

Basel Mission Archives

"Ramseyer to Basel"

Title: "Ramseyer to Basel"

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Description: His report of the expedition to Basel. This appears not to have been printed in more than a summary form. The expedition consisted of Ramseyer, Asante, Ofori, and Samuel Gyebi, church elder from Larteh, who made the journey at his own expense because he wanted to see Kumasi. There was a supporting train of 25. They had to ask twice that number to come with them, however, before they had 25 carriers, but great was the fear of Kumasi although some Akem people were keen to say that they had been to Kumasi. 4th Aug - they were entertained en route in Obo by 'Friend Sasu, a Kwahu merchant who sadly always dithers between the two sides'. 1 ½ hours after Obo they passed through the hamlet of Kwasihu, and slept at Akwaboa which they reached just before nightfall. 5th August - past Praso, where unfortunately they had no time to catch the fetish fish (Ramseyer says a sort of catfish or Silurus). They went on through little trodden paths, and reached the little village of Asankare at 4p.m., having started out at dawn. (In an aside, Ramseyer remarks that he usually catches the fetish fish and the local people explain this by saying that the Christians are baptised, and so the fetish has no more power over them.) 6th Aug - they spent least of the day in Bompata. Ramseyer says here that Akim became independent in 1874. As he writes in the annual report, Ramseyer thinks that having found they have little to fear from Asante the people are less interested in having a teacher. Ramseyer said to the chief in the words of a twi proverb 'A bird in a trap sings a different song from when it is free'. The chief understood what he meant, but said that the young people no longer listen to him, nowadays they are enthusiastic about the king of western Akim, although he cannot provide them with any protection. Asante and Ofori preached on the Fall and Redemption. 7th August - two ways go from Bompata to Konongo, one via Dwaso, the other via Nyabo. The latter is about an hour longer, but it leads through several villages, so they chose that one. 2 hours out they came to Moose. Ramseyer was already known there and was greeted with cries of 'Sisi'. One hour further on they came to Nyabo, newly built. Part of the population has fled to the Protectorate, and the new village is only half the size of the old one destroyed in the (Juaben?) War. From here the way was made dangerous by gold-pits (the Nyabo people were digging for gold), and when they came to Konomsgo the chief was out gold-digging too. 8th August. Konongo is a town with ruins, too, and it seems the whole population was not agreed over staying in Asante. They stayed the night in one of the Odumase villages - the population of that town are temporarily living in farming villages following the destruction of their town. Juabens in Asante are very unfriendly - possibly in this case because their town was destroyed by Europeans in 1874. 9th August - a tough 7 hour march to Boangkra. (This is the same town as Oboankra of the previous years' reports). This is a Kumasi village, at this town their messenger, sent

Basel Mission Archives

on from Odumase, returned with a sword-bearer and the news that on Saturday (12th Aug) they would be received in Kumasi. They were gratified at this, since they calculated that the following Wednesday the Asantehene would begin his 8 day period of confinement in the palace before the Adei. 10th August - apparently a rest day. 11th August - From Boangkra they were accompanied by their 'court servant' who scarcely left them for a moment thereafter. Whereas on the previous journey, however, they had had an unsufferably haughty escort, this time the young man, Bosomuru, was a very pleasant companion, who explained many things to them. About midday they reached the largish place Aweso or Aguiso, a sort of administrative centre, where they intended to stay the night. Here, and in the other villages through which they passed that day (Dadentem, Dotebi, Beseaso inter al), Ramseyer was very impressed by the small numbers of people, especially men, to be seen - he reckoned 4/5 of the latter must have been away. In reply to their indirect questions they were told that they wore at Kintampo, a market place 8 days away. They were given generous quantities of foodstuffs, in spite of a general shortage of food following a water shortage, and the same day an ox was killed, which provided a welcome change to the dried fish which was usually offered to them. When Asante preached, the chief declined to attend, and they understood by this that he was afraid of what would happen to him if he did. Asante's rousing and humorous preaching is well calculated to hold the people. 12th August - By 11 a.m. they had passed through the villages of Krapa, Kwaman, Fomasua, Ayigya, and reached Nsupow. There were hardly any men in these villages too, but the people said they were at the farms. Here they were met by a messenger who - like the others they met - did not treat them as formally as they had been treated on the former journey - they were very friendly and forthcoming. Ramseyer feared that this one was going to announce a delay in their meeting the king, but this was not to be, and they were soon walking along a broad way, rather as if they were going through a park, beside the cemetery. Ramseyer remarks that last time they had to go on a narrow path in the wood which had been specially cut for them, and now you could see why - there had been human sacrifices at the cemetery and they had had to be taken on a detour to avoid these, In the suburb of Dade-so-aba they were met by Nkwanta-Bisa and taken to their lodgings. This less formal welcome could be explained by the fact that this was Ramseyer's second visit. At about 5pm they were taken by a large escort of sword-bearers through a maze of little alleys, until they found themselves at the street-opening called Bang-kese-ho (by the King's childrens' cemetery fence). This led them onto the place called Mogyawae, where the king - when he does not want to make a full scale ceremony - often receives foreigners. Ramseyer recalls having been present there 40 years before when Prince Ansah was received, and it was in the same place where they had to appear every 6 weeks during their captivity to wait on the king during the Adaye. He recalls it as having on one side a row of ornamented rooms standing outside the wall around the palace, and on the other side beautiful 'dampon' (halls with one side open to the street). Now there was on the one side there was only a palmleaf fence erected on the ruins of the rooms, and on the other side only one hallway to be seen, half collapsed - the others were rubble. Only one thing was there as

Basel Mission Archives

before, the small quadrangel marked by Brechnuss trees (*nux vomica*) called nkra-wom (i.e. drowned in blood) where so many people had died by the executioner's sword, and others had lost their noses or ears. Ramseyer was not particularly happy to be back - his interpretation of Mogyawae is that it means 'the blood has dried' - implying that more is needed. 300 paces away there was a gathering of about 3000 to welcome them. Most of the chiefs greeted them in a friendly way; this was especially the case with Boakye Tengteng and Bosomuru Dwira. On the returning of the greeting however, the king did not dance before them, and although he greeted them in a friendly way, made an anxious face and quickly disappeared. The whole thing made a deep impression on Ramseyer's companions, and Asante especially was busy asking for details of each man's position, and working out the interrelations with his own family. Among the princes was the 16 year old king of Juaben, with a tiny following, but with the insignia of an umbrella and gold-decorated sandals. 13th August. They were called to take their gifts to the Asantehene - they were received in the 'Cannon-yard' (so called because there are two rusty cannons on the ground there) the Asantehene and his attendants were sitting on a broad peristyle where Ramseyer had so often seen an Asantehene sitting. The presents were well received in Asante-style, Asante took the king an easy chair, Ramseyer a musical box with a ship which rocked on the waves when the music played. Catechist Esau the Larteh elder brought the king 3 sheep. Asante also gave the queen mother an embroidered pillow made by the girls at Abokobi as an instance of what African girls could do. They were thanked in another room (there were also presents taken from the Committee) It was Saturday 19th before they gained admission to the Asantehene to make their request to be allowed to set up a mission station. Meantime they preached, usually in the late afternoon, in a street leading to the market, to a great number of listeners. They spent time looking around the town and talking to the people. Ramseyer says that the town was more fallen down than it was the previous year. He speaks of 'half quarters' having collapsed. Whereas last year there were some houses being built, this year no houses were being built, and there was a great absence of men. They came to understand that an army had gone to Koranza to fight the Gyamans - but that it had suffered heavy losses. 1000 men taken prisoner. This news helped to explain the anxious faces in the court. Ramseyer remarks that he was most sad to see how the town had gone down even since the end of his captivity - in those days every chief had his 'dampon' with moulded swish decorations, now they can be seen only in a few places. Another thing they learned was that the Bantamahene Awua had been deposed sometime in June - the Asantehene had had a spy among his followers, and thus had learned of his treachery, David Asante learned from his conversations that the central problem was lack of money - only a few chiefs possessed real means - and this situation is not surprising when one considers how much the Asantes have lost in tribute by losing control of their northern provinces. They also spent time visiting, calling on Bosomuru Dwira and Nensah Kukua, and having conversations with Owusu Koko frequently. Dwira had a big room furnished in the European style, with coloured wallpaper, glasses, a jug, and a lamp on the table, a sofa, albeit hard and rather dirty, and on the wall a photograph of himself.

Basel Mission Archives

Owusu Koko is no longer so close to the Asantehene as he was 10 years before, but still in circles close to the King, They also called on Boakye Tengteng, who has grown greatly in importance since his mission to the coast, Bosomuru Dwira and Boakye Tengteng both gave non-committal answers to his questions about the likelihood of their getting a favourable reaction to their request: Owusu Koko was more optimistic, but said that it was a pity that Prince Ansah had not come with them. They also kept their ears and eyes open for hints as the situation with regard to human sacrifice. The Asantes were constantly saying that they were having no more human sacrifices, and there were no more corpses to be seen in apete sene. But Anante heard two women in conversation on the market place. One said 'Akosua asked me to say to you that she has been handed over to the executioner - she thanks you for everything'. At which the other said in a whisper 'Ao, ao, due, due'. On the other hand when strangers talk about human sacrifice there is enormous exaggeration - it is not at 1/20th the level it used to be. 'This is out of fear of the English, and partly because the king sees that he must go slowly with his people'. They heard very little of the visit of the Wesleyan missionary Hayford from Elmina, and got no clear impression as to the relations between the Catholic mission and the Asantehene. On Saturday 19th August they were called before the Asantehene, having expected to be called on the Thursday. They had to wait 3/4 hours in the dilapidated courtyard asikasu, then they were called into the courtyard called Mpremaso (this is the same as the cannon-yard of Aug 13th, and he remarks here that it was in better condition than it had been the year before). The king was sitting on the broad peristyle, fanned by an almost white albino woman. At the other end of the yard where the two Kumasi chiefs usually sat there was only Asafo Boakye, which Ramseyer took to be conclusive evidence that Awua had been deposed. The Asantehene was not dressed with his usual richness - he was wearing an adinkra cloth, and dola nuts. Ofori introduced the embassy, and Asante presented the question, stressing that they had no connection with any political regime, asking for a certain answer, and stating that if permission was granted for a settlement then it would be started immediately. After this they were taken from the room to allow what Ramseyer feels was surely a pretence at discussion. On their recall, the head linguist (this may have been Boakye Tengteng who acted as linguist when they first entered the yard) started to answer them, saying 'The Asantehene understand your embassy, but as Sisi well sees, the town is not what it was before, many houses are in ruins. The people who make the town great are scattered in all directions, some are led off to war. At this the Asantehene made a quick gesture with his hand, and many voices cried out 'gyae, gyaе'. The Asantehene himself then said: 'Say to your Coemitee who sent you here that now my town (Ramseyer adds in parenthesis that he meant by this his whole state) is bababasa (and Boakye Tengteng struck himself on the thigh several times as a sign of unhappiness) and the people who ought to be rebuilding it are now some of them at Kuntampo, some on the coast. When they return they will rebuild their houses. When the town is rebuilt as it was before, and if someone then visits me again, then I will grant it and then send him away'. The missionaries replied that they would return this answer and Ramseyer's last word was

Basel Mission Archives

'Nevertheless, I will never forget Kumasi.' In a subscript to the report Inspector Praetorius writes (a) that he has seen a report of his visit to Kumasi by the Wesleyan Hayford in the quarterly Africa. (b) that Fr. Morean has told the English officials in Cape Coast and Axim that he has received permission to open a school in Kumasi, the Asantehehe himself having promised to send children

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