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From a Kingdom to a Commonwealth: A History of Denkyira, 1500–1950

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Abstract

This article examines the historical trajectory of Denkyira, a once-dominant Akan kingdom in Ghana. It challenges the prevailing narrative that the legacy of Denkyira ended with its defeat by Asante in 1701. Despite its significance as a precolonial West African powerhouse, the Denkyira kingdom remains largely absent from mainstream historical discourse. This paper fills this research gap by presenting a much-needed analysis of how Denkyira transformed into a resilient commonwealth that adapted to Asante rule and colonial power and even navigated the path to Ghana's independence. By employing a qualitative historical analysis, I integrate a variety of primary and secondary sources, including colonial records, oral histories, archival documents, newspapers, and historical narratives, to explore Denkyira's military, political, and economic institutions, as well as its strategic adaptations after its defeat in 1701. My analysis underscores Denkyira's active engagement with shifting power dynamics and demonstrates how the kingdom retained significance and influence, despite the predominant assumptions of a linear decline. In doing so, I contribute to broader debates on the dissolution and survival of pre-colonial states, emphasizing the role of historical memory in postcolonial Africa.

Keywords: Denkyira, Asante, Ghana, colonialism, statehood

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Introduction

The narration of history is deeply intertwined with collective memory and identity. Chinua Achebe argues that "it is the storyteller who makes us what we are, who creates history. The storyteller creates the memory that survivors must have – otherwise their surviving would have no meaning" (Achebe 1989, 10). At the same time, in Nigerian author Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel*, a village chief, Baroka, tricks the Public Works Department to halt modernization, then retells the event to the village as a triumph. His performance reveals how power manufactures truth: domination becomes wisdom, manipulation becomes leadership, and a lie becomes selective narration (Soyinka 1962, 38–42). These examples highlight both the role of storytelling in shaping identity and collective memory, and the ways in which the power embedded in history can distort social and historical truths and influence collective identities.

This is particularly evident in the case of Denkyira, once a dominant Akan kingdom, yet now largely absent from mainstream historical discourse. Despite being one of Ghana's most formidable and powerful precolonial states, the historical trajectory of Denkyira remains underexplored beyond its well-documented fall to Asante in 1701. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on Denkyira as a powerhouse of gold, its military dominance in the 17th century, and its defeat by the Asante in the early 18th century, overlooking its complex transformation over the following centuries (Renehan 1978; Wilkinson 1994; Shumway 2001; Kwarteng 2002; McCaskie 2007; Brukum 2008; Ofosu-Mensah 2010; Law 2012; Gblerkpor 2023). This paper posits that Denkyira's historical narrative is not one of mere collapse following its defeat by Asante. Instead, Denkyira underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a formidable kingdom into a resilient commonwealth that adeptly navigated Asante suzerainty, European colonial rule, and the complex political changes leading to Ghana's independence.

Denkyira commanded vast territories at its peak in 1690, reaching far beyond present-day Ghana's Central Region. According to my interlocutors, it was the first Akan polity to become a centralized kingdom in 1590 (e.g., Nana Amponsem Siriboe, interview, October 26, 2025), and throughout the 17th century, its control over gold production and its participation in the transatlantic slave trade instilled fear and respect among neighbouring states (Bosman 1705; Reindorf 1895). Its dominance extended over Adanse, Akyem, Amansie (later Asante), Asen, Domaa, Heman, Sefwi, Twifo, and Wassa (Boaten 1971; Daaku 1971; Addo-Fenning 1988; Ofosu-Mensah 2010). My interlocutors asserted that, beginning around 1630, the Dutch, English, and Brandenburg-Prussia actively sought alliances with the rulers of Denkyira, and the kingdom was able to maintain a diplomatic presence on the coast until 1701, when it eventually collapsed (Nana Frimpong Manso IV, interview, November 17, 2024; see also McCaskie 2007, 1). Denkyira's defeat by the Asante in the early 18th century marked a turning point, after which the kingdom was written out of historical narratives, reduced to the status of a vassal state, and later subsumed into British colonial governance. In an interview with Barima Siaw Panin III, the Denkyira Gyaasehene (chief of the royal household), he explained that Denkyira's defeat stemmed from internal rivalry over succession to the chieftaincy – specifically the dispute between Asenso Kufour (would-be founder of Asante Nkawie) and Ntim Gyakari regarding who was the legitimate Denkyirahene (king of the Denkyira kingdom). The eventual rule of Ntim Gyakari, marked by tyranny, led many subchiefs and clans to abandon the kingdom. Chiefs such as the Adansehene, Dunkwahene and the Tafohene withdrew, while others migrated further: the Hume moved into the Volta Region; Baah Abu relocated to Aburi in the Eastern Region; the Chokosi settled

in present-day Ivory Coast; and the Anofo dispersed into Togo, Benin, and Ivory Coast (Nana Ama Ayensua Saara, interview, October 19, 2025). The succession dispute led to large-scale defections toward the emerging Amansie state. One notable example highlighted by my interlocutors is Nana Adwoa Abora-Sika Oti-Akenten, a royal who left the Denkyira capital accompanied by 1,000 maidservants, 500 of whom carried gold dust. She settled at Atwema Koforidua with her deity. There she met Osei Tutu, the king of Asante, introduced herself, and later became his wife. Through her wealth, she helped finance the nascent Asante polity and played a key role in the establishment of the Asante kingdom (Nana Adwoa Abora-Sika II, interview, November 3, 2025). This exodus of royal authority and resources marked the beginning of a period of strategic reconfiguration that enabled the Denkyira kingdom to preserve a degree of influence and identity amid shifting power dynamics. Understanding this phase requires examining how Denkyira navigated Asante's dominance while simultaneously restructuring its internal political framework to adapt to the realities of colonialism. Therefore, this paper challenges the idea that when a kingdom is defeated and subsumed, it loses its historical relevance. This assertion is critical because whenever a new power emerged within the political bloc, prominent kingdoms and empires became marginalized, their histories oversimplified and eventually "lost" entirely in colonial-era writings. For example, the British chronicles of Asante depicted the empire as a "warlike aggressor" and ignored its sophisticated political systems, trade networks, and cultural achievements; in writing about the Kongo kingdom after its fall, Portuguese and Belgian authors minimized its earlier cosmopolitan diplomacy (McCaskie 1995; Hilton 1985). I challenge the idea that Denkyira's decline was a straightforward collapse. Instead, I examine how Denkyira reconfigured itself by strategically engaging with Asante rule, British colonial policies, and internal political restructuring to maintain its identity and influence well into the 20th century.

To do so, I examine the factors behind Denkyira's rise as a dominant Akan kingdom, analysing the military, political, and economic institutions that sustained its power. I trace Denkyira's transition from an independent state to an Asante vassalage and, later to British colonial rule. I also consider how Denkyira's absence from post-1701 history shapes our understanding of precolonial Ghana. This approach situates Denkyira within wider patterns of state dissolution, resilience, and adaptation in West African history. By investigating external forces – like European trade, Asante expansion, and colonial administration – alongside internal reorganizations, leadership conflicts, and alliances, I offer a multidimensional perspective that moves beyond conventional historical accounts of Denkyira. My analysis of Denkyira's place within Ghanaian and African history ultimately contributes to broader discussions on the dissolution and survival of precolonial states, the impact of colonial governance on indigenous polities, and the politics of historical memory in postcolonial Africa.

Methodology

I employed a qualitative historical analysis, drawing on a wide spectrum of primary and secondary sources, such as oral histories, colonial archives, historical texts, and scholarly articles, to reconstruct Denkyira's rise, transformation, and geopolitical role from 1500 to 1950. My qualitative enquiry into historical sources presents an opportunity to deploy a heterogenous approach, including anthropological, ethical and socio-political perspectives (Jovanović 2011, 3; Simonton 2003, 624–626). The study examines Denkyira's evolution as a nation-state within its broader historical context. Rather than treating its past as a linear trajectory of rise and decline, I follow Stewart's

(Stewart 2016, 79) view that "historicity offers a framework for approaching time as nonlinear." This perspective informs my use of oral history, reflexive awareness of interpretive bias, and critical analysis of historical data to uncover the patterns and power relations that shaped Denkyira's transformation.

The paper adopted a socio-historical approach to reconstructing and tracing new historical facts, which serves as a prerequisite for a more distinct analysis of Denkyira's checkered history. Thus, the research draws on Vico's famous expression, *verum esse ipsum factum* ('the truth itself is made'), as an epistemological foundation for interpreting and understanding the historical events discussed in this paper (Jovanović 2011, 4–6). Hence, the research takes an interpretive approach to history. I employed sampling to select a representative subset of historical records and relevant materials. The historical writings sampled were based on their relevance to the research objective. Primary sources included documents from the Manhyia Office Records (MRO) and the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), both located in Ghana, as well as digitized versions of rare historical texts and records that are usually out of print or housed in distant libraries in Europe. Such books included Bosman (1705), Reindorf (1895), Casely-Hayford (1903), Claridge (1915), Fuller (1921), and Rattray (1929).

In addition to traditional archival and textual sources, I used oral history as a vital methodological component. Incorporating oral accounts enabled the recovery of voices and life histories that are typically excluded from formal records. These marginalized accounts supplemented the data pool and provided a deeper perspective on Denkyira's transformation (see also Cooper 2005, 202–203; Henige 2005, 187). In all, 28 royals and traditional custodians were interviewed. Where the analysis draws directly from their testimonies, this is either narrated from their perspective or referenced in parentheses with the interviewee's name and date.

Purposive sampling was used to identify interlocutors with specific knowledge or significance in Denkyira's history, including Denkyira's Paramount Chief and Queen Mother, divisional chiefs, state linguists, the Asantehene, Paramount Chiefs from Akwamu, Asumenya, Juaben, and Mampong, and a royal historian of the Asante kingdom. Semi-structured interviews invited open-ended reflections on Denkyira's past. These conversations provided insights into participants' interpretations of Denkyira's legacy and significance. While oral history offers diverse perspectives, it is also constrained by memory bias and verification challenges (Falola and Jennings 2003). Where possible, interview accounts were therefore cross-checked among participants to ensure coherence and accuracy.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analysed with particular attention to how oral histories convey meaning. This involved identifying key points within the narratives, tracing recurring themes, and organizing the data accordingly. Oral histories were interpreted as narrative accounts, taking into consideration the context, tone, and linguistic choices of interviewees. To ensure reliability even further, findings were, where possible, triangulated with archival sources.

Secondary sources comprised scholarly articles and books that have shaped discussions of Denkyira's history over the past five centuries. I selected these materials for their relevance to key moments in Denkyira's history, such as its role as a vassal during the Asante wars, experiences of resettlement, encounters with colonial governance and the transition to independence.

Denkyira's economic and political foundation

The Denkyira, initially known as Adawufo, belong to the Agona abusua, who migrated

from Kemet around 30 BC and settled within the Ghana Empire, helping to build it for centuries. Around 800 CE, they migrated to the Songhai Empire, where they settled for close to five centuries until its collapse due to the Arab invasion of the empire (Francis Ayisi-Aboagye, interview, April 26, 2024). After the fall of the Songhai Empire, the Adawufo moved into modern-day Ghana. They settled at Nkyiraa under the leadership of Ɔkɔmfo Kyenekye and Aberewa Bomaasi, with her sister, Atta Fosuaa, in the 14th century (1320) to escape the Mohammedan invasion and the imposition of the Islamic religion in their quest for peaceful settlement and self-independence (Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13 2015; Nana Kojo Kobo II, interview, October 24, 2025). Among the Agona clan, the Adawufo are the most senior. The Agona also include Bodwesango, Buabin, Kayereku, Mampoma, Ɔda, Swedru, Aburi, Tafo, and Twifo.

At Bono Manso, they lived for about 150 years, contributing to the economic growth of the Bono kingdom before migrating out of Nkyiraa in 1450 under their first priest-king, Ayekra Adeboe, due to population growth and the desire to engage directly with the transatlantic trade (Nana Ama Ayensua Saara III, interview, August 8 2024). At Nkyiraa, the Adawu migrants had the appellation "*Adawu Dawu Denkyira, pretemprem mene sono*" ('Adawu Denkyira, the quick sand or forest which swallows elephants'), due to their might and military skills. Their stay in Nkyiraa was prolonged enough that they began to imitate the culture of the Nkyiraa people; therefore, their original name, Adawufo, evolved into *Da-Nkyiraa*/Denkyira.[1] This narration contradicts the assertion made by Claridge (1915, 193), who posited that the founding of Denkyira was presumably around the same time as that of Asante.

According to Nana Ama Ayensua Saara, one day, Nana Ayekra Adeboe received the pearl beaded stool, Bankamdwa, during her search for herbs, where three deities guarded it; hence, their first Odwira took place in 1502 (Daily Graphic, 2006, 35). The stool received became the symbol of statehood and unity among the migrants, and thus represents the birth of Denkyira as a nation-state. The birth of the nation-state began at Anhwiankwanta in Amansie. After the death of Nana Ayekra Adeboe, several chiefs[2] followed, and it was only in 1580 that Nana Mumunumfi established the Denkyira kingdom in Tutumbe near Bonatifi, Adanse Akrokyere, an area rich in gold (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022; Nyarko 2021, 100). Under this first centralized Denkyirahene, the state began to rise economically, with agriculture and commerce becoming the primary sources of wealth for the Denkyira nation. The economic rise of Denkyira was partly attributed to its cultivation of palm fruits, the congregation of all Agona states within the Adanse, particularly Ntibanso (Abankeseso), to the south, and to the skills of Denkyira traders and leaders (see also Reindorf 1895, 43–44; Ward 1965, 23).[3] Nevertheless, this assertion is disputed by Nana Boadu Ntiamoah, who argues that the rise of Denkyira was due to its strategic

[1] Dankyira means to be dependent on Nkyiraa. while Denkyira means to be like Nkyiraa.

[2] The following are the chiefs that followed in the succession: Anim Panyin (1515–1540), Ahi-Aha (1540–1579) Mumunumfi (1580–1602), Oboakropa (1602–1623), Wirempem Ampem (1624–1637), Boadu Ankafu Brempon (1637–1647), Boa Amponsem Dakabere (1647–1693), Bosiante (1693–1695), Ntim Gyakari (1695–1701), and Boadu Akefun (1701–1702).

[3] Tribal Histories: Denkyira'. Enclosing 'A list of the Old Denkyira towns and villages, given by Denkyirahene Owusu Bore II and his elders', Dunkwa-on-Ofin, (17 and 19 March 1946). ADM 11/824, PRAAD, Accra; Bekwai District, DC (Bekwai) to Commissioner Eastern Province, 'Report of a Tour of Inspection,' Bekwai (18 Jan., 1927). AM/779. Manhyia Records Office, Kumase. The famous Abankeseso is located near the modern day Obuasi mine. At Abankeseso, the core settlements were Abuaso, Abori, Datano, Mpatuom, Watreso, Asabi, Adiembra, Piaso, Asaman, Miradani, Akwabaso, Mpabinha, Obuase, Ahwiaso, Nyinawunsu (Efuonhumasu), Ntoamu, Kotimso (Kwanyako), and Ayamfori.

location within the area abundant in gold around Obuasi, which is today the largest mine in Ghana (Nana Boadu Ntiamoah, interview, July 19, 2025).

Denkyira's military strength, expansion, and decline

Before the migration of the Denkyira to Akrokyere, Adanse was a tributary of the Akrokyere State. However, as time elapsed, Denkyira settled at Ntibanso and subsequently established Abankeseso as its capital. Denkyira embattled and conquered the entire Adanse enclave after years of war, subjugating these city-states and towns – Akrofuom, Amansie, Ayaase, Bodwesango, Dompoase, Edubiase, Odumase, Apedua, Medoma, Prasu, Menhyia (Adediakyire), Ataase Nkwanta, Kyiaboso, Odumase, Eseneagya, Edwinase, Domposo, Sibinso, Ayaase, Kusa, Gyakobu and Ahinsan (Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, interview 2015; Kwame Ampene, interview, September 15, 2016; Okofo Kwabena Bonsu II, interview, November 21, 2024). The annexation of Adanse made Denkyira very prosperous and the primary supplier of gold on the Gold Coast, overthrowing Adanse as the most prosperous nation-state (Nana Ama Ayensua Saara III, interview, 2024; Reindorf 1895, 43; Fuller 1921).

During the reign of Wirempem Ampem, Denkyira's Abankeseso was established, with Abankeseso Banso (later known as Dunkwa-on-Ofin) serving as its capital. The capital consisted of 77 localities.[4] Wirempem's reign consolidated Denkyira's military dominance. Following the defeat of the Aowin state, he implemented a military strategy that reorganised the territories into divisions, each overseen by a divisional commander.[5]. This made Denkyira a large, sprawling kingdom. Wirempem Ampem became an absolute ruler, and his reign was the beginning of terror, hence the saying: "*Wirempem Ampem a, wo din yemmo*", meaning 'Wirempem Ampem, whose name is not to be uttered' (Nyarko 2021, 102). After his demise, he was succeeded by Boadu Ankafu Brempon (1637–1647), the second female king after Nana Ayekra Adeboe. Her reign saw peace between Adanse and Denkyira with few hostilities.

Later, her death sparked a contest between the royals; some wanted Kyereɛ Sikafo, who was very old, and others wanted a young man, especially considering the ongoing war with the Adanse. Asare Boa Amponsem, an eight-year-old boy eventually became Denkyirahene (1647–1692). Asare Boa Amponsem Dakabere was a non-royal of the Denkyira, whose mother was Aberewa Kukusi, and whose sister was Akoabena Bensua (Reindorf 1895, 46). With Kyereɛ losing the royal stool to a non-royal, he and his followers migrated from Abankeseso, moving northward and settling temporarily at Bantama before migrating to Anyinam.

With Boa Amponsem as Denkyirahene, the Adanse-Denkyira battle raged on, and

[4] Bekwai District, DC (Bekwai) to Commissioner Eastern Province (Ashanti), 'Report of a Tour Inspection', Bekwai (January 18, 1927). AM/77. Manhyia Records Office, Kumase.

[5] The Benkum/Akomatire Division is headed by Mfuomhene and the other chiefs whose territories are Dominase, Nkasawora, Abesewa, Mmradan, Breman, Agyempabuoso, Akyease, Atekyem, Baabianiha, Adwumam, Akrofuom, Gyaman and Dunkwa. Adonten Division headed by Diasohene and consists of the towns of Abissiwa, Abuabuasu, Adiambra, Agyimpoma, Amansasi, Amoyaw, Ankaako, Anhwiabam, Bisiasi, Brofoyeduru, Krobo, Nkrodua, Nkutumsu, Nsuaem, Nyinawusu, Odumase, Ofiafiasu, Passu. Twafo was headed by Oboasehene and consisted of Adiade, Anwianwia, Betinase, Fawomanye and Esaase. The Nifa Division is led by Abuakwa Buabensohene and the following towns: Amoafo, Breman, Akropong, Denkyira Fosu, Adwumam, Kyekyewere, Nkwantanan, Oda, Sobroso and Wawase; The Kronkor Division consist of Nyinawusu, Badua, Nsuaem Daada, Okotumaso and Pewako. The Gyaase Division is headed by Nyameanihene and consists of the following Nyameani, Kwakukurom, Frami, Mbem, Mesurumenhu, Mpesiem, Nkroforo, Nkubetsen, Nkwanta, Ntom, Nyamkomase, Nyinabontoa, Odumase, Ohenesi, Oponsokese, Sefwi, Tagyanbuoso, Tonsuosim and Watreso.

Adanse became a subject of Denkyira in 1659, as Denkyira destroyed the capital, Adansemanso. This forced the vanquished Adanse to settle among the hills of Akyem and purchase land there, where they remained for almost a century.[6] The defeat of Adanse led to Denkyira becoming a significant player in the gold supply to European merchants. Denkyirahene Boa Amponsem never used the same gold ornament more than once, which earned him the soubriquet "*Boa Amponsem a, odi sika tomprada*" ('Boa Amponsem, who eats fresh gold'). Denkyira's wealth in gold was so immense that it took five days to transport it all from Anomansa to the kingdom.

With Denkyira's rise to power in 1659, most states began to move in fear of being annexed due to Boa Amponsem's tyranny, and soon there was the saying: "*Kotoko som Amponsem*" ('The porcupine (Asante) is a servant of Amponsem (Denkyira)'[7] For instance, the Amansie states, led by Kwaaman under Oti Akenten, migrated, and the Akyem Abuakwa migrated in 1660 (Nana Agyen-Frempong Ababio, interview, June 16, 2024). Trade with the Europeans contributed significantly to Denkyira's growth – i.e., through access to guns and the presence of able, courageous, and tactful leaders such as Wirempem Ampem, Boadu Ankafu Brempon, and Boa Amponsem (Bosman 1705, 423).

In the 1670s, Denkyira began its imperialist course of conquests and consolidation due to its desire to control the gold production and the kola trade; thus, it became an "urban, commercial and high-level technology kingdom" (Gocking 2005, 22). The rise of Denkyira culminated in a powerful state that stretched from the Tano River to its contact with the Fante outposts. With Boa Amponsem, the suzerainty of Denkyira reached its zenith, and its vassals increased to include the Amansie (Asante)[8], Asen, Kwabre, Sekyere, Manso, Atwema, Bodwesango, Domaa, Kotoku, Bosome, Aowin, and Twifo by 1692.[9] Denkyira became the principal state for Dutch traders; its gold was abundant and of high purity, and it waged wars against its surrounding kingdoms. The Denkyira became an important source of enslaved people for Anomansa, especially as it annexed Ahanta (Adom), Fetu, and Asen.

The wealth came from its victories over Wassa, Twifo, Aowin, Kommenda, and Asen (a country renowned for its gold, which was a key supplier to the Dutch) in 1692, which almost devastated the Asen state (Bosman 1705, 415–418; McCaskie 2007, 1). Between 1680 and 1700, Denkyira was the largest slave supplier to the Royal African Company and other European merchants, who exported 160,000 enslaved people (Ward 1965, 87). With the rise of Denkyira, the century became a period of the great "*Völkerwanderung*" on the Gold Coast – characterized by migration within the Gold Coast itself, wars, and the consolidation of states (Ward 1965, 104–117). Under Boa Amponsem, the wealth of Denkyira increased significantly in 1690, when the kingdom expanded from the southwestern Gold Coast to parts of the Ivory Coast. With the defeat of Aowin, the states of Sehwi, Keteso, Yawu, Brako, and Sikaso, all located in the Ivory Coast, came under the control of Denkyira (Daaku 1971).

The first sign of the fall of Denkyira began under Boa Amponsem when he became tyrannical as Denkyira began to sell its vassals as slaves, forcing the migration of many royals as well as sacrificed the mother of Okomfo Anokye to appease the gods. A critical listening to the eulogized songs of Denkyira showed how imposing Boa Amponsem was.

[6] '*History of Akrokerri',* 22, Manhyia Record Office, Kumase.

[7] 'Testimony of Nyinawunsu Agona 'Family Head' Charles Osei Nkansah, ADM 11/824, PRAAD, Accra.

[8] The Amansie state had Mampon supplying red clay, Dwaben supplying plantain fibres and Kwaaman sending firewood as their tributes annually.

[9] The Ancient State of Denkera in Relation to the Twifurs. (15th February 1923), ADM/23/1/408, PRAAD, Cape Coast.

In eulogizing the Denkyirahene, the Adumfo[10] remarked: "*Wokyere Ankoma ma Ankoma kɔkyere Ankoma, wokum kuru ma yɛkɔɔ Ɔben kɔtoo asuo, wo Kwahene kum Kwaku Akwaniaba, samaniba fri Kɔtɔkɔ*" ('You defeated Kyere Ankoma; you killed a whole town, which resulted in Obeng running into a river. Your Kwahene killed Kwaku Akwaniaba from Kotoko'). In an interview with Okyeame Kwabena Adu, under Boa Amponsem, the most prominent vassal, Asante experienced growth in military might, especially after Adanse rebelled against Denkyira and fled to Asante for protection. The military prowess came in the form of many key chiefs of Denkyira joining the Asante as a new state. These migrants, having lived in Denkyira and served as warriors, allied with the growing Amansie state to devise strategies to subdue Denkyira. The Adanse's flight to Asante provided the Asante with guns and gunpowder from the Dutch. The Denkyira freely allowed munitions to pass; it was interested in levies and excises from the trade because its gold supply had dwindled so much due to the extravagant lifestyle of Boa Amponsem that it could not even produce two weights of gold in a month. With the draining away of gold, Denkyira became haughty and disrespectful towards its tributaries and began to exercise its highhandedness over them.

After Boa Amponsem came Boasiante (1692–1695) and Ntim Gyakari (1695–1701) as Denkyirahene; under the rulership of Ntim Gyakari, the Asante attacked Denkyira unaware in 1698, but they were defeated. However, as time evolved, Ntim Gyakari continued the policy of Boa Amponsem, where Denkyira treated its vassals with disdain by asking for the filling of a brass pan with gold dust; the chiefs' wives were to provide Ntim Gyakari's wives with *mposae*[11]; Ntim Gyakari demanded the delivery of a severed finger from each Asante chief, together with their most cherished wives and the mothers of the chiefs (Reindorf 1895, 53; Sarfo Kantanka, interview, November 22, 2024). These demands were deemed insulting, hence the Feyiase War of 1699–1701. The Asante assaulted the emissaries as they severed the hands of the courtiers and filled the brass pan with stones.

Before the unforgettable battle that dethroned Denkyira as a kingdom, many courtiers of Ntim Gyakari began to join the forces of the Asante. The Abooso people (now Atwema), whose leader was made Atwimahene, the Akyamfuo of Denkyira and the brothers, Akwadan and Nuamoa, the chief horn blowers of Denkyira, subsequently joined the Asante.[12] The Asante also refused to meet Ntim Gyakari's demands and battled the Denkyira for two years. According to Abuontemhene, Nana Adu Tutu Ampam II, during the battle, Denkyira attacked the Asante in Adunku, Baworo, and Abuontem, where the Asante resisted for seven days before marshalling forces from Kumase. By 1702, Denkyira was no longer a kingdom. The Battle of Feyiase saw the death of Asante General, Boahen Anantuo, the Mamponhene.

Before the defeat of the Denkyira, the Mamponhene came to the war with his god, *Atoku*, as this was the most powerful deity, who had helped the Asante defeat the Domaa (Daasebre Osei Bonsu II, interview, August 7, 2024). In the battle, the Asante warriors captured Ntim Gyakari from Ntoamu and took him to Kumasi, where he was executed. The Asantehene received his head as a war trophy, and his other body parts were taken to Mampon, Asumenya, and Aduaben. These three states of Asante were permitted to copy Ntim Gyakari's regalia (Rattray 1929, 132; Daasebre Osei Bonsu II, interview, August 7, 2024; Odeneho Nana Okyere Kusi, interview, September 10, 2023).

The war generals of the Denkyira were Kwame Tabi (on the van), Kwadwo Wiafe

[10] State executioners

[11] *Mposae* is the dry fibres of the plantain trees used by women during their menstrual periods. It is today synonymous with sanitary pads.

[12] 'Testimony of Ayamfuri (Ayamfori) Linguist Kwadwo Bredwa,' ADM 11/824, PRAAD, Accra.

(right wing), Kwaku Butuakwa (left), Kwasi Peprah (at the rear), and Asiama Tia (in the body). The Asante war generals were Aduenin Panin of Aduaben (on the van), Amaniampon of Mampon, Adu Ayeboafo of Bekwai, Wiafe Akenten (Ofinso), and Asumdwuma Tani on the right wing; Tweneboah Kodua (Kumawu), Okwawu Diawuo, Osafo Akoton on the left wing under the command of the Asumenyahene, Onomaya Apau. Amankwatia Panyin of Bantama, Asafo Awere, Saman Nantwi, and Okrakose were captains of the bodyguard; Osaben Odiawuo (cousin of Osei Tutu and son of Obiri Yeboa), Okra Domase, Okra Pomsem, Ansere Tani, and Safo commanded at the rear; Nsuta Agyin was the general of the left flank of the van and Adakwa Yiadom, general of the right van. The Asenhene, Agyensamoo allied with the Asante to avenge the destruction of the Asen nation-state by the Denkyira in 1697. Ansa Sasraku III of Akwamu sent Osahene Gyarantwi with a force to assist the Asante (Odeneho Kwaafo Akoto III, interview, December 9, 2023). The Asante had 60,000 men and camped near Adunku of Bosomtwe, fighting against Denkyira and its kinsmen, the Atoam (Kotoku) (Reindorf 1895, 53–56; Claridge 1915, 197; Rattray 1929, 131).

The Denkyira beat the Asante completely and also won subsequent encounters at Aboɔten, Aputuogya, before taking the battle to Feyiase. With the murder of Ntim Gyakari, the Denkyira generals, Asiama and Safo, surrendered to the Asante, and the battle saw more than 130,000 killed (Daasebre Otuo Siriboe II, interview, September 6, 2024). The Dwabenhene, Adakwa Yiadom[13], who captured Ntim Gyakari, took his bracelet off his hands, captured the Ofin ba ('golden stool'), and beheaded him (Boadu Ntiamoah, interview, August 19, 2024; Osei Kantanka, interview, July 15, 2024; Francis Ayisi-Aboagye, interview, April 26, 2024). Through this bracelet, Dwaben received the prerogative of placing an Asantehene on the stool of Kumase. The Asante killed the Denkyira generals on the basis of treachery after an Asante Council had found them guilty, ruling,

> You, as a general, ought to have done your duty to your king and nation and settled any differences existing between yourself and the king at home, but never have acted so treacherous as you have done. You have made us gain the victory, yet justice must be done for a memorial to the world. (Reindorf 1895, 56)

Denkyira's decline and transition

With the defeat of Denkyira in November 1701, historical writings on the history of Denkyira shifted their focus to the Asante and their relationships with other people. Denkyira was studied through the lens of the Asante hegemony. Claridge, in his work *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*, remarked that the 18th century marked a significant period in the history of Asante, further asserting that it was destined to play a pivotal role in the history of the Gold Coast. This partly explained the shift in historical writings, as Asante dominated the historiography of the Gold Coast (Claridge 1915, 181).

Boadu Akefun succeeded Ntim Gyakari. While he was preparing to fight the Asante again, the Asante, led by Onomaya Apau, Asumenyahene, invaded the capital, Abankeseso, and destroyed it in a battle fought on the banks of the Ofin (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022). The Asante executed Boadu Akefun for the rebellion and looted all the gold found in Abankeseso in February 1702; the looting lasted for fifteen days (Claridge 1915, 197; Rattray 1929, 132). Subsequently, the Asante annexed Denkyira and took all Denkyira territories on the Ofin's left bank. The Asantehene gave the Denkyira lands to Asumenya, where

[13] The Seventh Dwabenhene. The sequence was Awere Tumfo, Kofi Agyekum, Ato, Kwabi Ameyaw, Twumasi Ankra, Dankwa Afrapo.

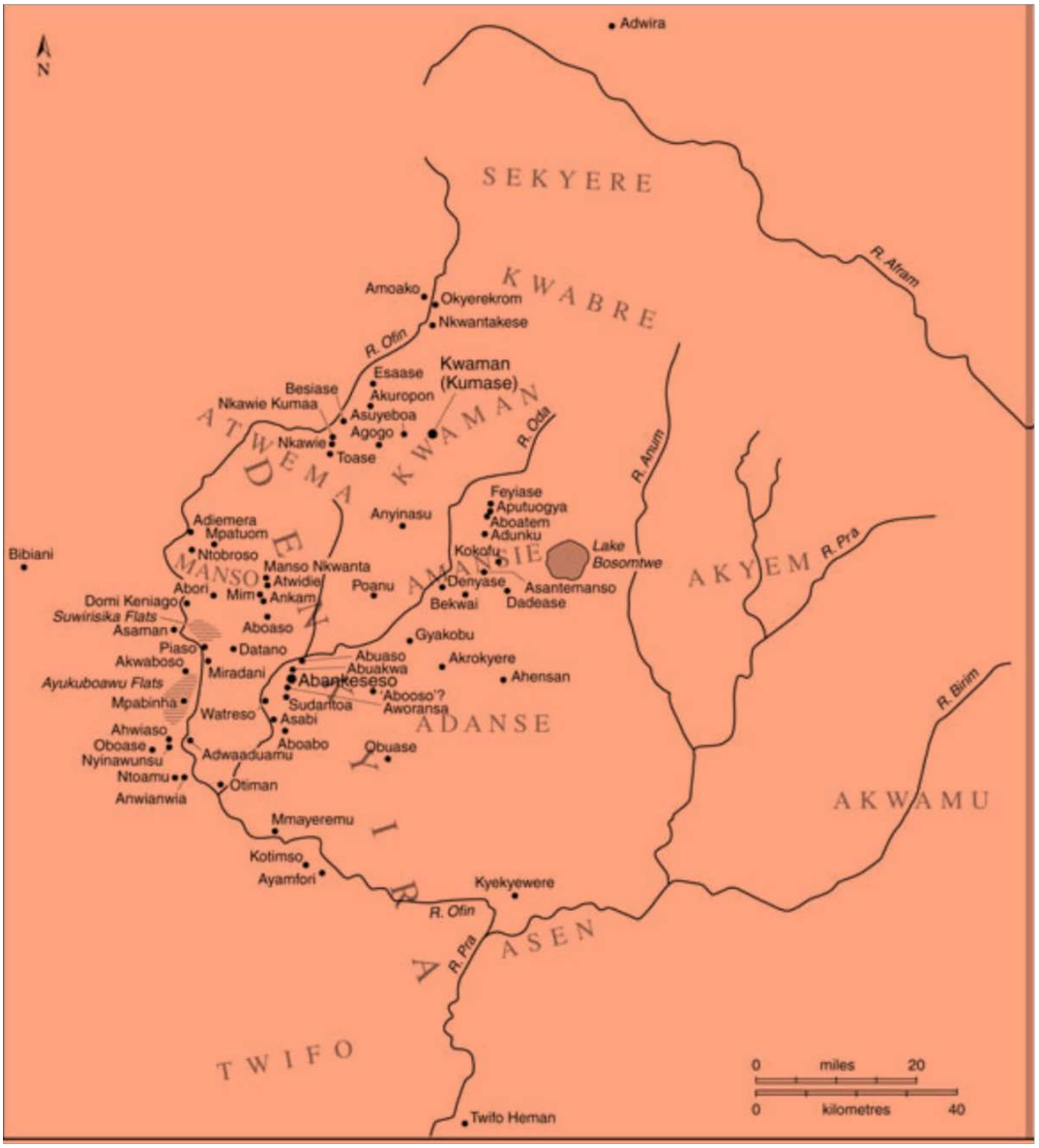


Figure 1: "Denkyira from 1660–1700", by Tom McCaskie. Image first published in McCaskie (2007, 5). Image is used with the generous permission of Professor Tom McCaskie.

the people of Asumenya established Dominase, Kyekyewere, and Agyemasu, and the rest to Bekwai, including Asokore Mampon, Ahuren, and Asokore. This act was intended to weaken Denkyira and prevent it from reasserting its independence (Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, interview, May 28, 2023; Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022).

With Denkyira vanquished, the states of Wassa and Sehwi threw off their allegiance, and Denkyira lost the Elmina Notes[14] and its lordship over both Anomansa and Kommenda states. Some Denkyira migrants also fled and became the Alanguire Baule. These migrants settled in the modern canton of Agba and lived among the Guro and Koro (Bosman 1705, 415). Others also established the Vume state

[14] Treaty documents and Dutch records that affirmed Denkyira's overlordship over Elmina and legitimated its claims to tribute

in present-day Volta and Wam in present-day Bono region (Okokoanko Yao Akornor II, interview, July 19, 2023; Kwadwo Antwi, interview, August 18, 2025). Denkyira resettled in Akrokyere and rebuilt its capital, Ntibanso. The Asantehene, Osei Tutu, instructed the Denyaasehene to settle in Amansie to watch over Denkyira, granted members of the Dwaben royal stool the Dedease lands to oversee Denkyira, and instructed migrants from other nation-states to establish new villages on Denkyira lands and integrate them into the existing Denkyira villages.[15] This move was to avoid Denkyira reorganizing to assert its independence.

Furthermore, the Asantehene, Osei Tutu, collected the best craftsmen and goldsmiths of Denkyira. The Asantehene created the Apagyafie and the golden Asomafo Stool for the Denkyira to integrate them into the newly established kingdom (John A. Kufour, interview, April 25, 2022; Boahen 1992, 413–423; Garrad 1980, 299).[16] As a vassal of the Asante, Denkyira engaged in numerous rebellions to reassert its independence and fought in wars as a commanding force under Denkyirahene, who served as a war general for the Asantehene. The Denkyira remained bellicose and rebellious towards Asante, such that between 1702 and 1820, it sought to reclaim its glory five times. In the years 1715–16, Denkyira united with its allies, particularly Bodwesango and Akyem Kotoku, to challenge Asante's dominance. This war, fought in the Pra Basin, culminated in the death of the Asantehene and the destabilization of Asante for three years – 1717–1720 (Boadu Ntiamoah, interview, August 19, 2024; Claridge 1915, 199–200).

As a vassal, in 1723–24, they allied with the Asante in military campaigns against Bono Manso, indicating a complex relationship where the Denkyira, despite past hostilities, also contributed to Asante's military endeavours (Fynn 1971; Lovejoy 2009). The Denkyira also played a role in Asante's gold mining; although an expedition of miners from Nyinawunsu sent by Opoku Ware in the 1720s failed to find gold in Sekyere, it nevertheless laid the groundwork for further mining activities that aimed to diminish Denkyira's economic standing and ability to acquire guns and munitions to reassert itself. This was done by settling miners from Manso Nkwanta at Obuasi and driving Denkyira out of Ntoamu and Kotimso, both located on the banks of the Ofin, to take over its rich gold deposits (McCaskie 2007, 8). The continuing resistance of Denkyira was evident in 1733–34 when they attempted to assert their independence again. The Asante crushed this rebellion decisively and used divide-and-rule tactics, restructuring the political landscape by placing Denkyira under the influence of the Bantamahene and introducing the Dagombas as a means of surveillance and control (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022; Fuller 1921, 62; Nyarko 2021, 113).

The Denkyira's discontent persisted, especially evident in 1764 when they supported the Banda in their wars against Asante. Despite initial successes, the Asante ultimately subdued the Banda, further reinforcing their dominance and leading to harsh penalties for Denkyira for supporting the Banda (Reindorf 1895, 138–139; Claridge 1915, 211–212). As a result, many Denkyira migrated to Agogo, seeking refuge from punitive measures (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022). From 1790 to 1794, Denkyira faced a significant challenge as it resisted Asante's expansionist policies. The capture of Denkyirahene Owusu Bore during this period marked a significant shift, resulting in Denkyira's complete vassalage to Asante after paying a substantial fine of 1,000 pereguans (i.e., approximately £140,413 in today's value) (Fuller 1921, 70; Wilks 2001, 123). The reign of

[15] 'Kokofu-Dadease Affairs'; Manhyia Records Office, Kumase. 183/35. 'Dadiase Native Affairs' 17 April (15 to 18 August 1954), ADM 11/1324, PRAAD, Accra.

[16] A group of goldsmiths and other craftsmen from Denkyira, whose duty was to make his regalia.

Owusu Bore (1793–1813) contradicts the assertion by Claridge that he was the third king of Denkyira (Claridge 1915, 193). The oral histories of Denkyira do not confirm that Owusu Bore was the third Denkyirahene neither does the narration from the Asante side confirm the assertions of Claridge.

Despite their subjugated status, the Denkyira played a pivotal role in the numerous victories and conquests of Asante. Under Owusu Bore's leadership, they achieved notable victories, indicating their continued military significance. The quest for independence intensified under Kwadwo Tibu as Denkyirahene in the aftermath of the Asante-Gyaman War (1818–19). Faced with what they perceived as existential threats, the Denkyira sought to distance themselves from Asante, particularly following the cold reception accorded to Kwadwo Tibu by Asantehene Osei Bonsu after the war (Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13, 2015). This was after Omanhene Kwadwo Tibu had bravely fought and defeated Kwadwo Adinkra, the Gyamanhene, in a battle that resulted in the deaths of thousands of Asante soldiers (Oduro Appiako II, interview, August 29, 2025). Tibu and his contingent felt disrespected, prompting Denkyira to ally with the Wassa and Twifo to challenge Asante's suzerainty (Boahen 1987, 156). This tumultuous relationship reached boiling point when a comment attributed to Kwadwo Tibu heightened Asantehene Osei Bonsu's suspicions, resulting in Tibu's prolonged detention in Kumase. The Denkyira responded with the war cry, "*Dakoro, Gyata fitaa bɛdane tuntum*" ('one day, the white lion will turn black'), which reflected an understanding of their precarious position and a foreshadowing of potential rebellion against Asante control (Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13, 2015).

Denkyira's re-assertion of independence

In 1820–21, Denkyira relocated to Nkyenkyenso near Aboaboso and subsequently settled at Kakomdo (Essakyiri) and Bonaso, where it waged war against the people of Banaso and absorbed them; the ruler of Banaso was Tueni Kodee (Reindorf 1895, 124; Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13, 2015).[17] The relocation was to avoid further interference in its internal affairs by Asante, and by 1823, it had established its new capital, Dwokwa (Nana Ayensua Saara III, interview, August 8, 2024). The relocation of Denkyira did not sit well with the Asantehene, resulting in the Anglo-Asante War of 1823– 24. With the arrival of George Maclean on the Gold Coast, Denkyira allied with the British and sought to reassert itself; therefore, the Nsamankow War (also known as the Anglo-Asante War) broke out in August 1823 (Ellis 1893, 148–149). In the war, Denkyira captured 300 Asante as prisoners and executed them all (Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13, 2015).[18]

At Dwokwa, Denkyira regained dominance as it sought to subjugate Twifo Mampon, forcing them to relocate to their present location after requesting land from the Hemanhene, Kofi Atta (Otumfuo Amoah Sasraku IV, interview, November 2, 2023). Denkyira sought to assert itself as a dominant force in the quest to trade directly with Europeans, but faced stiff opposition from the states of Anomansa and Fante. Between 1824 and 1829, Denkyira was under British's sphere of influence in Cape Coast, and the British felt obliged to assist the Denkyira due to their assistance at the Battle of Bonsaso and the ensuing clashes with the Asante army (Odeefuo Amoakwa Buadu VIII, interview, August 26, 2022; Renehan 1978, ii). In 1826, Denkyira allied with the British and their allies to wage war against Asante (Akatamanso War), where

[17] Hemang – Meeting on the 16th October 1923, ADM/23/1/398, PRAAD, Cape Coast.
[18] The Omanhene's Office (April 1925), ADM/23/1/408, PRAAD, Cape Coast.

Denkyira commanded the left wing of the army and inflicted the most significant defeat on Asante since its establishment (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022). Through this war, Denkyira became independent of Asante following the 1831 Peace Treaty between Asante and the British (Ellis 1893, 181–183).

Denkyira opted to come under the British sphere of influence subsequently, as it had grown tired of Asante invasions; hence, it championed the Bond of 1844[19], where eight states – Denkyira, Abora, Asen Apemanim, Asen Attandanso, Dominase, Anomabo, Fetu and Dominadie – came under British hegemony on March 6 (Oseadeeyo Kwesi Kenin IV, interview, September 2, 2024; Gyakabene Kwasi Amponsem, interview, February 13, 2025; Casely-Hayford 1903, 368). Before deciding to join the British protectorate, Denkyira attacked Shama and Takoradi in 1826 for assisting the Asante in the murder of some of the Denkyira. These two nation-states sold Denkyira nationals who took refuge in their towns during the war. People who fell victims to such an atrocious act included Denkyirahene, Kwadwo Tibu's wives and children, during the *Nsamankow* of 1824 (Wilkinson 1994, 68–70). The British sphere of influence was not about Denkyira being under European authority, but rather about Denkyira being an ally of the Europeans to prevent the Asante from expanding further.

Despite Denkyira seeing itself as an ally of the British, the Governors' actions undermined Denkyira's growth, creating hostilities between the parties. For instance, Governor Campbell, in 1826, banished Kwadwo Tibu from Cape Coast and attempted to discredit him among the Fante; in 1868, the Denkyira under Kwesi Kyei (1859–1869) became a force to be reckoned with, especially when the Dutch and British signed the Treaty of Exchange without consulting Denkyira, although it brought Denkyira into the Dutch sphere of influence. The Denkyira rejected this because the Dutch had long been allies of their archenemies, the Asante, and had not been assertive in their relations with the Asante.

This spurred the formation of the Fante Confederacy[20] in 1868, which aimed to present strong resistance against European colonization and to protect the nation-states which formed the Confederacy's interests and rights, specifically taking up the Denkyira and Wassa cause due to a direct appeal by Kwaku Afra, Denkyirahene, in March 1868, and establishing a self-governing state free from European influence (Odeneho Kwame Ackom, interview, August 10, 2022; Odeefuo Boa Amponsem III, interview, May 13, 2015). However, the British reluctantly agreed to put the Denkyira under their protection on the conditions of not entering into local disputes beyond their boundaries and banning the practice of panyarring, slavery, and human sacrifice during the reign of Boa Amponsem II (1870–75).

[19] According to an interview with Ampaabeng Marfo of Denkyira on August 27, 2025, the Bond of 1844 was necessitated by the attempt of Denkyirahene, Kwadwo Tibu, to embark on a massive onslaught against the Asante allies to reclaim its lands taken over by them during the Feyiase War of 1699–1701, after which the Denkyira had temporarily settled in Dwokwa, which the British reverted. The murder of Kwadwo Tibu's sister brought about the alliance between Denkyira and the British with their allies. The presence of Denkyira nearer to the coastal states created tensions among the British allies of the coast. Thus, the Bond of 1844 aimed for peaceful cohabitation along the coast, with the British having access to the trade routes after the 1831 Treaty. This agreement prevented the Denkyira from returning to their original homeland and was the reason why, among the eight states, the Denkyirahene was recognized as King.

[20] The following states constituted the Fante Confederacy: Abakrampa, Agona, Ahanta, Ampinafon, Anomabo, Anomansa, Apam, Asebu, Asen, Awutu, Denkyira, Eguafo, Etsii, Gomoa, Kommenda, Mankessim, Moree, Oguaa, Otsir, Shama, Tantum, Twifo, Wassa, and Winneba.

Denkyira under colonial rule

Although the Denkyira disagreed with the treaty, they reluctantly obliged and became part of the British Colony after the Treaty of Fomena in February 1874, as they could not continue their opposition to Asante without the assistance of the British, and feared abandoning their adherence to the British alliance (Renehan 1978 5). As Denkyira became more settled, parties of Denkyira began to drift back and occupy the lands in Upper Denkyira, and, significantly, most of the stools owning lands in the region were those of minor chiefs and the descendants of those who held lands to the south of the Ofin during the great days of Denkyira.

Under colonial rule, with the demonetization of some coins and the introduction of new coins on February 27, 1880, the power of the purse enjoyed by kings such as the Denkyirahene was taken away (Griffith 1887, ix). Additionally, the power of detention and deportation of the Colonial Government, as established on July 2, 1882, implied compliance with the colonialists' laws and dictates. This imposition further curtailed the authority enjoyed by custodians and nation-states. The Omanhene of Denkyira exercised limited authority, as almost all aspects of statehood, such as trade, security, legal authority, and the provision of amenities, were subject to European approval (Griffith 1887, v–xiv). Thus, by the end of the 1890s, Denkyira came under full British administrative control, and on January 1, 1902, it became a full British colony. For instance, the Colonial Government legislated on funeral customs in 1912, one of the significant practices of the Akan people, in the name of morality, concerning drunkenness.[21] Additionally, mining, which had brought wealth to Denkyira, was now under the authority of the Colonial Government under the Concession Ordinance of 1900. The payment of a prospecting or mining licence of £5.00 and £30.00, respectively, shared none of the proceeds with Denkyira (Colonial Office 1920, A 27).

The power and influence of Denkyira began to wane in its new land precisely due to the establishment of the Executive and Legislative Councils, the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (Amended) of 1910 and the Native Law and Custom, where Europeans settled chieftaincy issues (Colonial Office 1879, 74). For instance, in the statement of Denkyirahene, Kwadwo Tibu II, on February 15, 1923, he remarked to the District Commissioner of Dunkwa, Captain A. W. Norris, that "…it very often happens that a DISTRICT COMMISSIONER would contravene this request of the *OMANHENE*… but…by ignorance of this Law and Custom."[22] The Denkyirahene petitioned the Colonial Government in 1922–3 to have Twifo renew its allegiance to the Omanhene of Denkyira, as it had in ancient times; however, this request was declined.[23]

Additionally, Denkyira had been divided into two provinces – Central and Western – thereby curtailing the authority of the Denkyira state. This situation resulted in the absence of any visit from the Omanhene of Denkyira from the period of colonization until 1926, when the Denkyirahene, Kwadwo Tibu II, visited the Western Province, Upper Denkyira. In the absence of a visit to the Upper Denkyira, the Denkyirahene lacked control over his divisional chiefs, resulting in chaotic conditions. The majority of the divisional chiefs ignored the existence of the Omanhene. Chiefs hardly heard his oaths except those who thought it fit to do so, such as the adikrofo of Dunkwa, Ayanfuri, and Esikuma. The divisional chiefs never heard the

[21] Native Custom Celebration of Funeral. Native Affairs Department (13 July 1912), ADM-11-1-43, PRAAD, Accra.

[22] The Ancient State of Denkera in Relation to the Twifurs. (15th February 1923): 2, ADM/23/1/408, PRAAD, Cape Coast.

[23] The Ancient State of Denkera in Relation to the Twifurs. (15th February 1923): 3, ADM/23/1/408, PRAAD, Cape Coast.

Denkyiramanhene's oath (Meka Denkyira ne Fiada Ntam, to wit, the oath of Denkyira and Friday) on cases, nor was any portion of the oath fee ever remitted to him (Nana Kwadwo Antwi, interview, February 16, 2025). They also made no payments to the Denkyirahene in respect of any land leases or standing trees sold. The tribunal at Dunkwa had earned such an unenviable reputation that very few cases from Upper Denkyira ever reached Dwokwa, the capital of Denkyira.

This colonial administrative arrangement, where Lower Denkyira was in the Cape Coast District of the Central Province, and Upper Denkyira formed part of the Ankobra District of the Western Province, created a problem, leading to a tendency for the indigenes of Upper Denkyira to ignore the Denkyirahene and instead approach the District Commissioner at Dunkwa. The Colonial Government knew nothing about the electors of the Denkyirahene or who constituted the State Council.[24] From the 1910s onward, with the passage of the Head Chief's Court Ordinance in 1910, which allowed citizens to appeal the rulings of the Omanhene at the District Commissioner's Office, the influence and authority of the Denkyirahene were challenged, further weakening the power of the Denkyira State.[25]

Additionally, internal conflicts further tore the Denkyira commonwealth apart. In January 1918, two sub-chiefs, Kwadwo Kodia and Kwesi Broni, the Tufuhene and Abuakwa Tufuhene/Mankrado respectively, attempted to destool the Omanhene, Nkwantabisa II, who died in December 1919. The final decision was to be made by the political officers of the British Crown, who held the ultimate authority. After Nana Nkwantabisa II's death, divisions surfaced in Denkyira as many villages sought to overthrow their local authorities. The fact that chiefs remained chiefs, once the Colonial Government accepted the decisions made by the people, partly explained these divisions. In the case of reference 65/1920 dated November 13, 1920, the Adikrofo (village heads) destooled the Denkyirahene's senior divisional chief, Kwamin Enyimadu (Buabensohene), who was succeeded by Kwabena Agyeman. He was also destooled on November 27, 1924. Also, the elevation of Adikrofo, Safohene, and Ahenefo as Omanhene hastened the disintegration.

After the destoolment, Kwabena Agyeman took the Buabinso stool away and refused to return it. He was convicted and sentenced to a year in prison for failing to restore the stool, which demonstrated a complete disregard for the authority of the Denkyirahene. The conduct of these leaders influenced the Denkyirahene, Nana Kwadwo Tibu II, to state in his petition to the District Commissioner that "…this is a serious misnomer and greater confusion in the future than in the past will result from this if an immediate stop is not put to it. It particularly belittles the true OMANHENE (…) and in the Court, issues have often been confused by virtue of this self-styled appellation." Between 1923 and 1938, Denkyira became embroiled in chieftaincy disputes over whose authority was final regarding the relocation of the traditional capital. In 1923, the Omanhene, Kwadwo Tibu II, was asked to send a plenipotentiary to reside at Dunkwa following the Buabinso stool dispute, but he chose someone of no rank. In 1924, when the Adontenhene and Tufuhene, Kwadwo Kodia, committed a grave offence in Dwokwa, and he was summoned, he disregarded the orders of the Denkyirahene and relocated and settled at Diaso, opening his native tribunal in open defiance of the Omanhene on account of the Denkyira-Sehwi boundary

[24] 'Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 4–7, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra.

[25] Buabinso (Denkera) Native Affairs., para. 5, ADM/11/1/1199. Case No. 65/1920, PRAAD, Accra.

dispute and because of his quarrel with the Omanhene.[26]

In December 1926, the Omanhene, drawn by the increasing prosperity and development of Upper Denkyira, suddenly visited that part of the state without consulting his council and arrived in Mfuom, the village of the Benkumhene near Dunkwa, where he took up residence. The Omanhene began regularly visiting Upper Denkyira and building a house in Mfuom. He also proposed to relocate the traditional capital of Denkyira from Dwokwa to Dunkwa, but the divisional chiefs fiercely resisted this idea. This marked the start of proceedings toward his deposition (Nana Kwadwo Antwi, interview, February 16, 2025). In 1929, while visiting Upper Denkyira, Kwadwo Tibu II became involved in a dispute between the Odikro of Dunkwa and a former Odikro, whom the Adontenhene supported. The Omanhene declared the Adontenhene deposed, and the latter immediately made charges against him. However, out of fear, the Denkyirahene fled and took some of the stool properties with him, leading to a destoolment charge. The Adontenhene was the most powerful and influential chief in the Denkyira State.

Additionally, the Buabensohene (Nifahene of Denkyira) declared his independence from Denkyira in 1929, following a prolonged stool dispute of over eight years.[27] The rift between the Buabensohene and Omanhene stemmed from the Secretary of Native Affairs recommending the registration of a Native Prison at Buabinso and the subtle recognition of the Buabensohene as independent of the Denkyira Paramount Stool.[28] The Denkyirahene faced charges from Buabensohene and Twafohene. The Buabensohene and Twafohene claimed they had destooled Omanhene Nkwantabisa III (1931–1941). The chieftaincy dispute created tension in the Denkyira region, necessitating a Commission of Inquiry under the Native Affairs Ordinance of 1883. The Native Affairs Ordinance granted colonial officers, acting through the Governors-in-Council, the authority to remove a chief if he proved incompetent or unsatisfactory.

The Denkyira State further disintegrated when the District Commissioner, E. Norton Jones, in a letter dated August 30, 1929, declared Abuakwa independent. According to the letter, the grant of independence to Buabinso hinged on the claim that "The Omanhin prefers to spend most of his time at DUNKWA and regards that place as being of more importance than BUABINSO as is instanced by his refusal to recommend that the prison at BUABINSO be registered and used to accommodate prisoners in UPPER DENKERA."[29] The Abuakwa division included the following towns: Buabinso, Agona (*Gyaasehene*), Akropong, Edwiman, Badwa, Akyempim, Bremen, Nkwanta, Diaso, Domenase, Gyemsu Nkwanta, Sobroso, Fosu, Kyikyiwere, Amoafo, Sokoso, Mfuom, Wawasi, Kokode, and Kwin.[30]

Interestingly, on January 18, 1930, the Colonial Government destooled the Denkyirahene to normalize the rift between

[26] 'Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 6–7, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra.

[27] Handing Over Notes on Denkyira Native Affairs. (21st October 1929), ADM/23/1/408, PRAAD, Cape Coast.

[28] Central Province 651/SNA65/1920. File No. 73. 'Buabinso (Denkera) Native Affairs (14th September 1929), ADM/11/1/1199, PRAAD, Accra.

[29] Central Province. SNA.No.405. Provincial Commissioner's Office, Cape Coast. No. 2307/CP.659/27, (30th August 1929), ADM/11/1/1199, PRAAD, Accra.

[30] Letter of Kwame Enyimadu, Paramount Chief of Abuakwa on Ofin, Buabinso, 20th August 1929 to the SNA Office, ADM/11/1/1199, PRAAD, Accra; Central Province. No. 141/Trav:/1929. District Commissioner's Office: Twifo (20th August, 1929), ADM/11/1/1199, PRAAD, Accra. The aforementioned town and village heads played an important role in electing a Denkyirahene. Abuakwa came under Denkyira through a covenant established between Oduro Akenten, Abuakwahene, and Enin Amoako, Denkyirahene, after Denkyira waged wars against the Abuakwa people, who migrated from Asante. Abuakwa is located on the Ofin.

the Omanhene and the Buabensohene.[31] However, Kwadwo Tibu II appealed to the Colonial Government in June 1933, as the State Council had not unanimously destooled him and had also destooled Abuno Tia, the Denkyirahemaa, who had ruled Denkyira from 1899 to 1930 and had installed another, Akosua Ebum, in 1933. Between June and December, the Colonial Government, after several meetings with the State Council to decide the original charges against the Denkyirahene, concluded that the allegations were ambiguous and unsatisfactory. However, on March 10, 1934, the Colonial Government confirmed the destoolment of Kwadwo Tibu II as Paramount Chief of Denkyira.

On June 2, 1934, the Colonial Government gazetted Albert Daniel Appia Mensa as Denkyirahene, Nkwantabisa III, and the entire Denkyira came under the Cape Coast District of the Central Province. As Denkyirahene, Nkwantabisa III was quick to realize the significance of the upper part of the state due to the rapid development of its mining industry, which was bringing in a considerable amount of money to the chiefs from their concessions and to the people from their labour through the promotion of trade and sale of foodstuff, so in 1935, Nkwantabisa III made his headquarters at Ayanfuri and endeavoured to get the State Council to pass a resolution to form a State Treasury to improve modern sanitation and layouts for the villages and build a new prison at Dunkwa. However, the divisional chiefs vehemently rejected the proposal, and the chiefs became antagonistic, especially concerning the Provincial Council (Gyakabene Kwesi Amponsem, interview, February 13, 2025). This created a fracas between the Denkyirahene and two of his chiefs, Nkyidomhene[32] and Twafohene, in 1936–37.[33]

However, in 1936, the Nkyidomhene was charged with slander and found guilty. He failed to pay a fine, was incarcerated in the State Prison at Dwokwa, and subsequently abdicated the stool. In 1937, the Omanhene attempted to demarcate a boundary between the Twafohene and the chief of Nyinawunsu, which led to friction as the Twafohene refused to accept the Omanhene's ruling, affecting the relationship between Nkwantabisa III and his divisional chiefs. In September 1937, there was a riot by the youth staged by Kwame Antwi in Dwokwa, who styled himself as Nkwankwaahene[34] based on a rumour that the Denkyirahene was about to attend a meeting of the Provincial Council of Chiefs. The Denkyirahene incarcerated these men for four months, which further worsened the conflict and tension in Denkyira State.[35]

Additionally, Nkwantabisa III directed that all correspondence from the chiefs of Upper Denkyira to the Assistant District Commissioner should first be submitted to him in Dwokwa. The chiefs disregarded this direction, resulting in the destoolment of the Denkyirahene. They charged the Denkyirahene with 24 charges, including never celebrating the Odwira custom for the blessing of the

[31] Provincial Commissioner's Office, Cape Coast. No. 1111/30/CP.659/27 (15th May 1930), ADM/11/1/1199, SNA No. 182, PRAAD, Accra.

[32] The chief in charge of all soldiers who are left behind and sends them back to the main army. He is usually a son of the chief himself or a relative, such as a nephew from the male side of the chief.

[33] Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 9–12, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra.

[34] Head of all the young men in the Denkyira State.

[35] Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 13-17, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra. The men were Kwame Antwi and a group of young men from Dwokwa, Krobo, Watreso, Nyameani, Frame, and Abrafo.

Great Bankamdw*a* Stool, not looking after the Denkyirahemaa, and disrespecting the District Commissioner of Dunkw*a,* "by asking him to bow down with the crown before you during your first occasion of visiting Upper Denkera, an act of which shows that we are uncivilised knowing not the value of the Crown".[36]

The Denkyirahene refused the purported destoolment; thus, he wrote to the District Commissioner for permission to return to Dwokwa and retrieve his stools and properties, after being previously restricted from returning to Dwokwa in July 1939 (Opanyin Gyakabene Kwasi Amponsem, interview, February 13, 2025). The impasse dragged on from August 1938, largely due to procedural events. The contested procedure was that the Queen Mother had summoned the divisional chiefs, and the Twafohene presided over the ruling. In February 1941, due to the growing unpopularity of Nana Nkwantabisa III, the colonial administration advised him to abdicate. It told the Omanhene not to exercise any judicial functions in his tribunal until it was known whether the charges had been served on him or not.[37]

Therefore, the Colonial Government set up a Commission of Enquiry on April 29, 1941, which recommended a referral to the Central Province Council of Chiefs. Subsequently, during the enquiry, it emerged that the State Council that sought to destool the Omanhene was illegal and short of 73 members. In Upper Denkyira, the Omanhene had 28 supporters against 20; in Lower Denkyira, five supported him, while 18 opposed him. Thus, in his findings, the Commissioner of the Enquiry concluded that the Omanhene's destoolment was illegal because the State Council's constitution was improper. Despite being cleared, the divisional chiefs still pursued their goal and destooled Nkwantabisa III, enstooling Owusu Bore II instead (1941–53).[38]

Conclusion

In this paper, I decisively argue that the narrative surrounding Denkyira must be re-evaluated, as its history reveals a perspicacity that traditional narratives fail to convey. Contrary to the prevailing notion that Denkyira simply collapsed following its defeat by Asante in 1701, the evidence clearly demonstrates its significant transformation into a resilient commonwealth. This evolution enabled Denkyira to navigate Asante suzerainty and colonial rule, asserting a level of agency that challenges dominant perspectives of decline. Through a critical engagement with Asante-centred narratives, this paper complicates them and disrupts the linear "rise-and-fall" models that have long characterized the historiography of African polities. It demonstrates the fact that Denkyira did not merely fade into obscurity on the historical stage; rather, it strategically adapted to the shifting power dynamics of its time. This finding is crucial, as it shows that formerly dominant states like Denkyira retained relevance and influence in their subsequent political environments.

This intervention significantly contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on precolonial statehood, vassalage, and resilience by recognizing Denkyira's ability to redefine itself amid external pressures, which reveals a more complex political landscape in which power relationships are fluid rather than static. My analysis also contributes to a more textured, multidimensional interpretation of historical narratives about African societies and fosters a

[36] Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 18–21, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra.

[37] Report of an Enquiry held by A. Duncan-Johnstone, Provincial Commissioner on a Commission by His Excellency, the Governor. Issued under the Commissions of Enquiry ordinance and dated the 1st July 1941: 40, ADM/11/1/1645, PRAAD, Accra.

[38] Inquiry into the Alleged Deposition of Omanhene Denkera by A. Duncan, ADM/11/1/1646, PRAAD, Accra.

richer appreciation of their complex and adaptive strategies in the face of adversity.

The omission of Denkyira from mainstream historical discourse is a disservice to the understanding of Ghanaian history, both precolonial and postcolonial. It not only obscures the complexities of state dynamics in Africa but also perpetuates the erasure of significant political legacies that continue to influence contemporary identity and heritage debates. By bringing Denkyira's story to the forefront, we gain insights into the adaptive strategies employed by polities facing formidable challenges. This enhances our understanding of Denkyira's legacy and also prompts a critical re-evaluation of other overlooked African states whose histories are similarly rich and multifaceted. Future research could delve deeper into Denkyira's contemporary sociopolitical identity and explore how its historical legacy continues to influence local governance and cultural practices. This paper provides a crucial foundation for such further studies.

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