

Title:

Palaver Held at the Central Market, Kumasi

Creators:

Akoto, Bafuor Osei; Kwanteng, Chief Yaw

Date:

October 13, 1946

Description:

Muslim traders settled freely in Kumasi after British conquest in 1898, but they had to negotiate a place for themselves politically and economically as a minority. Each immigrant ethnic group acknowledged a Kumasi headman, who maintained constructive relations with the Asante chiefly hierarchy and the British colonial authorities to protect their trading activities and legal traditions. Although most of the translations for this case will be from oral interviews, the paramount chief's archives contain valuable English language documents from earlier decades, such as petitions and court cases. The following sample document shows high-ranking palace officials mediating a conflict between male traders from Gao (Mali) and Asante women traders. Their rivalry over access to truckloads of yams arriving in Kumasi Central Market sparked several violent clashes between 1938 and 1952.

Archive:

Asantehene's Archives in Manyia, KUMASI

Transcript:**BUSINESS:**

Having taken down the names numerated above, Bafuor Akoto informed the meeting that he and the Omantihene in the person of Nana Yaw Kwanteng had come to investigate certain discrepancies existing between the Gaos and the Yam Sellers and then effect a reconciliation between them in obedience to the instructions of Otumfuo the Asantehene, following a complaint lodged with him by the yam sellers. They were also told that by their mutual co-operation, the present inflation of the price of yam in the local market was bound to subside to the advantage of the community in general.

The Gaos, who were alleged to have been responsible for the present unhappy condition of affairs, were asked to suggest ways and means whereby the price of yams would become normal, but they rather referred the matter to the yam sellers for their views and any suggestions they might deem fit.

At this stage, the head yam seller in the person of Madam Ama Asor clarified the circumstances surrounding the unhappy situation as follows:-

That the Gaos were monopolising in the whole business transaction, i.e. if the yams arrived from the N.Ts. and some of the female traders who brought and retailed them approached the Gaos to buy some, they were denied the privilege until when the Gao in charge of the particular yams had been given some monetary present.

*From: Everyday Islam in Kumasi: Devout Lay Men and Women in Daily Life
by Gracia Clark*

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She further said that when the yams arrived, the Gaos, who acted as middlemen, would clear them wholesale and raise the price thereof to such an extent that the yam sellers were compelled to buy them at an exorbitant price; and in order that they also might realize a very small margin of profit, they added a few pence to the cost price and thus swelled the local price of yam.

Having questioned the Gaos as to their conduct in this regard, they were unable to answer the allegation made against them; but, however, made us to understand that the prices of yams varied according to their sizes, ranging from £2 per 100, up to £13 per 100 tubers. They were asked to suggest reasonable price for 100 tubers of yam according to their sizes, but they in turn rather asked the women to suggest, and they suggested £5 per 100 tubers (big size) as the maximum price. They were advised that if the yams arrived from the N.Ts., they should not bid for the prices, that they should not clamour for the yams and bargain for the price thereof.

The head yam seller, hereafter, ventilated one of their chief grievances:-

That when a Gao insulted and/or assaulted a woman, and the latter lodged a complaint against the former with the Gao Headman, the Headman, would, instead of investigating the complaint and checking the Gao concerned if he acted wrongly, thereby deterring others from committing a similar offence, discountenance it and thus connived at their offence.

The Gaos explained away this point, that the woman, taking advantage of their sex and tribe, were used to offering insults to them, and their act would subsequently develop into assault. Believing the story told by both sides, each side was advised strongly to respect one another in their business tradition, and to work harmoniously with each other.

At this stage, the following rules were drawn to be enforced by both the yam sellers and the Gaos, subject to the approval of the authorities concerned:-

1. That a tuber of yam (big size) should not cost more than 1/3d [1 shilling 3 pence] in the Kumasi market.
2. That 100 tubers of yam (big size) delivered should not cost more than £5 locally.
3. That on no account should traders group round the yams as they arrive from the N.Ts and bid for the prices thereof.
4. That anybody who obstructs trade, i.e whoever advises or persuades a farmer to transfer his yams to him or her so that he or she might sell them above the price intended for by the said farmer, is guilty of an offence, and report of such contravention should be made to the Asantehene's office for the necessary measures to be taken.
5. That excepting only the Gao and/or the seller responsible for the arrived yams, no other person should approach and unload the said lorry.

Both sides, having agreed to the above, the Gaos were advised to be true and sincere to themselves. That they should see to settle their internal affairs amicably and not to give way to discord which might eventually develop to rioting as hitherto was the case. They were also reminded of the fixed maximum prices of the local yams.

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The meeting came to a close at 12.30 noon.

Chief Yaw Kwanteng
Omantihene.

Bafuor Osei Akoto
Asantehene's Linguist.

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