

# ‘History has many cunning passages’: Kwasi Apea Nuama between the Asante and the British<sup>1</sup>

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## I

This is a companion piece to the essay on Kwame Tua (c.1865–1950).<sup>2</sup> It concerns the life of his older full brother Kwasi Apea Nuama (c.1862–1936). Like its predecessor, this article deals with an individual who was constrained to negotiate and recast his aspirations when the independent Asante he was born into and grew up in became a British colonial possession. There is a little general overlap between the two articles but, as was the case with Kwame Tua, the objective here is to dissect and anatomize a single person’s purposes, choices and actions during a period of quite unprecedented change. Kwame Tua was shown to have been an abrasive character, marked by strong personal likes and dislikes, who went his own way to both success and failure. It was shown, too, that he had the inspiration and solace of a great talent for skilled and then innovative music-making. As we shall see, Kwasi Apea Nuama was a very different person. He elected to deploy the legacy of his upbringing as a royal servant (*ahenkwa*; pl. *nhenkwa*) to confront and try to master the challenges and opportunities wrought by colonial rule in a much more subtle and indirect – but no less ambitious – way than his notoriously cantankerous younger brother.

In the introductory remarks to these articles I cited insightful research that has been carried out on indigenous mediators in colonial contexts across the African continent. Some of this, for example on cross-cultural brokerage and its ambiguities (Lawrance *et al.* 2006), on the arenas of local history and law as sites of potent but ambiguous opportunity for mediators (Ginio 2006), and on the relative absence of women in all these proceedings (Klein 2006) resonates with the lives of Kwame Tua and Kwasi Apea Nuama. If this work has limits then these are to be found in matters of detailed continuity between the relatively underexplored biographical selfhoods of their subjects antecedent to and outside their function as mediators. Here, I have tried to supply some of this lack of complicating personal, cultural and historical detail, in an effort to move discussion and understanding towards the impossible level of Amadou Hampâté Bâ’s acute – but fictionalized – portrait of Wangrin (Bâ 1973; 2000).

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<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, *Gerontion* (1920). This article is *in memoriam* Kwame Arhin (1935–2015), otherwise Bare Kese Nifahene Nana Arhin Brempong.

<sup>2</sup>This article, “‘You are the music while the music lasts’”: Kwame Tua between the Asante and the British’, appears in this issue of *Africa*.

## II

In 1945, the anthropologist Meyer Fortes, a co-director of the Ashanti Social Survey (1945–46), had a number of talks with Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (1931–70) in Kumase. On one such occasion, they discussed a bitter dispute about land that was then taking place between the stools of Donyina and Asiempon. The Asantehene was incensed, and said that the problem dated back to wrongheaded rulings made by Chief Commissioner of Asante (CCA) F. C. Fuller (1905–19). These errors arose, he declared, because CCA Fuller always ‘paid too much attention to Chief [Kwasi Apea] Nuama’s evidence’. This chief was a ‘traitor’ to Asante, and as such he was rewarded by the British. He set himself up as an expert witness on the Asante past, although he ‘really didn’t know any history’, but he ‘always spoke in such a way as to gratify the Chief Commissioner’.

On another occasion, Fortes spoke with James Adu Opoku, the sole surviving son of Kwasi Apea Nuama’s – and Kwame Tua’s – mother’s sister, Abena Nipanka Fiwaa. This nephew declared that his uncle supported the British, and that after the final Anglo-Asante war (1900–01) they asked him which stool he would ‘prefer to occupy’. He asked for the stool of Safie and Amoanim, thereby becoming both Kumase Domakwaehene and, much more significantly, Kumase Akyeamehene. In customary terms, the latter office made him titular head of the twelve accredited *akyeame* (‘linguists’ or spokesmen; sing. *akyeame*) who advised an Asantehene and were responsible for the daily running of the royal court of law. Kwasi Apea Nuama selected this office because he saw that the British administration would need an ‘intermediary’ between itself and a society it knew virtually nothing about. He understood, too, that someone in this position might possess only limited formal power, but care, skill and assiduity in making oneself indispensable in the role would confer huge informal influence with people on both sides of the colonial divide. Traditionally, *akyeame* functioned as the custodians of – and thus the authorities on – an oral history that passed before them day after day in disputes in the royal court. Thus, as James Adu Opoku attested, his uncle was constantly summoned to the colonial courts as an ‘authority’ on ‘history’; this gave him a position of immense importance in swaying legal outcomes one way or the other, and one from which in consequence Kwasi Apea Nuama ‘became a very rich and influential man’. The nephew, however, confirmed in a more forgiving way the verdict of Osei Agyeman Prempeh II. Kwasi Apea Nuama, he opined, ‘did not know history himself, but he went round [and] asked people and told what he heard from them’ (for more on *akyeame* generally, see Yankah 1995).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Fortes Papers, Cambridge, 8.51, ‘Chief Nuama’; *ibid.*, unaccessioned, ‘Discussion with Ashantihene about land cases’, 16 December 1945, and ‘House No. O. B. 477 Kumasi’, n.d. but 1945; also see Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana-Legon, Ashanti Stool Histories (collected by J. Agyeman-Duah), IASAS/43: Safie and Amoanim, dd. 28 March 1963. My own understanding has been greatly enhanced by talks over the years with four royal *akyeame* in Kumase: Baffour Osei Akoto, Buasiako Antwi, Kofi Apea Agyei (Boakye Tenten) and Nsuase Poku II (this last being kin to and sometime occupant of Kwasi Apea Nuama’s own stool).

Indeed, Kwasi Apea Nuama was perhaps the Asante individual most frequently named and cited in official British correspondence, secret or otherwise. Up to a point, he did make himself indispensable, and I turn now to consider how he achieved this end, and with what consequences.

### III

Kwasi Apea Nuama was born in about 1862 as the eldest child of the marriage between Kumase Asokwahene Kwasi Ampon and Yaa Mena of Amoaman. As noted in the article on Kwame Tua, Asokwa was a service stool (*esom dwa*) that provided specialist functionaries trained for the Asantehene's service. Asokwa trained both hornblowers (*asokwafoɔ*) and carriers of the king's trade (*batafoɔ*). By prescriptive right, Kwasi Ampon took his son and trained him to be a trader (*batani*), for, unlike Kwame Tua, he proved to have little musical aptitude. As a boy and then as a youth, he went on trading missions to the Gold Coast on behalf of the brother Asantehenes Kofi Kakari (1867–74) and Mensa Bonsu (1874–83). His collateral descendants assert that he was extremely clever (*nyansafo*), good at counting (*bu ano*), and above all a born speaker of languages who managed to pick up a smattering of English even on his earliest visits to the coast. He attracted the attention of Mensa Bonsu, but in quite another way from Kwame Tua. Family history has it that Kwasi Apea Nuama made some money on his own account on the coast, and back in Kumase he entered into a business partnership as a moneylender. His partner was Yaw Ntem, a royal of Sawua who earned the nickname 'Dafofo' (i.e. *odaefo*, 'a bringer of discord') because of his aggressive nature and outbursts of violence. Yaw Ntem publicly deprecated Mensa Bonsu, and he was one of the group of 'young men' (*nkwankwaa*) who first detained the Asantehene in 1883, manhandling him and declaring him destooled. It is unlikely that the calculating and cautious Kwasi Apea Nuama was a part of this conspiracy, but, like others of the *asokwafoɔ* and *batafoɔ*, he decamped to the Gold Coast Colony as political chaos overtook Asante. Certainly, in later life he very carefully distanced himself from Yaw Ntem. In 1935, with his erstwhile business partner safely dead, he denounced him as a leading conspirator in 1883 without ever mentioning that he had known him.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Kwame Tua, Kwasi Apea Nuama immersed himself in the political intrigues and schemes of his fellow Asante exiles in the colony. He attached himself to Yaw Awua, his fellow *ahenkwa*, and joined in his support for the British and his opposition to any resurrection of the old regime in Kumase. Here, however, we must be careful. Nothing in all that is known about Kwasi Apea Nuama suggests the levels of visceral hatred towards Yaa Kyaa and her son Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh, the ultimate victors in the dynastic wars (1883–88), that marked Kwame Tua and Yaw Awua. His siding with the British must be seen as a self-interested calculation or a prudent wager on the future. Like his brother, he saw much

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<sup>4</sup>For family oral history I thank Dominic Opoku, a son of James Adu Opoku, and the former's collateral kinsman Frederick Kwabena Nuama. I thank, too, Yaa Amanto, Grace Apea Agyeman and Kofi Dabo. Kwasi Apea Nuama's denunciation of Yaw Ntem is in Manhyia Palace, Kumase, 'Record of evidence submitted about the abolition of Nkwankwaahene in Ashanti', dd. Kumase, 1–5 and 20–23 December 1935, sworn testimony of Kwasi Apea Nuama, 4 December 1935.

palpable evidence of the industrial and military power of the putative colonial rulers, and also heard all the talk about the imminent British annexation of Asante. However, this did not mean that he was unwilling to involve himself in Asante affairs; however, in his case interest rather than passion was the driving force. In 1887, when the civil wars in Asante reached a nadir of near exhaustion, combatants began to run out of resources to continue the fight. Yaa Kyaa's chief supporter, Edwesohe Kwasi Afrane, was reduced to sending men to Kwamo, a village owing allegiance to the Kumase Adontenhene, to loot its royal cemetery of the funerary gold buried with the dead. Yaa Kyaa's chief opponent, the Kokofuhene, with his allies in Amofo, Dadease, Sawua, Abodom, Aseyere and (part of) Adanse, began to run short of both guns and ammunition. They pooled their resources in gold dust, even stripping the gold 'leaf from stool ornaments', and 'made a covenant' with Yaw Awua for him to buy weapons on their behalf from coastal traders. He was offered £1,000 and used some of this to procure 370 guns that he forwarded to the Asante frontier on the Pra River, where they were handed over to the Kokofuhene. The man in charge of escorting these goods northwards through the colony was Kwasi Apea Nuama, and he shared in the large profits of the venture with Yaw Awua. Oral history affirms that this was no more than one exceptional episode in a sustained commerce, for Kwasi Apea Nuama traded coastal salt, tobacco, alcohol and cloth into Asante during the course of the civil wars and long afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

Calculation underlay and informed Kwasi Apea Nuama's other activities in the Gold Coast Colony. All sources are agreed that he used his time to become a more or less fluent speaker of English. It is recalled that he could read it as well, at least up to a point and with difficulty, which is why he employed a succession of literate clerks when he returned eventually to Asante. In short, he anticipated the need for literacy in English in any future colonial dispensation. In later life he was careful to have all the deeds and covenants for his various Kumase properties committed to paper and duly notarized and witnessed. He possessed 'great foresight' in such matters, and in his old age 'he did the unusual thing of making a will distributing all his properties' (cf. McCaskie 1999b).<sup>6</sup> It is unclear where Kwasi Apea Nuama lived during his thirteen years in the colony while he was trading and acquiring English. Unlike his brother Kwame Tua, he appears to have spent as much if not more time in Accra than in Cape Coast. It is likely that this was because the first replaced the second as British government headquarters after the Anglo-Asante war of 1873–74, with the transfer being finally completed in 1877. It was symptomatic of all of Kwasi Apea Nuama's dealings that he wanted to be privy to any information that was to his advantage, and he

<sup>5</sup>For written accounts see National Archives of Ghana, Kumase, ARG 1/2/13/12, 'Ejisu Affairs, 1925–38', 83A, 'A Statement made by Chief Yaw Awua', dd. Kumase, 8 January 1930; Edwesohe Kobina Wusu to Commissioner Eastern Province Ashanti (CEPA), dd. Kumase, 9 March 1925; CEPA to CCA, dd. Kumase, 27 March 1930; and 'A Note on Yaw Ewuah and Kwasi Nuamah by the Cantonment Magistrate', marked as 'Copy', dd. Kumase, 3 August 1910. The oral historical consensus, as expressed by Nana Nsuase Poku II, is that 'Chief Nuama worked alongside Yaw Awua of Edweso in the British territory and both made plenty of money'.

<sup>6</sup>Fortes Papers, Cambridge, 8.51 'Chief Nuama'.

evinced a lifelong need to hear such things for himself and not by report. It seems that Kwasi Apea Nuama took part, but at a distance, in the plotting by Yaw Awua and others to make Yaw Twereboanna Asantehene in 1887. This came to nothing, and it is hard to believe that Kwasi Apea Nuama felt anything other than relief. As far as he was concerned, the British were the future, and he ingratiated himself with them at Accra in the expectation that he would prosper under their patronage when they at last annexed Asante.

The moment finally came in 1900. Kwasi Apea Nuama was one of those exiles who travelled back to Asante in the train of Governor Hodgson. After the outbreak of hostilities, he was confined in the Kumase fort with the besieged British. He and his brother were both in the straggling column that finally broke out and reached safety at the coast. Yaa Mena, the mother of both Kwasi Apea Nuama and Kwame Tua, was brutally done to death with a number of her – and their – kin by Asante insurgents in the war of 1900–01 in revenge for the brothers having supported the British. As noted elsewhere, Kwame Tua was emotionally devastated by this loss and never forgot it. It is recalled that Kwasi Apea Nuama's relationship with his mother was filial and more properly dutiful than personally affectionate. He is said to have resented the fact that she lavished attention on Kwame Tua. In 1912, however, it was Kwasi Apea Nuama who did as custom ordained on behalf of both brothers. He organized and paid for an appropriate funeral observance for Yaa Mena. It must have been a fairly lavish affair, for the crowd of mourners made a lot of noise and caused a disturbance in Kumase (Brown 1972: 180–1).

We have already seen that, in 1901, Kwasi Apea Nuama was offered a Kumase stool by the British and chose to become Domakwaehene and Akyeamehene. In many ways this was an extremely shrewd choice, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that Kwasi Apea Nuama acted with care and foresight. Historically, the post of Domakwaehene carried with it a seat on the precolonial council of Kumase, but it was neither an office of the first rank nor was it very wealthy. Kwame Tua and the other Asante returnees who scrambled after the prestigious and rich stools on offer probably looked askance at Kwasi Apea Nuama's choice. However, Domakwaehene both encompassed and brought with it the post of Akyeamehene. Kwasi Apea Nuama must have seen in his daily interactions with the British that these new masters knew very little about Asante and its people. They would need help and guidance from someone who spoke English as well as Twi, and who knew and understood Asante custom. He must have also seen that his fellow Asante would require aid from someone as well placed as himself in their dealings with the alien British. In the time-honoured tradition of the *ahenkwa* as aspirant 'big man' (*ɔbirempɔn*), Kwasi Apea Nuama also knew that the road to status and riches still lay in the hands of the government in Kumase, whether British or Asante, and that by making himself an indispensable intermediary between colonial officials and their subjects he might reap the rewards of opportunity as well as loyalty.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>There is no direct evidence, but Kwasi Apea Nuama must have been aware of the central role in government played by one of his more recent predecessors. Domakwaehene and Akyeamehene Kwame Poku Agyeman (c.1803–60) was a leading executive agent of the autocratic Asantehene Kwaku Dua (1834–67) (see McCaskie 1974).

## IV

In 1905, CCA Fuller appointed Kwasi Apea Nuama, as Domakwaehene, to be a founding member of the colonial Council of Kumase, and he held this allotted seat without interruption until the council was finally wound up between 1924 and 1926. It is best, perhaps, to investigate Kwasi Apea Nuama's informal influence in tandem with his formal role. The former allowed him over time to enlarge and to exceed his duties in carrying out the latter, but the two interacted reciprocally and in truth there is no way to carve them into separate narratives.

Fuller spent fourteen years in Kumase, but at the outset he was every bit as uninformed as his predecessors. Kwasi Apea Nuama spoke English, was agreeable and never belligerent, and was patently eager to serve and to assist. There can be little doubt that Fuller came to rely on him for all these reasons, and in turn Kwasi Apea Nuama came to enjoy more or less open access to the Chief Commissioner. This allowed him to pursue and to further his own aims.

In 1910, for example, he persuaded Fuller to push through a significant change in the Asante laws of inheritance at a session of the Council of Kumase. With Fuller's prior agreement and then his public support, Kwasi Apea Nuama secured assent to his proposal that henceforth all of the properties amassed by a stool holder should be divided into three equal parts. Two-thirds of this division was to remain with a chief, even if destooled, and at death it was to be inherited by his 'family' as defined by colonial (English common) law. The remaining one-third was to go to the stool, and this residue alone was to be taxable. This was naked self-interest, for Kwasi Apea Nuama and the council office holders who voted for his proposal (with only one abstention) knew that they held their stools only by British fiat, and that they might well be deposed and their kin disbarred from the succession. In sum, this new ruling meant that arriviste office holders such as Kwasi Apea Nuama might retain the bulk of whatever monies they accrued from imposts and fines exacted from their subjects, or as rents from Kumase buildings acquired or built with loans secured against their stool's lands and other resources. The larger aim here was legitimation. Succession by matrilineal descent within a restricted kin group (or 'royal family') was most likely to become established and made normative over time if a usurpatory incumbent's lineage descendants already controlled most of a stool's resources. Fuller approved of the additional security now afforded to key colonial clients, and he saw in this measure an encouraging step by the Asante towards the modernist individualism of *laissez-faire* capitalism.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most subtle, resonant and enduring informal influence that Kwasi Apea Nuama had on Fuller was when the CCA chose to write a book about the Asante past and present that was published in 1921 after his retirement. Fuller specifically singled out and gave thanks to Kwasi Apea Nuama and the British-appointed Kumase Adontenhene Kwame Frimpon 'for the enthusiastic assistance they gave me in my endeavour to compile the national traditions of the country' (Fuller 1921: lviii; 1968; see also Ward 1948; 1958; 1991). The book contains a

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<sup>8</sup>District Commissioner's 'Palaver Book, 1910-13', 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Chiefs', dd. Kumase, 1 September 1910. I thank William Tordoff who alerted me to the existence of this file, and who kindly gave me copies of his notes on it taken in the 1960s; neither he nor I are aware of the present location of the original text.

full-page photograph of Kwasi Apea Nuama, and one of Abena Nipanka Fiwaa, the sister of Yaa Mena and the mother of James Adu Opoku (Fuller 1921: 80, 120).<sup>9</sup> The influence of Kwasi Apea Nuama can be discerned throughout Fuller's text. He furnished details on oaths, for *akyeame* were responsible for looking into disputes that arose when these were exchanged. He self-interestedly suggested that the judicial and executive power 'were never separated', and that the Akyeamehene was a vital medium between the two. He said that, at the time of the first Asantehene Osei Tutu (d. 1717), one Safie was made the head linguist, and then he claimed a fictitious attachment to this first occupant of his stool: 'The position has remained in Safie's family in unbroken succession until our own day.' He made claims for the political indispensability of his own office: 'He [the Akyeamehene] was considered to be the mouthpiece of the King and Council, but he was also Crown prosecutor, counsel for the defence, and judge, rolled into one.' With an ingratiating nod towards the self-image of the British, he admitted that the historical Asante system was 'expensive, and often capricious and corrupt', but its redeeming feature, to be improved by colonialism, was 'the fair play meted out to the poor man'. He emphasized the Akyeamehene's pivotal role in the installation of an Asantehene, and, just for good measure, he recounted to Fuller the speech made by his predecessors on every such occasion, and so on and so forth (Fuller 1921: especially 5–7, 20–2, 31–2).

Kwasi Apea Nuama may have played a part in discrediting the English-educated Owusu Ansa, a son of Asantehene Osei Bonsu (1804–23), and his sons John and Albert as anti-British intriguers who forged documents in the failed cause of an independent Asante (Fuller 1921: 150, 179, 182). Fuller withdrew these statements and printed an apology for them after Albert Owusu-Ansah drew his attention to the fact that he and his brother had been acquitted of these very charges by a British court in 1896 (Fuller 1921: 'Author's Note', n.p.; for context, see Wilks 1989 [1975]: 657–8). Be that as it may, Kwasi Apea Nuama made other instrumental suggestions that found their way into Fuller's text. In describing the Asante order of battle, he told Fuller that the left wing (*benkum*) of the army was 'more important' than its right wing (*nifa*), ostensibly because that was where an Asantehene took up his position when he went to war in person (Fuller 1921: 12, see also 14). This passing remark was intended to foreground the history and importance of the Kumase Benkum, not simply in military terms but also to suggest that such an entity – construed as an administrative *fekuo*, a group of stools with a designated head – was a vital component of historical political arrangements. In precolonial Asante, the Akyeamehene served as spokesman for this group, but its head was the Tafohene. By the early colonial period, Benkum had fallen into disarray, and Kwasi Apea Nuama worked hard to assert his *de facto* authority over its component stools while scheming to have the British recognize his *de jure* headship of the *fekuo*. For reasons of order and security, the British connived at this arrangement, at least in practical terms. Thus, the Kumase Council of Chiefs had no place for Tafohene, although he had served as *fekuo* head on its precolonial predecessor.

The history of Kwasi Apea Nuama's relations with the Benkum *fekuo* chiefs is recorded in quite overwhelming detail, but its essence in outline is as follows (see

<sup>9</sup>Fuller misidentifies Abena Nipanka Fiwaa as Kwasi Apea Nuama's sister.



Tordoff 1965: 158–9, 206, and especially 234–42). By the 1910s, with Fuller’s tacit approval, Kwasi Apea Nuama represented the Benkum chiefs to the government, but he also interfered in their internal stool affairs. These office holders took no exception to the Akyeamehene functioning as their spokesman, as he had done in the past, but they hugely and sometimes violently resented and opposed his attempts to make himself their overlord. Matters came to a head when Agyeman Prempeh was given the colonial title and office of ‘Kumasihene’ in 1926, two years after his repatriation. The former king was determined to reconstitute the Benkum *fekuo* in formal terms, and to restore the Tafohene to its headship. The British thought – with good reason – that Agyeman Prempeh aspired to be reinstated as Asantehene, and so they refused to countenance any restoration of the precolonial *status quo ante*, in Benkum or otherwise. Then, in 1927, Agyeman Prempeh wrote to the CCA to say that there would be ‘trouble’ if Kwasi Apea Nuama went on acting as if he were head of the Benkum *fekuo*.<sup>10</sup> The CCA called a public meeting at which he told Agyeman Prempeh that, with regard to Benkum, ‘the state of affairs for the past thirty years must continue’. Agyeman Prempeh attempted to put Kwasi Apea Nuama on the spot. He asked him to recite the history of the Benkum *fekuo*, there and then in front of all the assembled Kumase stool holders. The CCA swiftly intervened. He told the Akyeamehene that he need not speak, as he had ‘already informed me all about the Benkum Sub-Division’. The matter dragged on. Up to a point, Kwasi Apea Nuama continued to enjoy the support of the British, but they refused to reassemble Benkum or to appoint him officially as its legally recognized head. Such an arrangement offended Agyeman Prempeh, and for a growing number of office holders Kwasi Apea Nuama – ‘a mere linguist’ – had overreached himself. It was stated bluntly that ‘Nuama is fully aware that in the History of Ashanti no linguist has ever been made a Ruler over Chiefs who occupy our Ancient Stools’.<sup>11</sup>

## V

By the later 1920s, when the foregoing events took place, Kwasi Apea Nuama had spent nearly three decades using – and abusing – the confidence placed in him by the British. He was able to maintain the same conditions of informal access he had to Fuller with his successor, CCA C. H. Harper (1920–23), and for much the same reasons. This is made plain in Harper’s official diary. On 8 April 1921, ‘Chief Nuama as the Paramount [Chief] brought his subordinate Tafohene to the signing of the lease for the building of the new Wesleyan Methodist Mission House and Training College; it was an arrangement involving the leasing of ‘45 acres of valuable land at ground rent (I think) of £50 an acre’. On 24 May, Harper was visited by ‘Chief Nuama’ after his return from leave, and was told

<sup>10</sup>Manhyia Palace, Kumase, correspondence of Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I, Kumasihene to CCA, dd. Kumase, 2 December 1927.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, Secretary of Native Affairs, Case Files, 9, ‘Benkum Wing of Ashanti’, enclosing CCA to Colonial Secretary (Accra), dd. Kumase, 28 December 1927 and 14 January 1929; ‘Minutes of a Meeting at the Kumasi Fort’, dd. 8 December 1927; ‘A Memorandum on the Benkum Chiefs of the Kumasi Division’, by Major Gosling, n.d.; Colonial Secretary (Accra) to CCA, dd. Accra, 1 March 1929; and Tafohene to CCA, dd. Kumase, 11 June 1928.



'everything had gone well since I had been away'. On 16 June, Kwasi Apea Nuama suddenly appeared 'with a large following' at Harper's office to plead for clemency towards five of his associates who had been sentenced to prison for illegal gold trafficking; and then 'Nuama fasted for six days' until the CCA remitted the sentences.<sup>12</sup> This level of access and favour increasingly infuriated stool holders and set them against 'a mere linguist' (as they saw him); they determined to punish him for his presumption, and for his success in enlisting British favour in his manoeuvres to make money and to proclaim status.

Kwasi Apea Nuama had two badges of office in the form of staffs plated with gold. One, *fantamfram mene esono* ('the elephant drowns in mud'), was his staff as Domakawae *akyeame*. The other was the Akyeamehene's staff *asempa atia* ('a good case is simple and short'), which was said to have been made by Komfo Anokye and then handed over by Asantehene Osei Tutu to Safie. This latter was an important item of state regalia due to its reputed antiquity, and because it conferred seniority among the twelve accredited royal *akyeame* who served the Asantehene. In 1921, in a well-known episode, the Golden Stool (*sika dwa*) was dug up and looted of its gold by those who took it from its hiding place (see McCaskie 1986; 2000). It was widely reported that Kwasi Apea Nuama took a large bribe from three of those condemned for this crime in return for asking the British to reduce their sentences. This was too much for the Kumase chiefs, many of whom had wanted the death penalty for the transgressors. They demanded that all existing royal regalia be shown to them, including *asempa atia*. They were convinced that Kwasi Apea Nuama had sold the gold on this staff for cash, and so would be unable to produce it.

The Akyeamehene saw that this request was no more than the opening shot in a campaign to have him destooled, bankrupted, and disgraced. On 9 November 1921, he appealed to Harper by letter. He declared that he had refused to produce *asempa atia*, for the chiefs were not the Asantehene and so had no authority to ask for it. In any case, 'I am the [British] Government's Linguist because the Government is in place of King Prempeh.' Kwasi Apea Nuama went on to say that the Kumase chiefs were his enemies, because they believed that he reported all their 'secret matters' to the British. He acknowledged that this was the case, and mentioned his fealty to Fuller and to his successor Harper. The chiefs responded by declaring Kwasi Apea Nuama destooled, for 'he has no respect for us as his superiors'. The Akyeamehene's riposte was that the chiefs hated him because of his 'close connection' with the British and the fact that he had amassed wealth. Further name-calling exchanges took place, but in the end Harper refused to sanction Kwasi Apea Nuama's destoolment, for 'he has the confidence of the Government he has served so loyally for over twenty years'.<sup>13</sup>

The Adontehene Kwame Frimpon, who cooperated with Kwasi Apea Nuama when both supplied material to Fuller for his book, now emerged as one of his

<sup>12</sup>NAG, Accra, ADM 11/1/1902, 'CCA's Confidential Diary', entries for 8 April, 24 May, 15, 16 and 23 June 1921.

<sup>13</sup>NAG, Kumase, ARG 1/2/1/149, 'Request for the Removal of Chief Akwasi Nuamah from his Position as Head Linguist', n.d. but 1921, enclosing Kwasi Apea Nuama to CCA, dd. Kumase, 9 November and 5 December 1921; Kwasi Apea Nuama to Kwame Kyem, dd. Kumase, 8(?) November 1921; Council of Kumase Chiefs to CCA, dd. Kumase, 26 November 1921; and CCA to Kwabena Kokofu, dd. Kumase, 6 December 1921.

sworn enemies. The two were almost inevitably rivals. Both were arriviste chiefs, clients of the colonial power determined to embed their kin as successors to the stools they had been awarded, and competitively avid for money, status and legitimacy. Kwasi Apea Nuama knew that Kwame Frimpon had inspired and led the attempt to bring about his downfall in 1921, but four years afterwards the Akyeamehene had an opportunity for revenge. Kumase Adonten was a bigger, wealthier and historically more significant *fekuo* than Benkum. Its composition included stools with important pasts and descent lines of haughty aristocratic occupants. Kwame Frimpon aspired to lead and rule over it in the same way that Kwasi Apea Nuama wished to be the overlord of Benkum. So fractious were Adonten affairs, however, that in 1925 the British launched a major inquiry into its history and organization. This was led by Crown Counsel, and it was empowered to subpoena such witnesses as it wanted. One of these was Kwasi Apea Nuama, called as ‘chief historical witness’ because of his supposed expertise on the subject of the Asante past.

The hearings developed into a duel between Kwame Frimpon and Kwasi Apea Nuama amidst sprawling testimonies from the senior Adonten *fekuo* stools of Antoa, Kwamo, Otikrom and Amakom. Kwame Frimpon’s case was simple. He said that his own stool of Adonten had always been head of the *fekuo* named for it. Kwasi Apea Nuama said that Amakom had been the head before Adonten. The constituent stools all said that their occupants were titled *abirempon* (‘big men’), and as such they were directly answerable to the Asantehene alone, and ‘cannot be commanded by Kwame Frimpon’. Counsel noted that in Fuller’s book it was asserted that Amakomhene had been killed by Asantehene Osei Tutu and replaced by Kwame Frimpon’s alleged (but falsely so) ancestor Adu Panin of Adonten, who had gone on to marry into the royal family of Kumase and, it was said, to lead the Adonten *fekuo*. Kwasi Apea Nuama and Kwame Frimpon were asked who had supplied this information to Fuller. The former said that he had recounted the history as printed in Fuller’s book, but Kwasi Apea Nuama said first that ‘it was not I who gave him [Fuller] that information’ and then added, in his capacity as an expert witness, that he had never heard of the tradition recounted by Kwame Frimpon. He continued, now with deadly purpose, that neither Amakomhene nor any of the stools represented at the hearing had ever been in any way subordinate to Adontehene. He then declared with all the authority of an expert witness that ‘I was Head Linguist to the King of Ashanti’ – a fabrication, of course – and provided a very long and circumstantially detailed account of the history of all the stools involved in the hearing. He concluded by attesting that the *abirempon* of the Adonten *fekuo* occupied stools that served the Asantehene independently and directly, and ‘owe no service of any sort’ to Kwame Frimpon. Kwasi Apea Nuama’s evidence decisively shaped the judgment. The hearing found that Kwame Frimpon had no ‘jurisdiction’ or ‘power’ over any of the Adonten *fekuo* stools represented in court. No one mentioned the anomaly that Kwasi Apea Nuama had denied to Kwame Frimpon the very same authority that he himself was then seeking to impose on the Benkum.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>NAG, Accra, ADM 11/1/1338, ‘Case No. EP 200/1924: Report on the Tribal Organisation of the Adonten Abrempon of Kumasi: Evidence and Testimony’, dd. Kumase, 24 March 1925.

## VI

It would be otiose to rehearse all of the interventions that Kwasi Apea Nuama made in the affairs of Asante stools and their subjects, sometimes on the order of the British, but just as often on his own initiative with people who understood no more than that he was in favour with the colonial power and under its protection. From these affairs, as his successor in office Nsuase Poku II plainly told me, 'he made a lot of money', for 'he told everyone he was in a good standing with the British and able to influence them in all things'. There can be no doubt that a confident – even brazen – intelligence supported, framed and gave voice to his aims. As early as 1908, he had persuaded the British authorities always to refer to him during court proceedings as 'the King's Linguist' or 'King Prempeh's Linguist'.<sup>15</sup> There is a suggestion in his speech and behaviour that at some level he came truly to believe that he was an authority without peer on the history of Asante. He also knew when to keep silent. Thus, in 1921, angry Asante chiefs led by Nkawiehene Kwabena Kufuor wrote to Accra demanding that Fuller's book be banned, for it declared that the Asante originated in Bono, and this was outrageous for 'Bona people are all slaves'. Invited to respond, Kwasi Apea Nuama declined to do so. He dismissed the complaint with brusque authority, asking 'what do these Chiefs know of history?' compared, by clear implication, with himself.<sup>16</sup>

From the mid-1920s onwards, Kwasi Apea Nuama's unceasing battle to gain public acknowledgement of his status and importance began to go decisively against him. He had risen and been buoyed along by British policy, but that policy was now in the process of reformulation. In 1924, Agyeman Prempeh was repatriated as the private citizen Mr Edward Prempeh after twenty-eight years in exile. Two years afterwards the colonial authorities gave him the invented title of 'Kumasihene' as titular head of Kumase but not Asante. At the close of Agyeman Prempeh's installation ceremony, Kwasi Apea Nuama delivered the vote of thanks to Governor Guggisberg on behalf of the assembled Asante. He praised the ex-Asantehene and the British for bringing him home to his people, and concluded by saying: 'I have served the Government and during the years before me I will ever continue to serve the Government so that when my own time is up and I leave this world I will die in peace and for the Government and Prempeh to see about my burial.'<sup>17</sup> This was calculated hypocrisy, for Kwasi Apea Nuama was opposed to the return and reinstatement of Agyeman Prempeh, but he publicly supported these measures because he understood that they were inevitable and he thought that he might still be able to turn them to his advantage.

In this he was in error. Like others, Agyeman Prempeh regarded Kwasi Apea Nuama as 'a mere linguist' and he sought opportunities to ensnare him, and hence to neutralize his influence. In 1928, just such a chance was furnished by Kwasi Apea Nuama's labyrinthine business dealings. He entered into partnership

<sup>15</sup>Consult the cases recorded in Manhyia Record Office, Kumase, 'Palaver Book 1907–10'.

<sup>16</sup>NAG, Accra, ADM 11/1/1902, 'CCA's Confidential Diary', entry for 8 December 1921, and minuted enclosure entitled 'Chief Kwabena Kufuor', n.d. but 1921–22.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, ADM 11/1/1906, 'Ex-King Prempeh 1926–1927', enclosing 'Minutes of a Meeting held at the Fort, Kumasi, at 10 a.m. on Thursday 14th October 1926'.

with one Kwaku Gyambrah to buy up substantial amounts of cocoa from the area of Mponoa between Kumase and Lake Bosomtwe. The price was agreed, but Kwaku Gyambrah proved to have insufficient funds to pay for his half of the deal. Confident of the profits to be gained, Kwasi Apea Nuama stood surety for his partner. For unknown reasons, the deal then fell through. The upshot was that, with the money he had already laid out on the transaction and on surety for Kwaku Gyambrah, Kwasi Apea Nuama found himself with a debt of £600. Even worse, his confidence in a quick and profitable sale had led him to borrow the sum involved from moneylenders. These now demanded their loan back with substantial interest, and Kwasi Apea Nuama was 'being dunned hard'. He made a predictable but fatal move. Afraid that he might be exposed to ignominy and shameful mockery for his debts if these ever became public knowledge, and that this eventuality would tarnish and damage his status, reputation and self-image, he turned to Agyeman Prempeh for assistance. The 'Kumasihene' courteously arranged for Barclay's Bank to loan Kwasi Apea Nuama the money he required, but savoured the moment. He knew that he now held a weapon over the Akyeamehene, for if his own generosity and Kwasi Apea Nuama's supplication were made public, 'the linguist will be unable to bear all the disgrace to his prideful reputation'.<sup>18</sup>

Worse followed. Agyeman Prempeh died in 1931 and was succeeded by Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, who was restored to the office of Asantehene in 1935. Among other things, these events signalled a generational shift. Osei Agyeman Prempeh II was only four when his predecessor was exiled in 1896, and nine when the British formally annexed Asante in 1901. He grew up in a colonial world and embraced its educational and business opportunities. In his outlook, however, he combined this with an acute sense of his own historical prerogatives as a royal lineage descendant of the first Asantehene Osei Tutu.<sup>19</sup> He had the comportment and attitudes of a highly self-conscious aristocrat (*mmarimase*), and brooked no argument or opposition. He was (in)famously *de haut en bas* with commoners, and a conspiracy of 'young men' (*nkwankwaa*) against him shortly after his election as Asantehene served to harden his opinions. Many Asante recall him as being haughty (*yɛ ahatan*), and he expected *nhenkwaa* such as Kwasi Apea Nuama to behave in an appropriately deferential manner. In particular, he had no time for ageing arriviste chiefs who had risen from nothing because of the British, and he wanted them returned to their proper station in life (see McCaskie 1999a).

Battle between the two men was joined during the election of 1931. At some point immediately prior to this event, Kwame Kyeretwie (Osei Agyeman Prempeh II) seduced one of Kwasi Apea Nuama's young wives. According to the oral record, the offender came to the aggrieved husband with customary compensatory damages for adultery (*ayɛfɛrɛ sika*), to make amends and to resolve the matter (see McCaskie 1981; Allman 1996). There are two contradictory accounts of what happened. One says that Kwame Kyeretwie offered a risibly small amount

<sup>18</sup>Manhyia Palace, Kumase, correspondence of Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh I, Kumasihene to DC (Kumase), dd. Kumase, 7, 13, 16 and 22 April, and 11 and 17 May 1928.

<sup>19</sup>Indeed, he chose the stool name Osei Tutu II, but the British overruled him because they thought it a provocative and potentially inflammatory reminder to the Asante of their past independence.

of money, because, after all, Kwasi Apea Nuama was only his servant. The other claims that a large sum of cash was offered, for Kwame Kyeretwie wanted to secure the Akyeamehene's support in the upcoming electoral contest. Whichever is correct, Kwasi Apea Nuama accepted the money that was offered, but went on to tell Kwame Kyeretwie plainly that: 'I take your money but I still will not support you for the stool [and] I shall speak the truth about you.'<sup>20</sup> This combined insult with threat, and it cannot have been prompted solely by a case of adultery, a phenomenon that all too often affected chiefs and their wives. Instead, family history suggests that this case and the likelihood of Kwame Kyeretwie becoming Asantehene combined to raise Kwasi Apea Nuama's 'enmity' (and that was the word used) to fever pitch. The self-made 'big man' could tolerate no more condescension, and it was his *amour propre* that responded. Whatever the case, it was the close of Kwasi Apea Nuama's public and political career. Kwame Kyeretwie never forgave him, and the mutual personal dislike ended only with Kwasi Apea Nuama's death from heart failure on 22 October 1936.

## VII

As noted, Kwasi Apea Nuama left a notarized will. I have never found a copy of this, but other evidence allows some inferences to be drawn about its contents. It is clear that, like many other colonial stool holders, the Akyeamehene's dealings were complicated and secretive, and that he suffered periodic difficulties with liquidity and cash flow (see Arhin 1976). In part, this was because much of his capital was tied up in buildings in Kumase. He owned at least four Kumase houses, two in Adum, one in Bantama, and a fourth in Amakom. He appears to have conformed to the early colonial norm and borrowed against these assets when he needed cash. Thus, he built one of the Adum houses in 1907, but in the 1920s he mortgaged it in return for £700 in cash. Again, he followed the normative practice of registering his buildings in the names of his close female kin, so that these might not be considered assets to set against his personal debts. In oral recollection, Kwasi Apea Nuama is often characterized as 'an Asante of the Asante' or as 'a real Asante man' in terms of his attitude to wealth. That is to say, he regarded paper currency as money, but, as was the case historically, gold (*sika*) in all of its forms was wealth. It is recalled that Kwasi Apea Nuama always had on his person two padlock keys that opened the big boxes (*adaka kɛsɛɛ*) that contained his gold in both its raw and worked forms. I have been told by his lineage descendants that Kwasi Apea Nuama left behind at his death gold in various forms estimated to be anywhere between £7,000 and £40,000 in value. These figures, subject as they are to the historical Asante tendencies towards both reticence and boasting, cannot be taken at face value. All that can be said here is that their scale and range converge on the basic understanding that the Akyeamehene achieved the status of a 'man of wealth' (*sikani*) and was acknowledged as such in his life and after his death. In sum, he was publicly known to have been a success by the standards of his own time – and, more importantly, by the norms of accumulation inherited from the Asante past.

<sup>20</sup>Fortes Papers, Cambridge, 8.51, 'Chief Nuama'.

It is known that Kwasi Apea Nuama left nothing to his brother Kwame Tua. He sheltered Kwame Tua in the Domakwae stool house in Kumase Nsuase when the Gyaasewa stool *mmamma* swore to kill him in 1905, but thereafter he seems to have washed his hands of his brother. I have been told, without much elaboration, that Kwasi Apea Nuama ‘disapproved’ of his brother’s way of life. It is not difficult to see that this may well have been the case, but there was another factor in play. Kwasi Apea Nuama was an ambitiously clever opportunist, like so many other *nhenkwaa* in the history of Asante, and at some point he began to think hard about the legacy that might crown and perpetuate his achievement. In this matter, he embraced the norms and values of the Asante past that he was born into and grew up in. He had risen up with British support to occupy the Kumase council stool of Domakwae, together with the influential post of head of the royal *akyeame*. Like countless others before him, he set about trying to insert his matrilineage (*abusua*) into the stool succession, if not as a *de jure* royal line then as a *de facto* kin group with established rights of preferential access to occupancy. To do this he needed matrilineal descendants with the resources to support their claims. The key women involved were his full sister Abena Kwabena and his matrilineal niece (his mother’s sister’s daughter) Abena Nipanka Fiwaa. The former died without issue, but the second had a son, James Adu Opoku, and a daughter called Ama Ntusuo, who was in her turn the mother of an adult son when Kwasi Apea Nuama died in 1936. Kwasi Apea Nuama wanted James Adu Opoku to succeed him, as he had been brought into and trained in his great-uncle’s business dealings. Unfortunately, one of James Adu Opoku’s matrilineal cousins was married to Kwasi Bonsu, who had unsuccessfully contested the 1931 royal election with Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, while another one was a wife of Owusu Sekyere Agyeman, leader of the failed attempt to destool Osei Agyeman Prempeh II in 1936. While this conspiracy was afoot, said James Adu Opoku (to Fortes), ‘I was in Cape Coast at the time so they could not implicate me. If I had been here [in Kumase] they would have accused me of complicity or perhaps taken action against me.’ He added that he was afraid to associate with Kwasi Bonsu any more in case he invoked the Asantehene’s ‘wrath’.

The upshot was that Osei Agyeman Prempeh II would not countenance James Adu Opoku as Kwasi Apea Nuama’s nominated successor. The family pleaded with the king, making the powerful case that Kwasi Apea Nuama’s kin had inherited the resources necessary for ‘keeping up the dignity and name’ of the Safie and Amoanim stool. The Asantehene was much concerned with the indebtedness of many stools, and so he conceded the point. A compromise was then reached between Kwasi Apea Nuama’s ambitions and Osei Agyeman Prempeh II’s thirst for punishment. The new Domakawhene and Akyeamehene was Ama Ntusuo’s son, who adopted the stool name of Kofi Amankwa. It is no part of the present article, but it might be noted here that Kwasi Apea Nuama’s matrilineal descendants have occupied his stool up to the present day.

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### **Abstract**

This article, a companion piece to that on Kwame Tua, traces the life history of his elder full brother Kwasi Apea Nuama (c.1862–1936) as he too sought purchase and place in the new colonial order in Asante. Temperamentally a very different man from his brother, Kwasi Apea Nuama set out to make himself indispensable as the interpreter of Asante history and custom to the uncomprehending British. Both brothers, then, were mediators or translators between the old and new worlds in which they found themselves. Their heyday was the often anarchic early colonial period. Thereafter, and most especially after the British restored the office and some of the prerogatives of Asante kingship, their influence fell away. They found themselves caught between a colonial order that had little further need of their services, and a restored Asante polity that demonized them as collaborators.

### **Résumé**

Cet article, qui accompagne celui consacré à Kwame Tua, retrace le récit de vie de son frère aîné Kwasi Apea Nuama (c.1862–1936) qui lui aussi a cherché à asseoir sa place dans le nouvel ordre colonial en région Ashanti. D'un tempérament très différent de celui de son frère, Kwasi Apea Nuama a cherché à se rendre indispensable en tant qu'interprète de l'histoire et des coutumes ashanti auprès des Britanniques qui ne les comprenaient pas. L'un et l'autre étaient donc des médiateurs ou traducteurs entre l'ancien monde et le nouveau dans lesquels ils se sont retrouvés. Leur apogée fut le début de la période coloniale, souvent anarchique. Par la suite, et plus particulièrement après que les Britanniques ont restauré la fonction de la royauté ashanti et certaines de ses prérogatives, leur influence a décliné. Ils se sont retrouvés pris entre un ordre colonial qui n'avait plus guère besoin de leurs services et un régime politique ashanti qui les diabolisait comme collaborateurs.