



The contribution of selected Asante Kings to the spread of Islam in Kumasi in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries

Victoria Agyare Appiah¹ 

¹ Centre for African and International Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

A remarkable aspect of Asante history that has not received adequate scholarly attention is the role of Asante rulers in the spread of Islam in Kumasi, the capital of the empire, which the expansion of the Asante brought into contact with Muslim communities, including the Hausa, Dagomba, Mande and Gonja. Although scholars have researched the history of Islam in Asante extensively, little of this work isolates the specific contribution of individual kings to the religion's spread. This paper addresses that gap by examining how Nana Osei Kwadwo, Nana Osei Kwame, Nana Osei Bonsu and Nana Agyemang Prempeh II supported the Muslims who served their courts through charms and amulets, prayers for warriors before battle, secretarial work, trade and medicine. The qualitative study draws on structured interviews with fifteen participants in Tafo, Suame and Asawase, triangulated with secondary historical sources. The findings show that each king made a distinct, identifiable contribution to Islam's growth in Asante, from Osei Kwadwo's administrative reforms to Prempeh II's grant of land for the Kumasi Central Mosque. The study concludes that these rulers were deliberate agents whose support for religion was consequential rather than incidental, and it contributes to African religious historiography by shifting analytical focus from the structural presence of Muslim communities in Asante to the personal agency of the kings who hosted them.

Keywords: Asante, kings, Islam, patronage, 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries.

INTRODUCTION

Using a qualitative research approach, this work explains how certain Asante rulers supported the Muslims who came to Asante in diverse ways and thereby spread Islam in the capital, Kumasi. The rulers considered are Nana Osei Kwadwo, Nana Osei Kwame, Nana Osei Bonsu and Agyemang Prempeh II. They were selected based on their special interest in Islam and their documented contributions to its spread and growth in Asanteland. Research has shown that Muslim communities from ethnic groups such as the Dagomba, Hausa, Mande, Gonja and Mamprusi came into contact with Asante indigenes in Kumasi.

In Ghana, scholars such as Antwi have written on Asante kings and their support for the development of Christianity in Kumasi.¹ Although some scholars, including Wilks, Hiskett, Levtzion and Owusu Ansah,

¹ Moses Antwi, "The Contribution of Asante Kings to the Growth of Methodism in Asante" (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2011).

have conducted extensive research on the history of Islam in Asante, little work has been done specifically on the contributions of Asante rulers to the spread of Islam in Kumasi. This paper sets out to fill that gap by exploring the numerous roles played by selected Asante rulers in the spread of Islam in Kumasi during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Disagreement among historians further motivates this study. Wilks and Owusu Ansah have different points of view on the precise era in which Islam took root in Asante. The former traces Muslim contact to the pre-imperial period,² and the latter locates it more firmly in the eighteenth century,³ yet neither treats the individual king as the primary unit of analysis. Existing accounts have, on the whole, overlooked the personal contribution of specific rulers, treating royal support for Islam as an undifferentiated feature of Asante statecraft rather than as a set of distinct decisions taken by named individuals with their own motivations and constraints. This paper offers a different reading, one that treats Osei Kwadwo, Osei Kwame, Osei Bonsu and Agyemang Prempeh II as agents in their own right, each responding to a particular set of circumstances, and in doing so it reconstructs a more granular account of how Islam became established in Kumasi than the structural narratives currently allow.

This study is guided by these key objectives:

1. To examine the specific ways in which selected Asante kings, namely Osei Kwadwo, Osei Kwame, Osei Bonsu and Agyemang Prempeh II, facilitated the spread and growth of Islam in Kumasi from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.
2. To assess the motivations, whether pragmatic, political or personal, that drove these rulers to accommodate and, at times, actively support Muslim settlers and clerics in the Asante capital.
3. To determine how the contributions of individual Asante kings relate to the broader conditions, including constitutional constraints, commercial ties and indigenous religious beliefs, that shaped the nature of Islam's growth in Kumasi.

The following questions underlie the study:

1. In what specific ways did selected Asante kings contribute to the spread of Islam in Kumasi from the eighteenth to the twentieth century?
2. What were the underlying motivations of these kings in supporting Muslims and their religious activities within the Asante Kingdom?
3. How did the Asante constitutional order and indigenous religious environment shape the limits and character of Islam's growth in Kumasi under royal patronage?

This paper's unique contribution lies in its focus on the individual Asante king as the unit of historical analysis. By tracing the specific decisions, reforms and personal relationships of four rulers in three centuries of Asante history, the study moves the discussion of Islam's growth in Kumasi away from an account of impersonal structural forces and towards a fuller understanding of the role of individual agency and royal patronage in the history of religion in Asante.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on Islam in Asante is substantial, though it has tended to focus on the structural dimensions of Muslim settlement and trade rather than on the deliberate role of individual kings in facilitating the religion's growth. Reviewed here under four broad themes, namely Muslim settlement, political patronage, trade, and the constitutional limits on royal authority, the literature also reveals disagreements over chronology, method and interpretation that this section returns to below.

² Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*, 1961.

³ David Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Asante* (The Mellen Press, 1991).

Muslim Settlement in Asante

Ivor Wilks, in his several works on Asante political history, identifies the presence of Muslim communities in the Asante court from the eighteenth century, noting that rulers valued their services as scribes, advisors and providers of spiritual protection. Wilks establishes that Asante policy towards northern Muslim traders was, for much of this period, one of calculated tolerance and active patronage rather than mere coexistence.⁴

Wilks draws on the diplomatic dispatches and manuscript collections assembled by Joseph Dupuis during his 1820 mission to Kumasi to reconstruct the networks of Muslim Wangara traders who had settled in the Asante capital.⁵ Wilks argues that Dupuis's encounter with the Wangara community offers an unusually detailed window into the organisation of Muslim commercial and clerical life in a non-Muslim kingdom during this period. The Wangara, who had for generations served as the principal conduit for the kola and gold trades across the western Sudan, were already a firmly established presence in Kumasi by the time Dupuis arrived. Wilks's reading of the Dupuis papers reveals that these Muslim traders maintained their own internal governance structures, including senior clerical leadership, and were in regular audience with the Asantehene. The article therefore supplements the existing literature on Muslim settlement in Asante by identifying Wangara influence as a distinct and organised strand within the broader Muslim presence, rather than treating all Muslim settlers as an undifferentiated community.

Jibrail Bin Yusuf examines the primary source itself with fresh analytical attention, assessing how Dupuis framed the Muslim presence in the Asante court and what his narrative reveals about the intersection of Islam, trade, and royal politics.⁶ Bin Yusuf identifies a pattern in which Dupuis's observations, though shaped by European diplomatic interests, consistently register the prestige and practical influence enjoyed by Muslim clerics and traders at the Asante court. The chapter draws attention to Dupuis's accounts of Muslim literacy, the employment of Arabic-literate secretaries, and the Asantehene's evident reliance on Muslim spiritual specialists before and during military campaigns. Crucially, Bin Yusuf cautions against reading Dupuis uncritically, noting that his account reflects the concerns of a British consul trying to negotiate treaty rights through Muslim intermediaries. Read alongside other sources, however, the *Journal* remains the most detailed single-source account of the Muslim community in Kumasi at the start of the nineteenth century. Bin Yusuf's evaluation reinforces the central argument of this present study, that the Asante kings' engagement with Muslim specialists was purposive rather than incidental.

Scholars, including Rattray and Sarpong, writing broadly on Asante religion, provide the necessary cultural context for understanding why Asante rulers were open to the services of Muslim specialists. The belief in protective spiritual forces was already deeply embedded in Asante religious life, making the Muslim's amulets and prayers a readily intelligible addition to the existing repertoire of spiritual protection.⁷ Victoria Agyare Appiah's doctoral work on syncretic beliefs and cultural practices in Kumasi is among the more recent scholarly contributions that document in granular detail how Islam became woven into the fabric of Asante court life.⁸

Political Patronage and Islam

Sey argues that after King Osei Kwadwo's reforms, some of the Muslim scholars were recruited to official positions, in particular, Alim Abu Bakr as Kyeame.⁹ This administrative reform undertaken by Osei Kwadwo paved the way for Muslims to have influence and dominance in the Asante Palace in Kumasi. Sey further mentions the names of some influential Muslim leaders in Kumasi such as Muhammad-Al Ghambah, Mallam Sallau and Alfa Dan Tano during the 18th and 19th centuries. Sey's work highlighted the support King Osei

⁴ Ivor Wilks, *The Positions of Muslims in Metropolitan Ashanti in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Clarendon Press, 1978).

⁵ Ivor Wilks, "Consul Dupuis and Wangara: A Window on Islam in Early Nineteenth-Century Asante," *Sudanic Africa* 6 (1995): 55–72.

⁶ Jibrail Bin Yusuf, "Dupuis' Discourse on Asante in the 19th Century: An Evaluation of the Islamic Themes in Journal of a Residence in Ashantee (1824)," in *The Asante World* (Routledge, 2021), 129–50.

⁷ Robert Sutherland Rattray et al., "Religion and Art in Ashanti," 1927.

⁸ Victoria Agyare Appiah, "Islam in Asante: A Study of Selected Syncretic Beliefs and Cultural Practices in the Kumasi Metropolis" (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2020).

⁹ Mark Sey, "Muslim Community in Ghana: The Contemporary Scene," *Journal of Shariah* 5, no. 2 (1970): 249–258.

Kwadwo gave to the Muslims who were domiciled in Kumasi during the 18th and 19th centuries, and so the contribution of some of the Asante Kings was in focus. Sey's work is relevant for this study because it focuses on the contribution of some Asante Kings: Osei Kwadwo to the development of Islam in Kumasi.¹⁰

David Owusu Ansah has treated the talismanic tradition of nineteenth-century Asante in detail, documenting how Muslim clerics manufactured amulets and charms that were believed to protect the king and his soldiers in battle.¹¹ His work situates the Asante kings' interest in Islam within a broader pattern of pragmatic religious engagement rather than theological conviction, a distinction this paper finds useful and seeks to develop further.

Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann used archaeological ethnography to examine how nineteenth-century Islamic talismans continue to circulate and carry meaning in contemporary Asante, while also reconstructing the original conditions of their production and use.¹² Engmann establishes that Islamic talismans, prepared by Muslim merchant-clerics using Quranic inscriptions on paper folded and sewn into leather pouches, travelled the trans-Saharan trade routes and entered Asante as part of the same commercial networks that brought Muslim traders into Kumasi. Consumed by non-Muslim Asantes alongside the indigenous protective repertoire, these objects served multiple purposes: warding off enemies, ensuring long life, treating illness, and above all providing warriors with spiritual protection in battle. Engmann's work speaks directly to the role of Muslim specialists in the Asante court examined in this paper, particularly the manufacture of the *batakari* and other war-related amulets that the Asante kings procured from their Muslim clerics. Her findings, grounded in both archival research and engagement with living custodians of these objects, confirm that the demand for Islamic talismans among the Asante was not marginal but was embedded in the political and military life of the kingdom. The article also complicates the picture by noting that the permissibility of such objects is contested within Islam itself, a tension that was already present in the nineteenth-century Kumasi Muslim community.

Islam and Trade

Similarly, Nathan I. Samwini documents the role of Muslim traders and scholars in the growth of Islam across Ghana, noting that the kola trade served as a primary conduit for Muslim penetration into the Asante heartland.¹³ Wilks's separate analysis of Asante policy towards Hausa traders, discussed further below in relation to the kola economy, corroborates this picture of commerce as a channel for religious contact rather than merely an economic relationship.

Religion and Constitutional Authority

David Owusu-Ansah situates the Asante case within a broader comparative framework that draws on the contrasting experiences of two major African kingdoms in their encounters with Islam.¹⁴ Owusu-Ansah argues that the Asante constitutional order, with its checks on royal power exercised through the council of chiefs, made it structurally resistant to any attempt by an individual king to impose Islam as a state religion. Buganda, in contrast, operated under a more absolutist political arrangement that allowed the Kabaka greater latitude to manoeuvre the kingdom toward religious transformation. The article thus explains, partly on constitutional grounds, why the Asante kingdom never underwent the kind of top-down Islamisation that some rulers in the wider region achieved. Osei Kwame's deposition, which is examined in this paper, is for Owusu-Ansah a paradigmatic illustration of constitutional constraint at work: the Asante state's structural resistance to religious imposition came from the very institutional fabric of the kingdom, not merely from

¹¹ Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Asante*.

¹² Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann, "Efficacious Texts: Unraveling Nineteenth-Century Islamic Talismans in Asante (Ghana)," in *Timbuktu Unbound: Islamic Texts, Textual Traditions and Heritage in West Africa* (Springer, 2023), 93–122.

¹³ Nathan Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*, vol. 7 (LIT Verlag Münster, 2006).

¹⁴ David Owusu-Ansah, "The State and Islamization in 19th Century Africa: Buganda Absolutism versus Asante Constitutionalism," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Journal* 8, no. 1 (1987): 132–43.

popular opposition. This comparative insight is important for the present study because it establishes that the kings examined here operated within a constitutional environment that shaped and limited how far their personal sympathy for Islam could translate into state policy.

Read together, these strands of literature converge on the claim that Muslim specialists became integrated into Asante court life through channels of trade, patronage and administration, but they diverge in emphasis and method. Wilks and Owusu Ansah rely primarily on documentary and archival sources, including colonial-era travel accounts by Bowdich and Dupuis, whose descriptions of Muslim life in Kumasi were shaped by European diplomatic interests rather than by direct engagement with the Asante or Muslim communities themselves.¹⁵ In contrast, Agyare Appiah and Engmann draw on oral testimony and material and archaeological evidence respectively, a methodological shift that this paper's own reliance on structured interviews seeks to extend. There is also a chronological disagreement running through the literature, evident in Owusu Ansah's and Wilks's differing accounts of when Islam first reached Asante, that later sections of this paper revisit. What remains largely absent, however, is a focused account of individual kings as agents of Islamic spread, particularly in Kumasi, the capital of Asante. Most studies treat the Asante court's relationship with Islam as an institutional or structural matter. This paper addresses that gap by examining four specific rulers and the concrete decisions each made that facilitated Islam's growth in Kumasi.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is suited to the historical and interpretive character of the inquiry. The choice of qualitative methodology reflects the nature of the research problem. This is because the contributions of Asante kings to the spread of Islam are best understood through the testimony of informed community members and through engagement with historical secondary sources, not through quantifiable data.

The study was carried out over one year, from January to December 2023, in three suburbs of Kumasi: Tafo, Suame and Asawase. These areas were selected because they have a predominantly Muslim population and represent communities with a long historical connection to Islam in the Asante Kingdom. The sampling strategy was purposive. A total of fifteen participants were selected based on their knowledge of the history of Islam in Asante. They comprised eight males and seven females, ranging in age from 55 to 90 years. The participants included Aimaams (Islamic congregational leaders), Islamic propagation leaders, Mallams (teachers) and members of the Manhyia Palace community, both Asante royals and non-Asante royals who are well-versed in the history of Islam in Asante. The rationale for limiting the sample to fifteen participants was the researcher's need for in-depth engagement with highly knowledgeable informants rather than a broad but shallow survey.¹⁶ This rationale follows the widely accepted principle in qualitative inquiry that the adequacy of a sample rests on the richness and relevance of the data it yields rather than on its numerical size, and interviewing continued until successive sessions were no longer producing substantially new information, indicating that an acceptable level of thematic saturation had been reached.

Data was collected through one-on-one structured interviews. A single standardised set of interview questions was administered to all participants, ensuring a consistent focus across the sessions and enabling a fair comparison of responses. Each interview lasted approximately forty minutes. The language medium of communication was Asante-Twi, as all informants were fluent in it, and the researcher recorded responses through detailed note-taking. Tape recording was initially intended but was not possible, as some interviewees were reluctant to be recorded for reasons they preferred not to disclose. The data collection

¹⁵ T Edward Bowdich, "Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee: With a Statistical Account of That Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa," (*No Title*), 1819; Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee. Comprising Notes and Researches Relative to the Gold Coast, and the Interior of Western Africa; Chiefly Collected from Arabic MSS. and Information Communicated by the Moslems of Guinea...* (Colburn, 1824).

¹⁶ Jan Reed, Susan Procter, and Sarah Murray, "A Sampling Strategy for Qualitative Research," *Nurse Researcher* 3, no. 4 (June 1996): 52–68, <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.3.4.52.s6>.

method was therefore adapted to the respondents' comfort, in keeping with the ethical principle of voluntary participation.

The research design used for this study is descriptive, or the narrative approach. This approach was used because the interviewees described the contribution of the selected Asante Kings to the spread of Islam in the form of a narrative. This is in line with Paulkinghome's view, which suggests that research designs suitable for qualitative research are exploratory, case study and descriptive (also known as narrative).¹⁷

Data Analysis

The interview notes and secondary historical sources were thematically analysed. Each set of notes was read repeatedly and manually coded to identify recurring ideas relating to the four selected kings, the services Muslims rendered to them, and the motivations attributed to royal support for Islam. These codes were then grouped into broader themes corresponding to the specific form each king's patronage took, namely administrative recruitment, spiritual and military protection, trade and diplomatic support, and the provision of physical space for worship. The same thematic framework was applied to the documentary and secondary sources consulted, allowing oral testimony to be read alongside, and checked against, the existing historical record on each king.

Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation in which the interview data were cross-checked against relevant secondary sources on the history of Islam in Asante, including published monographs, journal articles and theses. This triangulation strengthens the reliability of the findings by testing oral accounts against documentary evidence. Credibility was further strengthened through member checking, in which preliminary interpretations of the interview material were shared with selected participants for verification and correction, and through peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with Asante historiography, who reviewed the emerging themes for plausibility and bias. An audit trail of interview notes, coding decisions and analytical memos was maintained throughout the study to allow the research process to be traced and scrutinised. Ethical considerations observed in this study included informed consent, the right to withdraw, and the protection of participants' identities where requested.

The Asante

Before turning to the findings, this section situates the study in the broader historical and religious context of Asante society, tracing the identity of the Asante people, their indigenous beliefs, and the arrival and early growth of Islam in Kumasi, developments against which the specific contributions of the four selected kings, examined in the section that follows, can be properly understood.

It is not easy to trace the origins of a people, and this is certainly true of the Asante, whose history rests largely on oral tradition and myth. According to Nana Sarfo Kantanka, the cultural historian of the current Asantehene Osei Tutu II, the Asante ethnic group consists of seven states,¹⁸ a tradition or fact supported by J.K. Fynn, who notes that the Asantes originated from a hole at Asantemanso, a few miles south of Kumasi.¹⁹ King Osei Tutu I created the Asante *Amanfoɔ Nson* (The Seven Asante States)²⁰ to wage war against the oppressive rule of Denkyira,²¹ a union that Okomfo Anokye, priest and advisor to Osei Tutu, sealed by conjuring down from the sky the Golden Stool on which the union's spirit and strength were said to depend.²² Asante has, from time immemorial, been a centralised state structured around a dual political system of male and female offices, resting on the matrilineal descent that Warren and Fortes identify as the foundation of Asante social organisation.²³ This centralised and constitutionally structured kingdom,

¹⁷ Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany NY: State Uni of New York Press, 1988).

¹⁸ Nana Sarfo Kantanka, Interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah, 07-08-2023.

¹⁹ John Kofi Fynn, *Asante and Its Neighbours, 1700-1807*, (Longman Group Ltd, 1971).

²⁰ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 125.

²¹ Adu-Boahen., *Topics in West African History* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980), 71 - 72.

²² Fynn, *Asante and Its Neighbours, 1700-1807*, 28.

²³ Dennis M Warren, *The Akan of Ghana: An Overview of the Ethnographic Literature* (Accra: Pointer Ltd, 1986), 36; Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and Marriage among the Ashanti, African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 254.

expanding through conquest and governed through a dual political system, is what the Muslim communities discussed in this paper encountered when they came into contact with Asante, and it is this same constitutional structure, examined further below, that shaped how far individual kings could translate their personal sympathy for Islam into state support.

Some Asante Indigenous Beliefs

The Asante have maintained indigenous beliefs in God, ancestors, lesser deities and spiritual forces despite centuries of contact with Christianity and Islam. At the apex of this belief system is the Supreme Being, known by such names as Onyankopon, Twedumpon, Borebore and Otumfoɔ, whose existence is affirmed in Asante oral tradition, proverbs, songs and daily conversation rather than through formal instruction.²⁴ Below the Supreme Being, the Asante recognise ancestors, who are believed to continue their existence in *asamando*, the Land of the Dead, and on whom the living depend for guidance and protection, subject to conditions of a worthy life and a natural death.²⁵ The Asante also recognise lesser deities, or *abosom*, regarded as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and human beings, inhabiting natural features such as rivers, rocks and mountains and served by their own priests and priestesses.²⁶ This existing repertoire of spiritual protection, mediated through ancestors and divinities and directed towards concerns such as protection in war, healing and guidance, is what made the Muslim clerics' prayers, charms and amulets a readily intelligible addition to Asante religious life rather than a foreign imposition, and it is this receptivity, rooted in indigenous belief, that the following sections show the Asante kings drawing upon and extending through their support for the Muslims resident in Kumasi.

Islam in Asante

Islam's Contact with Asante

Scholars have varied positions on the timing of Islam's arrival in the Asante region. Some argue that it predates the establishment of the Asante Kingdom. Arhin maintains that non-Akan elements from the hinterland, in particular Mande-speaking peoples, were already settled in the area before the Asante Kingdom took shape.²⁷ Bari notes that historians such as W.H. Huydecoper, T.E. Bowdich, W. Hutchinson, J. Dupuis, Ivor Wilks and W. Hutton, all of whom visited Kumasi, attest to the presence of Muslims in the Asante capital during that period.²⁸ In contrast, Owusu Ansah places the arrival of Islam in Asante in the 18th century, and Wilks shares this position, noting that the Europeans who came to the Gold Coast between 1816 and 1820 observed the established presence of Muslims in Asante.²⁹

Many scholars observe that the Muslims who came to Kumasi rendered numerous services to the Asante rulers and the wider population. These services earned the domiciled Muslims a high standing in Asante society. The kings of the 19th century were particularly drawn to the charms and amulets manufactured by Muslims, which they regarded as essential to success in the territorial wars of expansion. This drew the Asante rulers to invite Muslims from Central Sudan to their court.³⁰ The significance of Muslim presence in Asante is further borne out by the use of Muslims in the Asante army and by the importance of the Asantehene's *Batakari* (*fugu* or smock embossed with leather pouches containing Quranic

²⁴ Kofi A Busia, "The Ashanti of the Gold Coast," *African Worlds* 197 (1954): 190–209; Peter Sarpong, "Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture," (No Title), 1974; Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, (No Title), 1978.

²⁵ Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*; Kwame Gyekye, "African Cultural Values: An Introduction," 1996.

²⁶ Louise Muller, *Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana: An Explanation of the Persistence of a Traditional Political Institution in West Africa*, vol. 2 (LIT Verlag Münster, 2013); Sarpong, "Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture."

²⁷ Kwame Arhin, "The Structure of Greater Ashanti (1700–1824)," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 1 (1967): 65–85.

²⁸ Osman Bari, "A Comprehensive History of Muslims & Religion in Ghana: Covers Leadership & Its Perceptions, Advent of Islam and Growth of Muslim Communities in Ghana," 2009.

²⁹ Victoria Agyare Appiah and Edmund Abaka Abaka, "The Contribution of Muslim Women's Associations to the Development of Kumasi, 1970–2019," *Abibisem: Journal of African Culture and Civilization* 8 (2019): 77–99.

³⁰ Appiah and Abaka, "The Contribution of Muslim Women's Associations to the Development of Kumasi, 1970–2019."

writings, believed to protect the wearer from bullets in battle), which predated the British defeat of the Asante in 1874.³¹

Historians record that during the mid-eighteenth century, several Muslims residing in Kumasi produced and distributed Islamic prayers and amulets as protective and curative devices.³² Asantehene Osei Tutu Kwame (1804-23) showed particular interest in Muslim amulets and prayers, and several Muslims served at the palace.³³ Indigenous ritual sacrifices and Muslim amulets and prayers were regarded as contributing to Asante national security. Arabic manuscripts collected from Muslims in 19th-century Asante reveal that the Muslims of Kumasi possessed esoteric knowledge from which they made charms capable of curing leprosy, bed-wetting, smallpox, sexual impotency and other common ailments.³⁴

Bin Yusuf identifies several patterns of Muslim settlement in Kumasi. The first is gradual infiltration. Muslim traders were likely present in the geographical area of present-day Asante before it became an empire, with the Dyula regarded as the primary agents of Islamisation.³⁵ The second pattern is that of the northern migrant community, comprising people who came from Banda, Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja. Third came the Hausa Regiment. Hausa mercenary soldiers were stationed in Asante to support the Asante during the Sagranti War, and the majority remained after hostilities ended, settling in Kumasi as traders.³⁶ Several factors accounted for the influx of Muslims into the Asante Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries. The most significant was the Asante kings' belief that Muslim prayers and amulets could protect their soldiers from gunshots and bad omens in battle. Owusu Ansah has documented this in detail.³⁷ Samwini further notes that the rapid expansion of the kola trade in the 1800s attracted merchants and princes from Hausa towns and Bornu to Kumasi.³⁸ Edmund Abaka traces a direct link between the introduction of Islam into Asante and the arrival of Hausa Muslim traders in Gonja, who later made their way to Kumasi, the heartland of the "kola kingdom." Salaga served as the midway point for Hausa land and Asante, with Hausa merchants trading in kola, salt, spices and enslaved persons.³⁹ The Muslims who came to Kumasi eventually dominated the kola and cattle trades, and the Asante rulers actively invited Muslim merchants from the north to transact business in the kingdom.⁴⁰

Anti notes that there were two groups of spiritual specialists operating in the Asante court: the Asante *Abenfo* (powerful men) and the *Nkramfofo* (Muslims). The first group included medicine men renowned for the preparation of war medicine. The second, the *Nkramfofo*, had an important role in war efforts: they provided spiritual protection for the king, conducted daily Quranic readings at the palace during war preparations to reveal the mysteries of the Supreme Being, and prepared charms and amulets to decorate the king's battle dress, making him invisible to attack, invulnerable to knife blows and gunshots, and capable of vanishing in critical moments. They could also foretell the outcomes of campaigns and promise the release of war captives.⁴¹

One development that aided the growth of Islam in Kumasi was the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Nuolabong, citing Debrunner, notes that when the trade was abolished in 1807, the Asante could no longer export their enslaved people, who were then reabsorbed into society as labourers and domestic

³¹ Appiah and Abaka, "The Contribution of Muslim Women's Associations to the Development of Kumasi, 1970-2019."

³² Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

³³ David Owusu-Ansah, "Prayer, Amulets and Healing," 2000.

³⁴ Owusu-Ansah, "Prayer, Amulets and Healing."

³⁵ Jibrail Bin Yusuf, "A Critical Study of Muslim Leadership in Ghana" (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 2018).

³⁶ Enid Schildkrout, "Islam and Politics in Kumase: An Analysis of Dispute over the Kumase Central Mosque," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 52, no. 2 (1974): 114.

³⁷ Owusu-Ansah, "Prayer, Amulets and Healing."

³⁸ Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*.

³⁹ Edmund Abaka, "'Kola Is God's Gift': Agricultural Production, Export Initiatives & the Kola Industry of Asante & the Gold Coast c. 1820-1950," 2005.

⁴⁰ Ivor Wilks, "Asante Policy towards the Hausa Trade in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (Routledge, 2018), 124-41.

⁴¹ A.A. Anti, *Kumase in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, 1700-1900* (Accra: Damage Control Ltd, 1996).

workers, some of whom were Muslims. Nuolabong further states that the Basel Mission opened a station in Kumasi to provide for these people.⁴²

Islam and Asante Kings

Adu-Boahen believes that Muslim traders visited and settled in Kumasi, and that they had influence at the Asante court during the reign of Asantehene Osei Kwame.⁴³ Osei Kwame's relationship with the Muslims and his intention to govern Asante along Islamic lines paved the way for the spread of Islam in Kumasi. Bin Yusuf records that by 1870 it was widely known that an Asante king had converted to Islam.⁴⁴ This report led the Asante to depose Osei Kwame, out of fear that the population of every locality would be compelled to follow the religion of their overlord. This was consistent with the position of Wilks, that the government of a country follows that of its chief: if the chief is a Muslim, the country is *dar-al-salam*; if a pagan, it is a pagan country.⁴⁵ Osei Kwame's closeness to Islam and its practitioners thus won him admiration among some Asante indigenes, even as it provoked alarm among others.

Osei Kwame is reported to have sought Muslim prayers particularly in times of crisis, when the traditional priests or necromancers were unable to resolve problems to his satisfaction. He also allowed Muhammad Al-Ghamba, the head of the Kumasi Muslim community, to maintain close access to him, in gratitude for the prayers Al-Ghamba had made for the Asante armies before they campaigned against Fanteland. This relationship eventually paved the way for the establishment of a school at which Al-Ghamba presided over seventy pupils, both Muslim and non-Muslim children. King Osei Tutu Kwame permitted the Muslims, within their means, to take several Asante pagans into their homes for religious instruction, though the number of such converts was limited. The king sent some Asante boys for such religious training and prohibited several festivals at which it had been customary to shed blood. Osei Kwame's plan to establish an Islamic civil code to govern Asante ultimately led to his abdication.⁴⁶

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented and thematically analysed in the sections that follow, beginning with the specific contributions of each of the four selected kings and followed by the oral testimony gathered from study participants.

Selected Asante Rulers and the Spread of Islam in Asante

The history of the spread of Islam in Kumasi, the capital of Asante, cannot be told adequately without examining the roles of Osei Kwame, Nana Osei Kwadwo, Nana Osei Bonsu and Nana Agyemang Prempeh II. These kings were selected for this study due to their documented contributions to the spread and growth of Islam in Kumasi. During the 18th and 19th centuries, they supported Muslims in diverse ways regarding the spread of Islam in Kumasi.

Nana Osei Kwadwo (1764-1777)

Osei Kwadwo succeeded his uncle, Kusi Obodum, in 1764 and continued the expansion of the Asante Kingdom through warfare, as his predecessors had done. His fighting spirit and resilience earned him the nickname "Osei Koawia," which literally means Osei who fights in broad daylight.⁴⁷ Osei Kwadwo made several contributions to the spread of Islam in Asante. Islam had gradually entered Asante socio-political life

⁴² Aloysius Nuolabong, *Islam and the Dagaaba Region the Upper West Region of Ghana C.E. 1400-2008* (Takoradi: St. Francis Press Limited, 2015).

⁴³ Adu-Boahen., *Topics in West African History*.

⁴⁴ Yusuf, "A Critical Study of Muslim Leadership in Ghana."

⁴⁵ Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*.

⁴⁶ Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*.

⁴⁷ Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History* (Buokrom-Kumase: Cita Press Ltd., 2004).

and later penetrated the royal house when three rulers recognised the literacy resources that Islam offered and drew close to the Muslim clerics in Kumasi.⁴⁸

The administrative reforms introduced by Nana Osei Kwadwo upon his accession to the golden stool opened the way for Muslims to serve in various capacities in the Asante state. These reforms resulted in the recruitment of Muslims to serve the administration, and Nana Osei Kwadwo's efforts produced a significant Muslim presence at the Asante court.⁴⁹ Knowledgeable figures such as Alim Abu Bakr Kyeame and his son Sa'aid Bamba were among those recruited to record the history of Asante in Arabic.⁵⁰ Nana Osei Kwadwo was also invited by a faction in Dagomba during the civil war to lend military support. The faction he backed prevailed, and Dagomba subsequently became part of the Asante Kingdom. Since Islam was already rooted in Dagomba, its incorporation into the Asante state brought the religion into direct contact with the Asante kingdom.⁵¹ Nana Osei Kwadwo's northern expedition and his administrative reforms thus brought more Muslims into Asante, increasing the size of the Muslim community in Kumasi and thereby giving Islam a firmer footing in the capital.⁵²

Nana Osei Kwame (1777-1799)

Asantehene Osei Kwame was the first king to introduce Muslims formally to the palace. According to Bari, Osei Tutu Kwame was the only son of the late Mamponghe, Nana Sarfo Kantanka, who had himself been influenced by Islam. On his father's advice, Osei Kwame was accompanied by a hundred Muslims to Kumasi when he ascended the throne, to support him in a spiritual capacity.⁵³ These Muslims were attached to the *Nsumankwaa Gyasewa* clan, who were responsible for preparing medicine for the protection and fortification of the Asantehene. Osei Kwame's reliance on Muslim spiritual protection allowed Muslim specialists to have close contact with non-Muslims and created conditions favourable to the spread of Islam in Asante. Some scholars regard Nana Osei Kwame as a believer at heart, given his intimacy with Muslim figures and his appreciation for the prayers they offered for the Asante armies before the campaigns against Fanteland. This relationship allowed him to establish a school where he presided over seventy pupils. The school was attended by both Muslim and non-Muslim children. King Osei Tutu Kwame permitted the Muslims, within their means, to receive Asante pagans into their homes for religious instruction, though the number was limited. He also sent some Asante boys for religious training and prohibited the shedding of blood at several festivals.⁵⁴

Nana Osei Bonsu (1800-1824)

Osei Bonsu succeeded his uncle, Osei Kwadwo, and continued the reforms established by him and by Opoku Ware I for the expansion of the Asante Kingdom. However, his reforms were not as favourable to the Muslims as those of his predecessors, particularly Osei Kwadwo. Some scholars record that Osei Bonsu was initially hostile to the Muslims.⁵⁵ Bin Yusuf, citing Levzion, notes that Osei Bonsu's aversion had no doctrinal basis; it appears to have been rooted in a fear of Muslim dominance within the Asante Kingdom.⁵⁶

Osei Bonsu later engaged Muslims in the Asante socio-political system, following the precedent set by his predecessors. He protected Muslim prisoners out of fear of the wrath of Allah and was closely associated with Muslim advisors who wielded considerable influence in Kumasi. He developed a chancery

⁴⁸ Yusuf, "A Critical Study of Muslim Leadership in Ghana."

⁴⁹ Yusuf, "A Critical Study of Muslim Leadership in Ghana."

⁵⁰ Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁵¹ Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*.

⁵² Osei Kwadwo, *An Outline of Asante History*.

⁵³ Bari, "A Comprehensive History of Muslims & Religion in Ghana: Covers Leadership & Its Perceptions, Advent of Islam and Growth of Muslim Communities in Ghana."

⁵⁴ Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*.

⁵⁵ Bowdich, "Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee: With a Statistical Account of That Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa."

⁵⁶ Yusuf, "A Critical Study of Muslim Leadership in Ghana."

for the diplomatic services of Asante *Nkramofoo*, Muslims whose records were kept in Arabic.⁵⁷ His eventual support for the Muslims was partly motivated by the military assistance he needed from them in the war against the Gyaman, whose king, Adinkra, had replicated the golden stool and diverted the annual tribute to the Sultan of Kong in present-day Ivory Coast. Osei Bonsu permitted the Muslims to practise their religion and proselytise, though they won a limited number of converts.⁵⁸ He did not neglect to seek Muslim prayers; he turned to them particularly when the traditional priests and necromancers were unable to resolve matters to his satisfaction.

It is reported that Osei Bonsu came close to converting to Islam but never abandoned his indigenous religion. He is recorded as saying that the Quran is a strong book and that he loved it because it is the book of the great God, that it had done him good, and that he therefore loved all the people who read it. The Muslims present instantly prayed aloud to glorify Allah upon hearing this, and the king extended his arms upward as if receiving a blessing.⁵⁹ Bowdich records that Nana Osei Bonsu kept a special talisman manufactured by Muslims in his bedroom and that he expressed his belief in the Quran for protection.⁶⁰

Nana Sir Osei Agyemang Prempeh II (1931-1970)

The consolidation of any religion depends partly on a permanent place for worship. The Muslims who settled in Kumasi came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including the Dagomba, Hausa, Mande and Gonja, yet they worshipped together under one Imam, Muhammad-al-Ghambah. The original mosque was built near the Kumasi Central Market, the present location of the Zongo Police Station.⁶¹ In Islamic practice, a mosque serves not only as a place of worship for the Friday Jumuah prayers and the dissemination of information, but also as a centre of governance, a welfare facility and a venue for intellectual, social and political activity.⁶²

During one of Otumfuo Sir Agyemang Prempeh's customary inspections of Kumasi, he found that a road was blocked. Upon enquiring, he was told that Muslims were praying in the street. He invited Amadu Baba, a personal friend, and asked why they were praying outside. Amadu Baba replied that it was due to a lack of worship space. All the Kumasi Muslims at the time used two small mosques in Aboabo and Alabar, and the resulting overcrowding caused traffic congestion at every Friday Jumuah prayer.⁶³ Nana Agyemang Prempeh II then gave the Muslims a large plot of land at Asawase. When they sought to build on it, however, they were informed that the land had been reserved by city planners for schools and other infrastructure.⁶⁴ Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the current Asantehene, has recounted how Muslims came to the Asante Kingdom and the support they provided for its expansion,⁶⁵ noting that Islam in Asante began during the era of his grandfather, Osei Kwame, who was surrounded by Muslims in the palace, and that these Muslims served as Arabic-language record-keepers of Asante history and events.⁶⁶ Otumfuo further stated that his uncle, Nana Agyemang Prempeh II, eventually gave the Kumasi Muslims a piece of land at Akwatialine for the construction of a mosque.⁶⁷ Mahamadu Bawumia, the former Vice President of the Republic of Ghana (2017-2024), praised the Asantehene Agyemang Prempeh for releasing land to the Muslims and commended the Asante kings for their support of the Muslim community, particularly Agyemang Prempeh II, after

⁵⁷ Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee. Comprising Notes and Researches Relative to the Gold Coast, and the Interior of Western Africa; Chiefly Collected from Arabic MSS. and Information Communicated by the Moslems of Guinea...*

⁵⁸ Wilks, *The Positions of Muslims in Metropolitan Ashanti in the Early Nineteenth Century*.

⁵⁹ Dupuis, *Journal of a Residence in Ashantee. Comprising Notes and Researches Relative to the Gold Coast, and the Interior of Western Africa; Chiefly Collected from Arabic MSS. and Information Communicated by the Moslems of Guinea...*

⁶⁰ Bowdich, "Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee: With a Statistical Account of That Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa."

⁶¹ Douglas Frimpong-Nnuroh and Mariam Afumwaa Osei, "A Political Architecture of the Leadership Crisis of the Kumasi Central Mosque from 1970 to 2013," *The Asante World*, 2021, 243–54.

⁶² Spahic Omer, "Rationalizing the Permissibility of Mosque Decoration," *Journal of Islamic Architecture* 4, no. 1 (2016): 14–26.

⁶³ Agyare Appiah, "Islam in Asante: A Study of Selected Syncretic Beliefs and Cultural Practices in the Kumasi Metropolis."

⁶⁴ Okyere Siabour Ishmael, Programmes Director, Ghana Muslim Mission, Ashanti Regional Branch, Interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah, 05-01-2023.

⁶⁵ Personal observation during the commissioning of the Kumase Central Mosque, Akwatialine-Kumase, 03-03-2023.

⁶⁶ Personal observation during the commissioning of the Kumase Central Mosque, Akwatialine-Kumase,

⁶⁷ Personal observation during the commissioning of the Kumase Central Mosque, Akwatialine-Kumase.

commissioning the reconstructed Kumasi Central Mosque to the Ummah (Islamic) community on Friday, 03-03-2023. Bawumia further lauded Nana Osei Tutu II for following the path of his predecessors in maintaining a cordial relationship between the kingdom and the Muslim community.⁶⁸

Ahmadu Baba, who contributed substantially to the construction of the mosque, was a wealthy transport owner, though most of the construction funds were raised through a public campaign.⁶⁹ A building plan brought from Turkey was eventually set aside, and the leaders produced their own design for the mosque.⁷⁰ The completed mosque has served the spread of Islam in Kumasi by providing a permanent venue for Friday prayers, Ramadan celebrations and all other Muslim community activities.

Presentation of Participant Views

Asante King

The findings presented here draw on structured interviews conducted with fifteen participants in Tafo, Suame and Asawase between January and December 2023. The participants included Aimaams, Mallams, Islamic propagation leaders and members of the Manhyia Palace community. Their responses illuminate the historical record with oral testimony and living memory, confirming and occasionally nuancing the secondary literature consulted in this study.

On the question of Nana Osei Kwadwo's administrative reforms and their bearing on Muslim settlement, Harun Abdul Mumin, the Asante Regional Imam and the Asantehene's personal Imam, stated:

It is not widely known outside the palace community that Osei Kwadwo was the one who first opened the gates of the administration to the Muslims in a deliberate way. Before him, Muslims were here, yes, but they were traders and occasional advisors. He brought literate Muslims into the record-keeping of the kingdom. He needed Arabic writers because the kingdom was expanding and needed permanent records. That decision changed everything. It was the first time a king gave Muslims an official role, and that gave Islam a foothold in the affairs of the state that no subsequent king could easily undo.⁷¹

This testimony aligns with Wilks's documentation of the appointment of Alim Abu Bakr Kyeame and his son Sa'aid Bamba to record Asante history in Arabic under Osei Kwadwo's administration.⁷² It also extends Wilks's point by emphasising the institutional permanence of this decision. Once Muslims entered the bureaucratic life of the court, subsequent kings inherited an apparatus in which Muslim specialists were structurally embedded rather than merely tolerated. Abdul Mumin's remark that "no subsequent king could easily undo" this arrangement speaks to Owusu-Ansah's argument about constitutional path dependency in Asante's relationship with Islam.⁷³

Nana Sarfo Kantanka, who serves as cultural historian to the current Asantehene Osei Tutu II, addressed the personal dimension of Osei Kwame's relationship with Islam:

Osei Kwame's father was himself sympathetic to Islam. When Osei Kwame came to the throne, he brought a hundred Muslims with him. These were not traders. They were spiritual men, attached to the Nsumankwaa Gyasewa, the medicine-makers of the palace. Osei Kwame trusted them more than he trusted the traditional necromancers because he had seen their prayers work. The chiefs did not depose him because of Islam as such. They deposed him because they feared that the whole kingdom would follow the king's religion, and that was a danger to the constitutional balance. If the Asantehene became a Muslim, every sub-chief would feel pressure to convert.⁷⁴

⁶⁸Personal observation during the commissioning of the Kumase Central Mosque, Akwatia-line-Kumase.

⁶⁹Harun Abdul Mumin, Asante Regional Imam and Asantehene's Personal Imam, Interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Suame, Kumase, 19-12-2023.

⁷⁰Issah Sapashini, Interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Asawase, Kumase, 05-04-2023.

⁷¹Harun Abdul Mumin, Asante Regional Imam and Asantehene's Personal Imam, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Suame, Kumase, 19-12-2023.

⁷²Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*.

⁷³Owusu-Ansah, "The State and Islamization in 19th Century Africa: Buganda Absolutism versus Asante Constitutionalism."

⁷⁴Nana Sarfo Kantanka, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah, 07-08-2023.

Sarfo Kantanka's explanation of the deposition maps closely onto the constitutional argument advanced by Owusu-Ansah, who holds that the Asante system of governance contained structural safeguards against any single ruler redirecting the religious orientation of the state.⁷⁵ His point about the hundred Muslims brought to the palace corroborates Bari's account of Osei Kwame's accession, where this group is described as spiritually attached to the royal protective establishment.⁷⁶ The phrase "he trusted them more than he trusted the traditional necromancers" is particularly significant. It suggests that Osei Kwame's relationship with Islam was rooted in a perceived efficacy of Muslim prayer and spiritual protection, a pragmatic religious orientation rather than doctrinal conviction. This distinction, first drawn by Owusu-Ansah in his work on the talismanic tradition, gains fresh texture through this oral testimony.

Yaa Agyemang Prempeh, a member of the Asante royal family who participated in the study, addressed the reign of Nana Osei Bonsu and the specific question of how a king known initially for hostility to Muslims eventually became one of their more significant patrons:

Osei Bonsu was a warrior king. He was afraid that if the Muslims got too strong inside the kingdom, they would eventually answer to a Sultan outside it, not to him. That fear was reasonable given what he had seen with Osei Kwame. But he was also a pragmatic man. When the war with Gyaman came, and he needed Muslim prayers and amulets for his soldiers, he could not afford to keep them at arm's length. He invited them closer. He kept a special talisman in his bedroom. He said openly that the Quran was the book of the great God and he loved those who read it. That is a remarkable statement from someone who never actually converted.⁷⁷

This account is consistent with Bowdich's record of Osei Bonsu's personal use of Muslim talismans and his public expressions of regard for the Quran.⁷⁸ It is also consistent with Bin Yusuf's reading of Dupuis's *Journal*, which records the king's close association with Muslim advisors during the diplomatic exchanges of 1820.⁷⁹ Yaa Agyemang Prempeh's observation that Osei Bonsu's initial hostility was "reasonable given what he had seen with Osei Kwame" adds a layer of political calculation to the historical record. What she describes is a king who learned from his predecessor's deposition that visible personal attachment to Islam carried constitutional risk, and who therefore managed his relationship with Muslim specialists carefully, keeping them close in practice while maintaining public distance from the faith. Engmann's work on the circulation of Islamic talismans in Asante is relevant here. The *batakari* and bedroom talisman referenced by Bowdich and recalled by Yaa Agyemang Prempeh were objects of exactly the kind Engmann documents as prepared by Muslim merchant-clerics for Asante royal use.⁸⁰

Okyere Siabour Ishmael, Programmes Director of the Ghana Muslim Mission's Ashanti Regional Branch, addressed the land granted by Nana Agyemang Prempeh II and the construction of the Kumasi Central Mosque:

Prempeh II was different from the earlier kings in that the issue for him was not charms or battle prayers. By his time, the kingdom was under colonial rule, and the old wars were finished. What he did was give the Muslims permanence. A mosque is not just a prayer house. It is an institution. Once you have land and a building, you have a community with a centre. Prempeh II gave the Muslims of Kumasi that centre. He did it because he saw them praying in the streets and blocking traffic. But the

⁷⁵ Owusu-Ansah, "The State and Islamization in 19th Century Africa: Buganda Absolutism versus Asante Constitutionalism."

⁷⁶ Bari, "A Comprehensive History of Muslims & Religion in Ghana: Covers Leadership & Its Perceptions, Advent of Islam and Growth of Muslim Communities in Ghana."

⁷⁷ Yaa Agyemang Prempeh, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah, 04-04-2023.

⁷⁸ Bowdich, "Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee: With a Statistical Account of That Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa."

⁷⁹ Yusuf, "Dupuis' Discourse on Asante in the 19th Century: An Evaluation of the Islamic Themes in Journal of a Residence in Ashantee (1824)."

⁸⁰ Engmann, "Efficacious Texts: Unraveling Nineteenth-Century Islamic Talismans in Asante (Ghana)."

effect went far beyond traffic management. Every Friday prayer, every Ramadan, every community meeting since then has happened because of that land.⁸¹

Siabour Ishmael's account draws a sharp distinction between the pragmatic religious calculations of the earlier kings and the infrastructural character of Prempeh II's contribution. His framing echoes Frimpong-Nnuro and Osei's argument about the central mosque's political architecture, namely that the provision of a permanent worship space transformed the Muslim community in Kumasi from a collection of resident traders and clerics into an institutionally anchored constituency with claims on public space.⁸² The dismissive remark "beyond traffic management" also gestures towards the observation in this paper that Prempeh II's motivation was partly situational, triggered by a specific incident of street congestion during Friday prayers, but that the outcome had lasting structural significance. Wilks's account of the Wangara's established governance structures, examined earlier in this paper from his 1995 article, provides useful historical depth here. By Prempeh II's time, the Muslim community in Kumasi had developed internal organisational capacity that made a permanent mosque a natural institutional next step rather than a novelty.⁸³

Issah Sapashini, interviewed in Asawase, addressed the question of how the Muslim community in Kumasi relates to its own history of royal patronage:

We do not forget that it was the kings who provided space for us here not because they converted, but because they needed us. They needed our prayers before battles, our literacy for their records, our trade for their economy. Every king found a different use for the Muslims. Osei Kwadwo needed writers. Osei Kwame needed spiritual protection. Osei Bonsu needed prayers for war. Prempeh II needed to clear the streets. But the result in each case was the same: Islam grew. We grew. That is not an accident. That is the mercy of Allah working through the decisions of kings who did not even know they were spreading the faith."⁸⁴

Sapashini's synthesis is striking in the way it reframes royal patronage as an instrument of providential rather than merely political history. Although this theological framing is not the analytical language of this paper, it captures something that the scholarly literature also registers: the cumulative and often unintended character of royal contributions to Islam's growth in Kumasi. Sapashini's identification of a distinct motivation for each king- literacy, spiritual protection, military prayer, physical space- corresponds closely to what this paper documents in its four case studies. It also resonates with the argument made by Ivor Wilks that Asante royal policy towards Muslims was one of "calculated tolerance and active patronage," a phrase that Sapashini's testimony fills with concrete human texture.⁸⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has identified several areas requiring further scholarly attention. Future research should engage more deeply with the competing historical interpretations of the timing of Islam's arrival in Asante, particularly the divergence between those who place it before the establishment of the kingdom and those who date it to the 18th century. Additionally, the question of the relationship between indigenous Asante religious beliefs and the selective adoption of Muslim practices deserves sustained analytical treatment. Scholars should also consider examining other Asante rulers who have not been included in this study, so that the scope of royal involvement in the spread of Islam in Asante may be more comprehensively understood. It is further recommended that oral sources be pursued more systematically, given the unique knowledge that elder Muslim community members in Kumasi carry about the history of these relationships.

⁸¹Okyere Siabour Ishmael, Programmes Director, Ghana Muslim Mission, Ashanti Regional Branch, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah, 05-01-2023.

⁸²Frimpong-Nnuroh and Osei, "A Political Architecture of the Leadership Crisis of the Kumasi Central Mosque from 1970 to 2013."

⁸³Wilks, "Consul Dupuis and Wangara: A Window on Islam in Early Nineteenth-Century Asante."

⁸⁴Issah Sapashini, interviewed by Victoria Agyare Appiah in Asawase, Kumase, 05-04-2023.

⁸⁵Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*.

Beyond future research, the findings carry practical implications for several audiences. Historians of Asante and of Islam in West Africa stand to benefit from a more systematic incorporation of oral testimony from elder Muslim community members alongside the archival record. Heritage institutions, including the Manhyia Palace Museum and the Kumasi Central Mosque, could draw on this history in developing exhibitions and public programming that document the long relationship between Asante royalty and the Muslim community. Religious scholars and leaders in the Islamic and traditional Asante communities may find in this history a resource for interfaith dialogue that emphasises a shared record of accommodation rather than conflict. Finally, educational curricula dealing with Asante history and Ghana's religious pluralism would benefit from including the contribution of individual Asante kings to the spread of Islam, a dimension of the kingdom's history that is presently underrepresented in school and university syllabi.

CONCLUSION

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, Asante rulers such as Osei Kwame, Agyemang Prempeh II, Osei Kwadwo and Osei Bonsu supported the Muslim communities in Kumasi in diverse ways, largely in reciprocity for the services and benefits they received from the Muslims. Despite their own indigenous beliefs and practices, these kings came out openly to support the Muslims in the Asante Kingdom. Their support took many forms: patronage of Muslim charms and amulets for protection, the employment of Muslims in the royal courts, the engagement of literate Muslims to record Asante history, and the permission granted to Muslims to receive Asante converts into their homes for religious instruction. Some of these rulers grew personally close to Islam, and through their actions they created conditions under which the practitioners of Islam could widen their influence, through the invitation of Muslim scholars to Kumasi and the building of Islamic schools that served the educational interests of Asante children and Muslim settlers alike.

Muslim traders, principally the Mande and Hausa, also spread Islam alongside their commercial activities in Kumasi. Ultimately, the support provided by the Asante kings created the conditions under which Islam gained a firm root in Kumasi, the capital of Asante. This paper has demonstrated that the role of individual kings was not incidental but deliberate and consequential, and that the history of Islam in Asante is inseparable from the history of these rulers and their choices.

This study contributes to African religious historiography by demonstrating that the spread of Islam in Kumasi cannot be adequately explained through structural or institutional accounts alone, but requires attention to the deliberate choices of individual rulers operating within, and sometimes against, the constitutional and religious constraints of their office. More broadly, the findings speak to the relationship between religion and political authority in African kingdoms generally, suggesting that royal patronage, even where it stops short of conversion, can be decisive in determining whether a minority faith takes root, grows, or remains marginal within a host society.⁸⁶ Further historical inquiry might usefully extend this analysis to other Akan states and to other West African kingdoms in which royal courts mediated the reception of Islam, testing whether the pattern of pragmatic accommodation identified here for Asante holds more generally across the region.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Dr. Victoria Agyare Appiah is a lecturer at the Centre for African and International Studies in the University of Cape Coast. She possesses a PhD and master of Philosophy in Religious Studies (Islam and Syncretism from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, a bachelor's degree in religious studies from the University of Cape Coast and a diploma in Education from the University of Education, Winneba (Kumasi Campus). Her research areas include: Islam and Syncretism (Asante Culture), History of Islam in Asante and History of Asante Muslims.