

<sup>1</sup>Samuel Adu-Gyamfi

mcgyamfi@yahoo.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-0193-867X

<sup>2</sup>Emmanuel Bempong

ORCID: 0000-0001-6202-4356

<sup>3</sup>Henry Tetey Yartey

ORCID: 0000-0002-7689-638X

<sup>4</sup>Benjamin Dompseh Darkwa

ORCID: 0000-0003-1662-9789

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana

## BRITISH LAND POLICIES IN THE GOLD COAST AND HER RELATIONS WITH ASANTE

**Abstract:** Colonization successfully advanced various reforms in Africa that affected several practices on the continent. The various customs that have been affected include the land tenure system of British colonies in particular. An abundance of laws and policies were adopted with the sole aim of conserving the environment. These policies often clashed with indigenous interests and witnessed counter attacks as a result. Despite this, there is little information in the literature concerning how British land policies shaped their relations with the indigenous people, particularly the Asante. Based on a qualitative research approach, the current study uses Asante as a focal point of discourse in order to historically trace British land policies and how they, the British engaged with the people of Asante. From the discourse, it should be established that the colonial administration passed ordinances to mobilize revenue and not necessarily for the protection of the environment. In addition, the findings indicated that the boom in cash crops, such as cocoa and rubber, prompted Britain to reform the land tenure system. With the land policies, individuals and private organizations could acquire lands from local authorities for the cultivation of cash crops. We conclude that the quest to control land distribution caused the British to further annex Asante.

**Keywords:** Land Policies, Cocoa, Gold Coast, Britain, Asante

doi: 10.2478/sho-2020-0007

---

## INTRODUCTION

Great Britain's colonization of Africa and her quest to shape all facets of indigenous lives across her colonies was challenging and sometimes successful. From the economy, politics and individual levels, the impact of the British colonial administration on the Gold Coast and Ghana for that matter, can be felt in contemporary times. Significantly, the discourses on land and their related policies remain as policy areas where traces of colonial policy can be felt. Prior to the colonization of several territories in Africa by the British, the system of land tenure was very complex. Three main types of land have been reported in the literature: stool lands, family lands, and individual or private lands [Lahouel B. 2011: 123].

During the colonial era, land conservational history of the Gold Coast witnessed a period of legislative activities by the British. These policies were not only aimed at controlling the environment, but they also created a system of exploitation of the natural resources of the Gold Coast. The increased demand for minerals and other raw materials such as gold and cocoa in the world market during the 19th century led to the enactment of the various land conservation legislations in order to control the natural resources of the country [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 295].

The first land conservation bill by the British, referred to as the Public Land Ordinance of 1876, was a way of empowering the government to seize public lands and, in their view, to correct the land tenure system of the country [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 295]. The British Land Bill of 1894 followed this. However, due to its failure, it was subsequently replaced by the Land Bill of 1897. This bill created the concessional court whose duties were to check land transactions and issue land certificates. All these earlier policies aimed at circumventing local chiefs as the major trustees of land. It is worth stating that at the inception of these policies; the existing norms on land ownership were reformed, making the colonial authority sole custodian of land and its resources [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 295].

As a response, the various policies saw emerging oppositions from indigenous Africans to the extent that J.H. Cheethan had to provide a copy of the bill to J.W. De Graft Johnson who brought it to the notice of chief J.O Abraham, J.P Brown and John Mensah Sarbah. The immediate reaction included agitations for the removal of the bill, which led to the establishment of the Aborigines Right Protection Society (ARPS) on 4th August, 1897 [Benjamin T. 2007: 7-6].

Over the years, governments across the globe, among other stakeholders, have passed a cornucopia of land conservation policies. During the era of the Gold Coast, the British administration adopted numerous policies towards the conservation of the forests in her region. It is expedient to state that these policies shaped the relations between the state and indigenous people. However, there has been little studies addressing the policies used by the British during the era of the Gold Coast and how the British responded to the reactions that erupted from interest groups during the period under review. Using Asante as a focal point of discourse, the current study aims at filling the gap in the literature by historically tracing British land conservation policies and how the British further related with the Asante. Our focus is primarily on late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To reach the objectives listed above, the study deploys a qualitative research approach rooted in both primary and secondary sources. Primarily, data was collected from a compendium of archival data, such as Public Records and Archival Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra and the Manhyia Archives of Kumase<sup>1</sup>. Significantly, the researchers gleaned data from government records, reports and newspapers. In selecting the primary data, the researchers used information from sources that cover, largely, the colonial period. The secondary data for the research was gathered from books, articles in journals as well as internet sources. The data collected from the two sources have been carefully analyzed in order to put this work together. The current study, based on its historical perspective, shall be useful for the interpretation of land management policies. Apart from its contribution to related literature, it has the proclivity to contribute to the understanding of how historical developments shape discussions on land, land management and land use.

The study is grouped under three major themes: introduction; findings including discussions and conclusion. Under the first section, a general background to the study, the method that was employed, as well as the study objectives have been discussed. The second part presents and analyzes the findings of the study based on primary and secondary sources. Finally, we draw a conclusion to the study.

---

<sup>1</sup> PRAAD is an archival source that stands for Public Records and Archives Administration. The department appears in major Regions in Ghana and has a heap of data especially those that focus on the colonial period in the Gold Coast.

## INDIGENOUS LAND POLICIES IN ASANTE PRIOR TO HER CONQUEST

Generally, at the dawn of colonialism, lands in the Gold Coast including Asante, were classified based on stool lands and family lands [PRAAD. ADM 5/3/13, Lahouel B. 2011: 123].<sup>2</sup> Throughout the Gold Coast, individual ownership of land was never a common feature; the acquisition of land as a private property only became apparent through purchase and/or inheritance [PRAAD. ADM 5/3/13]. In Asante, most lands were inherited through the matrilineal traits. This showed that, individually, lands and their inalienability were salient features of land tenure prior to the influx of the Europeans. It is believed that during the era under review, land for rent was limited and traditional leaders had the sole control over lands [Obeng-Odoom F. 2016: 668]. Concerning purchase, the Chiefs in Asante had the sole right and responsibility to dispose of land for any stipulated purpose [PRAAD CSO/12/1/21].

Prior to the British conquest of Asante, the empowerment of the traditional leaders on issues of lands resulted in lands given out to organizations and wealthy individuals. To acquire land for private use, one had to follow a set of requirements. An applicant for land and concession ought to:

*...first approach the chief, personally or through an advocate. At this meeting, the applicant or the agent, orally through an interpreter, describes the area of land and situations surrounding the area he [they] seek(s) to acquire. After the chief expresses his comprehension of the request, the parties bargain on the favorable amount for renting the land for the said purpose [PRAAD ADM 5/3/13].*

At this juncture, it is imperative to state that lands were not necessarily sold; they were rather leased or rented for a stipulated purpose. Lands were therefore disposed off for a specified term and purpose by the applicant and subject to the agreement of the chief in question.

In Asante, most of the renowned organizations to which lands were leased, included religious groups. Notable amongst them were the Basel Mission under Ramseyer and the Wesleyan Mission under Rev.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lahouel B. [2011: 123] argues that stool lands are lands that are believed to belong to ancestors and traditional rulers who acted as custodians of that common heritage. Apart from stool lands, there were lands acquired by inheritance, purchase or awarded after a successful war. The land tenure system of ownership included a kinship group and freed slaves who shared the family life.

Thomas B. Freeman who settled and practiced Christianity in Asante [Antwi M. 2011: 45]. The religious groups later turned to criticize some aspects of Asante culture and traditional practices; such as human sacrifices, slavery and child marriage as inhumane and outmoded and further reported to the British colonial officers [Antwi M. 2011: 64]. Freeman introduced the Methodist church in 1839 during the reign of Otumfo Kwaku Dua I. In 1841, Otumfo Kwaku Dua I; exercising his customary land powers, donated land to the Wesleyan Missionaries for building a Mission house and a chapel at Adum [Antwi M. 2011: 45]. In one of the letters by Philips, the traveling commissioner stated that:

*If things remain as they are, he told Wolseley, that means constant quarrels and troubles in the interior, the continuation of human sacrifices which have never ceased and the shutting up of the place for commercial purposes and educational works [Parliamentary Papers, C7917].*

Again, in a correspondence to the colonial office, Ramseyer made an unrestrained plea:

*...for God's sake, for humanity's sake, for the prestige the English Government still has, for the Gold Coast's sake, may the government act at once, before it is too late, and bring peace to the whole Asante country and open it for the work of civilization, for the work God has laid in their land and for which it has been so much blessed, and these hundreds and thousands of poor innocent people who have been sacrificed in the street of Coomasee (Kumase). Are their voices not loud enough...[Parliamentary Papers, C1999].*

In addition, an extract from the Gold Coast Methodist Times of 31 August, 1894 also indicated that:

*A dreadful slaughter of human victims, it being customary with the new king of Asante ,on his enthronement , to observe a general funeral custom for deceased royal relatives , Prempeh also being now installed, kept the hereditary custom by slaying some 400 human beings in cold blood [Gold Coast Methodist Times 1894].*

The extracts above suggest that, beyond what can be regarded as barbaric acts, land acquisition and the establishment of policies to control same prompted Britain to put in measures to establish her protectorate over Asante. For Ramseyer, the need to maintain peace for the propagation of the gospel was key to establishing Asante as a protectorate [Jone A. 1991: 184].

The management of stool lands under the traditional authorities in Asante also gave way for the chiefs to give out lands to British trading and mining companies who wanted to establish branches in Asante.

In 1890, three Fante concessionaires had launched the Asante exploration company, leasing 100 square miles of land around Obuase. It was alleged that both *Bekwaehene* and *Adansehene* had agreed upon the arrangement on 27<sup>th</sup> September, on a memorandum to the kings and chiefs of Asante including *Manponhene* and *Bantamahene*<sup>3</sup>, recommending that the mining operations be suspended pending the return of the embassy [McCaskie T. 1978]. The company was later liquidated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1896 and re-named Asante Goldfields Corporation [McCaskie T. 1978].

## BRITISH LAND CONSERVATION POLICIES IN THE GOLD COAST AND RELATED MATTERS

The first British land bill, which was geared towards land conservation and control was the public ordinance of 1876. The major motive underpinning this policy was to enable the government acquire land for public purposes. The colonial authorities stipulated that compensation be granted to owners of land for cultivation or habitation as well as land for collecting or storing water for any industrial purposes, except for unoccupied lands, that is, lands that were deemed or proven not to have been used or occupied before [PRAAD CSO 12/1/20]. Records revealed that; under the review of the land policy: “the Crown possessed the inherent right of *ultimus haeres* to any land for which no other owner could be found...” [PRAAD ADM 5/3/13].<sup>4</sup> In this regard, the colonial administration regarded all unoccupied lands as the property of the government, capable of being used for any purpose it deemed fit.

The effect of this bill on Asante and the rest of the Gold Coast was such that they felt the ordinance impaired their land rights. They strongly denounced the above concept of unoccupied lands as later used in both the Land Bills of 1894 and 1897 respectively. From their perspective, uncultivated land was simply allowed to stay fallow according to the traditional technique of shifting cultivation. The protests and concerns of the Africans pushed the government to enact another land bill in 1894 – the second British land bill.

---

<sup>3</sup> The term “*Hene*” is an Akan accolade that is used as a title for Kings and Chiefs. To that extent, *Bekwaehene* can be translated into English to mean the Chief of Bekwae.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of *ultimus haeres* (Latin for ultimate heir) used within the text could be explained as succession from the dead.

The Land Bill of 1894 was enacted after the British collected information on the land tenure system of the people in order to find a compromise to vest the land to the Crown without encroaching upon the rights of the Africans since ex-appropriation was likely to generate tensions. To the British, land appropriation had the tendency to undermine the influence of the traditional rulers and could generate a feeling of hostility against the government. To reconcile, the British suggested the allocation of compensation and targeted only forestlands and minerals. In the bill, not only forestlands, but also wastelands were also given the same meaning as the notion of unoccupied land in the ordinance of 1876 [Lahouel B. 2011: 125-30].

The locals in the Gold Coast and Asante in particular continued to hold the right to grant concessions, but only subject to government approval. This affected the Asante tradition as Chiefs and other stakeholders had little or no opportunity for raising much revenue from land leases and especially mining concessions [PRAAD ADM 5/3/13]. The Gold Coast including Asante, protested against it on the grounds that, the government should be in the position to prevent the land of the colony from falling into the hands of concession mongers for a bottle of rum or a gin. In Asante, it was suggested that a longer period for registration should be given novelty to avoid discontent. It was further argued that conferring an absolute title was not a wise policy, as grant obtained mistakenly, through improper means, could not be cancelled under the present bill [Lahouel B. 2011: 125-30].

The bill was protested against when it was first read in 1894. Ghanaians or Gold Coasters argued that the British government had no ownership of land outside the castle. Prominent individuals such as J.F.H Brew who had already been involved in the Fante Confederation of 1853 to 1873 played a conscious role against the bill. In 1895, the chiefs of Apollonia and all adjacent villages including Eastern and Western Shama, Elmina and Sekondi voiced the same grievances to the secretary of state against the 'so-called' wasteland and said that the land belonged to them. To them, the term "annexation" was incorrect as much as the Gold Coast colony remains a protectorate. It was believed that the land was in the hands of the natives and under the jurisdiction of the native chiefs [Lahouel B. 2011: 125-30].

The next land bill of 1897 provided a concessional court whose prerogatives consisted of checking land transactions and issuing land certificates [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 293-7]. This was in a way, to control the increasing land distribution by the traditional rulers. The bill gave a distinction between superior and inferior rights of land. Essentially, the governor was

given a superior right to take over land for public purposes and the ability to grant land certificates. In the bill, a concession court was to decide the validity of all claims related to grants of lands. This was in sharp contrast to the belief that all forests in Ghana were a reserve for the local communities and their traditional rulers. However, the colonial administration was particularly interested in controlling lands in order to generate considerable revenue from the natural resources [PRAAD ADM 4/1/52].

To achieve this aim, in 1894, the administration attempted to create Crown lands which later became known as the 'Crown Lands Ordinance' [PRAAD CAP 169]. This ordinance sought to vest waste forestlands and minerals in the hands of the colonial administration. If the grants are valid, the grantee had to pay a sum proportional to the value of the land. The traditional rulers were to be recognized by the governor, and that they could no longer grant concessions without the approval of the governor [PRAAD CAP 169]. To that extent, the local leaders were reduced to settlers. The denial of their privileges was believed to influence the loss of their identities as rulers and leaders.

Natives, under the leadership of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, fiercely resisted the bill of 1897. The society consisted of an association of chiefs and educated elites [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 296]. African intellectuals like John Mensah Sarbah, J.W De-Graft Johnson, Chief J.D Abraham and J.P Brown and some chiefs as well as other indigenous rulers, led the Aborigines Right Protection Society (ARPS), which was formed in 1897 in Cape Coast to protest against the land bill of 1894. Its first president was Jacob W. Sey and the vice president was J.P Brown [Sackeyfio N. 2012: 296].

The society had branches in Saltpond, Elmina, Winneba, and Axim as well as Krobo, Akuapim in the Eastern Province. Later, the society extended its activities to Asante and the Northern Territories. With its main pre-occupation as a Land Bill, it also protested against other bills such as taxation, labour, and constitutional changes that would later affect indigenous Africans. The ARPS resisted the bill on the grounds that it ignored the facts that lands could be inherited from ancestors [Omosini O. 1972: 455-8]. The association also fought against the modification and passing of several bills including the forest bill of 1907-1911.

The Forest Bill can be traced to the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1833, which empowered chiefs to pass byelaws for forest preservation [Agbosu L. 1983: 170]. It is suggested that due to mismanagement and lack of interest, both the traditional and the colonial administration failed



to ensure the protection of forests, especially during the era of the mining boom [Agbosu L. 1983: 170]. On the part of the colonial administration, most of their ordinances were intended for mobilizing revenue and not necessarily for the protection of the environment [Agbosu L. 1983: 169-72]. According to Attuquayefio and Fobil, historically, the initial attempt at developing a formal forestry policy occurred in 1906, when a legislation to regulate the cutting down of commercial tropical tree species was enacted [Attuquayefio D.K., Fobil J.N. 2005: 1-18]. This was implemented in 1907 with the passing of the Timber Protection Ordinance, which sought to prevent the cutting of saplings. However, there was no strict attempt made by the British to assess the forest capacity in the Gold Coast until 1908 when they employed H.N Thompson, a trained forester who had previously worked in Nigeria and Burma to carry out an assessment of the forested areas of the colony [Sayer J. et al. 1992: 1-12].

## LAND POLICIES AND THE COCOA INDUSTRY IN ASANTE

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a change in economic activities across the world. It is important to state that Asante and other parts of the world had moved away from slavery, which was abolished between 1807 and 1900, to a more commercial and agricultural based activities [From Slave... 2002: 5-7]. The growth in commodity export during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1807- 1900) had an immense impact on agricultural pattern in the Gold Coast. Food crop cultivation for subsistent and local demand also followed the same pattern.

Significantly, a shift in agricultural production pattern occurred with the introduction of cocoa cultivation in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Ross C. 2017: 79]. This led many farming households in Asante to indulge in cocoa cultivation in order to modify their system of land holding. With the introduction of cocoa, the Asante economy became integrated with the other parts of the Gold Coast by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [Ross C. 2017: 79]. At this time, kola nuts production and palm oil extraction reduced across Asante territories in the same period as cocoa cultivation entered the *Amansie* region of the Asante territory during the late 1890s, with major concentrations in Bekwai, Kokofu and Kuntinaase.

The expansion of cocoa cultivation and the colonial government's attempt to transform land tenure systems and extractions of natural resourc-

es were key factors that influenced the changes to land use and forest cover in the Asante Region. The introduction of cocoa to the Gold Coast brought many developments to the colony. Documentary sources report that:

*The cocoa industry appears to be making headway...and the necessity for creating a form of land tenure in the nature of individual ownership is therefore becoming apparent. At present, a member [of an ethnic group] may occupy and plant the tribal land free of charge, and subject only to liability of delivering a portion of his produce to the Chief – in the case of cocoa, one tenth. Nevertheless, he holds no title to the land, and appears to have no power to dispose of it in his lifetime, neither can he ensure continued possession by his family after his death [PRAAD ADM 5/3/13].*

From the data above, it can be inferred that the introduction of cocoa to the Asante region changed the system of land tenure. Individuals started acquiring private lands free of charge from their chiefs and in turn, these lands were used to cultivate cocoa. At harvest, the chiefs received one-tenth of the total produce. One notable development was that the farmer's entitlement to the land expired upon his death. This notwithstanding, some wealthy farmers purchased other lands privately for cocoa production.

Export of cocoa from the Gold Coast began in 1891 with the first official export of two bags in 1893. Within two decades, the country's export reached 40,000 tons [Ross C. 2017: 79]. The high demand for cash crops such as cocoa and kola in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to feed industries in Europe led to the shipping of cocoa on a large scale from the Gold Coast. Although cocoa was also produced in places such as Trinidad, Brazil and other parts of the world, African farmers increasingly dominated the market for the product [Ross C. 2017: 71]. This brought a different dimension to the cash crop industry, hence, Asante and British relations in the era of the cash crop revolution in tropical Africa intensified [Austin G. 2005: 48-56].

The impact of the cocoa industry, just like other cash crops, brought inequality to the regions of the Gold Coast. This was because fertile and suitable lands for cash crops like palm oil and cocoyam, for instance, were found in certain areas of the Southern forest belt including Asante, Bono and Ahafo, as well as the Western, Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana [Amanor K. et al. 2020: 31].<sup>5</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the favourable land for the cultivation of crops such as cocoa, kola and palm nuts made eth-

---

<sup>5</sup> On this same subject, Agbosu [1983: 169] provides detailed information on the forest belt as a reserve for the cultivation of cocoa, coffee and oil palm among other cash and domestic crops. He argues that based on the availability of fertile lands within the areas un-

nic groups located in these areas of the country, and especially Asante, to become richer than other ethnic groups in the country. The Asante cocoa farming societies gradually became affected by the cocoa industry in different facets of their life.

Firstly, the cocoa farmers saw a rise in their income as the price of cocoa grew due to the high demand in the world market for the new industrial revolution [Danquah F.K. 1991: 24]. As a result, Asante cocoa farmers took advantage of the rising cocoa prices to expand their cocoa farms by acquiring large private lands for farming in the Bono, Ahafo and Sefwi areas of the present-day North Western Regions of Ghana. Economically, this created an avenue for the generation of wealth among the Asante. In Kumase, the paramount city of Asante, some royals began to send their children abroad for education and started the formation of political organizations agitating for Africans to be included in the process of governance of the country [Hill P. 1969: 41-6].

Commercial workers benefited from the economic opportunities that the cocoa sector offered. The cocoa industry brought about an increase in revenue to the colonial government through export of the commodity. As a result, the government started paying higher wages to its official staff [Hill P. 1969: 41-6, Danquah F. 1991: 21-4].<sup>6</sup> This prompted a growing number of Africans to seek employment in the colonial system.

As the demand for cocoa increased, the cocoa industry brought about an increase in the standard of living for both skilled and unskilled labour [Hill P. 1969: 41-6]. The 19<sup>th</sup> century rise of the cocoa industry in Asante resulted in income disparities between the south and the north in general; and between Asante and the rest of the country in particular. The result was that cocoa farmers became very important and highly respected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Asante, indigenes tagged as cocoa chiefs, became very influential in the society politically, economically and socially. Large-scale cocoa farmers were regarded among the worthy in the society as they owned tens or more acres of cocoa farms across the southern parts of the Gold Coast. Some farmers even acted as collateral security for other small scale and less skilled farmers in order to acquire individual lands [Hill P. 1969: 38-40].

---

der review, farming has been a major activity over the years, at least, prior to the influx of Europeans into the Gold Coast.

<sup>6</sup> In Danquah's Dissertation [1991] the author discusses the nature and state of cocoa production in the then Gold Coast in detail.

Cocoa farmers also acted as leaders in protecting the interest of other cocoa farmers in other parts of the Gold Coast such as demanding, among others, for increase in cocoa prices. This led to a rapid increase in cultivation and investment in the cocoa industry in Asante from 1890 onwards. Subsequently, there was an influx of male migrant labourers from the Northern Savannah to the Southern forests belt and Asante in particular [Hill P. 1969: 41-6]. Following the prohibition of slave trade and slavery, slave labour in the northern part took advantage of the cocoa industry and the demand for labour to secure increasingly formidable contract from employers such as the Asante cocoa farmers [Hill P. 1969: 40]. As a result, cocoa farmers acquired more lands and employed more migrant labourers. Accordingly, "using capital earned from earlier cash-crop ventures, farmers bought land on freehold from local chiefs, often by pooling their resources in commercial syndicates, and sometimes on the basis of kinship groups" [Ross C. 2017: 79].

Export of cocoa from the Gold Coast reached its peak in 1910, when the Gold Coast became world leader in the export of the commodity [Danquah F. 1991: 24]. The annual average per capital growth in GDP also rose to 1.8% between 1890-1910 [Danquah F. 1991: 24]. This led to an increase in British interest in the Gold Coast and by 1896, the British made efforts to extend its control to Asante, the northern territory and some parts of Togoland [Hill P. 1969: 41].

One commodity that was equally important in the Gold Coast during the era under review is the rubber trade. Like cocoa, the forest belt proved worthy for the cultivation and trade of rubber. Although the trade in rubber and its associated activities were short-lived, its contribution to the economy of Gold Coast and the British Empire cannot be treated with contempt [Dumett R. 1971: 79]. Sources indicate that from 1890 to 1905, the Gold Coast was notable for its position as the largest exporter of rubber in all of the British Empire; across the world, it was among the top five [Dumett R. 1971: 79]. In response to the contribution of rubber to the British economy and the rising world prices for same, the government used lands for experimentation. Similarly, private companies started acquiring lands in Asante and other forest regions for large plantation and cultivation of rubber [Dumett R. 1971: 79].

## IMPACT OF BRITISH LAND POLICIES ON BRITISH-ASANTE RELATIONS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

In 1898, her majesty The Queen legislated that the local colonial administration should allow the natives to exercise ownership of their lands [Kotey E. et al. 1998: 23-5, Parren M., deGraft N. 1995: 1-5]. This ruling, after several land conservation laws, changed the British-Asante relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and affected Asante economically, politically as well as socially. In Asante, 'stool lands' became absolutely managed by chiefs based on customary laws. The provision also recognized traditional authorities as custodians of lands and customary laws as the regulating order. Furthermore, it guaranteed the institution of chieftaincy and denied the colonial administration the power to enact any law, which confers on any person or authority the right to accord, or withdraw recognition to or from a chief for any purpose whatsoever [Owusu-Mensah I. 2014: 36]. This policy made a large proportion of land in Asante to be managed as stool lands. Free market bargaining power of lands by owners and buyers increased thereby creating wealth in Asante.

This was, however, to be changed in 1945 when Mr. Havers made recommendations regarding the *Regulation of Land Title*. The sole aim of this policy was to promote security of title to land. Under the provisions of the policy under review, both stool lands and individual lands were to be registered at the office of the commissioner of lands [PRAAD ARG 1/3/6/12]. Significantly, "all acquisitions and other transactions relating to land..." was to pass through the office of the Lands Department in Kumase [PRAAD CSO 12/1/21].

Essentially, this brought a different dimension to the cash crop industry and Asante-British relations in the period under study [Austin G. 2005: 48-56]. The ability to secure individual lands made Asante farmers able to purchase more land and shift more into the commercialization of agriculture through the cultivation of cocoa and palm oil among other important cash crops. Farmers cultivated cocoa in places, such as *Amansie*, *Bekwai*, *Kokofu* and *Kontinaase* on larger scale for export to Europe. The direct response to this was a march-up of the high demand for the production of cash crops to feed industries in Europe.

Land distribution in Asante also changed leading to the expansion of major cities and towns in the region. With the traditional leaders being the key actors in this process, farmers and land developers were con-

fronted with a wide range of economic, social and other institutional factors that affected agricultural activities such as commercial crop production, land use and exploitation of mineral resources. Wilks estimated that by the beginning of the 19th century, the population of metropolitan Asante might have ranged between 500,000 and 725,000 people [Wilks I. 1975: 5-10]. In comparison with estimates of per capita land use in the shifting cultivation system, the extent of forested areas under cultivation and fallow within metropolitan Asante ranged between 600,000 and 870,000 hectares [Wilks I. 1975: 5-10]. It was also reported that metropolitan Asante, with its capital Kumase, and the surrounding agglomeration of towns and settlements were entirely within the forest zone and covered an area of 25,000sq. Km (9,652.5 sq. miles) [Wilks I. 1975: 5-10].

Again, the control and distribution of land by Asante gave them such power that the British were left with no alternative than to turn their attention toward the annexation of the former. The initial effort of annexation was quite persuasive. It involved George E. Ferguson's engagement with the chiefs to accept British protectorate. The failure of this approach compelled the British to use force. According to Shillington, in 1895-96, in the face of British military superiority, Asante military leaders tactically avoided battle. The kingdom was occupied and the British protectorate was proclaimed over most of the regions of modern-day Ghana, previously referred to as the Gold Coast. However, because the Asante army had remained intact by 1900, they seized the opportunity and rose against the British. The Asante army was crushed and the colony of the Gold Coast was subsequently proclaimed [Shillington K. 1989: 310].

The presence of British forces in Kumase following the Land Bill and the defeat of Asante by the British in the 1896 war led to new developments in the region. Yaa Asantewaa of Edweso declared her opposition to the presence of Britain in Asante. This compelled leaders from Kumase to take up arms against the Queen's forces [Wilks I. 2000: 13-20]. Both documentary evidence and oral accounts are emphatic that Prempeh presented no military defense. To Wilks, what has been questioned about Prempeh's response was the *Asantehene's* motivation. Was his behaviour an act of indifference? He further contended that the real reason, however, lay in Agyeman Prempeh's supreme faith in the moral supremacy of negotiation. Rattray discussed the British expedition of 1896 towards the annexation of Asante and asserted that Agyeman Prempeh not offering any mili-

tary resistance to the British expeditionary force of 1896 has never been in question [Steiner P. 1901: 7, Rattray R. 1923: 156].<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, it is significant to note that the *Asantehene* had had a reputation for his commitment to negotiation and had pursued a policy of diplomacy. The *Asantehene's* reputation culminated in his dispatch of the mission led by *Kyidomhene*<sup>8</sup> Kwame Boaten and Oheneba John Owusu Ansa, Jr., to England in 1894-95 in an attempt to resolve Asante-British differences directly with the Crown [Adjaye J. 1989: 231]. However, the nineteenth-century Asante-British relations, unknown to the Asante ambassadors, the king or councilors who had deputized them, had assumed a different dimension and meaning. Significantly, while the military prepared for a British invasion of Asante, the *Asantehene* was more emphatic and reliant on diplomacy [Adjaye J. 1989: 231].

Having made such an investment in the mission to England, the *Asantehene* naturally preferred to explore this line of approach to its logical conclusion. This necessitated his actions or inactions, to receive the report of the Kwame Boaten-Owusu Ansa mission, news of whose return to the Gold Coast had already reached him just as the British force was on its way to Kumase [Adjaye J. 1989: 231]. The evidence points, inescapably, to the conclusion that the British acted rather surprisingly in their arrest of Agyeman Prempeh along with *Asantehemaa* (Queen mother) Yaa Akyaa as well as other leading chiefs and councilors [Adjaye J. 1989: 231].

Prior to this, during the decade of reconstruction following the end of the Asante civil war of 1883-1888, most mainstream Kumase politicians realized that it was inevitable that Asante would become part of the British empire and that the principal issue was to secure acceptable terms [Brempong A. 2000: 99]. There were, however, conservatives who opposed any sort of the erosion of Asante sovereignty, they were known as the radicals. On the other hand, there were those who advocated for closer association with the British as a way of achieving the liberalization of the traditional political system and privatization of trade and production [Wilks I. 1998: 159-65]. At the time of

<sup>7</sup> Steiner [1901] succinctly echoes the view portrayed in the documentary sources. See also: Rattray R.S. [1923], who witnessed an Apo celebration in 1922. He argues that at this festival, a derisive song questioned whether the Asante knew about guns, "They would not have let the white man seize King Prempeh and Yaa Akyaa without firing".

<sup>8</sup> Among the Akans, *Kyidom* is a title used to refer to rear. In that regard, *Kyidomhene*, among the Akans, can be taken as a rear chief, he defends from the rear.

the conquest of Asante, “the Crown was in position to dictate the terms and proclaimed the nation’s [Asante] lands as the Crown’s property” [PRAAD ADM 5/3/13].

## CONCLUSION

Across the world, policies enacted for the purpose of land conservation aimed at controlling the environment with their corresponding benefits on the forest and other agricultural purposes. Similarly, the creation of various land conservation bills in the Gold Coast by British authority aimed at controlling the forest and mineral resources of the country in order to protect the resources for exploitation through exports from the Gold Coast to Europe.

The current study focused on historical methods and approaches for analyzing land conservation policies enacted by the British and how the relationship between the British and Asante were shaped by these policies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Findings from the study have indicated that the colonial authority enacted these policies to preserve the forest for agricultural purposes in order to increase the production of cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, and kola for exports to feed industries in Europe.

In the Gold Coast, the land ordinances of 1876, 1894 and 1897, among others that were to follow, were all aimed at accomplishing the above-stated purposes. These laws equally had their corresponding impacts on the citizens of the country. In the case of the Gold Coast, it gave rise to protests from the local chiefs and elites of various communities particularly Asante. Essentially, political organizations were formed to protest against their exclusion in the system of governance in the country and to demand for an increase in the prices of cocoa.

Whiles the various efforts by the local people to resist European hegemony resulted in the restoration of the ownership of lands to the natives, the policies were successful at changing the land tenure system among the indigenous populations even in contemporary times. The empowerment of the natives with respect to the land distribution process led to an influx of religious, trading and mining organizations in Asante throughout the centuries under review.

It is deducible from the current discourse that the quest to control the distribution of land served as a basis for British annexation of Asante.



British land conservation policies did not only shape the relations between the British colonial authorities and Asante, but also became the genesis of nationalist agitations and struggle for self-government in the Gold Coast. Furthermore, the land conservation policies of the British colonial authorities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became the basis upon which most pre- and post-independence land management policies of the country were developed.

## REFERENCES

### Historical Sources

- Parliamentary Papers (10 August, 1894), *Ramseyer to Colonial Office*, C 1999.  
 Parliamentary Papers (19 June, 1894), *Ramseyer to Wolseley*, C 7917, 192-94.  
 PRAAD, Accra, Annual Reports on the Land Department for 1929-30, CSO 12/1/20  
 PRAAD, Accra, Annual Reports on the Lands Department, 1931-1932. CSO/12/1/21.  
 PRAAD, Accra, Report on the Legislation Governing the Alienation of Native Lands in the Gold Coast Colony and Asante, ADM 5/3/13.  
 PRAAD, Accra. The Northern Territories Administration Amendment Ordinance, 1923. ADM 4/1/52.  
 PRAAD, Kumase, Registration of Office to lands with Special Reference to its Introduction on the Gold Coast, ARG1/3/6/12.  
 The Gold Coast Methodist Times for 31 August, 1894.

### Literature

- Adjaye J.K. (1989), *Asantehene Agyeman Prempe I and British Colonization of Asante: A Reassessment*, International Journal of African Historical Studies, 22(2), 223-249.  
 Agbosu L.K. (1983), *The Origins of Forest Law and Policy in Ghana during the Colonial Period*, Journal of African Law, 27(2). 169-187.  
 Amanor K.S., Yaro J.A., Teye J.K. (2020), *Long-Term Change and Agricultural Commercialization in Ghanaian Cocoa*, Working Paper 31, Future Agricultures Consortium, Brighton.  
 Antwi M. (2011), *The Contribution of the Asante Kings to the Growth of Methodism in Asante: 1839-2002*, KNUST, Kumase (diss.).  
 Asante S.K. (1965), *Interests in Land in the Customary Law of Ghana: A new appraisal*. Yale Law Journal, 848-885.  
 Attuquayefio D.K., Fobil J.N. (2005), *An Overview of Biodiversity Conservation in Ghana: Challenges and prospects*, West African Journal of Applied Ecology, 7, 1-18.  
 Austin G. (2005), *Labor, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labor in Asante, 1807-1956*, University of Rochester press, Rochester.  
 Benjamin T. (2007), *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450*, Thomson Gale, New York.  
 Brempong A. (2000), *The Role of Nana Yaa Asantewaa in the 1900 Asante War of Resistance*, Ghana Studies, 3(1), 97-110.  
 Danquah F.K. (1991), *The Capsid, Black pod and Swollen Shoot Cacao Diseases in Ghana: 1910-1966*. Iowa State University (diss.).  
 Dumett R. (1971), *The Rubber Trade of the Gold Coast and Asante in the Nineteenth Century: African Innovation and Market Responsiveness*, Journal of African History, 79-101.

- Hill P. (1969), *The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study and Rural Capitalism*, Cambridge, London.
- Jone, A. (1991), *Four Years in Asante: One Source or Several?* *History in Africa*, 18, 173-203.
- Kotey E.N.A., Francois J., Owusu J.G.K., Yeboah R.A., Amanor K.S., Antwi L. (1998), *Falling into Place: Policy that works for Forests and People*, International Institute for Environmental and Development, London.
- Lahouel B. (2011), *British Land Legislation in the Gold Coast (1876-1897): A Threat to Native Institutions?* *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines (Université de La Réunion), *Straddled Borders*, 123-138.
- From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa* (Vol. 86) (2002), Law R. (ed.), Cambridge University Press, London.
- McCaskie T.C. (1978), *The Creation of Asante Goldfields Corporation Limited, CA 1890- 1910: An Episode in the Colonial Impact upon Asante*, *Asantesem*, 9, 37-47.
- Obeng-Odoom F. (2016), *Understanding Land Reform in Ghana: A Critical Postcolonial Institutional Approach*, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 48(4), 661-680.
- Omosini O. (1972), *The Gold Coast Land Question, 1894-1900: Some Issues Raised on West Africa's Economic Development*, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 5(3), 453-469.
- Owusu-Mensah I. (2014), *Politics, Chieftaincy and Customary Law in Ghana's Fourth Republic*, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 6(7), 31-48.
- Parren M.P.E., de-Graft N.R. (1995), *The Quest for Natural Forest Management in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia*, the Tropenbus Foundation, Wageningen.
- Rattray R.S. (1923), *Asante*. Oxford, London.
- Ross C. (2017), *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World*. Oxford University Press, London.
- Sackeyfio N. (2012), *The Politics of Land and Urban Space in Colonial Accra*, *History in Africa*, 39, 293-329.
- Sayer J., Harcourt C.S., Collins N.M. (1992), *Conservation Atlas of Tropical Forest: Africa*. World Conservation Monitoring Centre and IUCN, Cambridge.
- Shillington K. (1989), *History of Africa*, Red Globe Press, New York.
- Steiner P. (1901), *Dark and Stormy Days at Kumassi, 1900*, S. W. Partridge, London.
- Wilks I. (1975), *Asante in the Nineteenth century: The structure and evolution of a political order*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wilks I. (1998), *Unity and Progress: Asante revisited*, *Ghana Studies* 1, 159-65.
- Wilks I. (2000), *Asante at the End of the Nineteenth Century: Setting the Records Straight*. University of Wales, *Ghana Studies*, 3, 13-59.

**Samuel Adu-Gyamfi** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History and Political Studies of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi-Ghana. His research focus is in Applied History, Environmental History, Health Policy, Social Policy, Social Medicine, Societal Studies and Social Change. Through Applied History, he makes explicit attempts to illuminate current challenges and choices by analyzing historical precedents and analogues. He begins with a current choice or predicament and provides a perspective from history.

**Emmanuel Bempong** is a lecturer at the Sunyani Technical University in Ghana and a PhD candidate in History in the Department of History and Political Studies, of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. His research focus is on Environmental

---

History and policy, Culture and Medicine. He also studies Cultural Tourism of Ghana with a special focus on the Akyem-Abuakwa Traditional area.

**Henry Tettey Yartey** holds an MPhil. in Political Science and a PhD candidate in History in the Department of History and Political Studies. The applicant lectures in Political Science in same department. He has published several articles in the area of politics and policy.

**Benjamin Dompheh Darkwa** holds a BA in History and is currently an MPhil History candidate at the Department of History and Political Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Benjamin primarily focuses his research on the History of Medicine, Environment and Culture. Specifically, his interest is linked to how the discourses of Medicine, Health and Culture have been shaped throughout History.