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New wine in old calabashes?

The Akuapem case 1843–1874

The image of the new wine is a well-known biblical metaphor.¹ According to the Gospel Jesus used it to refer to the disruptive quality of his presence to the status quo: No one fills new wine into old goats' or sheep's skins (Mt 9,17; Mk 2,22; Lk 5,37f.). The skin will not be able to endure the pressure created by the fermenting process. With regard to the activities of Protestant missions in 19th and 20th century Africa the disruptive not to say the destructive quality of their evangelism is part of an almost stereotypical popular image. In academic debates, though, it has been challenged at the latest since the 1980s. A calabash might be more resilient than a goat's skin... Books and authors ranging from Jacob Ajayi and Lamin Sanneh to John Peel have emphasised the agency of people in West Africa in their encounters with Christian missions.² These accounts can be read as narratives of a reconfiguration of collective local African identities complementing the shaping of a new, Christian identity in the context of modernity.

In Ghana, one of the important Protestant mainline churches, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), traces its foundation back to the activity of the Basel Mission.³ The area where the Basel Mission was first active today is located in South-Eastern Ghana. It was then part of what was known as the Gold Coast, a name which at first referred to the coast and then to a shifting and gradually increasing territory in its hinterland. In 1839 the home board in Basel had called back from the Gold Coast the last surviving missionaries Andreas Riis, and his wife Anna née Wolters, because eight of the ten people

¹ This article is based on research carried out in the context of a PhD project on the Basel Mission and women in 19th century Ghana. Christine Lienemann played an important role in it, not least as a supervisor who encouraged the author to establish contacts outside the fold of theology – with African studies. The thesis was accepted by the Phil.-Hist. Fakultät of the University of Basel in 2007. A book by the hand of the author with the same subject is currently forthcoming at Brill to be published in 2010.

² J. Ajayi: *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841–9. The making of a new elite*, London 1965; L. Sanneh: *West African Christianity. The religious impact*, London 1983; J.D.Y. Peel: *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington 2000.

³ N. Smith: *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835–1960*, Accra 1966; P. Jenkins: *Afterword: The Basel Mission, the Presbyterian Church and Ghana since 1918*, in: J. Miller: *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control. Organisational contradictions in the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast, 1828–1917*, Grand Rapids 2003, 195–222.

sent out since 1828 had died. In 1835 Andreas Riis had moved from the coast to the hinterland, to Akuropon, the capital of the small Akan state of Akuapem. Back in Basel Riis advocated the continuation of this missionary activity and in 1842 the home board decided to resume work on the Gold Coast – with a new concept. In the West Indies it recruited settlers among Christian congregations that the Moravians had established with former slaves. From the Basel Mission's side this was motivated by the idea that such a group could significantly help in the missionary endeavour especially in Akuapem, the Basel Mission's first hinterland (mission field). For one the (West Indians), as they were called, should present an example of Christianity as lived by (African) people. At the same time the Mission's home board thought they would be better able to stand the climate in West Africa and would also help the European missionaries with manual labour. Jon Miller summed up the Mission's long-term goal with, and the intended role of, the West Indians: «... the intention was no less than the creation of an entirely new social structure around which stable communities built on a European model could be organized. In the 1840s this meant going as far as (repatriating) black families to the Gold Coast from the West Indies ...».⁴ More precisely the intention was to build African Christian congregations on a model that the Basel home board had decided would be fitting for them.

In Ghana the popular – indeed notorious – icon of Basel Mission policy *vis à vis* the political entities on the Gold Coast is the (Salem), the Christian quarter. It comprised the (mission house), church and school as well as the compounds of the Christians. It represents, in the eyes of many Ghanaians, the image of a strict separation of Christians from the so-called traditional community, the town.⁵ Yet the (Salem) also can be designated as recourse. It offers room for manoeuvre exactly because it is a space exempt from the prescripts governing the surrounding community. So the (Salem) can be seen as playing a potentially ambiguous role with regard to what was already (there). Ambiguity, Michelle Gilbert has argued, is at the heart of society, politics and religion in Akuapem, at the same time potentially creative and de-stabilising.⁶ If, indeed, in local perceptions the (Salem) displays traits of ambiguity, then this might reflect that it has become (local) also.

In 1983 in his seminal article John Middleton gave an overview of the history of the relationship between first the Basel Mission and later the Presbyterian Church on the one side, and Akuapem on the other.⁷ He sketched how

⁴ J. Miller: *The Social Control of Religious Zeal*, New Brunswick 1994, 116.

⁵ Jenkins: *The Basel Mission* (fn. 3), 215.

⁶ M. Gilbert: *Sources of Power in Akuropon-Akuapem. Ambiguity in Classification*, in: I. Arens, W. Karp (ed.): *Creativity of Power*, Washington 1989, 59–90.

⁷ J. Middleton: *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Christianity in a Ghanaian Town, Africa* 53 (1983) 2–17.

in the course of time the Presbyterian Church (PCG) there has become part of the local establishment. Still while the PCG today, as Middleton describes, is part of local society and polity, being Presbyterian also carries with it the notion of a distinct collective identity. The following pages will look at the beginning of its history.

Relating community and polity in the Basel Mission and in Akuapem

The Basel Mission's endeavours in Akuapem were situated in a pre- to early colonial situation. Establishing the mission station in Akuropon, the Akuapem capital, was a complex process. It involved the ability of the two relevant protagonists, the European missionaries and the Akuapem office-holders, to negotiate a framework accommodating the perceptions and precepts of both sides. From the missionaries' point of view their aim was to settle in Akuapem and to build an exemplary 'African' Christian community. Since the mission station was located on Akuapem soil, from the Akuapem side it will have been viewed as being under the authority of the Akuapem government, and specifically also under the authority of the actual community where it was located. The basic issue at stake, then, was how both sides related the mission community as a socio-political sub-structure to the Akuapem state as meta-structure.

The European missionaries, women and men, conceptualised the situation in Akuapem through their perception of their own religious community 'at home' and its relationship to society and state at large. It was shaped by the motif of the small church, *ecclesiola*, within the larger church, *ecclesia*. This was a template for German-speaking non-separatist pietists' critical relations to any polity in which they lived, as well as expressing the pietists' self-perception as agents for (positive) change within it. In the missionary discourse of the Basel Mission the concept of the small, pious, exemplary and potentially critical community was extended overseas. In short, the Basel Mission intended to establish 'African *Korntals*', to use the image introduced by Karl Rennstich and Paul Jenkins some thirty years ago.⁸ The criteria by which European missionaries, female and male, assessed any political structure was how far it subscribed to the core values of the Mission or at least provided a context which

⁸ P. Jenkins: Villagers as Missionaries. Wuertemberg Pietism as a 19th century missionary movement, *Missiology* VII (1980) 425–432 (430). Jenkins refers to: K. Rennstich: Mission und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der von der Basler Mission geleisteten wirtschaftlichen Hilfe in Afrika und Asien in den Jahren 1850–1884, unpublished Dissertation, University of Basel 1976, 349–352.

was conducive for this kind of special missionary community and socio-religious reform efforts.

Turning now to the state of Akuapem, it presented itself to the people living in it as a composite social and political entity. This was reflected in its political and military structures and was imaged in the way its history was recounted.⁹ The original populace of Akuapem up to today is considered to be Guan. The Guan came under Akan overrule, first from Akwamu then from Akyem. The victorious Akan group from Akyem is said to have settled in Akuropon and made it the capital of a state elaborated on Akan patterns. The majority of towns and villages in the state remained Guan, even though some adopted the Akan language of the successive overlords.

As opposed to the patrilineal Guan, Akan people trace descent matrilineally. In Akan societies, it is the mother from whom the *blood* comes and it is the matriline (*abusua*) which defines a *family* and is associated with ancestors (*asaman*). The patriline (*agyabosom*) is the source of *character* and associated with deities (*abosom*).¹⁰ The state is headed by a king, the *Omanbene*, or for Akuapem the *Okuapembene*. The *Omanbene* was and is chosen from the royal clan, in Akuapem the Asona clan. The *Ohemmaa* or Queen Mother up to this day has the crucial office of naming an eligible candidate, thus providing him with legitimacy. In his election the representatives of the Akuropon lineages and, in a second step, representatives of those groups considered to form distinct sub-units within the state (and which form the various wings of its army) also participate. These sub-units reflect the composite character of the state. Through them communities which to their own perception shared a collective identity were integrated into the meta-structure of the Akan state while retaining a non-Akan or non-Akyem identity and keeping non-Akan societal, political and religious structures to a greater or lesser degree.¹¹

So the Akuapem state which the Basel Mission group met in 1843 was a political meta-structure shaped according to Akan patterns, but in various ways a composite community, prone to conflict, but also able to comprehend new groups from the outside.

⁹ M. Gilbert: No Condition is Permanent. Ethnic construction and the use of history in Akuapem, Africa 67 (1997) 501–533; id.: The history of Akuapem 1730 to 1850, in: M.A. Kwamena-Poh: Government and Politics in the Akuapem State 1730–1850, London 1973. – Sonia Abun-Nasr provides an in-depth analysis of Akuapem politics for the years of conflict after 1835, paying special attention to the role of the Basel Mission (S. Abun-Nasr: Afrikaner und Missionar. Die Lebensgeschichte von David Asante, Basel 2003).

¹⁰ A concise and brief overview over these categories in: Gilbert: Sources of Power (fn. 6), 62ff.

¹¹ Gilbert: No Condition (fn. 9); Abun-Nasr: Afrikaner und Missionar (fn. 9).

Founding the mission station in Akuropon 1843–1844

For the Basel Mission group in 1843, permission to stay in Akuapem demanded a decision by Akuapem office-holders whether they would accept the newcomers, and if so under what conditions. In Akuapem the political, the military and religious spheres were interdependent. The Akuapem authorities allowed the Christians to stay, on condition that they adhered to certain prohibitions which catered to the prescriptions of locally important deities. Some inhabitants, though, may have agreed to these arrangements in the short term, expecting the deities to dispose of the missionaries by having them killed by predators. But in the first years after 1843 religion does not appear to have stood in the fore-ground as a matter needing urgent solutions, rather the process of negotiation centred around political issues.

When the Europeans and West Indians arrived in Akuropon on June 18th 1843 they found the place which had once been allocated to Andreas Riis in a state of decay – his original house in disrepair, the coffee plants and orange trees overgrown.¹² The political situation in Akuapem and especially in Akuropon, its capital, was suffering from the after-effects of a civil war, and was still tense, as they were soon to discover. Yet the King and Elders had left the town to meet with the Basel Mission group before it reached Akuropon in what they evidently felt was an appropriate gesture of welcome. Sonia Abun-Nasr cautiously argues that the interest on the side of Akuropon office-holders in the Basel Mission presence was caused by a vague interest in modernisation.¹³ It is, at any rate, clear that the presence of the Basel Mission was an experiment for both parties involved. It was the first time that a substantial mission group – rather than Riis as an individual with a few servants – had attempted to settle in the hinterland of the Gold Coast and the first time that a state there had agreed to such a project. The presence of the Mission was accepted under certain conditions the authorities thought necessary to safeguard the spiritual basis of the state. The construction of stone-houses was prohibited locally, as was the hunting of one species of monkey. Members of the mission group were not to enter the sacred groves.

The missionary group first set to work to clear the place previously allocated to Andreas Riis and to establish the necessary buildings. As had already happened when Andreas Riis had been in Akuropon for the first time in 1835,

¹² If not stated otherwise, the following sketch is based on the account given in the Station Chronicle, which during these years was kept by the missionary Johann Georg Widmann. (Archive Mission 21, holdings of the Basel Mission [*henceforth ABM*] D-5,11 *Stationschronik* Akropong). It also draws on Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9); Kwamena-Poh: *Government and Politics* (fn. 9); Gilbert: *No Condition* (fn. 9).

¹³ Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9), 73ff.

two men from Akuropon offered to build a house, this time for Johann Georg Widmann.¹⁴ One of them was Kwaw Kutanku, the captain of the local group of young warriors (*asafɔ*). Kwaw was a supporter of the former *Okua-pembene*, Addo Dankwa. His involvement was probably a signal that some specific factions in Akuropon were interested in the Mission's presence. But it also signals that at least one of the local parties was intending to secure the allegiance of the mission group.

To build a house for the mission group Kwaw Kutanku and his companion first brought sticks or thin branches, which they had cut from trees. These pieces of wood were put together to form the basic structure of the house, and they were then covered with clay (swish). For the roofing grass was used. A month after his arrival Johann Widmann could move into this house or hut, which consisted of one narrow room. The mission group also cut down trees to produce shingles for future roofing. Almost immediately after arrival they also began planting. A fence for a kitchen garden was erected.

While the group was busy establishing the physical structure of the future station, the spiritual and intellectual objectives of their being there were not neglected. On their plot the mission group regularly assembled for devotions, at first in the open air under the trees. Since the project of establishing a school initially met with reluctance from the side of Akuropon people, the group first set up a school for the children of the West Indian settlers.

The teacher in the school was Alexander Worthy Clerk from the settler group, although he was officially under the supervision of a European missionary. The language of instruction was English. Like the European missionaries the immigrants had yet to learn Akuapem-Twi. The school was to provide the instruction which the West Indians and the Europeans both considered appropriate for Christian children. But it was also part of the concept of mission by example. This school should show that Christianity and schools were not only for Europeans but for «African Men» also – and for «African Women» and «African Children».

In the first months after their arrival in 1843 the example of the West Indians did not induce the inhabitants of Akuropon to send children to school. When Johann Georg Widmann attempted to gather children for that purpose, some boys did signal their interest but the Akuropon Elders were reluctant to give them permission to attend. In October 1843, in a formal meeting of

¹⁴ In 1835 Andreas Riis had been told by the *Omanbene* that a house would be built for him, but when to his thinking it took too long, he began to build one himself, and interfered with the one being built by local people. This allegedly is at the root of his local nickname *osiadan* (house-builder). On this episode and its potential meanings: P. Jenkins: Der Skandal fortwährender interkultureller Blindheit. Ein bescheidenes Opfer vor dem Stuhl des Akwapim Königs Addow Dankwa I, ZMiss 23 (1997) 224–236.

missionaries and Elders, the matter was resolved.¹⁵ The *Okuapembene* and the office-holders were prepared to support the project, once it was clear that the children would not spend all their time with the Mission, and would not be the missionaries' 'slaves' or enter the missionaries' possession. With regard to one point the Akuropon notables were adamant: They expected the mission school to teach English. This, according to Widmann, was a wish the townspeople had voiced before.

The clearly pronounced interest in English shows that in Akuropon people were aware of the changing situation on the coast. During the early decades of the 19th century, if Akuapem was considered to be associated with any of the European powers present on the coast, it was Denmark and not Britain. But British trade and power was increasing, whereas the Danish presence was receding. Therefore to insist on learning English can be seen as an Akuapem investment in future resources for economic and political relations.

Ten days after the meeting with the missionaries the *Omanbene* met them again to decide on a suitable location for the school. In late November 1843 people from Akuropon were working on the construction of the school house. In February 1844 the people from Abonse sent grass for roofing, and the Akuropon Elders themselves helped to thatch the building. In May 1844 the school-house, which also was to serve as a chapel, was inaugurated. A few months later, in September 1844, the missionaries commenced a school with nine boys from Akuropon. But by November the pupils had already dispersed again, due to the political situation.¹⁶

*Culmination and end of Akuapem civil war and the crisis
on the mission station – 1844/45*

In Akuapem the years between 1835 and 1845 were politically tense, with outbursts of outright violence and with spells which can only be described as civil war. Of the European missionaries Andreas Riis was especially embroiled in the conflict, a development which had begun already during his first residence there in the 1830s.¹⁷ By 1844, from a local perspective, Riis was no longer seen in the role of a mediator, as he regarded himself, but as a partisan.¹⁸ He was actively supporting Owusu Akyem, one of the men eligible for the office of *Omanbene*, and on several occasions Riis' actions must have appeared to challenge the authority of the actual *Okuapembene*, Nana Adum Tokori. In

¹⁵ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1843, J.G. Widmann 06.11.1843.

¹⁶ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1844, J.G. Widmann 09.12.1844.

¹⁷ Jenkins: Skandal (fn. 14).

¹⁸ Abun-Nasr: Afrikaner und Missionar (fn. 9), 61f.

1844 Owusu Akyem had become a serious aspirant for the succession to Adum, when he was killed by partisans of Adum Tokori in Christiansborg. Representatives of the Danish Government were involved in the incident, as were local people.

The violent death of Owusu Akyem had severe repercussions for the Basel Mission in Akuapem. It not only meant the loss of an influential supporter. People in Akuropon blamed Andreas Riis for the death, because allegedly Owusu Akyem had gone to Christiansborg to meet his opponent Adum Tokori on Riis' advice. Implicitly Riis' colleague Widmann agreed that the European missionaries had misjudged the situation when he complained about the lack of actual power held by the Danish government on the coast, which had resulted in its not being able to protect Owusu Akyem.

In the years culminating in the killing of Owusu Akyem the towns and villages of Akuapem, and not least Akuropon as capital, had suffered severely and people had left the area. In the wake of this the Danish representatives sent the ruling *Omanbene*, Adum Tokori, into exile in Denmark and obliged his successor to swear fealty to the Danish government. All parties agreed on Nana Kwadade I, because he did not belong to any of the factions involved in the conflict. In December 1845 he was enstooled.

After 1844/45, while the Danish claimed hegemony over Akuapem, their power was in fact limited. They had asked the proper local protagonists whom they would choose as a successor for Adum Tokori. Although the Danish Governor came for an official instalment ceremony for the new *Omanbene*, Nana Kwadade I, Danish representatives were not present at the ceremonial swearing of allegiance. In this ceremony the new head of the Akuapem state was acknowledged in his office by the Elders and wing-chiefs heading sub-units of the state and, in case of war, of the army. Finally while for decades people reckoned with the existence of political power in the coastal settlements, the fear of an Asante invasion also loomed large in their consciousness right up into the 1870s, at least. Thus in 1864 the headmistress of the boarding school in Aburi reported the acute fears of her pupils, who claimed that if the Asante came the European missionaries would have to flee.¹⁹ It appears that the Akuapem authorities tried to steer a course between the rising power of the Europeans on the coast and potential claims from the Asante Empire.

When in 1845, following repeated difficulties, the Basel home board called Andreas Riis back to Europe, this will probably have been interpreted in Akuropon as the Mission removing a key figure who had contributed to the fission affecting the state.²⁰ The impression might have been reinforced by the

¹⁹ ABM, D-1,16 Aburi Nr. 32, Julie Mohr, 08.10.1864.

²⁰ Miller: *Missionary Zeal* (fn. 3), 129–134.

appointment of Johann Georg Widmann as senior missionary. He had been less involved and after he assumed office as *Praeses*, i.e. as head of the missionaries, the policy of the group became more reticent with regard to Akuapem politics. Because of this, and the more peaceful political situation which developed after 1845, Akuapem office-holders may have become more inclined than they had been to accommodate the mission group.

The years after 1844/45 – establishing the mission community

In the first years after 1844/45 the relationship between Akuapem office-holders, especially in Akuropon, and the mission group appears to have been one of cautious co-existence, which gradually gave way to fresh experiments on both sides, fresh conflicts and more negotiations about the Basel Mission presence.

After the drama of 1844/1845 the European missionaries in Akuapem had reason to be cautious with regard to the role the powers on the coast might play in securing or endangering their position there. For decades they were under the impression that they could not rely on European «power» for support in cases of conflict, not even to enforce certain European key values, like the abolition of so-called human sacrifice. In addition it was clear that the powers on the coast could not and would not help with what the Mission regarded as advancement and reform in Akuapem. In 1861 Johann Dieterle explained to the Home Board, that the government officials (*Beamte*) on the coast were only interested in personal advancement and in filling their own coffers.²¹ But he also mentioned a pragmatic reason why the missionaries did not seek their intervention: the Europeans had not sufficient power and influence to enforce anything unilaterally in the interior. Also for the missionaries the Chiefs and Elders of Akuapem were, in the 1860s, still regarded as the «government» (*Obrigkeit*) in biblical terms.²² This discussion was not confined to the Gold Coast. As at least one of the Gold Coast missionaries knew, the role of European commercial and political involvement overseas was a matter of debate in mission circles in India at this time.²³

²¹ ABM, D-1,11, Aburi Nr. 22, *Jahresbericht* (Annual Report) pro 1860, J.C. Dieterle 21.01.1861.

²² A general reflection of the relationship between missionaries and politics was published in an article in *«Evangelisches Missionsmagazin: Der Missionar und die Politik*, EMM N.F. 5 (1861) 249–265.

²³ The Basel missionary, Wilhelm Locher, when he was sued by a British trader for libel in Christiansborg, referred to a conflict in India between the colonial government, lobbyists and the missionaries which he saw as paradigmatic (Proceß und Verurtheilung des Missionars Lang in Kalkutta, EMM N.F. 5 [1861] 533–584).

While the missionaries were reluctant to seek intervention from the coast, this does not imply that they approved of realities in Akuapem nor does it imply that they never attempted to intervene in specific cases. But this they preferred to do locally. In 1858 Johann Dieterle, then in charge of the freshly re-established mission station in Aburi, strove to prevent the ritualised killing of a Krobo war captive. But when he realised that his efforts were going to be in vain he refrained from seeking support from the coast.²⁴ From the side of Akuapem office-holders the proximity to the coast might have made it a sensible move to incorporate representatives of the Europeans into the state, especially with Asante looming on the other side. So in 1859 in a conflict between the representative of the British and Akuapem the missionaries were employed by the Akuapem leadership as intermediaries. But they found that the role as go-betweens put them in a precarious position and raised the governor's suspicion, that they were perhaps too strongly partisans of Akuapem.²⁵ On the whole the attitude of Akuapem office-holders towards the missionaries was ambivalent, while they might use the missionaries as intermediaries to secure Akuapem interests *vis à vis* the powers on the coast, they also were wary of a potentially disruptive role of this group in Akuapem affairs.

The Europeans were not only useful for political reasons alone. Already in 1844 at least one of the missionaries was referred to as *osofo*.²⁶ When, exactly, this term came to refer to all ordained missionaries is not clear, but it must have been rather early. *Osofo* (pl. *asofɔ*) was a hereditary priest who «owned» one of the major deities (*abosom*), powers which were perceived to have come from «outside». According to Michelle Gilbert, Akuapem authorities encouraged the acquiring of new sources of spiritual power.²⁷ Thus when they termed the missionaries *asofɔ*, this indicates that some people in Akuropon, at least, saw them as related to a new source of such power. This is further corroborated by some incidents after 1845.

In the years after 1845 the European missionaries and the community of the West Indians, gathered on the space allocated to them in Akuropon, gra-

²⁴ What Dieterle recorded of the killing, resonates with the accounts R.S. Rattray gave from Asante of what was called the «dance of death» (*atopere*). (ABM, D-1,9 Aburi, Nr. 8, J.C. Dieterle, 05.11.1858; R.S. Rattray: *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, Oxford 1927, 87ff.).

²⁵ ABM, D-5,11 *Stationschronik* (Station Chronicle) Akuropon, entries Sept.–Dec. 1859.

²⁶ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1844, Hermann Halleur 07.06.1844: Halleur reports that in Akuropon Riis was perceived as a merchant, Widman as an *osofo* (priest), and the West Indians as «slaves». On the significance of this statement: Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9), 83f. On *osofo*: Gilbert: *Sources of Power* (fn. 6), 73.

²⁷ Gilbert: *Sources of Power* (fn. 6), 70.

dually overturned some of the prohibitions originally placed on them. In 1848 they were not only allowed to use stone as a building material, they were actually encouraged to do so by one of the Elders, who even supplied the stones himself.²⁸ His son was with the Mission and he himself had, as a small boy, been with Dr. Isert on his plantation.²⁹ Also in all likelihood people from Akuapem will have observed Europeans and Euro-Africans living in stone houses on the coast, and maybe even had stayed in such buildings themselves. That the newcomers were encouraged to breach one of the local prohibitions can be interpreted as following the thought that the space where they did it was no longer considered to be related to the local deities already known, but to the spiritual power with which the missionaries associated themselves. Or it could mean that local people encouraged some religious experimenting, to find out about the issue – since they themselves were not directly involved the wrath any insulted deity would meet out to the actual perpetrators. The missionaries first used stone to put up one large building, which was to serve as a chapel and an abode for the trainee catechists. They also had smaller houses of stone built for the West Indians. No ill effects seemed to have resulted from this breach of taboo.

At the same time people in Akuropon observed not only that the missionaries survived, but that they were doing well with regard to their farming endeavours. Joseph Mohr, then in charge of the *Oekonomie*, had started a coffee farm, which in 1849 rendered a plentiful harvest, and the same held true not only for arrow-root, but also for their banana and plantain cultivation, which used a piece of land many local people considered as unsuitable and not good. When Mohr pointed someone from Akuropon to this success and said that it was due to his proper agricultural and horticultural technique, he earned the reply that it was so because the missionaries «served God», i.e. *onyame*, the Supreme Being in Akan religion.³⁰ Around the same time the first Akuropon families consented in a few scattered cases to have some of their offspring baptised.

The first persons from Akuropon to receive baptismal instruction were from a group of young men sent to the missionaries by the *Okuapembene*. Widmann asked them to inform their families of their intention to be baptised. On Christmas 1847 four received baptism, while one had to wait because the family objected. By July of the following year, however, he had obtained that

²⁸ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1848 Nr. 27, *Jahresbericht* (Annual Report) pro 1848.

²⁹ Paul Erdmann Isert visited Akuapem and set up an experimental plantation there in 1788 ([P.E. Isert], *Letters on West Africa and the slave trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's «Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia»* [1788], transl. from the German and ed. by S. Axelrod Winsnes, Oxford 1992 [= *Fontes historiae Africanae: series varia*, 7], *ibid.*, Appendix 3 on Frederiksnopel).

³⁰ ABM, D-1,3 Akropong 1850 Nr. 7, *Jahresbericht* (Annual Report) pro 1849.

consent and received baptism, too. Members of this small group were also among the first men to be trained as catechists. Prominent among them were the «princes», *abenemma*, i.e. descendants of an *Omanbene* in the male line – in matrilineal Akan state and society they were not eligible for hereditary offices, or only those linked to their mother's families. For this group the Mission offered a new career, in a few singular cases this was to include training in the Basel seminar – the most notable being David Asante.³¹ But as we read the letters which they wrote to the Inspector in Basel in 1851, their involvement with the mission community did not follow from new social and political options alone.³² They were also distancing themselves from the religious perceptions and practices of the people of Akuropon. What they wrote may, of course, have been to some extent a genuflexion in the direction of what they knew was expected from them in Basel. But their letters do, as we shall see, relate to the conceptualisations of local religion.

The group of young men, who had become Christians a few years earlier, discussed their changing religious affiliation and reinforced their arguments with experiences which they depict as proving to them that the deities were not as powerful as was assumed and as they themselves had previously believed. Two of them quoted the local saying that «God makes the book for the white man and fetish for the black men», but they also reported experiences which for Akuropon listeners will have given ground for speculation whether this saying really reflected the truth. One young man explained that some local people had expected the missionaries eventually to fall prey to predators.³³ Since powerful animals were customarily associated with deities, one can translate this statement by saying that some people in Akuropon had originally expected the deities to have the missionaries killed. Many of the missionaries who arrived in the 1840s did survive, and certainly none was the victim of a large predator. Another of the young men reported how he and others had entered the grove of the deity (*obosom*) Bosomptra in the Guan town of Abiriw, which is close by Akuropon. Thus they had violated a major prohibition of a deity who was, at the time, one of Akuapem's most important ones, and purportedly the *obosom* could have had them killed. They survived, but the priest of Bosomptra came to confront the missionaries about the incident. He demanded a cow for pacification, but this was refused. The priest then pre-

³¹ Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9), 75ff.; Middleton: *One Hundred and Fifty Years* (fn. 7), 4.

³² ABM, D-1,4a Nr. 15-17, *Briefe* (Letters) from David Dieterle (Asante), John Powell Rochester, William David Hoffmann (Irenkyi), Daniel Sekyama, Jonathan Palmer (Bekoe).

³³ On a similar approach to the first missionaries in Kwahu: V. Arlt: *Ein Leopard im Archiv der Basler Mission. Vom Kontakt mit Afrikanischer Geschichte*, 1997 (www.unibaszasb.ch/redakteure/arlt/Leopard.pdf).

dicted a drought as retribution from the *obosom*, yet only a few hours afterwards rain set in. Another of the trainee-catechists mentioned that he did not abide by the religious prohibitions in his family concerning food and drink. Yet he did not die or fall ill, even though his family was still expecting him to succumb to illness.

Even though the young men reported that their association with the Mission faced them with ridicule, criticism and disbelief, it is clear that there were also local attempts to conceptualise the Mission according to familiar religious practices. Baptism was contextualised with a local practice where the head of a person was touched with a powerful object by a priest and then the person was not allowed to carry head-loads anymore.³⁴ As has been discussed above, almost from the beginning the missionaries were termed *asofo* (sg. *osofo*), i.e. priests who «owned» a deity, which showed insofar analogies between Christianity and the cults of the deities as both were perceived to come from outside and both were sources of mystical power. Yet exactly because of this local conceptualisation, the emerging Christian communities also became part of the local religious cosmos with its high degree of pluralism.³⁵ Thus the notion of an exclusive religious identity which the European Basel missionaries intended to propagate was challenged almost from the start.

After the first baptisms of young men, five young women followed suit in 1853. These were the earliest beginnings of a local mission community. The first major conflict after 1845 took place in 1856 in Akuropon.³⁶ By then a fledgling mission community had developed consisting of roughly 90 persons, sub-divided into 60 communicants, 8 baptised people who were not yet communicants, 8 catechumens, 4 people who were excluded (i.e. under church discipline) and 20 children. Among the newly baptised was the first *paterfamilias* to turn to Christianity, Abraham Kwaku Sae who had been, at some time before his baptism, treasurer of the Akuapem state.³⁷

In May 1856 Akuropon Elders issued a law which fixed the prices for provisions sold to the Mission at a level which, it was alleged by the missionaries, prevented any profit accruing to the vendors, thus provoking a crisis by threatening to close off an important part of the Christian community's food supply. The missionaries attempted to negotiate with the Elders, but were not prepared to pay the sum the Elders expected as compensation for reopening

³⁴ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1848 Nr. 1, J.G. Widmann 03.02.1848.

³⁵ This is so until today: C. Omenyo: Pentecost outside Pentecostalism. A study of the development of Charismatic renewal in the mainline churches in Ghana, Zoetermeer 2002, 24.

³⁶ ABM, D-1,7 IV. Nr. 11, J.G. Widmann, Akropong 25.05.1856.

³⁷ ABM, D-1,7; IV. Nr. 49, *Jahresbericht* (Annual Report) Akropong pro 1856. P. Haenger: Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast. Towards an understanding of social bondage in West Africa, Basel 2000, 32–47

the question. The Elders then interdicted any sale of provisions to the missionaries. They also prohibited people from the town from giving food to relatives who were with the Mission. Finally they intended to intercept any supplies which might be sent to the mission station from outside. The situation was resolved, when Abraham Kwaku Sae donated the necessary sum and other Christians supplemented this with smaller contributions, asking the missionaries not to mention their names. After the money had been sent to the chief the interdict was revoked.

The Elders stated the reason for their embitterment clearly: The European representatives of the Mission had not given them clothing the previous Christmas, as they had been wont to do with their predecessors, and – the most beautiful girls of Akuropon were with the Mission and hence the Elders were prohibited from marrying them. That the Mission had not given them a present, which after well over ten years might have been considered customary, can be regarded not only as a material loss, but as a social and political affront. One can assume that it will have remained no secret in Akuropon that the Elders for once were left empty-handed by the Mission. The retribution, which at first sight might look rather severe, indicates the gravity of the offence from the point of view of the Elders, and how necessary it was for them to recover lost ground. Finally the reference to the 'beautiful girls' might translate into the acknowledgement of the Elders that they did respect some of the Mission's prohibitions, where it concerned people related to the Mission, and thus showing respect for the Mission's authority over them. But they expected the Mission, in return, not to challenge or in any way damage the Elders' authority either.

The local Christians showed active allegiance to the Mission in this crisis. But with respect to the office-holders they tried to operate covertly. One has every reason to doubt that in Akuropon, with its intricate social networks, the Christians' act will have remained an actual secret. And the actors will have been aware of this fact. Thus when they asked that their names not be mentioned, it probably meant that they did not want to come into a position where they might appear to challenge the authorities openly. Their action highlights the precarious position of potentially conflicting loyalties due to their association both with the Mission and with the existing political and social structures of power. One might go one step further and interpret the fact that the Elders then let matters rest as indicating that they were, in principle, prepared to carry on accommodating the mission community.

In the end one can speculate whether in this – and maybe parallel instances – local actors used their social skills to smooth over or to resolve problems created by the Mission as a European organisation with the ensuing ignorance and intransigency of its European actors. To what extent the leadership in Akuapem was aware of the complex structures within the Basel

Mission as a European organisation one can only speculate. One can assume that on a local level they will probably have sensed something of the problem at the latest during the difficulties which arose because of the Mission's so-called slave-emancipation in 1860 and the following years. In this the Home Board promulgated an appendix to the regulations governing congregational life which abolished 'domestic slavery' in the Basel Mission congregations. This decision was favoured only by a part of the European missionaries in Akuapem (and on the coast). The senior missionaries, especially, opposed this change of policy, while it was supported by young 'new-comers' who were backed by the Basel Home Board.³⁸ All in all partisanship and the problems of cohesion must have been familiar to both the missionaries and the Akuapem office-holders.

From the perspective of Akuapem state once it accepted the affiliation of people with the Mission, including the allegiances it implied, the issue at stake will have been to find ways of incorporating it into existing structures. In the process of dealing with the Basel Mission and the emerging missionary community Akuropon appears in a twofold role, as a town and as the capital of Akuapem. When the state recognised the Mission at the level of the King and his court, it did not follow that every single community in Akuapem would do the same, as these to some extent formed polities of their own and belonged to different specific military/political/cultural sub-structures of the state. Akuropon itself, while being the place where the palace of the paramount chief is located up to this very day, was and is also a town community. As such Akuropon was the place where the first hinterland mission station of the Basel Mission was established. It was the first community, where patterns evolved in which a Christian community could be incorporated into the existing political, societal and religious structures. Thus it served as a precedent for other communities in Akuapem. But it also could be the place, where in a case of conflict an appeal to the *Omanbene*, as head of state, would be heard.

The second and third major centres for Basel Christianity in Akuapem after Akuropon were Aburi, the town where the palace of the *Adontenbene*, the chief of the fore-guard of the army is situated, and Larteh(-Ahenease), where the *Benkumbene*, the chief of the left-wing has his seat. A missionary had been posted to Aburi already in 1847, but he withdrew in 1850. Aburi was re-established as a mission station in 1857 largely due to the initiative of the first local Christian, Edward Samson. According to his personal recollections his own turn to Christianity was owed to a process of religious experimenting and experience by which he felt claimed by the Christian God.³⁹ In Larteh

³⁸ P. Haenger: *Slaves and Slave Holders on the Gold Coast. Towards an understanding of social bondage in West Africa*, Basel 2000, 18–23.

³⁹ Edward Samson published a history of Akuapem, which also contains his life sto-

from 1853 on a faction had sought contact with the Mission, intent on establishing a school. When in the course of time a missionary community emerged there, it faced the same conflict patterns as had once troubled Akuropo, where the existing community had had to find ways to ensure its cohesion and its spiritual foundation while giving space to a new group challenging some of the existing prescripts, practices and prohibitions. This process can be traced down further to the village level, with the crucial difference that each purportedly subordinate level could serve as a surrogate space of negotiation about issues relevant for the higher levels. All in all Akuapem structures offered several levels of authority, from the head of state down to heads of family, with a hierarchy of office-holders in between, in a setting of complementary but also potentially competing and conflicting structures.

Incorporating the mission community into existing structures

In the meta-structure of the Akuapem state, military and political sub-units were and are congruent. The regulations for the Basel congregations from around 1860 contain a paragraph on military service, stating that Christians should not engage in it without necessity, because it often implied action against 'innocents' (*Unschuldige*), but where the authority (*Obrigkeit*) demanded participation Christians were not allowed to abstain.⁴⁰ In the 1860s the Akuapem male Christians accordingly responded to the call to arms by Akuapem authorities. Thus the various armed conflicts of the 1860s provide indicators as to when the mission community was recognised as a distinct socio-religious entity.

The Akuropo Station Chronicle mentions for the first time in 1866, during the so-called Anlo-War, that the Christians of Akuapem formed a separate military unit, accompanied by the Akuropo prince (*obeneba*) and Basel-trained missionary David Asante as chaplain, and headed by their own war-captain.⁴¹ They were reported to have fought valiantly and together with the unit of the Akuapem force which usually fought close to the *Okuapembene* to have provided relief when the king was almost captured by the enemy.⁴² During the same war the Christians in Aburi assembled in the chapel – a building

ry: E. Samson: A Short History of Akuapim and Akropong (Gold Coast) and Autobiography of the Rev. Edward Samson of Aburi, Native Pastor, Aburi 1908.

⁴⁰ «Ordnung für die evangelischen Gemeinden der Basler Mission in Ostindien und Westafrika», § 137 (ABM, D-9.1c, 8, dated 1861).

⁴¹ ABM, D-5,11 *Stationschronik* (Station Chronicle) Akropong, entries for February 1866.

⁴² The King's bodyguard were the *Gyaase* from Amanokrom and Akuropo (ABM, D-5,11 *Stationschronik* [Station Chronicle] Akropong, entry 18.4.1866.) On the role

whose walls the Christians had erected for no payment, two years earlier – as members of the Aburi Basel Mission congregation set off for the war. In the service the soldiers were not only admonished, but the congregation also interceded on their behalf. Between April 12th and April 21st, as the warriors gradually returned to Aburi at the end of the war, many were emaciated and ill, and they had all had a narrow escape. The missionary noted that all the Christians had come back, but many of the «heathens» had been killed.⁴³

In Larteh in mid-1869, when war-clouds were gathering again, the *asafo*, the local group of warriors, made an approach to David Asante, who was in charge of the Christian community. They complained about breaches of religious prohibitions by the Christians e.g. the keeping of pigs or dogs which the local deities purportedly disliked. In the *asafo*'s perception this would have endangered military success, for which support by the deities was considered a vital factor. The parties sent to the *Okuapembene* in Akuropo as well as to the wing-chief, the *Benkumbene*, for help with the arbitration of this question. Both authorities were of the opinion, also put forward by David Asante, that the community of the Christians was located on a separate space which constituted a sphere of its own, distinct from the rest of the town. They were thus exempt from observing the prohibitions of the local deities. The military success and the bravery of the company of the Christians in the second Anlo-War a few months afterwards will have corroborated this interpretation and probably added to its plausibility even for local sceptics. By their bravery and discipline the Christians earned general praise also from the side of the «pagans» in the town, and after the war the «pagan» women of Larteh had come to the mission station explicitly to express their gratitude.⁴⁴

The wars provided the emerging mission community with the opportunity to prove the efficacy of the source of spiritual power they relied on, and also to show themselves as loyal citizens of the Akuapem state. The Mission may have added to the potential for internal conflict in the state, but it also offered a new over-arching Akuapem sub-identity, when the soldiers from the different congregations were gathered into one company. When the Basel Christian congregation and church termed itself an *asafo* in Akuapem-Twi, it was, thus, as we shall see, no mere metaphor. It referred to actual experience.

In the search for the «traditional» precedents through which both the Christians and the non-Christians understood the nature, the rights and the duties of the new community, thus, *asafo* offers us some important clues. The

and significance of the Christian companies and on the role of David Asante: Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9), 166–170.

⁴³ ABM, D-5,10 *Stationschronik* (Station Chronicle) Aburi, entries for March-April 1866.

⁴⁴ Abun-Nasr: *Afrikaner und Missionar* (fn. 9), 167ff., quoting a report by David Asante (ABM, D-21b, D. Asante, Late 01.11.1869).

asafo is a structure which was and is related not to descent but to ability – it offered space to rise to a leading office for any man irrespective of his origin. It constituted a space for flexibility within the Akuapem set-up and one that in later years was also known as a factor for reform and for challenging the existing structures and the powers that were.⁴⁵ Indeed, the first social group from which larger numbers joined the Basel Mission were ‘youngmen’ – who might trigger conflict between the Mission and office-holders with breaches of religious prohibitions, as in the case of entering Bosomptra’s grove. On the other hand, of course, as we have seen, a non-Christian *asafo* could also challenge the mission community, precisely because of similar misdemeanours. The negotiations over such issues in either case were in the hands of senior persons. In the case of the Basel Mission the leaders of the new community were first the European missionaries, but gradually a strong local leadership was emerging.

Another clue to ‘traditional’ precedents which helped to place the new community in Akuapem society was the word *osofo*. We have already seen that as early as 1844 it is on record that a missionary was called an *osofo*, that is the hereditary priest of a major deity (*obosom*).⁴⁶ In 1872 the Basel Mission ordained the first Ghanaian pastors. Like the missionaries the pastors were called *osofo*. Akuapem pastors were to play the role as heads of the Christian communities in their relationship to the many polities in which they resided or to which they belonged, (and their links to the palace, the *abenfie*, are noteworthy but little researched). A vivid account of this kind of role can be found in a report by the pastor Theophilus Opoku: ‘It is usually the custom with the King that whenever any Christian from this or any of our other stations is summoned in His court, he passes the summons to the Pastor and the leading members of the Congregation, viz: Presbyters, that means to say he gives us information before thereby giving us chance or occasion to investigate and know the nature of the case for which the party was sued and to withdraw the summons and settle it out of his court or to let the defendant attend it if we find it reasonable and adviceable [sic] for him or her to do so.’⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Paul Jenkins’ research report on the topic is quoted in Haenger: Slaves and Slave Holders (fn. 37), 142 (ABM, D-10.34,13, P. Jenkins: Towards a definition of Social Tension in rural Akan communities in the high colonial period – the Asafo Movement of the Eastern Province and Eastern Asante [= Research report, History Department, University of Ghana Legon, 1971]).

⁴⁶ ABM, D-1,2 Akropong 1844, Hermann Halleur, 07.06.1844.

⁴⁷ T. Opoku: Akropong, Annual Report 20.03.1903; the transcript was provided by the courtesy of Michelle Gilbert and Paul Jenkins from their projected edition of Opoku’s letters. – For an in-depth analysis of one case cf.: M. Gilbert, P. Jenkins: The King, His Soul and the Pastor. Three Views of a Conflict in Akropong 1906–7, Journal of Religion in Africa 38 (2008) 359–415.

From the side of the palace «giving» boys or young men to the Mission who – as «princes» – were not eligible for hereditary offices, implies an interest in reform and/or in a new cult.⁴⁸ But it can also be understood as a «traditional» means used by the authorities to make sure they were informed about the reforms and so able to keep them under control. The momentous occasion of the death of *Okuapembene* Nana Kwadade I and the enstoolment of his successor indicates how Akuapem palace officials strove to bind the Mission into the existing structures – and make this intent public knowledge.

When in 1866 the *Okuapembene* Nana Kwadade I was dying, the senior missionary, Johann Georg Widmann, was not only allowed to visit his death-bed to pray for him. He was also informed confidentially of the actual death before it was announced to the public. He was allowed to see the deceased lying in state on his bed, clad in a dress «according to the country's fashion» (*Landeskleid*) and adorned with golden rings and beads, the tobacco-pipe in his mouth and his sandals in front of the bed.⁴⁹ The «brother» of the deceased, Atta Poku, requested that a coffin be made by the (Christian) carpenter; this was given to the palace as a gift. A few weeks later the Elders, together with the designated new *Omanbene*, came for an official visit to Widmann as the senior missionary. A relative of the former *Omanbene*, speaking on behalf of the new king, requested a loan to help cover the funeral costs. Widmann declined, explaining that the Mission was on principle opposed to «funeral customs», but in any case it had already provided the coffin as a gift. He also reminded the Elders of the missionaries acting as intermediaries on behalf of Akuapem in 1859.⁵⁰ That the palace treated the senior missionary as the «Elder» or head of the mission community is even more evident when Widmann's role is compared to the way the death-bed visits of Johann Adam Mader, the Inspector of Schools, were received. Mader – also at this stage a very senior missionary – was not given the same privileged access to the *Omanbene* which was granted to Widmann. The palace thus had its own hierarchical understanding of Basel Mission organisation and Mader, by his de-

⁴⁸ Sonia Abun-Nasr describes the association of «princes» (*abenemma*) with change in Akuapem (id.: *Afrikaner und Missionar* [fn. 9], 75ff.). Akuapem was not a singular case. Ivor Wilks describes the involvement of some of the «princes» with Christianity and/or reform in Asante, the most powerful Akan state (I. Wilks: *Asante in the Nineteenth Century. The structure and evolution of a political order*, Cambridge et al. 1975, 589–665 [esp. 589.596]).

⁴⁹ ABM, D-1,18a Akropong Nr. 87, J.G. Widmann 2. *Quartalsbericht* (Quarterly Report).

⁵⁰ ABM, D-1,18a Akropong Nr. 93, J.G. Widmann 3. *Quartalsbericht* (Quarterly Report), October 1866. – He referred to the conflict in 1859 between Governor and Akuapem state mentioned above.

scription of the situation, indicates he was well aware he was ascribed a lowlier position in the palace rankings.

For the rituals closing the funeral of Nana Kwadade I the wing-chiefs came to Akuropon and approached a tent made of many coloured silk containing his effigy, made of dark clay and three feet tall, seated on an English easy chair, again with his tobacco-pipe in his mouth and a bottle with rum in front of him.⁵¹ The effigy of the dead king was clothed in a state robe and adorned with strings of precious beads. Next to him were the state sword and state sandals. The *Königin-Mutter* (Queen Mother/*Ohemmaa*) sat there receiving gifts in the form of cowries being handed to her on plates, on the other side of the tent sat Asa, the man chosen by the Elders of Akuropon as successor. But until the wing-chiefs had officially agreed to his election he had to sit on a hide or skin (*Fell*) on the floor.

The wing-chiefs agreed in the end to the choice of the Akuropon Elders and accepted Asa as *Omanbene*. His enstoolment as Nana Asa Kurofa saw the various chiefs and Elders in separate groups, each with his people and a servant behind him holding his umbrella aloft, spread out along the main street in Akuropon to participate in the ceremony of swearing fealty. The missionaries were there also. Nana Asa rose and, with his entourage and one drummer, proceeded from one chief to the next. «Each time he swore the oath which said roughly «By the oath of Wednesday (people believe that many years ago a famous and great king died on a Wednesday) (...) I swear that I will fulfil my obligations (*Pflichten*) as King of Akuapem conscientiously.» While speaking he pointed with his sword towards the person he addressed who in turn held three fingers of his right towards the *Omanbene*, simultaneously somebody from the entourage of the latter emphasised and confirmed each word with *ampá, ampá* (truly, really) or *hm*, while another held his dress and wiped the sweat from his face and breast. When he reached the missionaries he approached them as he approached the chiefs, and added to the customary words that he was a friend of the Europeans and intended to help them where possible.⁵²

These events took place during a phase of considerable conflict both within the missionary community and between the Basel Mission and Akuapem state. It was the time when the Basel Mission attempt to force through its own «slave emancipation» had reached a critical phase. But in spite of this tension in the background the involvement of representatives of the Basel Mission in the funeral and enstoolment illustrates that by the late 1860s state

⁵¹ Two photographs by Michelle Gilbert of such tents from late 20th century Akuapem have been published in: D.H. Ross: A Beautiful Cloth Does Not Wear Itself, in: id. (ed.): Wrapped in Pride. Ghanaian Kente and African American identity, Los Angeles 1998, 38–57 (46).

⁵² ABM, D-1,19b Akropong Nr. 28, Theodor Breitenbach 01.07.1867.

and society had not only recognised the mission community as a separate and distinct group in the kingdom, but also made its intention known in a public performance to keep that new community within its bounds and to apply to it the same commitment which the King swore to observe towards the other groups. The palace expected signs of allegiance like the participation in the swearing of fealty, and in this connection was officially prepared to grant its protection to the Christians.

Conclusion: The Christian Quarter – a space for innovation in a «traditional» setting

The motif of the small exemplary and critical community «travelled» to the Gold Coast – together with the Basel missionaries – and it gained a new shape there. The emerging Christian quarter indeed came locally to be perceived as a distinct socio-religious sphere, but (with the exception of one Christian settlement in Abokobi in the Ga area) it still was regarded as part of the local meta-structure of community or state. Thus right from its very first beginnings the «Salem» evolved as an ambiguous structure. It was a space associated with a local interest in change and reform, thus a space where innovations could take place and from where these could spread into the community at large. It was also a space which challenged existing structures and endangered cohesion. With creativity local people found ways of incorporating the mission community into existing structures. Conceptualising it in analogy to the «cult» of a «deity» some people came to perceive they had developed affiliation with the new source of mystical power. The Salem's putative rigidity and exclusiveness turned it into an alternative to what was already there, not least offering room for manoeuvre to individuals. Finally it became a place where concepts with a putative universal validity (e.g. «school» or «church») were discussed and negotiated – thus connecting a local «traditional» setting with modernity.

Abstract

Der Artikel beschreibt, wie sich in Ghana ein Missionsgemeinwesen in einem vor- bis frühkolonialen Umfeld entwickelte. 1843 nahm die Basler Mission in dem kleinen Akan-Staat Akuapem im Hinterland der Küste ihre Tätigkeit wieder auf, die erste Missionsstation entstand in der dortigen Hauptstadt Akuropon. Das Entstehen von Missionsgemeinden in Akuapem erforderte notwendig das Zusammenwirken der europäischen und der ghanaischen Akteure und Akteurinnen. In der örtlichen Wahrnehmung erscheint das neue Missionsgemeinwesen sowohl als fremd und bedrohlich für das Bestehende als auch als Chance für Innovation und Reform in einem «traditionellen» Umfeld. Diese Ambiguität kann als Zeichen dafür interpretiert werden, dass das

Missionsgemeinwesen selbst Teil der örtlichen Strukturen geworden ist, da Ambiguität für diese ein zentrales Merkmal darstellt.

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