

OTUMFOUR SUMANKWAA

27th February 2006

Baafour Domfeh Gyeabuor III Ashtown.

Baafour: The little I can say is that to begin with, if I had known the reason for this meeting I would have arranged for another person, in case I forget something and in that case the person would have tapped my shoulder or filled in the gap. If it wouldn't bother you or be too inconvenient I would ask for a postponement in order to make such an arrangement.

Prof: Well, since we are here, let us just have a conversation then we would come back the next time we are in Kumasi.

Baafour: Well, what I see is that Otumfuo has various chiefs with varying and specific assignments such as his cook-soodo, his barber and am his chief physician-sumankwaa. He even has someone who only extracts his grey hair- Tudwene (grey hair remover). Sumankwahene means all the Asuman (deities) in Asante kingdom are under me. All the various fetish priests and priestesses obtain their licenses to practice from me. This is the room where they have to be registered and that huge register on the shelf over there contains all their names and photographs. (Please hand me that book over there, This registry includes all the deities in Asante as far away as those in the Brong Ahafo area- those areas under Asante before Kwame Nkrumah's geographical boundaries.

Prof: So this is the registry of fetish priests and herbalists.

Baafour: Both priests and herbalists. It also includes the "Mallams," the Muslims who tell fortunes. Those who do not need to obtain license from me are the very old deities like Kyenaman. They serve Asantehene directly so no license is required. For example Kyenaman, Kwaku Firi, Kukuro of Nhyira, Duase Te-Kwabena do not need license. Te Dwemo too doesn't need license. They only come to me when they have a problem, else they serve Otumfuo directly. Anything that bothers Otumfuo he discusses with me then I consult the appropriate deity for the right solution. I would figure out if consultation with a deity (komfo) or a Mallam (Kramo) would be appropriate. I can go as far as the Upper East or Upper West region. All the Mallams from the north also come to Asante through me. If they are coming to Otumfuo privately then that is different matter, but officially they have to report to me first, then I will lead them.

When there is a problem, I study it carefully and decide the right/appropriate avenue to pursue. Sometimes I consult with Mallams, sometimes I consult with deities on some occasions I consult with river deities like Tano, then following the prescribedI would perform all necessary rites such as slaughtering sheep, pouring libations and all kinds of purification rites.

There are times when Asantehene has to perform some rites in Kumasi Township, he first instructs me and carry them out. Otumfuo would provide the sheep and any other items

prescribed, then I would carry them out. Sometimes I have to slaughter as many as eight sheep and chickens in order for peace to prevail.

Prof: You did not include Christians in your consultations, do you also sometimes consult with Christians? Why Christians don't have powers? (Joke).

Baafour: Oh well, they usually consult deities to boost the size of their congregation. They sneak to different oracles for help. So about two years ago when they started preaching against traditional religion I called a press conference to warn them. There is a Christian council, I appealed to them to control their members and their utterances. Apart from the Christian council, the spiritual churches [?] have their own organization, I appealed to them also to advise their members to practice what they know and we will practice ours. I urged the organization to advise their members to refrain from negative attacks and utterances about traditional religion because they are inciting a conflict in Ghana. This could start a confrontation that may well develop into a civil war. A spiritual war of some sort. We could target the churches and some various radio stations. I told the press that I could organize my priests/priestesses and attack the various targets with whatever we have; it will not be a covert or clandestine operation, it would be done openly. They have since stopped.

It is just recently that I have heard a preacher on Nkosuo Radio Station making some negative pronouncements, but I am listening and studying it for a while before I react.

What is their problem? You heal the sick we also heal the sick, what is the difference? Why should you speak against us? You are the ones who came to us for talisman to build your church and extort money from people. I have also heard the Ahmadiyya movement speaking against us at Kejetia. As I have said, they are inciting a civil war. Subin is there at Kejetia you can disappear and be found at the other end of Subin (Briscoe) with your body parts missing. It won't be my fault.

Prof: Baafour can you tell us something about how we worshipped/served God before the Christians came?

Baafour: The deities/Oracles have always been there. They were here before the Christians came. Back then, we only prayed for our daily bread. Everyone, no matter who, was under the protection of one deity or the other. So if anyone wronged you, the protecting deity would expose them. The deities were feared because of their unforgiving nature and their ability to expose evil/ wrong. These days when one appears before a Judge in court, they are asked to swear before the bible and they do so willingly. No one would swear willingly by a deity such as Antoa Anyama because it will expose and kill you. It is effective and relatively instant. On the other hand the bible is preferred because God is patient and he takes time. He waits till after one's death to prosecute. So before the white man and Christianity came, people were honest. They arrived and the "Truth" and honesty died. For example, I can't and I will never lie in this world till I die. What for? Why should I lie? Lying is a disservice to God. They kill even their own priests if and when they lie. Kwaku Firi killed Nana Drobo (his priest) when he offended him. Kyenaman does the same thing when his priest offends him repeatedly. Otumfuo always

says that it is the deities that carried him to all wars and back victoriously so if you disturb any of his deities, he would destool you.

Prof: There modern times too?

Baafour: Yes, today, that is why I had a problem today. I violated that so I was ordered to slaughter two sheep this morning. Otumfuo Osei Tutu II is very keen about his deities. Since his enstoolment, he has never failed to perform any rites of purification or atonement. He makes all his sacrifices.

Prof: Sometimes in discussions with other Asante elders, they say that “you don’t have a god”. What is your take on that?

Baafour: Well, God created all men and all things, you cannot forsake God. The deity that protects you was created by God and they rely on God for all their abilities to help and protect you. Who created you, from where did you get the fortitude to acquire a deity for protection? You cannot forsake God. What do you have if you don’t have God. It is the people who claim to be custodians of Christian religion that are tarnishing his name by their bad deeds. No one can forsake God. I do not go to church I only attend church services on invitation to an event at a church. I do strongly believe that God created man and everything and I am here by his grace. I have been Sumankwaahene for 39years. I serve Nana Prempeh II for 5 years, then served Nana Opoku Ware II for 29 years and I have served this one for five already. So I have learnt a little bit from all three kings.

Prof: Baafour was it from Prempeh I that they started going to the Anglican Church?

Baafour: Before he was sent to exile he was attending church, so he continued while he was at Seychelles, then continued when he returned to Kumasi. So his nephew Prempeh II followed that tradition. So all members of the royal family follow that tradition of attending Anglican Church.

Prof: So the Anglican Church should be registered under Sumankwaahene.

Baafour: Oh no! I am under God. I should be rather under the church not the other way round. God created the deity.

Prof: You talked about some superior deities such as Kwaku Firi, Kyenaman etc.

Baafour: Yes about six of them. They serve Otumfuo directly not true me. They do not need license or registration. They only come to me when they need something. All others need license. Those classified as Bosom-brafo -- meaning deities that people have consulted and imported them from outside. Less significant deities include Te-Gare, Sand- divination oracles etc.

Baafour: Yes, all of those. I have to register you then give you a letter to take to Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly for licensing. If you are practicing in Obuasi, you still have to come here to register then take the registration to Obuasi council for a license.

Prof: Baafour can you say something about how the Sumankwaa stool was created.

Baafour: The Sumankwaa stool was created by Opoku Ware I. Sumankwaa deity is to supervise all deities of the golden stool and in the kingdom.

Prof: So what number are you in succession ?

Baafour: I am the Eighth Sumankwaa here.

Prof: So is this a “Mmamma” or adeshie stool?

Baafour: It is Mmamma stool unlike the Kuntanase stool.

Prof: Can a female inherit this stool?

Baafour: No. Even my nephew from my maternal side my sisters children cannot inherit this stool. It is inherited by children of the Sumankwaahene. That is why I should be careful of choosing a spouse /mate. For example Sumankwaahene’s father a child of a Fante, or a northerner. I would be exposing Asanteman in the unfortunate event that such a child should succeed me. Because Sumankwaahene knows all the dealings in Asante and therefore it is prudent for Sumankwaahene to be Asantes only. For example this house was built by my predecessor who was from Chiraa. There was a period when we couldn’t find an heir and previous Sumankwaahene had fathered some children over there so one of his sons was enstooled. During the Tchiman war, Sumankwaahene went all over consulting with Te Kwabena, Kukuro of Chiraa etc for prediction. It was during his consultation with the Kukuro deity at Chiraa that he fathered some children there.

Prof: Baafour, who was the 1st Sumankwaahene.

Baafour: It was Kwesi Domfe. Rather he was, the first Sumankwaa from Chiraa. But the 1st Sumankwaahene was Baafour Asabre then Kwesi Dente and Kwadwo Addo also from Chiraa .Kwadwo Addo built this house.

Prof: Baafour, when Nana Prempeh I was sent to Seychelles did he take his Sumankwaa?

Baafour: No, he did not go. If I had been there it would have been very bloody. How do you take my lord away just like that? I don’t know what the then Sumankwaahene was thinking.

Prof: Baaffour, can you say something about Nurom?

Baafour: A long, long time ago, we sumankwaa people we originated from Dwuma-Akyi, near Daabaa, Apagyahene’s town. But Otumfuo gave us land at Suame where we cultivated herbs and medicinal plants for treating Otumfuo when he is sick. The Genfi family is also known to be from Dwuma-akyi. They were appointed to go and live at Nurom to maintain the plants for Otumfuo.

Prof: It seems that their maternal grandmother was a fetish priestess.

Baafour: yes. Her name was Durowaah. They all come under sumankwaa. There is also a deity in my own town too. They are all under sumankwaa. They are at Nurom on behalf of sumankwaa.

My father was sumankwaahene, he died in a car accident. Then another one came, then my brother (mmammahene's father) also died after a short reign. When mmammahene's father died, he was about three years old. I enrolled him in day nursery and have raised him since. Well, when the stool became vacant at some point, the Genfi people contested for it and Asantehene told them that the Nsumankwaa stool is not a gentleman's stool. One must learn how to administer certain rites and all the duties of sumankwaa to be an efficient one. There are many things that we perform for Asantehene. My brother that I succeeded never went to school, he reigned for only three years and died in a car accident. Then Otumfuo gave me a room in the main Manhyia house, then assigned some tasks to me. The things that were handed over to me included the special cloth "yesewoa, ense" among other things. There are some things that they take inventory and handover to Nsumankwaa when you are enstooled. Among Asantehene's belongings, there are places where women are not permitted. Not all his belongings can be exposed to a woman. So when the Genfi's wanted the stool, Otumfuo told them it is a service stool, one must really serve the Asantehene. He told me I was too young, but kept me in the house. The person who was enstooled reigned for seven years and died, then I was enstooled on August 1967.

Prof: Baffour, what is the name of the person who reigned just before that?

Baffour: Kofi Asabre, then Kwadwo Asabre whose house is right across the street from here, then I came, Baffour Domfe Gyeabour III.

Prof: So the Nurom people are under you?

Baffour: Yes, they take care of the medicinal plants for me. All the Nurom lands are under me, I sign the leases whenever necessary. Even the Bank, I signed the lease and I am currently chasing A-Lang because their lease has expired.

Prof: Baffour, can you please say something about Muslims.

Baffour: Yes. The Asante Nkramo people perform some rites for Asantehene. Sometimes they notify me to let Asantehene know when they would come and chant prayers with him. Sometimes about eight people would come, then including myself and Otumfuo, we would "kram" (chant) with them very late in the night. Then Otumfuo would give them a cow for alms and sacrifice. Then we would slaughter the cow here in my house, cut it into very small pieces and give them away to the poor and disabled.

On every Friday, they come to pray and then after that Otumfuo would distribute Massa and candies to children and the children would yell, "Okose oo! Okose oo!, Okose oo!" three times. Then the children would be chanting 'Nana Onyame nhyira wo oo'. This past Christmas

Otumfuo gave away over two million cedis, all in ten-cedi notes. I have never seen anything like that. Everyone got ten thousand cedis, even babies.

Prof: Baffour, when did the Muslims come to Asante?

Baffour: During the reign of Nana Osei Tutu

Prof: How about the deities and the Muslims. We have heard that some work together.

Baffour: They do not work together. Some of them do not take good care of their deities and go around looking for powers to boost what they have. But the big deities like Tano, they do not ask for money, sometimes just pennies, that's all. But some add Te-gare and others to increase their powers.

Ques: Baffour, what we would like to know is that, some of these Muslims work very closely with some deities. It may be attributable to sheer proximity, but they appear to be working together because when you go there someone would advise you to consult the oracle before you come to the deity.

Baffour: Yes. I consult oracles every now and then. For Asantehene and sometimes on my own behalf. But you have to be very careful and use it very sparingly, because they are very controversial.

Prof: We also know that sometimes when the fetish priest prepare a potion to be worn around the waist, it is usually the Muslims who weave the [leather] band around it.

Baffour: that is why my brother was sent to the north to learn how to weave that. You cannot send Otumfuo's talisman and other sacred things out for someone to weave, as Sanaahene has been doing lately. That is part of my job, I know how to weave very well.

It is not safe to take Otumfuo's things outside. It is private.

Prof: Baffour, thank you ever so much. We will be back if and when the need arise. Thank you.