

Basel Mission Archives

"Zimmermann to Basel"

Title: "Zimmermann to Basel"

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Date: Proper date: 30.06.1869

Description: Since his thoughts are dominated by the thought of the uncertain fate of Ho and Anum mission stations and their personnel, he is writing about the background to the catastrophe. After Simpson's visit for some time there was no news of the Asantes, the Akwamus, movements on the part of Protectorate tribes, or the of the Government. Governor Kennedy appears to have left Sierra Leone in this period, leaving Governor Glover of Lagos, an energetic military men, in his place. Governor Glover came as far as Battor in his little steamer last year, with Governor Kennedy: as well. The Cape Coast Governor was not with them, which apparently annoyed Kennedy, and would help to explain the lack of Government action since. Then two months ago news came from Krobo's northern frontier (which lies towards the Afram) and from the middle Volta (i.e. the Akwamu section). It appeared that the 5000 Asantes who seem to have been in Akwamu for a long time had been joined by 5000 more. Previously they had been in Kwahu - one days' march North West of Gyadam — under the command of the General of the whole Asante army. This group sent to tell the Krobos and Akwapoms that they had no war with them — and the Krobos and Akwapims allowed them to pass their territory unhindered. They did, however, report this movement to the King of Accra and to the Government. They received no instructions from the Governor. The King of Accra sent to say that they should send him either the Asantes or their heads. This had been forbidden by Governor Simpson, however, and in any case the Krobos had no wish to attack such a strong force unearth: alone, when they had a two—days' march long bush frontier to defend. They sent the reply to the King of Accra that they must be sent munitions or money to prepare themselves, and if they had these would be ready to attack when joined by a Ga army, and given the Governors instructions to do so. No reply was received to this message. The King's sons (for, unfortunately, the King's successor Sakite has not yet been formally installed) sent to tell the Asantes and Akwamus that that if they attacked Ayigbe ('Anum, Pekyi etc') that would be treated as an attack on the tribes on this side of the river also, and these, and the Akyem leader Dopmre, would attack them. If they did take Anum, the kings' sons asked protection for the missionaries, because the missionaries make war with no-one, and had already done much good. The Asantes sent to say in reply that the Asantehene had commanded them to protect the missionaries especially because they had saved the life of an Asante (Zimmermann comments this refers to Br. Schönhuth in Pese). They had also drunk fetish to the same effect with the Akwamus. But the missionaries (Zimmermann glosses that this means themselves) should apply to the head of the Asante force and the King of Akwamu on behalf of the missionaries in the threatened area; Zimmermann interprets this as meaning, 'send them gifts'. At which Zimmermann said to the Odumase kings' sons that he was not prepared to

Basel Mission Archives

do this, since this would give them the appearance of traitors, and they were already suspected of acting a traitor's role by their enemies in Akwapim and Accra. Naturally Zimmermann wrote all these rumours down in detail for the brethren in Osu and Akropong. Earlier, he had written down everything he had heard for the use of the brethren in Anum. Then came the report from Osu and Akropong that the Civil Commandant, Capt. Russel, had promised to act in the matter, and Mader and Schrenk thereupon asked him to prepare a rough sketch map of the Volta to assist him in his planning. Zimmermann did this - with the remark that it was only what he knew, not containing any specific advice. He promised to reply, but has not done so. It is said that the Governor has given King Takye of Accra (his predecessor had deposed him and deprived him of all rights) £500 to send 1000 men to support Donmpre and the Ayigbes, but that he has only sent 30, and they are still hanging around in Battor. The Osu people are also supposed to have received ammunition to pass on to the Krobos, and the Krobos have been given a promise that ammunition is coming, but so far none has arrived. Meantime news came that the Asantes and Akwamus had marched against Ayigbe (this was 4-5 weeks before the report was written) and that it would come to a battle. The kings' sons offered to go to the support of the Anum brothers either through Akwamu or by some other route. The missionaries could not allow them to do this, since any day might bring a declaration of war, and therefore new accusations of being traitors. Even the own Ga and Twi workers were becoming unsettled, and were urging either that the Asante peace messengers and Asante traders should be imprisoned or executed. A few days later came the rumour that the Asante-Akwamu army had returned to its quarters and that the King of Peki did not want to be involved in a war, but would rather serve Asante than Akwamu - which the Asantes would not agree to. Food supplies in Akwamu, which produces almost nothing for itself were very short, the Akwamus almost cleaned out by the Asantes, and quarrels developing between them. Krobo farms on the borders were being plundered for food, Asantes were being taken captive by the Krobos on this account, and war between Krobo and Asante began to seem very likely. From Dauromadam, which has not, however, been touched by them - you can see the Asante camp fires on the other side of the Volta, and hear their shouts. However, neither Krobo, Akwapim, Accra, nor the British government made any move. For 8-10 days everything was quiet again, then suddenly came to the rumour that without raising their swords the Asantes, Anum, Peki and Abofia (a town 4 hours west of Ho) had captured. The missionaries reported it to Accra and Akropong hardly believing the news - but their letter crossed with the news coming from Keta. Ayigbe was attacked simultaneously from the south-west by an Asante-Akwamu army 12-15,000 strong, and from the north east by another Asante army which crossed the Volta north of Anum. They now control the towns of Abofia, Anum, Peki, Bose, Barrima etc. The first two towns named were quite abandoned by their people, and were captured by two separate sections of the Asante-Akwamu army. It was the advanced guard of the part of the army with which the Akwamu king is marching which took Anum. This is mostly composed of rough Donko-slaves. These people went up to the station, met the missionaries' servants and a number of refugees totalling

Basel Mission Archives

40, immediately took them prisoner and shot some of them. Thereupon they took the missionaries prisoner and plundered the house. At this stage the King of Akwamu was in his headquarters either in Anum, or in the village of Khakubew. When the missionaries heard the news, he brought the three missionaries under his protection, otherwise they would have been killed. Sadly there is no news of the Ramseyer's child. They are now said to be with the King of Akwamu in camp at Tongu, east of Peki, unharmed, but Fr. Ramseyer is said to be very much afraid, since so many people have already been killed. Anum stood empty when it was captured, and after taking it this part of the Asante army moved east to Peki. They found Peki partly deserted, partly in flames, for it is said that the head of the Asante army himself warned the Pekis of their coming, for which he was put in chains by one of the king's sons serving under him, and some other Asante leaders, and handed over to the Akwamuhene. Nevertheless they apparently took 500 prisoners in Peki. In Anum the station and the town are intact. The army's main ambition now was to get hold of Dompere in order to send him or his head to the Asantehene. Dompere is a refugee from Asante, and a brother of his is in the Asante army. Dompere, however, withdrew to the east with the Anum—Peki army. Up to this point Zimmermann's information was mainly from a slave of an Asante, sold to a Krobo, and an eyewitness of the war who had arrived in Odumase 3 days previously. The next news had arrived the day the letter was written, and had come across the lower Volta. The second Asante army is said to have advanced from Akwamu eastwards across the inhabited lands to Abotia which they found deserted. At Sokote, however, there was a fight with the inhabitants which worked out unfavourably for them, after which the force moved on Ho, where the three towns were found deserted, and in flames; found the two Bremen missionaries on the station, plundered the station without damaging missionaries or buildings, and withdrew southwards towards Adaklu and Ways in order to link up with the Anglos. The Anglos, however, perhaps out of fear of English warships, and because of their worries about the Agotimes, do not seem to have hurried to join them. The existence of this second force would explain why, area even though the Ramseyers wanted to flee to Ho, they could not: while the Ho missionaries who wanted to leave were able to get at least as far as Waya. This sums up what he has heard so far. Zimmermann has attempted to send the captured missionaries a letter via the Akwamuhene, asking the latter for news, and for permission for them to write themselves. The head of the Akwamu forward posts this side of the river gave grounds for hope that they will hear today or tomorrow. He also told the missionaries are well. The missionaries, and the king's sons, must be careful, however, not to be regarded as traitors treating with the enemy, even though the Colonial Government has not declared war, and even though there is little excitement among the tribes in the Protectorate. He will be guided by the Missions Executive Committee on the Gold Coast as to exactly how far he should go in trying to free the prisoners without the Government's active permission. (There is an passage on the weakness of the English colonial government).

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Basel Mission Archives

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