

OBAYIFO TO OBEAH: PRIESTLY POWER AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF AFRO-ATLANTIC AKAN IDENTITY

Akan (e.g. *Akwamu, Asante, Denkira, Fante, Akyem Abuakwa and Akyem Kotoku*) and non-Akan (*Guan, Ga-Adangbe*) culture and history from the Republic of Ghana region contributed to larger Akan identities noted in the co-mingling of Guan, Ga-Adangbe, Akwamu and Akyem into Akuapem and Asante.¹ Spiritual power was a key aspect of politics and culture in and around the southern Akan states. Okomfo or priests, Obayifo (sorcerer or witch) and Obommofo (hunters) are Twi names for those who acted as spiritual intercessors utilizing oath-making, allegiance rituals, shrines and other priestly powers for king-making, birth and funerary ceremonies, war, commemoration of annual celebrations and other local examples to convey southern Akan culture. Akan culture and history accompanied captives on their voyage to the Americas. Forced migrants from in and around the southern Akan states memorialized the priestly power of *okomfo* and *obayifo* along with other traditions and practices in 18th and 19th century Jamaica. Spiritual or priestly power was a key aspect of politics and culture in the southern Akan states. In order to understand the degree to which Akan culture and history influenced slave resistance, cultural expression and identity among maroons, slaves and free blacks in Jamaica from the late 17th to early 19th centuries it is important to understand how that culture and history developed in West Africa.

Maroons, slaves and free-blacks utilized priestly power for magic, oath-making and allegiance rituals to resist enslavement in Jamaica, similar to slave resistance in and around the southern Akan states.² This paper examines transfer of priestly power along with other cultural

¹ Of this process Ivor Wilks notes “The fusion in the forest zone of different traditions into a distinct and fairly homogenous southern Akan culture...made it a particularly vigorous one, and many of its features were borrowed by the predominantly patrilineal Ewe, Ga, Adangbe, and Guan-speaking people”, see J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 433.

² Okomfo or priests, obayifo (sorcerer or witch) and *obommofo* (hunters) are Twi names for those who acted as spiritual intercessors utilizing oath-making, magic, allegiance rituals, shrines and other priestly powers for king-making, birth and funerary ceremonies, war, commemoration of annual celebrations and other local examples to convey southern Akan culture discussed in Chapter II. For this aspect of Akan culture and history influenced slave resistance, cultural expression and identity among maroons, slaves and free blacks in Jamaica from the late 17th to early 19th centuries, see Carl Christian Reindorf and J. G. Christaller, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante...from About 1500 to 1860* (Basel: The author, 1895), 113-114, R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 275, Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 112. Regarding Jamaica, see, Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London: Printed for T. Lowndes, 1774), 416, 417, 418 416-420 discusses botany skills of the Myal-men, Bryan Edwards and Daniel M'Kinnen, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*

forms to the Americas via trans-Atlantic contact. It introduces themes of a larger manuscript currently under revision for publication. “THE GOLD COAST, JAMAICA AND NEW YORK: AKAN IDEAS OF FREEDOM IN THE AFRO-ATLANTIC DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY”, is part of a dissertation successfully defended this past summer. It emphasizes the influence of Akan culture and history on ideas of freedom among maroons, free blacks and slaves in Jamaica and New York during the 18th century. The trans-Atlantic slave trade dispersed tenets of Akan culture throughout the Americas with the common themes of identity, access and community emerging in Jamaica and New York to resist slavery. The life of the priest Okomfo Anokye (c.1635-1720) and the installation of an Akyem Abuakwa stool in Akuapem in 1733 were central themes of southern Akan culture related to freedom and resistance to enslavement in the region labeled the Gold Coast of West Africa. Akan captives in the Americas expressed elements of this culture throughout the 18th century. In Jamaica the role of priests and sorcerers was important to resistance and rebellion against slavery by maroons, slaves and free blacks, who idealized cosmologies and traditions from in and around the southern Akan states. They coordinated anti-slavery actions in the Americas as kumfu-men, obeah-men and later myal-men, not unlike their predecessor’s resistance to invasion and enslavement in West Africa. Akan cultural transference is noted in Cudjoe’s Treaty of 1739, Tacky’s Rebellion in 1760 in Jamaica and the Uprising of 1712 and 1741 “Conspiracy” in New York. My research also shows how Akan affiliation declined in the latter 18th century, as the slave trade and influences of Christianization and the Enlightenment grew. St. Mary’s Rebellion of 1780 and Second Maroon War of 1795 in Jamaica and the closure of the African Burial Ground in 1795 in New York demonstrated this process.

This paper reviews several elements of that research, particularly the life of Okomfo Anokye and Cudjoe’s treaty in 1739 at the conclusion of the First Maroon War. These examples illustrate the spiritual and medicinal power of obeah-men, kumfu-men and later myal-men and elements of Akan cosmology in Jamaica. Okomfo “formed a tree from his arms to hide the Akuapems from the Akwamu” and memorialized priestly power in and around the southern

(United States?: s.n., 1806), Vol. II Appendix, 355 and Robert Charles Dallas, *The History of the Maroons, from Their Origin to the Establishment of Their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone...* (London: Cass, 1968), 92-93, Joseph J. Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs: Phases of West India Witchcraft* (Forgotten Books, 2007), 121-122, 156, 157, Jacqueline Cogdell Dje Dje, “Remembering Kojo: History, Music and Gender in the January Sixth Celebration of the Jamaican Maroons of Accompong” *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 18 No.1/2 (1998): 74 and note 9 on this page.

Akan states and in Jamaica, priestly power sanctioned Cudjoe's peace in 1739 after nearly a decade of "hostilities, murdering, as before, every white person, without distinction of sex, or age, who came within their reach." Cudjoe's maroons fought a desperate war and they "possessed no plunder to allure or reward the assailants; nor...anything to lose, except life and...freedom."³ However, these spiritualized anti-slavery tendencies, as a form of Akan cultural transfer, diminished at the end of the long 18th century as maroons, slaves and free-blacks adjusted to the spread of Christianity, the experience of slavery and Enlightenment notions of liberty. These influences gradually supplanted oath-making, naming patterns and other Akan cultural forms as central mechanisms for expressing freedom in lives of maroons, slaves and free-blacks. The theme of declining cultural transfer is discussed in St. Mary's Rebellion of 1780. Remembrances and adjustments of these composite Akan cultural forms are integral to themes of freedom, defined as identity, access and community for maroons, slaves and free-blacks during the 18th century.

Okomfo Anokye

Awukugua is the traditional *Kyerepong* (Guan) capital in the Akuapem hills and the birthplace of Okomfo Anokye. Traditional priests held religious and spiritual power but also political power equivalent to that of secular chiefs. However, these "Priest-Chiefs" had varying power throughout the 17th to 19th centuries. Kwabena Aseido, Chief Priest of Okomfo Anokye's

³ Interview with Kwabena Aseido, Chief Priest of Okomfo Anokye, November 17, 2008. Anti also made references to the Adadifo. The term 'Maroon' was first applied to these groups of slaves who chose their own leader and hunted wild pig or 'Marrano'. Edward Long noted it in his account of the letter from Major General Sedgwick to Secretary Thurloe in 1656 in Long, *Jamaica* Vol. II. Sect.IV. 330., Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies*, Vol II, Appendix, 337-341, Dallas, *The History of the Maroons* 31,33-34. McFarlane, *Cudjoe* 26. Freedom is defined in this research as identity, access and community. Identity is ethnic and cultural self-definition or the ability to characterize oneself through kinship or fictive kinship as affiliated with a specific African ethnicity. Access refers to social mobility and social accessibility, both within larger American societies and in separate or secret societies, as slaves, free blacks or maroons in ways attributable to Akan culture and history. Lastly community is collective action of Akan culture and history for cultural production and/or politicizing projects such as treaty-making, oaths of allegiance, rebellion and conspiracy, celebration and/or festivals. The struggles to preserve freedom had a unifying effect for people of African descent generally. This along with commemoration of important historical events they associated with these efforts became important in the development of identity and community in the Afro-Atlantic. Patterson's discussion of freedom reminds us that it was engendered wherever slavery existed yet freedom as a "tripartite" value is a uniquely Western concept. Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 3-5, 24-28. Paul E. Lovejoy, "The African Diaspora Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion Under Slavery," *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation II*. (1997): 1-23, here 16-17.

family in Awukugua, reported that until 1733, “there was no major chief in Awukugua and the representative body was a group of elders of seven clans called *Adadifo*.” Historical sources confirm that instead of a paramount chief or other form of secular governing body “the point of any unity of any of the communities was the common worship at a given shrine.” Thus Guan spirituality was the only unifying element making “the office of a Guan chief indistinguishable from that of a priest.” Due to or perhaps in spite of this spiritual impetus Anokye’s greatest contribution to the Akan was to distinguish the sacred office of a chief priest in his promotion of the Asante state.⁴ He set a precedent in the use of spirituality and religious power for the purpose of nation-building. He famously empowered oath-making, foretelling, music and dancing, *suman* or fetish, knowledge of plants and animals and other forms of magic and spirituality for political projects that complemented but did not surpass the power of Asantehene Osei Tutu. Mistreated slaves sought refuge as servants to priests of powerful shrines in Akuapem. Reindorf noted in “former days, the priest had a good revenue from runaway slaves protected with the fetish...” This is also documented by Isert in his description of the priest at “Schentema” (Kyenku shrine at Obsomase). Isert described priests as “swindlers” who “acquired some degree of reputation...to make themselves powerful and rich.” As a result “half the population of this...settlement are *his* slaves. Usually the swindlers are kind to them in order to attract more slaves.”⁵

With the exception of a few extant sources Okomfo Anokye was relatively unknown among Danish, Dutch and British traders in late 17th and early 18th century along the coast.⁶ Yet maroons, slaves and free blacks emigrants of Akan descent galvanized their quest for freedom in the Americas through cultural memorializations and historical example. C.C. Reindorf, William Bosman and Ivor Wilks are among the many historical authors that confirm this aspect of Akuapem culture and history. Priests in the palace of Nana Asare Brempong II, Chief of Awukugua are shown in Figure 3.⁷ Aseido and Anti’s accounts taken together both confirm a

⁴ Aseido, Chief Priest of Okomfo Anokye, November 17, 2008. Anti also made references to the *Adadifo*. He however identifies them as the seven stool holders, Anti, *Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye*, 41-42, and 36. Kwamena-Poh, *Akuapem*, 19-20.

⁵ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast*, 115, authors emphasis, Winsnes, ed. trans., *Isert’s Journey*, 214-215.

⁶ Anti, *Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye*, 14-16, 36.

⁷ Anti, *Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye*, 14.

number of miracles performed by Okomfo Anokye in his early adulthood.⁸ Ongoing discussions between Okomfo Anokye and the Adadifo were interrupted by new revelations. Another Adadifo was convened and he “foretold that the Akwamu were coming to fight from Nyanoase near Nsawam.” Anokye assured that town that he would protect them from the invaders. “When the Akwamu arrived, Okomfo formed a tree from his arms to hide the Akuapems from the Akwamu.” They tried unsuccessfully to shoot through his blockade but “all their bullets were finished.” At that moment Anokye “removed his arms and the Akuapems chased the Akwamu to the east of the Volta River, where they reside today.”⁹

The assertion that Anokye fought the Akwamu at Awukugua demonstrated utilization of spiritual or religious power to enable rebellion and resistance, an example of spiritual power to promote the freedom of Awukugua residents although there is some disagreement between Akan and Guan oral accounts of historical events. Ivor Wilks argues that Akuapem resistance to the Akwamu was essentially non-existent before 1733. However, oral traditions that Anokye “formed a tree from his arms to hide the Akuapems from the Akwamu” find some support in the historical, field and oral evidence provided by Kwabena-Poh. He finds some disagreement with conclusions reached by Wilks, Anti and Bekoe accounts and his evidence at least makes it plausible that Awukugua resisted the Akwamu. He confirmed that by 1646 “the western parts of Akuapem were already claimed as Akwamu possessions, and the Akwamu king was receiving gold payments from Accra in order to permit merchants from the interior to pass through the hills to the coast.” However, the presumption that the Akwamu were able to conquer all of Akuapem may not be correct. Considering the total evidence of Akwamu-Accra relations in the mid seventeenth century “concerning the dispute over the trade routes passing through the Akuapem hills”, suggested “Akwamu annexation of the Akuapem hills was not complete until the defeat of Accra in 1681.” He states “The Accra people were beaten in a battle and brought under the Akwamu rule, but the Hill people were not; rather they tacitly accepted Ansa Sasraku’s rule for

⁸ For example, Anokye empowered a mysterious stone, the *Oboabeduru* or *Boboduru*. Aseido recalled “that the Adadifo told Anokye that they needed something for entertainment and Anokye used his heel to carve out a piece of the *Boboduru* to create the stone for Oware. The marbles used for the game were commanded from the sky with his whisk.” These marbles “became gold and were used to play the Oware game.” George Kofi-Manu Interview, October 15, 2008. Anti, *Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye*, 12, Kwabena Asiedo Interview, November 17, 2008.

⁹ Kwabena Asiedo interview, November 17, 2008.

‘he was much feared even by his own people.’” In addition, Kwaben-Poh noted that “they did not pay any specific tribute to the Akwamu, as they were to do to the Asante many years later.”¹⁰ If Anokye was born around 1640 (using Aseido’s birthdate), the seven heads of the Adadifo at Awukugua, located in northeast Akuapem would have been concerned about growing Akwamu power at his birth. If we conservatively estimate the age of twenty-one as the year when Anokye became a practicing okomfo (considering Asiedo and Bekoe’s assertions that Anokye trained as a priest in his adolescence or early adulthood) than Anokye could have encouraged resistance to the Akwamu sometime between the 1661 and 1681, the year after Accra was conquered by the Akwamu and oral traditions place Anokye in Kumasi. Anokye’s spiritual power in Awukugua was utilized to resist indigenous and trans-Atlantic slavery.

Faced with the threat of “Akwamu, who in their desire for the slave trade with the Europeans at the coast, were ready to use any means of obtaining slaves from the hills”, a local idea of freedom seems particularly important. In addition, the demands of the Atlantic slave trade “the increase in the supply of firearms, an insatiable demand for labor in the American mines and plantations as well as the extreme profitability of the trade in slaves...” fuelled warfare in the region from the 17th to 19th centuries. Kwabena-Poh noted a tradition from 1658 that an elder from Akuapem “went to Akwamu to greet the king, but was seized and sold as a slave at Accra, for the King of the Akwamu had specifically ordered him to be sold to the whites, so that he should be carried out of the country.” Ports like Accra and Christianborg, so close to Akuapem provided significant numbers of slaves for trans-Atlantic traders not unlike Anomabu and Kromantse (noted in the trans-Atlantic characterization Koromantee) to the east. These factors make the magic of Okomfo Anokye more than local myths of magic, fame and fortune. More importantly, they connect his life and example to resistance against slavery. The legacy of the Golden Stool and Seventy-seven laws linked traditions of Okomfo Anokye and the Asante in 1701. Anokye used spiritual power to complement the nation and the first Asantehene Osei Tutu. Decades later, Guan and Akan leaders of Akuapem swore an oath to the Kyenku shrine, where priests offered solace to escaped slaves with the enshrinement of an Akyem Abuakwa stool in 1733. In these examples priestly power, oath making and magic were examples of political culture and local definitions of freedom. These factors made the magic of Okomfo Anokye more

¹⁰ Kwabena-Poh, *Akuapem*, 22-23, 50, Appendix and 136.

than local myths of sorcery, fame and fortune. Similarly, the distinction between *Odehye*, “free born,” and *Akoa*, “bought person” was noted in the Concord at Abotakyi, if only in the name “Akuapem.”¹¹ They are memorialized in Guan and Akan cosmologies, an example of priestly power as cultural production or politicization to resist enslavement.¹² Okomfo Anokye as a mythical and historical figure exhibited themes of priestly power, political authority and freedom memorialized in 18th and 19th century southern Akan states. Thus his articulation of local culture and history through oral traditions is an important link to a pre-slavery past for Akan descendants brought to Jamaica and New York and throughout the British Americas. For these reasons his life is an important starting point to investigate Akan cultural and historical examples of priestly power, political culture and freedom in West Africa and the Americas.

Jamaica

At the time of English conquest of Jamaica in 1655, the transition between English and Spanish colonial power afforded the opportunity for Africans bought to the island as slaves to recreate an African identity in the Americas (see Map 4). Major General Sedgwick of the English colonial army commented in 1656 that these maroons lacked “moral sense” with no understanding of what the “laws and customs of civil nations mean.” Throughout the 17th to the 19th centuries they harassed settlers and “not only augmented their numbers by natural increase, but...were frequently reinforced by fugitive slaves.” Groups of “Coromantee” maroons found refuge in the contiguous forests of the Cockpit Country surviving off plants and animals including the wild boar of the mountainous interior. The original inhabitants included Taino

¹¹ Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 672, Kwabena Asiedo interview, November 17, 2008, M.A. Kwamena-Poh, *Government and Politics in the Akuapem State 1730-1850* (Longman Group Ltd: Evanston, 1973), 104 and 135, J. G. Christaller, *A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante language called Tshi (Chwee, Twi) with a Grammatical Introduction and Appendices on the Geography of the Gold Coast and Other Subjects* (Basel: Printed for the Evangelical Missionary Society. Sold by the Missions-Buchhandlung, Basel, Switzerland, by Trübner & Co. 57 & 59 Ludgate Hill, London, and in the Book Depository of the Basel Mission, Christiansborg, G.C., W.A., 1881), 71. Slaves procured through warfare comprised 31% of slaves from the region see Akosua A. Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century* (Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004), 36, 28, 53. Dutch chief trader Jacob De la Planque also encouraged conflict between Akyem and Akwamu see 50, 54-55, 37-38, for more discussion of the Kotoku-Asante War of 1717-1718 Kofi Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor in Ghana's History: 1700-1875* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2000), 47.

¹² Kwabena Poh, *Akuapem*, 20, slaves procured through warfare comprised 31% of slaves from the region see Perbi, *Slavery in Ghana*, 36, 28 and 53.

Indians, Senegambians, Kongolese, Malagasy as well as Akan captives, but Cudjoe's "Coromantee" maroons referred to Akan and non-Akan associated with the well known Fante port. Imported laborers "principally those...from Coromantee country" joined these maroons and used "a language entirely different from that...of the rest with whom they had incorporated." That language "superseded the others and became in time the general one in use."¹³

Cudjoe's maroons resided near the Cockpit Country in Jamaica near Accompong Town, located in the modern day parish of Trelawney.¹⁴ The Cockpit Country, with "its karst terrain and unique vegetation", was the scene in which the maroons successfully engaged the British Army.¹⁵ Milton McFarlane, a descendant of Koromantee maroons argued "the old West African code of communal living was transported almost intact to the Jamaican mountains, enabling the Maroons to govern themselves...according to the old ways."¹⁶ Contemporary researchers connected Cudjoe's surveillance, "ambush" and guerilla tactics to "Obeah." Employ of priestly power for subterfuge and rebellion, the recognition of spirit power as distinct from that of headmen or chiefs correlated to the interaction of chiefs, okomfo and obayifo among the Guan, Ga-Adangbe and Akans. Cudjoe's obeah highlighted this interrelationship of spirit power with political culture and slave resistance in and around the southern Akan states. Contemporary definitions of obeah labeled maroon spirituality as "superstitions of Africa (derived from their ancestors)." Priestly power varied amongst individual practitioners and "operated differently according to one's "strength...understanding and experience." Maroon belief in "the prevalence of Obi, and the authority...of their old men as wizards... was... successfully employed in keeping them in subordination to their chiefs." Proselytizing failed because the "magic" of obeah-men was significant. The "charm of Obeah" held no power over those "baptized" but "the weaker

¹³ Table 2 shows imports from Kormantse and nearby western Akan coastal factories to Eastern (Leeward), Long, *Jamaica*, Book II Chapter XIII, 340, 345, Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies*, Vol II, Appendix, 337-341, Dallas mentions a number of "tribes" that augmented "Cudjoe's group", see Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, 31, 33-36.

¹⁴ Dallas, *The History of the Maroons* 28, Kopytoff, "Political Development" 298.

¹⁵ Agorsah, "Archaeology" 188.

¹⁶ The term 'Maroon' was first applied to these groups of slaves who chose their own leader and hunted wild pig or 'Marrano'. Edward Long noted it in his account of the letter from Major General Sedgwick to Secretary Thurloe in 1656 in Long, *Jamaica* Vol. II. Sect.IV. 330., Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies*, Vol II, Appendix, 337-341, Dallas, *The History of the Maroons* 31,33-34. McFarlane, *Cudjoe* 26.

ones, whether maroons or others, dreaded the arts of Obeah even after baptism.” These accounts of obeah reflected notions of enslavement, barbarism and brutality. This characterization of obeah as malevolent found its way into later generalizations of African spirituality. Yet, considered alongside interdisciplinary evidence these sources provided an important example of Akan cultural transfer in Jamaica.¹⁷

At the end of the First Maroon War (1725-1740) belief in obeah expressed spiritual guardianship over “a nation, town or family”, the public kumfu or myal form of priestly power. Cudjoe and his captains used it to finalize a treaty and sustain a maroon identity distinct from outsiders and the “backra-man.”¹⁸ In March, 1738 under a large silk-cotton tree in the Cockpit Country, Cudjoe and several maroon captains including Accompong signed a treaty with the British representatives. R.C. Dallas, Edward Long, and Bryan Edwards reproduced the treaty in their research and in 1980, Colonel Mann Rowe secretary of the Leeward Maroons contemptuously exhibited it (see Figure 9). According to Milton McFarlane’s oral interviews with his grandfather, Cudjoe was unaware “that Colonel Guthrie would commit the treaty agreement to paper.” He reminded the British attendees of his people’s obedience to “laws over many centuries without having had the necessity to write them on paper.” Cudjoe agreed to sign the document but demanded “that the signatures be affixed with blood.” With the exception of recently published oral accounts by self described maroon descendants, there is no historical evidence of a blood oath. The treaty itself has not been tested for blood residue. Dallas mentioned a “treaty concluded with all solemnities attending it” and a desire on the part of Guthrie to “come unarmed to him with a few of the principal gentlemen of the island, who should witness the oath he would solemnly make to them of peace on his part.” In his account, however, the “solemn act” is not a blood pact but a symbolic gesture, a trade of hats between Cudjoe and the British Dr. Russell. It is interesting that Dallas’ description of Cudjoe’s hat noted its resemblance to a calabash or gourd, an object referred to in oral accounts of an oath of allegiance ritual at the treaty signing (see Figure 10).¹⁹ Kenneth Bilby and other researchers

¹⁷ For example of this generalized definition, see J. G. Christaller (see note 2), Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies* Vol. II Appendix, 355 and Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, 92-93.

¹⁸ J. G. Christaller, *A Dictionary of...(Twi)...*, 9, 242, Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies* Vol. II Appendix, 356, McFarlane, *Cudjoe*, 24.

¹⁹ Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, 56-57. McFarlane, *Cudjoe* 130-131.

recounted this significant historical event using oral traditions “carried down from the ancestors and widely known in Accompong Town...a central symbol of maroon identity.” He presented several versions that involve oath, blood, and allegiance. Accompong, Cudjoe’s captain and brother performed an oath-making ritual in the treaty ceremony. This is an interesting allusion to the function of oath and spirituality that complemented chiefs and assumed a political form, such as the Concord at Abotakyi that led to the installation of an Akyem Abuakwa stool in 1733. C.C. Reindorf identified an oath of allegiance followed by the “eating of fetish” where an okomfo or obayifo used a suman or fetish to create a magical potion in and around the southern Akan states. Extant accounts and interdisciplinary evidence referenced throughout this research note “this phenomenon” which “outsiders and the uninformed... refer to as ‘obeah’ ...served as a...form of entertainment among Maroons but in...extreme manifestations...inspired and stabilized the people.”²⁰

The treaty placed the maroons “under the jurisdiction of Europeans” and offered “little they did not already have.” However, the significance of the treaty is considerable as it was the first concession made to the maroons for preservation of the island colony (see Map 5). It proposed “all...lands...between Trelawney town and the Cockpits, to the amount of fifteen hundred acres.” It also required “captain Cudjoe and his successors...to take, kill, suppress or destroy...all rebels...throughout this island.” The treaty stipulated any fugitive slaves that “run away from their masters or owners and fall into Cudjoe’s hands...shall immediately be sent back.” This included all fugitives “since the raising of this party by captain Cudjoe.” The “Assembly granted a premium of thirty shillings for each fugitive slave returned” and appointed “two white men” to live and reside with captain Cudjoe and his successors.” The largest Leeward maroon settlement was Accompong, which referenced Cudjoe’s captain, brother and participant in oath making at the treaty signing. *Nyankopon*, the Akan word for God is also identifiable in this name. This assertion offered another correlation to declining yet significant Akan cultural transfer among maroons in Jamaica.²¹

While there is no written evidence of a priest at the treaty ceremony, written and oral evidence verified the close bond between Cudjoe’s maroons and “obeah-men” who acted as

²⁰ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast*, 122-124 and McFarlane, *Cudjoe* 29.

²¹ Edwards, *The History of...the West Indies*, Book II Appendix, 348-350, Several contemporary sources document the name of the town, see for example Dje Dje, “Remembering Kojo”, 71-72, Kopytoff, “Political Development”, 296.

“interpreter and mouth-piece of the guardian spirit of a nation, town or family.” Akan cosmology and a spiritual functionary at the treaty signing seem significant in light of Accompong’s role as Cudjoe’s brother, captain of his own settlement and representative of priestly power in oath-making ceremonies of recently collected oral traditions. James Knight wrote in 1742 Cudjoe’s maroons “were very superstitious having during their state of actual rebellion, a...Obea Man whom they greatly revered, his words carried the force of an oracle...consulted on every occasion.”²² Barbara Kopytoff identified Koromantee as “the largest number of Maroons and thus the predominant cultural influence among them.” Yet she noted the “hopeless task” of reconstructing early maroon religion “in any specificity” based on acknowledged limitations of 17th and 18th century written source material and oral traditions collected by anthropologists since the 1930’s that sketch “broad outlines.” Like “other aspects of Maroon culture, it was a synthesis of elements reflecting the varying background of those escaped slaves who came together to form Maroon bands.”²³ While this conclusion is instructive one has to consider how investigation of culture and history from the southern Akan states provided insights into generalizations or Africanisms and synthesized cultural forms such as Koromantee in Jamaica.

Comparing events in St. Mary’s Parish in 1760 and 1780 demonstrate the variable significance of Akan cultural transfer and growing influence of the Enlightenment and Trans-Atlantic slavery. In 1760 slaves “projected and conducted” a “conspiracy...with such...secrecy that almost all...Coromantin...throughout the island were privy to it.” The rebels chose St. Mary’s Parish in north-east Jamaica as a starting point because it “was abounded with their countrymen...contained extensive deep woods and plenty of provisions.” Their aim was the “extirpation of the white inhabitants...and the partition of the island into...principalities in the African mode.”²⁴ In St. Mary’s Parish, where the rebellion commenced, members of the militia

²²Kopytoff, “Early Political Development”, 298, She uses James Knight, “The Natural, Moral and Political History of Jamaica...in the year 1742” from the Charles Edward Long Papers, British Library, Long, *Jamaica*, Book II, Chapter VII 472-473, McFarlane, *Cudjoe*, 24.

²³ Zora Neale Hurston conducted anthropological research in Jamaica during the 1930’s and her research of spirituality in Jamaica is an early field source of Akan cosmology and Afro-creole spirituality in Jamaica. A contemporary of Melville Herskovits and student of Franz Boas, Hurston presented a travelogue, one that offers an important analysis of the Jamaican spirit world. “Using the spy-glass of anthropology her work celebrates rather than moralizes; it shows rather than tells, such that both behavior and art become self-evident...”, Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Perennial Library, 1990), Afterword by Herny Louis Gates p. 295, 22, see Kopytoff, “Religious Change”, 466.

²⁴ Long, *Jamaica*, Book III, Chapter III, 345, 444-457.

came upon a “famous obeah or priest, much respected among his countrymen” who was surprised, captured and hanged. He was an “old Coromantin, who with others of his profession, had been a chief in counseling and instigating the credulous herd, to whom these priests administered a powder, which being rubbed on their bodies was to make them invulnerable.” Obeah-men spread the message that Tacky, “their generalissimo in the woods...could not possibly be hurt by the white men, for...he caught all the bullets fired at him in his hand, and hurled them back with destruction to his foes.”

Oral, written and field sources demonstrated that “Coromantin”, was indeed a distinct identity throughout Jamaica amongst slaves. Tacky’s Revolt spread to all corners of the island after the spring of 1760. Leaders were “Coromantin” mostly “imported Africans” who incited the rebellion among their countrymen. Tacky, the name of the rebel leader is attributable to the Ga male names *Tackie*, *Tetteh* or *Tetty*. The Kormantse affiliation, inter-island communication and demographic evidence of Akan and non-Akan captives from the southern Akan region in Jamaica offer an important connection to Akan identity as an influence in the rebellion. Non-Akan participants joined the rebellion and African spiritualists from other cultures labeled obeah-men, kumfu-men and later myal-men found common cause in resistance to slavery. Yet maroons, spiritualists and captives affiliated with Kormantse were either largely of Akan descent or heavily influenced by Akan culture and history. An influx of “Coromantee” captives energized priestly power and its politicized function in and around the southern Akan states in Jamaica. Akuamu, Asante, Akyem and Fanti, along with Ga and Guan and are among those ethnics embarked in Jamaica and frequently classified as “Coromantee.”²⁵ These cultures played key roles in the life of Okomfo Anokye and installation of an Akyem Abuakwa stool in Akuapem.

A 1780 newspaper reported “a gang of runaways... 40 men and 18 women” robbing especially “mulatto and creole negroes.” They were described as “chiefly Congos” and “Bristol alias *Three Finger’d Jack*, is their Captain.” In early 1781 the *Royal Gazette* reported the “death of that daring freebooter Three Fingered Jack.” The rebel killed “by a maroon...named John Reeder (a Christian convert) and six others...who...overpowered him and severed his head and arm from his body.” The *Gazette* praised the “intrepidity of Reeder in particular” whose behavior “justly entitle” him to a “reward.” Several contemporary sources also reported “Maroon bounty

²⁵ Long, *Jamaica*, Book III Chapter III, 345, 444-457, Williams, “*Voodooos and Obeahs*,” 122, 125, 157, 133.

hunters....blowing conchs and celebrating Jack's demise.”²⁶ Three versions: A contemporary novel, scholarly text and theatrical play illustrated the experience of slavery (in increased multi-ethnic imports to Jamaica and an emanation of colonial authority) and efforts to spread Christianity in the lives of slaves, maroons and free-blacks. These factors constrained the value of Akan cultural transfer. In particular, Akan identity, priestly power and naming modified and adjusted in these retellings.²⁷

Akan cultural transfer of priestly power and anti-slavery rebellion or resistance diminished amid divergent maroon-slave relations, Christian proselytizing and expanding legal authority. In response to Tacky's Rebellion in 1760 The Jamaican “Code Noir” strengthened and pro-slavery regulations forced priestly power to the periphery, making it legally prohibited and socially deplored. These laws defined priestly power as an injurious, intoxicating and “wicked art...with the devil and other evil spirits.” Regardless of legal restrictions priestly power remained a potent factor in unrest and slave rebellion in St Mary's Parish (1780-1782). However, it was described as “white Obi” employed by a “vast concourse of negroes,” including Scots Hall maroons, and affiliation with Christianity, that got the better of Three Fing'rd Jack. This example of spirituality was more general than Akan and reflected the influence of imports from other regions in Africa, a factor of increased slaving in the late 18th century, Christianity and increased colonial authority.²⁸

²⁶ *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* Vol. III No. 93 January-February 1781, 79, in Srinivas Aravamudan ed. William Earle, *Obi, Or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005), 8, 10, 13. William Earle's fictional tale *Obi, Or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack*, reflected the above events in a series of letters between a Jamaican overseer and an English absentee landlord. According to Aravamudan it combined “romance elements, sentimental poetry, mock-epistolary structure, anthropological footnote and colonial reportage.” Two additional accounts detailed the events at St. Mary's Parish in 1780-1782. They are Benjamin Moseley's *A Treatise on Sugar*, published in 1799 and *Three-Finger'd Jack*, a play written by William Burdett in 1800 and performed at the Theatre-Royal Haymarket in London.

²⁷ There are a number of accounts of this event based on the Dr. Benjamin Moseley, *A Treatise on Sugar* (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robins, 1799) 173-180.

²⁸ This co-existence of traditional beliefs with Christianity continued “until well into the 20th century.” Proselytizing and expanding colonial authority did have some effect on priestly power. Maroon leaders cultivated relationships with the CMS and Church of Scotland for political motives. They co-opted church affiliation and prestige in religious ceremonies such as baptism for youth education and material benefit, Barbara Kopytoff, “Religious Change among the Jamaican Maroons: The Ascendance of the Christian God within a Traditional Cosmology,” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 20 No. 3 (1987): 463-484 here 469-471, 474. Fuller, *The New Act of Assembly of the Island of Jamaica.... commonly called, The Consolidated Act: As exhibiting at one view most of the essential regulations of the Jamaica Code* (London: B.White[ect.], 1788), 7,

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database records some 1.2 million imports from the Gold Coast region who disembarked in the Americas throughout the period of the slave trade. Imports to the British Caribbean totaled over 700,000, the majority of these imported to Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua. Akan cultural transfer from the British Caribbean revitalized Akan cultural expressions in New York. In 1712 Rev. John Sharpe (chaplain of the English garrison in New York and Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts) wrote to Elias Neau, a French Huguenot merchant, that “ye Nations of Carmantee & Papa plotted to destroy all the White(s) in order to obtain their freedom.” On New Years Eve they took an oath and bound “by Sucking ye blood of each Others hand.” To make themselves invulnerable, “they believed in a free negro who pretends Sorcery and gave them a powder to rub on their Cloths...” In the 1741 “Conspiracy” in New York, often labeled a “parody” of gentlemen’s clubs, politicians and free masons “mistook for rebellion”, plotters swore oaths of the “promise of freedom” to promote recruitment of slaves and Doctor Harry returned to New York after being legally banished to foment rebellion. He created combustible balls, poison and oath-making for collaborative action by urban slaves to resist enslavement.²⁹ Akan day names and labels of “Coromantee” were also noticeable in the rebellion given increased importation of Akans from West Africa and the Caribbean. Nearly twenty conspirators listed in the court record shared Akan day names: Slaves named “Cuffe” (Kofi) and “Quack” (Kweku), members of the Fly Boys

10. William Burdett, *Life and Exploits of Mansong, Commonly Called Three-Finger'd Jack, the Terror of Jamaica In the Years 1780 & 1781: with a Particular Account of the Obi; ... By William Burdett* (Sommers Town: printed and published by A. Neil [etc.], 1800),53, 22. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),178.

²⁹ Daniel Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy, or, A History of the Negro Plot: With the Journal of the Proceedings Against the Conspirators at New-York in the Years 1741-2* (New York: Southwick & Pelsue, 1810), Preface 6, 13, African American historian George W. Williams argued the “the Negro plot” had its origin in a “diseased public conscience” of “religious bigotry, hired liars” and a “blind and bloody court and jury”, George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race In America 1619-1880* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1885) 169-170. Rucker, Linebaugh and Rediker and other contemporary inquires acknowledged Horsmanden’s “subjective assessment” but conclude it does not “overly distort the evidence” nor devalue the secret cabal for “money...freedom [and] revenge against particular powerful people.” Corroborative testimony of the same essential plot divulged without coercion support the conclusion that the trial was neither “mob delusion” nor “considerable slave conspiracy”, but something in between. The aforementioned research considers slave recalcitrance, theft, arson and illegal meetings of white and black on equal footing with exaggerations, coerced “Negro” testimony, and a discredited and partial New York legal system Lepore, *New York Burning* xvii-xviii, 13, 81-83 Rucker reviewed historical perspectives of the plot and noted key authors including Williams, Thomas J. Davis, Herbert Aptheker and E. Frankin Frazier, see Rucker, *The River* 74, 73-79, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* 178.

street gang, played pivotal roles in 1741. Several slaves identified with the designation “Carmantee.” One of them, Will, testified against his co-conspirators on rebellions in St. John in 1733 and Antigua in 1736. His life displayed “connections among insurrection, diaspora, trade and new insurrection” in the Afro-Atlantic World. Exiled to New York, Will was tried in June and pled guilty for his involvement in the conspiracy and was burned at the stake in July 1741.³⁰ My research also shows how Akan affiliation declined in the latter 18th century, as the slave trade and influences of Christianization and the Enlightenment grew. St. Mary’s Rebellion of 1780 and Second Maroon War of 1795 in Jamaica and the closure of the African Burial Ground in 1795 in New York demonstrated this process. Akans constituted roughly 10% of the estimated 12.5 million African identities shipped to various parts of the Americas. However, leadership skills in war, political organization, expertise in medicinal plants and spirit practice and their very presence as archived in musical traditions, language, and patterns of African diasporic life outweighed actual numbers of Akan imports. Further, it was a composite Akan culture that arrived in the Americas. This Afro-Atlantic Akan identity originated with interior interaction of Akan matri-clans, Guan and Ga-Adangbe groups and “calls attention to an important rethinking of the historical formation of Akan culture in West Africa and its reach into the Americas.” Thus the creolization or cultural transfer arguments should be modified particularly in consideration of Akan cultural forms in an Atlantic zone of circulation and transmission concomitant to trans-Atlantic slavery.³¹

³⁰ In 1733 “Coromantee” rebels used “cane bills (knives)” to kill soldiers, damage plantations and held the Danish Fort Christinasvaern on St. John hostage for seven months. In 1736 rebels conspired to murder white inhabitants and form a new government on the island of Antigua, Will “set his back to the stake and raising up one of his legs, laid it upon the fire,” see Lepore, *New York Burning* 11, 54-55, 175, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 201-202, Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy*, 386-391, Rucker, *The River* 82-83.

³¹ Table 1, Imports from the Gold Coast to the entire Atlantic World 1660-1830; those to British Caribbean outnumber all others. Source: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Estimates,” accessed January 5, 2011, Kwasi Konadu, *The Akan Diaspora in the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.