

Traditional Gold Mining in Adanse*

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ABSTRACT

For centuries, the people of Adanse worked and mined gold, and their goldfields were one source of supply of gold to the Trans Saharan traders and to the European market before and during colonial administration of the Gold Coast. The Adanse gold miners used simple but effective technology, and kept Europe supplied with enormous quantities of gold especially between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries. This article shows the sources of Adanse gold in the historic period, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. It also discusses gold production, the media of gold distribution, including trading and the impact of traditional mining on the people of Adanse.

Keywords: *Akan, Ashanti, Adanse, Gold mining, Pre-colonial Ghana, Slavery.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gold mining in the Akan forest area of modern Ghana antedated the European contact; and it is commonplace knowledge that until the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, gold was easily the commodity most eagerly sought after on the Gold Coast.¹ Several of the impressive forts that dot the coastline of modern Ghana from Axim to Accra were built originally to facilitate the gold trade.²

Before the advent of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade at the end of the seventeenth century, gold was the lever of power for the budding Akan Kingdoms during the era of state formation in the central and southern territories

* Using as principal sources of data for writing this article, I conducted a twelve-month fieldwork in Adanse between 1998 and 1999. I visited a number of people and interviewed them five times each. I also drew upon the rich and largely untapped mine of information contained in K.Y. Daaku's "Oral Tradition of Adanse". This work compiled in 1969 is deposited in the Institute of African Studies Library, University of Ghana, Legon. The purpose of this article as well as the methodology used is both derived from the existing literature.

¹ Walter Rodney, "Gold and Slave on the Gold Coast", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 1969. See also K.Y. Daaku: *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600 till 1720*. O.U.P., 1970. Also see James Anquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana's Past* (Harlow Essex: Sedco Publishing Limited and Longman group Ltd. 1982), and R. Addo-Fening, "The Gold Mining Industry in Akyem Abuakwa C. 1850–1910", *Sankofa: Legon Journal of Archaeology and Historical Studies* Vol. 2, 1976.

² Jim Silver, "The failure of European Trading Companies in the nineteenth century Gold Coast", *Journal of African History* 22: 511, 1981. See also R. Addo-Fening, *Ibid.* See also F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980).

of modern Ghana.³ Bono Manso noted to be the first of the powerful Akan kingdom flourished on the gold trade during the trans-Saharan trade.⁴ Denkyira, then located near the site of the modern Obuasi gold mine, established power based on gold trade with European merchants at Elmina in the seventeenth century. Asante, Akyem, Twifu and Wassa had gold with which to obtain weapons from European trade establishments.⁵ Gold was important as a means of obtaining European weaponry, a symbol of kingship and imperial splendour. The social order and entire culture of the people revolved around it.⁶

2. CONTEXT

Today the Adanse state is part of Asante and owes allegiance to the Golden Stool. Historically, however, Adanse emerged as a state earlier than their than their one time vassals, Denkyira and Asante. The Adanse state emerged probably during the twelfth century and it is traditionally known in Akan cosmogony as the place where God started the creation of the world.⁷

In 1659, Denkyira regained her independence and superimposed her political sway on Adanse. Present day Obuase (in Adanse) which has currently been one of world's richest gold mines, was an area within metropolitan Denkyira. Denkyira became a vast, powerful empire not only because of the many vassal states it annexed through the wars of expansion, but also because of the wealth it obtained from the gold mines in the empire, revenue from trade and receipts from tributes, taxes and tolls. In addition to the very rich deposits of gold in metropolitan Denkyira itself, nearly all the important tributary states, including Adanse, Asante, Aowin, Twifo and Wassa were rich in gold.

The numerous vassal states also paid tribute in the form of slaves and gold to the Denkyira King. Another source of wealth was the lucrative trade which Denkyira engaged in both with the merchants on the coast and with her northern neighbours as far as Begho and Kong in the north-west, thus, linking Denkyira with the western Sudan.

Endowed with so many advantages, Denkyira's power increased tremendously. However, as often happens in history when a kingdom or an empire becomes wealthy and powerful, the rulers became tyrannical, and this with other causes led to the decline and fall of the empire, following their

³ Walter Rodney, "Gold and Slave on the Gold Coast", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 1969.

⁴ K.Y. Daaku: *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600 till 1720*. O.U.P., 1970.

⁵ Ibid. See also K.Y. Daaku, *Oral Traditions*, No. 4 Part 1. Sehwi Ahwiaso and Bekwai, mimeographed. Legon.

⁶ K. Arhin, "Status differentiation in Asante in the nineteenth century: A preliminary study", *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 4: 3, Legon.

⁷ F.K. Buah, opcit. See also W.E.F. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).

decisive defeat at Feyiase in 1701 at the hands of the Asante, her tributary state.⁸ The long-term cause of this was the long-standing desire of the Asante not only to free herself from Denkyira's repressive rule, but also, when independent, to get direct access to the coastal trade with the European merchants. After Denkyira's defeat Adanse and Denkyira came under the suzerainty of Asante. The *Sagrenti War* of 1874, established British authority in the Gold Coast after defeating the Ashantis.⁹ The British occupied Kumasi in 1896 and colonised the Asante Empire in 1901. After the war, the British abolished slavery in the Gold Coast.

The modern state of Adanse lies south of Bekwai (see map on next page).¹⁰ It is bounded on the south by river Pra, on the east by Banka and Asante Akyem and on the West by Denkyira. Its population in 1984 was about 233,902.¹¹ The Adanse people occupy the hilly lands of Twisa and Moinsi. Much of Adanse land consists of dense luxuriant tropical forest. The state enjoys a good amount of rainfall and possesses some of the best agricultural lands in Ghana. In the pre-colonial era, the vast stretches of land were exploited mainly for hunting, subsistence agricultural production and gold mining.¹²

⁸ F.K. Buah, *Ibid.*

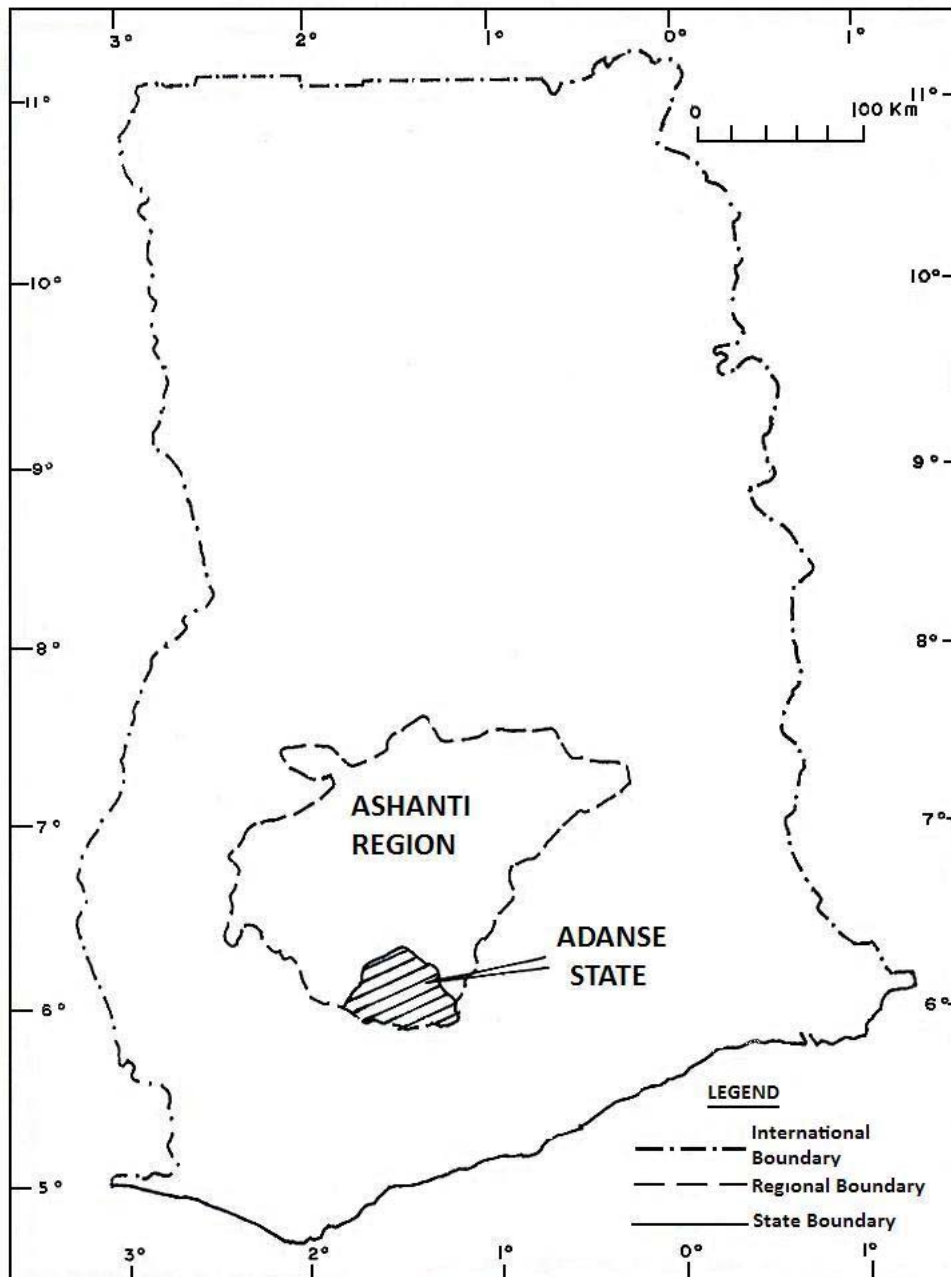
⁹ *Ibid.* This war was named after Sir Garnet Wolseley. The Gold Coast people who could not mention the governor's name correctly called the war "Sagrenti War" instead of "Sir Garnet War". See also Adu Boahen, *Topics in West Africa History* (London: Longman 1966). Also see W.E.F. Ward, *opcit.* p. 53, and Eva Meyerowitz, *Akan Tradition of Origin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950).

¹⁰ Adanse state emerged probably in the twelfth century A.D. and it is traditionally known in Akan cosmogony as the place where God started the creation of the world. See C.C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel: 1898), p. 48.

¹¹ Ghana, 1984 population census, pp. 63–89.

¹² Bowdich referred to the hills between Akyem and Assin as very rich in gold. See *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: Murray, 1819).

A MAP OF GHANA SHOWING ADANSE STATE IN ASHANTI REGION



According to oral tradition and the nineteenth century written sources the origin of gold mining in Adanse dates back to centuries.¹³ It is not known for certain when the Trans-Saharan trade in gold started but from the historical records it is known that from the fifth century onwards gold was sent from the western Sudan across the Sahara for trading in North Africa and Europe.¹⁴ By the eighth century, some of this gold was obtained from the auriferous regions of Bambuk

¹³ Interview with Opaning Kwabena Brenya, Fomena, 5 January 1998.

¹⁴ T.F. Garrard: *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade* (London: Longmans, 1980), pp. 6–12.

and Bure on the forest fringes of the ancient Mali empire.¹⁵ The trade was extended to *Begho* (Nsawkaw) in the ninth century and subsequently linked up with the *Bono* Kingdom (Takyiman) in the tenth century.¹⁶

By the twelfth century, some of this gold was probably coming from the forest south of the Bono kingdom from which the Adanse Kingdom emerged. The people who linked the Adanse goldfields with the Arabs of the Barbary Coast, the Maghreb, Egypt and Mediterranean Europe were the Mande Dyula, known to the Akans as the Wangara.¹⁷

In the light of the above, it is clear that Adanse contact with Europe began centuries before there were recorded reports of the appearance of Europeans on Adanse soil. This contact was through the trading of Adanse gold which found its way to Europe through North Africa.

Before the Europeans came to the Gold Coast in 1471, the people of Adanse were already mining gold. From 1482 till the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established themselves at Elmina, building a castle and trading European goods for gold from Adanse.¹⁸ The Dutch, the Danes and the English also followed the Portuguese to the Gold Coast to trade in gold in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1601, Muller was probably referring to Adanse gold when he stated that it was in the rich mountains in the interior that the best gold sold on the coast could be found.¹⁹

In the middle of the seventeenth century, a Dutch factor on the Gold Coast, describing the people of the interior of the Gold Coast to his superiors in Amsterdam, referred to the “rich gold countries of Adanse”.²⁰ Writing within the same period, Bosman and Barbot stated that gold from Adanse, which they referred to as “Accany” was so pure and fine that the best gold was called “*Accani sika*” (Accany gold).²¹

¹⁵ Major gold producing areas during the Trans-Saharan trade.

¹⁶ *Begho* and the Bono Kingdom were historical predecessors of modern day Nsawkaw and Takyiman respectively.

¹⁷ Kwame Arhin “The significance of Gold in the History of the Akan people”. Paper read at Emory University on April 6, 1991.

¹⁸ Kwame Arhin “Gold Mining and Trading among the Ashanti of Ghana”, *Journal des Africanistes* 48: 80–100, 1978.

¹⁹ Akosua Perbi, “A History of indigenous slavery in Ghana from 15th – 19th centuries” (An Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Ghana, 1997).

²⁰ Raymond Dumett ‘Eldorado’.

²¹ The Accany merchants often came to the coast in large numbers and so impressed their European customers that in 1660s the English even named one of their ships “The Accany Merchants”. See Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Gold Coast of Guinea* (London: Zimmer, 1705).

2.1. TRADITIONAL METHOD OF IDENTIFYING GOLD IMPREGNATED AREAS IN ADANSE BEFORE EUROPEAN CONTACT

Gold could be found in several places in Adanse, but, due to the undeveloped technology of gold mining, in the past it was difficult to identify the gold-impregnated areas. According to the *elders of Fomena*,²² areas of potential gold finds were indicated during the April rains when pebbles gleaming with gold grains were washed out. In Fomena, children often searched for grains of gold in streets and ditches after heavy rainfall.²³

Gold could also be found in the beds of rivers like the Pra and Ofin in Adanse.²⁴ Certain types of vegetation were believed to be associated with auriferous soils. According to a tradition recorded by Daaku, Ntim Gyakari, Denkyirahene²⁵, discovered gold with the help of such vegetation in a local stream at Boberase in Adanse in the late seventeenth century in the course of his war against Asante. Narrating the story, the elders said that:

When he got to our stream he realised *from the type of plants growing by* it that the land was rich in gold. He therefore put up camp here for three days to wash the soil for the gold. When he left our people took up digging.²⁶

Gold could also be found in river valleys. The valley of river Jimi was known to be auriferous.²⁷ In addition, some elders in Akrokyere claimed that in the past

²² Fomena is the capital of Adanse. At all levels of the political hierarchy – the village, division and state units – the chief or kings ruled with the Council of Elders. In most Akan states, this council consisted of the chief and the heads of the lineages as well as people or the ancestors of people who either by their prowess in war or their wisdom as councillors have gained distinction in the community. The most important political institutions in Akan Chiefdoms are the family, the Chief, the Council of Elders and the military groups. The Chief or ruler was the most central figure in the political organisation of the Akan, below the ruler were the paramount chiefs (*amanhene*) of the divisions and the lesser chiefs who were in charge of the villages. The military groups (“*asafo*” companies) were semi-military groups made up of the commoners. They did not exist as standing armies of today. They were soldiers only in times of war and during other civic commotions; and dispersed to their farms after the disorder had quietened. See Kofi Abrefa Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System in Ashanti* (Oxford University Press, 1951).

²³ Interview with Elders of Fomena, 10 January, 1998.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Prior to the eighteenth century Denkyira was the dominant political power in the area and the suffix “hene” comes from Ohene, which refers to the ruler. Hence Denkyirahene is the Chief of Denkyira. I use the term Denkyirahene, Adansehene, etc., to mean the chief or king of the Denkyira or Adanse people. See W.E.F. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966).

²⁶ K.Y. Daaku: *Oral Tradition of Adanse* (Unpublished manuscript), Institute of African Studies, Legon 1969, p. 250.

²⁷ Interview with the elders of Fomena, 10 January, 1998.

auriferous sites could be revealed in dreams by their fore fathers. Finally, earth of a blue-black or grey appearance along river beds and banks provided clues for auriferous strata.²⁸

2.2 TAXATION AND ALLEGIANCE

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the gold mining industry in Adanse was controlled by the Adansehene and his sub chiefs and no pit could be dug without their permission. Any stranger who wanted to mine gold had to consult the chief on whose stool land he intended to mine gold. Native miners as well as strangers were required to give one-third of their winnings to the chief.²⁹

To ensure that what was due to the state was not taken by some fraudulent miners, the chiefs stationed officials at the mines to report the quantity of gold dust and any nugget that would be found. This was also done where gold was scooped and panned from rivers.³⁰

A heavy fine was imposed on miners who failed to report the discovery of large nuggets of gold to the chief. Miners who wanted to keep for themselves the gold nuggets to which the ruler was entitled, avoided going to the mines with their maternal nephews for fear of being betrayed by them.³¹

2.3 BELIEF SYSTEMS (CUSTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH GOLD MINERS IN ADANSE)

Miners were required to pay an annual tax known as “apafram” or “asikafe” and the chiefs often collected contributions from them to finance rituals connected with mining.³² Before a mine was dug, it was customary in Adanse for traditional priests to sacrifice a hen or a cock and pour libation to the ancestors. It was their belief that a lot of gold could be extracted from the earth by sacrificing to the ancestors who were the owners of Adanseland.

Custom also demanded that the indigenous Adanse miners should abstain from sex the night before they went to the mines. Menstruating women were forbidden to approach the mine and could not take part in gold mining. The reason was that they were considered unclean and bearers of bad luck. In

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Interview with Elders of Akrokyere, 25 January, 1998.

³¹ *Ibid.* It was felt undesirable that they should have too great a knowledge of their uncles' wealth. It is not uncommon for elders to fear youthful next of kin who might inherit their property.

³² *Ibid.* See also Arhin *op.cit.* p. 94.

addition, the miners had to refrain from evil thoughts while digging the pit lest they lose concentration and injure themselves.³³

In Adanse, the most important local deity to whom people prayed for special favours and deliverance from misfortune was Bona.³⁴ As an earth deity, Bona was closely associated not only with the forest, hunting and farming but also with gold mining. Miners seldom went gold mining without first obtaining Bona's blessing for the journey.

The people of Adanse traditionally believed that all the gold that lay under the earth and in the rivers was under Bona's custody and guardianship; hence when villagers went on gold-finding expeditions they prayed to him for personal safety and good luck on their journey.³⁵

Libation and offerings of chicken eggs, mashed yam or plantain were made to Bona and *Asaase Yaa* – (spirit of the earth) after a particular find. If a mine became exhausted, it was suspected that a custom had been violated causing the gold to run away. A traditional priest would instruct the miner to perform sacrifices to bring back the gold.³⁶ The Adanse people commonly perceived gold as having the capacity to move about in the earth. In 1868, Dr. Africanus Horton noted that around the Ofin and Pra rivers that it was

...against the fetish of that country that people should dig very deep for gold as they believed that would lead to its escape.³⁷

In Adanse, gold was not allowed to be panned from a river on the days sacred to the spirit of the river.

Another traditional belief connected with traditional gold mining in Adanse was that mining for gold was not conducted on *Dabone* (a sacred day) particularly at the time of the *Adae festival*.³⁸ The Adanse people believed that the land they inhabited belonged to their ancestors who bequeathed it to the living, hence at the annual *Adae festival*, mining activities were suspended to

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II. Fomena, 10 February, 1998. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* See also Garrard *op.cit.*, p. 48.

³⁷ Garrard *op.cit.*, pp. 6–8.

³⁸ The *Adae festival* is celebrated twice every forty-two (42) days. Within the 42-day period, one *Adae* falls on Sunday (*Akwasidae*) and the other on Wednesday (*Wukudae*). At the *Adae festival*, the ancestral Stools are offered food and drink. The Chief is the principal officiant, for he is the one who represents his people before their ancestors, and derives his authority from the fact that, he sits on the Stool of the ancestors. He, therefore, performs the rituals on behalf of his people. The *Adae festival* that is held on Sunday is the bigger occasion, for it is usually celebrated as a public feast, although the most important part of the festival takes place in the Stool-house from which all unauthorised persons and the general public are barred. The day before this festival is an important one on the Akan calendar called *Memeneda Dapaa*, it is a day of meticulous preparation for the feast by all who have anything to do with the *Akwasidae*. See Kofi Asare Opoku *West Africa Traditional Religion* (Nigeria: FEB International Private Ltd, 1978).

enable all the people to join their chief in the performance of rites for the ancestors. It was believed that the ancestors would punish a miner who flouted this custom by causing him to be buried alive by the earth.³⁹

The death of an Adanse chief or a diviner's revelation of the desecration of the Earth was followed by a ban on mining for a prescribed period. Sheep were slaughtered for purificatory and pacificatory purposes (*asubo*). The Earth-goddess was promised further sacrifices for bountiful recovery of gold. A native Adanse gold prospector would sometimes wash his face with herbal medicine believed to have the power to open his eyes to a glow on the surface of the earth under which the gold lay.⁴⁰

Beliefs about gold mining in Adanse prompted Barbot to remark that: blacks either through ignorance or policy, regarded the gold mines as sacred and kept all persons in fear of opening them.⁴¹

The source and methods of production of gold were kept a closely guarded secret and were not revealed to strangers and foreigners. Villault de Bellefond remarked in 1697 that

If you talk about it to a hundred of them they will all tell you different things not because they do not know but because they hide the truth in perpetual defiance of the whites.⁴²

2.4 METHODS OF EXTRACTION: GOLD PRODUCTION

The Adanse people developed an indigenous technology for the gold mining industry. One method involved digging pits, the other involved scooping in river beds.

Digging or washing for gold was known to the Adanse as *asikadie*. Deep or shaft mining was *nkron dwuma* and the person engaged in the work was generally called *nkrontufo*.⁴³ Digging of pits was the major source of gold production. Gold prospectors dug pits in places where nuggets had been washed out during the rains and therefore offered hope of recovery of sufficient quantities. Shallow mining known in Adanse as *mnoaboa* was the main method of extracting gold from below the earth's immediate surface. For this operation miners employed *sosotoa*, a narrow shovel.⁴⁴

The more serious form of mining involved digging the *amena peaa nkron* (shaft). The usual method was to use a kind of digging stick fitted with an iron

³⁹ Interview with the elders of Fomena, 10 January, 1998.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ J. Barbot, *A Description of the Coast of North and South Guinea* (Paris: 1723).

⁴² Garrard *op.cit.* p. 17.

⁴³ Information from Opaning Antwi Boasiako of Akrokyere, 11 January, 1998. See also K. Arhin *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁴ Information from the elders of Akrokyere, 25 January, 1998.

tip. This soil chisel – known as *soso* or *tofa*⁴⁵ was used to dig a vertical shaft through the hard laterite crust until the gold bearing earth ended or the shaft hit the water table. Such a shaft might also continue for hundreds of metres twisting and turning as the miners followed the gold until the source ran out. In 1812 Meredith described the

Natives dig as if forming a well until they come to a dark coloured stone which is recovered by grinding the stone to powder and washing it.⁴⁶

The width of a shaft was between three and four feet in diameter and the depth ranged from fifty to a hundred feet.⁴⁷ The roof of the shaft was supported with timber to prevent it from caving in or collapsing. A shaft was so narrow that miners could support themselves between its walls in the descent. Usually steps were cut into the sides of the shafts to help miners climb up and down.

The bottom of the shaft opened out into a round chamber as more of the rock and soil was dug out. When it became too difficult to go any deeper, the work in one shaft was abandoned and another was dug, often only a few meters away. A horizontal tunnel linked the bases of the shafts. Fire was set at the base of the shaft to draw air down a nearby shaft connected to it by a tunnel or gallery. Fires were also lit on the quartz exposed in a shaft till the rock heated up. The heated rock was doused with cold water to cause it to crack and make it easier to break up.⁴⁸ The miners attacked a pillar of reef gold quartz by trying first to dig the earth and broken rock out from around it, thus exposing the gold laden pillar or block on all sides. Next they went into the bush to gather a special kind of dense, slow burning wood, which was stacked in big piles against the rock.

Underground bonfires had to be kept burning for three to four days and, perhaps, longer in order to be effective. After a reasonable period of time, the miners returned to douse the fires and crack the rock with cold water. Then they attacked it with their chisels.⁴⁹ To help light up the dark underground, miners

⁴⁵ Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ H. Meredith. 'Early Days on the Gold Coast', *Mining Magazine*, December 1909, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Interview with Elders of Akrokyere, 25 January, 1998. See also Arhin *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* For descriptions of the traditional African art of pit-mining, see the following: Kwame Arhin, 'Succession and Gold Mining at Manso-Nkwanta', University of Ghana, *Institute of African Studies Research Review*, 6(3): 101–9, 1970; R.F. Burton and V.L. Cameron, *To the Gold Coast for Gold* (London, 1883), pp. 11, 115–16; George Ekem Ferguson, 'Mission to Atebubu', in Kwame Arhin (ed.), *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 6; W.F. Holmes, 'Notes on the Early History of Tarkwa as a Gold Mining District', *Gold Coast Review* 11(1): 78–117, 1926; N.R. Junner, *Gold in the Gold Coast* (Gold Coast Geological Survey, Memoir no. 4); Henry Louis, 'Gold Mining on the Gold Coast Coast', *The Mining Journal* (7 September 1901); E.T. McCarthy, *Incidents in the Life of a Mining Engineer* London, n.d.); T.A. Rickard 'The Primitive Use of Gold', *Transactions of the Institutions of Mining and Metallurgy*, XLIV(1934–5): 49–87; H.A. Skertchly, 'A Visit to the Gold-Fields of Wassaw, West Africa', *J. Royal Geog. Soc.* XLVII (1878), pp. 274–83; and G.W.E. Turner, 'The Ashanti Goldfields Corporation', *The Mining Magazine* (June 1932), pp. 329–37.

⁴⁹ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 372.

developed a special lamp, made of clay and lighted by wicks of cotton cloth soaked in palm oil.⁵⁰

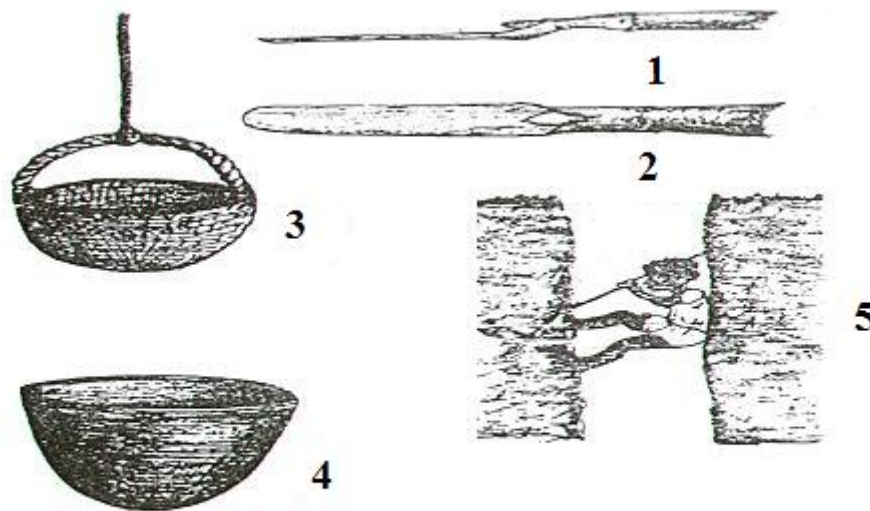


Figure 1. Traditional mining implements. 1. *Soso toa* 2. *Soso tupre* 3. *Small can with rope attached* 4. *Koro* 5. *Amena pea nkron*. From G.E. Ferguson (1891). As Found in Kwame Arhin, *Gold Mining and Trading among the Ashanti in Ghana*, *Journal des Africanistes* 48: 1, 1978.

The native Adanse miners had few implements for digging the gold. These were *soso toa*, or *tofa* a soil chisel, a hoe (*aso*) baskets and trays called *pan pan*.

In the pre-colonial era, the royal miners were the *foto san foo* (treasury officials) who also doubled as keepers of the Adansehene's gold.⁵¹ Special days were set aside for communal digging, involving men and women to produce gold for the Adansehene.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 372.

⁵² Interview with Elders of Fomena, 10 January, 1998.



Figure 2. *Ayensu, Edward S. (1998). Ashanti Gold. The African Legacy of the Worlds most precious Metal. London.*

2.5 LABOUR

Slave labour was used for gold mining activities in Adanse as in Akyem until the abolition and emancipation of slaves in 1874 in the Gold Coast.⁵³ The slaves were bought from northern market centres like Bonduku, Wagadugu, Salaga and Timbuctu.⁵⁴ Slave labour was important to Adanse society because Adanse people considered mine work as servile and therefore it was performed by slaves; hence, the Akan saying “*Atantannie nti na yetɔ dɔnkɔ*” – we buy a slave because of filthy work.⁵⁵

The slave miners were exposed to dangers because the atmosphere of the mines was often hot, enclosed and dark. Their only sources of light were small lamps that used palm oil. Rock falls always threatened lives and often, the walls

⁵³ R. Addo-Fening, “Akyem Abuakwa 1874–1943: A study of the impact of missionary Activities and Colonial Rule on a Traditional State” (An unpublished PH.D dissertation, University of Ghana, 1980).

⁵⁴ K.Y. Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 69. See also T.F. Garrard, “Studies in Akan Weight”. THSG 1, Legon, (1972): 5. Interview with Opanin Kwaku Fokuo, 15 February, 1998, Fomena.

⁵⁵ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 144. See also Akosua Adoma Perbi, “Domestic Slavery in Asante 1800–1920” (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 1978), p. 149.

collapsed on the miners. Besides, the work was tedious and backbreaking. In the seventeenth century, Mueller reported, “many slaves lost their lives in mining accidents”.⁵⁶ Meredith confirmed that the miners employed much labour to procure the ore and were “not uncommonly lost by the earth falling upon them”. He added that “when miners were killed by falls of the earth and by bad air the workings were often abandoned and fetish put on them”.⁵⁷ This was done to prevent further deaths or casualty.

Once a shaft had been worked the miners simply left it without filling it. In some places as many as a hundred pits could be found on an acre of land. When the ore was very rich, large pits and narrow open cuts and trenches were made. This made the auriferous forests in Adanse dangerous to walk through.

After the abolition and emancipation of slaves in the Gold Coast in 1874, the British colonial administration extended it to Adanse (which was in Asante by then) in 1908. After their emancipation, most slaves claimed their liberty and left their masters.⁵⁸ Because of the shortage of slave labour, family members were used for gold mining. A small scale miner or the single individual prospected for and mined gold with his family. Most men in Adanse married several wives and employed their children in mining or farming.

A man and his sons mined the gold while his wives and daughters washed it. The dug out ore was collected in trays called *pan pan*. These were passed from one miner to the next (who stood on the steps inside the shaft) till they reached the surface. In some of the mines the ore was pulled up to the surface in cane baskets tied to the end of fibre ropes. The ore containing the gold, greyish in colour, brought to the surface in the *pan pan* or the basket, was crushed by men and boys and washed by women.

If a mine was far away from a river or stream, women fetched water from a nearby stream or a river and used it to wash the ore for the gold. On the other hand, if the mine was nearer to a stream or river, the ore was carried there to be washed by vanning under the supervision of palace supervisors. Panning involved washing for gold in shallow con-shaped wooden bowls (*krowa*) which were wide at the top and pointed at the bottom. They measured about two feet in diameter at the rim.⁵⁹ There were four bowls of varying sizes used in washing gold. The washers started with the largest and finished with the smallest. They filled the bowls with ore and washed them repeatedly with fresh water till all the lighter material was removed. In other words, the concentrate containing the gold was washed several times in the different sizes of *koro* one after the other beginning with the largest and ending with the smallest till all the dross was

⁵⁶ W.J. Mueller, *Die Afrikanische auf der Guineische Goldkueste glegene Landschaft. Fetu* (Hamburg, 1673) – as quoted in Garrard *op.cit.*, p. 141.

⁵⁷ Meredith *op.cit.*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Addo-Fening *op.cit.*, p. 116. See Also Adu Boahen *Ghana, Evolution and Change in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (London: Longman, 1975). Also see, W.E.F. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).

⁵⁹ Addo-Fening *op.cit.*, p. 67. See also Arhin *op.cit.*, p. 91.

removed. In the past, the beds of Adanse rivers Jimi, Pra and Ofin were scooped for sand and panned by women after heavy rain.⁶⁰

2.6 IMPLEMENTS

Women, free and slave, as well as children (boys) both free, slave whirled the bowls round, and round just beneath the river surface until the clay was washed away leaving the gold dust or nuggets as sediments at the bottom of the bowl.⁶¹ Describing panning for gold from streams after heavy rains, Bosman says:

This employment holds them till noon at which time some of them cannot get above the value of six or eight shillings which is very rare and sometimes they lose all their labour.⁶²

The largest of the bowls used in washing and panning gold was known to the Adanse as *sika koro* (gold bowls). The medium sized bowls were known as *apasia* and the third as *nson mu*.⁶³

Miners obtained four sizes of gold nuggets, namely *sikampo* (the largest nugget) *mpokowa* (the medium size nugget) *nsanma* (the smaller nuggets) and *sika futuro* (gold dust). The gold dust was stored in a container called *kuduo*.⁶⁴

After recovering the gold dust, one-third went to the Adansehene or the chief on whose stool land the gold was mined. The landlord received one-third and the miners the remaining third. The Adansehene, as the ultimate owner of Adanse lands, was entitled to all gold nuggets (*epo*)⁶⁵ found on his land. The tripartite division of the gold dust mined on Adanse soil underscored the stake which king, chief and subject had in stool lands. As the Omanhene in Adanse said in 1912:

All land in Adanse is the property of Adanse people. There is land attached to my stool and also to the stool of my sub chiefs, the latter including family land. There is no land in individual ownership. The paramount chief and sub chiefs hold the land so long as they are on the stool as trustees for the people.⁶⁶

Where a chief used his own slaves to win gold, he would appropriate it all to himself. When Adansehene's treasury became empty, all the sub chiefs in his

⁶⁰ Interview with Elders of Akrokyere on 25 January, 1998.

⁶¹ Addo-Fening *op.cit.*, p. 69.

⁶² William Bosman's speech as quoted in N.R. Junner's "Gold in the Gold Coast", Geological Survey Report in Memoir No. 2, p. 6.

⁶³ Arhin *op.cit.*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Oral tradition from Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II a royal of Fomena Stool on 5 February 1998. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 139.

⁶⁶ Belfield report on Native Lands in the Gold Coast, 1912, p. 97.

kingdom were asked to replenish it (*boafotowuo*) by contributing specific quantities of gold dust.⁶⁷

3. USES OF GOLD IN ADANSE

Goldsmiths used gold to make different types of figurines and objects for wealthy Adanse citizens.⁶⁸ Gold smithing activities were carried out at Fomena, Akrokyere and Dompoe where indigenous goldsmiths developed the art of gold workmanship and produced numerous ornaments for the wealthy. A goldsmith was known in Adanse as *sika dwumfo*.⁶⁹

The excellent skills of Adanse goldsmiths were demonstrated in two fields, namely, the manufacture of gold jewels and decorations for their rulers and wealthy citizens and the fabrication of brass weights for measuring units of gold dust for trading. The same basic casting techniques were used in each cast.

The goldsmiths worked in a secluded place under a roof of palm leaves which has its sides open to admit fresh air. Their furnace was a thick-walled clay cylinder at the bottom of which were holes for the mouth piece of the bellows. The goldsmith's tool included bellows, anvil, tongs, a wood or bone spatula for making wax threats, a pointed bamboo stick and an iron needle which was heated and used to impress designs on the wax.⁷⁰

The craftsman first made an object in wax and then converted the wax object into metal. This was done by shrouding the wax with clay and allowing the clay to dry out and harden. The clay and the wax model it contained were then heated until the wax melted and disappeared, either by being soaked into the clay or by dripping out of a hole made through it. The disappearing wax left behind a cavity of its original shape in the clay. Molten metal was then poured into this cavity. The metal cooled and solidified in the exact shape of the original wax model. The clay was then broken up and the casting removed and cleaned up.⁷¹

Gold was cast into a wide variety of forms including armlets, anklets, rings, beads, pectorial discs, sandals adornment, bells and decorations for the sheath of state swords. Except in every few cases, gold weights were not made of gold but of brass, iron or other metals. The goldsmith kept a stock of weights often amounting to several hundreds used for comparison with his new products and also as samples for his clients.

⁶⁷ Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 372.

⁶⁸ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II, 5 February 1998, Fomena.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Interview with goldsmith Opanin Kwaku Fokuo, of Fomena, 15 February, 1998. See also Anthony Ott, "Akan Gold Weight", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* IX (1968).

⁷¹ Edward Ayensu, *Ashanti Gold The African Legacy of the World's Most Precious Metal* (Italy: Marshall Editions Development Ltd. 1997), p. 167. The description confirmed those given by Opanin Kwaku Fokuo, 15 February, 1998, Fomena.

The gold weights were categorised into two broad groups often described as geometric and figurative. The geometric weight consisted of relatively simple shapes decorated with a remarkable range of abstract designs. The figurative weights covered an enormous range of forms, which were used to convey messages. Hence they were known as proverb weights (*mmebusem*). The figurative weights were moulded into the form of birds, fishes, human figures, insect, fruits, seeds and snails. Some of them were also cast in the form of drums, cannons, shields, sandals, horns, stools, domestic implements and other artefacts.⁷²

Sickly children to restore them to good health and as charms or amulets to bring good fortune or to preserve the wearer from harm occasionally wore some of the gold weights.⁷³ The measure of Adanse's faith in the value of gold is evidenced by the elaborate series of gold weights used during trading activities at the northern market centres.⁷⁴

In Adanse, in very early days, trading transactions was made through the medium of barter, a system by which a buyer and a seller exchanged commodities directly without the use of money or currency of any kind. Gold dust was also used as a commodity in the barter trade. Before the coming of the Europeans to the Gold Coast, Adanse traders travelled as far as Buna, Gyaaman, Kintampo, Bonduku, Wagadugu and Timbuktu in the north to trade. At these market centres they exchanged their gold dust, *sika futuro* and kola nuts for salt, *kyenkyen* cloth and Dagarti and Moshi slaves.⁷⁵

Bonduku, or Bitu its predecessor, was known to be a flourishing trading centre in the tenth century. By the thirteenth century, Adanse traders were regularly visiting there for trading activities.⁷⁶ The commercially dominant Mande traders who were based in Timbuktu and Jenne brought North African goods to these market centres. Among the most valued were bowls and other brass vessels *kuduo* made in Egypt or Arabia decorated with elaborate designs and texts in Arabic script.⁷⁷ These goods were also exchanged for *sika futuro* (gold dust) from Adanse traders.

An important feature of the Sudanic or Trans Saharan Trade was the fact that many kinds of goods, gold dust, silver, copper and brass, bread, meat, sugar, salt, spices, drugs and later tobacco were sold by weight. This was undoubtedly the practice in Timbuktu and Jenne and it became the practice in Adanse also.

⁷² Ott, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

⁷³ Interview with Opaning Kwaku Fokuo, Fomena, 15 February, 1998.

⁷⁴ See p. 25 for explanation.

⁷⁵ Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Garrard *op.cit.*, p. 14.

For centuries, gold dust was used as currency in Adanse.⁷⁸ The common denominations of gold used in trade with Europeans, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were as follows:

WEIGHT	VALUE	STERLING VALUE
12 takus	1 ackie	5/-
16 ackies	1 ounce	£4
2 ounces	1 benda	£8

By this account, gold dust was valued at £4 an ounce until it was changed to £3.12s. This was subdivided into sixteen units of 5^s each. A five shilling unit was further subdivided into 12 takus of 5^d each.⁷⁹

The predominance of gold dust as currency in the seventeenth century did not facilitate smooth transactions because gold scales were not the same. The inequalities were the result of different styles of manufacture. What the Adanse traders did was to compare new weights with those they had inherited from their fathers.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, Adanse traders proposed scale weight to be used for measuring gold dust. Their units of gold dust ranged from:

Original Currency/Modern Equivalent in Ghana

Local Name of Currency	Colonial Currency Equivalent	Equivalent in Ghana Cedis (GH¢)
Ntaku num	2s 6d	40.35
Ntaku nsia	3/-	60.25
Suru	£1.2s	478.50
Osuaa	£2	870.00
Osuaa ne dwoa	£2.7s	882.75
Peredwan	£8	3,480.00

⁷⁸ During the reign of Adansehene Nana Ntiako Sakrakyire, (c1160) Nnabuo or Nnaredwoo (pieces of forged iron) came into use as currency. Cowrie shells were another important form of currency that was used in Adanse in the C15th. Tradition recorded at Adanse Akrofuom says that “we use the cowries obtained from the north”. See Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 33.

⁷⁹ In due course, as trade became complex, people realised the defects of barter. Barter was convenient only when the seller possessed and was prepared to give out what the buyer actually wanted and of the right amount and at that material moment. In the barter system, moreover, it was not easy to determine the relative value of the two commodities being exchange, nor was it easy or in some case possible to sub-divide the same material object. To overcome these and other defects connected with the barter, Adanse people like other peoples throughout history devised the monetary system; money then became standard as well as a store of value. See F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana*. Macmillan Publishers limited, Malaysia, 2008. Also see: Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic change on the Gold Coast 1807–1874* (London: Longman, 1974), p. 34.

Nearly every male of Adanse of any standing possessed a certain number of the weights. The highest value of the series of weights was the peredwan – two ounces of gold dust worth about £8. The peredwan was related to the Islamic mitkal and ounces standards both from the Western Sudan, the Portuguese ounces standard and the Troy ounces standard.⁸⁰

Young children in Adanse, especially those attached to their chiefs' treasuries, were carefully taught the names of weights. The knowledge of the names and values assigned to weight confirmed their use by Adanse traders. Below is an example of the names of the weights.

GRAMS	ADANSE (AKAN) NAMES	VALUE IN STERLING ⁸¹
10.8	Suru ne dommafa	£1. 3. 6
13.2	Dwoa	£1. 10s
26.3	Osuaa ne suru	£3

Linguistically, the impact of the northern trade on Adanse was tremendous. The North African or Arabic term “Sikka” or “zecca”, a general term meaning coins or money, was adopted by the Adanse and other Akans to denote gold.⁸²

The Mande words *fam fa* (gold dust shovel), *laka* (gold dust box), *sanna* (treasury), *kotoko* (satchel or money bag) and *kolo* (gold mine) came into use among the Adanse and other Akan who rendered them as *famfa*, *adaka*, *sanaa*, *kotokuo* and *nkron*.⁸³

From the latter part of the fifteenth century till 1637, the Portuguese established themselves at Elmina and traded European goods for gold from Adanse.⁸⁴ The Adanse traders headloaded their goods and made a journey of one hundred-and-twenty (120) miles through forest, across rivers and along bush paths to Elmina. With the help of the ‘hardened’ coastal middlemen the Adanse traders exchanged their *sika futuro* (gold dust) with brass lead, pewter basins, copper bangles, pots of coarse tin, daggers, swords, calico, gun-powder and silver pan from the Portuguese.

Gold played an important role in Adanse political history. The earliest symbol of authority in the Adanse political system was the mystical sword

⁸⁰ Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 372, also Arhin *op.cit.*, p. 95.

⁸¹ Garrard *op.cit.*, pp. 5 & 14.

⁸² Throughout North Africa the goldsmith's art was well developed. In Fez all silver and gold objects had to be stamped or hallmarked. Most of the goldsmiths were Jews, and their workshops were close to the city mint, known as the Zecca or Sikka. Muslims were forbidden to be goldsmiths or silversmiths since it was considered usury to sell objects of precious metal at a price in excess of their weight. The Jewish craftsmen were given a special dispensation but they were not allowed to work in the old town and lived in New Fez. See Timothy Garrard *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 7.

⁸³ Another impact was the art of cloth dyeing and designing of Adinkra funeral cloth (which takes its name from a ruler of the Abron Gyaaman of Bono Kingdom – in the north). See also Garrard *op.cit.*, p. 25.

⁸⁴ Arhin (1978), pp. 80–100.

mfena pa Afrakwa or Afenakwa.⁸⁵ Besides the “Afenakwa” other stool regalia – the head gear, the sword of the couriers and the bards, were ornamented with gold. They exhibited the power and authority the Adansehene and his sub-chiefs wielded. At the same time, they were used to impress rivals and visitors with the wealth and power of the state.⁸⁶

In the past, the main source of revenue for Adansehene’s treasury was gold. Within the auriferous confines of Adanse state, all taxes and levies including payments of tribute and war indemnities were paid in gold. During the reign of Adansehene Awurade Basa, Denkyira was a tributary state to Adanse. In 1659, Awurade Basa sent his son, Apea Brenya, to the Denkyira capital to collect a tribute in gold, *mpredwan apem asibuo apem* (i.e. about £96,000.00) from Denkyirahene.⁸⁷

As has been said earlier, all gold nuggets found in his kingdom was given to the Adansehene. He was also entitled to one-third of gold nuggets mined on his stool lands. These taxes, levies, tributes enabled the Adansehene to purchase gun and gun-powder to protect his state against external aggression and maintain his palace.

The *Sanaahene* (Treasurer) was in charge of Adanse state treasury. His responsibilities included the protection of the gold deposited in the *sanaa futuo*, and the disbursement of the state funds. Under him were the treasury officials *fotosanfoo*.

Owing to the value of gold, auriferous territories were targeted for conquest by neighbouring states. Adanse’s gold and her economically advantageous location attracted the envy of neighbouring states notably, Denkyira, and later Asante. In the ensuing wars with these powerful neighbours, Adanse suffered several defeats.⁸⁸

Gold was also often used to bury the ruling aristocracy in Adanse for it was an article of faith in Adanse customary practice that the dead would appear in another world where gold would be of great value to them.⁸⁹ In 1875, Swanzy remarked that he saw a chief buried with the whole of his body from the waist upwards with gold dust.⁹⁰ The Adanse people used gold for personal adornment. Nuggets picked up from riverbeds or unearthed in the course of farming, were strung together with stone beads and used as the earliest form of gold ornament.

⁸⁵ *Adanse Paramount Stool History* (Unpublished manuscript), Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, p. 8. See also W.E.F. Ward *op.cit.*, p. 53 (London: 1948), Addo-Fening *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II, Fomena, 10th January, 1998.

⁸⁷ *Adanse Paramount Stool History*. Ibid. See also W.E.F. Ward, Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interview with Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II, Fomena, 10 January, 1998. Also see Adanse Paramount Stool History *op.cit.* See also F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980).

⁸⁹ Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁹⁰ A. Swanzy, “Trade in Western Africa with and Without British Protection”. *Journal of Royal Society of Arts* (1874), p. 10. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 372.

During their contact with the Mande traders their goldsmiths learnt how to cast gold into excellent jewellery for the wealthy in Adanse.

Gold (*sika*) was a symbol of wealth and power in Adanse. A wealthy man was known as *sikani* and was greatly revered. Gold dust was used in marriage ceremonies. When one offered his daughter's hand in marriage the suitor expressed his gratitude by presenting gold dust to his in-law.⁹¹

4. CONCLUSION

The Adanse people have lived in an auriferous and forest region in Ghana and have known for many centuries that their land, streams and rivers are a fertile source of gold.

Although the exact origins and dates of gold exploitation in the area are obscure, it is almost certain that the people of Adanse were mining gold before they began to take part in the Trans Saharan trade. Adanse goldfields were linked to the Trans Saharan trade through the Arabs of the Barbary Coast, the Maghreb and Egypt and Florence, Venice, Spain and other states of late Medieval and Renaissance Europe by the Mande Dyula known to the Akans as the Wangara.

In the pre European time, the gold mining industry was controlled by the Adansehene and his sub chiefs, and no pit could be dug without their permission. One third of all gold recovered went to Adansehene, or the chief on whose stool land the gold was mined. Where a chief used his slave to win gold, he would appropriate it all to himself.

A host of beliefs were closely associated with traditional gold mining. Libation and offerings of chicken were made to the Adanse god *Bona* and *Asaase Yaa* (the earth goddess) to ensure personal safety of the miners and bountiful gold finds. Annual tax, *apafram*, was required to be paid by miners and this was used to finance rituals connected with gold mining.

The people of Adanse had their own technology for mining gold. The major method involved digging pits, and the other involved scooping in river beds. The miners had few implements for digging the gold. These were *sosotoa*, also known as *tofa*, a shovel, a hoe (*aso*) baskets and trays called *pan-pan*.

The abolition and emancipation of slaves in the Gold Coast in 1874 meant that family members became the main source of labour for gold mining in Adanse. The ore containing the gold brought to the surface was crushed by men and boys and washed by women.

Goldsmiths (*sikadwumfo*) used gold to make different types of figurines and objects for Adanse rulers and wealthy citizens in the state. Skilled artisans in Adanse became known far afield for the artistic quality of their gold jewellery and brass casting. The famous Adanse brass weight used for weighing gold dust

⁹¹ Oral tradition collected from Nana Kwaben Amponsem of Akrokyere on 30th January, 1998. See also Daaku *op.cit.*, p. 84.

played important part in royal regalia and ceremonies of state. Gold dust formed the base of the currency system in Adanse. Tributes from conquered states were most commonly paid in gold as were taxes, judicial fines and other imposts on ordinary citizens. Gold dust was used to bury royals in Adanse.

Gold also played an important role in Adanse political history. The state sword, *Afenakwa*, and other stool regalia were ornamented with gold to exhibit the power and authority Adansehene and his sub chiefs wielded.

It was also a symbol of wealth and power and was known in Adanse as *sika*. A wealthy man became known as *sikani*. Gold was also used to win the hands of women in marriage.

From the last two decades of the fifteenth century through the end of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese traded European goods for gold from Adanse. Centuries of gold exploitation led to a major industry in the area which in turn gave rise to a rich Akan culture, as were taxes, judicial fines and other imposts on ordinary citizens. Gold dust was also used in marriage ceremonies. Gold (*sika*) was a symbol of wealth and power in Adanse.

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INTERVIEWS (ORAL TRADITION)

Interview with the elders of Adanse and the employees and ex-workers of AGC at Obuasi, Cape Coast and Nkoranza-Nkwabeng in Bono-Ahafo were conducted in 1998 and 1999.

NAMES OF INTERVIEWERS	AGE	OCCUPATION	STATUS
Nana Bonsra Sakrakyire II	60	Lawyer	Royal
Nana Kwabena Brenya	86	Farmer	Royal
Opanin Kwadwo Donkor	80	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Nana Kwabena Amponsem	55	Farmer/ Store Keeper	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwaku Fokuo	72	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwame Akuoku	70	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Antwi Boasiako	65	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Appiah Dankwa	62	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwame Appia	66	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwame Affum	64	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwadwo Wusu	60	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kwadwo Boateng	62	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff
Opanin Kofi Adanse	83	Farmer	Ex-AGC Staff

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