

"A STUDY IN URBANIZATION"
PROGRESS REPORT ON OBUASI PROJECT

For about a year now I have been engaged in sociological survey of Obuasi, a mining town in Ashanti.

My aim in this survey has been to find out the extent to which traditional social structure in this Akan town has changed throughout the 64 years of mining in Obuasi by the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation.

Obuasi can be considered as one of the first places to be urbanized in Ashanti. The discovery of gold in Obuasi at first attracted Fante miners who in turn attracted European speculators from Cape Coast. Ever since the first agreement was signed between the first European Company (Cote d'Or Company) and the Chief of Bekwai, on behalf of the Adansis, workers from all parts of Ghana and indeed from many parts of West Africa have come to Obuasi to make a living.

The coming together of so many people with different cultural experiences is fascinating sociologically, and my aim has been to find out the new social links that have been established and the changes, if any, or adjustments that are noticeable in the social structure of the Adansis who are the indigenous people at Obuasi.

So far I have conducted the investigation along the following lines:

Historical Background:

I have collected information from living persons, records of Adansiman Council, the Akrokerry State Council, the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation records and publications, the minutes and records of Obuasi Health Board (the predecessor to the Urban Council, with the aim of understanding the political and sociological conditions in Adansi and Asante on the whole during and around the year 1897 when the first agreement was signed between Edwin Arthur Cade on behalf of the first European Company (Cote d'Or Company) and the Chief of Bekwai.

In this exercise I have collected material, clarifying the position of the Adansis vis-a-vis the Denkyiras and later the Ashantis. For instance, I have gathered material explaining

- (a) why the first treaty of the Concession was signed by Bekwaihene and not by any Adansi chief.
- (b) why the Fomenahene got the title Adansihene and later on lost it, thus making it possible for every Adansi chief to be autonomous. ('Adansi koto butu ne bon ano')
- (c) why Akrokerri lost the eminent position it used to occupy among the Adansis.
- (d) why Asantehene did not feature prominently in negotiations leading to the signing of the agreement.

The autonomous status of each Adansi chief was reflected in the arrangements made for the traditional administration of Obuasi which required that each town send one person to the panel of administrators who traditionally ruled Obuasi until a chief was appointed by Akrokerri State Council for Obuasi in 1960.

The Role of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation in the development of Obuasi

Although the original agreement signed between the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation just allowed £66 a year in royalties to the Adansiman Council, the Corporation is always ready to show what it had done for Adansiman and the people of Obuasi. From the minutes of the Obuasi Sanitary Board established in 1901 by the Colonial Government (except for its chairman who was the District Commissioner for Obuasi, all its members were officials of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation), I have gathered the official information concerning the role of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation in the development of Obuasi. The people of Obuasi, especially Chiefs of Adansi and elderly people who have seen the development of Obuasi, of course, see things from a different angle and their views, in my opinion, rather supplement the official view. For

Instance, while Obuasi is perhaps the richest spot in Ghana, one sees practically no storey buildings, and when I asked the Chief Personnel Officer of the A.G.C. for an explanation he said that since the whole area of Obuasi is part of the concession of the A.G.C., the authorities of A.G.C. have had to control the development of Obuasi carefully so as not to let the growth of the town interfere with future mining developments. The A.G.C. authorities have not therefore encouraged very expensive buildings for which compensation would have to be paid if the area was required for future mining development. The unofficial view is that the mining authorities suspect that any of their employees who builds a good house might have stolen gold from the mines, and there were instances where employees of A.G.C. who had built good houses at Obuasi had been fired by A.G.C. Consequently employees of A.G.C. who had made fortunes honestly or otherwise have built good houses outside Obuasi.

I have also collected material on the recruiting and employment policies, terms of service, welfare services for the employees of A.G.C. from the Personnel Department.

Since 1947, the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation has had the "Ashanti Times" as its official mouthpiece, and the back copies of this paper have also furnished me with the history of industrial disputes, their causes and settlements. The social atmosphere at Obuasi has also been portrayed in the pages of "Ashanti Times".

The Political Administration of Obuasi

- (a) Traditional: Until 1960 when the Akrokerri State Council appointed a chief and a queenmother for Obuasi, the role of a chief was played by a panel consisting of elders each one of whom had been appointed by the seven traditional towns of Adansi. This panel administration partly reflected the autonomous status of each of the seven traditional towns in Adansi and also the fact that the concession area of A.G.C. included little portions of land belonging to some of the seven towns.

The Akrokerri Traditional Council has been able to establish a case that the actual area covered by Obuasi township forms part of the stool lands of Akrokerri Traditional area, and therefore accordingly enstooled a chief and a queenmother. The case put up by the Akrokerri State Council in support of this claim is fully supported by the historical material which I collected from a Kumasi elder who is not involved in Adansi affairs.

An interesting departure from the established Akan procedure of having a queenmother and a chief belonging to the same lineage or related lineages has been adopted by the Akrokerri Traditional Council in the appointment of a chief and a queenmother. The chief belongs to the Asona Clan from which chiefs are elected to the Akrokerri Stool. The queenmother on the other hand belongs to the Asakyiri Clan from which a chief or queenmother to the Akrokerri Stool has never been chosen. I have inquired into the implications of this procedure from the Akrokerri Traditional Council.

The Chief of Obuasi who is also a member of the Akrokerri Traditional Area is asserting his authority through unofficial courts of arbitration. The heads of the tribal groups whom I met complained that while formerly they were able to settle disputes amicably between members of the same tribe, now the tendency is for aggrieved persons who are convinced that they have a good case to go to the unofficial arbitration courts of the chief of Obuasi where if they are victorious over their adversaries they can get good compensations. This is naturally worrying to the tribal heads who see in this a threat to tribal solidarity.

- (b) Colonial Administration: From the records available, Obuasi was the seat of the Chief Commissioner for Ashanti (Southern Sector) in the 1920s till 1935 when the Ashanti Confederacy was restored and consequently the post of Chief Commissioner for Ashanti (Southern Sector) was abolished. Obuasi then became the seat of Senior District Commissioner in the Colonial Administration.

- (c) Independent Ghana: Obuasi with its large non-Adansi and proletariat population has always supported the Convention People's Party.

A District Commissioner was appointed in 1959 to Obuasi and as the result of various interviews with the first person to be appointed to this office and also observing the District Commissioner at work, I have material on the role of the D.C. in contemporary Obuasi.

- (d) Obuasi Urban Council: I have also collected information on the work of the Urban Council and its predecessor the Obuasi Health Board. The sources of information have been the minutes of the former Health Board and the Urban Council. I have also interviewed the Chairman of the Urban Council, the Clerk of Council and senior officials of the Council about the work of the Council and the problems facing it.

In discussing the resources of the Urban Council, I learned about a major source of revenue which is part of the taxes paid by the A.G.C. to the government, which the government has turned over to Adansiman for the improvement of the Adansi state. This fund called "The Adansi Betterment Fund" has interesting history of its own, and there had not been infrequent petitions by the various chiefs at one time or the other about how the fund should be shared among the seven "independent" Adansi towns. The latest of these petitions (October 1964) came from the Akrokerri Traditional Council which argued that if its right to appoint a chief and a queenmother to Obuasi had been conceded then the "Betterment Fund" quite naturally engendered considerable uneasiness and I visited Fomena, Edubiase and Akrokerri to collect views. The Akrokerri Traditional Council lost the case which was settled by the Ashanti Regional Commissioner. I have collected copies of the various petitions which had been made by various persons and traditional councils concerning the shareout of the "Betterment Fund".

Sociological Survey:

I am at the moment engaged in collecting data on social relationships in Obuasi through the enclosed questionnaire. I have taken a sample of every tenth house in Obuasi and I hope that in all I may be able to collect data from about 600 heads of households which will represent 5% of the total number of heads of households in Obuasi. I have engaged the services of 15 research assistants. I have also organized another group of four assistants who are checking up on the accuracy of the information that I have been receiving. I shall start analysing the material collected very soon.

I am also collecting information personally on the role of such institutions as ethnic associations, churches, and other voluntary organizations.

I hoped that by March 1965 I should have collected most of the data that I required on Obuasi and had the plan to look at Odumasi-Konongo another mining town near Kumasi.

Ampene, E.

Editor's Note: This article was written in January, 1965.