THE CIMMERIAN DARKNESS OF INTRIGUE:
QUEEN MOTHERS, CHRISTIANITY AND TRUTH
IN AKUAPEM HISTORY

BY

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I. INTRODUCTION: 'YOU LIE TO MAKE YOUR CASE GOOD'

In the early 20th century, in the small Ghanaian kingdom of Akuapem, the identity of two kings was determined by a judicial procedure that lasted many years and involved a series of linked interpretations, re-interpretations, and counter-interpretations of the past by adversaries arguing the same questions and playing by the same rules of evidence and truth (cf. Robertson 1973, Werbner 1969, Middleton 1960, and others). The protagonists defined the case as one concerning the effect of Christianity on political organization. Conceptually the issue was rather how Christianity as an idiom was used in politics, given that Christianity and ancestor worship (which validates chieftaincy) were considered mutually incompatible. The problem arose when a Christian Queen Mother chose not to sever her ties to Christianity upon installation. The chiefs (while not denying the effect of a particular individual’s strong and winning personality) framed the problem as one of personhood: was the definition of a person inherent in the individual or in the performance of the role?

The case raises a related question: why focus on the Queen Mother when the real power lies with the king? The reasons are two: she alone is critical in validating the king’s royal ancestry and thus legitimacy; and in a highly formal culture stressing harmony and consensus, ambiguity and indirection are applauded for not being final and disruptive.

This paper is about power and process, concepts which lie at the heart of anthropology. It focuses on an historical incident for which there is extensive archival material in the form of Government Enquiries held in the then Gold Coast by British colonial officials. These Enquiries include verbatim accounts of what the witnesses
actually said, followed by legal arguments as to their political meanings by the officials. I have supplemented these with commentaries by present-day Akuapem elders.

The long-lasting case concerns which of two women, one Christian and one not, was the legitimate Queen Mother. On the surface the confusion was religious: the Queen Mother-elect, the senior woman of the royal family, being Christian, did not want to perform the traditional ‘customs’ for the ancestors, and therefore allegedly relinquished or delegated her power to her niece, a non-Christian. The question was whether it was her ritual duties alone that were delegated and the junior woman then claimed to be senior because she performed the rituals; or whether the position was declined and given to the younger woman who accepted it but being so junior was not allowed to take overt political responsibility. The crucial question was, in fact, the identity and validation of the king; the two Queen Mothers were manipulated by two rival kings each of whom needed their support to legitimize his own position. By invoking the behaviour of a Christian Queen Mother to frame the matter, outright denial of either king’s legitimacy was avoided. (The protagonists are dead, but the case has resonance not least because the present Queen Mother is herself a Christian.)

The case therefore points first to the precise political and ritual role played by the Queen Mother: In what sense is she an ‘essential ingredient’ (Cohen: 1977) in the nature of royal power and authority? Secondly, it illustrates the sanctioning function of oral and written histories in the service of political segmentation (Robertson 1973: 57), the invention of histories and the manipulation of genealogies, the casual will to deceive and the need to believe, and the nature of truth and untruth as it emerges in legal process. The style of the legal discourse was vicious, base and aggressive: it was clear to the British that the ‘facts’ varied widely with their reporter and that both sides were lying— a reflection of their conflicting interests. Neutrally, Robertson (1973: 57) has written

Truth is a matter of political incorporation, the recognition that rival truths exist being no more than an acknowledgment of political opposition.

Akuapem people are cognisant of this, but, of course, with considerably more affect. Discussing the case in the 1980s, an elder remarked with patent despair: ‘In politics, you tell lies to make
your case good'. This does not necessarily make the lies palatable, except perhaps for the liar. The psychological and political implications are morally vexing and run as a leit motif throughout this paper, for, in so far as knowledge gives power, lies affect the distribution of power (Bok 1978: 19). In this sense, the problem of truth-telling illuminates the relationship between coercion and deception, for as Bok has aptly said,

Deceit and violence—these are the two forms of deliberate assault on human beings. Both can coerce people into acting against their will... But deceit controls more subtly, for it works on belief as well as on action. (1978: 18)

By examining the strategies of argument adopted in this long recurrent legal case and the participants' conscious play of tradition against Christianity, the subtlety of particular kinds of control, the extent to which they are practiced and the manner in which they relate to public accountability emerge along with grave suspicion that many of the 'lies' have over the years been accepted as truth.³

_Akuapem: an eastern Akan kingdom_

The Akuapem kingdom in the hills of southeastern Ghana was established in 1733 by warriors from Akyem Abuakwa who, having allegedly been invited by the indigenous Guan to aid them against their Akwamu overlords, stayed and set up a kingdom with themselves as the rulers (Kwamena-Poh 1973). The kingdom is heterogeneous, with matrilineal Twi-speaking Akan rulers in the capital of Akuropon, indigenous patrilineal Guan-speakers comprising the majority of the seventeen towns, and Twi-speaking Akwamu remnants and other Akan in the other towns. The early 20th century was a time of great change, growth of wealth, introduction of formal education and Christianity, and freeing of slaves. The state seems always to have been structurally fragile: over the years various towns have threatened to secede while the Akan rulers have repeatedly tried to change the structure of the kingdom to give themselves more power over the Guan. Confusion over the identity of the 'legitimate' office holders has sometimes occurred when disputing factions left the capital to establish exile-villages in the valleys.

Such was the background for this case which concerned the two uncontestably greatest and most controversial Akuapem kings: Nana Kwasi Akuffo and Nana Ofori Kuma; and their two Queen
Mothers: Nana Akua Oye (a Christian) and her non-Christian niece, Akua Asor. When Akuffo was destooled in 1907 he went into exile with Akua Asor and Akuapem was ruled by Ofori Kuma with Akua Oye as Queen Mother. When Ofori Kuma was destooled in 1920, Akua Oye joined him first in jail and then in exile. When he returned to office in 1931, Akua Oye had by then died and Akua Asor reigned as Queen Mother. Factions today reflect similar structural divisions as the Queen Mothers and the kings came from two lines within the royal sub-clan.

_Queen Mothers: the position is old, the name is new_

Before considering the case one must examine the nature of the Akan Queen Mother, which varies somewhat from one kingdom to another. Much that is misleading has been written about the office and duties of the Queen Mother: that she is literally the mother of a ruling king and therefore is, in fact, the real ruler; that she has special responsibilities for the welfare of women, adjudicating disputes, and administering laws to ensure women are not sexually exploited; that (more fancifully) she is the High Priestess of a cult associated with women and the moon. There has also been a good deal of fantasy about the idealized role of a senior woman in a matrilineal society—much inaccurate assumption has taken the place of ethnographic observation.⁴

The structure of political power is replicated at different levels of Akuapem society. To talk about kings (s. OMANHENE) requires discussion of chiefs (s. OHENE) and ABUSUA PANYYIN (elder or head of a lineage, who is always male). Similarly discussion of the Queen Mother (OHEMMAA or OHEMMEA⁵) necessitates mention of ABEREWATIA or OBA PANYYIN, the female head or senior woman of a matrilineage: the two words are interchangeable. When a Black Stool⁶ is attached to a sub-clan the position of ABEREWATIA is of great importance, and for this the term OHEMMAA is sometimes very loosely used. Akuropon people say that originally there were no Queen Mothers, only ABEREWATIA. The term OHEMMAA has been adopted for the elder woman of the king's lineage (who is usually not his actual mother): 'her position is old; it is the name that has changed.'

OHEMMAA is a gender specific term for Queen Mother. OHENE means chief, and the suffix MEAL/BEA indicates that it is a woman, but OHEMMAA is not simply a female chief. Formerly, there were no
female chiefs: today a woman is occasionally made a sub-chief and is referred to by the nongenderized title,7 not by the term Ohemmaa. The word Queen Mother is an English translation of Ohemmaa, as was used for Queen Victoria, the ‘Queen Mother’ of the Empire. Yet the meaning is neither that of the English Queen Victoria as a female ruling monarch, nor that of the present English Queen Mother, the widowed mother of the ruling monarch. In the Akuropon royal Asona sub-clan, there are now three houses or lines which (since 1959)8 rotate to provide the king; there is one oba panyin for each house, but there is only one Akuapem Queen Mother from this entire sub-clan. If a woman is too old or too weak to hold the official position of Ohemmaa herself, she remains the aberewatia, the senior woman of the descent group, and a woman junior to her is appointed Ohemmaa. If there is no person senior to the Ohemmaa, she is then also the aberewatia or oba panyin.

More than her name is ambiguous. In Akuapem, as in Asante she is ‘the personification of motherhood’ (Rattray 1923: 85), yet in attire she differentiates herself from ordinary women by wearing her cloth draped in the traditional manner (much as a man) rather than a sewn blouse worn over a cloth wrapper.9 In the palace she sits on the king’s left (spatially associated with his ancestors);10 when she meets to discuss and adjudicate issues she is the only woman among the men. Although ambiguous in her political role, her actual gender is not problematic. Were she to be infertile, it would be deemed a personal tragedy, but would not disqualify her from the position. The Queen Mother is not the symbol of the kingdom. Despite the fact that a king in a matrilineal society does not produce his heirs, he must produce children to show that it is he, as symbol of the kingdom, who is fertile.

The Queen Mother is greatly respected, but is neither a queen nor a woman who rules; formal political and familial authority is exercised by men.11 The fact that succession is through women and not men does not mean that women are, or ever were (except exceptionally), Stool occupants. Nor do they have power over land for in Akuropon land is a scarce and hotly contested issue: it is ‘not a matter for women’ and not even the Omanhene has power to delegate stool lands.12

The association of women with reproduction and thus succession means that the position of Queen Mother is politically critical. Her ‘knowledge’ is necessary in the selection of a new king: she
legitimizes him and represents the lineage that produces him. His position is thus ultimately dependent upon hers. Yet when Akuapem men and women are asked what the Queen Mother does, the most frequent reply is 'nothing'. Her status is symbolic of the continuity of the royal descent line and so of the kingdom, but she exercises little actual authority.

The Queen Mother does 'nothing':

The Queen Mother's role can best be seen through her ritual involvement in four situations. In the annual Odwira festival\(^\text{13}\) she is the symbolic link to the matrilineal ancestors (by weeping) and personifies nurturing 'motherhood' (by giving food). In arbitrations she is invoked metaphorically as the ultimate decision-maker (the symbolic creator and destroyer). In the king's enstoolment rite she legitimates the selection of a proper successor (Gilbert 1987). Finally, she may be instrumental in removing an incompetent or unpopular king.

On the first day of the new year, on Odwira Wednesday, the Queen Mother goes to the palace at dawn to weep for those who have died in the previous year. Only then may all the town mourn. Women are repositories of emotion—of sorrow, suffering and remorse.\(^\text{14}\) At funerals, women are the official mourners: they are expected to weep;\(^\text{15}\) by so doing they symbolize lineage continuity. Women are links to the past and, by giving birth to future lineage members, also to the future.\(^\text{16}\)

The Queen Mother provides food for the royal ancestors and on the final day of Odwira, she 'feeds the town', by giving food to the townspeople on the first day on which the king eats yam. She is also the metaphorical 'mother' for the vulnerable and needy, and pleads for mercy for those in trouble.\(^\text{17}\)

The term aberewatia (as distinct from Ohemmaa) is used metaphorically as the ultimate appeal or uncontestable arbiter in decision making: she, the 'Old Lady', is cited to resolve conflict and create an impression of consensus in contentious state, lineage, or personal relationships.\(^\text{18}\) Aberewatia thus refers to lineage status, nurturance and justice, whereas Queen Mother refers to a political position in the state.

Finally, the Queen Mother plays a direct political role in the enstoolment and destoolment of a king. Succession to the kingship
is indeterminate, and besides genealogical legitimacy depends on an elusive quality of ‘character’. In addition, lineage membership may also prove uncertain if there is suspicion of slave ancestry. Civil war threatens whenever the kingship falls vacant: while the Senior Divisional Chief (Kurontihene) is Regent and garners most respect, it is the Queen Mother who inhibits the violence of an interregnum. The Queen Mother ‘knows’ who is eligible to be the new king as she is the recognized authority on royal genealogy: without her participation a king cannot be enstooled. For this reason were both the Omanhene’s and the Ohemmea’s Stools to be simultaneously vacant, the post of Queen Mother would be filled first.\textsuperscript{19}

In the election of a king, the kingmakers must consult the Queen Mother on the eligibility of the candidate. In recognition of her affirming his legitimacy, the new king swears his oath of allegiance first to her:

You are my mother and you have made me chief. I swear \textit{Wukuda ne Sokoda} [the state oath] that I shall always obey you. Any advice you give me, I shall accept it and I will serve you. If I do not then I break this oath.

The idiom that the king’s Stool ‘belongs’ to the Queen Mother is particularly compelling when joined with her customary right to criticize the king in open court,\textsuperscript{20} something other elders may not do. How much power she actually has to destool the king and thus to destroy her creation depends upon her own informal skills and inclinations as well as those of the various elders in the intrigues and manipulations of chieftaincy politics (the rules of which may subtly be redefined with every litigation).

As head of all the women in the state, the Queen Mother is said to have taken part in ceremonies pertaining to women, such as puberty rites (now no longer performed) and ‘out-dooring’ rites for infants.\textsuperscript{21} Formerly she organized the performance of Aworabe, a ritual to keep away disease or bring rain in which nude\textsuperscript{22} women pound the street with pestles at night. This rite drawing upon women’s dangerous creative power is rarely performed today and the present Queen Mother does not participate in it.

While actively concerned in the enstoolment and possible destoolment of the king, once the Omanhene is actually reigning the Queen Mother’s responsibilities are minor. It appears that in the 1930s the Queen Mother took no part in ‘Executive affairs’.\textsuperscript{23} She
might attend Tribunals or the State Council, but she was not bound to do so, she had no vote, and the Chief and Councillors gave her whatever Tribunal fees they pleased: she had no share fixed by custom. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Queen Mother was a member of the Akwapim Traditional Council and as such participated in legislative and judicial processes. But to argue that her formal power had increased would be a distortion: These matters rest on the talents and tastes of the individuals and on the current micro-politics of the kingdom.

The significance of the Queen Mother's position and the statement that she 'does nothing' cannot be understood by looking at her role in isolation. She holds one of three distinct but complementary roles that are crucial to the structure and continuity of the state. One is that of the king himself: always male, always 'made' by certain ritual officials, who at his accession transform him from an ordinary man (although of a kingly lineage) into a sacred king, and always non-Christian. Most kings since the beginning of this century have been brought up as Christian, but even in this almost totally Christian kingdom it is still not possible for the ruling king himself to be one. The second is that of the Kurontihene, Senior Divisional Chief of the state, chief of the capital town Akropon, Regent when the king is absent from the state, representative of the common citizens, with an important role in election of a king. He is of Akwamu ancestry and so, although Akan, is in symbolic opposition to the ruling Akyem clans. There has never been a Christian Kurontihene. The third is that of the Queen Mother. The king and Kurontihene are given legitimate authority by the state officials. The Queen Mother has little direct state authority and her legal jurisdiction is limited and ill-defined. Her main attribute is the moral quality of wisdom, knowledge, emotion, compassion, all that pertains to her as a woman and is not bestowed by male officials. As the senior woman of the state she has perhaps more of this quality than do other women, but it remains womanly and innate. She should not be a Christian, but several Queen Mothers have been, including the present incumbent.

The nature of all these office holders is ambiguous. The king is a sacred person, symbolically between life and death. The Kurontihene is not a royal Asona yet he stands at the very heart of the polity. The Queen Mother is symbolically in some respects not a woman, but a person with the innate quality of a woman who
moves in a man's sphere of action; a person without formal political authority in a court of male power; and in recent history, a Christian in a formally defined non-Christian context.

Christianity and custom in conflict

In the ever-changing political climate of chieftaincy affairs, indirection is zealously celebrated and religion is sometimes used as an idiom to soften, mediate, or camouflage political conflict and to diffuse situations of stress.

The Basel mission came to Akuropon in the early 19th century; their first converts were mostly slaves, the poor and outcast, and the children of kings (Middleton 1983). A man is responsible for the education of his children but in a matrilineal system they do not succeed him. One way a king could provide for his children was to send them to the mission schools; later, children of adehye (royals) were sent.26

In the early 20th century reasons for converting to Christianity were as many as today. While many converted for genuine reasons of belief, Christianity increasingly became a fashionable religious alternative with which one acquired 'respect' (obu), which in turn was displayed in prestigious burials.27 Christianity could be used to avoid the unpleasant societal consequences of personal behaviour. Customarily a sick person was sent to an oracle to discern the cause of illness: should one fear being accused of witchcraft, conversion would 'hide his shame', for Christians formally and publicly discourage the consultation of oracles. Christianity could also be used to extricate oneself from awkward political or social responsibilities. A chief might not say that he wished to resign because there was not enough money to perform his duties; but he might diplomatically do so to become a Christian. A man might tell his children that he would not convert because it would require that he divorce all but one of his many wives, or conversely he might use Christianity as an excuse to divorce a more recently acquired spouse. Belief transcends obligation: therefore there is no argument. These strategies were clearly as useful in the early years of this century as today.

Because of incompatibilities between Christianity and ancestral worship and because rituals involving blood sacrifice are integral to customary worship, a Christian upon being made a chief is no
longer accepted by the Presbyterian church as a fullstanding member who receives Holy Communion and chiefs customarily cease being Christian upon installation (when a sheep is ‘cut’ on their feet). Belief in, and surreptitious worship of, deities and ancestors persists alongside Presbyterianism by many Akuapem citizens but this is deplored by the Presbyters who believe that those Christians who also serve ancestors and deities ‘misplace’ their worship.

Nana Kwasi Akuffo (reign 1895-1907 and 1920-1927) was the first educated Akuapem king to have formerly been a practising Christian. He was followed by Owusu Ansa (reign 1907-1914), a Presbyterian teacher before becoming king, and then by Ofori Kuma (reign 1914-1918/1920 and 1931-1941), who was a barrister and solicitor practicing before the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony before becoming Omanhene. When Ofori Kuma was enstooled, he was blessed by the missionaries in the Presbyterian Chapel: his troubled rule was later attributed to the fact that he had refused to have anything to do with the royal ancestors.

II. ‘A sorry record of unedifying disputes’

The ambiguous role of the Queen Mother in the organization of the Akuapem kingdom lay at the core of a long and still unresolved legal dispute. The case material comes from a Government Enquiry in 1907 to determine whether Nana Kwasi Akuffo was lawfully and customarily destooled and from other Enquiries instituted in 1920 and 1922 to determine whether Nana Ofori Kuma had been lawfully re-elected as Omanhene. The summaries of these Enquiries form an enlightening source for the anthropological interpretation of historical events. Both the Minutes of the Enquiries, containing the actual testimony, and the retrospective views of present day elders (who were present during the crucial events) provide an ‘internal’ perspective on the material.

It is difficult to discuss contested historical events, especially those that bear on ongoing matters of legitimization for political power, because such events refuse to remain historical. The following claims and counterclaims are presented not to judge their validity, but rather better to understand the position of the Queen Mother and the nature of legal process and decision-making.
The 1907 Enquiry lasted sixteen days and included thirty three witnesses despite being a case in which according to Mr. Robertson, the Secretary for Native Affairs,

...the facts were obvious, the procedure well recognised and the deposition of the king approved by the entire population of the state with a unanimity which is probably without parallel in the history of the Country.\textsuperscript{33}

The case was lengthy ‘to prevent the possibility of any future complaint by Akuffo that his arguments were not granted the fullest hearing’. Some of the evidence from the 1907 Enquiry was re-examined in 1920 and 1922. In one of the 1920 Enquiries an Appeal Record compiled in six weeks included a book of 550 pages. District Commissioner Saxton submitted a report in 1922 which included nineteen Enclosures. In the preamble he noted that

The maze of previous evidence, the intricacy of the questions, the shrewd contradictions and interpretations have made definite proposals difficult. I trust however the report taken as a whole may throw some light on the Cimmerian darkness of intrigue, family jealousies and grasping finances...

I doubt whether any decision will procure immediate peace, neither will revenge and prejudice be stamped out on either side. However Government is well able to take steps to ensure law and order. There should be no equivocation in impressing both parties with this fact and so removing the obsession that this is an Ireland in Akwapim.\textsuperscript{34}

Mr. Saxton concluded that the most important question for decision, that of whether Akua Oye or Akua Aso was the \textit{Aherewatia} or the Queen Mother, proved impossible to resolve; side issues relating to the Constitution of Akuapem, such as the requisite conditions for a valid election, crept in which he was anxious to settle in order ‘to regularise a Constitution which had withered away almost to a shadow’.

The case was fraught with contradictions and the continual introduction of new evidence by protagonists who interpreted events and customs to their own advantage. Yet all the many documents, in fact, confronted only a few basic problems: Who is the Queen Mother? Who has superiority: the Queen Mother or the state? What is the role of the state? Can the role of Queen Mother be divided into secular and ritual aspects? And how exactly does the mechanism of rotation of royal lineages work? At different times the writers gave differing weight to these questions largely because of the changing positions of the witnesses. The protagonists clearly played on what they saw were the preferences and leanings of the various commissioners in order to gain an advantage over the rival
factions. As well as the two claimants and their lineages within the royal sub-clan, the two Queen Mothers, and the citizens (represented formally by the Kurontihene and at times taking to the streets and acting as a Greek chorus), the commissioners also found themselves cast as surrogate protagonists.

The Embryo of Revolution under the Guise of Christianity

To understand the case we must begin before Akuffo’s reign during that of Nana Kwame Fori I (1880-1894), when the position of Asontihene, leader of the young men and next in line for the king’s position, fell vacant. Many believed that the new incumbent should have been Owusu Ansa, son of Kwame Fori’s sister Akua Oye, but Akua Oye refused to nominate any of her sons, claiming they were too young. Kwame Fori’s other sister also ‘withheld’ her children. So the genealogy was traced one generation higher and Akuffo, grandson of Kwame Fori’s mother’s sister (from a different ‘house’ of the royal line) was chosen Asontihene. Then Kwame Fori died suddenly. Any sudden death is inauspicious, and Akuffo’s opponents maintained he had killed Kwame Fori as he was eager to be king. Akua Oye, allegedly fearing Akuffo, then ‘withheld’ her children from succeeding as Omanhene and Akuffo ultimately succeeded Kwame Fori. The factions persisted, however, and throughout Akuffo’s reign many of the opposition remained in their villages and cocoa farms, refusing to come to Akurupon to serve him.

During Akuffo’s first reign (1895-1907) the Asontihene Stool was left vacant. Owusu Ansa, the obviously rightful heir, was still ‘withheld’ by his mother Akua Oye, and no one else appeared both eligible and popular. Akuffo then allegedly transferred the regalia of the Asontihene stool to himself and disposed of Stool land in order to pay for the new regalia he commissioned to display his power: golden hats, arm and breast ornaments, golden stools, swords and sandals. To check Akuffo’s growing despotism, Akua Oye was persuaded to allow her son Owusu Ansa to be made Asontihene. Akuffo then refused to give up the Asontihene’s Stool and its associated property. Akua Oye, to prove her own position as senior woman (abereawatia) of the royal sub-clan with responsibility for the disposition of Stool land, then accused the Asonahene, the senior Asona non-royal chief, of having bought the Asontihene
Stool land without her consent. She then demanded that Akuffo hand over the *Asonkohene* Stool to Owusu Ansa. Akuffo agreed and instructed the Stool house attendant to comply, but still refused to release any of the lands attached to the Stool. Akua Oye objected and instituted formal destoolment charges against Akuffo. She charged him with having sold and converted to his own use without necessary consent Stool lands and gold and silver regalia and with failing to look after the descendants from Nana Kwame Fori's line. These were classic destoolment charges.

Akuffo was summoned to the hearing by the chiefs but did not attend; he was therefore destooled *in absentia* in 1907. The Queen Mother then demanded he return the royal Stools. Akuffo armed his followers with guns and cutlasses, as did Owusa Ansa: a riot was imminent. The police were called to see that peace prevailed. Mr. C. Napier Curling, Commissioner of the Eastern Province, described the conditions in the capital:

> Our arrival with a strong police force averted what would have been a serious riot.... Whether what took place is a destoolment in accordance with Native Customary law or not I am not a sufficient authority on the subject to say but...the Chiefs agree that it is, on the principle apparently that they form the highest native Tribunal in the land and the only one before whom a subject can appeal for redress against the Omahene—and that if the Omahene can treat this Tribunal with contempt there can be no redress for anyone against him except the British Courts which the Chiefs hold and apparently reasonably is not in accordance with Native Customary law. While I remain here order will be maintained...  

Curling stopped the rejoicing in town as premature and called for an Enquiry into Akuffo's destoolment, believing that, were the destoolment not confirmed, there would be recurrent disturbances and breaches of the peace.

The Enquiry attempted to establish who had the customary authority to destool the king and who occupied the critical position of Queen Mother: Akua Oye or her niece Akua Asor. This was where Christianity entered. It was claimed that Akua Oye did not want to prepare food for the ancestral stools and deities because it was contrary to Christian teachings, so she told her sister's daughter, Akua Asor, to do it for her. Those who supported Akua Oye, I was told, averred that this did not mean that Akua Asor was *Ohemmea* while Akua Oye was alive. Akua Asor was far younger than Akua Oye, she was merely an *Opetetohemma* (an imaginary position, literally: 'Queen Mother who sprinkles mashed yam').
Akua Oye could have sent any of her ‘grandchildren’ to do this—that would not mean they were senior to her. But Akuffo and his supporters declared that as Akua Asor fed the ancestors she was the Queen Mother. The question was whether the actual performance of the custom was sufficient to make the performer the Queen Mother, or whether this ritual could simply be delegated. The answer was not simple to determine. Another question concerned the putative existence of a Black Stool for the Queen Mother: were these disputed rites for the king’s Black Stools or for her own?

Akua Oye testified that the position was hers:

Of our grandmother from whom the family is descended I am the Elder......I gave them Kwasi Akuffo. He is the elder of my [classificatory] children. I do not mean my own [biological] children. Akuffo’s grandmother is the elder sister of my mother. I took an action against the Omanhene...... Such an action by the Head of the family brought against the person managing the family is not uncommon...... The oman is my witness. If I had not a hand in it, it would not have been regular. I am the one who should have to say because it is I who gave him to the oman.43

Akuffo attempted to show that she was not the qualified Queen Mother and therefore had no right to destool him. He stated that a Queen Mother’s Stool had been offered to Akua Oye but given by her to Akua Asor. Akua Oye replied that no Stool had been offered to her: ‘I do not know of it’ she said. Akuffo alleged that this was an admission that Akua Asor was on the Stool and not Akua Oye. When, later in the testimony, Akuffo repeated that a Stool had been offered to Akua Oye, she denied it and countered that she had been asked to succeed to be his ‘mother’, but refused the property.

I was by nature head of the family already...... I was asked to make the funeral custom for [your mother], but I refused...... I refused to succeed to the property and perform the custom...... The Oman recognized me afterwards as head of the family. Akua Asor made the funeral custom...... I have witness that Akuffo has created one [black Stool] lately for Akua Asor. She carries out the custom of giving chop [food] to departed spirits [ancestors]. You have made a stool in memory of your Mother. I heard this but you have not informed me.44

Other testimony confirmed this.

The existence and time of creation of this Black Stool therefore became a crucial issue. Those today who support the Ofori Kuma faction think that Akuffo made this Ohemmea stool to legitimize his line. They note that it was never mentioned for earlier Queen Mothers and that Akua Oye said she was not aware there was any
such stool. They contend that what she objected to originally was preparing food for the Omahene’s stools. It was here the confusion entered.

In the Enquiry, one Akuropon elder testified that Akuffo was nominated by Akua Oye, the elder of the family, but that he had neither heard of a Queen Mother stool nor of another senior woman being substituted for Akua Oye. Others agreed, stating, ‘Akua Oye is your mother…’

An Asona elder who was a Presbyterian minister testified that he had never heard of any Stool and that because of her Christianity Akua Oye avoided performing customary rites and Akua Asor was appointed to do them. He said,

Awura Oye is the elder woman of the family. She has been so since the death of her mother…. I have never heard of any [woman’s] stool…. I remember that Akua Oye refused to perform certain customs, and another was appointed to do them. This… does not prevent the elder—Akua Oye—from being recognised as Elder of the family…..
I have not seen a stool in my Mother’s house…..
I know that…Akua Asor succeeded to the estate of Akua Sakyiamabea [the former Queen Mother]. I know that Akua Asor is the one who performs the ceremonies attached to the stools.47

Akuffo and his supporters testified that a Queen Mother Stool did exist and was held by Akua Asor because Akua Oye and her younger sisters refused the stool ‘owing to Fetish Custom.’48

Further confusion was now introduced into the evidence. Two Asona elders professed that the Queen Mother worshipped not a Black Stool, but a ‘doll’ or ‘image’:

Akua Asor occupies the Ohememea’s [stool]. There is something called Aberewatia for which the occupier of the Stool has to pour rum and give food. It is a doll made in the form of a woman. Akua Asor performs worship to this every 40 days.49

Finally there was the testimony of Akua Asor herself:

A. I perform ceremonies as to worship of the stool. As regards occupation of the stool he [Akuffo] is my son…..
I am only elder over my Mother through worship of the stool [‘mother’ here refers to mother’s sister, i.e. to Akua Oye.] Owusu Ansa refused stools several times—Akua Asor after hesitation states she offered it to him.
Q. So you told Owusu Ansa and he occupied it?
A. When Kwasi Menaku [Asonahene] asked me I told him to ask his mother Akua Oye, to give him to help to look over the Oman.50

The Enquiry ended inconclusively and matters rested there for the time being.
The second case

Akuffo was destooled in 1907. He was succeeded by Owusu Ansa, who died in 1914, allegedly from poison, and was followed by Ofori Kuma. Soon after, dissention broke out again; another Enquiry was held in 1915 resulting in a reconciliation, but it did not last long. In 1919 Ofori Kuma abdicated and in 1920 a case was brought before the Supreme Court in which the state, as plaintiff, claimed that they had elected ex-Omanhene Akuffo as the new king but could not complete the enstoolment without the paraphernalia of the Stool which Ofori Kuma (defendant) refused to give up as he claimed he had not been deposed but had merely abdicated and then been re-elected.

The question now became who was king: Kwasi Akuffo or Ofori Kuma? The state (in the person of the Kuronithene) sued for the return of the royal property\textsuperscript{51} which had to be held by a regnant king and claimed that Ofori Kuma had not, in fact, been re-elected according to custom. Ofori Kuma affirmed he was selected by Akua Oye who was the Queen Mother; his opponents, however, declared that the Queen Mother was not Akua Oye, but her niece, Akua Asor. Ofori Kuma stated that by right of birth (i.e. in terms of seniority) Akua Oye still held the political office of Queen Mother, but she refused to perform the ritual functions of her office because she was a Christian and that only the sacrificial duty devolved upon her niece.\textsuperscript{52} The Queen Mother selects the Omanhene and her identification validates the election. Thus this was a critical issue for the second time.

The Supreme Court now entered into the matter: it was no longer a petty issue of keeping order in the streets. A number of issues had been raised and the town was again divided. In July 1920, Acting Chief Justice Mr. Wm. Thomas Porter noted that in the 1907 Enquiry:

Mr. Robertson [Secretary for Native Affairs] in his report admits to have had no doubt that Akua Oye is in fact Queen Mother and this at first seemed odd to me in view of the evidence of Akua Oye herself.....

'I have heard of a stool—I know it exists—anyone who occupies that stool is the grandmother of the Omanhene—She is the elder of the family—there is someone on that stool now—Akua Asor'.

It would appear that Mr. Robertson concluded that the powers of a 'Queen Mother' might be delegated without the 'Queen Mother' losing her position, viz: the right cannot be abrogated by desuetude and that whenever she cared to re-assume that position, she is entitled to do so by right of birth.
In view, however, of my findings, the question as to whether Akua Oye or Akua Asor is Queen Mother is not of any great importance although both sides have seriously contested this point—probably in view of future action.\textsuperscript{55}

Porter was mistaken and both sides did indeed contest the point. Acting Chief Justice Porter then found that, even assuming Akua Oye was Queen Mother and therefore the first step in re-electing Ofori Kuma had been taken, the other necessary steps to a valid election, namely the consent of the state by the Divisional Chiefs,\textsuperscript{54} which he was satisfied on the basis of documentary and oral evidence was necessary,\textsuperscript{55} had not been fulfilled, and so Ofori Kuma had still not been re-elected according to custom. As for the ‘ownership’ of the disputed Stool paraphernalia, he was convinced that it was Paramount Stool property. He cited the 1907 case brought against Akuffo to recover Stool property in which Ofori Kuma had himself stated the articles were Akuapem Stool paraphernalia; yet now Ofori Kuma was asking the Court to believe that there was no such Stool paraphernalia but that it was property of his ‘house’ or line. Porter concluded that Ofori Kuma had not been re-elected according to custom and that the articles in dispute were paraphernalia of the Paramount Stool of Akuapem. The Judgment was appealed.

In the Appeal, the Defence Counsel argued that the judgment of the Court was contrary to law and equity as the Plaintiff, \textit{Kuron-tihene} Yao Boafo, representing the state, was suing the Queen Mother, contrary to custom. This objection depended entirely on the question of whether Akua Oye or Akua Asor was Queen Mother. Chief Justice Smyly noted\textsuperscript{56} that in the 1907 Enquiry Mr. Robertson had held that Akua Oye was recognized as Queen Mother based on the fact that she had sued the head of the elder branch of Asona family on a land case and that she took away the stool property of the late \textit{Omanhene} Kwame Fori; further, she stated she was recognized by the state as head of the family when Kwame Fori died, and, if she was asked to perform the funeral custom, that showed she was recognized as head of family. But according to Justice Smyly, Mr. Robertson had ignored Akua Oye’s own evidence that after having denied all knowledge of the Ohemea or Queen Mother’s Stool, she admitted that she had heard of it, that she knew it existed, that it belonged to her grand-mother Ajua Asante... That anyone who occupied that stool was the grand-mother of the Omanhene, she is the elder of the family, that there was someone on this stool now, Akua Asor, though she
qualified this by adding Akuffo says she was placed on the stool, and goes on it was never offered to me. And... 'Every year when the chop is going to be given to the spirits Akua Asor is the one who does it, I mean the spirits of the grandmothers and grandfathers who have died already.'"

From this, pace Mr. Robertson, Smyly concluded that there was a stool known as the Ohemmea Stool and that Akua Oye was not the occupant, and therefore Plaintiff could not be held to be suing the Queen Mother.

In September 1920, the case was brought before the Supreme Court for Mr. Justice Ewen Reginald Logan to judge whether or not Ofori Kuma (who admitted he had abdicated on 12 June 1919) had been duly and lawfully re-elected as Omanhene of Akuapem. Mr. Logan noted that both parties agreed that for a valid election the king must be selected by the Queen Mother. The Defendant (Ofori Kuma) stated that he had been selected by Akua Oye who was the Queen Mother; that his selection had been approved by the Adonten Division and elders of Akropong; and that customary formalities such as the slaughter of sheep and being shown to the people in a palanquin had been performed; he added that the Nifa and Benkum Wings had no voice in the election of Omanhene. The Plaintiff (Kurontihene) contradicted this statement, asserted that the Queen Mother was not Akua Oye, but her niece Akua Asor, and that the consent of the Nifa and Benkum Divisions was essential. Mr. Justice Logan concluded that

Seeing that the Queen Mother selects the Omanhene, it is of great importance to ascertain who in fact was the Queen Mother. If Akua Oye is not the Queen Mother, first Defendant's election is invalid. Mr. Robertson, SNA...is of the opinion that Akua Oye is the Queen Mother, but it is difficult to see how he arrives at this conclusion in view of her own direct statement...that the stool has never been offered to her and that Akua Asor is now on the stool. The probability seems to be...that the stool was offered to Akua Oye and to Ajua Obuo her sister and refused by them because they were Christians and finally accepted by Akua Asor. [This] will perhaps also account for the somewhat curious statement made by [Kurontihene] Yao Boafo... that the late Omanhene was nominated by Akua Oye, Adjoah Obuo and Akua Asor. What we have to ascertain is—What were the conditions requisite for a valid election and has Ofori Kuma complied with them? It is I think very probable that the conditions are not very definitely established or generally known by the people themselves, which would account for the very different opinions given...'

...On the whole I come to the conclusion that whatever the de jure position may have been, the de facto and acting Queen Mother was Akua Asor and that she was the person who selected the Omanhene. It is possible that Akua Oye may have been in a sense the de jure Queen Mother, i.e. entitled to succeed to the vacant position on the death of the occupant and that she may
have been so regarded by some of the people without herself being aware of it, but it is not possible that she can have taken an active step such as selecting a new Omanhene without being aware of what she had done. I also think that the consent of the Nifa and Benkum was necessary to the election of the Omanhene..... It is admitted that the Nifa and Benkum [Divisions] did not agree to Ofori Kuma’s second election. It follows therefore that, in my view, for both reasons his election is invalid.\textsuperscript{58}

In 1921 the case was appealed to the Privy Council. At that time the Principal Defendant (ex-\textit{Omanhene} Ofori Kuma) was confined in Ussher Fort Prison.\textsuperscript{59} The appeal to the Privy Council was deemed essential because the Trial Judge had decided only that the paraphernalia in dispute belonged to the Paramount Stool. Akuffo returned to reign with Akua Asor in accordance with the Privy Council verdict, but it was still not clear who had the right to elect the king and which side the Government should support.\textsuperscript{60}

A final Enquiry was held by Mr. Saxton in October 1922. Recognizing that the question of the Queen Mothership became of great political importance about the time of Akuffo’s destoolment in 1908, Saxton tried to appraise himself of the history of the various branches of the royal lineage as it concerned the Queen Mother’s position: Nketiaa (the line of Ofori Kuma), Sakiyiea or Asantewa (the line of Akuffo) and Ama Oygaa (the then expelled Tutu branch). He thought that, if Akua Oye was Queen Mother, then she would have appointed Akuffo (Asantewa Branch); if Akua Asor assumed the role of Queen Mother, she would have appointed Owusu Ansa and Ofori Kuma (Nketiaa Branch) and he believed that only ‘One supposition must be correct and the only feature of interest is the change in the line of descent...’\textsuperscript{61} In this he was mistaken. The rules of matrilineal succession in Akuapem generally allow a junior person from the same generation to succeed before one from a lower generation while also making allowance for ‘character’: the basic rule is that the successor is the eldest male child by the eldest woman.\textsuperscript{62} The Queen Mother does not change at the same time as does the king, but only when her position falls vacant and the intricacies of Akuropon politics permit considerable pressure to be applied by subsidiary chiefs in a royal election. A Queen Mother could certainly appoint a king of a different line from her own (if she could not then the present rotation of kingly lines of the royal subclan would be impossible).

Saxton noted that Sakiyiamabea, the former Queen Mother, had died just prior to Akuffo’s election in 1895 and remarked:
it matters little whether Akua Oye or Akua Asor put him on the stool. Both were undoubtedly present—with the authority of age on the side of Akua Oye...  

Saxton thought that ‘apart from the point of view of Native Custom’ Akua Asor did not put Akuffo on the Stool as her mother was then living. And he percipiently noted that

This is where Christianity creeps in. The suggestion is that the whole sequence from Akua Oye to Akua Asor declined the position on the grounds of Christianity...

There is no reason to doubt that because of Christianity these women declined the position of Queen Mother, but Christianity is often used strategically, as a form of indirect discourse when someone wishes to refuse a position without having to divulge other underlying reasons.

The Problem of Christianity

Conversion to Christianity was at the heart of the case. Akua Oye was a forceful personality, a well-known and respected Christian, the wife of a Presbyterian minister and a Deaconess. The problem was whether her refusal to perform ‘heathen’ customs was equivalent to a refusal to be Queen Mother, or whether she could be the Queen Mother and delegate the ‘heathen’ rites as ‘unimportant’. Politics was also inextricably involved. Saxton pointed to Akuffo’s own evidence,

The late Queen Mother Akua Sakyiamabea died on the 1st May 1895. It was practically [i.e. properly or by customary law] the turn of Madam Akua Oye alias Mrs. Amelia Koranteng, the wife of late Rev. Koranteng of Akropong both cousins as family marriage and lawful one after the ecclesiastical principles (or after European marriage ordinance) in the year 1866. The custom of the country embraces according to choice any member of the congregation who will sever the connection between yourself and such society and would submit to the laws and customs of the country.

Rightfully amidst the Oman of Akwapim who were to attend to the funeral custom of the late Queen Mother, the position of the Queen Mothership was offered as custom demands to Akua Oye but repeatedly refused from all her heart as being only a mere Christian woman but wife of a Minister who is regarded as Deaconess in church principles, as Queen Mother position is attached with black Stool in connection with worshipping of Ghost and Fetishes. All of the principal people in the assembly advised her against the future, one week was appointed to her to consider. After the lapse of one week, she appeared in the assembly in the street followed by a good many members of the congregation and ministers. She there and then finally replied ‘She will never accept the offer upon the above mentioned grounds’.
The offer then passed to Madam Victoria Adjoa Obuo the first daughter of the late Queen Mother Akua Sakyiamabea who also refused upon the affairs of Christianity, also her youngest sister Afua Fofie alias Mrs. Caroline Newman who again refused the offer upon the same ground.  

Akua Oye concurred, saying that she had declined to succeed when asked and that she had refused to perform the funeral custom for Akua Sakyiamabea. An Asona non-royal elder explained that Kwame Fori had not allowed her to pour rum for Sakyiamabea because at the death of Ohene Yao (Akuffo’s mother’s brother) Akua Sakyiamabea took his money and did not deliver it to Akua Oye’s elder brother. So there was a squabble within the kingly lineage and Christianity was used as an idiom to express the discontent. Surely Akua Oye, as Deaconess and wife of a Presbyterian Minister, also faced genuine conflict of belief? Perhaps. But Akuffo’s evidence suggests otherwise:

From the very day Akua Oye refused the Stool detesting the ceremonies in connection with the stool she from then expressly made aversion to even permit any of her offsprings to be interned in the Royal Cemetery taking it to be pollution…. The principal Chiefs and Chiefs have met with her several times, but she ruled that she will never recant. Just this month…one of her eldest daughters…who had even gone astray from the principles of Christianity died in town, but according to her order sent, she was buried in the Christian Cemetery.  

The Presbyters (many of whom were royals) went along with these funeral arrangements which were clearly politically motivated.

During the reign of Nana Ofori Kuma, Akua Oye’s opposition to one of her ‘daughters’, Obuo, being buried in the Royal Cemetery nearly caused a riot: the body was eventually buried by the chief of the neighbouring town of Abiriw, proof that royal factional politics are not contained within the capital. Akua Oye, prevaricating, said that she opposed the burial ‘not on grounds of Christianity but because she was not properly approached’. Saxton concluded it was due to the feud between the Asantewa and Nketia branches represented by Akuffo and Akua Oye (seemingly a correct interpretation as Obuo, who died in 1920-21, was Akua Asor’s mother).  

Saxton was still uncertain about whether or not Akua Oye was really Queen Mother: ‘both sides aver differently.’ So he turned to ‘the effect of Native Custom’ which he suggested was ‘subject to the laws of opportunity like everything else’. When he asked if it would be possible for a king to be a Christian and follow the tenets of
Christianity at the expense of customary law, a broad discussion arose. The view was not generally accepted. Akuffo and Owusu Ansa were Christians who renounced its tenets when they became king. 'Ofori Kuma was one and apparently practiced the ritual if he did not abide by the tenets...''74 So, Saxton asked, 'why should not the same licence be allowed to a Queen Mother?' He concluded

Surely if a nation became converted then the question would not arise, but accepting the theory at present would destroy Akuffo's case. I express no view on this because one party is still clinging to native custom and the other to Christianity...''75

Akuffo then tried to rid himself of his opponents by asserting that the whole Nketiaa line (of Ofori Kuma and Akua Oye) was not legitimate having previously severed its connection by moving to Kumase.'76 Members of the Nketiaa line countered by arguing that, as Akua Asor went into exile with Akuffo in 1907, she was not even present at the selection of Owusu Ansa or Ofori Kuma and therefore could not be Queen Mother. Saxton seems to have doubted this. (It is a classic strategy in stool litigation to question the legitimacy of a line or a person.)

The existence of a genuine (i.e. old) Queen Mother's Stool also remained at issue. Saxton wished to clarify if there really was a Queen Mother Stool,77 or if the references to a Stool were actually to the king's Black Stools, or to a wooden image described as a 'doll'. Here too the underlying issue was the legitimacy of the line. He also wanted to ascertain whether it was the Stool which was sacred, or the person (occupant of the Stool). He decided it was the former:

'I find myself a little at sea here. Queen Mother's Stool do exist.... I believe I am right in saying, it is the stool which is sacred, and not the person. If the stool referred to i.e. the Aso Hemma or Gyankonama Stool or Queen Mother Stool is a genuine one we are a step nearer solution, assuming the Stool being in possession of Akua Asor....'

...History will bear on this point. I have seen no mention of a Queen Mother's Stool in Akwapim except the Big Black Stool held by her as Old woman of the family. Akuffo party say that the stool is a very old one and that it came over from Akym with the first Queen Gyankonama from whom it derived its name. This is a difficult point to prove and the other side are emphatic that there is no stool.

During the Awuna War, it appears that the Omanhene at that time (Kwadade) was sick and the Queen Mother Adjua Asantewa led the forces and was given the name of 'Fighting Queen'—in memory of her a doll was made as 'a stool could not be created for a woman'. The doll is now part of the Stool Property and it is alleged by Akuffo that this is not the proper image. Surely if it were possible to create a stool, such bravery on the part
of a woman would have warranted even the creation of second stool. Not so—an image of wood was made—It is one of the customs that Akua Asor shall dress it on certain occasions.\textsuperscript{78}

Further we find that during the festival Akua Asor is not allowed to touch the big stool though she prepares the food for the departed spirits.\textsuperscript{79}

The ‘doll’ referred to above, seems to be an \textit{obaduaba}, a carved wooden figure carried by women who wish to become pregnant. It is claimed today by some not in the ‘Akuffo faction’ that Queen Mother Adwowa Asante (of Sakyiabea line) had no issue, but she had an \textit{obaduaba} and a stool was made to remember her. They say that she kept the ‘doll’ to let future generations know that her followers were ‘servants’ (i.e. slaves and thus not ‘true’ descendants of line). An elder in the 1980s explained: ‘That was the way of the old people: it meant the doll was her child. That is all.’ This was (and is) not said openly\textsuperscript{80}; it is accepted today that all are members of the royal sub-clan.

Saxton then considered again the issue of whether the authority of the Queen Mother is innate or must be supported by possession of the Black Stool. In the Enquiry, evidence was then given regarding the creation of the \textit{Asonkohene’s} Stool and whether or not it was the ‘proper’ (i.e. old) one. The suggestion was that Akuffo kept the \textit{Asonkohene’s} stool and his opponents kept the proper image of Queen Asantewa.\textsuperscript{81} The legitimacy of the protagonists was being queried yet again. Saxton also wondered about Akuffo’s respectful attitude to Akua Oye: ‘was it because her support was necessary and also because she was still his ‘‘mother’’?’ What was the meaning of the Stool itself and the relative influence of the Queen Mother as opposed to the electors in nominating a king? He concluded that power lay with the electors:

\ldots if all goes smoothly the Queen Mother has the power to nominate. If opposition arises she will give another nomination. If she remains adamant the Oman and Asona Elders look to the hallmark of her Motherhood, it must be remembered she is well aware of the fact that her position in authority depends on selecting the right candidate.\textsuperscript{82}

Yet Saxton was aware of differences in opinion regarding those who were the principal non-royal Asona stool occupants, noting accusations that specific Stools were in the caretakership of slaves and recognizing that members of one faction would doubtless desire the destoolment or banishment of those opposing them. As for the Queen Mother’s role in electing a new king, he remarked:
The Queen Mother meets with the other Asona women in private consultation. If the Oman or male Asona...can refuse the nomination then the Queen Mother's position (minus her personality) is no more than a hallmark that the nominee is of the Royal Blood. The presence of other Asonas is a check on an upstart being put forward and the presence of female Asonas ensures the nomination being put forward with the approval of the actual "mother". This would be a check against substitution at birth and a double check on the law of succession... The presence of other Asonas apart from the principal male who has a definite duty is surely a safeguard against the Royal Family putting up a nominee who is distasteful to the community at large, so safeguarding themselves against the Oman usurping the power which belongs theoretically and traditionally to the Royal Family.83

He summarized the evidence as follows:

(a) Akua Oye was the proper person to succeed Sakyiambea according to descent but,
(b) She refused to perform the customs attached to the positon as they were opposed to her Christian principles, but claims she did not relinquish her power to appoint or to take part in the private consultation during selection
(c) She appointed Akuffo originally. Akua Asor was too young to be a personality of importance and her own Mother was still alive and did not die until 1920.
(d) Akua Oye was in a position to oppose the appointment of Akuffo in the time of Sakyiambea to the Asonkohene Stool, she did not press her nominee when the election to the big stool had to be considered and when she had a full opportunity of taking the reins of the destiny of Akroppong by accepting the Queen Mothership...without qualifications. Sakyiambea died before Akuffo was elected.
(e) Her position as "old woman" Aberewa remained unaltered and therefore she gave the necessary hallmark to the royal succession.
(f) Akuffo later played into her hands by recognizing her authority to demand the Asonkohene Stool (for Owusuansa her own son) and in other matters. Later Akua Oye even prevailed in keeping Obuo (of the Asantewa branch) from interment in the Royal Cemetery.
(g) Owusuansa and Ofori Kuma eventually occupied the big stool. Thus showing in the selection of the three last [kings]—interchangeability in the line of succession. This reflects equally on the alternative claims of the two Queen Mothers.
(h) I do not believe in the fable regarding the Queen Mother stool and consider it has recently been created....
(j) the position of the younger court functionaries... is dependent on the family and must be approved by the Omanhene.....Therefore their voice is a changeable one.
(k) The Asona Elders themselves are not immune from prosecution and condemnation to be followed by suspension and exile.....
(m) Two essentials are necessary outside the power of the wings [Divisions] (which has already been adjudicated) (I) the genuineness of the blood claim to the succession, (II) the voice of the oman.....The Oman is still represented by [Kurontihene] Yao Boafo... The voice of the wings is prejudiced or shall I say is dependent on settlement of v. heavy debts.
(n) Akua Oye has attached herself to the appellants who have lost their case; she is therefore just as guilty as Ofori Kuma himself and ipso facto she has
offended the Oman. The next senior woman Afua Fofie as a partisan of Akua Oye...The Tutu Branch has been called into the councils of Akua Oye party, and until such time that the Oman is prepared to call in and forgive that branch, they must come under the same taint as the Akua Oye branch. If the presumption of taint does really exist.  

(o) the value of the Omanhene's power to select certain people for certain posts... is bound to create supporters... it is only human to suppose that the supporters expect some reward. The reward lays in the selection of an accommodating Omanhene....  

(q) The Akua Oye party is still in possession of the Stool though the Privy Council has given judgment for the Oman. The costs of the case have not yet been paid. There is a considerable grievance...Akua Oye states the stool is with the Elders of Akropong... the Akuffo party state that if it is not returned the Oman will have to take steps. Apart from force the alternative would be to go to Akim Abuakwa for a new stool....  

(s) ...Akropong is deserted... The crux is therefore to be sought in the absence of the stool and that Government has not given its very necessary seal....  

Saxton said that this completed his impression of the situation but that he used the word impression 'advisedly' because while he had only been asked for a report and had tried to deal with the matter impartially there had been 'so much contradictory evidence.' Briefly he thought that 'Native Custom' was best safeguarded by the selection of a king from the Asantewa, Ama Ogyaa, or Nketiaa branches of the kingly lineage; and that approval of the Oman had been given to the nominee of the only line not then under suspicion. He eloquently and rather dryly concluded:

To go beyond this is bringing in an electoral system and destroying native custom altogether. I frequently ask myself whether the embryo of revolution is not being germinated in this dispute under the guise of Christianity. Luckily families are large.  

III. 'To live in such confusion is intolerable'  

Saxton was distressed by the discrepancies in the evidence and believed that 'cross examination on oath...would have produced but an even greater series of contradictions.' It is impossible to disagree but difficult to ascertain the extent to which the participants and their followers took the 'lie' into their unconsciousness to make it the truth for them.  

The case has never really been resolved and the same factions persist in Akuropon to this day. Central to the Enquiries were certain basic contradictions. The Gold Coast Government Enquiries, Judgments, and Appeals attempted to discover an historical 'truth' and a useable past. But each side sought definition of the identity
of rival kings and 'their' Queen Mothers that depended upon the nature of their personhood, a social and jural construct which was continually being reconstructed.

Both Akuapem people and the British officials defined the identity of the kings and Queen Mothers by certain criteria, foremost being the relationship between office holder and a Black Stool. The evidence revealed several Black Stools—those held by the king and that (allegedly) by the Queen Mother. The problem was to ascertain whether the Queen Mother's role depended upon her 'feeding' the king's Black Stool(s) or rather one for the Queen Mother (supposing one existed); and whether or not the former belonged to the whole royal sub-clan or to only one 'house' of that sub-clan. In the early 20th century, a king had the power to make and to destroy Black Stools which were subordinate to his own; consequently the provenance and age of Stools were continually under discussion in the town in general. The centrality of the relationship of Black Stools to office holder is seen in the fact that when Ofori Kuma refused to give up the Black Stools and Akuffo ruled without them the people objected and rallied round the cry 'We serve the Stools, not the person'.

A related issue, never resolved because it could not be determined by any firmly accepted criteria, was whether a Queen Mother was so by genealogy, selection, and individual 'wisdom', or merely by virtue of 'serving' a particular Black Stool. The evidence on this was never clear, as the parties replied in whatever ways they thought most advantageous. Both 'history' and the 'constitutional' definition of office and person were fluid and continually being reconstructed.

A final problem was never brought into the open, but was implied in the sure knowledge that it would be understood by the local people, but perhaps not by the British. This was the question of slave ancestry and the associated legitimacy of one line of the royal sub-clan. References to a 'doll' or 'image' called Aberewatia were really to slave descent.

One underlying factor was the manner of constructing and manipulating knowledge and truth. There are a number of different words in Twi that may be translated as 'truth'. Notkware is the word commonly used; but there are others, mostly associated with notions of purity and clarity, such as trenee (correct, in the right way, nothing mixed with it), kurunnyen (clear, unfettered), and
kronkron (holy). The difficulty is more than one of translating a slippery concept from one culture to another. All religions are concerned with the question of what truth is and whether one can attain it, and all societies grapple with means to distinguish between truthful messages and deceptive ones, for central to truthfulness is our vulnerability with regard to the coercive element in deceit (Bok 1978: 18). The first advice given an Akuapem child is to speak the truth: it is what makes him a member of society (and what distinguishes a human from a non-human). At the ‘out-dooring’ rite performed when an infant is eight days old and given a name, an elder dips his finger first in water and then in palm wine, then placing it in the baby’s mouth each time he says ‘water is water; wine is wine’. Implied in the categorical distinction is the opposition between truth and error, but also between intentional truth and deception.

Some of the discrepancies in the Enquiries were intentional in that witnesses consciously distorted the truth to express the view of their own faction and to validate particular positions of authority: morality was relative to need. When discussing the problems of truth and untruth and the politics of litigation, both past and present, Akuapem elders often told me that in court cases (concerning land, inheritance, or chieftaincy), ‘People make up stories to get what they like. They tell lies, they don’t care. They are liars (atorofo or nkontopofo).’ These contradictions in morality were accepted as a matter of course, much of the motivation being fear to lose power, position, favour or protection, fear of possible retribution, and the like. Hence, what would not have been believed in local, private conversation in the town was frequently uttered in the ‘European’ colonial enquiries and appeal courts. The context determined the truth and untruth of an utterance.

Some of the divergent positions in the Enquiries may be more apparent than real, that is, some of the evidence seems contradictory but in actuality probably was not. Take, for example, the ambiguity inherent in the notions of aberewatia and Queen Mother. When asked who was responsible for selecting Ofori Kuma, Akua Asor replied, ‘I was; I with... [Asonahene] and other Asona Elders’; and when asked ‘Was Akua Oye present?’ she affirmed that ‘She was present as a member of the Royal family.’ The point is that customarily many women of the royal line are present during election consultations: the Queen Mother is not alone; from this
one can surmise that Akua Asor was telling the literal truth—or at least part of it. If in fact Akua Asor was there as the actual, appointed, Queen Mother, then according to custom Akua Oye should also have been there: both as aberewatia and as a ‘mother’ to give her permission on behalf of Owusu Ansa and Ofori Kuma, for according to custom ‘a son must not be taken from the back of the mother’; and whatever her formal position, as an elder woman of the royal Asona lineage, Akua Oye would have been shown great respect. From the other faction’s perspective, supposing Akua Oye to have been the Queen Mother who delegated her ritual duties to her ‘granddaughter’ Akua Asor, there is no reason why Akua Asor should not also have been present, as assistant, when Akua Oye, as Queen Mother, selected a new king. If we start with the presumption that Akua Asor was Queen Mother, we read the documents one way, and another if we presume Akua Oye to have been Queen Mother. The material does not ‘speak for itself’.

In the Enquiries, as in everyday life, people knowingly and consciously juggled with the subtleties of actual behavior and formal position. It is a serious and enjoyable game, but played for real life outcomes. In Akuapem political and family life, there is considerable leeway as to how much power an elder will release to a junior or retain for himself, and it is not always easy for family members to wrest control from him.\textsuperscript{93} Bending rules which are perceived to be intolerably strict is acceptable so long as it is done quietly and with discretion. Public exposure of a wrong frequently results in subdual of the accuser. Family and chiefly arbitrations, which aim to reconcile the seemingly unreconcilable, are usually held very late at night or in the very early morning hours: out of sight and, symbolically, out of time. One option when things cannot be resolved is for the dissatisfied, often desperate, individual(s) simply to leave and refuse to play the game: that is a difficult decision. An alternative is the disruption of litigation which may ultimately verge on civil war. In these Enquiries one can see the ‘process’ of the creation of myths that validate positions of authority in the sense that the legal outcome is defined as a moral truth. Once a particular faction has won, its position is defined as the truth, until the next appeal or renewed litigation. The legal decision validates and legitimizes present day positions of authority and so becomes part of legitimate history. But not everyone will accept this ‘truth’ and they may respond in a variety of ways.
Chieftaincy affairs are disquietingly uncertain; perhaps this is part of their fascination. There is no neutral position in Akuapem micro-politics; one cannot help but to take sides or be perceived to do so. To whom one speaks or even greets in passing, whose hand one shakes, whose house one enters, whose funeral one attends or does not attend, which Stools one serves, on which side of the courtroom one sits, what cloth one wears: all may be used to proclaim factional affiliations and sympathies. Loyalty is primary.\textsuperscript{94} To say that one supports a chief but with reservations is not a tenable option. In the past oaths could be sworn on opponents for the merest of infractions and fines imposed to reduce people to dire poverty, even to slavery; people could be forced from their homes;\textsuperscript{95} and rewards in the form of appointments to chiefly positions often included monetary benefits and the use of land. To a certain extent it is the same today.

IV. EPILOGUE: THE QUEEN MOTHER’S BLESSING

The relationship between Queen Mother, religion and political authority is as salient today as in the past. On Odwira Wednesday, 1977, Akuropon elders met with the king in the palace to dance to the fontomfrom drums and to enjoy the bands and singing groups from the Akuapem villages and hamlets. Then the elders rose one by one to bless the king with the power of the deities and ancestors. The spokesmen (akyeame) were first, followed by the Queen Mother and then the other chiefs. When it came to the turn of the Queen Mother, she blessed the king in the following words:

I bless you with the mouth of Jesus Christ.
His power which he used in ruling over the whole world,
That is what I am using in blessing his servant this morning.
Christ’s power which his Father gave him
That I am giving to his servant this morning.
Gideon’s cutlass which God put in his hand
which helped him in his reign as king
That I am giving him this morning.
Moses’ stick which was given to him
Which he used in crossing the Red Sea
That I am placing in his hand this morning.
Blessings from Heaven.
Blessings which contain power and strength,
When he talks, may he not have slip of tongue [lit. mouth].
Christ’s blood should differentiate him
He should use this to stand against his enemies
He should let all his enemies change.
In the name of Christ I am standing here,  
And I am putting together his strength and his power  
And I am giving it to you.  
I bless you completely,  
I bless you,  
I bless you,  
I bless you.

Early in my stay in Akuapem I learned that in private homes, at funerals and other family gatherings, Christian prayers were often said for the Christians in addition to a traditional libration being poured for the non-Christians; I also knew that in the palace on the day following *adae* when secular issues were attended to, the proceedings were introduced with a Christian prayer rather than libration to the royal ancestors and local deities as on the previous day. I was nevertheless surprised to hear the Queen Mother bless the king calling on the power of Christ rather than that of the ancestors, as is customary, knowing of the profound incompatibilities between Presbyterianism and palace traditions which have caused a king upon enstoolment to cease being a practising Christian. One elder whom I asked about the implications of the Queen Mother’s prayer told me

This *Ohemmea*, this one, does not perform “fetish” customs. This Queen Mother, being Apostolic Christian, does not perform any customs with regard to the Black Stool. She deputises someone else to do it. She has no belief in *abosom* [deities] so she deputises someone else. In the old days, she would have to do it. In the old days, a Christian would not accept the post.

In 1896, Nana Akua Oye was Queen Mother. She was also a Christian and she should have performed these things because she was Queen Mother. She was made Queen Mother but she did not want to perform the customs, so she sent her niece, Akua Asor, to do the customs on her behalf. Akua Oye was Queen Mother, but Akua Asor was her representative as Queen Mother. Then Akua Asor brought trouble. There was litigation. It went to the Privy Council in London. Akua Oye said “I am Queen Mother over you, you are my niece.” Akua Asor said “Yes, but you refused to perform the customs, so you are an elder, *opanyin*, that is all.” England agreed. Akua Asor was taken as Queen Mother and Akua Oye was considered elder.

This present Queen Mother is clever. She does not allow Asona [royal] women to perform customs on her behalf. If she did, the other one could claim Queen Mother status.

Thus was I introduced to the case discussed above, basically about rival and unreconciled versions of royal legitimacy but phrased as a problem of Christianity.96

One may ask how the Queen Mother’s Christian prayer was received by the Akuapem elders. The Biblical referents in her
prayer—Christ’s blood, Gideon’s sword, Moses’ rod, the emphasis on fluency and eloquence in speech (‘no slip of tongue’) and honesty in word—are all idioms redolent of traditional Akuapem values. Whether conscious or not, the particular choice of symbols was clearly not accidental. The political connotations of power and strength for the king were clearly understood by those educated as Christians, as was the idea of the king being a servant of Christ and of the Queen Mother giving Christ’s blessings. An Akuropon Presbyter later explained:

The prayer meant that when the Omanhene speaks, he should speak as Christ did with wisdom, and he should be powerful as Christ was over the whole world. The Omanhene should have power over his subjects and they should obey him, they should humble themselves before him. He should have power over his enemies—those in Akuropon and those in the whole of Akuapem and all the others who oppose him politically—with this power he will be able to control them. It is this power the Queen Mother is giving her “son” to organize his subjects so the state can be a good state, so the subjects will behave and work towards the development of the state... And so, with Gideon’s sword, the king will over-power his enemies and conquer them all, and with Moses’ wonderful stick which he used in crossing the Red Sea, he will perform miracles: these are all God’s blessings from Heaven and all imply power and strength and thus politics.

In 1977, the newly enstooled king was experiencing considerable factional opposition to his reign. The fact that Gideon was a warrior, with the power to fight given by God, alluded to this and probably also had historical resonance to the origin of Akuapem and early years of war. The notion of a magical rod had parallels in traditional walking sticks embedded with protective amulets and linguist staffs (akyeame poma) black from sacrificial offerings with the power to discern truth. Finally, Christ’s blood had a fan of highly charged referents. On one level, it meant that

Nana Ado Dankwa should have the same qualities that Christ had when he accepted being killed on the cross for the sake of mankind: he should be tolerant, merciful, kind, sympathetic, loving and serviceable, humble and tactful, and because of the goodness of others be ready to suffer for them.

Note that in the enstoolment rite the king is symbolically killed and then reborn. On a deeper level, Christ’s blood which ‘ties his subjects together’ might symbolize the blood (mogya) of the clan (abusua) and possibly the sacrificial blood for the ancestral Black Stools. A formerly Christian Akuapem chief denied this interpretation and quickly replied, ‘Christ’s blood is different from Stool worship: Don’t confuse the two.’ He added,
The power of the person who was killed for the Stool is in the blood. Christ's blood is from a person who was killed for the people. These are different beliefs. The Christians condemn us. They say that Jesus' blood is superior to the Stool's blood. But this we don't accept. I know my Stool possesses power. It can bless me, it can heal me, it can protect me, just the same as a Christian believes the blood of Jesus can do for him.

I asked what the prayer meant to non-Christian illiterates and to himself, a non-Christian, albeit one highly educated in Christianity. He replied

For non-Christians, the Queen Mother's prayer is of no use. I wouldn't listen. A non-Christian does not know who Moses is. Who is that Moses? Who is that Gideon? Someone from the Bible? Oh! Then it is a purely Christian affair. The palace is not a church. In the Chapel, all these references will be known.

And after a moment he continued,

If you call the power of God on the Omanhene, it is in order. Christians know God. Non-Christians know God. But if you refer to persons from the Christian Bible, it means you base your faith on Christianity rather than on faith in our ancestors. Whether the Christian power is above ours or not, we are not concerned: We have our faith. So it is the Queen Mother's own faith she is expressing, and we are ignorant of that faith because we do not know [or do not chose to know] anything of Christianity.

The thematic resonance between Christian and traditional religious idioms in the 1977 Queen Mother's prayer are contradicted by the perceived incompatibility between Christianity and ancestral worship by the Presbyterians which, in turn, leads to the dictum that a Stool occupant cannot owe double allegiance and be Stool occupant and Christian at the same time. This is further reinforced by an overwhelming interest in Akan thought to keep categorical boundaries discrete (see McLeod, 1981; McCaskie 1986: 330), a notion illustrated in a number of Akan proverbs. The same chief expressed it as follows:

Christians abhor ancestor worship because Christianity says to have no other God than Christ. Chiefancy means ancestor worship and this, a Christian is forbidden to do. This Queen Mother wanted to enjoy the power and authority of being head of family, to enjoy the land and property attached to the rank, to feel the power that belonged to her as Queen Mother, to be able to chose the Omanhene. She chose this king to be enstooled on the Black Stool, yet she would have nothing to do with the Black Stool. How can one understand that? We call this kyiri kookoo dine mma [you don't eat cocoyam, yet you eat the leaves as kontomeri]. She wanted to enjoy the power of the Stool indirectly, yet she didn't want to have anything to do with it. Is it good? It is not good. But it happens.
CONCLUSION: 'A discourse in malevolence'\footnote{97}

The violence of the dynastic conflicts which centered on incompatibilities between the rules of Christianity versus traditional religion in this Akan kingdom were linked to a complex and subtly aggressive negotiation of political reality where the actors, who were all men, played out a scenario of greed for power and domination focused primarily on a position held by a woman. I have tried to show both why it was a woman who was at the center of the dispute and thereby explain the symbolic and political role of the Queen Mother and also how political struggle in a time of radical economic and social change was expressed largely through an idiom (still preferred today) of conflict between old and new religions. The contradictory testimony in the Enquiries of 1907, 1920 and 1922 is mirrored in the opinions of the differing factions today. One ends up with no absolutely certain answer as to what 'really' happened, but with a strong suspicion that the underlying issue is simply power for its own sake, that morality is always relative to its acquisition and enjoyment, and that by means of subtlety in negotiation and eloquence of speech the widely (and justly) proclaimed 'honest, polite, religious and respectful' people of Akuapem engage in an often aggressive and defiant pursuit of order as political power.

NOTES

1. The title is from a quote by District Commissioner Saxton in a 1922 Report. The reference is to the Cimmerii, reputed to have lived by plunder and to have inhabited dark caves on the western coast of Italy. Homer, Virgil and Ovid used the image of Cimmerian darkness for the infernal regions and the river Styx.

2. In the Judgment before the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast on July 7, 1920, Acting Chief Justice Porter stated: 'the evidence of the Plaintiff's witness is naturally biassed and equally so is that of the Defendants; so the oral evidence is equally open to suspicion. If either side had called a hundred other witnesses it would have been equally doubtful...' (page 4).

3. I am not directly concerned in this paper with larger philosophical issues of truth, nor with oaths and oracles as traditional means of ascertaining deception. I address rather how rival and irreconcilable versions bear on the use of truth in political action.

4. Meyerowitz (1951) and Busia (1951) both posit a time when the Asante Queen Mother ruled in her own right; Oduyoye (1979) attributes the survival of matriliney in Asante to the tenacity of Queen Mothers in administering protective regulations for women: the evidence for this is slim. Assertions that Asante Queen Mothers deal with domestic cases (efiesem) and men with matters of the state (amansem) ignore the fact that the Asante Queen Mother's court is less costly than
the king's (Rattray 1923: 83) and that the members of her court are men. In Akuapem men and women sit on many cases and domestic cases are family matters which are referred to a town chief or palace counsellors only if they cannot be resolved. In both Akuapem and Asante women are considered to be less responsible than men sexually (in cases of adultery, men are expected to exercise control) and economically (a woman's trade debt is her husband's responsibility as it is assumed he has not looked after her well).

5. Older generations in Akuapom mostly say Ohemmaa; the variant use of Ohem-
mea is attributed to Guan influence.

6. Black Stools are ancestral shrines (see Gilbert 1987, 1989). Most important
Akuapom matrilineages have one. The royal line has six.

7. e.g. Adumhene, 'chief of the executioners'.

8. ADM/KD 33/6/224.

9. Sewe European-style blouses (kabah) became mandatory apparel after Nana
Ofori Kuma's hotly contested 'cover-shoulder law' was passed in 1917. The
Akuapom Queen Mother's attire reflects time honoured custom rather than
gender.

10. The other chiefs seated on the king's left comprise his ankobea, who are
children and grandchildren of former kings; those on his right are mostly from
other Asona clans.

11. 'Women have a difficult life. They leave all their decisions to men, but if
the men do not decide as they wish, they blame the men.' (An Akuapem man,
1989)

12. Cf. the Asante Queen Mother has the right to fallow land and its distribu-
tion; the Asantehene decides which stools will serve the Asantehema. The Queen
Mother of the Shi kingdom of Ngweshe, eastern Zaire, holds as her private
domain approximately half the land in the kingdom and may grant plots to her
own administrative chiefs and personal subjects. She may rule as Regent for years
until her son comes of age and is powerful enough to end her rule; she is a sym-
bolically complementary aspect of the kingship: both she and her son share a single
essence which embodies both masculine and feminine traits (Sosne 1979: 233). For
other variations on Queen Motherhood, see Ray (1991) and Krige (1943).

13. See Gilbert (1993) for an outline of Odwira, an annual rite to purify and
renew the power of the king and affirm his authority.

14. A man overwhelmed by sorrow may weep, but should he do so will be told
'a man does not weep' (obarima nsu). Men are symbolically agents of death in that
they kill in war and in the hunt; women are blamed for death.

15. If a widow does not weep 'with tears running down her face' she will be
suspected of offending her husband when he was sick, or of causing his death.

16. Women's link with the living and the future continuity of the lineage is seen
in the final phase of a funeral rite when women are given salt to take home. Salt
is food for the living: food for the ancestors lacks salt.

17. A chief in trouble may take refuge (oguan toa) with the Queen Mother.
Although often he can afford to pay the fine (of sheep and/or money) decreed by
the king and chiefs, it is customary to beg for a reduction and thus show that he
is humble and did not deliberately offend. The Queen Mother publicly pleads for
him. Her power and gratification derive from the dependence of others on her (as
in child-rearing).

18. Cf. our Western use of the Goddess of Justice. When judging a case,
Akuapem elders withdraw to make their decision in private; on their return the
decision is announced beginning with the words 'aberewatia says...'. Whereas men
use power and force, women are mediators and the source of ultimate appeal. The
'Old Lady' gives the uncontestable decision. Her dominant role in dispensing
frustration and nurturance is made psychologically explicit when Akuapem men say ‘all women are our mothers’.

19. The same principle applies at lower levels. In 1977 after an Akuropon chief had been destooled because of his opposition to the king, palace elders urged the family to choose a new oba panyin so that she could select a new chief to be enstooled.


22. See Beidelman’s (1968) use of ‘nudity’ for the unclothed liminal state, based on Sir Kenneth Clark’s well known contrast between the ‘nude’ and ‘naked’.

23. In January 1934 when the Ohemmaa refused to sign a Resolution on the grounds that she was not present at the State Council meetings, the Commissioner of Eastern Province held that the Resolution was valid without her signature (ADM/KD 29/6/53).


25. In the 1980s the Queen Mother of the town of Amanokrom was actively involved in ritual and judicial matters in her own town and on Akuapem Judicial Committees, while the Akuapem Queen Mother of Akuropon resided much of the time outside the state with her husband in Kumase.

26. The gradually increasing number of Christian adehye was also due to crosscousin marriage and to the fact that the missionaries encouraged Christians to marry other Christians.

27. In the early years of this century the prestigious funerals were ‘customary’ ones.

28. The only exception is the Dormaahene, highly educated, wealthy, presently a member of the Committee for Constitutional Reform in Ghana, who only agreed to become Omanhene of his small cocoa-growing kingdom in western Ghana were he permitted to remain a full Communicant in the Presbyterian Church and delegate his traditional customary duties: His people accepted this stipulation before installing him.

29. (See account of missionary Erwin Nothwang, 1915, in Brokensha 1972: 209). When Ofori Kuma ruled for the second time, he conscientiously worshipped the royal ancestors and those deities which were believed to help bring peace to the kingdom.

30. Mr. A. L. Slater, Acting Governor of Gold Coast Colony, in N.A.G. 11/1101, 7/7/20 Supreme Court Judgment, Exhibit L.

31. The 1907 Enquiry was before Mr. Robertson (N.A.G. 11/1665, Case No. 167/07); the 1920 case was brought before the Supreme Court under Acting Chief Justice W. T. Porter and later Mr. Justice Ewen Reginald Logan; and the final Government Enquiry in 1922 was the Appeal Record under Chief Justice Sir Philip Crampton Smyly.

32. The District Commissioner, Mr. S. W. Saxton, considered himself to be an impartial outsider. In a Minute on the destoolment of Ofori Kuma in July 1919, the Acting C.E.P. expounded on the British role (SNA Case No. 31/19):

It may be that an unprejudicial person present at the enquiry could not escape the impression that Ofori Kuma has been the fons et origo mali in Akwapim and that his complete lack of tact and contemptuous disregard for the welfare and traditions of his people are tinctured with a cupidity that has to a large extent achieved its object and that such a type of man is unfit to possess the powers of an office he has consistently abused, but the duty of the Government is unfortunately not to decide whether Ofori Kuma is fit and proper to continue to be Omanhene but whether he has been destooled in accordance with Native Custom and in this I have no doubt whatever that the answer is in the negative.
Yet Werbner’s point (1969: 258) about Judge Willis among the Bemba is well taken when he argues that analytically the Judge was an *insider* in that his decision had to be in line with past administrative decisions and policy must make future administrative relations regular and peaceful.

33. N.A.G. 11/1101, Case No. 167/07 Akwapim Native Affairs, Report 12 September 1907, Mr. W. C. F. Robertson (SNA).

34. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, District Commissioner, October 31, 1922, Mampong.

35. The *Asonkohene* position, once hereditary, was changed in 1948 from heir to the king (i.e. an Asona royal) to a non-Asona and therefore no longer a possible heir due to fears the incumbent would undermine rather than support the king. The position was abolished in 1959 (ADM/KD 33/6/224).

36. In Akuapem if an elder refuses a position for factional political reasons, the next in line will, out of loyalty, often also refuse the office. The post may thus remain vacant for years.

37. Any death is considered to be unnatural, but especially a sudden one (Gilbert 1988). Akuffo, not popular among those who supported Kwame Fori, is alleged to have removed a supernaturally protective hat from Kwame Fori’s head when the king met the Governor in Accra and on his return Kwame Fori died before reaching Akuropon. Another indigenous source (Samson: 1908, Chapter IX) suggests Kwame Fori died from a ‘broken heart caused by the unfair treatment of his own family’. No one seems to have raised the possibility that Kwame Fori’s own medicines were not strong enough to protect him, presumably because it would be an admission of weakness and so undermine his position. (See E. Goody 1970: 229, 232-234 who says that among the Gonja killing a political rival by mystical means is not actionable in contrast to women accused of killing by witchcraft.)

38. Some say that Akua Oye was so reluctant to have Akuffo succeed Kwame Fori that she invited Kwapon, from the Ama Ogyaa line, to succeed. The Ama Ogyaa line of the royal family was then living in exile in Tutu. It is said that when Kwapon came to Akuropon, Kwasi Akuffo greeted him and ‘his hand became shorter than normal; it was difficult to treat him and he died. Akua Oye said my children are too young—too young to be allowed to perish.’

39. N.A.G. 11/1101, Case No. 167/07; letter from Mr. C. Napier Curling.

40. There is only one royal Asona lineage or sub-clan (with three branches or houses) but there are a number of other non-royal Asona lineages. The *Asonahene* (newly titled ca. 1920) is the senior Asona elder, non-regnant, with specific duties in the king’s election. His line, once the senior royal branch, was debarrned from succession in the early 18th century.

41. Akua Oye (N.A.G. 11/1101, June 28, 1907 letter), referring to herself, as *abrewa* [sic. *abrewawia*], demanded an investigation into Akuffo’s conduct: ‘Abrewa (mother) of occupants of and heirs to Omanhene and Asonkohene stools the person entitled to appoint all successors to the stools have instituted proceedings against Akuffo.’

42. N.A.G. 11/1101, letter from Mr. C. Napier Curling to Colonial Secretary, July 31, 1907, Akropong.

43. N.A.G. 11/1665, Case No. 67/07, Enquiry by Mr. W. C. F. Robertson (SNA).

44. In the Enquiries the spelling of the names Akua Oye and Akua Asor varies. To lessen the readers confusion, I have spelled them the same throughout.


47. N.A.G. 11/1665, Vol. I, p. 59-60, Case 67/07, Enquiry into Destoolment of Kwasi Akuffo; and Enclosure No. VI from 1907 Enquiry, Extracts bearing on 1922 Report by Mr. S. W. Saxton taken from Appeal Record Exhibit ‘N’.


51. The issue was whether the paraphernalia in dispute was the property of Akuapem or only of Ofori Kuma’s ‘house’ and whether or not Ofori Kuma had been re-elected according to Native custom. The claims included six ancestral Black Stools, one Golden Stool engraved ‘King F. W. Kwasi Akuffo’ and one solid gold crown engraved ‘F. W. Kwasi Akuffo’. The claim (see evidence by witnesses for the plaintiff Okantah Fori, *Benkumhene* of Akwapim) was that the paraphernalia belonged to the state. (N.A.G. 11/1101, Judgment of His Honour Mr. Justice E. R. Logan, Supreme Court of the Gold Coast, 20 September 1920.)

52. N.A.G. 11/1101, Suit No. 108/1920, Judgment, 7/7/20, p. 5. Acting *Omanhene* Yao Boafo IV (Plaintiff) vs. Ex-*Omanhene* Ofori Kuma (Defendant) in the Supreme Court before Mr. Justice Wm. Thomas Porter, Acting Chief Justice.


54. Akuapem towns are divided into Benkum, Nifa and Adonten Divisions or Wings, as in a War formation (see Gilbert 1987).

55. Saxton was later baffled that statements elicited in the Minutes of Enquiry about procedures for electing a king that were generally agreed to by both sides were not so clear upon cross-examination. An elder discussing the 1907 Enquiry with me remarked that the Europeans got it wrong. This was a “family” affair and Akuropun people did not agree. The Divisions are only invited to see [the enstoolment rites] and if there is a private quarrel, it will be settled. The Wings *could not* object to the *Ohemmea*’s choice.

During litigation in 1989, the role of the Divisions in *destoiling* a king was raised and the decision that the Wings were indeed quite powerful surprised many. This uncertainty about rules clearly allows them to be manipulated for political ends. (See Gluckman, 1955, on how the manipulation of precedents depends on the ‘flexibility’ of the legal concepts.)


59. As he had no money for bail and the regalia had not been returned.

60. N.A.G. 11/1101, letter to Acting SNA from Akua Oye, 27 April 1921: The Akwapim Stool Dispute.
61. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Report on Akwapim Stool Dispute, Mr. S. W. Saxton, 31 October 1922, p. 3.

62. In Minutes of Enquiry 1922, (N.A.G. 11/1101) Saxton asked ‘if Akua Oye was Queen Mother, why was Akuffo selected and not one from Ntomo [Nketiaa] line?’ Kwasi Menako (Asonahene) replied ‘Because he is eldest male child after Kwame Ofori and by the eldest woman’.

63. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Report on Akwapim Stool Dispute, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 4.

64. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Report on Akwapim Stool Dispute, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 4.

65. Akuapem people themselves use the term ‘heathen’.

66. ‘A very modern idea’ noted Saxton. (N.A.G. 11/1101, 279/10/18, October 1922, p. 6).


68. Appeal Record, p. 110 of Mr. Robertson’s report.

69. See Privy Council Appeal, p. 167.

70. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Akwapim Stool Dispute, October 1922, p. 7. Mr. Saxton referred to the Judgment of His Honour Chief Justice Smyly and Justice Logan p. 75 of the Privy Council Record.


72. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, Argument on Akwapim Affairs, 31 October 1922, p. 8.

73. See N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Enclosure V, Extract of letter dated 26 November, from Akua Oye, Yao Boafo and others.

... There has been a banishment according to the Native Custom of Adjoa Obuo and her heirs about which they took action by oath against us in Eastern Akim, but they were fined and since September 1918 the said branch of the stool family have not taken steps to get back into the fold of Akua Oye who owns the Royal Cemetery. It is well known that persons who have been banished have not the right to come to the stool house in Akropong and they have no right to be buried at the cemetery.

74. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 8.

75. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 9.

76. In N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, October 1922, p. 9, Mr. Saxton observed that there were two views about this event, one being that they were ‘paid off’ and the other that the severance was never complete, cf. Reindorf (1895) and Samson (1908). Akuffo alleged the severance was complete; Akua Oye denied it asserting that Ntomo, the ‘mother’, never left Akuropon.

77. In the 1922 Enquiry (N.A.G. 11/1101), an Asoa elder asserted that one Black Stool for the Queen Mother had been ‘lost’ and another had been created by Akuffo (in exile) for Akua Asor, essentially to straighten things up. This was rebutted by Akua Oye who claimed it was not an actual Stool, but merely obaduaba, a wooden carving or ‘image’. In the 1970s, the problem of whether or not the Black Stool currently held by the Queen Mother was the ‘correct’ one was phrased in terms of the remembered size of the genuine Stool.

78. In the Minutes of the Enquiry (1922), Enclosure VII (N.A.G. 11/1101), one elder said this ‘doll’ was an image of Queen Asantewa (who fought in the Awuna War of 1782-4) and that the image was made when she died and kept with the Omanhene’s Stools because Stools were not customarily made for women. Contradicting this, he later said a Queen Mother’s Stool was created in 1806. Another elder in the same Enquiry agreed that there was an image of Queen Asantewa who had never had a child; the image was made when she died as a remembrance.

79. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, p. 10-11, Mr. S. W. Saxton. Note: food
for the royal Black Stools is prepared by members of a special lineage though the Queen Mother should be present; the Stool is then fed and anointed by Stool attendants.

80. Ofori Kuma supporters allege that either Tanwa Yebuah (Akuffo’s mother) was a slave, or that her mother was. Note that while it is neither polite nor customary to publicly denigrate the ‘origins’ of another, slave ancestry (real or invented) often becomes an open and bitter issue at funerals (with reference to succession) and in chiefly litigation. In present day Akuapem litigation, if a stool occupant framing charges can be shown to have slave ancestry, the proper line having ended, or, if for some other reason he can be discredited, the case may be dismissed without even examining the charges.

81. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 12.
82. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 15.
83. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 20-21.
84. They only came back with Nana Addo Dankwa III in 1976.
85. The Stool was in fact ‘stolen’, hidden by strong supporters of Ofori Kuma and Akua Oye and later brought to their exile village. Akuffo never had the Black Stools during his second reign. Akuapem people never had a new Stool created, nor did they go to Akim Abuaakwa for a new one—a not very feasible suggestion by Saxton.
86. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 26-29.
87. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 30.
88. An Akuapem elder in 1990 discussing the factional politics of his hometown and his planned departure to his farming village remarked,
   Akuapem people are regarded as being honest and polite, religious and respectful. Now look at the confusion in Akuapem. It is no credit to the rulers of Akuapem. Sometimes it is very frustrating. Sometimes you have to find a place to stay and forget all this, because to live in such confusion is intolerable.
89. N.A.G. 11/1101, 279/10/18, Mr. S. W. Saxton, October 1922, p. 17.
90. See Evans-Pritchard (1965: 11-13) and T. O. Beidelman (1970: 511) on the problem of translation. McCaskie 1986: 325 cites K. Wiredu, Philosophy and an African Culture (Cambridge, 1980) who remarks that nokware may indeed be translated as ‘truth’, but only as a moral rather than a cognitive concept of truth. Note that we too agonize over the subtleties between a ‘lie’ and an ‘untruth’ by attributing the difference to intended malevolence. In Court, our request for ‘the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth’ addresses the moral question of intention to mislead, or intended truthfulness and deception rather than the often overlapping greater domain of truth and falsity in general (see Bok 1978: 6).
91. N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 279/10/18, Minutes of Enquiry, Enclosure VII, October 1922.
92. Cf. evidence that when Kwame Fori was made Omanhene by Sakyiambea, Adjua Obuo and Akua Oye were present, as were other women: Ason Afua, Aye Kade, Afua Obobra, Afua Fofie (Mrs. Newman), and Akua Asor.
93. In Akuropon in the 1970s and ‘80s several cases arose in which the abusua panyin was different from the stool occupant and the former refused to relinquish real control of lineage land and money; Despite much anguished wrangling, the stool occupants resigned as no resolution was deemed possible until the abusua panyin died.
94. In the 1920 Enquiry (N.A.G. 11/1101, No. 108/20), Kuronihene Yao Boafo remarked, ‘If Koranteng tells me to lie I will lie, because if I refuse it is not
good—as I have taken oath of allegiance. I would rather lie a little to be unhappy much.’

95. In Akuropon people may move from their mother’s house to that of their father because of political dissension—juxtaposing the matrilineage with the group of patrilineation. Even today a king or chief can try, though not necessarily succeed, to oust a family in political opposition by claiming the house or land belongs to him. Legal attempts are also made, currently, to banish opposition chiefs from the town—again, not always successfully.

96. At a Wenner-Gren Conference on Divine Rulers in 1988, Gillian Feeley-Harnik asked ‘Why kingship? Why not Queens?’ I thank her and the participants of the Conference for directing my attention to this topic. Field research was begun in 1976-8 and continued in the latter half of the 1980s while I was affiliated with the University of Ghana, Legon. This paper was written while I was a Smithsonian Fellow at the National Museum of African Art in spring 1990. I am grateful to these institutions and to Nana Addo Dankwa III, Omahne of Akuapem; Nana Boafo Ansah II, Kuruomihene of Akuapem; Nana Dokua, Queen Mother of Akuapem; Mr. B. E. Ofori of Akuropon; and Nana Asifu Yao Okoamankran, Apaghene of Abiriw, for their encouragement and patient forebearance at the activities of an outsider who persistently inquired into politically delicate matters. I thank the participants of the 1991 Satterthwaite Conference on African Ritual and Religion, especially Murray Last, for their comments; Sandra Barnes, T. O. Beidelman, Susan Drucker-Brown, M. E. Kropp-Dakubu and John Middleton who kindly read earlier drafts; and Adrian Hastings for his extraordinary patience in waiting so long for this paper.

97. Janet Malcolm (1990: 63) ‘A lawsuit is to ordinary life what war is to peacetime. In a lawsuit, everybody on the other side is bad. A trial transcript is a discourse in malevolence.’

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