extremely tense states continued and these kings were forced into dethronement. It is said that, due to this tension, Kumase became vulnerable to the attack by the British [ARHIN 1983: 95]. Kings deprived of their kingship were regarded unclean and were no longer respected. How the death tax was disposed of after the dethronement of these kings is an interesting theme.

The key to this theme is the location of the national treasury where gold possessed by the nation was kept. In the nineteenth century, "the Great Chest of the Treasury" (*adaka keseē*) was placed in the royal palace, in *damponkeseē* which meant "the huge room." According to the record, at the time of the demise of Kwaku Dua I (K9) in 1867, the national treasury included over 400,000 ounces of gold-dust, which was approximately 15,000,000 pounds at the rate of 3.6 pounds per ounce in the weights and measures of the nineteenth century [WILKS 1975: 414–418; McCASKIE 1986: 4]. In accordance with the mode of throne succession, Kofi Kakari (K10) was selected as a successor. This king was enthroned, entrusted with a task of abolishing the unfair authoritarianism of the former king. It was of vital importance to improve the financial states. The amount of gold possessed by the nation was unknown. However, while this king was flexible and generous, he was notorious for wasting the national financial sources. This king is said to have had 3,333 wives (The number 3 is a sacred number). There can be no doubt that enormous sums of money were needed to provide daily allowances to these wives and to pay the servants working in the royal palace [ANTI 1974: 23]. Furthermore, this king unfairly appointed his favorite men as councillors [McCASKIE 1983: 37]. This king reigned for approximately seven years. He is assumed to have been, killed by poisoning or a curse.

As a successor of this king, Mensa Bonsu (K11), his real brother, was selected. After being in the position for about nine years, he was dethroned on 8 March 1883 under tense circumstances. In the following year, the king was imprisoned together with Afua Kobi (Q9), the real mother of the former king. It is certain that financial procedures came to a standstill due to the domestic conflicts which lasted for several

months before his dethronement. In the palace, the normal court trials in which disputes over land property were reconciled, did not proceed. People who did not have stable jobs, called *nkwankwaa*, occupied the palace and put the capital city of Kumase into confusion. On the same day, the king was imprisoned in a village called Sawua. Two days later, he was transferred to a village called Abrade, ten miles southeast of Kumase. T. C. McCaskie wrote that the short stay in Sawua was interesting, involving various problems.

Mensa Bonsu secretly brought out 3,200 ounces of gold (11,520 pounds) from Kumase to Sawua. According to the same source, he entrusted *Sawuahene* Saaman Akyampon with the money. To hide it? However, explanations previously offered do not exceed the realm of guess work. One authoritative source gave the following account: Mensa Bonsu brought out a lot of national funds to Sawua for himself. He was found to have handed more than 3,200 ounces of gold to Sawuahene, and, before leaving for Abrade, he buried accessories worth 1,000 *mperedwan* (8,000 pounds) and a jewelry box (*apem brɔtoa*) containing 1,000 *mperedwan* (8,000 pounds) in the toilet of his house. Another source said that, before leaving Abrade, he took out the gold he had hidden in his mattress and threw it into the toilet [McCASKIE 1986: 4-5].

This scene was described in detail as follows: "Before he left Kumase, Mensa Bonsu filled a mattress with gold. He always slept on the mattress at Kwabena Nkatia's (sic) uncle's house. He did not even go to the toilet. He made a pit in his house for his shit (faeces). He did not leave the house. ...Mensa Bonsu heard the Asantes (Kumasi office holders) wanted him to return to Kumase. He put the mattress over the pit. He cut it with a knife. The gold drained into the pit. The Saawua people shared all the gold. When they heard the Asantes wanted Mensa Bonsu to come back to Kumase, the Saawua people ran away to the coast. ...They did not want to give up the gold" [LEWIN 1974: 146-147].

It is impossible to analyse the historical documents anatomically. However, Mensa Bonsu (K11) did not only collapse the financial system of the Asante Nation, but also profaned the value symbolized by the Elephant Tail. His hiding the gold degraded the value of the Golden Stool both ideologically and psychologically. The Asante Nation (*Asanteman*) belonged to the *Asantehene*. Kings took charge of the Golden Stool and assets for the Asante Nation (*Asanteman*). The kings expressed moral and practical entity. Mensa Bonsu, who conducted financial reform of the nation during these tense circumstances, has been evaluated in different ways. This king was imprisoned in England and died in 1896 in a village called Praso. In 1910, his body was exhumed and reinterred in Kumase [McCASKIE 1986: 6]. Considering that the remains of the kings deprived of their kingship were never buried in the royal mausoleum, this means that the Asante regarded Mensu Bonsu as a king. However, he has been said to have degraded gold, women and all valuable things. The Elephant Tail obviously turned out to be no longer a valid concept at the end of the nineteenth century.

Mock kings and millionaires appeared with the fall of the kingship, while with

the decrease of the national funds, counterfeiting became rampant. Thus, in Asante history, upheavals were frequent at the transition periods. Proliferation of adulterated gold and counterfeit money containing brass or silver in a sense were also deformed products of society at these transition periods of history. In the Asante history, kingship and money have a close relationship, while functioning as two symbolic "powers" of the world. However, when royal financial policy depending on the proliferation of gold collapsed, then, a medium which had the same value as gold was invented. People had the illusion that the medium was always replaceable with gold. The background of this final "deformed product" seems to have lain in this illusion. This means that the times underwent a transition from the physiocratic idea that gold should be gold, to the mercantilistic idea that a coin could represent gold symbolically.

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