

**TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION IN NORTHERN
GHANA FROM 1900-1969: A CASE STUDY OF NAVRONGO AND SAKOT**

by

Ali Yakubu Nyaaba B.A. (Hons.)

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of

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College of Art and Social Sciences**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the PhD and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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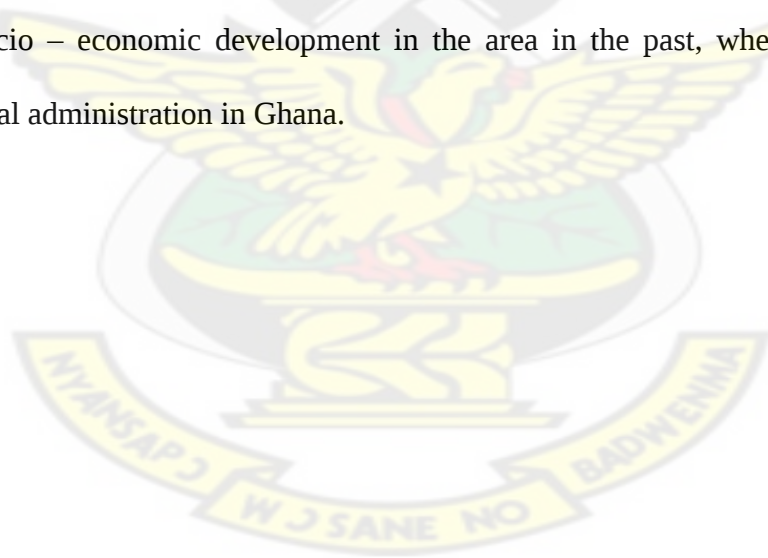
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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION IN NORTHERN GHANA FROM 1900-1969: A CASE STUDY OF NAVRONGO AND SAKOT

This study focuses on the transformations that have characterized indigenous political administration in Navrongo and Sakot. These areas both belong to the *Gur* speaking group and lie north of the Black Volta, specifically in the Upper East Region of modern Ghana. The study highlights the changes that has occurred in the traditional political administration of Navrongo and Sakot since 1900. It reflects change and continuity before British rule, under colonialism and after independence up until 1969. Before colonial rule in the twentieth century, immigrants had introduced chieftaincy into Navrongo from Zikku in the North-East Territory of the Upper Volta. This was probably during the second half of the seventeenth century. The chief therefore replaced the *Tendana* as the overall head of the community. He like the *Tendana* was the link between the community and its ancestors. Though on the other hand, chieftaincy had not been introduced into Sakot during the period; the Sakot *Da'an* as the principal mediator between the people and the earth god and the ancestral spirits, by virtue of his religious power, wielded considerable political authority. This form of indigenous political administration was however short-lived after the British occupied the area in 1902, when the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast was constituted by an Order in Council. Due to the devastating effects of the slave raiding activities of Babatu in Navrongo and Sakot, the people reluctantly accepted British colonial rule as a means to restore peace in the area. The outcome, was the erosion of the erstwhile sacred personality of the *Navorope*

and on the other hand, the transfer of power and authority from the Sakot *Da'an* to a “created political leadership” established by the British. It also created an unhealthy relationship between the people and their leaders, as the latter were tasked under the British system of administration to recruit labour for various undertakings. The state of the chieftaincy institution has been checkered, from colonial times when the British introduced the system of Indirect Rule in the area, up to the post independence era when some of the new political elite subverted the institution for political capital. However, traditional political institutions seem to be the necessary tool for the sustenance of the various ethnic and cultural groups in Northern Ghana and the country as a whole. The institution has over the years served to maintain a cohesive social structure of the various communities. Indeed, an important source of unity and stability that has underscored the peace and socio – economic development in the area in the past, when there was no central political administration in Ghana.



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I owe a debt of gratitude to the following persons who were of immense help during the fieldwork. Mr. Donald Amuah (a retired educationist), Professor Albert K. Awedoba of the University of Ghana, Legon, Professor David Milla of the University for Development Studies (Navrongo Campus), Mr. Nayimbe (a retired educationist and a historian at Bolgatanga), Mr. Mahama of the Archives in Tamale and Weken Balinia Adda, the Regent of Navrongo who helped in one way or the other to make my mission a success. Nat Nunoo Amarteifio, a former Metropolitan Chief Executive of Accra, who had known the researcher from the meetings of the Historical Society of Ghana, introduced him to one Mr Abloh and other workers in the search room of the archives in Accra. I specially want to thank Na'ab Sigri Bewong I, Paramount Chief of Sakot who is

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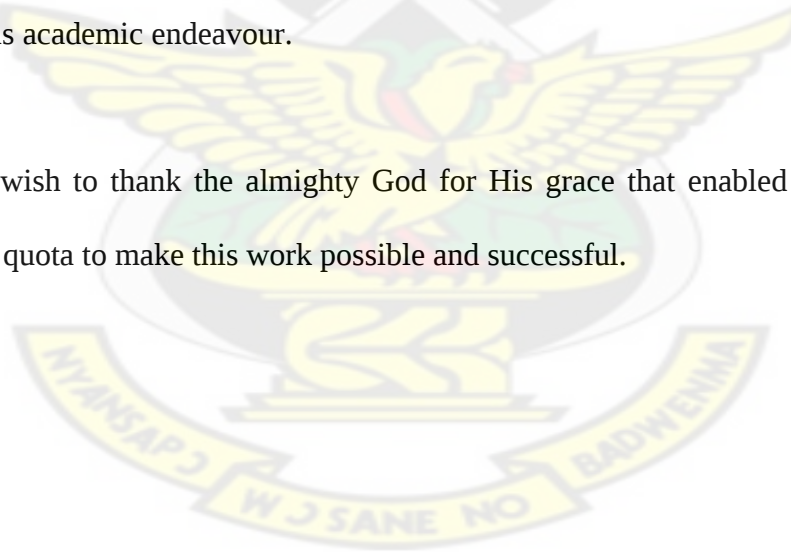


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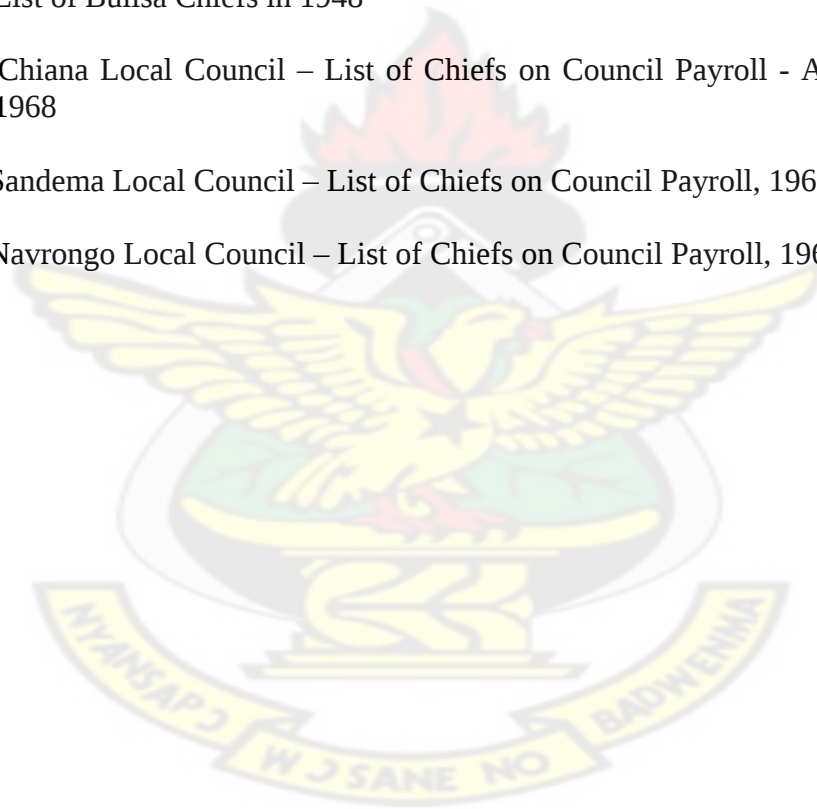
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KNUST - Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

PRAAD - Public Record and Archives Administration Department

C.P.P. - Convention Peoples Party

N.P.P. - Northern Peoples Party

N.L.M. - National Liberation Movement

K.N.N.A - Kasena- Nankana Native Authority

C.S.P. - Commissioner of the Southern Province

C.C.N.T. - Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories

N.L,C - National Liberation Council

U.G.C.C. - United Gold Coast Convention

O.U.P. – Oxford University Press

N.R.C. - National Redemption Council

S.M.C. - Supreme Military Council

P.N.D.C. - Provisional National Defence Council

K.N.T.C. - Kasena-Nankani Traditional Council

C.A. - Constituent Assembly

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The study seeks to trace systematically the transformations that traditional political administration in Navrongo and Sakot have undergone in the periods just before colonialism, the colonial era and thereafter. It comments on the effectiveness of indigenous political administration among these people before colonialism and how the rudiments of this phenomenon have gradually been altered since the establishment of colonial administration in the Northern Territories at the beginning of the twentieth century. This study thus suggests the necessity to trace some of the common problems of the chieftaincy institution in most parts of present day Northern Ghana (specifically, in Navrongo and Sakot), to the historical evolution of the institution and how it has evolved over the period.

Despite perceived manipulations under both colonial rule and independence, many traditional African institutions, including chieftaincy have retained their own inner dynamics, distinct from and frequently in conflict with the modern and secular political system which in this case include the colonial governments and the nationalist governments after independence. The relations between these two are among the most fascinating and complex aspects of contemporary Africa. They are increasingly under examination by scholars of various disciplines and indeed, a multi-disciplinary approach is often adopted to such studies, which touch on anthropology, history, politics, sociology and most frequently, economics.¹ The institution of chieftaincy is one of the oldest traditional institutions in Ghana. Through its own resilience and cultural value systems, it

¹ S. Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975). Also, J. N. K. Brukum, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Under British Colonial Rule, 1897 – 1956: A Study in Political Change". An unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Graduate Department of History, University of Toronto, Canada, (1996).

has been able to survive in spite of the changes, which have taken place since colonial rule, independence and the post independence periods. While it is difficult to assess quantitatively the considerable influence which the chieftaincy institution continues to exert locally in Ghana, this influence is unmistakably apparent.² Indeed, even at the lower levels of the councillor or village headman, traditional office is still ardently sought.

It is against this background that the 1992 Constitution clearly states in, Article 270: "(1) The institution of chieftaincy together with its traditional councils as established by customary law usage is hereby guaranteed and (2) Parliament shall have no power to enact any law which (a) confers on any person or authority the right to accord or withdraw recognition to or from a chief for any purpose whatsoever or (b) in anyway detracts or derogates the honour and dignity of the institution of chieftaincy". These bold provisions in the 1992 Constitution seem to have freed the institution from political control and it is expected that it will meaningfully contribute its quota to national development.³

During the pre-colonial period there were mainly two forms of traditional authority, first, non-centralised or fragmented systems, which some anthropologists referred to as acephalous⁴ societies. The family head or the *Tendana* was the rallying point of authority; examples include,

² P. Ferguson, and I. Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana", Crowder, M. and Ikime, O. (eds.) *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation and Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1968), p.364.

³ J. S. Nabila, "Decentralisation within the Traditional System of Authority in Ghana" (A Paper Presented at a KAF/NHC Organised Workshop for Traditional Leaders and District Chief Executives held in Akosombo from 16th – 18th August 2006), p.2.

⁴ Though, these areas cannot be described as acephalous in the literal sense, since they had heads in the person of the *Tendana*; most writers on the history of Northern Ghana have always asserted that the only centralized states were those of Mamprugu, Dagbon, Nanum, Gonja and Wala. However, Tuurey has pointed out that others such as Manlarla of Kaleo and Wecheau based at Dorimon also existed even if they did not form large empires. See G. Tuurey, *An introduction to the Mole-Speaking Community*. (Wa: Wa Catholic Press: 1982) pp.38-46. Another ethnic group which could also come under this category will be the Nchumuru.

the Talensi and Kokomba of Northern Ghana. The second was the centralised states with a clearly defined hierarchy of authority with the King or Paramount Chief at the apex of traditional authority. Examples here also include the Akan states in Southern Ghana, the Mole Dagbani and Gonja of Northern Ghana.⁵ Traditional rulers are both social and political leaders. Though, their primary function is to regulate and control relationships and social behaviour within a traditional community: they are in essence people-oriented and service-oriented as government structures are. "The authority of traditional leaders is derived from tradition and is exercised in consultation with senior advisers without being regulated by provisions."⁶ Where the institution of traditional leader or cultural leader exists, it is sanctioned in accordance with the culture, customs and traditions of the people to whom it applies.

The chieftaincy institution is understood and legitimised as founded on the principle of tradition; chieftaincy without reference to tradition seems an unimaginable concept, a contradiction in itself. Many Ghanaian societies in fact had elaborated chieftaincy institutions, whose holders individually and effectively ruled their polities in the pre-colonial era. This was not only the case in the Northern areas of Ghana, but also in the Asante, Eastern, Western and Bono-Ahafo Regions of modern Ghana. In these cases, the reference to tradition of chieftaincy makes some sense, if as it is widely done in Ghana, the term 'tradition' is understood to refer to a continuity from some pre-colonial status quo, at least in the late nineteenth century if not at some much earlier period in history. Even then the fact may frequently and conveniently be overlooked that the functions and meanings of the institution might have drastically been changed, been transformed, and possibly even perverted, during the last century, and increasingly so in recent decades.

⁵ J. S. Nabila, "Decentralisation within the Traditional System of Authority in Ghana", p.4.

⁶ D. I. Ray, and P. S. Reddy, *Grassroots Governance? Chiefs in Africa and the Afro-Caribbean* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002) P. 90

The group referred to as traditional leaders/rulers are individuals occupying communal political leadership positions sanctified by cultural mores and values, and enjoying legitimacy in particular communities to direct their affairs. Their basis of legitimacy is tradition, which includes a whole range of inherited culture and way of life; a people's history; moral and social values and the traditional institutions, which survive to serve those values. The concept "traditional leader" has as its features, among other things, been a living and adaptable institution. It is an institution of governance, which is recognised by both the secular state and communities ruled, with an area of influence, and having control over instruments of administration such as customary law courts. For example, especially in the rural areas, chiefs settle the majority of disputes with finality and indeed many rural dwellers are quite reluctant to file cases in the regular government courts. In this wise, chiefs remain "tribunals of preference" for most citizens. With regard to communal lands, chiefs execute judicial, legislative, executive and land management functions. In many African polities, those who abuse their traditional authority through the illegal sale of lands or misappropriation of public revenues can be ousted or face charges if certain strict procedures are not followed.

However, there are many areas in Ghana, where the institution of chieftaincy did not exist in pre-colonial times, or, at least, were much less significant than in the above-mentioned cases. In these societies, chiefs as rulers emerged only during the post-colonial period. These include the Kokomba and the Talensi of Northern Ghana.

Statement of Problem

Among most of the countries of the West African sub-region, Ghana seems to be regarded as an oasis of stability in a Region ravaged by strife. However, the country faces a host of bitter ethnic and chieftaincy conflicts, especially in its three northern regions. Notable among these are the Kussasi-Mamprusi clashes in Bawku, Dagbon, Bimbila, Gwollu, Kaleo and Nandom

chieftaincy disputes. Chieftaincy disputes and the question of who wields power, mostly political, accounts for many of these conflicts. In most instances, the causes of these conflicts and the methods adopted to curb them are sought from the factors that triggered them off and how the people are perceived to be inherently violent. The pertinent questions worth considering should rather be: how did the people live and govern themselves before colonial rule? And what historical factors have shaped the indigenous political institutions since colonial rule?

The central issue is about legitimacy of political authority. At one level, it is the desire for political recognition by the various ethnic groups in the North. At another level, it is about land ownership; but the two claims are closely interwoven. At the end of the nineteenth century, surveys conducted by the European colonial powers namely, Britain, France and Germany, painted a dualistic picture of the political landscape in the Voltaic Basin. George Ekem Ferguson's investigations into the Asante hinterland were of key importance for establishing the British colonial narrative. He identified centralised kingdoms as the Mossi kingdoms, Dagbon, Mampurugu, Nanumba, Wa and Gonja which existed side by side with the so-called stateless or acephalous groups. From a colonial perspective, only the centralised kingdoms were of importance since they had identifiable rulers with whom one could negotiate and sign treaties. Thus, a link between the local rulers and the colonial authorities was established, either by signing treaties or by conquering and imposing loyal candidates as new rulers, as the Germans did in Yendi in 1900.⁷

The politicisation, in the form of manipulation of the indigenous political institution and the intrusion of national politics, which began under colonial rule and was increased by the post-

⁷ See further K. Arhin (ed.), *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson, A Fanti Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890-1897*, Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum and Cambridge: African Studies Centre 1974; M. Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975; H. Weiss, "European Images of Islam in the Northern Hinterlands of the Gold Coast through the Early Colonial Period", *Sudanic Africa. A Journal of Historical Sources*, 12, 2001, 83-110., P. Ferguson and I. Wilks, op. Cit, pp. 326-369.

colonial civilian and military regimes after independence, resulted in the escalation of chieftaincy disputes.⁸ While it has been widely speculated that chieftaincy in Northern Ghana is entangled with disputes and conflict mediation, very little efforts have been made to trace the evolution of the institution in the area and how it has transformed over the period. Richard Rathbone a British Professor of Modern History in the University of London concedes; “there is nothing here about the North, the history of Northern chieftaincy in the 1950s is extremely important but exceeds my research competence”.⁹

Chieftaincy in the Ghanaian society evolved out of the need to establish structures that could uphold and defend the egalitarian interest of the community as a whole. Its historical transformation, current status, role and image are interrelated and it will be of immense value to the nation if we took the pain to study the institution systematically, instead of making wholesale statements.¹⁰

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is an attempt to trace the transformations and analyse the changes that the indigenous political administration has undergone in Northern Ghana, specifically, in Navrongo and Sakot from the pre-colonial period, through colonial rule and subsequently under the nationalist governments from 1900-1969. The period is chosen to illuminate the era just before colonial rule in the study area, colonialism and a civilian and military

⁸ A. I., Olawale *From ‘Owo Crisis’ to ‘Dagbon Dispute’: Lessons in the Politicisation of Chieftaincy Disputes in Modern Nigeria and Ghana*, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2008, pp.47-60.

⁹ Rathbone has written extensively on chieftaincy in Southern Ghana. He however made this confession in his book, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This buttresses the point that there is a stereotypical conception about chieftaincy in Northern Ghana. However, little efforts have been made unravel the rudiments of the institution in the North.

¹⁰ K. Arhin, *Traditional Rule in Ghana – Past and Present* (Accra, Sedco Publishing Limited: 1985).

regime under nationalist governments after independence. The study discusses the pre-colonial political structure and the evolution of chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot. It also examines the impact of colonialism on chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot and how the institution fared under the nationalist regimes (that is the first civilian and military regimes) after independence in Northern Ghana in general.

Method of Study

In the discussion of this work, efforts have been made to describe the position of chiefs in Navrongo and Sakot before the advent of British administration and to indicate the changes that have taken place since British administration was established. This has made it possible to highlight the historical factors that have conditioned their status up to 1969. To this end, the data-need for the research, as well as the different methods used to collect the data is described. The method of study also elaborates on the procedure, the methods used and how they were applied to solve the research problem (that is analysis of data) and the problems encountered in applying these methods.

In consonance with the outlined objectives, data collected for the research included secondary and primary information. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the collection of data for the study. The main distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches to rural data tended for years to be drawn as a sharp dichotomy.¹¹ However, the situation is not entirely so. Anthropologists and Historians have traditionally used qualitative methods, whereas Agricultural Economists and Demographers, for instance, have been known to

¹¹ J. Moris, and J. Copestake, *Qualitative Enquiry for Rural Development* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications Limited, 1993).

use the quantitative method.¹² The latter were interested in obtaining empirical measurement, which could be analysed within the framework of a deductively justified methodology, while the first tended to get their approaches immersed in primary data before they formulated an inductively derived picture of a specific situation, institution or system.

Several researchers in recent years have argued that such a rigid distinction and use of methods may be misunderstood, and that the distinction is more blurred. As Moris and Copestake¹³ have argued, problems arise immediately when one tries to put such a rigid distinction into practice. Thus, almost any qualitative information can be transformed and treated quantitatively at a higher level of analysis. Similarly much quantitative data occurs initially as a qualitative report of some activity or observed trait. The initial observation is then converted into approximate numeric values for ease of comparison and processing.

In this study, the qualitative method was mostly applied during fieldwork. It was aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of the social, economic and cultural processes and most importantly, the traditional institutional framework of the people. Furthermore, it was used to disclose personal perceptions of continuity and change in the traditional political institutions in Navrongo and Sakot. However, the quantitative method was also used to address the income level and sources of income of the Navoro *Pe* and the Sakot *Na'ab* during the colonial and the post-colonial era. The combination of the various methods has hence served to obtain different kinds of information, as well as supporting or crosschecking the findings. The data collection techniques should therefore be seen as a mutually supporting process of getting more insight into a complex reality.

¹² R. T. Pedersen, "Land Use and Land Cover Changes in Northern Ghana: A Case Study of Sekoti" (An Unpublished MA Thesis in the Department of Geography, University of Copenhagen), p.36.

¹³ J. Moris, and J. Copestake, *Qualitative Enquiry for Rural Development*, p. 42.

Oral information gathered from semi-structured interviews with key informants, minutes of meeting, informal conversations as well as observation and archival materials, altogether make-up the primary data-need for the study. Twelve inhabitants each from Navrongo and Sakot respectively were also interviewed to support the primary data.

Most of the books consulted for this study were obtained from Libraries in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi and the University of Ghana, Legon. The 'Ghana Collection' section of the library of the former, including their staff, have been particularly helpful in the provision of 'secondary materials' especially, published books.¹⁴ It is important to note that because of the regular attendance of the monthly 'work-in-progress',¹⁵ presentation meetings of the Historical Society of Ghana, in the University of Ghana in Accra; the study benefited from documents obtained from the University's Libraries, particularly that of the History Department and the Institute of African Studies.¹⁶ All these were augmented by periodicals, articles and minutes of meetings obtained from the National House of Chiefs in Kumasi and the Upper East Regional House of Chiefs in Bolgatanga. In most instances the National House of Chiefs provided clues to certain articles in newspapers and other materials relevant to the study.

Archival material was collected from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra. In addition, the archive in Tamale was visited thereafter. Here too

¹⁴ Most of these books treated issues concerning Ghana. However, with the exception of Arhin, the rest did not specifically deal with the chieftaincy institution at least, as pertaining in Northern Ghana.

¹⁵ The Historical Society of Ghana, under the Presidency of Professor Irene K. Odotei, all Graduate students from the four Public Universities in Ghana (namely, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, University of Ghana, Legon in Accra, the University of Cape Coast in Cape Coast and the University of Education, Wineba Campus), particularly those from the History Departments were given the opportunity to present their works (what was termed 'Work-in-Progress Presentation'). The panel or audience included but not exclusively senior lecturers/members of the institutions mentioned above. Admittedly, the work was largely shaped here.

¹⁶ The most important of the documents obtained here included unpublished theses, which though did not necessarily treat chieftaincy, but dealt with other issues in Northern Ghana.

notable gains were made, especially in areas where it was noticed that the study lacked enough information from the initial archival material gathered from the National Archives in Accra.

The paucity of documentary materials, particularly on Navrongo and Sakot, also prompted the use of personal interviews with key informants such as Professor Albert K. Awedoba of the University of Ghana, Legon; Professor David Milla of the University for Development Studies, Navrongo Campus, both of whom are conversant with the issue being studied. Others include, the chiefs concerned (the Sakot *Na'ab*, *Na'ab* Sigri Bewong I and Weken Balinia Adda, the regent of Navrongo who is acting as chief because of the ill health of the current chief) and Nicholas Nayimbe, a retired educationist who is also a historian in Sakot. Twenty-Four other people and indigenes knowledgeable in the customs and traditions of the people concerned, were interviewed. Donald Amuah, who is also a retired educationist and other learned persons of the study areas were engaged in informal conversations as well as observation as a historian. The method used for the interview with the key-informants and the chiefs as well as their elders was a semi-structured interview system, while a basically informal interview was adopted for the ordinary people.

For the first part of the study, which dealt with a general evaluation of the study area and its people, which include the geography, historical origin and their socio-cultural and economic life and the evolution of chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot, the researcher relied almost entirely on interviews, oral tradition and official government documents from Navrongo and Talensi-Nabdam District Assemblies respectively. However, existing relevant studies on the societies in Northern Ghana as a whole as well as their institutions and history were consulted. Many of these were written by colonial officials, of which the most well known was R. S. Rattray's *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*.

For Chapter Three in particular, oral interviews were used to collect historical information on the study areas concerning the Land and People of Navrongo and Sakot. In the oral historical interviews a person or sometimes a couple of people were interviewed on a specific topic such as the historical origin as well as the socio-cultural life of the people and how this had changed over the years. The interviewer concentrated on one or two or more of the above topics, depending on where the respondent seemed to talk, or knew more about. In total, twenty-four interviews¹⁷ were conducted. The only criterion for selecting the respondents was their old age, ability to recall their history as a result of some form of enlightenment and eagerness to tell about their people.

The interviews had a very loose structure and were built up around a dialogue between the respondent and the interviewer. At the beginning of it, the purpose of the interview was explained and most often the respondents were very eager to tell about their life so they spontaneously began to talk. In this way, the respondent's personal involvement in or perception of processes and structures was the point of departure for the following dialogue. The respondents were interrupted as little as possible while talking. It was only when the respondent transcended the area of interest that questions were asked to get them on the right track again. Otherwise, the researcher waited until the talking had come to a natural end, and then, the respondent was asked to clarify or elaborate on some of the most relevant perspectives or personal experiences.

The advantage of this method was that it created room for new perspectives and insights that it would be difficult to deduce from more structured interviews. In addition, it was experienced from the preliminary study that the old people in the village for example, felt it difficult to enter into a more traditional interview situation with structured questions. The dialogue had more flow if the respondents had the opportunity to follow their own logic. Through these

¹⁷ Twelve each in Navrongo and Sakot.

interviews, insights were gained into the history of settlements and their organisation, origin of people, their economic activities and their socio-cultural way of life including marriage and funeral celebration.

Observation of daily life in Navrongo and Sakot formed a very important research method during fieldwork. As a historian, observations of physical structures, social differences, behaviour, actions and symbols were a major source of material to discuss during interviews and conversations. Observations also helped to go deeper into topics of relevance to the study because they regularly countered what had been said at first instance in an interview or a conversation.

In dealing with the evolution of chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot as discussed in chapter four, interviews with key informants were resorted to. During the fieldwork, several semi-structured interviews were held with key-informants. The key informants were individuals who, as a result of their knowledge, previous experience, or social status in the community, had access to valuable information and insights about the context and functioning of the society, particularly the chieftaincy institution in this context. Key informants for this study included the Chiefs¹⁸ and their elders, the *Tendana*,¹⁹ Professor Albert K. Awedoba of the University of Ghana, Legon; Professor David Milla of the University for Development Studies, Navrongo Campus and Nicholas Nayimbe, a retired educationist and historian in Sakot. While the chiefs and the *tendan'ma* were allowed to tell the story about the evolution or the historical origin of the chieftaincy institution, these had to be substantiated by some of these key informants and on a few occasions, archival sources. A typical example was when the Regent in Navrongo and his elders pointed out that the chieftaincy institution existed in Navrongo, long before colonial rule was introduced in the area.

¹⁸ The Sakot *Na'ab* and the Navoro *Pe's* Regent.

¹⁹ Include the *Tigatu/Tendana* in Kasem and Nankani respectively of Navrongo and *Tenda'an* or Sakot *Da'an* as in Sakot.

On the other hand, Na'ab Sigri Bewong I conceded that the institution was only created at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the area came under British Colonial Administration. It must be noted that, chieftaincy though not an indigenous traditional institution in most parts of Northern Ghana, was introduced into certain areas long before colonialism, as is the case in Navrongo. Even before the introduction of chieftaincy, they had leaders whose power and authority, though derived from their religious responsibilities in the society, could be largely, compared to a chief.

Chapter five which discusses the impact of colonialism on the chieftaincy institution in Navrongo and Sakot relied heavily on archival information such as reports, letters and memoranda of District and Chief Commissioners of the Northern Territories and letters written by chiefs and other opinion leaders during the era. The account here is based largely on a documentary analysis of archival material relevant to the effect of colonial rule and especially indirect rule on the indigenous political set-up of Navrongo and Sakot. British colonial officials were seen to have used traditional rulers and their institutions in ways that suited their system of administration. They subjected traditional rulers to hitherto unknown practices such as recruitment of labour and levying and collection of taxes for the former, to the detriment of their subjects. The information derived vividly illuminated how the British Colonial Administration consciously manipulated the indigenous political set-up to suit its administrative principle in the Northern Territories. The result was that the indigenous people lost a considerable amount of confidence and respect in the erstwhile sacred institution. This was also to make nationalist governments after independence associate the institution with colonialism because of its role in the indirect rule system and thus subjected it to further manipulations.

Admittedly, analysis of chieftaincy under nationalism and independence relied on the few books that were accessible. Some of these were Arhin's: *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana (1951-1996)*, and Richard Rathbone's work on *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-1960*. Archival documents available on this area are few and scattered. However, these were still relied upon to ascertain some of the major assertions in the documents.

As with every research, a number of problems or impediments had to be overcome in the application of the above methods. As pointed out by Mazzucato and Niemeijer²⁰, when working with colonial archival materials, it is important to be aware that political motivations can colour the information given in the colonial reports. This notwithstanding, since the written materials about the region dating before independence are very scarce such colonial documents from the archives are a very important source of information together with oral interviews in the study of the indigenous political system of the people. During the research, apart from the illegibility of some of the archival documents that made them difficult to decipher, some of the information given showed a total lack of understanding of the tradition and customs of the indigenous people and their institutions. Thus, there was the need to be cautious in drawing generalisations on such information, but rather other sources had to be consulted for clarification.

Researchers have argued that the information given during research in the field is influenced by the position of the researcher, the informants and interpreters or research assistants²¹. The accounts given during interviews were influenced by the time and the place of the interviews and by the expectations of both researchers and informants. During the fieldwork in

²⁰ V. Mazzucato, and D. Niemeijer, *Rethinking Soil and Water Conservation in a Changing Society: a Case Study in Eastern Burkina Faso* (Tropical Resource Management Papers, No 32. Wageningen University, 2000).

²¹ E. Robson, "From Teacher to Taxi Driver: Reflections on Research Roles in Developing areas", In E. Robson, and K. Willis, (eds.): *Postgraduate Fieldwork in Developing areas: A rough Guide*. (The Developing Areas Research Group of The Royal Geographical Society, 1997), pp.51-74.

Navrongo and Sakot, certain barriers and biases related to the interpretation and reliability of data were encountered. The researcher was not constrained by language barrier in the interviews, as he speaks the *Kasem* and *Nankani* spoken in Navrongo. On the other hand, the *Nab't* of the Sakot people is also mutually intelligible with *Grune*, which he spoke too. Also, other informants such as the Sakot *Na'ab*²² and the Regent in Navrongo understand and speak very good English. The major impediment however was that since most of the informants on the history of the Study Areas were not formally educated, it became difficult for them to provide dates for certain key events.²³

The chiefs also in most instances, were tempted to ideally glorify the issues concerning their polities. The solution however, was to crosscheck from other sources and on rare occasions, the use of the historian's intuition. It must also be admitted that the researcher has sometimes pre-determined to be conversant with some of the issues that were being narrated in the interviews, since he has lived in a similar cultural setting in the village for well over nine years. He was always quick to be as objective as possible in order not to make hasty judgements and conclusions.

Apart from being scarce, most of the documentary sources available and consulted, did not specifically treat Navrongo and Sakot. The few documentary sources on Navrongo and Sakot were on most occasions, unpublished theses, which did not even trace the transformations that the chieftaincy institution had undergone over the period under study. Significantly, archival information, especially on Navrongo in particular, was quite adequate.

²² The Sakot *Na'ab* is a retired mining engineer at Tarkwa.

²³ Here, the researcher had to apply his knowledge in History.

Justification for the Study

Since the nineteenth century, when scholars began to document the history of Ghana, very little has been written on the history of several ethnic groups in Northern Ghana. The few studies that are available as well as those being undertaken concern mostly the states of Gonja, Mamprugu and Dagbon. Each of these has a centralised administration in which the chief plays the dominant role. It has been widely said and argued that most other ethnic groups in Northern Ghana had nothing comparable to these states. In particular, that until the introduction of chieftaincy by the British Colonial Officials, the institution was unknown to these other ethnic groups. Though, the above assertion could be true about some areas; it will be grossly misleading, however, to associate it with several other areas in the Northern Ghana, including Navrongo. This is because Kasena/Nankana oral tradition as well as unpublished records from the Public Records and Archives Administration Departments (PRAAD) in Accra and Tamale all point to the fact that the institution has been in existence within the Navrongo Traditional Area long before colonialism.²⁴

Harvey remarks with respect to our knowledge of Northern Ghana in the twentieth century, that

Detailed data on the organisation and functioning of the indigenous societies of the area are fragmentary, and it is therefore difficult to assess adequately the degree of distortion and dislocation of traditional institutions effected after the advent of British administration in 1901²⁵

In the context of this remark, it was necessary that further research into the matter should be undertaken on the basis of a series of micro-studies of the chieftaincy institution in specific localities in Northern Ghana. This was done on the premise of offering detailed analyses of the

²⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5/ 1. Navrongo District Commissioner's Report, 24th October 1908.

²⁵ W. B. Harvey, *Law and Social Change in Ghana*, (Princeton: 1966), p. 80.

evolution, and problems of succession to chiefly office in specific localities with particular reference to the role of conflict or conflict potentials. In undertaking this task, it was realised that despite Harvey's prognostications, chieftaincy has become a topic of major interest in Ghana; in no small part as a result of the protracted conflicts all over Ghana and especially, the North. Under the heading, 'Chiefs and the Second Republic', the editor of the Daily Graphic of Ghana commented on 27th March 1969:

Next to litigation involving ownership of land, it appears controversy arising from the institution of chiefship, ranging from paramount chiefs to nondescript headmen of tribal communities comes next in magnitude as far as this country is concerned. . . . With chieftaincy or chiefship the problem is complicated by the almost non-existence of written laws and traditions affecting the office at the various levels. . . . The current dispute involving the installation of the *Ya-Na* emphasises this serious shortcoming. The world has come far into the twentieth century, and unnecessary strife and retardation is created by thinking and acting in a manner consistent with past centuries. It is important for Law and Order in the Second Republic for us to re-adjust ourselves to the theme of this century in matters affecting succession to, and the powers embodied in the institution of chieftaincy. . . . Unless we take a firm stand in codifying the rules of succession, we will eventually discover that chieftaincy instead of being the embodiment of our national and tribal aspirations, will turn out to be a thorn in our flesh in our endeavours towards national progress.²⁶

It is glaringly evident that chieftaincy at both the national and local levels is far from moribund. Bretton has described the manipulation, 'like so many puppets', of the chiefs by colonial rule and the Government of the Convention Peoples Party.²⁷

Scope of the Study

²⁶ P. Ferguson, and I. Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern" Ghana in M. Crowder, and O. Ikime, (eds.) *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation and Ile-Ife, University of Ife Press, 1970), p.340.

²⁷ H. L. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: 1966), p. 73.

The study is designed to trace the transformations that have taken place in the chieftaincy institution in Navrongo and Sakot from 1900 to 1969. These are major traditional areas with paramount chiefs in the Upper East Region of Ghana. For convenience therefore, the period between 1900 and 1969 has been chosen as the watershed since it was after 1900 that the British declared a protectorate over the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast (1901)²⁸ and with it came the British administrative system of Indirect Rule.²⁹ The British formally established their rule in Navrongo in 1905 and in Sakot in 1907.³⁰

The period is selected because it represents the era just before the British declared the Northern Territories of Ghana a Protectorate. It was widely assumed by scholars that there were no traditional leaders in most parts of the modern Upper East Region. The terminal date of the study is also selected to coincide with the first civilian and military post-independent regimes. Navrongo and Sakot were selected because, the latter is typically rural and the chieftaincy institution is believed to have been created by the colonial administration. Navrongo represents a relatively “urban traditional area” whose involvement with the institution dates back to the second half of the seventeenth century.

Theoretical Framework

²⁸ See G. E. Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana's History 1807 – 1957*. (London, Thomas Nelson, 1964), pp.533 – 4. ; Kimble, *op cit.* p. 234.

²⁹ It should be noted that Indirect Rule was only established in the Gold Coast after 1932. Before then, it was a period of Direct Rule as the British termed it.

³⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/5/2.1908. Annual Report of the Northern Territories.

According to H. J. M. Claessen and Piet van de Velde,³¹ evolution implies structural modification. Growth may lead toward structural modification; hence, evolution sometimes means growth. On the contrary, the evolution of chieftaincy in Northern Ghana is not necessarily characterised by growth. Rather, the institution has been subjected to inconsistent manipulations since the beginning of colonial rule. The evolution of chieftaincy in Northern Ghana is, however, compatible with Berrein's theory of evolution which observed that two kinds of evolution could be discerned: 'upward evolution' and 'downward evolution'. That, systems that evolve upwards grow through the development of successive suprasystems; whereas downward evolution means growth through the development of specialised subunits among the system's components.

According to the system of *synergetics* as noted by Haken and Guksch, evolution can be conceived of as the way parameters evolve on 'macroscopic' levels with 'slave' subsystems on 'microscopic' levels. This is probably the most general way to characterise evolution. In the domain of social evolution, 'upward evolution' leading to an ever-growing administrative hierarchy is an indicator for the activity of the principle of the selective neglect of certain details.³² They further stated that in upward evolving systems, subsystems initially possess stronger attractive forces and are less easily disrupted during the system's formative stages. They perform more effectively than the younger 'suprasystem'. However, evolution upward may proceed to the point where the weak 'suprasystem' becomes strong enough to overpower its 'subsystems'. The outputs of the 'subsystems are the nutrient sources for the 'suprasystems' without which, it cannot survive. Yet, 'suprasystems' frequently control their respective 'subsystems' as happens for example with business management.

³¹ H. J. M. Claessen and P. van de Velde, *Early State Dynamics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), p.24.

³² H. J. M. Claessen and P. van de Velde, *Early State Dynamics*, . p.26.

In tracing the evolution of chiefdoms, Elman Service in his work; *Primitive Social Organisation*, first published in 1962 (revised in 1971), drew a rigorous distinction between band, ethnic group, chiefdom and state forms, in his theory of 'socio-cultural integration'. For Service, then, "a 'band' is only an association, more or less residential, of nuclear families, ordinarily numbering twenty-five to hundred people, with affinal (marriage) ties allying with one or a few other bands."³³ The loose structure of 'bands' will be developed subsequently, but for Service the salient feature of the 'band' level of socio-cultural integration "is simply that all the functions of the culture are organised, practiced or partaken by no more than a few associated 'bands' made up of related nuclear families."³⁴ From those loose aggregates an ethnic group is formed, under certain circumstances through the crystallisation of 'sodalities' which become what he termed as 'pan-tribal'. These stabilise the fluid groupings and give them a cohesive structure in both depth and extent. "Probably, the most usual 'pan-tribal' 'sodalities' are clans, followed by age-grade associations, secret societies and 'sodalities' for such special purposes as curing, warfare, ceremonies and so on."³⁵

This structural organisation is brought on by pressure, not so much from the natural, as from the human environment, what Service calls the 'superorganic environment'. Hence, though "a tribe is a fragile social body compared to chiefdom or a state . . . it seems likely that without foreign-political problems, overall tribal integration would not take place; it is always such problems that stimulate the formation of large political bodies."³⁶

³³ E. R. Service, *Primitive Social Organisation* (New York: Norton: 1962), p.100.

³⁴ Service, *Primitive Social Organisation*, p.98.

³⁵ . Service, *Primitive Social Organisation*, p.102.

³⁶ Service, *Primitive Social Organisation* p, .102.

Service further intimated that it is possible that intense competition and frequent warfare among ethnic groups was an important condition for the rise of chiefdoms in the first place, in as much as planning and coordination have obvious advantages in war. While the evolution of chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot is very much in consonance with Service's theory, since the activities of Babatu and Samouri³⁷ largely led to the rise of chiefdoms in the area; Service was quick to add that this is not a sufficient condition. He explained that incessant warfare amongst New Guinea or Amazonian horticulturalists for example, failed to generate a chiefdom. This point was not lost on Bray³⁸ who advocates his own conquest theory, but for whom warfare is a necessary but not sufficient cause. However, redistribution seems to be an efficient cause to Service, since most chiefdoms seem to have arisen where important regional exchange and a consequent increase in local specialisation came about because differentiation in habitat was combined with considerable sedentariness. "Instead of people moving to exploit different ecological zones, they stay put and their goods move."³⁹

Sedentariness theory, as has been argued, has a lot to do with the evolution of chieftaincy. But, as for local specialisation and overall re-integration by the chief, Claessen and Skalnik⁴⁰ show quite plainly that territories within the Hawaiian proto-state were specifically organised to ensure local autarky, and that what was 'centralised' and 'redistributed' (only to the elite) were sumptuary

³⁷ The slave raiding activities of Babatu on one hand, and that of other established chiefdoms in the North, particularly Dagbon; led to civil war and insecurity in the north-east and the north-west parts of the then Northern Territories. Due to this the people of these areas reluctantly accepted colonial rule, which was to create the chieftaincy institution in Sakot; and even in Navrongo where it existed, it needed to be strengthened. That is why it is recorded in the oral tradition of the people of Navrongo that the 'Whiteman' was invited from Gambaga to save the area from extinction.

³⁸ W. Bray, "Civilising the Aztecs" in, *The Evolution of Social Systems*, ed. by J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp.373-398.

³⁹ Service, *Primitive Social Organisation*, p.135.

⁴⁰ Claessen, and Skalnik, *Early State Dynamics*, p.54

items marking their status. A conclusion generalised by the broad survey of Cohen.⁴¹ Thus, neither warfare nor quasi-marketing agency can explain the evolution of chieftaincy.

Sir J. G. Frazer⁴² invoked the theory of 'divine kingship' to explain the customary regicide of kings, which suggested that the king must be killed when he fell sick or grew senile. He employed the term to denote a particular class of sacred kings: those who should not be permitted to die a natural death. 'Divine Kings' incarnated what he termed, 'dying gods' and were approximately intermediate evolutionary figures between the magician and the 'rain maker' of the 'Age of Magic' and the 'god-king' of the 'Age of Religion'.⁴³ Perhaps the first to use Frazer's descriptive categories in African ethnography was Seligman,⁴⁴ who later provided a convenient definition of the 'divine king', which doubtless received Frazer's approval. The term was to be restricted to:

. . . such rulers, as being held responsible for the right ordering and especially the fertility of the earth and domestic animals, end their lives by being killed or killing themselves with greater or lesser ceremony, often at a fixed period (or the oncoming of senescence) or ceremonially expose themselves to the chance of death or else feign to die.⁴⁵

This definition incorporates Frazer's diacritical feature: the notion that the divine king should not die a natural death. It is more empirical than any of Frazer's implied definitions. In that, it points to a connection between king and nature without requiring

⁴¹ R. Cohen, "State Origins: A Reappraisal" In *The Early State*, ed. by H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), pp. 31-75.

⁴² J. G. Frazer, *The Dying God*, Part III of *The Golden Bough*, Third Edition (London, 1911)

⁴³ Frazer, *The Dying God*, p.11.

⁴⁴ C. G. Seligman, "Some Aspects of the Semitic Problem in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan" (Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, xliii, 1913).

⁴⁵ C. G. Seligman, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A Study in Divine Kingship* (The Frazer Lecture for 1933, London), p.5.

Frazer's original postulate of an incarnated nature god who, being mortal must be 'transferred to a rigorous successor'.⁴⁶

Evans-Pritchard⁴⁷ employed Frazer's theory of 'divine kingship' in his essay on '*The divine kingship of the Shiluk of the Nilotic Sudan*'. However, he viewed customary king killing as a fiction. The argument was based on three principal premises: that it is the kingship not the king that is divine; that divine kingship is as much a political as a ritual phenomenon and that the office must be viewed in the total context of the social structure. The Shiluk ruler, according to Evans-Pritchard is a medium between god and man. He is thus, the head of the political community and centre of the national cult.

Owing to the decentralised segmentary structure of Shiluk society, the king reigns but does not govern. In reigning however, he symbolises the whole community and must not become identified with any part of it; for this reason his office is raised to a mystical plane. Therefore, the ceremonial slaying of the king was probably a fiction arising from his dual personality as both an individual and an institution. He nevertheless considers that regicide was of frequent occurrence for, should the kingship tend to become identified with sectional interests, "the other segments asserted their rights in the office at the expense of the king's person."⁴⁸ Likewise, it might be expected that should a national misfortune weaken the king's support, a rival prince would be encouraged to raise a rebellion 'against

⁴⁶ M. W. Young, "The Divine Kingship of the Jukun: A Re-Evaluation of some Theories", in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p136.

⁴⁷ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shiluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, The Frazer Lecture for 1948 (Cambridge: 1948).

⁴⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shiluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, p.38.

the king in the name of the kingship'.⁴⁹ Thus 'divine kingship' according to Evans-Pritchard:

. . . is an institution typical of, though doubtless not restricted to, societies with pronounced lineage systems in which the political segments are parts of a loosely organised structure without governmental functions . . . (and in which) . . . the political organisation takes a ritual or a symbolic form.⁵⁰

For Evans-Pritchard then, the dogma of customary regicide is not only a statement about the value of the king's health and vigour for the Shiluk, but also a statement of the mode of resolution of structural opposition and segmentary competition for participation in the kingship.

Evans-Pritchard's theory of 'divine kingship' unlike Frazer's, explains the divine nature of the chieftaincy institution and the chief's role as an intermediary between the people and the 'spirit world', as is the case in Navrongo and Sakot and several other places in Northern Ghana. It also links the customary regicide of chiefs and its frequency to the competition for indigenous political office, which sometimes leads to the killing of incumbents.

Organisation of the Work

⁴⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shiluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, p.35.

⁵⁰ Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shiluk of the Nilotic Sudan*, p.37.

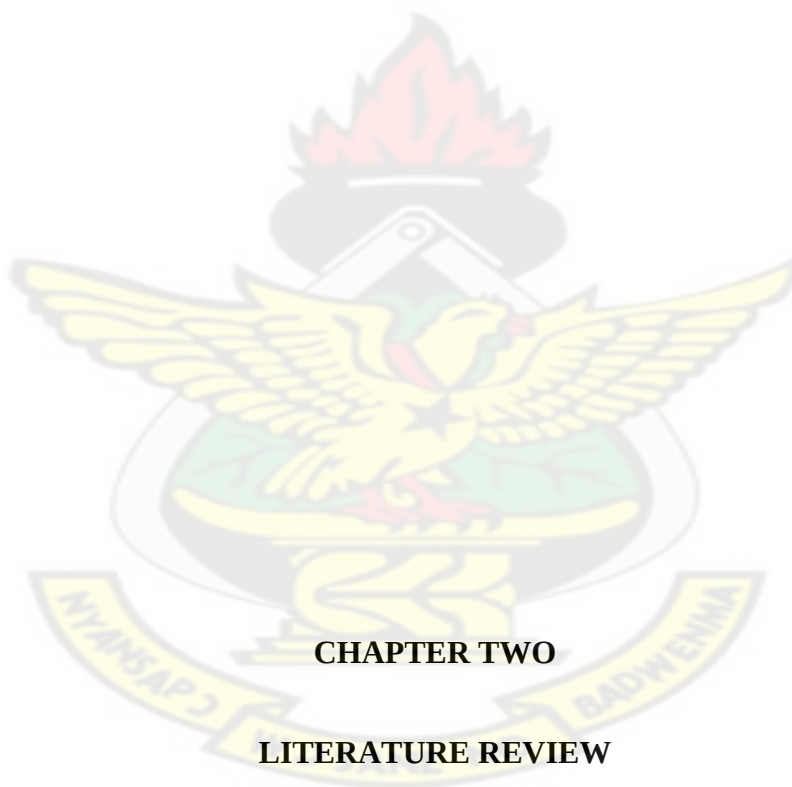
The study comprises six chapters. Chapter One opens with a general introduction to the work, states the problem, sets the objectives of the study, highlights the method of study and the scope within which the work has been undertaken. It also outlines how the work has been organised as well as the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature.

Chapter Three discusses the Area and People of Navrongo and Sakot. This includes the geographical setting of the areas studied, the historical origins of the people, their economic activities, and their socio-cultural backgrounds, which also include marriage and funeral celebrations, as a way of highlighting the general characteristics of the study area.

Chapter Four provides background information on the structure and the evolution of chieftaincy in Navrongo and Sakot in pre-colonial times. That is, the origins of the indigenous political system in the areas and how the people organised themselves politically before foreign influence after 1901.

Chapter Five discusses how colonialism on one hand, and nationalism and independence on the other, had an impact on the indigenous political system of Navrongo and Sakot. Here, attention is given to how the colonial political organisation in the areas after 1902, affected the traditional political institution. It also looks at how the first two nationalist regimes, that is both civilian and military, influenced the chieftaincy institutions in the area in one way or the other. Chapter Six provides a comprehensive conclusion to the study.

KNUST



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the available literature on Traditional Rule in Ghana concentrate on the Southern states and sometimes the so-called centralised states of Northern Ghana, which include the Gonja and the Mole – Dagbani states on one hand, and the Talensi who are said to typify the non–

centralized communities. Thus, Arhin⁵¹ remarked in his study of Traditional Rule in Ghana that he had to consider the Talensi, Dagbon and Akan because there already existed a substantial amount of information on these people. However, several other polities in the North had centralised political administration under a chief before colonialism. Notable among these are the Kasena–Nankana of Navrongo who are being studied. Although C.C. Reindorf had in the late nineteenth century had written about the history of the Gold Coast;⁵² W.W. Claridge, a colonial official who was also a Provincial Medical Officer in Tamale was the first to attempt a published work on the history of the Gold Coast in 1915.⁵³ Indeed Claridge made mention of the North peripheral in his work; he only mentions how the Protectorate became British.

As remarked by Gareth Austin “The end of Independent Chieftaincy must be one of the most fundamental changes in the long-term history of Ghana.”⁵⁴ It is in this sense that Richard Rathbone undertook what is regarded as a worthwhile study of the relationship between Nkrumah, the head of the first nationalist government in Ghana and the chieftaincy institution in the first decade of his regime, from 1951-1960. His work commented on how the government of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah sought to discard the chiefly principle in local government, hence, effectively replacing chiefs with elected personnel in the purported principle of democracy; and the long and bitter campaigns mounted by many southern chiefs to resist their political marginalisation. This was to weaken chieftaincy by attrition and eventually alter its legal basis to be able to considerably incorporate and control it. He concluded

⁵¹ K. Arhin, *Traditional Rule in Ghana – Past and Present* (Accra, Sedco Publishing Limited: 1985)

⁵² C. C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Ghana University press: 1966). Indeed, it was written in 1896 when the Northern Protectorate had not been formed, but the second edition was published in 1966.

⁵³ Claridge’s book was *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*, Volumes 1&2 (Frank Cass and Co. Limited: 1915).

⁵⁴ Gareth Austin is a Senior Lecturer in the London School of Economics and Political Science. He made this comment in the preface of Richard Rathbone’s work on ‘Nkrumah and the Chiefs’.

thus: “chieftaincy in the decade of the 1950s was consciously and systematically reconstructed with implications which can still be felt in modern Ghana.” However, despite being described as ‘distinguished scholarship and stylishly crafted’⁵⁵ this study does not include ‘Northern Chieftaincy’: as conceded by Rathbone himself in his preface, “The history of Northern Chieftaincy is extremely important, but exceeds my research competence.”⁵⁶

Ernest Obeng⁵⁷ like Busia⁵⁸ and Casely-Hayford⁵⁹ confined himself only to the art and practice of chieftaincy among the Akan. While the latter were concerned with the bare facts of some of the customs and usages, as they existed in ancient Asante. J. Casely-Hayford’s, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* is political in intent and primarily concerned with how to reconcile British rule with the institutions of Akan self-government. Busia also conceded that the changes in the Akan political system resulting from the colonial presence were not different from those experienced in the Gold Coast, Togoland under the British trusteeship and the Northern Territories, which together were granted independence of British rule under the collective name of Ghana on 6th March 1957. This argument suggests that the political underpinnings and practices of the Akan system, largely have some resemblance with those of Northern Ghana. However, contrary to this notion, in most parts of the North, the system of inheritance,⁶⁰ land holding or custodianship,⁶¹ as relating to indigenous political administration, substantially differ from the Akan system.

⁵⁵ Gareth Austin, op. cit.

⁵⁶ R. Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000)

⁵⁷ E. E. Obeng, *Ancient Ashanti Chieftaincy* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1988). p.34

⁵⁸ K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1951)

⁵⁹ J. E. Casely-Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (London : Frank Cass and Company Limited , 1970)

Events in the Gold Coast after the Second World War, which occasioned its rapid political advancement to nationhood, led Ward⁶² to attempt to explain how the Gold Coast came to be what it is. Although he gives a good exposition of political developments in the country, he only mentions the North when events in the area such as the formation of the Northern Peoples Party (NPP) impinge on national politics.

Although, Kwame Arhin's *Traditional Rule in Ghana: Past and Present*, focused attention on the Talensi, Dagbon and the Akan, which are part of the North, he was quick to state that apart from the fact that a substantial amount of information already existed on these,⁶³ taken together they illustrate all the kinds and aspects of traditional rule that may be found in Ghana. He gave a rounded view of traditional rule in the past and in the present. In effect, he tried to describe how traditional rule worked as a system of government before colonial rule, show the historical factors that have conditioned its present character and consequently, how it fits into the current institutional framework of Ghana. He also put forward arguments for and against the survival of traditional rule and suggested areas of which require reforms to respond to changing socio-economic, political and cultural situations that are faced by contemporary traditional rulers.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Contrary to the matrilineal inheritance system of the Akan, that of Northern Ghana is patrilineal. It is worthy to note thus that to a very large extent, this informs the eligibility of one who is to inherit. While nephews inherit their uncles among the Akan, it is mostly sons who are supposed to inherit their fathers among the people of the North.

⁶¹ In Northern Ghana, even where the institution of chieftaincy existed before the introduction of colonial rule, matters relating to custodianship of land were exclusively that of the *tendana*.

⁶² W. E. F. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

⁶³ This suggests that information on other polities in Northern Ghana, especially those generally considered as 'minor political entities' was scarce if not unavailable.

⁶⁴ K. Arhin, *Traditional Rule in Ghana – Past and Present* (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1985).

Boaten⁶⁵ effectively agreed with Arhin that the chieftaincy institution should be maintained because points for the continuation of the institution far outweigh those against it. He, however, went further to comment on relevant aspects of chieftaincy in the modern context by what he termed as the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal' planes. The former comprises the National and the Regional Houses of Chiefs, then the Traditional Councils; while on the latter, comments were made on some traditional areas selected from Ashanti, Volta and Northern Regions. He concluded by exposing some of the weaknesses in the institution. For example, corruption that makes it possible for people with dubious royal backgrounds to ascend to stools/skins in some traditional areas.

Specifically, the earliest literature on Northern Ghana before the nineteenth century and colonialism primarily dealt with trade and Islam than the social and political lives of the people.⁶⁶ George Ekem Ferguson,⁶⁷ a colonial official and a surveyor was the first British agent to write about the non-centralised societies inhabiting the area between Mamprugu to the south and Mossi to the north.⁶⁸ In his account, he did not recognise the presence of chiefs in these areas. However, when the government anthropologist, Captain Rattray, published *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland* in 1932 he gave reasons for reassessing the conventional ideas within the colonial administration about native polity, at least for the northernmost parts of the Northern Territories, when he noted;

⁶⁵ B. A. Boaten, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana: An Overview* (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, 1988)

⁶⁶ N. Levztion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.17.

⁶⁷ Between 1892 and 1894, George Ekem Ferguson is said to have signed treaties with amongst others the chiefs of Bole, Daboya, Yendi, Bimbila, Wa and Gambaga on behalf of the British Colonial Government.

⁶⁸ See K. Arhin, *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson a Fante Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890 – 1897*. (Leiden: Afrika – Studiecentrum, 1974), pp.66 – 107, 115 – 166.

In the past, in the Northern Territories, there were no chiefs, only *ten'danma* is a statement I have frequently heard made. Such a statement is a result of confused thinking and shows complete lack of knowledge of the local social organisation under which these tribes formally lived and in many cases still live. The case should rather be stated thus: In the past, the *ten'danma* were the only chiefs known.

The onset of colonialism ushered in a more vivid report on the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. Here again, the major weakness of most of these works was that, they were more anthropological than historical.⁶⁹ The hierarchy of the colonial administration was such that District Commissioners were to write periodic reports about their districts. These were sent to the Chief Commissioner in Tamale who forwarded them to the Governor in Accra. The latter then sent copies to the colonial office in Britain. These reports contained valuable information on the social life of the people, culture, history, economic activities and specifically, their system of governance. These colonial officials, to a very large extent, misunderstood most of the indigenous traditional practices of the local people. They therefore ridiculed some of these customary practices, when they used their culture as a yardstick to measure that of the indigenous people.

In West Africa, British colonial administrators worked on the assumption that they could reform traditional institutions to conform to Western models. The role of the colonial power was to rule until such a time as the indigenous people could prove themselves capable of self-government in European and for that matter, British fashion. The duties of the colonial officials also included the provision of instruments whereby colonial peoples could acquire the skills necessary for good government. For many officials, the most important of such instruments was the system of indirect

⁶⁹ Brukum made this assertion in his Doctoral thesis. J. N. K. Brukum, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Under British Colonial Rule, 1897 – 1956: A Study in Political Change". An unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Graduate Department of History, University of Toronto, Canada, 1996.

rule defined by one former colonial official as “governing local affairs through the customary institutions of the people of the area.”⁷⁰

For the British, indirect rule was truly ingenious as an instrument of colonial administration and as a precursor of self-government; however, it proved a disaster. It had two main weaknesses. These were the time scale it presumed and its assumption as to who was to rule. According to Sir Andrew Cohen, “the method of applying indirect rule was based on the assumption that we had an indefinite time ahead which the system could grow and develop under our guidance”.⁷¹

In the build-up to the introduction of indirect rule, District Commissioners were tasked to study the peoples under their administration. Thus, Eyre-Smith, Duncan-Johnstone, Blair, Tamakloe, Mackay and Kerr wrote extensively on Dagbon, Mamprugu, Kusasi and the Gonja.⁷² Although, they did not view the North in a national setting, their works vividly described the political administration of the specific areas studied. This was because, even as late as 1928, the Governor of the Gold Coast, T. S. Thomas, could bleakly express his Government’s bewilderment thus:

So far as I can ascertain, this government is completely in the dark as regards the Native Administration of the Northern Territories: there seem to be no clear cut statement of policy: we do not know what is being done and what our administration is intended to bring forth.⁷³

⁷⁰ A. Cohen, *British Policy in Changing Africa* (London: 1959), p. 25.

⁷¹ Cohen, *British Policy in Changing Africa*, P. 31

⁷² The outcome are books such as F. Tamakloe, *A History of the Dagbamba People* (Accra: 1931), A. C. Duncan-Johnstone, and H. A. Blair, *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organisation of the Dagbon Kingdom* (Accra: Government Printer, 1932); J. A. Eyre-Smith, *Brief Review of the History and Social Organisation of the Peoples of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: Government Printer, 1933) .

⁷³ Acting Governor, T. S. Thomas’ Report on the Northern Territories. PRAAD, Tamale, ADM 1/7, 3/7/1928.

Therefore, it was to give the colonial administration an understanding of how the indigenous people governed themselves. These would largely then, inform them on what measures to take to enhance the smooth running of the system of indirect rule in the area.

Most Political Scientists and Historians who wrote textbooks on politics or political administration of Ghana in the second half of the twentieth century⁷⁴ gave relatively little attention to the situation in Northern Ghana. While Kimble briefly discusses the administration of the North in its formative years, Austin and Boahen briefly treated the Northern Peoples Party (NPP) and its alliance with the National Liberation Movement (NLM) respectively. Agbodeka however, only mentions the North with regard to Britain's mandate over parts of Togoland. This notwithstanding, Ladouceur⁷⁵ and Staniland⁷⁶ specifically dealt with political developments in the North. Ladouceur for example, explains the origins of the demands for autonomy for the region before independence. In doing this, he examines the acquisition of the area by Britain, the policies pursued and attempts at integrating the North with the rest of the country. Ladouceur did not specifically delve into the traditional political administration of the area before colonialism.

The importance of the historical construction of chieftaincy and the interaction of traditional institutions with the state, in structuring the inter-ethnic conflicts of Northern Ghana over the years, is extremely important. The crisis has been interpreted variously as an inter-ethnic

P. Ferguson, and I. Wilks Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana, in M. Crowder, and O. Ikime, (eds.) *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation and Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1968), pp'340 and 363-364.

⁷⁴ Some of the books include D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: the rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford at Clarendon Press: 1963); D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (London Oxford University Press, 1964); A. A. Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1975); F. Agbodeka, *Ghana in the Twentieth Century* (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1972)

⁷⁵ A. P. Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London: Longman, 1979).

⁷⁶ M. Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political change in Northern Ghana* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

civil war or as a rebellion against the traditional authority of some groups over others. Labeling the clashes in these terms, however, may disguise more than it informs, as most customary practices and the issue of ethnicity are socially constructed and politically contested at both local and national levels. In Ghana, the powers of political and traditional leaders overlap and interrelate, making direct competition over access to traditional state structures important to these conflicts. Moreover, since most of these conflicts are connected with chiefs, traditional leadership in Ghana has become associated with a combined development and security discourse.

Thus, Jonsson in recent times provides a nuanced analysis of the social tensions in the North.⁷⁷ The study makes a case for alleviating some of the pressures that have caused such communal violence through careful review of traditional institutions such as chieftaincy. Staniland on the other hand was primarily concerned with the origins of the Yendi chieftaincy dispute. He describes Dagbon as the most important ethnic group in Northern Ghana that also possessed a strong tradition of chieftaincy. He thus sets out to examine in detail the history of the Dagbon kingdom from the immediate pre-colonial period in the late nineteenth century until the present day.⁷⁸ First, by tracing the history of Dagbon politics, which is the story of the actual events with particular emphasis on a conflict between two rival factions of the royal family, popularly known as the ‘Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute.’ Then, the other is the analysis of change in Dagbon political traditions as a result of colonial rule and subsequently of independence.

In assessing the first thirty years of colonial rule, Staniland concluded that “the really important effect” was in the colonial sphere, but that “many aspects of social life were, indeed,

⁷⁷ J. Jonsson, *The Overwhelming Minority: Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region* (Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, Department of International Development, London: University of Oxford, 2007)

⁷⁸ That was in the last quarter of the twentieth century when he conducted his research.

practically untouched by the presence of a colonial government.”⁷⁹ Superficially, this could be right, but in a society where the political sphere tends to overlap with other aspects of social life, the loss of sovereignty is bound to have fundamental implications for all aspects of the society. There is, in fact, very little analysis of the impact of colonialism on the lives of the ordinary people; many of the earlier anthropological studies for example, virtually ignored colonialism and were attempts to reconstruct traditional societies as though colonial rule did not exist or was unimportant. Concerning indirect rule, his judgment was that at worst, it was a failure⁸⁰ and at best, perhaps, “ambiguous as a formula for self-government and ineffectual as a strategy for change.”⁸¹

The major weakness of Staniland’s work is that the book is marred by digressions and occasional gratuitous comments such as an account of social life among the colonial officials of the Northern Territories. Thus, Ladouceur remarked; “although it is a useful case study, it would have benefited from a clearer sense of direction and overall perspective.”⁸² His major interest therefore, was to discuss in detail, indirect rule in Dagbon and how it shaped the future chieftaincy dispute.

⁷⁹ Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, p. 76.

⁸⁰ Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, 103-104.

⁸¹ Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, p. 170.

⁸² Paul Ladouceur made this remark in his analysis of Staniland’s work on, *The Lions of Dagbon: Political change in Northern Ghana*.

While Staniland and Jonsson try to trace the genealogy of the perennial inter-ethnic and chieftaincy disputes in Northern Ghana, Ferguson and Wilks highlight how such disputes were necessary to the viability of the chieftaincy institution in particular.⁸³

But as already noted and as will be argued further below, the viability of chiefly institutions is closely bound up with the continuance of competition for office: to attempt to eliminate contest as the British Colonial Administration did, is to weaken the mainspring of the system...Any superordinate government concerned to utilize chiefs in local administrative capacities, whether the British colonial power or the successive post-independence regimes, has necessarily been faced with the same dilemma: that while contests for vacant office appear, and doubtless are, in many ways disruptive of the normal processes of control, nevertheless the attempt to eliminate such conflict jeopardises the quality of achievement in chieftaincy and randomises the emergence of leaders at the local level.⁸⁴

From another perspective, it would be realised that before the onset of colonial rule, particularly during the closing years of the nineteenth century, most of the ethnic groups in Northern Ghana had traditional constitutions in one way or the other which helped to protect that noble African institution (chieftaincy). In spite of the upheavals following the activities of Samouri and Babatu in Northern Ghana on the eve of colonial rule, the institution of chiefship was intact, though much weakened. To ensure the success of indirect rule as an adjunct to their own rule, Britain reconstructed the kingdoms that were on the verge of collapse. This could only be effectively done if chiefly power were strengthened. To this end conferences were held between 1930 and 1933 in the various traditional areas in which their constitutions, chiefly hierarchies and lists of qualified candidates/gates were drawn up. Chiefs were then said to be very useful after the

⁸³ Ferguson, and Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana", p.297.

⁸⁴. Ferguson and Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana", pp. 340 and 363-364.

exercise. However, Brukum (2004) in his study of 'Traditional Constitutions and Succession Disputes in Northern Ghana' observed:

In spite of the existence of traditional constitutions . . . succession disputes still occur. This is mainly due to an attempt by one gate to monopolise that institution and eliminate its rival, as happened in Dagbon, or to individuals to usurp power. Sometimes too, intervention by superior chiefs has led to succession disputes. In spite of the disputes, the institution of chiefship has not lost the prestige it has always enjoyed among most communities of the Northern Region, and it continues to play a vital role in the governance of the people of the Region.⁸⁵

Since 1983, when Eric Hobsbawm published his *Invention of Tradition*,⁸⁶ scholarly analysis of the cultural impact of colonial rule in Africa has become more focused. In Ghana, scholarship pertaining to the colonial presence has not been lacking. To mention a few studies, Sandra Greene's *Sacred Sites*⁸⁷ and the various publications of Carola Lentz⁸⁸ on colonial creation of ethnic identities in the north-western part of Ghana are refreshing departures from studies of colonial history that overemphasized the political and economic. Sean Hawkins's *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter between the LoDagaa and the 'World on Paper'*⁸⁹ is an excellent addition to the study of cultural history of colonialism.

⁸⁵ J. N. K. Brukum, "Traditional Constitutions and Succession Disputes in the Northern Region, Ghana" (Working Papers on Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 2004).

⁸⁶ E. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1983).

⁸⁷ S. E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁸⁸ These include but not exclusively, L. Carola, and N. Paul, *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention* (London: McMillan, New York: St. Martins Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ S. Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter between the LoDagaa and the 'World on Paper'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

Hawkins's 'world on paper' can be equated to what Jack Goody and Ian Watt once defined as 'alphabetical culture.'⁹⁰ Compared to the non-literate, mythical-poetic world of practice, the literate world was presented as being logical, rational, civilized, and therefore superior to the superstitious cosmologies and peoples that were written about in colonial records and anthropological literature. The writings of the 'world on paper' included missionary accounts, as well as the thoughts and expressions of those educated in colonial and missionary schools. In the fashion of R.G. Collingwood,⁹¹ Hawkins argues that representations in these sources should not be accepted without questioning. They are not 'authority'; rather they are evidential representations. The author observes that anthropologists write so as to understand the society being studied, while colonial records often depicted administrative endeavours to tame the colonised. The premise of Hawkins's argument is that if one studied the true Aboriginal characteristics of the LoDagaa or the 'acephalous' Dagaare-speaking population of north-western Ghana on which the book focuses, the intentions of British administrators, and therefore the records that codified and distorted LoDagaa culture and practices, would be obvious. It is Hawkins's conclusion that despite the lack of a traditional state of the LoDagaa, and notwithstanding the fact that their dispersed settlements were connected only by footpaths, the 'stateless people' of what became the administrative district of Lawra did have a history and possessed a historical consciousness that was obvious only to the most 'unusual of officers.' However, colonial rule 'denied the LoDagaa the right to describe their culture in their own terms, and consequently 'created unresolved cultural, political, religious, and social tensions that continue to affect their capacity to regain lost sovereignty.'

⁹⁰ J. Goody and I. Watt defined 'alphabetical culture' in their work: *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1968).

⁹¹ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1958).

In reconstructing the history of the Dagaare-speaking people and the colonial state, Hawkins focuses on the issue of how the LoDagaa environment was controlled. Through the process of mapping, the territories were delineated and named to meet administrative interests. Chiefs were also 'invented' and appointed for the LoDagaa who hitherto had only known family headmen. The position of chief was imposed, a development that contributed to the erosion of influence of traditional elders and the Earth priest. Chiefs became labour agents for the colonial government, an administrative presence that was responsible for encouraging labour migration southwards to mining towns and to the cocoa producing territories. This point is made not so much to engage in discussion of the colonial economy, as to demonstrate the impact of colonial currency on local cultural practices - on the cultural use of cowries for transacting marriages, on purchasing hoes for local farming, and even on dressing in the European way. The author makes every effort to show that the impact of the colonial world was deliberate. Hawkins points to the strategies of religious conversion, and the numerous court cases relating to conjugal issues. In the end, the author argues that both the colonial and postcolonial administrations categorically defined conjugal unions to mirror their interests, a situation that hitherto had been ambiguous and had afforded women degrees of autonomy. This is a well-researched and well-documented book. However, there is also a clear absence of oral traditions.

The scholarly works reviewed above, is about chieftaincy in Ghana and particularly, Northern Ghana. Others also describe the socio-cultural and economic life of the people in the North. None of these however, gives a complete account or vividly describes the evolution of the chieftaincy institution in the North. Specifically, the literature ignores micro studies of individual polities as a strategy in order to provide a complete account of how the institution has transformed over time, as a result of colonial rule and independence. It is important to note however that, these

works collectively lay the foundation of our knowledge of the North. It is to fill the gaps in the various works, that this work has been undertaken.

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CHAPTER THREE

NAVRONGO AND SAKOT: THE LAND AND PEOPLE

This chapter discusses the geographical setting of Navrongo and Sakot, the historical origins of the people, economic activities and their socio-cultural background that also include marriage and funeral celebrations. According to the 2000 census, the Kasena-Nankana of Navrongo constitute about 15.7 percent of the Region's (Upper East) population. While the *Kasena* are 6.5 percent, the *Nankana* comprises 9.2 per cent.⁹² Navrongo is approximately 1,642 square kilometers with a total population of about 149,491 people⁹³. Sakot on the other hand is a relatively small place with a population of about 12,000. It is located 30 kilometers east of the Upper East Regional Capital, Bolgatanga. It covers an area of about 100 square kilometers and is

within the Talensi/Nabdam District.

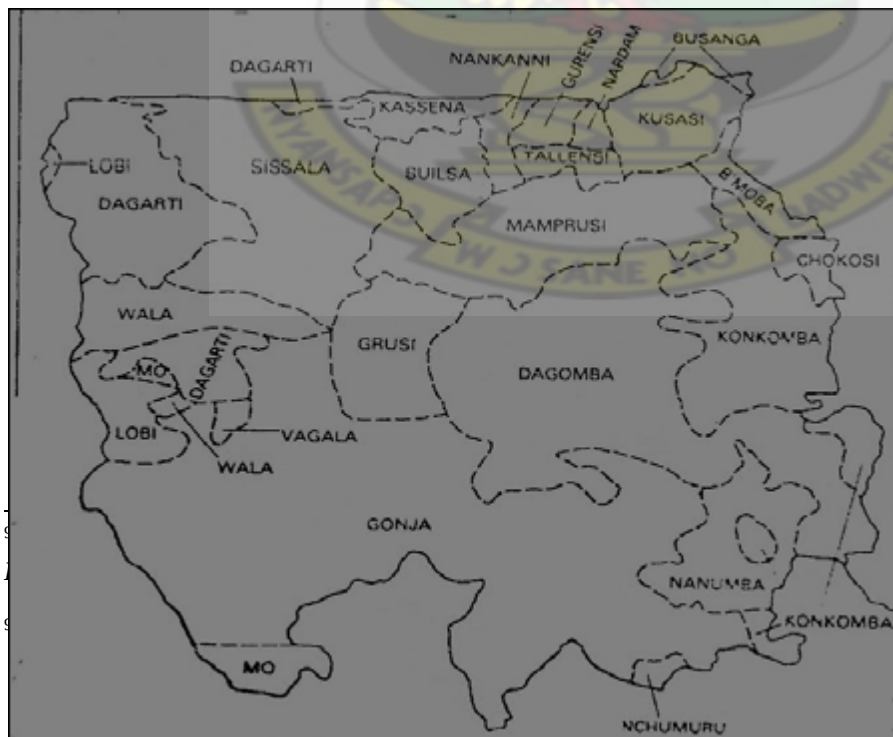


Figure 3.1 - A Map of Northern Ghana Showing Dominant

istrict Data and Implications for

Inhabitants of Areas before British Rule⁹⁴

The Geographical Setting of Navrongo

Navrongo is the administrative capital of the *Kasena-Nankana* people. It is located in the far north of Ghana in the Upper East Region, close to the Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). Navrongo forms a compact block of highland flat terrain. It is about five hundred miles from the National capital, Accra. Chuchuliga bounds the area to the west and to the east is Kandiga. To the north and south are Paga and Biu respectively. It must be noted that, the *Kasena* and *Nankana* constitute two different ethnic groups who peacefully co-habit the same geographical area (Navrongo). The *Nankana* can be found mostly to the south and southeastern part of Navrongo, whilst the *Kasena* have settled mostly to the north and northwestern parts of the area. Gradual mixing seems to have produced homogeneity,⁹⁵ since there are no natural demarcations that separate the two ethnic groups. In most cases therefore, you will find the *Kasena* and the *Nankana* owing allegiance to the same traditional authority. The pattern of settlement is a dispersed type especially, in the areas outside the Navrongo township. The area has steadily developed into a dispersed–nucleated settlement and the swish round type compounds have gradually vanished to give way to European style structures, although the round swish built flat top houses can still be found in the outskirts of Navrongo.

⁹⁴Source: A. P. Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London, Longman, 1979)

⁹⁵ R. J. Eyre-Smith, *A Brief Review of the History and Social Organisation of the People of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: Government Press, 1933), p' 12

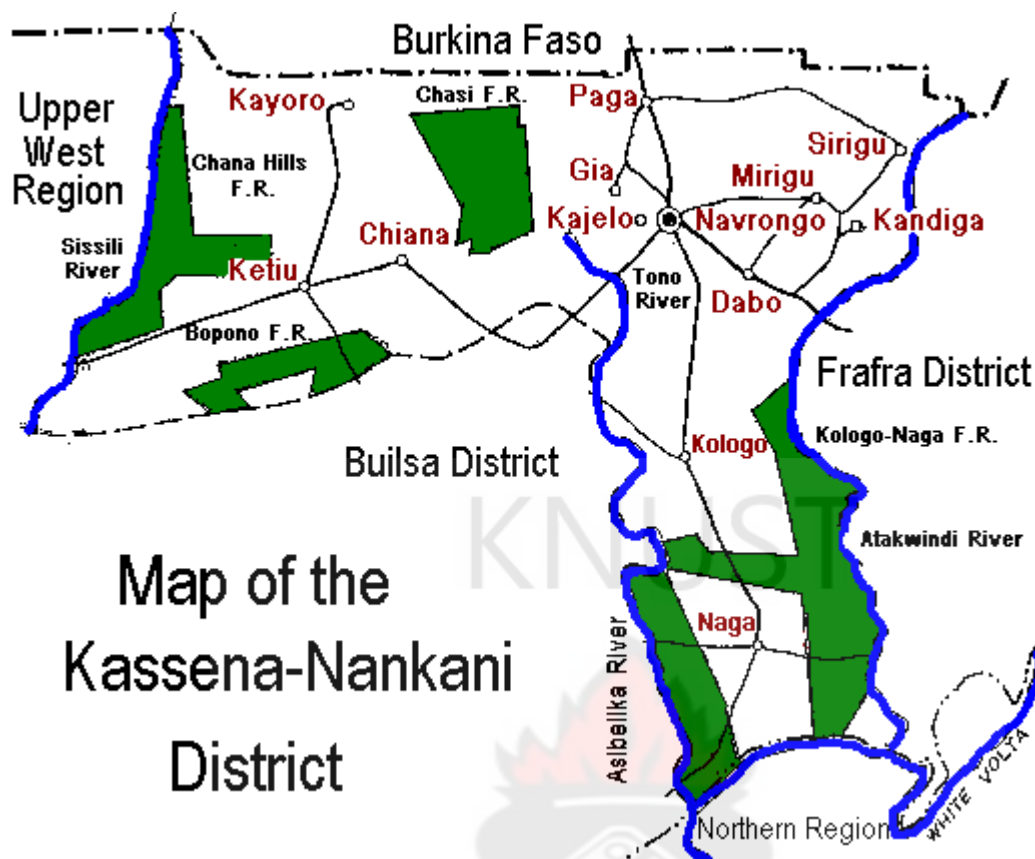


Figure 3.2 – A Map of the *Kasena-Nankana*⁹⁶

Like the rest of the North, the area falls within the broad vegetational zone of the Guinea Savannah woodlands that stretch from the north to the south-eastern corner of Ghana. The natural vegetation is generally grassland with scattered trees like the baobab, *dawadawa*, shea tree, fig and kapok. These trees are drought resistant by their ability to shed their leaves in the dry season and to store water against the drought.

The climate of the area is marked by a dry and wet season. The dry season lasts from about October to April. Characteristic of this season is the hot, burning sun and the dry, lip cracking and sand carrying harmattan winds. The wet season that lasts for about half of the year, from April to October is usually characterised by violent thunderstorms that often cause great destruction to

⁹⁶ Source: <http://mysite.verizon.net/vze827ph/images/KAS/-NAN1.gif>.

buildings. Basically, the season is marked by a general green ground coverage as plants and grass begin to grow. It is the belief of some elders that the vegetation as described has resulted from the reduction of a grassland due to human habitation.⁹⁷ It is thus not surprising that Ferguson in his report on the hinterland⁹⁸ in 1892 stated that the region affords room and food for elephants, hippopotamus, deer, buffalos and that spoors of lions were frequently noticed.⁹⁹ It is common even in recent times to see elephants occasionally traversing the area. It is significant to note that the vegetation and climatic conditions control the economic and social lives of the inhabitants.

Historical Origins of the *Kasena–Nankana* People of Navrongo

The *Kasena* and *Nankana* are separate people with different historical origins. The *Kasena* believe that they were the first to settle in the area, but some writers, notably A.W. Cardinall assert that, there is evidence of some ethnic groups who occupied this area which are now extinct.¹⁰⁰ Linguistically, they both belong to the *Gur* speaking group; but while the *Kasena* speak *Kasem*, the *Nankana* speak *Nankani*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Y. A. S. Chigabatia, "Colonial impact on the *Kasena –Nankana* People of Navrongo", an unpublished B. A. dissertation submitted to the Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon (1980). He did an interview with Mr. J. P. Wejong, who was at that time, a retired public servant of the Bureau of Ghana Languages.

⁹⁸ A. A. Illiasu, "British Administration in Mamprugu, 1898-1937", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Legon, 1975. Hinterland include but not exclusively ethnic groups like the *Dagbana*, *Kusasi*, *Bussanga*, *Sisala*, *Kasena*, *Nankana*, *Wala* and *Konkomba*.

⁹⁹ K. Arhin, *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson, A Fante Official of the Government of Gold Coast, 1890 – 1897* (Leiden: Afrika – Studiecentrum, 1974)

¹⁰⁰ A. W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (reprinted New York: Negro University Press, 1920) – pp. 2 - 25. The occurrence everywhere of ancient middens of unknown origin gives substance to this assertion.

¹⁰¹ R. S. Rattray, *The Tribes of Ashanti Hinterlands Vol.2*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932) ref. pp.VIII - IX *Kasem* has resemblance with *Vagala*, *Isala* and *Tampolese*, while *Nankani* bears semblance with the *Dagbani*, *Buili*, *Mampruli*, *Kusasi* and others.

Kasena oral tradition has it that, they originated from holes at a place called *Telania* in present day Navoro–Pungu. No archaeological evidence has yet unveiled the myth surrounding when they came to settle in the area. However, since the hole from which they allegedly emerged to settle on ground surface is still available, future archaeological excavation may unravel this myth.¹⁰² From cultural and linguistic evidence, the *Kasena* can be traced to Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. They are the same as the *Awuna* who claim to have migrated from the north–east from a place called *Pina*. It is possible to accept this explanation on the grounds that other *Kasena* groups who arrived at different times have legends which trace their origin to Burkina Faso. This argument is even more acceptable because of the fact that the *Kasem* language is only spoken in the north and north–western areas from where the legends of the other *Kasena* groups claim to have come.

There is a royal legend in Navrongo which traces the origin of the *Nankana*¹⁰³ to a town called Zikku also in Burkina Faso on the north–eastern border of Navrongo. The legend has it that, Butu, who was a royal at Zikku migrated with two of his brothers to the hole–dwellers in *Telania* whom he had earlier on encountered on one of his hunting expeditions.¹⁰⁴ They then moved to settle in an area they called *Navoro*, which was later corrupted to Navrongo by the British.¹⁰⁵ This account of a people from different linguistic and ancestral backgrounds tends to negate the contention that the *Kasena* and *Nankana* are one ethnic group. For so many reasons, however, it is

¹⁰² It is likely that some of the *Kasena* might be autochthons of Navrongo. That is to say the people have lived in the area for centuries and believe they came from the “caves” from which they lived.

¹⁰³ The *Nankana* are royals in Navrongo. They actually introduced the institution of chieftaincy in the area.

¹⁰⁴ D. J. Parsons, *Legends of Northern Ghana*, (Longman Green Limited: 1960) – p.1. There is a detailed narration of this episode, which has it that Butu is the legendary founder of Navrongo.

¹⁰⁵ *Naga* – this refers to leg in *Kasem*. *Voro* – signifies the sound emitted from stepping on soft ground. Thus, *Navoro* became the name of the area, but was later corrupted to Navrongo by the Europeans.

not contradictory to refer to the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo as a people. This is because since the *Nankana* came to meet the *Kasena* hole-dwellers at *Telania* and there evolved a system of close association between them. Thus, hundreds of years of close association of a people within a common geographical region, with distinct social and political organisations and a common culture have broken the bounds of different ethnic and linguistic origins to make the *Kasena–Nankana* one people. That the fusion of these two groups of people took place over a long period is convincing and acceptable if one appreciates the fact that the *Kasena* are among the oldest settlers of the North.¹⁰⁶

It is significant to distinguish between the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo and the other *Kasena* and *Nankana* groups in particular, who live outside the Navrongo Township, but within the same District. There are individual towns and villages within the *Kasena-Nankana* District (where Navrongo is the Capital), who speak either *Kasem* or *Nankani* alone, but not both. For example, predominant *Nankana* groups such as Mirigu, Sirigu and Kandiga do not speak *Kasem*, just as predominant *Kasena* like Paga, Chiana and Katiu do not speak *Nankani*. The *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo can thus be considered as one people and to a lesser extent, one ethnic group because they speak both *Kasem* and *Nankani* (infact, more *Kasem* than *Nankani*). It is reasonable to argue that the *Nankana* migrants under Butu coming from an area where they were already conversant with chieftaincy started the fusion of the ethnic groups by quickly adopting the *Kasem* language to legitimise their rule over the *Kasena*. For example, *Na–Voro* that Butu used to name his settlement is *Kasem* and not *Nankani*. Hence, the adoption of the *Kasem* language dates back to the time of settlement of the *Nankana* in the area around the second half of the seventeenth century.

¹⁰⁶ R. J. Eyre-Smith, *A Brief Review of the History and Social Organisation of the People of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: Government Press, 1933)

Furthermore, the individual or distinct *Kasena* and *Nankana* groups reject the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo from referring to themselves as either *Kasena* or *Nankana*, but prefer to refer to them as *Kasena–Nankana*. It is also worthy to note that, the *Kasena* and *Nankana* both frown on the *Kasem* and *Nankani* spoken by the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo. They consider it as inferior and polluted.¹⁰⁷

The Economic Activities of the *Kasena–Nankana* People of Navrongo

The vegetation and climatic conditions of the area has fundamentally influenced the economic and social life of the people. The main economic preoccupation of the people is subsistence agriculture and a poorly developed exchange economy. This is supplemented by hunting of game for meat. More than eighty per cent of them engage in agriculture. However, the launch of the Tono Irrigation Project in the early 1980s, coupled with the construction of dams in most parts of the area has generated increased agricultural activities among the people, particularly, the large-scale production of rice and tomatoes.¹⁰⁸

The family is the basic unit of farming and farms are thus mostly constructed around family compounds. The crops cultivated here include, maize, guinea corn, “early” and “late” millet, calabash, beans and vegetables. Others are sweet potatoes, cotton, tobacco and legumes such as bambara beans and groundnuts. Farming tools included stones and sticks. However, iron tools like spears, arrows and hoes were later introduced into the area as farming and hunting

¹⁰⁷ It is common to hear people say that, this is not “pure” *Kasem* or *Nankani*, or we are “pure” *Kasena* or *Nankana*.

¹⁰⁸ The Tono Irrigation Project is located in the *Kasena-Nankana* District of the Upper East Region of Ghana. The project is being managed by Irrigation Company of Upper Region Ltd. (ICOUR). ICOUR is a Ghana Government organization established to promote the production of food crops by small scale farmers within organized and managed irrigation scheme.

implements. Oral tradition has it that a long time ago, a Mossie wanderer came to settle in the area and got married to a woman from Pungu.¹⁰⁹ This young man introduced the smelting of iron into the area now known as Punyoro.¹¹⁰ Even today, Punyoro largely, still monopolises the smelting of iron among the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo. Also, owing to the length and intensity of the dry season that characterises the area, the rearing of livestock is prominent among the people. Animals reared include goats, sheep, donkeys, fowls and cattle. Apart from the prestige associated with the ownership of livestock, they are also kept for the payment of dowry and sacrificial purposes.

Exchange and subsistence among the people were integrated. For instance, transactional rules rather than price determined terms of exchange; and exchange was not determined by the rules of supply and demand. Exchange was conducted with the aim of maximising social and not economic values. According to the elders¹¹¹ therefore, in times of famine or poor harvest in a particular area, family groups travel to their relatives elsewhere to acquire foodstuffs. Consequently, it could be said that there were no regular institutionalised markets for buying and selling before the 1700s. There were neither currency nor bank too.

Around the eighteenth century, however, the caravan traders from the south introduced cowries as a medium of exchange in the region. European commodities like knives, rum and powder, as well as kola nut from the forest reached the area through the caravan trade. Ferguson on his tour of the Hinterland, specifically mentioned that salt found its way from the region of the

¹⁰⁹ Chigabatia, “Colonial impact on the *Kasena –Nankana* People of Navrongo”, He did an interview with one elder of Pungu called Akesoa.

¹¹⁰ Punyoro happens to be the lineage that the alleged Mossie wanderer is said to have founded.

¹¹¹ Chigabatia, “Colonial impact on the *Kasena –Nankana* People of Navrongo”, He conducted an interview with one elder Asatuui also of *Pungu*.

Safura on the Niger bend to the *Gourounsi* country.¹¹² The widening of the scope of the economy with the introduction of the cowries raised the desire of many to get rich. It was not surprising therefore that when Babatu came to the area, the indigenous people readily captured their colleagues and sold them to him.¹¹³ The beginning of the slave raids in the area rather strangled economic activities. People no longer moved out to find food and farming was an uncertain undertaking as crops were likely to be trampled over by Babatu and his men. As one elder mentioned, “while on the farm you had to put your bow and arrow by your side to forestall any sudden attacks”.¹¹⁴ In the face of no agricultural activities, the caravans fell prey to attacks for their goods. It was in this state of affairs that the British found their way into the *Kasena–Nankana* territory of Navrongo.

The Socio-Cultural Background of the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo

Some Europeans saw the African as an unorganised mass of ‘savages’ who were subjected to the rule of bloodthirsty spiritual leaders and superstitious witch doctors. The assumed uniformity of savage life is but a foreign myth. This is the contention of Miss Colson.¹¹⁵ Even in Sir Robert Filmer’s criticism of Hobbes who propounded the theory of man in his “natural

¹¹² A. A. Illiasu, “British Administration in Mamprugu, 1898-1937”, What he refers to as the *Gourousi* area includes but not exclusively the territory of the *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo.

¹¹³ Babatu was a slave raider, whose activities were mainly carried out in the north-east and the north-west regions of the Northern Territories.

¹¹⁴ Chigabatia, “Colonial impact on the *Kasena –Nankana* People of Navrongo”, He conducted an interview with Asonaye of Nyangua.

¹¹⁵ L. N. Gann and P. Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870 – 1960* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) p.11.

condition”, he points out that the theory is wrong for Hobbes himself admits “a government of families”¹¹⁶ before the creation of the “commonwealth”.

This view about the African and for that matter the *Kasena–Nankana* people of Navrongo as unorganised, stems from a total misunderstanding and ignorance of the general way of life of the people. A belief, which would have been projected by their desire to compare the African society to that of the European. As the District Commissioner stated in his report of 1936-1937, “they may be primitive, judged by certain standards, but they have good brains and excellent material to work with”.¹¹⁷ It is important to realise that the culture of a people pervades their entire life. This cannot be eliminated in considering the *Kasena–Nankana* society if culture connotes a complex whole that include, knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.

An examination of the people’s culture would therefore provide us with the basis for understanding the social relations among the *Kasena–Nankana* people. One finds among them, certain religious beliefs underlying the basis of their existence and personal development. Their basic conception of religion is the belief in the Supreme God (*Banga-We / Wine*), who is everywhere but can be worshiped only by the fetishes.¹¹⁸ The people also believe in ancestral veneration and spirits of nature, which are inhabited in stones, trees, rivers, animals and the earth.¹¹⁹ Religion therefore permeates everything the individual does, including all his actions

¹¹⁶ J. Bowle, *Hobbes and his Critics – A Study of Seventeenth Century Constitutionalism* (Cass & Company Limited: 1969) p.57.

¹¹⁷ Report on Northern Territories, 1936-1937, PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63 / 7 /2.

¹¹⁸ *Banga We* refers to God in *Kasem*, while *Wine* is the *Nankani* version.

outside the ordinary routine of his daily life. Social and moral values are governed by the dictates of the fetish. All calamities that befall him are ascribed to the spirits of the ancestors who may be displeased in one thing or the other. Recourse to them is then sought by contacting the soothsayer (*vuru/baga daana*) who indicates the remedy.¹²⁰

The *Kasena–Nankana* of Navrongo have a life so bound up with the deification of the earth and ancestors that ensures prosperity. Their only possible base of social relations is through genealogical descent. This gives them a sense of depth, historical belongingness, a feeling of deep-rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation. It is on these bases therefore that those social relations have evolved to segregate the entire society into clans, lineages, households and families.

At the lowest level is the family, which to the *Kasena–Nankana* includes not only the father, mother and children, but also uncles, aunts, nephews and grand parents. The term for family in *Kasem* is *anubu* and *mmabia* in *Nankani*.¹²¹ However, it is sometimes extended not only to signify blood relations, but also relations by marriage. Blood relations, which constitute a family live together in a compound house or *song yu* in *Kasem* and *ye zuo* in *Nankani*. Most of the compound houses are usually round and may consist of several circular mud huts with conical – shaped grass roofs connected by mud walls. The society further relates in the clan and lineage system. The clan is the wider division of the society and is composed of lineages. Each clan is a composition of related members who trace their ancestry to the original founder. The *Kasena–Nankana* clans are exogamous, totemic and patrilineal. Clan members do not marry among themselves. They have a totem which they all revere and inherit along the father's line. The totem

¹¹⁹It is the responsibility of every head of a household to build a monument in recognition of the former heads of the family who are dead, but represent the family in the spirit world. The whole family thus communicates to God through this monument, which represents their ancestors.

¹²⁰ The *Kasena* call the soothsayer *vuru*, while the *Nankana* call him *baga daana*.

¹²¹ This literally means mother's child, but depicts family or clan relations.

serves as an important binding force that unites members of a particular clan. Sometimes, people realise their relation by finding out if they share the same totem or *chullu* in *Kasem*.¹²² The people of the *Noghsenia* clan for example have the squirrel and the crocodile as their totem. Totems are usually acquired when it is alleged that at one time or the other, an ancestor swore against he and his descendants ever having to kill or eat what is regarded as the totem. The squirrel became the totem of the people of *Noghsenia* because of the ‘help’ it gave to Kambongwana, the father of Butu.¹²³ The lineage is composed of related families that trace their descent to various sons and grand sons of the founder.

Marriage among the *Kasena-Nankana* of Navrongo

Marriage is an important social institution among the people of Navrongo. The marriage of a young man (*nunuom* in *Kasem*) to a young girl (*katoguo* in *Kasem*) is the duty of his family. The immediate role of the young man is to make his choice of a partner and then inform his parents. The family head makes enquiries to make sure that there are no clan relations between them. A special person is sent to play the role of a “betweenner” between the two families. He was so significant that G. E. Bernard reported, “in every marriage ceremony amongst the *Kassenas* [sic] there is a man called the *Yiginu* who is the best man...I am assured that without the *Yiginu* the

¹²² It is known as *chisego* in *Nankani*.

¹²³ Kambongwana was said to be a hunter who was suffering from a swollen foot and was left stranded with his wife at *Zikku*. Ailing in pain under a tree, a squirrel suddenly fell on top of his wound, bursting the swell and thus relieving him of his pain. He thus swore that he and his descendants should never kill or eat the squirrel.

wedding is not valid”.¹²⁴ Social relations are expressed here, as this special person called ‘yingnu’ in *Kasem* or *Pogochigera* in *Nankani* is normally the son of a woman from the girl’s clan who has married in the man’s clan. This man approaches the family of the girl through a similar ‘special person’. He presents tobacco to the latter to be delivered to the girl’s family. If the gift is accepted, it means that it is agreed for courtship to start between the two. Significantly, the role of the *yingnu* has been minimal these days. The man and his friends, who are sometimes his family members, mostly perform this role now.

The courtship period may last between six months and one year or more. During this period, the “betweenener” continues to visit the girl’s house with gifts of guinea fowls, tobacco and cola nuts. There is no limit as to the number of guinea fowls and quantity of tobacco or cola nuts to be presented to the girl’s family. It all depends on the status of the man. The quantity of gifts given to the family of the girl is indicative of how wealthy one is or otherwise. This also gives an idea to one’s in-laws to be, about how capable the person might be to take care of his daughter. One important aspect of the courtship period is the restrictions that bind the young man and the young girl. The two must not engage in any sexual relationship and the young man does not eat food from the girl’s house nor pass a night there. The parents’ in-law do not receive any gifts from the man. It must also be noted that during this period, some form of joking relations develop between male companions of the young man and the girl. Indeed, sometimes this relationship becomes so intimate that a stranger within the community may mistake them for lovers. No wonder, out of ignorance, some writers have concluded that, these people are immoral and share their women with their friends.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63 / 5 /1. Report of the Navrongo District Commissioner for the month of July 1931.

On the day the girl will leave for her husband's house, her mother prepares for her a number of dishes including, cake,¹²⁶ and a variety of stew and soup and *tuo zafi* to eat. The girl also receives from her mother, cooking utensils especially two calabashes and a mat to take away with her to start life in her new home. The girl is then led away by the "betweenner", who on approaching the bridegroom's house announces the marriage. He shouts out the man's name at the top of his voice, while mentioning the name of the clan of the bride. For example as one may say it in *Nankani*, *poo poo poo! Nyaaba nzeli kandiga kule'ei*.¹²⁷ Women of the bridegroom's clan rush out of their houses to meet the bride and continue the announcement with shrill cries to inform everybody. For three nights, the bride is flanked by young girls of the village while drumming and dancing goes on. Local musicians come to sing the bride's praises on each night.¹²⁸ After the third day, the bride can then join the bridegroom in his room for them to begin life as husband and wife.

The next important ceremony in connection with the marriage is its ratification. It involves a visit to the family of the bridegroom by the brothers of the bride to perform what the Kasena call *gengna* or *anako gyei*.¹²⁹ This ceremony is normally begun in the evening and lasts the whole night through to dawn. The bridegroom's family slaughter a goat, dog and a number of fowls for their

¹²⁵Chigabatia, "Colonial impact on the *Kasena –Nankana* People of Navrongo", P. 31.

¹²⁶This cake is usually made of millet.

¹²⁷This literally means Nyaaba has come from Kandiga. In this case, Nyaaba is the bridegroom and Kandiga is the name of the bride's clan.

¹²⁸Local musicians here do not refer to those who sing secular music, but traditional praise singers who are however professionals in their task.

¹²⁹*Anako gyei* in *Kasem* literally means my sister is missing. Here the brothers of the bride however fully aware of where their sister is, still go to tell the family of the bridegroom that, their sister is missing. The latter then inform them that their sister is in their custody.

brothers-in-law. The marriage is then said to be complete, but it is sealed only after the coming of a baby.¹³⁰

When the bride gives birth, the last process of paying the marriage price can be started. The bride price among the *Kasena-Nankana* people include one bull, a cow, seven sheep, an axe, a cover cloth, a quantity of salt, tobacco and cola nuts. These could be paid in parts, but on the death of the bride, full payment of the bride price has to be made before permission could be granted for burial of the corpse.¹³¹ Where the man also fails to pay the bride price, the girl's parents also have the right to withdraw her from the marriage. Otherwise, the bond between them holds until death.

Divorce is permitted but it is very rare among the people of Navrongo. Apart from unfaithfulness that might prompt divorce, a marriage without issue also runs the risk of divorce. Nevertheless, in the case of the latter, it is safeguarded by what is termed as the "maid servant marriage". Here, the bride permits the man to marry her sister whom she had personally brought-up under her roof. In the case of impotency on the part of the bridegroom, his brother or close relative is also allowed to perform the sexual duties to bring forth children to save the marriage from collapse. When the woman has children out of the marriage, the marriage price is not refundable in the event of divorce. The custom of the *Kasena-Nankana* also permits polygamy. However, it is also believed that when the bride commits adultery, it is soon detected by her either falling sick or having difficulties at childbirth.¹³²

¹³⁰This is because the custom of the people demands that the bride price can only be paid after the woman had practically proven to be fruitful. That is after she had given birth to her first-born.

¹³¹It is a taboo to bury a woman whose bride price has not been paid, fully. This is because she only becomes a legitimate member of your family after you have fully paid her marriage price. The bride price in full also legitimises the bridegroom's ownership of the children.

Like many localities in Ghana, marriage ceremony among the *Kasena-Nankana* of Navrongo does not only bind the couple together, but their extended families as well. The two families begin to attend each other's funerals. During the farming season, the bridegroom together with his companions help his parents-in-law on their farms. Sometimes he is called upon to help in the rebuilding of broken-down walls or even new compounds. There also develop joking relations between members of the two families. Between the couples, they do not call each other by their names. While the bridegroom calls his wife "room owner" (*digatu* in Kasem), she also refers to her husband as "landlord" (*songotu* in Kasem). The social bond that marriage brings to the society finds an equal expression in funeral performances. It will thus be only appropriate to highlight the important aspects of funeral performances that bind the society together.

Funeral Performances among the *Kasena-Nankana* of Navrongo

There is a strong conviction among the people that death is not natural. They believe that witches or the ancestors cause death when they are offended in one way or the other. On the death of a family member therefore, the elders visit the soothsayer to find out the cause of the death before burial. Nevertheless, burial does not end the process of funeral performances. To them, the dead is still lingering among the living and the dead. Therefore, to enable the deceased to reach his ancestors in the next world, the final funeral rites or what the people call "departure rites"¹³³ need to be performed. This ceremony is still prominent among the *Kasena-Nankana* so that even the most sophisticated elites of the society dare not ignore it.

The performance of the final funeral rites among the *Kasena-Nankana* of Navrongo lasts for four days. It is characterised by two important aspects known among the people as, *yibela*

¹³²When the woman does not openly confess her predicaments of having committed adultery, she cannot successfully go through the process of child bearing.

¹³³ This is referred to as *Koore* among the *Nankana* and *Lua* among the *Kasena*.

zorim, literally meaning, “blackening of the grave”; and the other is the “burning of the quiver” for a man and *soko*¹³⁴ for women. Significant, all relatives of the deceased are required to attend and it is a time when family feuds are brought to an end. By way of contribution, each member of the family of the deceased brings millet, beans, tobacco and fowls. The performance is marked by feasting, where various foodstuffs and *pito* are prepared in abundance, depending on the economic status of the deceased. On the third day, there is drumming and dancing, which lasts until the end of the performance on the fourth day.



¹³⁴ *Soko* is the gathering of items like pots, brooms and calabashes usually used by the housewife.

Figure 3.3 - A typical funeral-dancing scene among the *Kasena-Nankana*¹³⁵

However, it must be noted that similar performances are not held for young children. Apart from the fact that, these performances mark the final departure of the deceased, the burning of the quiver and the *soko* provide the deceased with their working tools to continue life in the next world. It is also an occasion for the property of the deceased to be transmitted. The deceased personal property is distributed among their children or held for them by the eldest son. Family property, if the deceased is the elder of the house, passes to the next elderly person. The widow of the deceased is given the choice to remarry out of the family or choose any family member as a husband.¹³⁶

In sum, it could be said that, the *Kasena-Nankana* everywhere in Navrongo are related to each other by either marriage or blood, while their religion¹³⁷ serves to bind them together.

The Geographical Setting of Sakot

Sakot is located on the border of the Red Volta West Forest Reserve, about forty kilometres west of the Upper East Regional Capital Bolgatanga. It covers an area of approximately 100 kilometres square. Sakot is divided into eight territorial units or sections, namely, Nabouk, Kontintabik, Dasang, Kparaboug, Kugre, Nyogbare, Barabouk and Tankpaa.

¹³⁵ Source: [www://mith2.umd.edu/research/projects/nth/index2.html](http://mith2.umd.edu/research/projects/nth/index2.html)

¹³⁶ . The widower as the case may be, does not necessarily have to choose a wife from the family of the deceased bride.

¹³⁷ . Their religion here is referring to African Traditional Religion.



Figure 3.4 - A Map of Sakot – Showing the Major Clans/Sections of the Village¹³⁸

Each of these is under the authority of a headman or a sub-chief. Meanwhile, all the sub-chiefs come under the jurisdiction of a paramount chief, the Sakot *Naab*. The eight sections lie in direct continuation of each other, which gives the village (Sakot) a homogeneous outlook. Sakot, like the rest of north-east Ghana, is characterised by a remarkable absence of nucleated settlements. The compounds lie scattered around generally up to several tens of metres apart to

¹³⁸ R. T. Perdesen, "Land Use and Land Cover Changes in Northern Ghana: A Case Study of Sekoti", An Unpublished MSc. Thesis Submitted to the Institute of Geography, University of Copenhagen, 2004.

allow crop cultivation between the compounds. Thus, in 1906 S.D. Nash¹³⁹ reported, “The compounds of Sekoti¹⁴⁰ are widely scattered extending northwards practically to Nangodi, eastwards to the Volta and westwards to Pelungo and Duse”.¹⁴¹ The centre of the village is the area around the chief’s palace and the market place.

The vegetation of Sakot is classified as Sudan Savannah, which consists of widely spaced deciduous trees with a ground flora, composed of different species of grasses of varying height. The original woodland cover does not exist in many places today. On the contrary, mainly trees of economic value or fire resistant trees remain. The transformation of the savannah is a result of several hundred years of exploitation of the natural resource base, population growth, long settlement and the regular fires that are a part of the cultivation method practiced in the area.¹⁴² The most common tree species in the region are now various ficus and acacia species, shea-trees (*butyrospermum paradoxum*), *Dawadawa* trees (*parkia filicoidea*), baobab trees (*adansonia digitata*), kapok (*ceiba petandra*), neem trees, red and black berry trees and in small plantations, teak. The savannah constitutes an important natural resource for the local inhabitants. It provides a broad range of non-timber forest products for subsistence or the local market. These products encompass firewood, thatching materials, building poles, medicinal plants, bush meat, berries, *dawadawa* and shea nuts.

¹³⁹ S. D. Nash was a District Colonial Official of the Sakot area in the first few years of colonial rule in the Northern Territories.

¹⁴⁰ Sekoti is the corrupted version of Sakot. That is how the Europeans called the place. Therefore, it has come to be used to refer to the place in many documents, including all Official Government Documents.

¹⁴¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 2. p. 247. Colonial District Commissioner’s Report on *Sakot* on 24th October 1906.

¹⁴² S. V. Adu, *Soils of the Navrongo – Bawku in the Upper East Region, Ghana*. (Soil Research Institute, Kumasi, 1969).

The climate of the area is semi-arid distinguished by the alternation of a distinct wet (May-October) season and a distinct dry season (November-April). The distinct seasons are a result of Sakot's location in the sub-equatorial zone with changing wind regimes during the course of the year. During the dry season, the area is under the influence of the dry north-eastern trade wind (harmattan): as a result, relative humidity drops to a minimum of 16 per cent in January. During the rainy season, the maritime air from the southwest monsoon and strong convection causes rainfall and relative humidity levels reaching 69 per cent in August. The seasonal concentration of rainfall gives rise to seasonality in the agricultural cycle,¹⁴³ in labour demands, food availability, food prices, the prices of consumer goods and labour, health, birth, death, celebrations and migration patterns.¹⁴⁴

Considerable variations exist between successive rainy seasons in respect to time of onset, duration and amount of rainfall received. In some years, rainfall is adequate and well distributed, while in other years they are scattered and infrequent. The people of Sakot interviewed during fieldwork confirmed these trends in rainfall. When the farmers in the study area were asked to compare the harvest they get now with that of the past, nine out of ten said that, presently they get less. A typical answer was "Those days, we only weeded a small area around the house but the harvest was plenty." Farmers attribute this decline in crop yields mainly to a decline in soil fertility and worsening climatic conditions. When asked to explain in what sense the climatic conditions have deteriorated, some farmers were quick to respond that rainfall is less these days, but many of

¹⁴³ The length of the growing period for rain fed crops is less than 60 days in the region.

¹⁴⁴ T. Dietz, "Crisis Survival Strategies: A Summary of Concepts and an Example From the Semi-Pastoral Pokots in Kenya and Uganda", in J. C. Stone, (ed.), *Pastoral Economies in Africa and Long Term Responses to Drought*: (University of African Studies Group, 1991). P. 86.

them added that the rains have become erratic or unreliable. Moreover, it is often said that ‘in the olden days’, the rains came much earlier and made it possible to start sowing somewhere in April.

Historical Origin of the People of Sakot

No exact knowledge exists about the age of Sakot, but it is believed that the first settlers came from the Mamprusi hills around the 16th century and settled in Daasang. Being the first settlers, the *Sakoraan* or *Teng Da’an* is considered as the owner of the land.¹⁴⁵ The present Sakot settlement comprises people who have migrated into the area because of the relatively fertile lands and its suitability for farming. All the three major clans in Sakot; the *Zooloba*¹⁴⁶, *Tindong*¹⁴⁷ and *Daglig* are all believed to have inhabited quite a rocky area which made farming and other means of subsistence difficult. Thus, in search for fertile land, they settled for Sakot where the name of the area as already noted suggests a bumper harvest with very heavy surplus. Apart from these major clans, some other ethnic groups migrated to settle in Sakot before colonial rule mainly because of the fertility of the land. They include *Gurenie* settlers, a few people from Duuse who settled at Nyongbare, and others from Zanlerigu and Mossi land.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Sakoraan* sometimes referred to as *Sakot Da’an*, literally means owner of Sakot. He is so called because he is believed to be the first to settle on the land.

¹⁴⁶ The *Zooloba* include all the people who migrated from Damolug, Pelungu, Logre, Daglig and Zalerig. It must be noted however that, the *Daglig* have settled in the Kontintabik area in Sakot and constitute almost a different clan altogether. The royal clan that is Gella (the first headman of Sakot) and his descendants are also *Zooloba* who migrated from Damolug.

¹⁴⁷ The *Tindong* people migrated from Ndong. They occupy the Nyogbar section in Sakot. Ndong literally means indigenes. They are said to be the first people to settle in the whole Nabdam area.

¹⁴⁸ *Gurenie* settlers include the Frafra, Nankana, Kasena and Builsa among others who are sometimes referred to as the *Gurunshie*.

The Sakot *Da'an*'s clan who are supposed to be Mamprusi have been incorporated into the *Zooloba*. The *Sakot Da'an* however still holds allegiance to his roots.¹⁴⁹ Before one can be traditionally accepted as a Sakot *Da'an*, the person has to go to the *Nayire*'s Palace to be customarily enskinned as such by the *Kpana*.¹⁵⁰ The *Kpana* is the Spear-Holder and spokesperson of the *Nayire*. Although all the ethnic groups or clans in Sakot have their respective *tendanma* who are supposed to be custodians of the specific lands their kinsmen inhabit and feed on, they all collectively owe allegiance to the Sakot *Da'an*, who is said to be the first to settle on the land and thus the owner of the whole Sakot land.

The Economic Activities of the People of Sakot

The geographical setting of Sakot has had tremendous influence on the economic activities of the people of the area. Therefore, the main economic activity of the people is peasant farming, where two main vegetation classes for farming can be distinguished. Each of these has its own distinctive vegetation. First, the most densely populated areas are associated with intensive compound farming. In these areas, almost all arable land is used for cultivation. Secondly, bush areas, where the land use pattern vary between uncultivated, fallowed and cultivated land, surround the residential areas, but no settlements are found in these areas. The density of the trees is higher than in the residential areas. Thus, besides cultivation, the land here is used for the collection of bush products like firewood and grass for the grazing of livestock. Hence, while households cultivate the lands around their homes, they have the opportunity to increase their farmlands by going to the bush in order to increase their harvest.

¹⁴⁹ That is Mamprugu (The *Nayire* and his Elders), where he is believed to have migrated from to settle in Sakot.

¹⁵⁰ The *Nayire* is the paramount chief of the Mamprugu kingdom.

The most commonly grown crops in the area are early millet, late millet, maize, guinea corn, round beans, beans, groundnuts and 'Frafra potatoes'.¹⁵¹ Sheep, goats and cattle are some of the livestock the people of Sakot rear. The people also keep guinea fowls, fowls and a few ducks. The main source of labour for the cultivation of food crops and the rearing of animals is the family. This is, however, supplemented by labour from one's in-laws. In Sakot, like most part of Northern Ghana, it is a normal practice for a man to mobilise labour to work on the farm of his in-law.¹⁵² The hoe and cutlass constitute the most common farming implements of the people of *Sakot*. Animals like the bull and donkey are also used to plough the land, usually before sowing.

On a smaller scale, the inhabitants undertake smock weaving, leatherwork, pottery, and sheabutter and groundnut oil extraction. Mostly women in Sakot also undertake pito brewing and fish smoking.¹⁵³ Therefore, the people engage in petty trading to exchange for foodstuffs and other subsistence necessities. However, Sakot has not had a big market even before the 1900s. "A market used to be held during Yaraga's life time. None held now, although there is a market place... the people go to Kulmasa."¹⁵⁴ This is partly because there is no major trade route passing through the town.¹⁵⁵ As S. D. Nash reported in 1906:

¹⁵¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63/5/2, 1907. p'68. The names of these food crops in *Nabt* language are, early millet (*nara*), late millet (*zea*), maize (*kama'an*), guinea corn (*kazi'in*), round beans (*suma*), beans (*te'a*), groundnuts (*sukpam*) and (*frafra* potatoes) *pe'eha* respectively.

¹⁵² It is usually the family of the bridegroom who work on the farm of the bride's family and not vice versa.

¹⁵³ The people of Sakot caught the fish from the Red Volta, which is a few metres to the east of the town.

¹⁵⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63/5/2. pp. 66-67. Yaraga is supposed to be referring to Gella Yarig the first Sakot *Na'ab*, who was made headman of Sakot before effective British Colonial Administration in the area and died around December 1906. Kulmasa is a nearby town that possibly had a relatively well functioning market. Although the British Colonial Official reported in 1906 that there were no market days in Sakot, there is evidence of a market being held in the area every three days for well over sixty years now.

¹⁵⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63/5/2, 1907. pp. 67-68. Captain J. Oknealy, A British Colonial Official in the area reported on 23rd June 1907 that there was no big trade route and permanent local traders in Sakot.

Sekoti [sic] seem to be specially avoided by traders coming from Zongore and other places to the south. About forty-five minutes west of Sekoti on the Duse road appears a well used caravan route which I was informed was used by Gambaga and Zongore traders going north to Nangode. I was also informed that traders do not pass through Sekote {sic} itself. It has a bad name for looting¹⁵⁶

The economic activities of the people of Sakot can be summarised as characterised by a large agricultural sector mostly at the subsistence level. It accounts for over 90 percent of the people's total economic output. Crop and livestock production constitute the most important aspects of agricultural activities of the people, although they also undertake bush collection. However, other income generating activities include small-scale industries such as pottery, *pito* brewing, ironwork as well as sheanut and groundnut oil extraction.¹⁵⁷ The people of Sakot therefore rely on a multi-activity livelihood system.

The Socio – Cultural Background of the People of Sakot

The general way of life of the people of Sakot is bound- up in their religion. It is estimated that 30 per cent of the population are Christians with small numbers of Muslims.¹⁵⁸ The rest of the population practice traditional religion.¹⁵⁹ Religion among these people is a mixture of recognition

¹⁵⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/5/2, 1906, p. 247. S. D. Nash, the British Colonial Official, however, added that this needed confirmation.

¹⁵⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM.63/5/2, 1907. P.68. As far back as 1907, the British colonial Administration had reported of evidence of ironwork in the Sakot township.

¹⁵⁸ The British Colonial Official reported on 15th July 1906 that “There were no “*mohammedans*” residing in the town”. This suggests that it was rare to find muslims in Sakot around that time.

¹⁵⁹ Red Volta Community Reserve Plan, 2001.

of an almighty power through the spirits and a form of 'tabooism'. 'Tabooism' here refers to the totems of the people.¹⁶⁰ It may be an animal such as a lizard, squirrel, monkey or snake; or an inanimate object such as a big hill. If the totem is an animal, no member of that family can eat it. Generally, every clan in Sakot has a totem. The totem of the Zooloba¹⁶¹ for example is a python. The python is treated with reverence to the extent that killing it requires a befitting burial and funeral like the one done for humans.¹⁶²

The people believe that the earth and everything therein or thereon is the product of the Almighty God called *Nayin*. And that when God had finished creating everything He "retired above" and left behind various spirits to which He has delegated ordinary powers to act on his behalf.¹⁶³ These spirits are of two kinds. First, those of their ancestors who live in a place provided in every compound. This is generally a mound of swish with perhaps a stone or two incorporated therein, best described as a cenotaph. The second are those spirits which inhabit certain inanimate objects and animals. For example, a rock and a tree root in a clump of trees where sacrifices are made. Every *Tengdaan*¹⁶⁴ has a sacrificial clump of trees called *Tengan* in *Nabt* where libation is poured to the gods and ancestors. Others include a big rocky hill, a river and an animal using the river such as a crocodile.

¹⁶⁰ A totem could be an object, animal, plant, or other natural phenomenon revered as a symbol of a clan, lineage or family. It is usually regarded as a symbolic thing and treated with the respect reserved for religious icons.

¹⁶¹ The *Zooloba* constitute the royal clan in Sakot.

¹⁶² Interview with the Sakot *Na'ab* at Bolgatanga on 28th February 2008.

¹⁶³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/2, (1929), p. 2. Quoted in: "A Digest of the Religion and System of Land Tenure of the Kasena Tribe", Compiled by Lieut. Col. P. F. Whittall, D. S. O. Commissioner of the Northern Province, N. T. And assisted by Monsignor Oscar Morin, Apostolic Prefect of the White Fathers in the N. T., Father L. Barsalou, Father Superior of the White Fathers at Navrongo and Bali Cypriani, Government Interpreter at Navrongo (educated by the White Fathers).

¹⁶⁴ Apart from the Sakot *Da'an* who is the custodian of the land of the whole of Sakot, every clan has a *tenda'an* who is similarly a trustee or controller of the Clan's land. He performs similar functions as the Sakot *Da'an* for his particular clan, but all of them generally come under the jurisdiction of the Sakot *Da'an* with respect to their functions.

The people of Sakot like most parts of modern Northern Ghana do not believe that God kills.¹⁶⁵ It is rather held that human factors such as disease, witchcraft and poison cause death and that God only calls one when one is old. There is therefore a strong belief in superstition and witchcraft. The ordinary person relies on religion whenever there is any event of importance affecting him or his family. In situations such as impending birth, barrenness, death, threatened failure of crops and sickness, the first essential and invariable act is to consult a sorcerer or soothsayer who is called *bakoldaan* in *nabt*. The *bakoldaan* advises on the cause of the problem and what kind of sacrifices to make in supplication to the gods. The one idea underlying all this is that God is too big to be approached directly by a human being. The spirits have power delegated to them to act on behalf of God. In very special cases, they intercede on behalf of the supplicant.¹⁶⁶

Marriage among the People of Sakot

To the people, marriage is a union of not only the bride and the bridegroom but their extended families as well.¹⁶⁷ That is why usually as custom demands; a man upon making his choice of a woman¹⁶⁸ has to inform his father or family. The latter then takes up the mantle of soliciting for the woman's hand in marriage through her family. Like Navrongo, the most

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Mr. Nayimbe, A Historian and a retired Educationist from Sakot who lives in Bolgatanga on 30th February 2008.

¹⁶⁶ P. F. Whittall, O. Morin, L. Barsalou, and C. Bali, "A Digest of the Religion and System of Land Tenure of the Kasena Tribe", P. 164.

¹⁶⁷ This finds expression in the fact that, while the bride becomes a 'daughter' to the family of the bridegroom, the latter also become a 'son' to the bride's family. Therefore, he begin to bare responsibilities like working on the farm of his in-laws and helping to build broken-down rooms. The families also attend each other's funerals and other social gatherings.

¹⁶⁸ It must be noted that sometimes the family also makes these choices for their sons, though he has the right to accept or otherwise.

important personality is the “betweenner” or *pogsa’am* as the people call him in Sakot. As a witness to the marriage, he leads in all deliberations leading to the marriage and thereafter, including paying the dowry and its retrieval should this become necessary. Usually, the *pogsa’am* is chosen on the basis that his mother comes from the same clan as the bride to be, thus he will be better accepted.¹⁶⁹

The custom of the people of Sakot prescribes the payment of four cows as bride price. Sometimes, the bridegroom is allowed a longer time to pay the bride price in instalments, provided he cannot afford to pay in full.¹⁷⁰ The last cow of the bride price is expected when one’s daughter marries.¹⁷¹ It must be noted also that, when the woman dies, the family of the bridegroom is given the burial rites only after they had paid the bride price in full. The bride price is paid not only to legitimise the marriage, but also the ownership of the woman and children.¹⁷² However, this is not ownership in terms of buying, *da*, but in terms of legitimacy, *sole/sol*.¹⁷³ In practice, the people of Sakot perceive marriage and bride price in terms of social ‘prestation’.¹⁷⁴ That is to say, in marriage primary bride price goods are received by the wife-giver after he has transferred a daughter to the wife-taker. This is not an absolute transfer and alienation; it is partial and not total

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Mr. Nayimbe, A Historian and a retired Educationist from Sakot who lives in Bolgatanga on 30th February 2008.

¹⁷⁰ This is usually in situations where the in-laws of the groom and sometimes all his family are deemed to be respectful, especially, in terms of honouring their invitations and working for them when the need arises.

¹⁷¹ It is anticipated that, the cows one will accrue from the dowry of his first daughter will be used to pay the dowry of her mother, in the event that her dowry is not yet paid in full.

¹⁷² Thus, the man has the customary right to go for his entire dowry when there is a divorce, but returns one cow if there is a child or children out of the marriage.

¹⁷³ That is why in most *Moore-Dagbani* languages of the Upper East Region of Ghana, the appropriate word for the payment of bride wealth is *sole/sol*, which refer to the transfer of matrimonial goods and not *da* which literally means to buy.

¹⁷⁴ A. K. Awedoba, “Notes on Matrimonial Seeds among the Atonde Kusasi” (Research Review NS Vol.5 No.1, 1989), p.39.

because in spite of the virilocal residence, a married daughter's status in her natal lineage does not lapse with time. It is only on her death when her lineage permits her husband's lineage to perform her burial and final funeral rites that she becomes fully incorporated into the husband's lineage community of the dead.¹⁷⁵ Mauss argued that those involved in the transactions, which include the families of the bride and bridegroom exchange themselves, though vicariously.¹⁷⁶ When a wife-giver transfers a daughter, he does not only receive material goods, but he also receives a son.

Sakot marriage practices enshrine both lineage and clan exogamy. Thus, it is not permissible to marry from one's own clan. For instance, the Zooloba cannot marry among themselves, but are permitted to marry from the Ndong for example; and other clans within and outside Sakot. Kin marriages including all forms of cross-cousin marriages are scorned or frowned-upon. The following riddle captures the prohibition of marriage to a kin of the opposite sex. "I fancy such a beautiful flower, yet I cannot adorn myself with it". The riddle implies that a kinswoman is like a forbidden flower whose beauty can be admired, but cannot be appropriated for enjoyment.¹⁷⁷

Divorce is very rare, though permissible in marriages among the people of Sakot. Particularly, a man has the right to divorce his wife on the following grounds: witchcraft, especially when the woman confesses to being a witch, found guilty of adultery, stealing, disrespectful to the parents of the man, quarrelsome or is found to be infertile. However, the man can decide to forgive the wife on all these grounds and could also marry the wife's sister to safeguard the marriage in case the woman is incapable of giving birth. The woman on the other

¹⁷⁵ Awedoba, "Notes on Matrimonial Seeds among the Atonde Kusasi" p'40.

¹⁷⁶ M. Mauss, *The Gift* (Translated: I. G. Cunnison), Cohen and West, England. (1954).

¹⁷⁷ A. K. Awedoba, "Kasena norms and Reproductive Health", *Research Review* NS 18.1, 2002, p. 6.

hand has a limited opportunity, if not altogether impossible to have a divorce. Under the custom, a woman whose husband is dead has no right to remarry, but must remain a widow, *pogkoore* until her death. Moreover, if she may bear any child subsequent to her husband's death, that child is still regarded as belonging to the late husband.¹⁷⁸ As cited in *Gimburu vrs. Kaba* in 1971:

There was no effective way for a woman to communicate her intention to dissolve a marriage, than by her affective separation or desertion from the man and subsequent cohabitation with another man.¹⁷⁹

Funeral Performances among the People of Sakot

In crisis, as well as when in contact with intrusive alien cultures, a local group or culture may seek to portray and revitalise its deeper mechanisms and concerns. However, funerals among the people of Sakot still display such a vital stronghold of local cultural practices. It is more resistant than any other institution to alien influence; be it Christianity since the beginning of the twentieth century or Islam over two centuries. Not even the cash economy or urban lifestyle has made any difference. Even today, most Sakot Christians including those living in urban neighbourhoods, choose a traditional funeral to assure, as they say, 'their reaching their fathers' (entering the ancestral world) and 'having a tomorrow' (a continuation of life in the lineage).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Akaribo Vrs. Adeyine, "Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice", Bolgatanga. 1995.

¹⁷⁹ *Gimbuuru vrs. Kaba* (1971) 2 GLR 416.

Like most West Africans, the people of *Sakot* conceive of death as a transitory stage that can and should open up to a rebirth, if not a return to life in a body then at least to immortality of the soul or spirit.¹⁸¹ Rebirth here is not a matter of reincarnation. Death requires a series of concrete responses in conformity with the established eschatological beliefs of each people. Thus to these people, funerals provide that crucial role of effecting the process by which the deceased joins the community of the dead. They consider that, through death what is 'this worldly' spills over into what is the 'other worldly' and the living live with the dead.¹⁸² This world and the 'world of the dead' become a living theatre for the funeral drama and members of these two worlds are fully involved. The burial experts and diviners, as well as the cross-paths, sounds and rhythms, fire and smoke are mediating instances between these two worlds. In particular, the burial experts in performing the very art of funeral celebrate the journey from this life to the world after death for the benefit of both the deceased and the world of the living. This makes the lengthy and difficult initiation into the institution of burial experts, coupled with the reputation associated with it worthwhile.¹⁸³

According to Dacher,¹⁸⁴ one can find two or three stages in funerals: the burial, the in-between stage of mourning by close kin and the so-called second burial or final funeral.¹⁸⁵ Among

¹⁸⁰ A. K. Abasi, "Lua- Lia, The "Fresh Funeral": Founding a House for the Deceased among the Kasena of North-East Ghana", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.65, No.3, 1995, p.448. <http://www.jstor.org>

¹⁸¹ Le moal, *Les Voies de la Rupture: 'veuves et Orphelin Face Aux Taches du Deuil Dans le Rituel Funerairi Bobo (Burkina Faso)'*, *Systemes de Pensee en Afrique Noire* 9. 1989. P'13.

¹⁸² Abasi, "Lua- Lia, The "Fresh Funeral", p. 21.

¹⁸³ A. W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, (reprinted New York: Negro University Press, 1920) and J. Ovesen, *The Orchestration of Lobi Funerary Ritual*, (Folk28, 1986).

¹⁸⁴ M. Dacher, '*Le Deuil du Pere (Pays Goin, Burkina Faso)*', *Systemes de Pensee en Afrique Noire* 9. 1989. P'75; in Abasi, A. K., op. cit. p. 34.

¹⁸⁵ The second burial here refers to the situation whereby as practiced in most parts of Northern Ghana, when the person has died and is buried far away from home or when the burial of a deceased elder has not been accorded the full

the people of Sakot, however, two stages can be noticed: the period of the corpse and the process of ancestralisation, or the burial and the funeral rites for that matter. These two then have their subdivisions, which lasts between four to seven days.¹⁸⁶ They involve solemn and ordinary rites according to the age, status and role of the individual. For example, a chief and a land custodian both receive a solemn burial and funeral rites involving the whole community, while a child and a youth do not get full and solemn rites, nor do those who are said to have died from causes perceived to be gluttony, suicide, in childbirth, or had been killed by lightning. Different categories of the dead¹⁸⁷ are given slightly different rituals. For example, children and adults, unmarried and married people and men and women: just as the chief, head of lineage or clan, the sorcerer, the soothsayer, the 'medicine man' and the first daughter are all given varying degrees of solemnity in their funerals.

Funeral practices among the people of Sakot are very elaborate. They do not only reflect the social, cultural, religious and psychological values and preoccupations shared by the group, but are also a way of elaborating upon them. Social and cultural life are re-invigorated through a person's death and funerals, while the dead person is himself the foundation of his descendants' life.¹⁸⁸

ritual, it is redone by putting some of the dead person's belongings, known as the person's dirt, in a mat. The mat is then referred to as the corpse of the deceased.

¹⁸⁶ That is four days for children and seven days for adults. This includes the official mourning in the mid-night of the first day (*ka'a*), war dancing by relatives, sons, in-laws and related clans (*di'e*), brewing and preparation of *pito* and foodstuffs like round-beans and *tuo zafi* respectively for public consumption and bringing the soothsayer on the last day to find out what killed the deceased (*bogo kor ba'at*).

¹⁸⁷ The people of Sakot speak of normal, abnormal and bad deaths. The first are those of the old, whereas abnormal are those of the young and those close to and shortly after marriage. Bad deaths also include dying alone in the bush or as a result of lightning or drowning, dying away from home and dying from an accident.

¹⁸⁸ Abasi, "Lua- Lia, The "Fresh Funeral", p. 475.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EVOLUTION OF CHIEFTAINCY AND THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF NAVRONGO AND SAKOT

Prior to the proclamation of 1901¹⁸⁹ which established the British Crown as the central authority in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, the supreme power over the various individual indigenous states: political, military and for the maintenance of law and order was vested in their respective heads who were in effect, chiefs. Among the people of Navrongo and Sakot like most of the inhabitants of the Northern Territories, it is the universal belief that the land belongs to the earth-god and is in the care of the ancestral spirits of the respective lineage divisions. To all therefore, political authority is vested in those who represent them in their

¹⁸⁹ The Northern Territories was proclaimed a British Protectorate under the Governor of the Gold Coast Colony with the promulgation of the Northern Territories Order in Council on 26th September 1901 (Gold Coast Colony, 1902). After the reorganisation of the administrative boundaries of the former protectorate of the Northern Territories in 1957, the area was established as the Northern Region. In 1961, it was sub-divided to create the Upper Region. The Upper Region was further sub-divided into the Upper East and Upper West Regions. See G. E. Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History 1807 – 1957* (London, Thomas Nelson, 1964), pp. 533 – 4. ; D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.234

relationship with the gods and the ancestors. There was no single political authority, at least in Sakot. That is to say, no one held absolute power in the land. Power was decentralised among the various lineage heads of the community. The social structure as described provides the stratum on which political power was exercised.

The Introduction of Chieftaincy into Navrongo

Chieftaincy, though a foreign institution, had long been introduced into the political set up of Navrongo before the advent of the Europeans in the region. This happened probably in the second half of the seventeenth century¹⁹⁰ by immigrants from Zikku¹⁹¹ in the North-East Territory of the Burkina Faso. This is evidenced by the fact that the British first came to meet the twelfth of the chiefs in Navrongo. As depicted in the Navrongo District Commissioner's Report in 1908, when he stated: "Navarro, a Kasena (Grunshie) town. Paramount over all Kasena Grunshies. Chief Kwara an old but active man wants constant backing to encourage him to give orders to his people"¹⁹². The origins of chieftaincy here like most part of the Northern Territories are shrouded in myth and mystery. The most popular and well known legend about the evolution of the institution is the account which traces the royal descent to Butu the son of Kambongwana.¹⁹³

According to this legend, Butu was a very good hunter. One day, he got lost in the forest while he was chasing a bull. It threatened to rain and in his search for shelter, he saw a group of people weeding in an open field. Suddenly, these people vanished as the clouds got darker. In his

¹⁹⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5/ 1. Navrongo District Commissioner's Report, 24th October 1908.

¹⁹¹ *Zikku* is located in present day Burkina Faso.

¹⁹² PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5/ 1. Navrongo District Commissioner's Report, 24th October 1908. This was the period when the British had just started to assert their rule over the people of Navrongo. It is thus clear from the oral tradition of the people that before the British arrived in the area, eleven different chiefs excluding Kwara, whom they first came to meet, had already ruled as chiefs in Navrongo.

¹⁹³ Kambongwana was said to be a hunter and a royal at Zikku.

shouts for help, some strange hands pulled him away and he soon found himself in a cave with people all around him warming themselves up and some having a meal. He was given some food to eat and a warm place to sleep. The next day, Butu thanked them for their hospitality and left for home. On his return, he told his people about these hole-dwellers at Navoro-Pungu.

However, Butu quarrelled with his people over one of his favourite hunting dogs that had been killed and eaten while he was away. In bitterness and anguish, Butu left Zikku (his Home Town) to permanently live with the hole-dwellers. Being a royal and the eldest son of his father, he took along the *Kwara* (horn) which is the symbol of chieftaincy. After narrating his story to the hole-dweller, he was welcomed and allowed to settle with them. Butu was given a wife and eventually was allowed to become a chief, probably because of his royal inclinations. He called his new home *Pung*, meaning thick forest. Today, this area is known as Navoro-Pungu. Butu introduced the hole-dwellers (that is the indigenous people) to permanent buildings of swish houses with roof tops made of grass or swish concrete as seen in most parts of Navrongo today.



Figure 4.1 - This is a typical setting of a traditional home in Navrongo¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Source: [www://mith2.umd.edu/research/projects/nth/index2.html](http://mith2.umd.edu/research/projects/nth/index2.html)

It is believed that Butu later moved to Navrongo and settled at the area known as Noghsenia. Here, he made his permanent home after several years wandering in search of a fertile area to settle. Significantly, *noge* is a *Nankani* word which means to move entirely with one's belongings and the Nankana happen to be one of the ethnic groups of the Navrongo Traditional Area. It has been established that the royal house of Navrongo are Nankana.¹⁹⁵ That is why *Nankani* is spoken during the pouring of libation, instead of *Kasem*.¹⁹⁶

Meanwhile, a terrible plague befell Butu's people at Zikku. They immediately attributed this to the loss of the *kwara* and decided to follow Butu. They came to settle at Noghsenia with Butu. They built houses, made farms and increased in numbers. During the slave raiding activities of Babatu, many immigrants who had been displaced in Burkina Faso also took shelter at Navrongo. They were soon assimilated into the society and have since lost their original identity.¹⁹⁷

Butu was made chief with his brothers as his advisors. His children were given areas to settle with their families and have subsequently become headmen of those areas or sections. In all, fifteen chiefs have ascended the throne since the introduction of chieftaincy into Navrongo. The current chief Dr. Augustine Atudeku Adda III is the fifteenth on the skin. The rest are, Butu the founder of Navrongo, Nogsie, Dumazoya, Yifue, Basina, Birekem, Afa, Kyigibe, Gyampia, Kadatua, Kwara,¹⁹⁸ Awe, Adda and Kogozua in that order.

¹⁹⁵ This was confirmed by the Regent of Navrongo and his elders in an interview on 22nd February 2008.

¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, within Navrongo Central, the Kasena are said to be predominant.

¹⁹⁷ Currently, the indigenous people refer to them as *Yara*.

¹⁹⁸ Kwara's rein coincided with the Colonial Administration in Navrongo.

The Political Structure of Navrongo

Prior to the introduction of chieftaincy into the Navrongo Traditional Area, political power was vested in the heads of the totemic clans called *Tigatu (Kasem)* or *Tendana (Nankani)*.¹⁹⁹ These were the landowners of the various clans of the Navrongo community.²⁰⁰ The British (Colonialists), mostly referred to them as Fetish Men.²⁰¹ Their influence and authority was considerable by virtue of the spiritual powers they were believed to possess. The authority of the *Tigatu/Tendana* lay in his control of the supernatural, whose power he could invoke to punish wrong doers. The *Tigatu/Tendana* was the chief intermediary; he stood between God, or divinity and man. He was the religious symbol of God among his people. He was the owner of the *tangwana (Kasem)/tengana (Nankani)*.²⁰² The duties of these clan heads were chiefly religious, but since the people did not disassociate religion from other departments of life, he had political functions as well. However, as will be seen later, most of these have been eroded with the advent of the British administration in the area. For instance, it was his duty to introduce the new chief to the earth-god, and he was the chief peacemaker whenever war broke out.

¹⁹⁹ *Tigatu* and *Tendana* can be literally translated as landowner in *Kasem* and *Nankani* respectively. *Kasem* and *Nankani* represent the two different languages spoken by the Kasena and Nankana of Navrongo.

²⁰⁰ They are landowners because they are said to be the first to settle on their respective lands or community. However, they are effectively custodians of the land.

²⁰¹ Mostly, when the District Commissioners of the Northern Territories reported of Chiefs, they named their Fetish Men and even that of all their various Head Men.

²⁰² These are the sacred groves or holy places of the clan.

A council of elders called *Nakwa* assisted the *Tigatu/Tendana*. The *Nakwa* served as the intermediaries between the clan heads and the people who came under their leadership. They acted as war leaders and thus became the organisers of the people. Later when chieftaincy was introduced, they organised the people to help the chief when he needed material aid like clearing the chief's lands for cultivation, harvesting his crops and building his homestead. The headmen (clan heads) and the council of elders could enskin and deskin the chief. They administered justice in their own localities, especially cases of little importance.

With the introduction of chieftaincy into the area, the chief replaced the *Tigatu* as the overall head of the community. He had the final word in all political matters and was the final judge in all legal disputes. He like the *Tigatu* was the link between the community and its ancestors. Nevertheless, the chief's powers must not be understood to mean that he was authoritarian. In practice, the chief though often hereditary, was merely *primus inter pares*. Neither he nor any other leader had the power or the right to compel compliance. He could only advise or persuade. Decisions were reached through discussion and informal consensus and sanctions were applied exclusively through the operation of informal mechanisms of social control. Political relations tended to be indistinguishable from kinship relations. The Kasena/Nankana people of Navrongo were generally law abiding. All serious disputes were handled in open courts where the chief or headman sat with his advisors, heard evidence, examined witnesses for both sides and gave judgement. Litigants who were dissatisfied with decisions at the sectional courts could appeal to the chief's court that served as a court of appeal for the whole community as well as a court of first instance to those living within the vicinity of the chief.

Land was communally owned and the chief, his elders and the headmen who in theory owned the land, regulated its use. Each family had a land allotted to it and cattle grazed freely on a

common land allotted to the village. It was the general practice that any one who first cultivated a “virgin” piece of land should have the right to plant his crops there in future even if he had not made use of it for a prolonged period. Strangers could be allowed by the headman to cultivate and graze their cattle on the ancestral land and for this a small tribute paid in recognition of the *Tigatu* and prior rights of the family that occupied the area. Such agreements did not amount to outright sale.

The political organisation of Navrongo remained significantly unchanged even after the introduction of chieftaincy in the area by these immigrants. It would seem that the immigrants either adapted or held in common similar cultural practices with the people on whom they imposed themselves. It is possible that they also believed in the earth-god and the ancestral spirits, for they did not interfere with the religion of the people but left to the *Tigatu* his office of priest and of propitiating the god of the soil and ancestral spirits of the area.²⁰³

The binding force that held the whole community together was entirely religious or magico-religious. This power was vested in both the chief and the clan heads. It helped them to control their people using these supernatural powers. There was little economic power attached to chieftaincy, as there was no wealth in the area. The chief did not control the people by an army of warriors or by wealth that in any case was non-existent. He was vested with spiritual rather than secular power. In the absence of any economic or material power, it is reasonable to assume that a chief did not introduce measures that did not have the approval of the subjects. In addition, belief in the spirit world precluded him from doing anything that was contrary to the wishes of the spirits of the ancestors of the people over whom he ruled. It was undoubtedly the general belief in the

²⁰³ That is not to say, the chiefs did not play a significant role in the religious lives of the people.

spirit world that made the deskinment of a chief relatively unknown to these people. Such a thing as heir apparent was also unknown, although succession to the skin was limited to candidates of specific families. On the death of a chief, the successor was determined by consultations of the Kingmakers with the ancestral spirits. It was the one whose duty it was to promulgate the wishes of the ancestral spirits who was generally elected. These beliefs are still largely maintained.

Succession to the throne was therefore hereditary and the general practice was that, a deceased chief was to be succeeded by any of his sons born during his chiefship or reign. However, preference was usually given to the eldest son provided he was acceptable to the kingmakers, as depicted here by the District Commissioner of Navrongo in 1947:

I have the honour to refer to my letter . . . and to forward in duplicate a declaration of custom in regard to the succession to *Kassena* and *Nankani* skins made by the Kasena Nankana Native Authority (K.N.N.A.) at a meeting held in Navrongo on May 16th, 1947. In contrast to the *Builsas*[sic]; the *Kassenas* [sic], more than the *Nankanis* [sic] appear to have evolved some set form of succession to skins. There appears to be a preference for eldest sons, but this is far from being invariable or inevitable.²⁰⁴

Adda the *Navorope*, who was in fact not a son but a nephew of Awe the late chief of Navrongo was among those who stressed the importance of the eldest son succeeding if he was not debarred by any physical, moral or mental disabilities, such as being a murderer, leper, blind or having one eye.²⁰⁵ Under any of these circumstances, one of his brothers could be elected. If none of the sons was eligible to ascend the skin, a candidate could be chosen from the nephews, but brothers of the deceased chief were not eligible. Nonetheless, on the death of a chief all his sons and paternal cousins were eligible to contest. The candidates were given equal opportunities to

²⁰⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2, This was a letter headed, "Succession to the Kassena-Nankana Skins" written by the Navrongo District Commissioner to the "Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi, Gambaga" in 1947, para. 1 & 2.

²⁰⁵ Adda was installed chief of Navrongo in 1945 to succeed his uncle Awe who was also installed in 1916 and died in 1942.

contest for the skin. The campaign was usually done after the official announcement of the death of the chief.

The contest was done openly and the contestants sent gifts of tobacco and cola nuts to the kingmakers to solicit their support. Thus, the Navrongo District Commissioner in 1947 was quick to note that:

Apparently, when a skin falls vacant, possible candidates pay visits to the horn holders and elders of the chief's section and ask for their support and no doubt there is considerable lobbying and present giving involved. To what extent the elders of the chief's section determine the final candidate, I am not in a position to say: however, I would hazard a guess that it is they who make the selection and then instruct the *Kwaranu*²⁰⁶ or the *Dongma*²⁰⁷ as the case may be, on whom to confer the horn.²⁰⁸

As the great day of the election of the chief approached, several of the contestants stepped down especially the younger ones in order to give support to their own elder brothers of the same mother. There were many rules and regulations by which all the contestants had to abide: and each of them symbolised an aspect of chieftaincy. These included the wearing of the *yugongo* (calabash as a hat), a goatskin and a locally woven straw bag to be hanged on his shoulder. The contestants must also not shave their beard or hair until the new chief was elected.

The *yugongo* from which the contestants would drink until the election was over, together with the straw bag were symbols of a beggar. This indicated that the contestant was not only begging for power from his people, but was also assuring them of the humility with which he

²⁰⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. The *Kwaranu* is a Kasena term for a priestly office-holder who bestows the symbol of chiefship on a newly elected chief. Also quoted from the letter headed, "Succession to the Kassena-Nankana Skins" written by the Navrongo District Commissioner to the "Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi, Gambaga" in 1947. para. 3

²⁰⁷ The *Dongma* is the Nankana version *Kwaranu*. Ibid.

²⁰⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. This was a letter headed, "Succession to the Kassena-Nankana Skins" written by the Navrongo District Commissioner to the "Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi, Gambaga" in 1947. para. 4 & 5.

would conduct himself if elected; that he would be as humble as a beggar. The *yugongo* also symbolised the crown that the contestant hoped to wear if elected. The skin was symbolic of the chiefly position as chiefs sit on skins. The hair was also an indication of the fact that, the contestant anticipated being so busy that he would not have enough time to shave. This was yet another indication of his determination to serve his people if even it took personal discomfort. Finally, the hair was believed to be the easiest part of the body used for poisoning. Every contestant therefore tried as much as possible to prevent his hair from falling in order to guard against death through poisoning by a rival contestant. During the campaign days, each contestant hired a group of drummers and musicians to sing his praises and in the past when wars were frequent, it was an occasion where the heroic deeds of the contestant were loudly proclaimed.

The vernacular word for chieftaincy in Kasem is *pare*, a word that connotes power, wealth, glory and prestige.²⁰⁹ A chief is therefore called *Pe* that is a person who wields power and wealth. The period of campaign was known as *parecharem*, which literally means “chieftaincy courtship”. The day of campaign was therefore an occasion for the show of wealth by all the contestants. An aspiring chief had to prove to his followers that he already was a man of means and suited to the skin. That was to say, he was economically sound enough to take-up the task. Consequently, on market days (which fell every three days), the contestants go to the market to purchase tobacco, kola nuts and *pito* as gifts for people in order to induce or influence them and also show off in terms of wealth.²¹⁰ This went on for about two weeks at the end of which the kingmakers, once more after consulting the soothsayers, fixed the day for the election of the chief.

²⁰⁹ Its equivalent in Nankani is *Na'am*.

²¹⁰ A locally brewed beer made with a type of millet known as ‘Guinea-Corn’.

Before colonial rule, on the day of the election, all the contestants assembled and some sticks were cut to various lengths, each stick representing a particular candidate.²¹¹ These sticks were then gathered and sent by one of the kingmakers to different outstanding soothsayers. The candidate whose stick was chosen by a majority of the soothsayers was proclaimed the chief-elect. The *Kwaranu* and *Kwarayiginu* were priestly office-holders who bestowed the symbol of chiefship on the newly elected chief. This emblem was a ram's horn containing earth from the land of the chief's ancestors. The *Nankani* equivalents are *Dongma* and *Dongchigera* respectively.²¹² The table below shows the sections the various *Kwarayiginu* and *Dongchigera* of the major Traditional Areas making up the Kasena–Nankana Native Authority in 1947 come from.²¹³

TRADITIONAL AREA	SECTION
Navrongo	Wuru assisted by Nangalkenia
Katiu	Saa
Nakon	Balbinia
Chiana	Adonia assisted by Wuru
Kayoro	Kakyela
Paga	Nania assisted by Kajello and Balo

²¹¹ During colonialism however, the king makers or those who were customarily eligible to vote were required to stand behind their favourite candidate during the election of the new chief.

²¹² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. This was contained in a letter by the District Commissioner of Navrongo, headed, "Succession to Kassena–Nankani Skins" to the Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi – Gambaga in 1947. Para.3.

²¹³ These include; Navrongo, Katiu, Nakon, Chiana and Kayoro. The rest are, Paga, Kologu, Naga, Sirigu and Mirigu. 'Major Traditional Areas' is used here because the other areas such as Doba and Kandiga were under one or the other of these ten. Doba for example, was under Navrongo.

Kologu	Tangabiisi assisted by Zuu
Naga	Kologu (Donchigera) and Choo (Dongma)
Sirigu	Basengo (Dongma) and Kyibeli (Donchigera)
Mirigu	Chanse

Table 4.1 – *Kwarayiginu* and *Dongchigera* of the Kasena-Nankana Native Authority in 1947²¹⁴

The newly elected chief was then locked up in a room with his most senior wife for seven days. On the seventh day when he was released, he was expected to be able to tell his people what the future held for them. This was followed by an official ceremony where the chief swore the oath of allegiance to honour the customs and traditions of his people.

The introduction of chieftaincy in the case of Navrongo, unlike most parts of Northern Ghana was through peaceful means. Butu obviously coming from a relatively developed state and probably bringing with him superior military knowledge was able to organise the people against hostile neighbours, thereby seen as one with superior powers. By virtue of the superior magico-religious powers that they were believed to possess, these immigrants were able to maintain their authority over the indigenous people who had no idea of chieftaincy. In sum, the introduction of chieftaincy into Navrongo simply meant a single leader spearheading the affairs of the whole area instead of the various clan heads.

Chieftaincy in Sakot: Origin and Structure

²¹⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. This was contained in a letter by the District Commissioner of Navrongo, headed, “Succession to Kassena–Nankani Skins” to the Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi – Gambaga in 1947.

The *Teng Da'an's*²¹⁵ devotion to the customary order and opposition to colonial rule as well as the British lack of understanding of indigenous authority structures, meant that they remained on the margins of the political changes brought about by the Colonial Administration and subsequently, by the Nationalist Government.²¹⁶ The *Teng Daanam* authority was gradually overshadowed by the introduction of indirect rule through chiefs, who took over some of the functions previously attended by *Teng Daanam*, such as safeguarding of peace and order, and mediating between community and outsiders. Besides performing rituals and sacrifices to the earth god, *Teng Daanam* still oversees the allocation of unused lands where land is still available. Their role, however, remains mainly a spiritual one. Strangers who wish to acquire land must now first approach the chief, who has the power to refuse or accept the request and to select an area for the person. He will then refer the petitioner to the local *Teng Da'an* for the necessary rituals to propitiate the earth god on his behalf.

Unlike Navrongo, the institution of chieftaincy in Sakot was created by the colonial administration. With the entrenchment of British indirect rule in the Gold Coast²¹⁷ now modern Ghana, it became necessary for each established village to have a chief or a *Kanbong Na'ab* as was practiced in Northern Nigeria.²¹⁸ The Colonial Administration wanted to rule the people through chiefs or *Teng Daanam* who were not opposed to them and who could quickly carry out their policies.²¹⁹ However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sakot had no chief but had a

²¹⁵ The *Teng-Da'an* in *Nabt* language literally means owner of the land. *Nabt* is the language of the Nabdam in general, who include the people of Sakot. The *Teng-Da'an* here therefore is referring to the Sakot *Da'an* who is supposed to be the owner of Sakot for being the first person to settle there.

²¹⁶ S. Bewong, *The Institution of Sakot Chieftaincy*, an Unpublished Report, 2002.

²¹⁷ The system of Indirect Rule introduced in the 1930s, was developed in Northern Nigeria by Lord Lugard and popularised in his book ; *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh : 1922)

²¹⁸ *Kanbong Na'ab* is a *Nabt* word which means created chief or Government Appointed Chief

Sakora'an who was the *Teng Da'an*. The District Commissioner wanted to make Gella Yarig the chief or *Kanbong Na'ab* (Headman).²²⁰ Gella Yarig and his brothers Gella Tii and Gella Yarigbil were said to have migrated from their ancestral home at Damolug around the eighteenth century and settled at Sakot which is seven miles east of Damolug because of the availability of abundant land in Sakot for farming. By then, there were only a few human settlements in the area, basically the *Sakora'an* and his clan members. Yarig and his brothers approached the *Sakora'an* who offered them land to settle. Thus, Tobik who was the *Sakora'an* did not agree that Gella Yarig be made chief at his expense. To settle the matter, the District Commissioner then told the people to line up behind each candidate. The one who had majority support would be their *Kanbong Na'ab*. Almost all the people lined up behind Gella Yarig while Tobik had very little support.²²¹ Gella Yarig was more popular than the *Teng Da'an*. Thus, Gella Yarig was declared the *Kanbong Na'ab*²²² and Tobik remained as the *Sakora'an* or the Spiritual Head of the land – the *Teng Da'an*. Since then, the descendants of Gella Yarig have ruled as chiefs of Sakot. This is how Gella Yarig founded the Sakot skin and he has often been referred to as the “White man’s friend” during appellations.

After Gella Yarig’s death, his second son, Dokbila, succeeded him. He went to the *Nayire* and was enskinned in 1907 as a Divisional Chief.²²³ It is significant to note that all the other chiefs

²¹⁹ It literally means owners of the land. But while some of them were converted to chiefs in certain areas of the Northern Territories; others who did not co-operate with the colonists were sidelined for others who were considered “the white man’s friend”.

²²⁰ Gella Yarig unlike the *Sakora'an*, is said to have given the Chief Commissioner and his entourage a warm reception in Sakot when he was touring the Frafra District from Gambaga.

²²¹ Probably for obvious reasons because Gella Yarig already had the support of the colonial officials, who are capable of manipulating the elections.

²²² Gella Yarig was probably made the *Kanbong Na'ab* around 1905.

after Dokbila had to go to the *Nayire* to be enskinned. In all, five chiefs have ascended the Sakot skin after Gella Yarig. They are Dokbila Yarig (1907 - 1938), Biuk Yarig (1941 to 1964), Namoo Dokbila (1965 - 1986), Roger Gelbila Bewong (1989 - 1992), and Joseph Gelbire Bewong (1998 – date). The table below shows the chronology of chiefs.



²²³ This was because Sakot was and still is under the jurisdiction of the *Nayire*, whose kingdom extended beyond the Frafra District through to the Kusasi District. Infact, the *Nayire* is the paramount chief of the Mamprugu Traditional Area.

Title	Name	Skin Name	Date of Enskinment	Date of Death	Gate	No. of years reigned
Paramount Chief.	Joseph Gelbire Bewong	Naab Sigri I	9 th May 1998 as the 6 th Paramount Chief of Sakot.	Current Chief	Dokbila's gate	Current Chief
Paramount Chief.	Roger Gelbila Bewong	Naab Salima II	9 th July 1989 as the 5 th Paramount Chief of Sakot.	22 nd Sept 1992	Dokbila's gate	3yrs 2months and 13days
Paramount Chief.	Namoo Dokbila	Naab Wobug	13 th May 1965 & then 12 th Feb 1968 as the 4 th Paramount Chief of Sakot.	August 1986	Dokbila's gate	21yrs and 4months
Divisional chief. (3 rd chief).	Biuk Yarig	Naab Kunbari h Salima I	May 1941 3 rd Chief of Sakot	27 th Jan 1964	Biuk's gate	23yrs
Divisional Chief. (2 nd chief)	Dokbila Yarig	Naab Leeb Mogr	1907 – 1938. 2 nd Chief of Sakot	1938	Dokbila's gate	31 yrs
1 st Kanbong nab or Headman	Gella Yarig		Did not go to Nayire but was appointed a Headman (Kanbong Naab) around 1905	December 1906 ²²⁴	Founder of the Sakot Skin	

Table 4.2 – Chronology of Sakot Chiefs²²⁵

²²⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63 / 5 / 2. p. 66. As reported by Captain J. Oknealy, a British Colonial Official in Sakot.

²²⁵ Bewong, The Institution of Sakot Chieftaincy, P. 14.

There is one main gate to the *Sakot* Skin, which is the Gella Yarig's Gate, founder of the Sakot Skin. Any descendant of Gella Yarig can be eligible to occupy the Sakot Skin provided that person is duly qualified to become a chief.²²⁶ The descendants of Gella Yarig are Dok, Dokbila, Biuk, Sugre, and these four form the four sub-gates as follows:

- Dok's Gate
- Dokbila's Gate
- Biuk's Gate and
- Sugre's Gate

Succession to the Skin is not rotational. Any descendants of the *Gella Yarig's* gate can become a Sakot *Na'ab*. The selection and enskinment of the candidate is at the pleasure of the *Nayire* so long as the candidate is from Gella Yarig's Gate and he is duly qualified to become a chief. That is, the candidate has no disability or criminal record. It is normally by mutual consent that each head of the four gates selects their suitable candidates to contest the skin.

²²⁶One is qualified to become a chief provided the person has the following qualities; two eyes in their natural position and not blind, all the ten toes and ten fingers in their correct positions, a wife, a sound health with no other physical defect and with sound mind and has no criminal record such as murder, stealing or robbery

Succession to the Sakot Skin

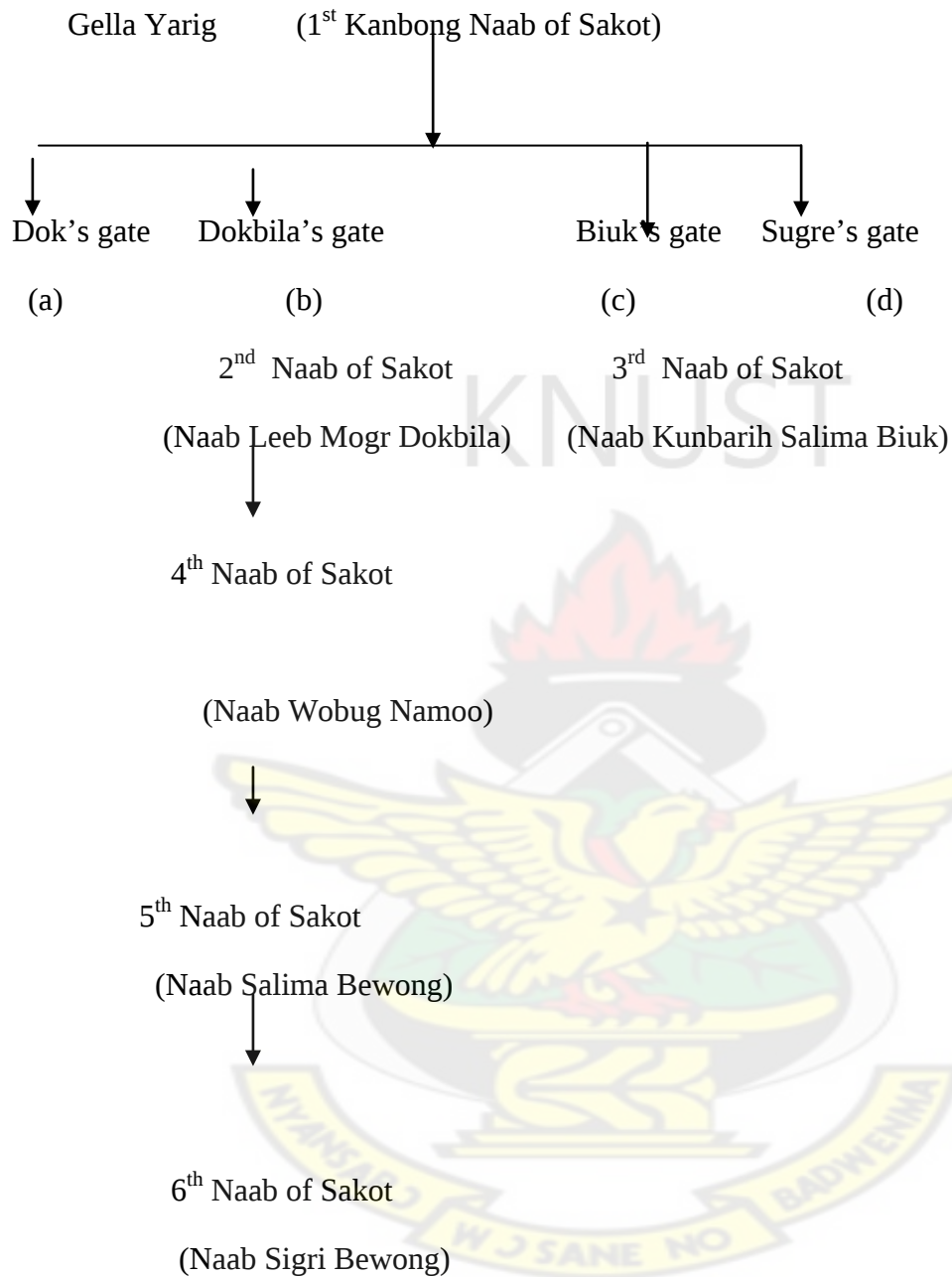


Figure 4.2 – Shows the Succession Pattern to the Sakot skin

A council of five elders assisted the Sakot *Na'ab* in performing his duties. It is important to note that, just like the chief, the office holders held office for life. The *Kpana* was the chief's

linguist. He controlled the “House” in its deliberations and gave pronouncements when appropriate. In the early years of colonialism, he was in charge of the chief’s warriors and armory. This position is defunct now, since there is hardly any ethnic conflict in the area. Succession to this position had always been the descendants of Zanlerigu settlers in Sakot, one of the five villages that constitute the Zoolubah ethnic group.

The *Taraan* was responsible for visitors. Visitors to the palace must first report to him who in turn would bring them to the Sakot *Na’ab*. He was the first person to be informed of the death of a Divisional Chief and it was his responsibility to inform the Sakot *Na’ab*. The office holder must hail from Gella Yarikbil’s descendants.²²⁷ When matters came before the elders, he deliberated on the issue with the other elders and when a conclusion was reached, they consulted the chief who was the final authority. When it came to installing an acting divisional chief (*Gbanda’an*), the *Taraan* assisted by the Paramount chief’s elders, installed the *Gbanda’an*. After the performance of a divisional chief’s funeral, the “*gbanjeouk*” (a bag containing the late chief’s used clothings) was sent to the *Tara’an*’s house. He in turn brought the “*gbanjeouk*” to the Sakot *Na’ab*’s palace, amidst drumming and dancing. The *Tara’an* in consultation with the chief and the other elders, installed a new Divisional Chief. The first *Tara’an* was Yenmongba at the time of *Na’ab* Leeb Mogr’s and *Na’ab* Kunbarih Salima’s reign.

Yida’an literally means elder or head of the household or of the Chief’s Palace for that matter. This privileged position has been reserved for the *Baaraboug* people who are descendants of Damolug. The Sakot *Na’abnam* are also descendants of Damolug. The *Yida’an* was responsible for the health of the Chief and his family, and the chief’s in-laws in terms of funerals, health and

²²⁷ That is one of the brothers of Galla Yarig who migrated with him from their ancestral home in Damolug to Sakot.

other welfare issues. He was in charge of the Chief's meeting hall (*zong*) and its maintenance. He accompanied the Regent to the *Nayire* when they were sending the "*gbanjeouk*."

The *Asumah* was the Finance Officer in charge of the Chief's treasury that also included animals. Infact, he saw to the needs of the chief. The office holder was always a descendant of Daglig, one of the five villages that form the *Zoolubah* ethnic group. The first *Asumah* was Midihuk Kolbil. He was enskinned by *Na'ab* Kunbarih Salima. The second *Asumah* was Bong, son of the first *Asumah*. He was enskinned by *Naab* Wobug.

Sakpar was the Sergeant-at-arms, when the chief sat in state, he responded to greetings. The office holder came from Gella Tii's descendants. It was the wisdom of *Na'ab* Wobug Namoo who instituted this office in 1968 to appease Gella Tii's descendants. The first to occupy this position was Zi-ingr, followed by Kapote Zato and currently Ali Bendiung.

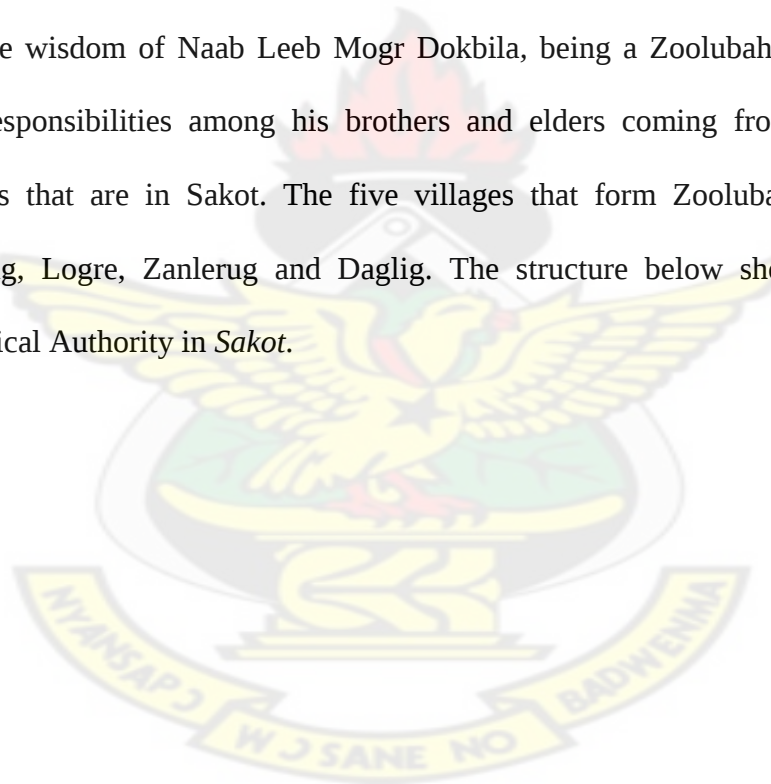
There were other elders who were allowed to attend the Chief's court but were not allowed to take part in their deliberations. They were there because of their job functions. They included: *Na'ab Zor* – A trusted friend and confidant of the chief. He was in fact the Chief's Security Adviser. He was a descendant of Tindongo, one of the five villages that form the *Zoolubah* ethnic group. The Chief appointed him. He was in charge of the Chief's Skins. When the Chief had to sit in state, he carried the skins and prepared them for the chief to sit on. The first *Na'ab Zor* was Mba Nyeya, followed by Mbabil, but currently the position is vacant.

The *Saman Na'ab* was in charge of the Chief's Palace gates. If anyone wanted to see the chief, he had to inform *Saman Na'ab*. He was in fact the Outer Guard. He maintained tidiness of the Chief's palace and served as a messenger.

Grunshies' Naab was in charge of *Goreih* settlers in Sakot. The first was Ayamgah, then Belimboug, Ta-ah and Saman, who is now dead.

There was also the *Da-a Na'ab* (Market Chief) who collected the market tolls. Another institution that performed an important responsibility in Sakot was the *Biihnanam* who were eight in number. Every divisional chief had a *Biihna'ab*, each reporting to his respective chief. They were Youth Leaders who mobilised the youth for community work. Closely associated to the *Biihnanam* were the *Mangaazies* also eight in number. They were Women Leaders who mobilised the women for community work.

It was the wisdom of Naab Leeb Mogr Dokbila, being a Zoolubah himself, to share the positions and responsibilities among his brothers and elders coming from the various ethnic Zoolubah groups that are in Sakot. The five villages that form Zoolubah ethnic groups are: Damolug, Pelung, Logre, Zanlerug and Daglig. The structure below shows the hierarchy of Traditional Political Authority in Sakot.



Structure of Traditional Authority in Sakot

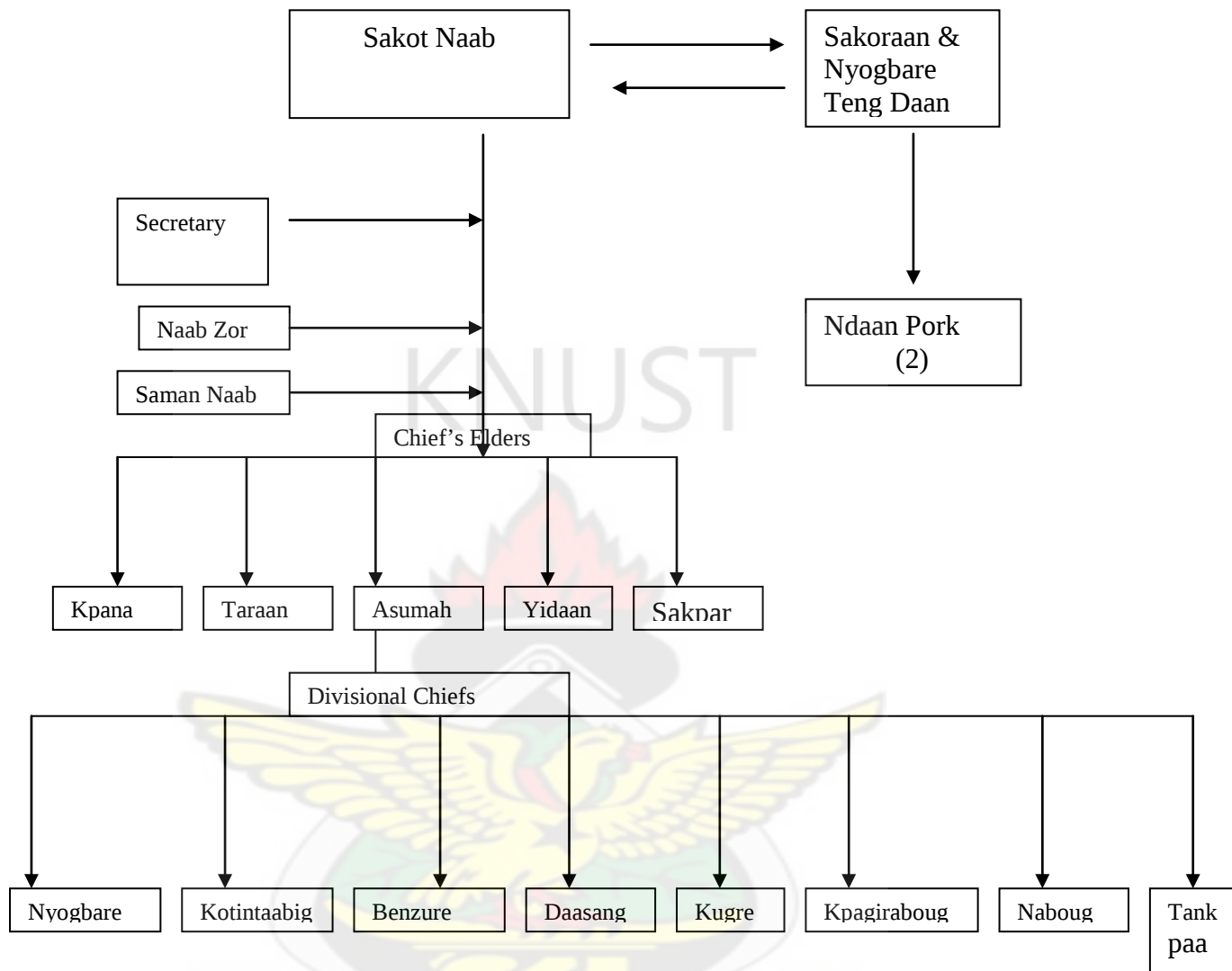


Figure 4.3 – Shows the Hierarchy of Traditional Authority in Sakot

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND INDEPENDENCE ON THE INDIGENOUS POLITICAL SYSTEM OF NAVRONGO AND SAKOT

Introduction:

This Chapter traces systematically how colonialism on one hand, and nationalism and independence on the other, impacted on the indigenous political system of Navrongo and Sakot. It concentrates on how the colonial political organisation in the areas after 1902 and the nationalist regimes that followed after independence up to 1969, affected the traditional political institution.

It was after British rule was firmly established that the missionaries started establishing churches in the territories under British rule. In Asante and the North, the spread of both education and the Christian religion advanced with the establishment of British rule.²²⁸

Colonialism, Christianity and Western education are three related phenomena that have had tremendous effect on the Traditional Political Administration of the Northern Territories in the twentieth century. Western educated young men who had traditional duties at the palace could no longer perform them for a number of reasons. They were busy in their new jobs as clerks in Government or Trade Establishments. They usually lived away from their own areas in new employment centres and were not at hand to perform those duties. They also thought that the

²²⁸ K. Arhin, *Traditional Rule in Ghana – Past and Present* (Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1980), p.130.

performance of some of those duties was an offence against the “Christian God.” Busia summarised the position of the chief before colonial rule as follows.²²⁹

The chief had been a priest revered as the lineal successor of the founder of the state, and its sub-divisions, the division and the village. His subjects felt beholden to him for their well-being. He was the custodian of the lands of the political community of which he was the head. He exercised judicial functions in relation to offences classified as hateful to the ancestral spirits and other spiritual beings, to which he offered prayers for the prosperity of the community. The chief succeeded to office by virtue of his lineal descent from the ancestral founders of the political community; and what amounted to election by the representatives of the sub-units of that community.²³⁰

The sacredness of chiefs was derived from both the general sacred conception of the ancestors and the mystical relationship existing between traditional rulers and their ancestors. In addition, the customary rites, rituals and practices performed by traditional rulers all appeared to have religious undertones that make the institution sacred. Parrinder sums it up when he writes, “The Kings now often called “chief” or “paramount chiefs” ... were sovereign rulers, divine kings, both traditional and charismatic ...”²³¹

However, this divine nature of chiefs was soon to be manipulated at the beginning of the twentieth century in Northern Ghana, when in the words of Northcott, “Every system of

²²⁹ K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System in Ashanti* (1951), Chapter IX, pp.196-217.

²³⁰ A. Brempong, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana (1951 – 1996)* (Accra, Sedco Publishing Limited, 2001) p. 2.

²³¹ E. G. Parrinder, *Divine Kingship in West Africa* in (Numen 3, 1956), p. 112.

Government if it is to be permanent and progressive must have its roots in the framework of indigenous society”.²³² Bening quoted him:

The agency to be employed will be that of the native chiefs, and their power will during good behaviour, be uniformly supported except in matters of their relationships with their neighbouring chiefs and of offences of a capital nature.²³³

This was the background to the Administrative Ordinance of 1902, which, though gave the chiefs a significant role in the administration, altered their traditional power and responsibilities considerably. The powers of chiefs depended on the backing of the District Commissioners because there was no formal framework for them to exercise authority. Much therefore depended on their ability as well as on the initiative of the District Officers. In addition, although “Native Tribunals” were established, chiefs heard only matrimonial and land cases; all criminal cases were tried in the Commissioner’s Court. Traditional authority was therefore only useful as long as it helped in the achievement of colonial objectives, but those exercising it were not seen as having intrinsic or inalienable rights or as entitled to assert interests of an independent kind. To sum it up in the words of Cardinall, “...the chiefs were practically powerless: they have neither revenue nor authority. They have tended to become mere sergeant-majors through whom the Administration can address the rank and file”.²³⁴

²³² PRAAD, Tamale, ADM. 1/145, C. S. P., Memorandum on the Introduction and Development of Native Administration, 14 April 1930.

²³³ Quoted in Bening, “Foundations of the modern Native States of Northern Ghana”, p.118. These were the words of Lt. Col. Northcott, the first Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories.

²³⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, ADM. 1/7, Acting Commissioner of the Southern Province (C.S.P.), 20 July 1928; Report on Native Administration in the Northern Territories. A.W. Cardinall was the Acting Commissioner of the. Southern

The Impact of Colonialism on the Indigenous Political System of Navrongo

The indigenous political system of Navrongo was “diffused” among parents, elders and chiefs. None of them wielded absolute political authority over the entire populace in the European sense. Theoretically, the clan chiefs had control over the elders of their sections, but practically each of these elders was independent of the other. The combination of an ethnic whole under one political leader (chief) was unknown. It is important to note that the chief’s power stemmed from his position as the link between the people and the spirit world. Thus, he received respect and loyalty from his subjects as their mediator with the supreme God. To this extent, the chief wielded power that was closely knit with the religion of the people, rather than the issuing of orders and commands. This orderly arrangement was thrown into disarray in the face of the slave raids of the Dagbon and later that of Babatu.²³⁵ This had the effect of making life and property insecure in the region.

To understand British colonial policy in Navrongo, which was to cause a total orientation in the political system, it is important to note not only the chaos they met, but also, more importantly the factors that motivated their drive into the hinterland of Asante. It has been contended by some historians that the Fomena Treaty 1874, that was signed by the British and the Asante was to safeguard trade in the colony.²³⁶ Similarly, it could be maintained that Britain’s establishment of its authority over the hinterland was to safeguard not only the colony, but Asante’s trade. The Northern markets of Kintampo and Salaga were converging points where

Province at the time. Also quoted by A. A. Illiasu, “The Establishment of British Administration in Mamprugu, 1898-1937”, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*. Vol. XVI No.1 Legon (1975).

²³⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/4, p.1. “Memorandum on the Proposed Northern Territories Native Administration Ordinance”.

²³⁶ A. A. Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1975), p. 29.

Asante traders met the caravans from Mossi land. It was thus the opinion of the British that if the country was opened up and the society returned to normalcy through the establishment of peace, order and security of life and property, they would be able to attain their economic objectives. Thus, the British remarked:

It was of vital importance to the trade of the colony with the interior that the routes passing through Salaga to the districts east of the Volta should be kept open and free, and that the district used as recruiting grounds for the Hausa force should be kept, as heretofore, independent of any foreign jurisdiction.²³⁷

The establishment of colonial rule thus brought quite a novel political scene among the Kasena-Nankana of Navrongo. There was an extension of the territories that originally constituted Navrongo. The original territories were, Navrongo, Paga, Kayoro, Nakong and Katiu. The territories, however, extended to include the Nankani territories of Mirigu, Sirigu, Naga, Doba, Kologo and Gane and Builsa territories such as Sandema and Kanjarga. The table below shows the list of Chiefs and Headmen in 'Navarro' (Navrongo) District in 1918.²³⁸

PLACE	NAME OF CHIEF	RANK
Navarro (Navrongo)	Awe	Head Chief
Chiana	Naiyerewe	Chief
Chuchuliga	Periga	Chief
Doba	Tunyoa	Chief

²³⁷ Quoted from Bening, "Foundations of the modern Native States of Northern Ghana", p. 14.

²³⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63 / 5 / 2, Navrongo District Record Book, October 1918.

Kayoro	Gamba	Chief
Kandiga	Akabi	Chief
Kologo	Azubere	Chief
Manyoro	Kobirikwa	Chief
Mirigu	Avulkabba	Chief
Naga	Azanga	Chief
Nakong	Afawnachigi	Chief
Natugnia	Acha	Chief
Navoro Pung	Wecheru	Chief
Paga	Teidam	Chief
Pinda	Kovaram	Chief
Sirigu	Agdalinnia	Chief
Yua	Ayule	Chief
Sandema	Afawko	Head Chief
Dechawnba	Yenala	Chief
Bedema	Amboru	Chief
Doninga	Akacheri	Chief

Fumbisi	Ampusiba	Chief
Godembisa	Akanuinena	Chief
Ipala	Avawro	Headman
Iuwase	Ambiwa	Chief
Kadema	Atugbero	Chief
Kanjarga	Akanam	Chief
Katigri	Ancha	Headman
Siniessa	Abadim	Chief
Vare	-	Headman
Wiaga	Azinaba	Chief
Wiase	Apasure	Chief
Kunkwa	Aparinga	Chief

Table 5.1 – List of Chiefs and Headmen in the Kasena-Nankana District of Navrongo in 1918

The colonial administration forcibly united the Kasena and Nankana under one administrative unit known as the Kasena-Nankana Administrative District. The fusion of the Kasena and Nankana appears today as a single ethnic group irrespective of their different historical origins. Generally, in the Northern Territories, this union of a people of different historical backgrounds was to enable the British Government to introduce the “Pax Britannica” among a

people in a continuous strife. It was necessary for the British system of Indirect Rule, which was aimed at providing the people with social and economic development.²³⁹

The union was therefore an administrative convenience for the British colonial administration. This forceful union bred ill feelings among the various ethnic groups, particularly against Navrongo. This manifested itself in rivalry over development projects allocation, provision of educational institutions and distribution of essential commodities. In recent times, the *Nankana* communities such as Mirigu and Kandiga have strived relentlessly to sever themselves from a union with Navrongo. Even before colonialism, the chief of Navrongo had preceded all the others, within what was then the *Kasena–Nankana* Native Authority, in authority and power, as the District Commissioner wrote:

It is true that the *Navoropio*'s area is larger than that of any of the other chiefs and he has far more people under him. He is also supported by virtue of precedent. There seems to have been no opposition to the permanent presidency of Awe, the late *Navoropio* . . .²⁴⁰

Therefore, in spite of the rivalry, the *Navoropio* could have justifiably wielded considerable power over the other *Kasena–Nankana* chiefs and areas, though, they were independent of each other before colonialism. However, this was not to be the case as the District Commissioner writing on the subject, 'Election of President of the *Kasena–Nankana* Native Administration' identified the need to find a lasting solution to the erstwhile jealous rivalry between the *Kasena* and *Nankana* chiefs.

²³⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 56 / 1 / 121, Annual Report of the Northern Territories.

²⁴⁰ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/17, The District commissioner of Navrongo was on 12th May 1948 commenting on the *Navoropio*'s letter to the Chief Commissioner in Tamale, concerning the Presidency of the *Kasena – Nankana* Native Authority. Para.7.

One of the principal obstacles appears to be the jealous rivalry between the *Kasena* and *Nankana* chiefs. With that in mind, I have the honour to submit the following proposals which, I think might help us out of the deadlock. It is proposed that a new President be elected or the old one be re-elected by ballot. Then, if the President elect be a *Kasena*, then the *Nankana* chiefs elect a *Nankani* to be Vice President to assist the President in his duties. If a *Nankani* chief is elected President, then of course, the *Kasena* chiefs would elect one of their numbers to be Vice President. This, I think, would overcome the rivalry obstacle.²⁴¹

This antagonism does not find expression among the *Kasena-Nankana* alone, but extends to the Builsa of Sandema and its environs. “As far as I am able to ascertain, until 1933 the whole of the *Kasena-Nankani* Native Administration and the present Builsa Native Administration were together under the *Navoropio*. He in turn was under the chief of Nalerigu, Mamprusi.”²⁴² Thus, in an article by a Member of Parliament for Builsa Traditional Area, he blamed the plight of the Builsa partly on their long political subjection to Navrongo by the colonial administration.²⁴³ However, after 1933, Builsa Native Administration was separated from that of Navrongo. “In 1933 *Kasena-Nankani* Native Administration was formed and the Builsa Native Administration became separate”.²⁴⁴ The tables below show the list of chiefs that constituted the *Kasena-Nankana* and the Builsa Native Administrations respectively, in 1948.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/1/17. This was a letter by the District Commissioner of Navrongo, headed, “Election of President of the Kassena-Nankani Native Administration” to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories on 12th May 1948. Para.3 & 4.

²⁴² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/1/17. The District Commissioner of Navrongo wrote this on 12th May 1948 to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories (C.C.N.T.). The statement also depicts how almost all the chiefs of north – eastern Ghana had hitherto been under the jurisdiction of the chief of Mamprugu, the Nayire.

²⁴³ Daily Graphic Of 1st April 1980. Article “Plight of Builsas”

²⁴⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/1/17. This was the concluding part of paragraph 2 of the District Commissioner’s letter on 12th May 1948.

²⁴⁵ Tribe here is referring to the ethnic group of the people.

TOWN	NAME OF CHIEF	TRIBE	TITLE	DATE OF APPOINTMENT
Chiana	Ayagtam	Kassena	<i>Pio</i> ²⁴⁶	1928
Navarro	Adda	Nankani	<i>Pio</i>	1945
Kologu	Akanvuri	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1943
Nakon	Atanchige	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1917
Sirigu	Akwara	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1923
Katiu	Ayikwatoge	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1928
Kayoro	Nabo	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1940
Naga	Awinni	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1941
Mirigu	Atasige	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1933
Paga	Awompaga	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1938
Navropung	Anonkoro	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1943
Doba	Tenyua	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1910

²⁴⁶ *Pio* is the corrupted version of *pe*, chief in the Kasem language.

Mayoro	Manone	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1939
Pinda	Kubagamo	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1912
Paga-Buru	Adurigola	Kassena	<i>Pio</i>	1920
Natugnia	Atuma	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1933
Kandiga	Amenga'etigo	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	1941
Uwa	Vacant	Nankani	<i>Naba</i>	-

Table 5.2 – List of Kasena-Nankana Chiefs in 1948²⁴⁷

TOWN	NAME OF CHIEF	TITLE	DATE OF APPOINTMENT
Sandema	Azantilow ²⁴⁸	Nab	1932
Gbedembilissa	Akanuemena	Nab	1910
Seniessi	Anusayansa	Nab	1919
Becnuansi	Anakansa	Nab	1921
Uasi	Akobii	Nab	1944

²⁴⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. This was contained in a letter by the District Commissioner of Navrongo to the Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi – Gambaga in May, 1948.

²⁴⁸ Azantilow, the chief of Sandema reigned until the 21st Century to become the oldest chief of Africa, before he died in 2006.

Fumbisi	Akambong	Nab	1924
Gbedema	Ayarak	Nab	1927
Chuchulliga	Assangalensa	Nab	1927
Kadema	Anangabe	Nab	1927
Kanjarga	Apimpaata	Nab	1934
Doninga	Atong	Nab	1939
Wiasi	Adunturu	Nab	1939
Vare (Headman)	Awonbotime	Nab	1943
Wiaga	Vacant	Nab	-

Table 5.3 – List of Builsa Chiefs in 1948²⁴⁹

The Native Authority Ordinance of 1924 defined a chief as, “a person whose election and installation as such in accordance with native law and custom is recognised and confirmed by the Governor by notification in the Gazette”. The colonial regime thus instituted measures for the election of chiefs.²⁵⁰

I had included holding the election for the new chief of Navarro today, but owing to the rain all the chiefs have not yet arrived...²⁵¹ All the chiefs under Navarro were in today except Chiana, Naga and Nakon. The election was

²⁴⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/2. This was contained in a letter by the District Commissioner of Navrongo to the Senior District Commissioner, Mamprusi – Gambaga in May 1948.

²⁵⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 56/ 1 / 95. As indicated by the Governor in his letter to the Chief Commissioner in Gambaga.

²⁵¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 3, Navrongo Station District Diary on 6th June 1916.

held. Four sons of the late chief and a grandson of a former chief came forward as claimants. Eventually, Awe the eldest son of the late chief was elected by ten votes to one... Awe was carried away shoulder high.²⁵²

The order stipulated that the Heads of Families elect the Headmen of village sections. In the same way, village chiefs were to be elected by their section headmen. The chiefs when elected had to gain approval of the District Commissioner and could be deskinning by the latter. As the Governor of the Gold Coast stated in his communiqué to Major Festing, the then Commissioner of Navrongo, “chiefs who could not be brought to realise their responsibilities must be removed from their positions and replaced by men of greater capacity”²⁵³.

Agulu an ex-headman...is a blind man and still claims to be headman. He is ordered to obey the present headman as he is not capable of holding the post while blind, besides having not been the proper headman and deposed, or he should be brought to and kept in Navarro...²⁵⁴

It should be noted here that the custom of the people of Navrongo did not require chiefs or headmen who had physical deficiencies in one way or the other to be deposed. Nevertheless, the task expected of them by the colonial administration required that they should be young and active. Thus, the Navrongo District Commissioner is said to have noted again in his report on 7th February 1915 that, “... received a mail from Gambaga and also one from M. O. Navarro informing me of the chief of Navarro’s death... he was a very old man and quite a useless chief”.²⁵⁵ The new system of electing chiefs also provided for a new basis for responsibility and authority. The family heads owed allegiance to the section heads, who in turn owed allegiance to the chief of Navrongo

²⁵² PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 3. This typically depicts how chiefs were being elected to the otherwise sacred positions; as if they were secular leaders. Navrongo Station District Diary on 6th June 1916. p.199.

²⁵³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 56/1/7. This was contained in a letter by the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories to the District Commissioner in Navrongo.

²⁵⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 3 Navrongo Station District Diary (1915), p. 140.

²⁵⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 3 Navrongo Station District Diary (1915), p.186

and then to the District Commissioner in that order. The latter, in effect could make and unmake chiefs as far as chieftaincy was concerned. This is depicted in this letter by one Akampale of Mirigu to the District Commissioner on 26th September 1917.

I have the honour most respectfully to beg you to help me gain my father's throne. My father was a chief at Mirigu and he is now dead and I am the actual proceeder [sic.] of the throne. The town is called Mirigu. I think you will help me. Thanks in advance.²⁵⁶

This was a total reorientation in the traditional political system of Navrongo. Prior to colonial rule, chiefs were not elected on this basis. Succession to a vacant skin was entirely by inheritance and was solely the affair of the heads of the autochthonous clans. Being the land owning clans, they kept the *kwara* (horn) which was the symbol of chieftaincy. Furthermore, deskinment was unknown. There was no machinery for the removal of a chief in native custom as he was regarded as the representative of god on earth and his position was only inherited on his passing away through death. It was also believed that, the ancestral spirits through physical death would ultimately eliminate a "bad chief".

The new system of electing chiefs was not only an innovation in the traditional political system, but it also undermined the stability of the institution. The need for the colonial Government's recognition and the power to deskin a chief may be explained as an instrument to compel the "electorate" to do the will of the colonial Government, hints of which might have been known by the former. In another respect, it made the chief submissive to the colonial Government against the interest of his own people. In this light alone, the colonial Government did impose chiefs on the people and provided them with authoritative powers hitherto unknown. However,

²⁵⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/2. A letter written by one Akampale of Mirigu to the District Commissioner on 26th September 1917.

they claimed such procedure of election was to ensure that each chief was the “peoples chief and not the Whiteman’s chief”²⁵⁷ These ‘colonial elected chiefs’ were often maintained on the throne through threats, physical force and other forms of coercive methods. For instance, the Navrongo District Commissioner, Captain Nash²⁵⁸ reported that Kwarwtio, one of the contestants and three other elders refused to recognise the newly installed chief.²⁵⁹

Chief of Navarro complaint against [sic] his brother Kwaratio and three of the elders. These people informed him on his selection to visiting the *Na* at Gambaga that they would not recognise him as chief, refused to hand over the *juju*, and the late chief’s gown, medallion and other property...the chief and all the accused were up before me... and Kwaratio was ordered to produce this.²⁶⁰

Kwarwtio was said to have continued wearing a goatskin, which was customarily worn by contestants, even after the election. He also refused to hand over late chief’s gown and medallion. Kwaratio and the three elders were quickly arrested and brought before the District Commissioner. They were warned and forced to declare their support and recognition to the new chief. This served as a warning to all future opponents.

You may recall that one Kwaratio was sentenced to ten years imprisonment . . . for committing ritual murder to secure his succession to the skin of Navrongo. I believe he did to death [sic] five young girls; his target was ten,

²⁵⁷ ADM. 63 / 4 / 1 PRAAD; N.D.R.B., p.41, Minutes of 9 / 9/ 32.

²⁵⁹ The newly installed chief was Awe. He was to succeed Kwara who died in 1916. However, the colonial Administration came to meet Kwara on the skin.

²⁶⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/ 5 / 3 Navrongo Station District Diary (1916), pp. 201–2.

but he was arrested and tried before he reached this figure. He is apparently now resident in Navrongo but has dropped out of public life, as it were.²⁶¹

The most serious instance where the British interfered with the election of chiefs in Navrongo was the election of the *Navoropio*, Adda I to the throne. Awe, the second chief of Navrongo during the colonial regime died on 31st March 1942, leaving the skin vacant. James Chinatera, the eldest son of the late chief laid a claim to the throne. Meanwhile, Adda had already been given to the British officials by his uncle, the late chief as a works-supervisor. With the British, he learnt to read and write the English language and later became their interpreter. Thus, when he contested for the skin, the colonial Administration indirectly influenced the kingmakers, who are basically the headmen of the different sections of the community and the elders, to lend their support to Adda. The Navrongo District Commissioner is on record to have stated in 1948 that “. . . Adda, the present *Navoropio*, now has sufficient experience to be President. He was formerly the Navrongo Station Foreman and speaks English”.²⁶²

Chinatera on the other hand, was a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, but had greater claims to the throne because he was a ‘direct’ son to the late chief. He had spent most of his life with the missionaries and was regarded by the local people as one who could not execute his traditional responsibilities or customs efficiently because of his new faith (Christianity). The colonial Administration capitalised on this to get their favourite contestant (Adda) enskinned as the *Navoropio*. Chinatera protested in vain. In anger, he left the Royal House to build a new compound of his own. The colonial Administration thus created a split in the Royal House of Navrongo to this day. Even after the death of Adda I in 1970, there arose a succession dispute to the skin. The

²⁶¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/2 This was quoted in paragraph 6 of a letter that the Navrongo District Commissioner wrote to the Commissioner in Gambaga in 1947 with the heading, “Succession to Kassena-Nankana Skins”.

²⁶² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/1/17. The District Commissioner of Navrongo’s letter in May 1948 to the Chief Commissioner in Tamale. Para.7.

sons of Adda I and Chinatera, who had both died claimed equal rights to the skin of Navrongo. In the ensuing dispute, the royal house of Chinatera refused to recognise Adda II who had been installed to succeed his late uncle, Adda I.

Another far-reaching effect of colonialism on the indigenous political system of Navrongo came with the establishment of Native Administration in the 1930s.²⁶³ Under this scheme the chief of Navrongo was designated the paramount chief of the whole of the Kasena-Nankana Traditional Area. In 1932, three ordinances were passed to give legal backing to this. They were the Native Authority (Northern Territories) Ordinance, the Native Tribunal Ordinance (later replaced in 1935 by Native Courts), and Native Treasuries Ordinance.²⁶⁴ The *Navoropio* was thus endowed with executive, judicial and financial powers and tasked with the responsibility for the development of the area.

The executive role of the *Navoropio* empowered him to maintain order and to pass laws for the general upkeep of sanitation and development. In the execution of these duties and responsibilities, which meant an effective control over the people, he was initially aided by a detachment of troops under Sergeant Major Ayongo. Later, the Native Constabulary was set up under the direction of the Provincial Commissioner. The military men freely raped women and confiscated property without any significant resistance because of the fear of the gun they possessed. The people were also subjected to the forced labour policy passed in 1895.

²⁶³ PRAAD, Tamale, ADM. 1/145. C. S. P., "Memorandum on the Introduction and Development of Native Administration", 14 April 1930. Also PRAAD, Tamale, ADM. 1/7. C. C. N. T., Memorandum of 28 December 1928. See Native Authorities (Northern Territories) Ordinance (cap. 84), Native Tribunals Ordinance No.1 and Native Treasuries Ordinance No.10 of 1932. See also Native Authorities Ordinance No.18 (cap.111, 1932) Land, and Native Rights (Northern Territories) Ordinance (cap.121, 1935).

²⁶⁴ These were Ordinance 2 of 1932, Ordinance 1 of 1932 and Ordinance 10 of 1932 respectively.

Chief of Sandema came in and I asked him if he had got me any recruits and he said no. I told him that he was to go back at once ... if he had not get me some recruits by the time I visited Kanjarga next week, he would 'catch trouble'. [sic] I then interviewed the chief of Navarro on the subject of recruits... I pointed out to them that, if they went about it in the proper manner, there should be no difficulty in getting three to four young men from each town which would make forty to fifty recruits in Navarro alone.²⁶⁵

Through the agency of the chiefs, men were forced to provide labour in the construction of roads, government offices, bungalows and rest houses. As early as 1921, the Governor of the Gold Coast was able to travel from Kumasi to Navrongo to meet the Governor of the Upper Volta.²⁶⁶ It must be noted also that by 1935 there was an all year round mortorable road from Kumasi to Navrongo.²⁶⁷ The present road system linking the villages and towns of Bolgatanga, Sandema and Navrongo owe their existence to the colonial period.

The rising power of the chief over his Elders and subjects had the effect of eroding the hitherto respect and loyalty accorded the chief on grounds of his divine nature. The various ordinances that defined the chief's status and power as an agent of the colonial Administration undermined his authority in the eyes of his people. The Native Tribunal Ordinance for instance provided for the establishment of Native Tribunals with the chiefs assuming the role of a judge. He heard cases of both civil and criminal nature, using customary law. Offences like stealing, quarrels, murder, land and marriage disputes were reported either to him by the people affected or the elders of the sections. The Native Authority Police made arrests.

Prior to the establishment of colonial rule, however, these offences were under the jurisdiction of the Family Heads or Elders. It was only in the event of disagreement over

²⁶⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/5/2. Navrongo Station District Diary on 1st March 1917. p. 221

²⁶⁶ A. W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: 1933).

²⁶⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, ADM. 1 / 33. Report from Oscar Merin to the Colonial Secretary in May 1909.

settlement, especially in land and marriage disputes that the case was referred to the chief as a court of appeal. Instead, the chief court was now the first place of call, while the District Commissioner heard appeals. In this regard, his subjects now downgraded the chief. For while his word was final in judgement, some people now flouted his decisions and sought recourse in the District Commissioner's court, as indicated in Section 78 (2) of the Memorandum on the Proposed Northern Territories Native Administration Ordinance.

Any person who is dissatisfied with the decision of a paramount chief's Tribunal . . . may within three months from the date of the decision appeal to the District Commissioner in which the paramount chief's tribunal is heard. . .²⁶⁸

The chief under colonial rule heard cases in a courthouse instead of the palace. This house was built of stone and he sat on a large wooden chair. His Elders sat in court with him and there were court clerks recording proceedings of the trial. The chief's court charged a small fee and if an accused person was pronounced guilty, he was either fined or sent to prison. This was quite a new practice. In the traditional setting, there were no prisons and fines were paid in tobacco and or animals depending on the gravity of the offence. The judicial power of the chief was not limited to only his clan area, but the entire Kasena-Nankana District.²⁶⁹ In most cases, the chief disregarded the authority of the Village Chiefs and ordered arrests of their subjects without recourse to them. It is thus not surprising that the chief became so unpopular among his people. Although threats to the life of the chief were highly contrary to traditional practices, the people threatened to kill him.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/4. Memorandum on the Proposed Northern Territories Native Administration Ordinance, (Section 60).

²⁶⁹ The Kasena-Nankana District refers to not only the Navrongo Township, but all the other villages around it. These included, Doba, Paga, Pungu, Chiana, Kandiga, Mirigu, Nayagnia, Vunania, Natugnia and Sirigu.

²⁷⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 56/1/61. Report by the Navrongo District Commissioner. This happened when the British were on the verge of leaving the territory.

The system of indirect rule by virtue of its provisions as in Section 79 exposed traditional rulers to some of these threats.

. . . provided nevertheless that, whenever by reason of some act, omission, negligence, misconduct, dishonesty or other default on the part of the Native Ruler and or . . . in respect of his duty, any person shall suffer any loss, injury, detriment or damage, such Native Ruler as the case may be, shall be deemed to be under a legal liability to compensate such a person to the extent of such loss . . . as suffered as aforesaid.²⁷¹

Provisions of this nature, eroded the sacred nature of the indigenous political institution and made it look like a secular political institution that could be viewed in the mirror of a modern public office. Therefore, Section 78 (2) of the Memorandum stated:

Every Native Ruler shall be a Public Officer within the meaning of the Criminal Code of the Gold Coast Colony. For the purpose of this Section, the expression “Native Ruler” shall be held to include members of the Native Authority individually.²⁷²

The system of Indirect Rule also tasked the Chief of Navrongo with financial duties or responsibilities. The Native Treasury Ordinance established native treasuries into which were paid court fees and fines, tolls from traders and proceeds from the poll tax. With the need for revenue to run the Native Administration, the poll tax was instituted at the rate of one shilling per head taxable male and two shillings per compound owner. The compound owner or head collected the total tax payable by the compound, which was in turn paid to the chief. The chief was assisted in this task by native administration clerks and a native administration police. The chief received as pay, the compound tax of his section. The rest of the money was supposed to be used to provide

²⁷¹ Supra, Note 41, Section 79.

²⁷² Ibid., Section (78) 2.

infrastructure and other social services for the people. Chieftaincy thus became a salary earning institution as the people stopped rendering the somewhat obligatory services to the chief.

The people, particularly the youth who had to work hard to meet the taxpaying obligation, protested vehemently against the Poll Tax Scheme. Contrary to the arguments raised for the justification of the imposition of the tax, revenue realised was not used to provide those services that were meant for the well-being of the people in general. The fact that resistance to the imposition of the tax did not begin in the first year, but rather from the second year of its enforcement shows that it was touched-off not by the tax itself, but rather the way in which the first proceeds were used. Most of this money was mainly used to pay increased salaries to the British officials and for the maintenance of roads which were hardly used by the natives. Thus, this letter by the Navrongo District Commissioner in September 1941 to the *Navoropio*, President of the Kasena-Nankana Federation, is reminiscent of how a section of the people within the Federation did not only refused to pay their taxes as required of them, but also opposed their chiefs in this respect; and how the Authorities that be, dealt with the situation.

I have noticed that certain persons of the LOGESE [sic] section of Kandiga are still opposing the elected chief of Kandiga and seem to be headed by one ATUNA [sic]. At present . . . they refuse to pay their tax through the chief of Kandiga. I today categorically stated as follows to them: either they pay their tax through the chief of Kandiga or they will pay it to the Native Authority Police . . . I told the chiefs of Mirigu and Kandiga not to worry about this section. If when tax collection starts and they do not pay through the chief of Kandiga, the matter should be left and I will tell you what to do about it. The chiefs of Mirigu and Kandiga need not make any extra effort to collect the tax from them, but if the leading men refuse to pay their tax they will of course, be imprisoned . . .²⁷³

²⁷³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/2, Navrongo District Commissioner to Chief of Navrongo, 13th September 1941.

The Impact of Colonialism on the Indigenous Political System of Sakot

Generally, the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast was and still is characterised by two groups of people, namely the indigenous people who were said to be acephalous and the “invaders”.²⁷⁴ According to Rattray,

Majority of the ethnic groups who inhabit the Northern Territories were . . . residents in or near the localities where we find them, centuries before the ancestors of those whose names many of the divisions now bear had arrived in this part of Africa. Upon these more or less autochthonous peoples, with their very primitive institutions, descended small bands of strangers better clothed, familiar with the idea of kingship or chieftaincy in our modern sense, in some cases conversant with the rudiments of Mohammedanism.²⁷⁵

The strangers superimposed their political institutions upon the indigenous population, who even where their languages differed considerably, had certain characteristics in kingship and politico-ritual organisation. It is noteworthy to state that even wherever this occurred, these strangers hardly actually interfered with the activities of the *Tendana*.²⁷⁶ The result was that there evolved a kind of dual mandate. There was the secular ruler who was a descendant of the leader of the earlier warrior bands. He was recognised by the people as a kind of titular head, but really hardly interfered with the lives or private affairs of the masses. All religious and magico-religious

²⁷⁴ Though Sakot cannot be described as acephalous in the literal sense, since it had a head in the person of the Sakot *Da'an*; most writers on the history of Northern Ghana have always asserted that the only centralized states were those of Mamprugu, Dagbon, Nanum, Gonja and Wala. However, Tuurey has pointed out that others such as Manlarla of Kaleo and Wecheau based at Dorimon also existed even if they did not form large empires. See Tuurey, G., *An introduction to the Mole-Speaking Community*. (Wa Catholic Press: 1982) pp.38-46. Another ethnic group that could also come under this category is the Nchumuru.

²⁷⁵ Rattray, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterlands*, p.xii. The conquerors usually adopted the languages of the conquered, since the former in most instances did not come with many women. A typical case is Gonja where the invaders from Mande came to speak Agbanyito the language of the conquered. W. E. F. Ward, *A History of Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p.39. This thesis is supported by J. Goody, *Ethnography of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, West of the White Volta*. (Colonial Office: London, 1954) p.9 and I. Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*. (Legon: 1961) p.8. Also, the royal family of Navrongo who came from Zikku, virtually speak *Kasem* alone. It is usually during libation that one will hear them speak their language, *Nankani*.

²⁷⁶ Despite the fact that it is on record that Na Nyagse had them killed in Dagbon, generally the invaders in most instances co-operated with the *Tendan'ma*.

concerns continued to be managed and conducted by the former priestly rulers (*tendanma*). He continued to be the custodian and trustee of the land of his people. This was a claim which few, even of the most arrogant secular chief did not dispute.²⁷⁷

However, this cannot be said of Sakot. Before colonial rule, no foreign power had imposed its authority in any form on the people. The Sakot *Da'an*, as the principal mediator between the people and the earth god and the ancestral spirits of the area, by virtue of his religious power, wielded considerable political authority as well. The Sakot *Da'an*'s reluctance and subsequent refusal to accept the 'Whiteman' marked a significant turning point in the political history of Sakot.²⁷⁸ As observed here by the Lands Commissioner in 1948

. . . I would here mention that the Tindanas [sic] are usually unwilling to enter into any negotiations with Government. They appear to keep in the background but have a strong influence and are strong minded obstinate men who are so convinced of the immutability of the state of affairs of which they are the living custodians that, to them, it seems infinitely wise to admit, say and agree to nothing, remaining wise and inscrutable in the assurance of their sacred trust. Up to a point, they may be acting wisely.²⁷⁹

Indigenous political Authority in Sakot before Colonialism

Before Gella Yarig was made headman of Sakot and in 1907 when Dokbilah was officially elected and accepted as chief of Sakot by the British,²⁸⁰ the indigenous political system of Sakot was characterised by a form of organised administration under the Sakot *Da'an* who was custodian

²⁷⁷ Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, p. XVIII.

²⁷⁸ The Sakot *Da'an* is said to have refused to meet the British. On the other hand, Gella Yarig who did was considered as the 'Whiteman's friend' and was accordingly designated headman of Sakot. Even today, during appellations, the chief of Sakot among other things is referred to as the 'Whiteman's friend'.

²⁷⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/57, 1948: para 4-5. "Land Tenure in the Protectorate and its development under the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance".

²⁸⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 63/5/2, 19/01/1908. "Visited by Captain O'Knealy 23-6-07 when Duggubila was elected and enstated as headman . . . Sekoti is the real name of the town". Quoted from the District Commissioner's Report (19 January 1908).

of all the land of Sakot.²⁸¹ He was enskined as such by the *Kpana* in Nalerigu.²⁸² All the other clans in Sakot had their various *tendanma*²⁸³ who administered their areas under the supervision of the Sakot *Da'an*. Under them were lineage and family heads. For instance, the Sakot *Da'an* advised the *tendanma* on how to offer sacrifices to the gods to forestall certain calamities. It must be noted, however, that all these heads were independent of each other. The Sakot *Da'an* in the performance of his duties consulted certain elderly members of his clan for advice. These elderly members were considered as his Council of Elders in the secular sense, considering the role they played in the administration. Significantly, the relationship between the Sakot *Da'an* and his people was very cordial because of the sacredness of his position and the role he played. Among other things, he gave permission to build new houses, to enter the forest and to cut trees or grass. He sacrificed to the shrines for rain, to forestall epidemics, to ensure peace and unity and to ask for God's blessing for a good harvest. He settled marriage and land disputes, while stray animals were also sent to him. The Sakot *Da'an* was informed about the death of all persons in the land for him to allow the digging of graves for burial and banned funeral performance just before or during the farming season.²⁸⁴ He also announced the day for the *tenglebgire* festival.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Interview with Mr. *Nayimbe*, A Historian and a retired Educationist from Sakot who lives in Bolgatanga on 30th February 2008.

²⁸² The Sakot *Da'an* is said to have migrated from Mamprugu, where he still owes allegiance to the *Nayire*. In order to legitimise his position therefore, he has to be enskined by the *Kpana* who is the spear-holder and the chief spokesman of the *Nayire*.

²⁸³ *Tendanma* is the plural *tendana* who is literally the owner/custodian of the land among the *Gur* speaking people of Northern Ghana. He is usually the first settler of the particular land that he inhabits.

²⁸⁴ Before the performance of a funeral, it is expected that the Sakot *Da'an* is officially informed to give his approval or otherwise. However, it is believed that the creation of a new grave in the farming season will bring wind to spoil the development of crops.

²⁸⁵ *Tenglebgire* in *Nabt* literally means the earth or the land for that matter has changed, there is a new beginning. The festival is usually celebrated after the farming season, not only to usher the people into the next farming season, but also to thank God for His blessings in the previous year and a good new year.

The Authority of the Sakot *Da'an* and Colonial Administration in Sakot

When the government anthropologist, Captain Rattray, published *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland* in 1932, he gave reasons for reassessing the conventional ideas within the colonial administration about native polity, at least for the northernmost parts of the Northern Territories. As Rattray observed,

Over the whole area, and embracing all three language groups, we had, it was found, a people who possessed a practically uniform religion, a uniform tribal and totemic organisation, and an identical tribal constitution or system of tribal government. The outstanding feature of the last names was the ten'dana or priest king. "In the past, in the Northern Territories, there were no chiefs, only ten'danma" is a statement I have frequently heard made. Such a statement is a result of confused thinking and shows complete lack of knowledge of the local social organisation under which these tribes formerly lived and in many cases still live. The case should rather be stated thus: "In the past, the ten'danma were the only chiefs known". Had a series of events . . . not greatly affected the constitutional system, these ten'danma or priest-kings would undoubtedly have evolved into the type of native ruler with whom we are familiar among the Akan; that is a ruler who was not only high-priest and custodian of the land of his tribe and ancestral spirits, but one who was chief or king on territorial basis whose sanctions were secular and physical rather than spiritual. Here in the north, this natural process of evolution from the priest-king to the territorial ruler was interrupted by external influences which produce a really remarkable state of affairs. These it is well we should understand before embarking on schemes for Indirect Rule or a new Native Administration.²⁸⁶

Rattray was insisting on an evolutionary paradigm modelled on the Akan social structure that he knew from the south and believed that the *tendanma* would have evolved into territorial chiefs had it not been for the invasion of warrior tribes who settled in the north and in particular, British

²⁸⁶ Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, p.XI.

colonisation. He argued that the secular territorial rulers who invaded the north were too superstitious to interfere with the work of the *tendana*.²⁸⁷

However, the colonial encounter according to Rattray, meant a serious blow to the *tendana*. The *tendana* having seen what had happened to his fraternity who had appeared before the officials of the other continental powers, preferred to 'thrust forward' some individuals to be an emissary to meet the 'Whiteman'.

In the course of time however, many of these individuals came to dig themselves in and became more assured and confident of their positions. Some of them are fine men and all are most careful to function satisfactorily before the European Official. From a Commissioner's point of view, they are mostly efficient and hard working chiefs. They realise very fully that they will not hold their position for a day without Government backing, so take good care to please the local Government representative. I myself have seen this kind of chief stand up and declare that the land of the tribe is his and that no tin'daana existed or ever had existed in his division. This extreme type is happily somewhat rare, but he exists and is a real menace. These upstarts would not survive long were we to leave the country. A remedy is simple and need cause no great upheaval. All that is necessary is to insist that every rightful tin'daana who is not actually a chief and the tin'daana's hereditary elders should act with the chief as his councillors.²⁸⁸

In the case of Sakot, Gella Yarig because of his previous encounter with the Germans probably before British occupation of the Northern Territories was referred to as the 'Whiteman's friend' by the people including the Sakot *Da'an*.²⁸⁹ Thus when the British took control of the Northern

²⁸⁷ This Rattray said to mean that but for colonialism, the activities of the so-called invaders of the Northern Territories could not have affected the authority and responsibilities of the *tendana* much. C. Lund, "The Situation is incongruous in the Extreme" *The History of Land Policies in the Upper Regions of Ghana* (SEREIN Working Paper, 2004) p,17.

²⁸⁸ Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, p,XVII. This, Rattray said to describe those representatives who met the 'whiteman' on behalf of the *tendana*.

Territories in 1898, he became the obvious person to be mandated by the Sakot *Da'an* to meet them since he was already familiar with the 'Whiteman'.²⁹⁰ However, the fact is that Gella Yarig never denied the existence of the Sakot *Da'an* and peacefully co-existed with him, when he was made headman of Sakot.

The result was that, there evolved a kind of dual mandate. There was the Sakot *Da'an* and the *Kambong Na'ab*, the secular chief or headman of Sakot.²⁹¹ Everyone recognised the latter as a kind of titular head. Despite the fact that the Sakot *Da'an* was still exclusively entitled to his role as pertaining to his religious and magico-religious concerns of the people, he had to function nominally under the *Kambong Na'ab*. The authority of the Sakot *Da'an* was then restricted to his role as the custodian and trustee of the land of his people. Thus, "The people belong to me, the land belongs to the *ten'daana* is a statement I have repeatedly heard made".²⁹² Even here, the first person to approach for land is the chief (Sakot *Na'ab*), who then instructs the Sakot *Da'an* to propitiate the gods appropriately. Therefore, effective administration of Sakot was from then on, in the hands of the *Kambong Na'ab*. Under the British system of Indirect Rule the day-to-day administration of the traditional area as well as local ordinances were left in the hands of the traditional ruler and for that matter the *Kambong Na'ab* and his council of elders. He was the instrument of local government and appointed all officials who were responsible to him. He

²⁸⁹ It is on record that when the Germans tried to extend their hegemony into present day Ghana and were passing through Sakot, it was Gella Yarig who accommodated and also showed them their way to conquering other ethnic groups in the area.

²⁹⁰ The British occupied the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast in 1898, however, it was in 1902 that the Ordinance that established the Northern Territories as a Protectorate was passed and came into effect.

²⁹¹ *Kambong* in *Nabt*, like most of the *Gur* group of languages, literally means foreign. Thus *Kambong Na'ab* was used to suggest that the institution of chieftaincy as created in Sakot was only foreign and not indigenous.

²⁹² Statement made in Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, p.xvii.

presided over the law courts, which as far as possible, applied customary law. The *Kambong Na'ab*'s agents levied taxes for the local treasury. Part of the money was sent to the central government and the remainder kept for local improvements such as roads, sanitation, markets and schools and to pay the salaries of local officials.

The Commissioner of Lands who made a visit to the Northern Territories in 1948 made this observation concerning the 'ownership' or control of land;

Throughout the Protectorate the control of land is in the hands of one or other of the land priests known as Tindana. These priests are in absolute control of the land under their jurisdiction both as regards tenure and the practical rules of agriculture, and can eject an occupier who is unsuitable or farms in an unhusbandlike [sic] manner.²⁹³

The situation, however, took a different turn with the introduction of colonialism and the creation of the office of the *Kambong Na'ab*. The Commissioner of Lands again foresaw a situation, albeit with some reservations, where the Native Authority and in effect, the chief controlled the land instead of the Sakot *Da'an* and therefore made this submission;

So it seems that Government and economic and social pressure are both tending to raise the Native Authority to a point of influence in land matters, which at least for practical purposes, will in the normal course cause the Native Authority to be regarded as the land owners, or at least as being in control of the land, and much of the mysticism attached to the existing tenure to be forgotten. This assumption is a little in advance of my arguments but will be accepted in the light of information that in some areas African applicants for land make their applications to the chief who himself makes the necessary arrangements with the Tindana, while whenever Government acquire compulsorily a piece of land for public purposes, arrangements are made with the chief and his council who themselves consult the Tindana. It will be accepted, I think, that continual pressure will tend to create the general

²⁹³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/57, 1948: para 4-5. "Land Tenure in the Protectorate and its development under the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance.

impression and later acceptance of the fact that all land will be under the control of the Native Authority.²⁹⁴

Yet, the author in observing the strengthened role of the chief and Native Authority was cautious to spell out “that neither the Chief and his council nor the Native Authority holds any land by virtue of his position or appointment”.²⁹⁵

The observations and considerations demonstrate clearly the friction between *tendanma* and chiefs and for that matter, the Sakot *Da'an* and the *Kambong Na'ab* respectively. It also demonstrates the overlapping jurisdiction between the two that the Lands Commissioner saw as an irreversible process of erosion of the Sakot *Da'an*'s power and the accrue ment of that of the *Kambong Na'ab*. These observations were obviously somewhat at variance with the Land and Native Rights Ordinance that boldly declared all lands, whether occupied or unoccupied to be native lands and placed these under the control and subject to the disposition of the Governor. Such a discrepancy between the law and practice on the ground was not unusual. As the Commissioner of Lands observed in his report, day-to-day administration by the colonial personnel in reality recognised customary land rights and actively, though with some trepidation, involved customary authorities in the mutation of administrative practice. The Commissioner of Lands further observed:

In a number of cases in town the chief has from time to time granted leases to non-natives of land falling within the exception in section 3(a) of Land and Native Rights Ordinance (cap. 143). Such leases have in the past been regarded as invalid, and the lessee has been required to take up a right of

²⁹⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/57. “Land Tenure in the Protectorate and its development under the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance”, 1948; para 16-17.

²⁹⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/57. “Land Tenure in the Protectorate and its development under the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance”, 1948; para 9.

occupancy and then a certificate of occupancy has been issued to him. I do not consider that Government had any right to take this action.²⁹⁶

What the Commissioner of Lands pointed to is a clause in the Land and Native Rights Ordinance excluding from Government control of all titles to land or any interest therein lawfully acquired before the issuing of the Ordinance. Since the Sakot *Da'an* was in practice recognised by the colonial Administration to have at least for practical purposes, some legitimate interest in land, it would appear that the Commissioner of Lands, by deduction, considered such lands outside immediate government control. The rift between the ideal command by the colonial authorities and the necessity to rule via some local legitimate authority was glaring. The land tenure system was not practically operational for the administration without the involvement of the Sakot *Da'an* for that matter; on the other hand, involving him could be seen as relinquishing government control. Infact, these considerations led the Commissioner of Lands to suggest a series of amendments of the Ordinance to allow a formalisation of the customary land tenure system.

Chieftaincy in Northern Ghana 1951-1969

Essentially, this subject on traditional rule after independence seeks to investigate the implications that the Government of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), had on the institution of chieftaincy in Northern Ghana, from 1951 until its overthrow in 1966.²⁹⁷ It shall also look at how the institution fared after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, up until 1969 when the Government of the National Liberation Council (NLC) supervised the Second Republican Constitution. The

²⁹⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/1/57. "Land Tenure in the Protectorate and its development under the Lands and Native Rights Ordinance", 1948: para 22.

²⁹⁷ The year 1951, which is being referred to here, in the political history of the Gold Coast now Ghana marks the beginning of African representation in Government at the highest level, when the Convention People's Party (CPP) led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his close associates, won the elections stipulated by the Gold Coast Constitution Order-in-Council, 1950, against the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) and its allies. See D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (Oxford University Press: 1964), p. 43.

starting point is 1951, when Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became the Leader of Government Business,²⁹⁸ and then through his years as Prime Minister²⁹⁹ and President of the Republic of Ghana from 1960-1966 respectively.

Under colonial administration in the Gold Coast, traditional rulers had been active sub-agents in their Native Authority Administrations and Native Authority Tribunals. However, the chieftaincy institution in Ghana suffered a different fate after 1957. The various Acts relating to chieftaincy in these respects were the Constitution (Repeal of Chieftaincy Restrictions) Act, 1958 and the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1959. The first enactment enabled the government to act in chieftaincy matters without consultations with the Regional Houses of Chiefs, as had been provided in the Independence Constitution. The second facilitated the creation of more Regions, the passage of the Ashanti Stool Lands Act (Number 28 of 58) which vested the trusteeship of the lands of the Golden Stool (the physical symbol of the office of the ruler of Asante) in the Governor General, that is the government of Ghana; and the Akyem Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act, 1958, which provided for the control of revenues and the property of the Akyem Abuakwa State and the application of those revenues to development by a receiver appointed by the Minister of Local Government and acting under his instructions. The Local Council Act (1958) abolished the Native Tribunals. Article 13 of the Constitution (1960) of the First Republic stated, “Chieftaincy should be guaranteed and preserved.” The Chieftaincy Act (Number 81) of 1961 consolidated previous enactments on chieftaincy. Act 81 defined a chief as an individual who:

“a) has been nominated, elected and installed as a chief in accordance with customary law; and

²⁹⁸ This was between 1951 and 1954.

²⁹⁹ He was Prime Minister between 1954 and 1960, before Ghana became a Republic in that year.

b) is recognised as a chief by the Minister responsible for Local Government.”³⁰⁰

It was the CPP’s method of reconciling republican with monarchical principles.

However, the institution of chieftaincy has obviously been revived tremendously since the overthrow of the Nkrumah government and the inception of the succeeding military regime, at least to its former status before independence. There are three main indicators of the restoration or revival of chieftaincy not only as an important force in Ghana’s national life, but also as a revered traditional customary institution. In the first place, chieftaincy has featured prominently in all the constitutions of the Republic of Ghana which were enacted under the supervision of the military regimes.³⁰¹ The second indicator of the revived interest in the chieftaincy institution and the value placed on it is the interest shown by Ghanaians of all classes and status groups in succession to stools and skins alike. The third indicator of the renewed interest is the annual festival fever that has seized all the traditional polities and sub-polities in Ghana and the funding of these festivals by the private sector, including the breweries.³⁰²

Traditional Rule in Northern Ghana from 1951-1957

Attention is hereby drawn to the way and manner the CPP Government under Kwame Nkrumah treated the chieftaincy institution in Northern Ghana before Independence in 1957. Nkrumah’s CPP was committed not only to the rapid termination of British colonial administration

³⁰⁰ A. Brempong, “Chieftaincy, an Overview” in I. K. Odotei, and A. K. Awedoba (edited) *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*, (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006) p.31.

³⁰¹ That is the National Liberation Council (NLC) under Gen. Joseph A. Ankrah who supervised the 1969 constitution, the National Redemption Council (NRC), which later transformed into the Supreme Military Council (SMC) under Colonel I. K. Acheampong and the SMC (II) and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), under General Akuffo and Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings respectively. who supervised the 1979 and 1992 constitutions of the Republic of Ghana.

³⁰² A. Brempong, in I. K. Odotei, and A. K. Awedoba (e), “Chieftaincy, an Overview”, p.32.

but also to the elimination of chiefly power.³⁰³ Thus, he sought, among other things, to politically marginalise the chiefs by democratising local government.³⁰⁴

The 1951 general elections in Ghana established a diarchic regime in which government was exercised jointly by the colonial power and elected Africans. The CPP's resounding victory had dictated that Nkrumah should be released from prison to assume the office of Leader of Government Business, the Prime Minister in all but name.³⁰⁵ As far as chieftaincy was concerned, the direction of policy would now jointly lie with a receding colonial power intent on reforming local government and a political party. This was to prove to be yet another serious blow to the chiefs. When the Governor, Sir Charles Aden-Clarke, was forming the country's Cabinet, the chief's Territorial Councils pressed him hard to include what they called 'regional interests'. This seemed to be a new, less value-laden circumlocution for chieftaincy. They argued quite accurately, that the Coussey Constitution³⁰⁶ had not anticipated, and hence had not provided for, single-party control of government; while they were content to see four of the Executive Council seats going to the CPP, they wanted the four other African seats to be shared among the Regions.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ R. Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60*, (Oxford University Press: 2000).

³⁰⁴ Local government was said to be democratised because, through a Legislative Instrument in 1951, a majority of those who constituted the Local Government bodies, precisely two-thirds majority, were to be elected; while the chiefs were to be entitled to one-third.

³⁰⁵ He was formally to be made Prime Minister in 1952.

³⁰⁶ This was a government-appointed committee under Sir Henley Coussey to consider a new constitution for the Gold Coast. See the *Report to his Excellency the Governor by the Committee on Constitutional Reform*, London HMSO 1949, otherwise known as the *Coussey Report* in Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents on Ghana History, 1807-1957*, T. Nelson, and Sons Ltd. 1964:68.

³⁰⁷ For more on this see R., Rathbone: "The Transfer of Power in Ghana", 1945-1957. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of London, 1968; and Ghana; British Documents. . . in RathBone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, P'31.

Aden-Clarke resisted this request; but in consultation with the newly released Nkrumah, it was agreed that the CPP should be allotted six portfolios in an Executive Council of eleven members, a clear majority, while allotting two seats to representatives of Asante and the Northern Territorial Councils. The Territorial Councils, bitter and dissatisfied, continued to press for four ministerial posts. As the Governor stood firm or declined to heed their request, the Territorial Council members told him that they would neither co-operate with, nor accept the government and would refuse any Executive Council portfolios.

It was against this background that the CPP government dealt with the chieftaincy institution in Northern Ghana before 1957. It has been rightly argued by Arhin Brempong³⁰⁸ that during this period, the Nkrumah government resorted to both constitutional³⁰⁹ and informal activities³¹⁰ in dealing with the chiefs or the institution. “The petitioners are advised to await major constitutional changes in their area and to see how these will affect the question of their allegiance”.³¹¹ This typically depicts how the CPP under Kwame Nkrumah, manipulated the chieftaincy institution, through legislation. The first piece of legislation was the Local Government Ordinance (1951) which provided for two-thirds majority of elected and one-third representation by the chiefs on local government bodies.³¹² This new structure of Local Government subjected traditional rulers to several kinds of explicit controls by the government to the extent that the chief

³⁰⁸ A. Brempong, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana (1951 – 1996)* (Accra, Sedco Publishing Limited, 2001). P.19.

³⁰⁹ Constitutional activities took the form of legislation aimed at unraveling the so-called despotism of the colonial-sponsored Native Authorities.

³¹⁰ The informal or Party activities were directed towards inducing anti-party chiefs to support the party or at least secure their neutrality in the struggle for power between the CPP and its UGCC opponents.

³¹¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/138. Letter written on 21st April 1958 to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, by the Ag. Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Tamale.

³¹² It must be noted that the legislation also provided for the ceremonial presidencies of chiefs of those bodies.

ordinarily was expected to formally apply to the government for leave to even travel. Here, the chief of Fumbisi in the Builsa Local Area is quoted to have said in his letter headed 'Application for Leave' that "I have the honour most respectfully; to beg for permission to travel down south to look for my wife who ran away . . . I will be grateful if you could grant me one month leave in order to enable me perform effective search".³¹³

While the new African Minister of Local Government assured the nation that the new structure 'no way means any change is necessary in the traditional relationship between chiefs and their people . . . customary service and allegiance will remain unaltered', this was most assuredly not the sole intention.³¹⁴ However, in the same information booklet the Minister acknowledged that the reform 'contemplates a departure from the dominant influence of the traditional elements'.³¹⁵ Arhin elucidates this, when he writes that;

Nkrumah was not really a radical revolutionary, but a visionary who believed in reform rather than in radical alterations . . . what he did then was to 'guarantee' on paper chieftaincy in the constitutions that he made for Ghana; that is to say he promised not to abolish chieftaincy by legislation. But he then set about making sure that chiefs would become 'role-less' and, therefore, useless. In 1954, he excluded the chiefs from the local councils . . . He retained the constitutional power of the colonial authorities to recognise chiefs, that is, make and un-make chiefs. . . the Regional and District Commissioners like their British colonial predecessors, became the makers and un-makers of chiefs.³¹⁶

³¹³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 6/2/8. Akanko was the name of the chief. The letter was written on 1st December 1961.

³¹⁴ *Local Government Reform in Outline*, p.1. Foreword by the Hon. E. A. Asafu-Adjaye, MLA, Minister of Local Government.

³¹⁵ RathBone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, P'31.

³¹⁶ K. Arhin, *Chieftaincy under the Third Republic*, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. March, 1979, pp' 2-3.

The new Councils were to be efficient, modern and democratic bodies and to have an origin and existence wholly distinct from the Traditional Councils. Traditional Councils would not effectively function as a local authority in the secular sense, but would only perform ‘customary functions’. Summing up the reforms, the Minister wrote that they were based on two principles, decentralisation and ‘democracy, which implies the transfer of power from the official and the chief to the common. This is the very essence of the new system’.³¹⁷ Therefore, some government officials openly showed disrespect and disregard to chiefs and the institution as a whole. A typical case is when the Nangodinaba³¹⁸ reported the actions of the District Commissioner of Nangodi to the Regional Commissioner of Bolgatanga that;

I am writing to inform you that . . . the District Commissioner for Nangodi, Mr. R. B. Braimah, came to me when I was trying to settle a dispute between two people and told me that chiefs in Ghana had no powers anymore and I was not the right person to settle any dispute. He then advised those people to take their complaint to Ghana Police, Bolgatanga³¹⁹

Also in a memorandum considered by the Council in June 1951, the Minister of Local Government outlined his Ministry’s plans for establishing new local authorities. The Ordinance’s cardinal aim was to make the administration of local affairs more democratic. The creation of a ‘sound structure of Local Government’ was he argued, ‘essential to the future progress of the country’. The reforms moreover aimed at ‘making the popular will effective’.³²⁰ The election results in 1951 could be, and was in a constitutional sense, rightly held to be a clear mandate for

³¹⁷ All the above quotations are drawn from *Local Government Reform in Outline*, P’4.

³¹⁸ That is Chief of Nangodi in the Nabdam area. It is the same area that Sakot is located.

³¹⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/3/138. Chief of Nangodi (Nangodinaba) to the Regional Commissioner of Bolgatanga, reporting the action of the Nangodi District Commissioner.

³²⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM. 13/2/1. All quotes from a Memorandum by Edward Asafu-Adjaye, the Local Government Minister at the time, to the Executive Council. 28th July 1951.

the CPP. In this sense, to oppose their policies so soon after an election could justly be regarded as undemocratic and provocatively defiant. The new government's policies were to be understood as 'the popular will'.³²¹

Before 1957, the CPP also had informal ways of dealing with supposedly anti-party or anti 'people' chiefs.³²² The Party was in no doubt that many of the chiefs were antipathetic to it or were anti 'people' and supported one or the other of the opposition groups³²³ of the intelligentsia, and that the chiefs could generally influence to a certain extent, the voting patterns of their subjects.³²⁴ In 1959, in a letter forwarded by Mr. A. Ofori, a Government Agent in Zuarungu to the Regional Commissioner, he reported;

That the Damoligunaba is and has always been a member of the CPP is the fundamental cause of the difficulties between the Nangodinaba and the Damoligunaba. This led to a lot of wicked deeds being practiced by the Nangodinaba and his loyal subjects against the chief and people of Damoligu.³²⁵

Clearly, when the Nangodinaba was found to be an 'Anti-CPP Chief', the Government denied him certain privileges that should have been conferred on him as a paramount chief. He thus wrote:

³²¹ It is worth pointing out that the CPP took office in 1951 on the basis of a poll in which less than fifty percent of those enfranchised to vote actually registered and less than fifty percent of that register actually voted. There is no agreement in the scholarly literature about why less than twenty-five percent of the electorate actually chose to vote.

³²² 'People' here is not only being referred to the masses, but also the CPP supporters in particular.

³²³ Though, it has been generally asserted that chiefs in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast fell back on the practice in the colonial period of supporting the government; like the Asante and Okyeman chiefs who supported the National Liberation Movement, most of the Northern chiefs also supported the Northern Peoples Party (NPP).

³²⁴ D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.200 and J. M. Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in the Emergent Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp.16-50 on the origins of the National Liberation Movement, NLM.

³²⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/138. K. Ofori (Government Agent at Zuarungu) to the Secretary to the Regional Commissioner in Tamale, reporting the impasse between the Nangodi chief and the Damoligu chief in 1969. P'13.

I have to point it out to you the above quoted letter addressed to me was not sound in accordance with the Local Government set up. This can justly be said to bear no respect for your chiefs and traditional members. The Local Government Ordinance provides a President for all Local Councils in Ghana. The president or the paramount chief within such an area should be elected President. I was denied my appointment as Authorising Officer of the Nabdam Local Council and you will have to remember that I am a citizen of Nangodi and also pay my annual rates.³²⁶

As Nkrumah noted, “instead of supporting the efforts of the man in the street to express himself and to bring pressure to bear on the imperialists, these political opponents of the Party ranged themselves on the part of the British Colonial Government in trying to suppress the great upsurge of nationalism”.³²⁷ Thus, there was by now little doubt that the CPP was extremely hostile to chieftaincy, especially ‘anti-CPP chiefs’. While some Ministers of the CPP were publicly circumspect at this stage, many of its Members of the Legislative Assembly were not. J. Hagan, speaking in the Assembly during the debate on the Local Government Ordinance, was cheered loudly by his own benches when he said: “For the past 107 years our chiefs have been exercising their rights . . . but that privilege has been abused . . . our confidence is now gone . . . their future is doomed . . . we want them to abstain themselves from politics and wash their hands off financial matters”.³²⁸

Below the level of Central Government, however, CPP members and supporters in the rural areas showed as it was claimed, ‘gross disrespect to chieftaincy and a show of disrespect to established authority’.³²⁹ The Party dealt with the more pronounced of their chiefly opponents at

³²⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/138. A response by Harold A. Azure (the Nangodinaba) to a letter headed “Authorising Officer for Local Authority”, complaining about unfair treatment to government officials in 1963.

³²⁷ K. Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana*, (Panaf, 1968), p.55

³²⁸ Legislative Assembly Debates, 4th April 1951. Also in Rathbone, op. Cit., P.32.

the local levels through destoolment and for that matter deskinment agitation by the local branches expressed in ‘resolutions’ and ‘telegrams’ to the Minister of Local Government. Such was the spate of deskinment agitation that a harassed state council was moved to put the question, “Does the CPP favour destoolment?”³³⁰ It must be noted however, that deskinment of chiefs, particularly, in Northern Ghana by the government of the CPP was minimal, if there was any. In a letter to all District Commissioners, Upper Region, Mr. G. A. K. Bonsu, Principal Secretary to the Minister of Interior and Local Government wrote in 1963:

The Cabinet was informed at a meeting held on the 27th October by Osagyefo the President that the practice of preferring charges against chiefs and attempting by subversive means to effect their destoolment was becoming rather prevalent throughout the country. Apart from the heavy expenditure such disputes involve, they tend to undermine the institution of chieftaincy. My Minister would be grateful therefore if you would ensure that Section 3 of the Chieftaincy Act, 1961 (Act 88) which makes it an offence to undermine the authority of a chief, is adequately enforced in your Region in order to reduce such practice to a minimum³³¹

It is likely that the practice had become rather unnecessarily prevalent to the disadvantage of the CPP’s Government policies, to warrant a call for attention. However, since deskinment agitators were mostly CPP ‘activists’ or supporters, who had to appear before the State Councils and Native Authority Courts, the Party also pressured the Government into reducing the penalties attached to unsuccessful deskinment litigation.³³² Accordingly, while the State Council Ordinance (1952) seemingly protected the chiefs against baseless deskinment movements,³³³ it equally

³²⁹ Legislative Council Debates, 4 April 1951. It must be noted though that the speaker is a ‘southern’ chief, but one of the Territorial Members, the Okyenhene of Akyem Abuakwa, Ofori Atta II.

³³⁰ The Breman Asikuma (Central Region) State Council in the Daily Graphic No. 387, February 4th, 1952.

³³¹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/8. Letter written on 26th July 1963 by Mr. G. A. K. Bonsu, Principal Secretary to the Minister of Interior and Local Government to all District Commissioners, Upper Region.

³³² State Council (Ashanti) Ordinance, no. 5 of 1952; date of assent, 27th March 1952.

minimised the fees and fines attached to the proceedings and gave the courts of the central government and not those of the Native Authorities, the power of enforcing the prescribed sanctions.³³⁴ The Party's newspapers³³⁵ openly attacked chiefs who were opposed to the CPP; and it also published articles which utterly condemned chieftaincy and even encouraged readers to take matters into their own hands. An article by an author writing under the pseudonym 'Orlando',³³⁶ talked of the 'inglorious roles our chiefs have played in the imperialist post-war politics' and invoked 'the great democratic weapon DESTOOLMENT'.³³⁷ Therefore, both officially and unofficially, the Party made it clear that the chiefs must adapt themselves to the changing times and accept CPP rule.³³⁸

Traditional Rule in Northern Ghana from Independence to the End of the First Nationalist Regime in Ghana, 1957-1966

Arhin Brempong³³⁹ describes traditional rule under Nkrumah's CPP Government in the period between 1957 and 1966, briefly as "chieftaincy under attack".³⁴⁰ Rathbone³⁴¹ is also quoted

³³³ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG/2/8. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah is quoted to have made a statement concerning the rampant destoolment agitations that; "the practice of preferring charges against chiefs and attempting by subversive means to effect their destoolment was becoming rather prevalent throughout the country. Apart from the heavy expenditure such disputes involve, they tend to undermine the institution of chieftaincy".

³³⁴ *Daily Graphic*, Nos. 412 and 413, 4th and 5th March 1953.

³³⁵ Most prominent was the *Accra Evening News*.

³³⁶ From the tone of the piece, Orlando Furioso might have been more apt.

³³⁷ *Accra Evening News*, 29th august 1951. Also quoted in Rathbone, op. Cit., P'33.

³³⁸ *Daily Graphic*, No.452 April 21, 1953 reported Nkrumah as warning the chiefs to desist from opposing the CPP and party politics in general "and that his party would deal 'blow for blow' if the chiefs interfered with the activities of the party. The party was not against chiefs". Also, Prime Minister's statement in the Legislative Assembly Debates Vol.4 of 1954, cols 1557 – 1558.

³³⁹ Brempong, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana*, p.43.

to have said that “Within a few months following independence, government was to transform chieftaincy rather than destroying it by a mixture of coercion and inducement”³⁴² The period was therefore characterised by the Government’s commitment to demonstrate that it was in firm command. One of such notable ‘attacks’ on chieftaincy was the vesting of land in the President of the Republic of Ghana. On 3rd October 1963, Ayeebo Asumda, Northern Regional Commissioner in a speech to the Upper Region House of Chiefs remarked:

With the attainment of Independence and Republican status, it became necessary that the rights and privileges relating to land . . . be vested in the president of the Republic of Ghana. Consequently, provisions have been made in our laws . . . whereby land could be vested in our President . . . It has lately been found necessary to apply this Act to this Region,³⁴³ and to have vested in the President lands in the Bolgatanga, Wa, Lawra, Tumu, Navrongo, Paga and Bawku urban areas. Finality has been given to this decision approved by the Cabinet in the Executive Instrument Number 87 of 1963. In effect, it means that all lands in these places within the confines of the approved limits of the town boundaries are vested in the President. The allocation and disposal of lands in these centres is clearly prohibited except through the approved Lands Advisory Committee . . . From now on, I would advise all chiefs in the towns named herein to refrain from allocating plots to people³⁴⁴

However, two main factors shaped the relationship between traditional political administration and the government of the CPP, headed by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. First, there seemed to be adequate legislation safeguarding the chieftaincy institution. Second and quite

³⁴⁰ Professor Kwame Arhin is a renowned scholar of chieftaincy and matters relating to traditional rule in Ghana. In his book, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana (1951 – 1996)*, he chose to use this as a Heading to his third chapter. See, Ibid, P’33

³⁴¹ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, P’39.

³⁴² Richard Rathbone is a British Professor of Modern History who made this assertion in his work, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: the Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana 1951-60*. P’99

³⁴³ He was referring to the then Northern and Upper Regions respectively, which are now the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions.

³⁴⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/3Address by the Regional Commissioner Mr. Asumda to the Regional House of Chiefs on 3/10/63. pp.2, 3 and 5

paradoxically, apart from the inadequate safeguard, the CPP under Nkrumah manipulated, if not defied these legislations to subject the chiefs to its whims and caprices.

To some extent, the Ghana (Constitution) Order-in-Council (1957), adequately safeguarded chieftaincy, as Arhin has pointed out:

The result of the constitutional agitation, conducted both violently and non-violently by the NLM and the CPP in . . . the proposals by the Government of the Gold Coast and the intervention by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was that the institution of chieftaincy was given an apparently secure position in the Ghana (Constitution) Order-in-Council, 1957.³⁴⁵

Its major area of concern was how to balance the safeguard of regional interests centred on the chiefs, with the need for a strong unitary government which it considered necessary for the survival of the new state. The Order-in-Council (1957)³⁴⁶ therefore made provision for a measure of regional devolution³⁴⁷ and for the protection of chieftaincy. To this extent, Ayeebo Asumda³⁴⁸ noted:

You may have realised that the reorganisation of the Districts have been remodelled, so that the administrative boundary is now co-terminus with the jurisdiction of Local Government Administration. This new policy has been conceived to avoid overlapping of administrative business, and to give every locality the independence, confidence and the cohesion that is indispensable in any effective machinery of government. As a result of this arrangement, every chief here has in his own traditional area a local council run and managed by the people of the locality. This is what you have been asking for, for long; now you have it, and I know you are justly proud of your councils.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Brempong, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana*, p.24.

³⁴⁶ S. O. Gyandoh Jnr. And I. Griffith, *A Sourcebook of the Constitutional Law of Ghana*, Accra Catholic Press, 1972: 149 Nkrumah wrote; "On reflection, even though I trusted too much in the power of a reformed chieftaincy, I was not mistaken in attempting to use..."

³⁴⁷ That is a situation where some power and responsibility could be delegated to the Regions and for that matter the countryside. This is basically aimed at ensuring that chiefs are part of the general administration of the new nation, Ghana.

³⁴⁸ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/3. A. Asumda was the Commissioner to the Upper Region. He said this in a speech he delivered to the Upper Region House of Chiefs on 30th September 1963. P.2.

Section 66 of the Order-in-Council guaranteed the office of chiefs in Ghana as existing by customary law and usage. Section 63 (a-e) did not only provide for the establishment of five regions,³⁵⁰ but also Section 67 (1) provided for the establishment of Regional Houses of Chiefs. This was empowered to consider any matter referred to it by a Minister, “at any time offer advice to any minister” and “where the (National) Assembly so requests submit to the Governor-General or the Speaker (of the Assembly) as the case may be a written declaration of what in its opinion is the customary law relating to any subject in force in any part of its authority”.³⁵¹ Here too, the membership of the Upper Region House of Chiefs was in 1963, increased from 28 to 39.

I am glad to announce that at the next meeting of the House, you may find an enlarged membership. In order to obtain the views of a wider section of our chiefs on the conduct of the affairs of the country, it has pleased Osagyefo, the President to increase the membership of the Upper Region House of Chiefs from 28 to 39. This is indicative of the increasing role the chiefs are playing in our national life and of the Government’s desire and determination to avail itself of your seasoned wisdom and advice.³⁵²

This seemingly, but quite deceptively looked like the CPP was committed to actively involve chiefs in the administration of the country. To some extent, it was a way of rewarding some of the chiefs who were loyal to the CPP. Section 64 (1) provided for the establishment of Regional Assemblies; and 64 (2) for an Act of Parliament to specify their functions in the areas of local government, agriculture, animal health services, public works, town and country planning and such other works. In sum, these legislations were not only to enhance decentralisation, but also

³⁴⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG, 8/2/3. 3/10/63. Address by the Regional Commissioner Mr. Asumda to the Regional House of Chiefs on. p.2.

³⁵⁰ The five regions were Eastern (including the present Greater Accra), Western (including the present Central), Northern (including the present Upper East and Upper West), Ashanti (including the present Brong Ahafo) and Transvolta/Togoland (the present Volta Region).

³⁵¹ Gyandoh Jnr. and Griffith, *A Sourcebook of the Constitutional Law of Ghana*, p.149.

³⁵² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 8/2/3. A. Asumda was the Commissioner of the Upper Region. He said this in a speech he delivered to the Upper Region House of Chiefs on 30th September 1963. p.5.

to ensure that chiefs were actively involved in the political administration of the first nationalist government of Ghana. Ideally, it also meant that chiefs were to be given the exclusive responsibility of dealing with issues concerning local governance. That was why the *Navoropio*,³⁵³ in a letter to the District Commissioner in 1963,³⁵⁴ stated categorically that “This matter is solely the work of the Traditional Council”.³⁵⁵

However, it can be said that apart from the Order-in-Council (1957) rendering chiefs mere advisors on customary matters to the central government, the CPP Government succeeded in manipulating the constitution in their favour to control the chiefs. The government of the CPP was clearly not satisfied with the constitutional position of the chiefs in the Independence Constitution, obviously imposed by the British government as an element of the compromise solution to the constitutional impasse.³⁵⁶ As far as the government was concerned, chieftaincy and all other institutions ought to be subjected to the sovereign government. Between 1957 and 1966, a number of legislations were enacted by the CPP government, to enable it to achieve the aim of subjecting the chiefs to its control. To do this, restrictions in the 1957 Constitution on amending or repealing provisions relating to chieftaincy had to be removed. The government achieved this by the passage of the Constitution (Repeal of Restrictions) Act, 1958 and the Constitution (Amendment) Act,

³⁵³ The *Navoropio* is a corrupted form of ‘*Navoro Pe*’, chief of Navrongo.

³⁵⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG6/2/9, p.66. The chief of Navrongo, as the head of the Kasena-Nankana Traditional Council was also reacting to a letter sent to him by one Ayipakugum of Katiu, complaining that the Chiana Local Council has threatened to stop paying him his allowance due him as representative of Katiu, after the chief of Katiu was taken ill.

³⁵⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG6/2/9. p.68.

³⁵⁶ The constitutional provisions were clearly a compromise solution that could only have been imposed by Her Majesty’s Secretary of State and accepted by Nkrumah at the risk of delaying the attainment of independent nationhood. See, Nkrumah, K., *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, T. H. Nelson, 1957. Pp.339-340. And also Nkrumah, K., *Dark Days in Ghana*, Panaf, 1968. Pp.59-60.

1959.³⁵⁷ The process of altering the constitution was facilitated by the command of a two-thirds majority of the CPP and its allies in Parliament.

The passage of the Acts did not only enable the government to act on chieftaincy matters without first going through the process of consultations with the Houses of Chiefs, but it was also able to remove the remaining vestiges of indirect rule and create additional paramountcies as political rewards.³⁵⁸ ". . . I was on a different scale from the other four Traditional Chiefs before the old regime promoted all of us to be Paramount Chiefs . . ." ³⁵⁹ It was clear by the end of 1959 that a chief could act officially only if the government willed it. The Constitution (1960) of the First Republic stated in the "Declaration" of fundamental principles (Article 13) "Chieftaincy in Ghana should be guaranteed and preserved", but apparently in the form that the government wanted it. The Chieftaincy Act (No. 81) of 1961 consolidated previous enactments on chiefs and gave recognition to the fact that a chief was only one if the government willed it, and also stressed the form of chieftaincy that it favoured.

For the first time, the Government recognised "divisional councils of chiefs" which would perform functions specified by the Minister of Local Government. Their memberships were contained in lists drawn up by the Minister who could terminate memberships. The Act also specified the members of the House of chiefs. Therefore, as it is seen here the District

³⁵⁷ *Daily Graphic* No.2452, June 12, 1958.

³⁵⁸ Brempong, *Transformations in Traditional Rule in Ghana*, p.54

³⁵⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 9/2/24. This was a part of a letter written by the Bolganaba (chief of Bolgatanga), Naba Abilba Awugiya, on the subject 'Appliction for Salary Increment' on the 23rd of January 1968. It was written in response to a demotion in status, because of an earlier undeserved elevation to 'paramountcy' by the Nkrumah regime, probably as a political reward. p.286

Commissioner of Chiana³⁶⁰ in a congratulatory letter to the Chianapio,³⁶¹ headed, 'Chieftaincy Act: (Amendment of Schedule No. 4) Instrument, 1963 L. I. 287', wrote:

By virtue of the minister's powers under Section 20 of the Chieftaincy Act 1961 (Act. 81), Chianapio is recognised as a permanent member of the Upper Region's House of Chiefs. I am therefore directed by the Regional Commissioner/ Upper Region to convey to you officially the news of your permanent membership to the Upper Region's House of Chiefs, and to the Kasena-Nankani Traditional Council as early as possible. The Kasena-Nankani Traditional Council is accordingly informed by copy of this letter about your membership of the Upper Region's House of Chiefs . . .³⁶²

The Minister could change the headship of the House by legislative instrument, and the Regional Commissioner would supervise elections to vacant seats, while the Minister could also fill them with nominees.

In effect, as Ollennu says, a people could elect whoever they chose as their chief, but he could perform his constitutional duties only at the will of the government.³⁶³ The institution of chieftaincy went full circle: the Act reduced it to an agency of the government, just as it had been under the colonial regime. But in contrast to his position under the colonial regime, the chief was a passive and not an active agent under the supervision of the people's government. The decentralised despotism of the colonial administration was destroyed. It is within the framework of the removal of British restraints on the CPP government³⁶⁴ and the need to reconcile CPP

³⁶⁰ Chiana was a suburb of the Kasena-Nankana Traditional Area or District, whose capital is Navrongo.

³⁶¹ Chianapio is the corrupted form of Chianape, chief of Chiana.

³⁶² PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/9, p.67. The Chiana District Commissioner wrote to the Chianapio in December 1963, congratulating him on his appointment as a permanent member of the Upper Region House of Chiefs.

³⁶³ Ollennu, (1967). cited in Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, P.93.

³⁶⁴ The independence of Ghana on 6th March 1957, meant freedom of action for the government of Ghana in both internal and external affairs, and that the restraining hand of the colonial authorities, was effectively withdrawn.

ideology³⁶⁵ with the national views on indigenous political institutions³⁶⁶ that the CPP dealt with the institution of chieftaincy in the period 1957 – 1966.

Traditional Rule in Northern Ghana under the First Military Regime 1966 – 1969

The Government of the National Liberation Council (NLC), which overthrew the Nkrumah Government in February 1966, sought to restore³⁶⁷ and not necessarily revolutionise the chieftaincy institution in Ghana. To this extent, it is worth stating that the Government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) is reported to have manipulated the chieftaincy institution to a considerable extent that merited the attention of the Government of the NLC, to at least, restore it to its former position. D. Zogah³⁶⁸ in a congratulatory letter to the Government of the National Liberation Council (NLC), dated 18th July 1967, stated:

I sincerely write to congratulate you and your colleagues of the National Liberation Council (NLC) on your bold and generous step in reconstituting the Mamprusi Traditional Council back to our father, the *Nayire* who is our supreme head, with all his powers restored. The Mamprusi District or Traditional Area was the largest and most unique area in the North, but was destroyed by the Nkrumah's regime despite our refusal to the split of the Mamprusi State into three, namely, Frafra, Kussasi and South Mamprusi. It is really beyond all reasonable doubts that our sincere manifold thanks are due to you and your colleagues in giving us our reborn Traditional Area, thus suiting local or traditional conditions . . . To the real good taste of freedom and justice, which we have since the 24th February 1966 revolution, I always pray and hope that there should be absolutely no partiality in the affairs of

³⁶⁵ The CPP's official proclaimed ideology was to be 'Marxist-Socialist'. Its practical implication was a state, managed by a people's party, endowed with supreme power and authority which Mamdani has called "centralized despotism". See, M. Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of late Colonialism*, (Princeton University Press, 1996), pp.37-39.

³⁶⁶ The consensus in the country as stated by the Coussey Committee was in favour of the survival of chieftaincy.

³⁶⁷ Though the leaders of the National Liberation Council proclaimed a 'glorious revolution', the real essence of that government was the restoration of the Ghanaian state as provided by the 1957 (Constitution) Order-in-Council.

³⁶⁸ D. Zogah is a citizen of Togo in the Frafra Traditional Area, who had not probably been content with the state of chieftaincy under the Nkrumah regime.

chieftaincy, especially where chieftaincy was destroyed and was given to the wrong hands.³⁶⁹

One of the earliest Acts of restoration was Decree 112 which set out to put order into the institution of chieftaincy. Section (i) of the Decree provided that all chiefs who had hitherto been elevated to higher status listed in the first schedule to the Decree, should revert to their previous status and section;

For the past five years, I was on a different scale from the other four Traditional Chiefs before the old regime promoted all of us to be Paramount Chiefs, but for the past one year the Council stopped paying me as I ought to be paid because it has been stated that we were no more paramount chiefs.³⁷⁰

This typically depicts how chiefs, who had hitherto been arbitrarily elevated or otherwise, for political reasons, had to revert to their former positions under the National Liberation Council. Similarly, Section (ii) provided that all chiefs reduced in status should resume their former status and their relationship of allegiance to their erstwhile superordinates; and that where by virtue of his elevation, a chief held the presidency of a local council, in accordance with the Local Government Act, 1961, (Act 54), that person shall be removed from that office. Section 2 provided that chiefs reduced to their former status by virtue of Decree 112, should become subject to the jurisdiction of the Traditional Council to which they had been subject before their purported elevation.

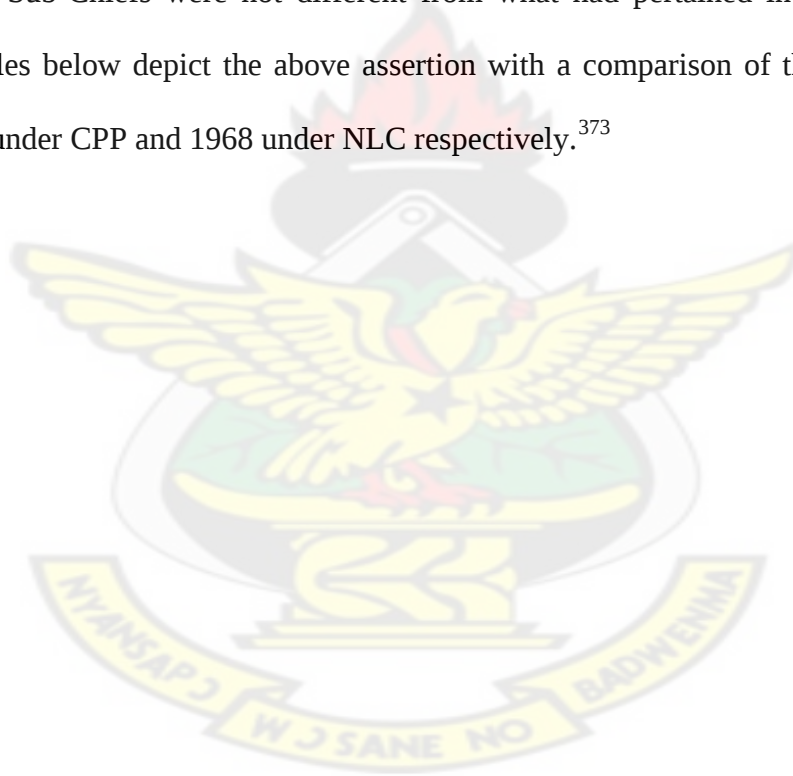
These acts of restoration by the National Liberation Council, however, did not necessarily lead to a significant change in the salary structure of chiefs, despite a number of agitations for increment and uniformity of salaries of chiefs during the period.

³⁶⁹ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 9/2/24, p.269. D. Zogah on July 18th, 1967, congratulating the Government of the National Liberation Council (NLC) on its assumption of power in a letter headed, “ Letter of Congratulation and Appeal for the Increase of Chiefs Salaries in the Mamprusi Traditional Areas of Frafra, Kusasi and the South Mamprusi”. p.269.

³⁷⁰ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 9/2/24, 23/01/1968, p.286. Bolga *Naba* (chief of Bolgatanga), Naba Abilba Awugiya, on the subject ‘Application for Salary Increment’ on the 23rd of January 1968. It was written in response to a demotion in status, as a result of an earlier elevation to paramountcy by the Nkrumah regime for probably political reasons.

. . . Now I feel with this my large traditional area, I have been receiving so many prominent people; but due to the decrease of my salary I always feel financial difficulties to meet these people, and for this purpose I will like to bring forward to you for a consideration as I have already pleaded as above.³⁷¹ To conclude, I do strongly appeal to the N. L. C. to step in and solve increase chiefs pay or see to it that they get unisalaries; [sic] because I have seen for a long time that the paramount chiefs get Forty Cedis per month, some Divisional Chiefs too get Thirteen Cedis per month, while others get Nine Cedis per month. All these differences, I do not understand and I do not think it is sound.³⁷²

The salaries of chiefs during Nkrumah's CPP regime and that of the NLC did not change significantly; just as the differences in the salaries of paramount chiefs as against those of Divisional and Sub-Chiefs were not different from what had pertained in the CPP's tenure of office. The tables below depict the above assertion with a comparison of the salary structure of chiefs in 1965 under CPP and 1968 under NLC respectively.³⁷³



³⁷¹ Bolga Naba, letter cited above.

³⁷² D. Zogah, letter cited above.

NAME OF CHIEF	TITLE	RANK	ANNUAL SALARY (1965) ³⁷⁴	ANNUAL SALARY (1968) ³⁷⁵
Rowland A. Ayagitam	Chiana Pio	Divisional Chief	£G.300	£300
Ayikwagatoge	Katiu Pio	Sub - Chief	£G.82	£82
Tiyiamo	Kayoro Pio	Sub – Chief	£G.82	£82
Afagachi	Nakong Pio	Sub – Chief	£G.66	£G.66
Ayipukuguni	Katiu Regent	Elder	£G.60	£G.60
Ayagatimu	-	Elder	£G.15	£15
Puaso	-	Kayoro Elder	£G.15	£15
Atichele	-	Kayoro Elder	£G.15	£15
Akwa Manu	-	Kayoro Elder	£G.15	£15
Agadi	-	Nakon Elder	£G.15	£15
Pelah	-	Nakon Elder	£G.15	£15
Adochiah	-	Chiana Elder	£G.15	£15
Anituu	-	Chiana Elder	£G.15	£15
Alerechana	-	Chiana Elder	£G.15	£15

³⁷⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/9. J. E. Abagre (Clerk of the Chiana Local Council) was in April 1965 responding to the Secretary to the Regional Commissioner's request for details of the salaries and allowances of chiefs in the Chiana Local Council.

³⁷⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 9/2/24. J. E. Abagre (Clerk of the Chiana Local Council) was in February 1968 responding to the Secretary to the Regional Commissioner's request for details of the salaries and allowances of chiefs in the Chiana Local Council.

Achanakwe	-	Katiu Elder	£G.15	£15
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Table 5.4 - Chiana Local Council – List of Chiefs on Council Payroll - A Comparison of 1965 and 1968

NAME OF CHIEF	RANK	ANNUAL SALARY
A. Azantilow	Paramount Chief	£G.600
Asangalisa	Divisional Chief	£G.200
Azuik	Sub-Chief	£G.192
Adangabe	Sub-Chief	£G.112
Mr. Afulang	Sub-Chief	£G.96

Table 5.5 - Sandema Local Council – List of Chiefs on Council Payroll, 1965³⁷⁶

NAME OF CHIEF	TITLE	RANK	ANNUAL SALARY
A. Adda	Navoro Pe	Paramount Chief	£970
Akanvuri	Kologu Naba	Divisional Chief	£163
Francis N'cho	Naga Naba	Divisional Chief	£123
Anankware	Navoropungu Pe	Sub-Chief	£123
Manchi	Manyoro Pe	Sub-Chief	£63
Ayamga	Natugnia Naba	Sub-Chief	£63
Ayambire	Uwa Naba	Sub-Chief	£50
Nabanise	Panda Pe	Sub-Chief	£50
Kaburi	Doba Naba (Regent)	Sub-Chief	£50

Table 5.6 - Navrongo Local Council – List of Chiefs on Council Payroll, 1968³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 6/2/8. P'65.

A second schedule to the Decree listed chiefs wrongly believed to have been *enskinned* and from whom the National Liberation Council (NLC) withdrew recognition. Section 4 restored chiefs believed to have been wrongfully removed, generally for political reasons, to their stools or skins, or traditional offices. The meaning of the Decree was that the government should not by itself elevate or demote chiefs and that government recognition should follow the customary procedures of enskinment and deskinment as had been ordained by the colonial administration. In this sphere, it has been reported that, the regime deskined all the chiefs in the Upper Region. Those who customarily deserved to be chiefs were re-elected or reinstated; while those who did not, were permanently deskined and replaced appropriately.³⁷⁸

However, it should be noted that the proposals of the Constitutional Commission,³⁷⁹ under the chairmanship of Justice Akufo-Addo and the ensuing establishment of a Constituent Assembly (CA)³⁸⁰ by the NLC to deliberate on the proposals, shaped the views of the NLC on the chieftaincy institution in the immediate post-Nkrumah Ghana. While the Constitutional Commission proposed that local government or administration should be ‘traditionally’ based, and that individual chiefs could also find a place in ‘national life’³⁸¹ depending on their ability; the Constituent Assembly

³⁷⁷ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG. 9/2/24. Table showing list of chiefs on Council pay roll in the Upper Region (specifically, Navrongo) in 1968.

³⁷⁸ Interview with *Na’ab* Sigri Bewong I, Paramount Chief of Sakot Traditional Area on the 20th May, 2008. This situation did not apply to the chiefs in the Upper West Region in particular, where chiefs had remained in office despite opposition to the CPP government.

³⁷⁹ The proposals of the Constitutional Commission were based on public representations in the new constitution; and it is remarkable that the final provisions on chieftaincy have been adopted, except for minor details, in the succeeding constitutions (1979 and 1992).

³⁸⁰ The NLC established a Constituent Assembly consisting of individuals and representatives of ‘identifiable’ public associations and organizations to deliberate on the proposals of the Constitutional Commission and give a final shape to the 1969 constitution.

(CA) went further to provide in Article 145 (1) that “There shall be established a National House of Chiefs”. The National House of Chiefs consisted of five members each from all the Regional Houses of Chiefs established by the Nkrumah government. Its functions included undertaking the progressive study, interpretation and codification of customary law, with a view to evolving in appropriate cases, a certified system of rules of customary law.



³⁸¹ The Commission also felt that some chiefs could be propelled into positions of responsibility in important areas of national life beyond the limits of local administration by the force of their experience of public affairs and by the power of their high educational qualification.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Among the people of Navrongo and Sakot like most of the inhabitants of the Northern Territories,³⁸² it is the universal belief that the land belongs to the earth-god and is in the care of the ancestral spirits of the respective lineage divisions. To all therefore, political authority is vested in those who represent them in their relationship with the gods and the ancestors. Before colonial rule, there was no single political authority at least in Sakot. This meant that no one held absolute power in the land. Power was decentralised among the various lineage heads of the community who were in effect chiefs. They exercised power over their various individual communities, though this power was limited to the maintenance of law and order. Unlike Sakot, however, chieftaincy was introduced into Navrongo before colonial rule in the Northern Territories, in a relatively very peaceful manner. This meant that a single leader spearheaded the affairs of the whole area instead of the various clan heads.³⁸³

However, the slave raids by Dagbon and especially, that of Babatu had the effect of throwing this orderly arrangement, in the form of indigenous political administration into disarray. Reluctantly, the people accepted colonial rule as a means of restoring peace in the area. Under this circumstance, the first major change introduced by the British was the transformation of indigenous political administration in Navrongo and Sakot. With a small staff and a large area to rule, the British realised the expediency to rule through the chiefs. Indeed, as early as 1898 Northcott, the first Chief Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories pointed out

³⁸² The Northern Territories as stated here is specifically referring to the Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions of Ghana.

³⁸³ The introduction of chieftaincy in Navrongo at this time, did not prevent the various clan heads from being independent, despite the recognition of the chief as the overlord of Navrongo.

that the agency to be employed would be chiefs and that their authority would be supported if they showed good behaviour.³⁸⁴ However, the problem that arose in the process was that the colonial administration did not find any “big chief” in Navrongo, though chieftaincy had been introduced into the area about two centuries before colonialism. Notwithstanding the power and authority of the *Navoropio*, authority was highly decentralised to the extent that the chiefs of the other Kasena and Nankana communities operated independently. To be successful in the administration however, the British found it necessary to strengthen and consolidate the authority of the chief of Navrongo. The British realised that the effectiveness of the system of indirect rule depended largely on strengthening and consolidating the power of the few existing chiefdoms to make them stronger for the task. That was why Sir Gordon Guggisberg, the Governor of the Gold Coast, in 1921 accordingly ordered the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories to draw-up and submit in due course a policy for the Northern Territories showing a definite scheme for fostering the formation of big states in the region.³⁸⁵

In this process, the powers of the erstwhile almost autonomous divisional chiefs of the other Kasena and Nankana communities were drastically curtailed. Also other autonomous chiefs in the vicinity of Navrongo, particularly the Builsa communities of Sandema, Wiaga and Chuchuliga among others; were amalgamated under the paramountcy of the chief of Navrongo. This process of consolidating the powers of chiefs like the *Navoropio* for administrative convenience continued for about three decades and was only completed with the introduction of indirect rule in the early 1930s.

³⁸⁴ J. N. K. Brukum, “The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule, 1897 – 1956: A Study in Political Change”, an Unpublished Thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Toronto, 1996, p.8. Also cited in R. B. Bening, “Foundations of the modern Native States of Northern Ghana”, in *Universitas*, Legon, iv, 3, 1975, p. 118.

³⁸⁵ PRAAD, Tamale, , ADM 1/8. Report by Governor Guggisberg, 1921

While the powers of divisional chiefs within the vicinity of Navrongo were subordinated to the authority of the *Navoropio*, the institution of chieftaincy was virtually absent in Sakot. The British thus created the institution in Sakot. The selection of Gella Yarig as headman and subsequently the installation of his son, Dokbillah as chief in 1907 was a result of loyalty and service to the British officials by the former. The net result of the creation and strengthening of chiefly power in Sakot and Navrongo respectively, however, was that chiefs became more powerful than their predecessors were and as Brukum had noted, they also “came to play an important role when western institutions such as political parties and parliament were introduced in the early 1950s.”³⁸⁶

However, the ‘artificial creation and strengthening’ of ‘chiefly power’ in Sakot and Navrongo respectively, to a very large extent, led to the erosion of the sacredness of the indigenous political institution and its associated consequences. For instance, during the pre-colonial period, apart from being customarily obligated to undertake specific tasks for the head of the indigenous political institution, it was also the responsibility of the people to ensure his social and economic up-keep. In those days, every male adult paid the Tendana (land-priest), clan head or chief dues in cash or kind a proportion of the yield of his farm. Before the advent of the Europeans, there existed . . . a well-defined system of tribute from the people to the chiefs; from the people to the local chief, from the local chief to the divisional chief and from the divisional chief to the paramount; at each stage of transition, a portion was retained. The people recognised the right of their chiefs as rulers who were rightly entitled to a share of the usufruct of the land. The chiefs also received free assistance in the cultivation of their farms and in the building and maintenance of their houses. But these dues other than in the form of free labour have lapsed in some parts, for the sole reason that

³⁸⁶ Brukum, *The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast under British Colonial Rule*, p.9. Brukum is probably referring to the situation where chiefs served in various capacities in the various Nationalist Governments.

colonial rule belittled the position of the chiefs and used them simply as a means of carrying out their orders, encouraged in the minds of the people the belief that they could with impunity refuse to pay their customary dues and in other respects disregard the authority of the chiefs.³⁸⁷ Indeed, this was the situation in which indigenous political leaders of Navrongo and Sakot found themselves. Indeed, W. J. A. Jones³⁸⁸ admitted that the ‘colonial manipulation’ of the indigenous political institution had altered considerably, the erstwhile sacred power and respect the institution had enjoyed.

The status of the chiefs even worsened under the nationalist regimes that followed after colonial rule, especially that of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) under Kwame Nkrumah. A study of the status of the traditional authorities in Ghana, published immediately before the military coup of 24th February 1966 revealed that the status of chiefs in Ghana had been reduced to that of a stipendiary of the Central Government. They depended in fact for office on official recognition, limited to meeting in bodies³⁸⁹ many of which have no traditional base, under procedures and only performed functions defined by statute.³⁹⁰

Nevertheless, what is of interest is not so much that the chiefs were manipulated, rather, the fact that the central government found it worthwhile to manipulate them, indicated how ‘delicate’ and indispensable the institution is to the national cause. Thus, unlike independent Guinea, where

³⁸⁷ Report by W. J. A. Jones, Chief Commissioner for the Northern Territories, 6th November 1934, ADM 1/32, PRAAD, Tamale.

³⁸⁸ Infact, W. J. A. Jones was Chief Commissioner for the Northern Territories.

³⁸⁹ Bodies like the National or Regional House of Chiefs.

³⁹⁰ W. B. Harvey, *Law and Social Change in Ghana* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 121-2.

chieftaincy had simply been set aside,³⁹¹ the institution is worthy of systematic attention and study in Ghana, and especially, Northern Ghana.

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³⁹¹ H. L. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: 1966), p.364.

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NAME	TITLE	DATE OF INTERVIEW	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	AGE OF INTERVIEWEE
Na'ab Sigri Bewong I	Paramount Chief of Sakot Traditional Area	September 2006 and February 2008	Tarkwa and Bolgatanga respectively	68 Years
Weken Balinia Adda	Regent of Navrongo	June 2006 and February 2008	Navrongo (in his Palace)	39 Years
Nicholas Nayimbe	Retired Educationist and Historian	February 2008	Bolgatanga (at his Residence)	70 Years
Prof. David Mila	Lecturer, Univ. for Dev't Stds. Navrongo Campus	February 2008	Bolgatanga (at his Residence)	
Prof. A. K. Awedoba	Lecturer, Inst. of African Studs., Univ. of Ghana,	October 2005	Accra (in his Office)	

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