

4 The Kingdom of Asante

Introduction

The Kingdom of Asante rose to power 300 years after Portuguese explorers first visited what became known to Europeans as the Gold Coast of West Africa. For nearly 200 years, it grew wealthy trading gold and enslaved people with European merchants. It was also able to resist British attempts to conquer the kingdom until the end of the nineteenth century. Home to the Akan people, the Kingdom of Asante was a matrilineal society: this meant that the Akan people inherited their mother's family name and status rather than their father's family name and status. One of the kingdom's most famous rulers – Yaa Asantewaa – was female. Starting with a map and a timeline of key events, you are going to find out about the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Asante, why it is remembered as the 'kingdom of gold', and why Yaa Asantewaa was so powerful.



1482 The Portuguese establish a permanent base on what becomes known to Europeans as the Gold Coast of West Africa and trade between the Portuguese and the Akan people begins

1471 Portuguese explorers first visit what becomes known to Europeans as the Gold Coast of West Africa

GROUP 4.1

How do I say?

When you start to learn about the history of another country, it can be difficult to know how to pronounce the names of people and places. Here is a handy guide to help you correctly say eight of the names you'll come across in this chapter. You emphasise the sound in bold.

- Akan: a **can**
- Asante: a **san**-tee
- Asantehene: a **san**-ta-nee-nee
- Asantehema: a **san**-ta-nee-muh
- Kumasi: **ko**-ma-see
- Osei Tutu: **o**-say **too**-**too**
- Prempeh: prem **pay**
- Yaa Asantewaa: **yah** a **san**-tay-waa

Later on...

The British colony of Gold Coast, now known as Ghana, gained independence from Britain in 1957. It is a democratic country, but the role of leader of the Kingdom of Asante or 'Asantehene' remains. The current Asantehene, Osei Tutu II, was crowned in 1999. He has an important and powerful role in Ghanaian politics.



1957

1701 Osei Tutu defeats Gyakari and becomes Asantehene (ruler) of the Kingdom of Asante, receiving the Golden Stool

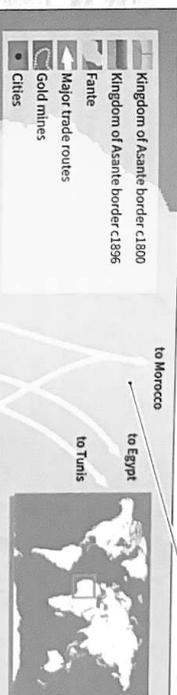


1791-1804 The Haitian Revolution, which involved enslaved Akan people, ends with Haiti declaring itself an independent country free from slavery

1750s The Kingdom of Asante gains control of the Akan gold mines, the largest gold mining area in West Africa

1760-1761 Tacky's War breaks out: Akan people in British-controlled Jamaica rebel against enslavement

▼ **MAP A** MAP A A map of West Africa and the Kingdom of Asante. Today, the borders of most countries are clearly defined: you know if you stand here you're in one country and if you stand there you're in another country, but we cannot be so certain about the position of borders, cities and trade routes during the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century in West Africa. Nevertheless, this map should help you understand where the Kingdom of Asante was located, and where some of the key events you will learn about in this chapter took place.



A savannah is a warm, wide-open space covered with different types of grasses and a few scattered bushes and trees.

Rainforests are tall, dense forests that are very hot, humid and wet. They are full of many different species of plants and animals.

The Sahara Desert is the third largest desert in the world. In summer it is one of the hottest regions in the world during the day, but the air becomes much cooler at night.

Major trade routes passed through the rainforest, across the savannah and then across the Sahara Desert to Morocco, Tunis and Tripoli, and on to China and Persia (a large kingdom centred in what is now modern-day Iran). A new trade route across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe and North and South America was also established.

The Niger River is the main river in West Africa and provides water for drinking and farming.

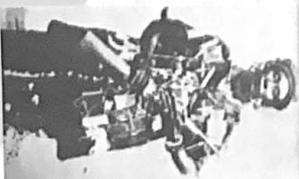
1900 The Kingdom of Asante loses the War of the Golden Stool and is forced to become part of Gold Coast, a British colony

1895-1896 The Kingdom of Asante loses the Fourth Anglo-Asante War, and the British seize control of most of the kingdom

1884 The Berlin Conference is held in Germany: leaders from Europe decide how they will divide up the continent of Africa between them

1863-1864 The Second Anglo-Asante War ends in a draw when more soldiers are killed by disease than in battle

1823-1824 The Kingdom of Asante wins the First Anglo-Asante War against the British



1957 Gold Coast becomes independent nation of Ghana

1873-1874 The Kingdom of Asante loses the Third Anglo-Asante War, and is forced to sign the Treaty of Fomena

1840 Yaa Asantewaa is born

How and why did the Kingdom of Asante rise and fall?

GROUP 4.2

In the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese arrived on what they came to call the Gold Coast of West Africa and began trading with Akan communities. They traded brass, cloth and guns for many things, including gold and enslaved people, who were transported across the Atlantic Ocean to work on plantations (large farms) in the Americas. In 1701, a number of Akan communities joined together to become the Kingdom of Asante, which grew rich trading with the Portuguese and other European traders, including British traders. The Kingdom of Asante is remembered as one of the most powerful kingdoms in West Africa, and it was able to stop the British taking control for nearly two centuries. How did trade between the Akan communities and Europeans begin? How did the Kingdom of Asante become so powerful? And how was it eventually defeated?

4.1A Trade!

The Portuguese arrive

In 1471, Portuguese explorers reached what they came to call the Gold Coast of West Africa. When they set out from Portugal, their main goal was to find a sea route to Asia that didn't pass through the Mediterranean Sea, where many nations competed for power and sea crossings were often dangerous. They also had a second goal: they were hoping to make contact with the Kingdom of Mali and the gold trade that they had heard so much about. However, they sailed past the Kingdom of Mali and landed further south, arriving on a stretch of coast where the Akan people lived.

The Portuguese quickly realised the Akan people had a lot of gold and were willing to trade. Soon Portuguese traders were bringing brass and cloth to the Gold Coast and exchanging them for gold.

1-act 01...

1500s

Portuguese sailors achieved several firsts. They were the first Europeans to reach the coast of West Africa. Then in September 1519, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan led five ships and 270 men on a journey around the world. Magellan himself died but one ship and 18 of his original crew made it home in 1522. Today, Magellan's voyage is remembered as the first circumnavigation of the world.

Objectives

- Outline how the Akan communities began trading with the Portuguese, and what they traded.
- Describe how the Kingdom of Asante was established and grew so powerful.
- Explain why the Kingdom of Asante fell.

São Jorge da Mina

In 1481, King João II of Portugal sent Diogo de Azambuja to the Gold Coast, with 600 soldiers and 100 builders. They were tasked with building a castle on the coast at Elmina. The castle would be used to store goods and carry out trade between Portuguese and Akan merchants. The Portuguese believed that if they could persuade the local ruler to lend them some land on which to build the castle, it would help them maintain their trading relationship without the use of force.

De Azambuja's first task was to ask the ruler of the local Akan community, Kwamena Ansa, for some land. It was not an easy decision for Kwamena Ansa to make. He was worried that the Portuguese would challenge his authority if they built a castle, but he also recognised that the Portuguese were stronger than the Akan community he ruled (as they had guns) and he could grow rich from the increase in trade. Eventually, he gave de Azambuja permission to build the castle, but emphasised that the Portuguese must maintain peace and follow existing trading customs. In 1482, the castle of São Jorge da Mina was built.

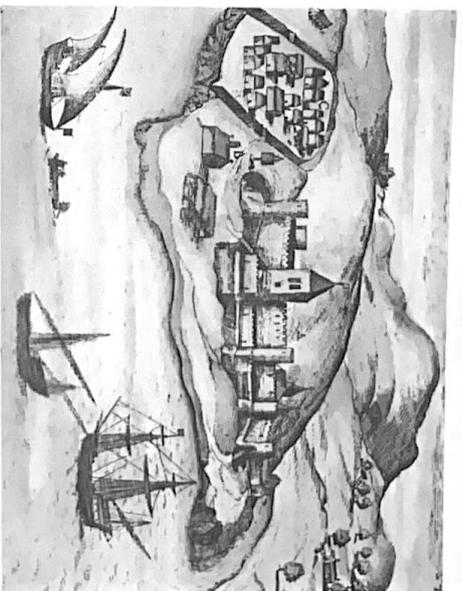
INTERPRETATION A

In 1552, João de Barros wrote about the meeting between Kwamena Ansa and de Azambuja, over 50 years after it took place. He was a Portuguese chronicler, hired by the King of Portugal to write about important events in the country's history.

When Kwamena Ansa was among our people, he... took the hand of Diogo de Azambuja, and letting it go again said 'here, here', which means 'peace, peace'... He would be pleased to permit him [de Azambuja] to build the house as he wished, warning him that peace in truth must be kept, for should our men act otherwise they would cause more harm to themselves than to him, because the land was great and he and his men could build another about [house] there with thach and timber, of which they had plenty.

INTERPRETATION B

A drawing of the castle of São Jorge da Mina, made in 1603.



The Kingdom of Asante and the transatlantic trade in enslaved people

The Akan communities the Portuguese encountered were established long before the Portuguese arrived. Areas of rainforest were cleared to make way for villages, towns and then cities, and crops were planted and harvested. Much of the hard work this involved was performed by enslaved people. The slavery that existed in the Kingdom of Asante was not, however, the same type of slavery that Europeans introduced with the transatlantic trade in enslaved people in the fifteenth century.

The European form of slavery was called 'chattel slavery'. A chattel slave was viewed as a piece of property, with no legal rights. In the Kingdom of Asante, slavery was different. Enslaved people were usually prisoners of war. They were still exploited and made to work hard but, in time, they could become free. In contrast, chattel slaves were enslaved for life, and as were their children and grandchildren, unless their owner decided differently.

The Kingdom of Asante's wealth and power came primarily from trading gold from the Akan gold mines for goods mainly from Europe. However, much of the kingdom's military strength came from trading enslaved people for weapons, first with the Portuguese and then later with the Dutch and the British. These weapons were used to expand the kingdom and then to fight against British attempts to take it over.

Over to You

- 1 Explain why the Portuguese arrived on the Gold Coast of West Africa in 1471.
- 2 Copy and complete the following table to show the similarities and differences between chattel slavery and slavery in the Kingdom of Asante.

Similarities	Differences

- 3 a Read **Interpretation A**. Select two words or phrases you would use to describe the interaction between Kwamena Ansa and Diogo de Azambuja.
 - b Explain why you have chosen each word. For example, you might choose 'peaceful' and explain that: The relationship between Kwamena Ansa and Diogo de Azambuja was peaceful because Kwamena Ansa was willing to share his land only if the Portuguese remained peaceful.

4.1B Osei Tutu and the rise of the Kingdom of Asante **GROUP 4.2**

The Akan states

The land that would become the Kingdom of Asante was home to a number of different Akan communities. Each community had its own state, governed by a local ruler. The founders of the Kingdom of Asante were descendants of the Oyoko community, who settled in the state of Kwaman. Other states included Adanse, Asen and Denkyira.

In the 1650s, a new ruler came to power in Denkyira. His name was Boampongsem. He was a ruthless leader: he used the guns and gunpowder he traded from the British to force other Akan states to pay him huge tributes, and he executed anyone who did not meet his demands. A tribute is a payment a more powerful ruler demands from a less powerful ruler.

The people of Denkyira came to resent Boampongsem. When he died in 1694, they hoped his son, Gyakari, would be kinder to them. However, they were disappointed: Gyakari was just as ruthless as his father. So, the people of Denkyira turned to the state of Kwaman looking for protection.

Osei Tutu founds the Kingdom of Asante

In the late seventeenth century, the state of Kwaman was led by Osei Tutu. Gyakari demanded tribute from Kwaman, but Osei Tutu refused. This infuriated Gyakari. Osei Tutu knew that it would only be a matter of time before the ruthless Gyakari sent his men to attack Kwaman, so he prepared for war.

Osei Tutu was a skilled warrior and his army was far stronger than Gyakari's army. The people of Denkyira and other Akan states that had been terrorised by Gyakari also supported him. After two years of fighting, Osei Tutu defeated Gyakari on the battlefield in 1701 and took all his gold.

Osei Tutu became a hero to the people of Kwaman and the other states that had joined together to fight Gyakari. He now wanted peace, and he asked the ruler of each state to bring their spear and bury it in the Bantama River to demonstrate an end to the fighting. Shortly afterwards, the Kingdom of Asante was established and Osei Tutu was declared the first Asantehene.

The Golden Stool

Oral accounts say that after Osei Tutu was declared Asantehene, he called a priest to chant prayers and spells. As the priest chanted, a Golden Stool descended from heaven. While many historians doubt the stool descended from heaven, we do know that there was a Golden Stool. It was both the royal stool and a sacred symbol of the Kingdom of Asante. It was believed to hold the soul of the people of Asante and legend told that the kingdom would fall if the stool was captured.

Fact

Wealthy individuals also had carved wooden stools. When they died, the stool was painted black, using a mixture of egg yolks, soot, spider webs and sheep's blood, and maybe nail clippings and hair from the dead person. The stool was then stored in a sacred stool house.

Oral history

Oral history is history passed down from generation to generation through songs and the spoken word. It is a way for people to pass on their culture, beliefs, traditions and stories without writing things down. Oral accounts are one of the main sources of information we have about the kingdoms of West Africa.

SOURCE C A photograph of the Golden Stool of the Kingdom of Asante. Today, it is housed in the Manhyia Palace Museum in Ghana and continues to play an important role in ceremonial occasions.



Key Words

tribute oral history

Over to You

- 1 Name three Akan states.
- 2 a Who was Gyakari and why is he important in the story of the founding of the Kingdom of Asante?
b Who was Osei Tutu and why is he important in the story of the founding of the Kingdom of Asante?
- 3 Read **Interpretation D**. Explain why historians need to use oral accounts to study the history of Africa.



INTERPRETATION D
Historian Andrew Dunlop Roberts wrote about the importance of oral history to our understanding of African history in 1976.

[I]n much of Africa south of the Sahara reading and writing made little or no impression until quite recent times. So, the use of oral [tradition] has naturally been a major feature of the recovery of African history.

4.2

Why is Asante remembered as the 'kingdom of gold'? GROUP 4.3

The Kingdom of Asante was rich with gold. It was used as currency. It was transformed into beautiful jewellery and ornaments. It was traded for goods including cloth, and carried north across the Sahara Desert by Muslim traders, and carried north-west across the Atlantic Ocean by European traders. But exactly how important was gold to the Kingdom of Asante? And how did the memory of the 'kingdom of gold' influence events on the other side of the world, in Brazil and the Caribbean?

Objectives

- Explain the importance of gold to the Kingdom of Asante.
- Describe how the 'kingdom of gold' influenced events across the Atlantic, in Brazil and the Caribbean.

4.2A Gold and the Kingdom of Asante

Throughout human history, gold has been considered a very valuable metal. It can be found all around the world, with large deposits in West Africa. Historically, it was usually mined close to the surface using simple tools. For example, the Akan people looked for pebbles glinting in the sunlight after it had rained. Then they would ask permission from the local ruler to dig into the riverbank to see if they could find more gold.

By the 1750s, the Kingdom of Asante controlled the Akan gold mines, the largest gold-mining area in West Africa. This included many surface mines but also mines that were up to 30 metres (or three double-decker buses) deep, which required lots of workers to dig underground. The gold was used as a currency, traded, and displayed to demonstrate wealth and power.

Earlier on...

1300s–1500s

The Kingdom of Asante was not the only kingdom in West Africa that owed its power to gold. Mansa Musa, who ruled the Kingdom of Mali from 1312 to 1337, is described as the richest person that ever lived because of his access to gold mines in Mali. The success of the Kingdom of Songhay, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is down in large part to the way it took control of the West African gold trade.

Gold as currency

Since the reign of Osei Tutu and the formation of the Kingdom of Asante in the early eighteenth century, the kingdom's gold mines were the property of the Asantehene (ruler).

▼ **SOURCE A** In 1896, Asantehene Prempeh I explained the relationship between gold and the rulers of the Kingdom of Asante to the British.

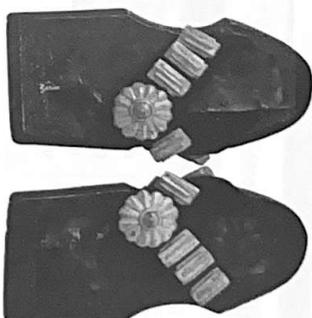
Half of the gold mine(d) goes to the king. Before a man opens a mine, I must be consulted. I give permission to a man to mine. I give him a price, he can open as many pits [mines] as he pleases. I would give permission only to my own people on condition that they give me half [of the winnings].

After the miners had paid half of what they had mined in tax to the Asantehene, they were able to use the gold as currency and able to trade (buy and sell) things with it.

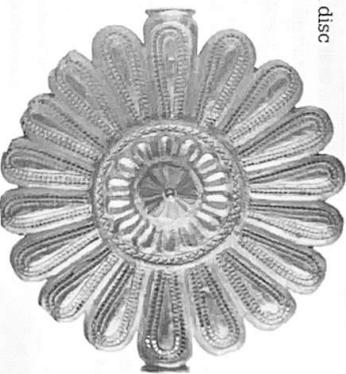
Gold on display

Gold was a sign of wealth and status in the Kingdom of Asante. Craftspersons called goldsmiths would melt down the gold and transform it into jewellery that was worn by people in positions of power.

▼ **SOURCE B** The Asantehene wore various gold ornaments, including gold brooches on his sandals. These are two of several sandals that survived the final Anglo-Asante wars and is still held by the Asante today.



▼ **SOURCE C** This pectoral disc was worn over the chest, attached to clothing or hung around the neck. It comes from the Kingdom of Asante some time before 1874.



Some people who did not hold positions of power also owned gold ornaments. For example, gold miners usually owned several weights to weigh the gold they mined. These weights were usually made of brass, but sometimes they were made of gold. The weights were also used to decorate their homes.

▼ **SOURCE D** These gold weights are from the Kingdom of Asante in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.



Key Word

mansa

Gold to trade

Gold was used not only as currency within the Kingdom of Asante. It was also traded with other African kingdoms, with Muslim traders who carried it across the Sahara Desert, and with European traders who carried it across the Atlantic Ocean. It was traded for many different things, including cloth, salt and alcohol.

Europeans were particularly hungry for gold. The Kingdom of Asante took full advantage of this, becoming very wealthy by trading gold with Europeans until the British took control in 1900.

Meanwhile...

1700s

During the 1700s, the Kingdom of Asante began to trade enslaved people with various European countries, as well as gold, and became very wealthy as a result.

Over to You

11

- 1 List three ways that gold was used in the Kingdom of Asante.
- 2 Explain, in your own words, how wearing and displaying gold saved the Kingdom of Asante from trading too much of its gold too quickly.
- 3 Read **Source A**. Explain how gold mines made the Asantehene wealthy.
- 4 a Look at **Source C**. Use the Internet to find other examples of pectoral discs made from gold. Notice where and when they were made.
b Choose your favourite and explain your choice in no more than 50 words.

4.2B The global impact of the 'Kingdom of gold'

GROUP 4.3

Asante's reputation as the 'Kingdom of gold' spread far beyond the shores of West Africa. Trading with European countries ensured the kingdom's fame travelled across Europe, and to South America and the Caribbean. However, the kingdom's involvement in the transatlantic trade in enslaved people meant it was known for more than just gold. Enslaved people from the Kingdom of Asante taught people in Brazil how to mine gold, but they also leaned on their shared culture and military experience to fight against the inhumane system of slavery in the Caribbean.

The Brazilian gold rush

Portuguese explorers reached the coast of modern-day Brazil in South America in 1500. Over the following decades, settlers established large sugar cane farms, known as plantations. Then in the late seventeenth century, gold was discovered in Brazil. This led to a 'gold rush': large numbers of people left towns and cities in Portugal to seek gold in Brazil.

▼ INTERPRETATION E

In 1946, historian Manoel Cardoso wrote an article about the Brazilian gold rush and its consequences. He believed that one of the first consequences was uncontrolled emigration from Portugal (emigration is leaving the country you were born in to settle permanently in another country).



Indeed, the discovery of gold in Brazil threatened to depopulate northern Portugal. Hundreds of persons... [departed] for [South] America in search of fortune. A single boat in 1709 transported more than three hundred passengers... the majority of whom headed directly to the mines. As a result of the uncontrolled emigration, certain parts of Portugal experienced a shortage of agriculture labourers.

In the 1700s, over 1,200 tonnes of gold were mined in the major gold mines of Brazil. However, it was not the Portuguese settlers who did the actual mining: the settlers got rich, but the gold was mined by enslaved Africans.

Fact

An average car weighs about two tonnes, so the weight of the gold mined in Brazil in the 1700s was equal to 600 cars. Today, one tonne of gold costs around £40 million, so the gold mined in Brazil in the 1700s was worth around £48 billion.

Asante gold miners

By exploring the oral history of enslaved people and the written history of traders, historians such as Emmanuel Ababio Ofose-Mensah and Carlos Da Silva Jr have discovered that the success of gold mining in Brazil was the result of the work of enslaved people from the Kingdom of Asante.

One of the Kingdom of Asante's most productive gold mines was in Obuasi, which was about 60 kilometres from Kumasi. Many of the miners came from families who had been mining gold for generations, and were skilled at locating and extracting gold using very simple technology. It is estimated that as many as 67,000 people were taken from the Kingdom of Asante, enslaved and transported to Brazil by the Portuguese, and some of these people would have come from Obuasi.

Once in Brazil, the enslaved miners were forced to mine gold. They were also forced to teach other enslaved people how to mine. They found far more gold than the Portuguese would have found without them, and the same mining techniques were also used to mine diamonds. As a result, Portuguese slave owners became very rich.

▼ SOURCE F A nineteenth-century engraving of

enslaved Africans mining diamonds, watched by a Portuguese man who is probably a slave owner. Like gold, diamonds are extremely valuable, and the Portuguese man would have become rich from the enslaved people's work.



The culture of the 'Kingdom of gold' survives enslavement

When they were enslaved, people from the Kingdom of Asante worked hard to preserve their Akan identities in South America and the Caribbean. Despite becoming the property of plantation owners and despite being deprived of their freedom and brutally treated by plantation owners, some continued to speak Akan, continued with African religious practices, and continued to play African music. Those who had fought to defend the kingdom also brought their military training with them when they were transported across the Atlantic Ocean.

The Akan go to war in the Caribbean

In 1760, Tacky's War broke out. It was one of the most significant rebellions against enslavement in British-controlled Jamaica in the Caribbean. It was led by an Akan man called Tacky, and over 100 Akan people who had just arrived from Africa were involved. They overpowered British soldiers, stole guns, attacked plantations and killed European settlers. As the rebellion grew, other enslaved people were inspired to join the fight. Ultimately, the rebels were captured and many were executed, but the governor of Jamaica was so worried about the central role Akan people played in the revolt that he asked the British government to limit the number of Akan people sent to Jamaica in future. This never happened, but it shows how people from Asante had an impact far beyond the 'Kingdom of gold' itself.

▼ INTERPRETATION G An image created for

the front cover of an 1800 French pamphlet about Tacky's War.

It shows there was significant interest in Europe about what happened, but it presents only one side of the story. It emphasises the violence of the rebels without showing the harsh conditions enslaved people were rebelling against.



Key Word

plantations

▼ INTERPRETATION H

An extract from *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*, written by historian Vincent Brown in 2020.



The economic, political and cultural consequences of this war within was reverberated [echoed] out from Jamaica to other colonies, across the ocean to Great Britain and back again to the island, where the revolt reshaped public life and lodged deeply in collective memory.

Tacky's War was not the only time enslaved Akan people fought for their freedom in the Caribbean. In 1791, the Haitian Revolution began when enslaved Africans were involved in a rebellion that overthrew slave owners in major towns. After over a decade fighting Spanish, French and British colonisers, the formerly enslaved people of Haiti succeeded in declaring Haiti an independent country free from slavery in 1804. It was the only successful slave rebellion in history and, as a result, some now call it the Haitian War of Independence.

Over to You

- 1 a Use the following terms in a sentence: gold rush, plantation, emigration.
b How did the skills of the enslaved people transported from Obuasi to Brazil make slave owners in Brazil wealthy?
- 2 Explain how Akan culture influenced enslaved people in the Caribbean. Make sure you use the following in your answer:
 - Tacky's War
 - Haitian Revolution
 - shared history, culture and traditions
 - military training

Why is Yaa Asantewaa a symbol of power?

GROUP 4.4

Yaa Asantewaa is remembered as a symbol of the power of women in Asante culture, and a symbol of the resilience of the Asante people when the Kingdom of Asante was attacked by the British in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, her name was used by the people of Gold Coast in their fight to become the independent nation of Ghana. In 2000, 100 years on from her heroic attempt to save the Kingdom of Asante during the War of the Golden Stool, she was celebrated in exhibitions in Ghana and further afield. But who was Yaa Asantewaa? Why is she referred to as a Queen Mother, a ruler and a war hero? And why is her life still celebrated today?

Objectives

- Identify the importance of women in Asante society.
- Describe the role of Yaa Asantewaa during the War of the Golden Stool.
- Explain why Yaa Asantewaa has been remembered as a symbol of power.

4.3A The role of women in Asante society

A matrilineal society

The Kingdom of Asante was a matrilineal society. Unlike the situation in many European countries, including Britain, people living in the Kingdom of Asante inherited their mother's family name and status and not their father's family name and status.

Many historians also believe the Kingdom of Asante was a matriarchal society. This meant households were led by women and not men, and women played an extremely important role in ruling the kingdom.

▼ SOURCE A An Asante proverb.

A proverb is a saying that summarises a general truth or a piece of advice that is well known. Proverbs can be useful for historians because they often reveal the cultural values and beliefs of the people who use them.

Obaa na owoo obarina
Obaa na owoo okne
It's a woman who gave birth to a man
It's a woman who gave birth to a king

4.3A The role of women in Asante society

The Asantehema

'Asantehema' translates as 'Queen Mother' in English. The Asantehema of the Kingdom of Asante was an older female from the royal family who advised the Asantehene (ruler). She could be, but was not necessarily, the Asantehene's mother. Many historians believe the Asantehema was essentially a co-ruler: that the Kingdom of Asante needed both the Asantehene and the Asantehema to rule together for there to be balance and for the kingdom to be ruled well.

Connections

In Europe, there have been several famous queens. For example, Queen Victoria ruled Britain from 1837 until 1901. However, female rulers were unusual and a woman on the throne did not ensure women had rights. For example, women living in Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria did not have the right to vote. It was not until 1928 that all women over the age of 21 were given the right to vote, finally achieving the same voting rights as men.

▼ **SOURCE B** In this photograph we see Asantehene Prempeh I on the left and Asantehema Kwaaedu Yiadom on the right. They sit side by side in identical chairs, indicating they had equal status.



Powerful women

The Asantehema and the Asantehene usually worked together, but the Asantehema was powerful enough to pose a threat to the Asantehene if she chose to. This is exactly what happened in 1820.

In 1820, the Asantehene went to war with a nearby kingdom and, according to Asante tradition, he left the royal women in charge of the prayers that he believed would keep him safe.

▼ **SOURCE C** A British man called Joseph Dupuis visited the Kingdom of Asante in 1820. In this adapted extract, he describes how much the Asantehene trusted the royal women.

When the king joined his army, he commissioned his eldest sister (the asantehema), to attend strictly to the sacred mystery, telling her that his crown and life both depended on her vigilance, and the fulfilment of his order. He selected also three wives to whom he was more attached than the rest, to watch by turns over the mysterious rites.

Key Words
matrilineal matriarchal

Fact

In some cultures, it is common for a man to be married to more than one wife at the same time. Having more than one husband or wife at the same time is called polygamy, and it was commonplace in the Kingdom of Asante.

We cannot be sure why, but while the Asantehene was away the royal women attempted to overthrow him. When he returned, he discovered what was happening and over 700 people were punished. Most had their heads chopped off, but the Asantehema was simply replaced with the former Asantehema and sent to live in another part of the city.

The fact that royal women were able to lead a rebellion against the Asantehene shows how powerful women could be in Asante society, and the comparatively light punishment given to the Asantehema shows how much the role was respected.

Over to You

- 1 a What is a matrilineal society?
b What is a matriarchal society?
- 2 Describe the role of the Asantehema in the Kingdom of Asante.
- 3 Read **Source A**. What does this proverb reveal about the importance of women in Asante society?
- 4 Read **Source C**. What can we infer about the importance of the asantehema? Make sure to use a quote from the source to support your inference.

4.3B Yaa Asantewaa and the War of the Golden Stool

GROUP 4.5

The aftermath of the Fourth Anglo-Asante War

After the Kingdom of Asante was defeated at the end of the Fourth Anglo-Asante War in 1896, Asantehene Prempeh I was forced to sign a treaty that gave the British control of most of the kingdom. He was then exiled, along with other Asante leaders, to the Seychelles, and the Asantehema – Yaa Asantewaa – took the Asantehene's place as leader. The kingdom's capital city was also moved from Kumasi to another city, because Kumasi had been destroyed by the British.

Fact:

The Seychelles are a group of islands off the east coast of Africa, and a long way away from the Kingdom of Asante.

Yaa Asantewaa was a skilled farmer before she was made Asantehema in the 1880s. From 1896, she led the negotiations with the British, ensuring the remaining land belonging to the Kingdom of Asante was protected from invasion. She also resisted British demands for taxes and valuable goods, so that the kingdom would not lose all its wealth to the British. She was also Gate Keeper of the Golden Stool.

In 1900, when the British governor of the region, Sir Frederick Mitchell Hodgson, demanded the Asante hand over the Golden Stool, Yaa Asantewaa took great offence. The Golden Stool was believed to hold the soul of the Asante people, and the Asante believed the kingdom would fall if it were captured. No Asante ruler would give it up without a fight!

Rallying her troops

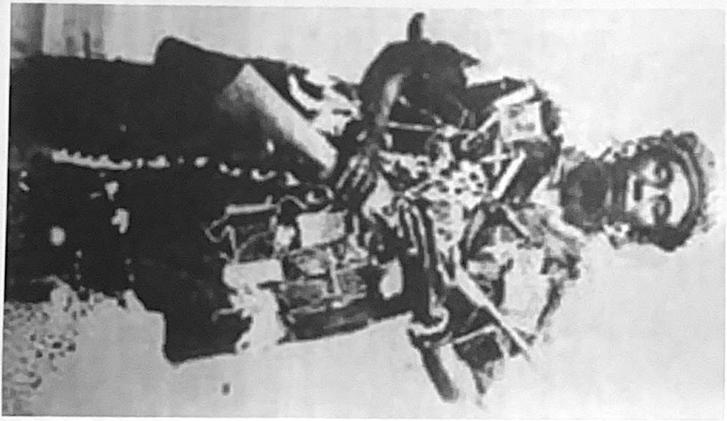
Many Asante men did not immediately respond to Yaa Asantewaa's call to defend the Golden Stool. However, as Asantehema, she declared that they must join the fight, and if they did not then she would rally women in their place.

► **SOURCE D** After hearing Asante men discussing the issue of the Golden Stool, Yaa Asantewaa is said to have given this speech.

The War of the Golden Stool (1900)

On 28 March 1900, Yaa Asantewaa – the 60-year-old Asantehema – led 20,000 Asante warriors into battle. She was not just a figurehead: she commanded the army herself, and is believed to have worn the traditional clothing of the Asantehene.

► **SOURCE E** A photograph of Yaa Asantewaa in the traditional clothing of the Asantehene. The photograph was probably taken to commemorate 28 March 1900.



How can a proud and brave people like the Asante sit back and look while the white men took away their king and chiefs and humiliated them with a demand for the Golden Stool. The Golden Stool only means money to the white men; they have searched and dug everywhere for it. I shall not pay one preduwan [sum of money] to the governor. If you, the chiefs of Asante, are going to behave like cowards and not fight, you should exchange your loincloths for my undergarments.

Despite Yaa Asantewaa's leadership and bravery, the British defeated the Asante army in the War of the Golden Stool, and Yaa Asantewaa was captured and sent into exile in the Seychelles. However, some historians argue that if we use oral tradition to understand Asante history, there is another way we can look at the War of the Golden Stool.

► INTERPRETATION F

Historian Angela Danso Gyane argues that a discussion about who won the War of the Golden Stool must consider whether the Asante achieved their goal in the long term. In this adapted extract, she argues that they did.



The literature, which was written mainly by non-Asantes, says that the war was a success for Britain, but it fails to consider several things. It fails to consider that Governor Hodgson's letters show us why the war was called the War of the Golden Stool: because getting hold of the Golden Stool was the ultimate goal of the war for the British and keeping the Golden Stool was the ultimate goal of the war for the Asante. For the war to be declared a success because the Asante leaders were sent into exile is incorrect, as that was not the goal of the war. It also fails to consider that the Asante, led by Yaa Asantewaa, also fought for their king's return, and the Asantehene was eventually reinstated many years later. These two things explain why the Asante declare themselves the winner of the war in their oral history.

Fact:

During the War of the Golden Stool, the British Prime Minister was furious that so many lives were lost fighting for a stool that the British never found. It is believed to have been hidden in a forest during the war and rediscovered in 1921. It never fell into British hands, and today it is the property of the Asantehene.

► **SOURCE G** An illustration of one of the battles in the War of the Golden Stool. Much of the war was fought in the forest. The Asante troops fought to the very end, and despite casualties on both sides, were finally defeated by the British army.



Over to You

- Write a short account of how Yaa Asantewaa came to lead the Asante people. Your account must include the following:
 - Fourth Anglo-Asante War
 - Asantehene Prempeh I
- Read **Source D**.
 - Why is Yaa Asantewaa angry?
 - What can you infer about what Yaa Asantewaa wanted to achieve with her speech?
- Read **Interpretation F**.
 - Who does the literature state won the War of the Golden Stool?
 - Who does Asante oral history state won the War of the Golden Stool?
 - What does Angela Danso Gyane say historians must use to truly understand Asante history?

4.3C Remembering Yaa Asantewaa

Yaa Asantewaa: A forgotten hero

In 1946, 46 years after the War of the Golden Stool, *History of Ashanti* was published. The book was written by people chosen by the Asantehene. In this account, Yaa Asantewaa is only mentioned three times, and never once as a commander during the War of the Golden Stool.

INTERPRETATION H

Historian Tom McCaskie has written an article about the life and reputation of Yaa Asantewaa, in which he talks about how she is discussed in *History of Ashanti*.



In this discussion, the role of Yaa Asantewaa is scanned [provided grudgingly] and downplayed... There is no mention of her having a leadership role, and she receives much less attention in the text than several other insurgents [people fighting the invading force].

Historians have suggested a range of different reasons to explain why Yaa Asantewaa's role in the War of the Golden Stool was not fully explained in the book:

- British influence meant women in Asante were respected less in 1946 than they had been previously.
 - The British did not want the Asante people to celebrate the life of Yaa Asantewaa because they considered her a dangerous rebel. Instead, they encouraged songs that referred to her as a coward who ran away from the battlefield and was defeated by the British army.
 - The Asantehene had an ongoing dispute with Yaa Asantewaa's brother and, as a result, attempted to write her out of history.
- It took until the 1950s for the story of Yaa Asantewaa to become an important part of the history of the Asante people, and eventually the history of Ghana.

GROUP 4.5

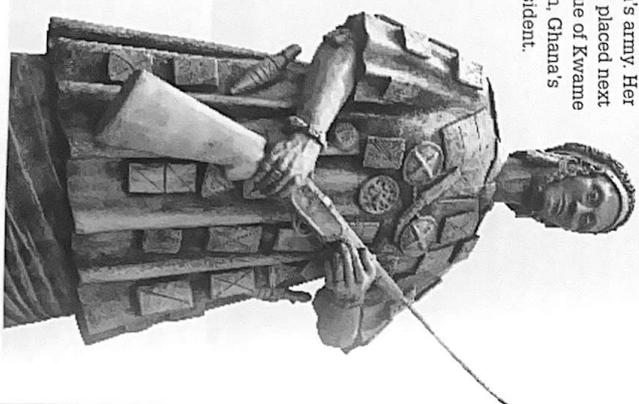
Yaa Asantewaa and Ghanaian independence

65,000 soldiers from the Gold Coast Regiment fought for the British army during the Second World War. When the war came to an end, these soldiers and the people of Gold Coast hoped their service would encourage the British to grant them independence.

However, it soon became clear this would not be the case, and so the people of Gold Coast began to fight for their independence from Britain. Their leader, Kwame Nkrumah, used Yaa Asantewaa's life to inspire them. Not only were they reclaiming the history of a woman the British wanted to forget, but her courage and strength demonstrated that they too could fight against the British government to achieve their freedom. This time they won: on 6 March 1957, Ghana became the first colonised African country to gain independence.

INTERPRETATION I

A statue of Yaa Asantewaa has been displayed at the National Museum of Ghana since the 1960s. She was the only woman in the history of the Kingdom of Asante to be named Commander in Chief of the kingdom's army. Her statue is placed next to a statue of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president.

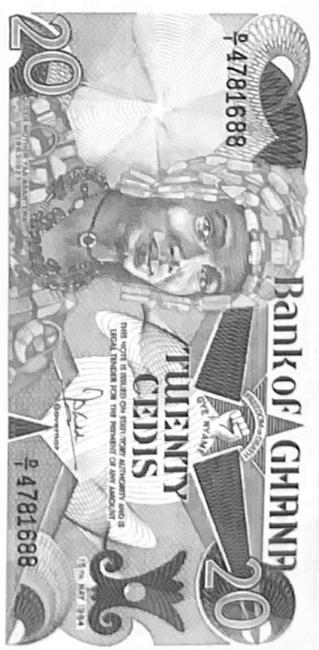


INTERPRETATION J

Yaa Asantewaa was on the back of Ghana's 20 cedis banknote in 1984 and in 1986.

Remembering Yaa Asantewaa

It is clear that Yaa Asantewaa is no longer written out of Asante history. She is remembered now as a courageous war hero, who reveals the importance of women in Asante culture and the power some women were able to hold.



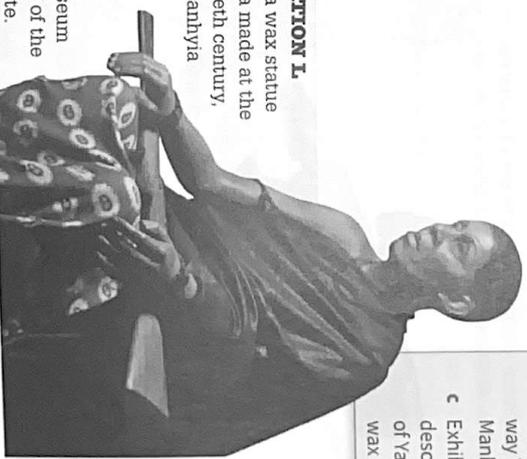
INTERPRETATION K

Historian Asirifi Danquah describes Yaa Asantewaa in a 2002 book called *Yaa Asantewaa: An African Queen who led an army to fight the British*.

Although militarily, Yaa Asantewaa lost the war, psychologically her resistance against the British attempt to dispossess Asante of the precious Golden Stool symbolises a resounding victory for Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante Kingdom as the queen of England could not capture the Golden Stool.

INTERPRETATION L

A photograph of a wax statue of Yaa Asantewaa made at the end of the twentieth century, which is in the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi in Ghana. The Manhyia Palace Museum is a museum about the history of the Kingdom of Asante.



Over to You

- 1 Read *Interpretation H*.
 - a How was Yaa Asantewaa remembered in the book *History of Ashanti*?
 - b What do you think is the main reason why Yaa Asantewaa was remembered in this way? Explain your thinking.
- 2 Look at *Interpretation L*.
 - a List five words you could use to describe Yaa Asantewaa based on this wax statue.
 - b What does the wax statue suggest about the way Yaa Asantewaa is remembered by the Manhyia Palace Museum?
 - c Exhibits in museums are accompanied by descriptions. Write a 100-word summary of Yaa Asantewaa's life to accompany the wax statue.

Significance

- 1 What do you think was most impressive about Yaa Asantewaa?
- 2 Yaa Asantewaa might have lost the War of the Golden Stool, but she is still a hero to the Ghanaian people. How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

4.1C Wars with the British and the end of the Kingdom of Asante

Growing tensions

In the early nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Asante was wealthy, powerful and keen to expand its territory. The Fante states, on the coast, played an important role as middlemen between Asante traders and European traders, and the Asantehene wanted to conquer the Fante states and cut out the middlemen.

Meanwhile, the British government had made the trade in enslaved people illegal, by passing the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807. They were, therefore, looking for new ways to make a profit from West Africa. The British did not want to see the Kingdom of Asante increase in power. Instead, they wanted to expand their colony beyond the coast, profiting from their control of the land and its people.

As a consequence, tensions between the Kingdom of Asante and the British increased and war between the two countries became inevitable.

First Anglo-Asante War (1823–1824)

In 1823, the first of five wars between the Kingdom of Asante and the British broke out. It started when the Asante invaded the Fante states.

The British came to the defence of the Fante, using soldiers from Britain and from India. They were led by Sir Charles McCarthy, who believed he would be able to defeat the Asante. However, McCarthy's force of 2,500 men was no match for 10,000 Asante soldiers and, on 22 January 1824, McCarthy was killed in battle. The Kingdom of Asante had won the First Anglo-Asante War and the Fante states became part of the Kingdom of Asante.

Connections

The British government officially took control of India in 1858. However, the British East India Company had started to take control of large parts of India from the late 1600s, and by the early 1800s, troops from India were being used by the British government to fight wars across the world. Indian soldiers fought for the British in the Anglo-Asante Wars.

Second Anglo-Asante War (1863–1864)

By 1863, the British were expanding along the coast, and were powerful enough to introduce a tax of 1 shilling per person across the land they controlled. A shilling was one twentieth of a pound at the time, around £3 today. This included the Fante states, which had gained independence from the Asante after the First Anglo-Asante War, only to come under British control.

To limit British influence, the Kingdom of Asante invaded the Fante states for a second time. The British were again no match for the Asante army. However, the war ended in a draw as illness spread through both armies, killing more soldiers than the actual fighting did. As a result, nothing was resolved and tensions between the Asante and the British continued to simmer.

Third Anglo-Asante War (1873–1874)

By 1873, the British were in control of the entire coastline bordering the Kingdom of Asante. Worried that the kingdom could now trade only through British ports, the Asantehene decided to attack Elmina.

Unfortunately for the Kingdom of Asante, the British army was now better trained and had machine guns. The British won their first victory at the Battle of Amofof on 31 January 1873. The capital of the Kingdom of Asante, Kumasi, was also briefly captured by the British and burned. The Third Anglo-Asante War eventually ended in 1874, and the Asante were forced to sign the Treaty of Fomena. This treaty required the Asante to give the British over 50,000 ounces of gold, and give up all claims to land on the coast.

▼ **SOURCE** Illustration of the Asantehene of the Kingdom of Asante, Kofi Kaakari, meeting with British soldiers to agree the terms of the Treaty of Fomena. It was published in Britain between 1873 and 1875, in a series of books called *British Battles on Land and Sea*.



Fact

In the 1880s, many European countries were racing to gain control of land in Africa because they wanted to expand their empires. In 1884, leaders from 14 European countries, including Britain, met at what became known as the Berlin Conference to decide how the continent of Africa would be divided between them. The USA acted as an observer, hoping to gain greater international influence. This 'scramble' for Africa gave no thought to the kingdoms, cultures and peoples of Africa. It focused solely on how Africa's natural resources could be exploited for maximum gain.

Fourth Anglo-Asante War (1895–1896)

The Fourth Anglo-Asante War began in 1895, 11 years after the Berlin Conference. It was different to earlier Anglo-Asante wars. Previously, Britain had wanted to limit the power of Asante. Now, Britain wanted to colonise the whole of the Kingdom of Asante before France or Germany could take control of it.

The Kingdom of Asante had paid only 4,000 of the 50,000 ounces of gold it was required to pay the British under the Treaty of Fomena. Using this as an excuse, the British invaded. They reached Kumasi quickly and the Asantehene, Prempeh I, was arrested. He was forced to sign a treaty that gave the British control over most of the kingdom. He was then exiled from his kingdom, along with other Asante leaders.

War of the Golden Stool (1900)

The final war between the British and the Asante was fought between March and September 1900.

The war began when Sir Frederick Mitchell Hodgson, the British governor of the region, demanded that the Asante hand over the Golden Stool to the British. The Golden Stool was thought to hold the soul of the Asante people, and the Asante believed their kingdom would fall if the stool was captured. They were, therefore, deeply upset by the demand and Yaa Asantewaa, the Asantehema (Queen Mother), believed that the British should pay for being so disrespectful.

Key Words

colony exile Asantehema

In March 1900, Yaa Asantewaa gathered together an army in a final attempt to defeat the British. In the fighting that followed, 2,000 Asante soldiers and 1,000 British soldiers died; that's more soldiers than were killed in the first four wars combined. The Asante lost and the last parts of the Kingdom of Asante were forced to become part of Gold Coast, a British colony. The land would remain under British control until Gold Coast became the independent nation of Ghana in 1957.

Over to You

- Look at the following dates relating to the Anglo-Asante wars: 1900, 1823, 1895, 1873, 1863.
 - Write out the dates in the correct chronological order.
 - Next to each date, write down three key details about the war, including who won it.
- Explain why the British decided to begin the Fourth Anglo-Asante War. Use the following in your answer:
 - Berlin Conference
 - colonisation
 - France and Germany

Cause and consequence

- List examples of ways in which the Kingdom of Asante resisted British control. For example:
 - Defeated 2,500 British soldiers to win the First Anglo-Asante War.
- 'African kingdoms were not able to resist British control and were easily conquered in the nineteenth century.' How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.