

**PAWN OF CONTESTING IMPERIALISTS: NKORANSA
IN THE ANGLO-ASANTE RIVALRY IN
NORTHWESTERN GHANA, 1874-1900**

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Abstract

Scholarship on the history of imperialism has tended to overly concentrate on Western imperial hegemony over non-Western societies. On the other hand forms of imperialism in societies elsewhere, particularly Africa, remain understudied. The frame of Western imperialism with its operational principles has generally been represented by non Western scholars as economically exploitative, culturally repressive, politically intrusive and disorienting. The rather limited literature on imperial systems in African political history has often been deconstructive of Western imperialism's disruptive propensities in its target societies. However, some referential frameworks employed in interpreting Western imperialism are also applicable to processes of empire building and maintenance in Africa. One of the most relevant of these conceptual frames, perhaps, is J.A. Hobson's idea that imperialism was invariably fashioned through the 'combination of economic and political forces' whose sources are traceable to selfish capitalist interests. Using and modifying the Hobsonian economic model of interpretation, this paper analyses an imperial conflict between the British, a Western imperial power, and Asante, an African imperial overlord, in the interior of Ghana during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It focuses on the ways in which the rivalry between the two imperial powers manifested as the two powers struggled over the control of Nkoransa, a state in northwestern

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Ghana, which was strategically situated to sway much of the tide of north-south commerce during the period. The paper argues that the pursuit of commercial domination in the area of modern Ghana was the key issue at the centre of all the imperial contestation between Asante and the British from 1874 to 1900 as represented by the struggle over Nkoransa.

Introduction

In the process of colonizing Africa, European imperial powers often had to contend with resistance from powerful African states whose territorial expanse, complexity of political organization and cultural diversity marked them as empires, in other words, polities which had overgrown their core politico-cultural units. In simple terms, imperialism, which is the subject of analysis here, refers to any kind of domination which one group of human beings exercises over another, whether consciously or otherwise. Simply put, imperialism involves forced acquisition and physical possession of other territories, imposition of foreign rule by a conquering power on subjugated peoples and the economic and financial exploitation by the imperial power.¹

To this extent, African resistance to colonialism can be contextualized in terms of the contestation of opposing imperial forces. The contestation represented African imperial powers' attempts at protecting their sovereignty and territorial domains against conquest by foreign imperial forces. A typical case of such European-African imperial conflicts was the Anglo-Asante military struggles which occurred in Ghana during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. This paper focuses on this particular imperial struggle.

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The paper analyses the nature and trend of the Anglo-Asante competition and conflicts as they manifested in the Asante hinterland. It argues that the British policy shift in Ghana from 1874 seriously weakened Asante imperial hegemony in its hinterland and as the Asante tried to regain their lost power the Asante came into confrontation with the British. The paper focuses on Nkoransa, a northwestern² state which became deeply enmeshed in Anglo-Asante imperial encounter. It examines the ways in which the British and the Asante used Nkoransa as a pawn in their imperial chess game and how that state's twists and turns shaped the trend of the contest.

Approaching imperialism

With reference to economic exploitation, the paper adopts the economic interpretation of J.A Hobson as its framework for the analysis of imperialism as approached here. Hobson's interpretation explains European imperialism as the pursuit of profitable investments engineered by a few selfish, parasitic, wealthy capitalists who exercised great influence over their countries' governments.³ V.I Lenin's also an economic approach to imperialism which has a large following and is perhaps a socialist version of the Hobsonian model. Lenin argues that imperialism was 'inevitable and predictable': the ultimate consequence of the internal contradictions in the workings of capitalism.⁴

The Hobsonian model has been very influential though scholars of the Joseph Schumpeter School have been critical of it. For Schumpeter, imperialism was a matter-of-course or an atavistic development which was not necessarily motivated by

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capitalist interests. Other writings interpret imperialism from the political angle. For instance, William Langer, Carlton Hayes and the notable French historian Pierre Renouvin see the whole project of imperialism as a nationalistic phenomenon which nonetheless had an economic component.

Studies on European imperialism in Africa have generally tended to focus on the economic exploitation of Africa by European imperial powers. Douglas Rimmer, for example, explains that the literature on the history of colonialism in Africa emphasizes the analyses of economic factors. This, Rimmer argues, implies that the primary purpose of European imperialisms was the incorporation of 'African dependencies into the capitalist world economy.'⁵

The imperial domination of one African state by another is much less studied. Literature on the subject often focuses on a nationalistic approach aimed at counteracting the Eurocentric historiography which denied Africa a past civilization. These African-centred imperial histories, therefore glorify the past political economic and social achievements of Africans.

Interpreting Asante imperialism in the north

One can explain Asante imperialism in its hinterland in economic terms. Asante's ultimate goal for subjugating the states in that area was to gain control over gold production in such places as Banda and Gyaman as well as the trade routes which led from northern Ghana to the Middle Niger region. Asante also aimed at extracting annual tributes from conquered northern states.⁶ In pursuit of these economic objectives,

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Asante had, by the mid eighteenth century, conquered most of the states in its hinterland.

Asante and the British

Up to 1874 Asante remained a formidable imperial power in the north but in 1874 the British seriously weakened this power when they invaded and defeated Asante. The British invasion marked their shift from their imperial policy which involved the gradual abandonment of caution for active intervention in the affairs of the interior of Ghana. The policy aimed at destroying Asante hegemony in the interior as a way of breaking its dominance of the trade routes and the flow of the north-south trade. Later in the 1880s, Britain also found it necessary to establish their presence in the Asante hinterland in order to check the encroachment of French and German imperial powers on its commercial interest.

From the 1870s there was a European scramble for colonies and spheres of influence in Africa. By the 1880s, France and Germany were vigorously penetrating West Africa to secure new territories. French activities to the north and west of the Gold Coast and those of the Germans to the east of the colony seriously threatened British interests in the distant Gold Coast interior. Owing to the tension generated by the rivalry between the British and other European powers, the British and the Germans signed a treaty in 1887-88 which created in the northeast, a Neutral Zone which included the important trading towns of Salaga and Yendi. None of the two signatories to the treaty was to occupy any part of this zone. However, German intrigues and incursions in the Zone and attempts at inducing the ruler of Salaga to accept the German flag in 1895

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compelled the British to occupy Salaga in 1897 as a safeguard to their interest.⁷

In their struggle for control of the Asante hinterland, both the British and Asante needed the support of the states in that area. Owing to their defeat of Asante, the British enjoyed considerable goodwill among most of the northern states. The war seriously weakened Asante and provided those states with the opportunity of liberating themselves from Asante rule. On the other hand, the war generated violent anti-Asante reactions which represented the outburst of suppressed hatred for oppressive Asante imperial rule.

Almost all the northern states took advantage to unilaterally declare themselves free from all Asante domination soon after the war. The British gave tacit support to these unilateral actions. Asante citizens suffered serious casualties in some of the revolting provinces. In Salaga, the rebels massacred large numbers of Asante residents, incarcerated others and burnt their possessions.⁸ In Yendi, also in the northeast, revolting men imprisoned some Asante residents but the rebels here were more humane perhaps due to a less harsh Asante rule there.⁹ All other provinces in the northeast and nearly every state of the northwest also declared themselves independent of Asante but without violence, as recorded in Salaga and Yendi.

The only state in the Asante hinterland which remained loyal to the *Asantehene* was Nkoransa. The Nkoransa had been a very close ally of Asante partly as a result of alleged consanguine relations between the founder of Nkoransa and the first *Asantehene*, Osei Tutu. However, the great autonomy Nkoransa enjoyed in the Asante Empire as well as the

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enhanced status of the *Nkoransahene* in the Asante imperial ranking hierarchy, may have also contributed to the state's continued allegiance to the Asante stool.¹⁰

In the immediate post-1874 years, the Asante saw the continued loyalty of Nkoransa as crucial to their economic survival as well as attempts at the reconstruction of their disintegrated Septentrional Empire. But the British also recognized the importance of gaining control over Nkoransa if they were to succeed in keeping the Asante both politically and economically isolated.

Economic effects of the revolts in the north

As a result of the hostility of the northeastern states to Asante imperial authority, all the trade carried from the northeast to the Gold Coast, which previously passed through Kumase, was diverted through the Volta Gorge to the southeastern coastal area stretching from Accra to Lome.¹¹ As with the northeast, the Asante also lost control over the trade between the northwestern hinterland and the southwestern coastal area as a result of the establishment of direct trade contacts between Bonduku and Cape Coast by way of a route which by-passed Kumase. To maintain her control over the trade in gold and other commodities, notably firearms and salt, Asante had hitherto always used her imperial power to prevent any north-south commercial contacts beyond her control.¹²

By late 1874, the harmful economic effects on Asante of the diversion of all north-south trade along routes bypassing Kumase had become clearly evident. In 1875 Asante faced certain economic strangulation as a trade blockade held against her on all sides. At this stage, Nkoransa provided the Asante

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with a lifeline to their economic recovery. Nkoransa was willing to provide the vital outlet Asante needed for the export of kola nuts to external markets in Hausaland and the Western Sudan. In 1875 the *Nkoransahene* assisted the *Asantehene* to establish a large market at Kintampo in the north of the Nkoransa state. The market soon became ‘the headquarters of the kola nut trade’.¹³ The Kintampo market served as a viable alternative to the Salaga market. The market helped Asante to break out of its commercial isolation and to gain economic recovery. In that situation, the British needed to co-operate more with the other northern states to prevent Asante from finding additional outlets and soon regaining its dominance of the northern trade.

British Contribution to the Economic Strangulation of Asante.

The British contributed much to the economic hardships of the Asante. It was largely through British diplomatic moves that the northern states were able to maintain a successful trade blockade against Asante. The British assurance of their support for anti-Asante independence moves encouraged the northern states to impose commercial sanctions on Asante and to assert their economic freedom. Such British missions were sent to the northeast and northwest in 1875, 1879 and 1882.¹⁴

All the diplomatic moves, as David Kimble argues, reflected the anxiety of the British to ‘break the Ashanti monopoly over the northern transit trade’. The British commissioners, to some extent, succeeded in ‘opening up again some of the trade routes to the east’.¹⁵ A contemporary of the 1870s, the Basel missionary F.A Ramseyer, discerned the

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economic basis of the Anglo-Asante rivalry. He noted that the British penetration of the interior was:

to encourage increasing trade between them and the coast, to open up new routes which will skirt Ashanti and thus break the monopoly of Ashanti entrepreneurs of the north-south trade which had, before 1874, been supported by Ashanti military domination of the area.¹⁶

The Consequences of Internal Crisis

British support for the northern states led to the emergence of two important centres of power in the Bono speaking areas: a loose eastern Brong confederation with its headquarters at Krakye and a western Brong zone centred at Gyaman.¹⁷

Nkoransa was sandwiched between these two anti-Asante power bases and the Asante were determined to hold on to it. The Asante expected to use Nkoransa as a staging-post for re-establishing their hegemony over their lost northern provinces.¹⁸ The Nkoransa were willing to assist the Asante in this but civil strife and secessionist threats in the metropolis balked these efforts. Within Asante, the military failure of 1874 generated widespread criticisms against the military and political hierarchy. This led to unrests in many areas of metropolitan Asante. Dwaben rebelled over the Asante conduct of the war.¹⁹ In 1875 Asante invaded Dwaben to suppress the rebellion, forcing large numbers of the Dwaben to flee to the colony where they founded a new Dwaben state.²⁰ There were also secession moves in Adanse, Kwahu and certain towns in Asante-Akyem. The British were partly behind these unrests, but resentment against oppressive Asante policies and the desire for economic freedom were also important factors.²¹

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These internal crises weakened Kumase's capacity to mobilize forces for campaigns outside the metropolis.²²

Pro-Asante Nkoransa

The Kintampo market was undoubtedly essential to the sustenance of Asante commercial interests in the north. The rapid growth of the market virtually crippled the kola trade of Salaga.²³ But the *Asantehene* did not have a monopoly in the control of the Kintampo market. The market was under local control so that the *Asantehene* was compelled to share the revenues it generated equally with the *Nkoransahene*, local authorities and market supervisors.²⁴

As Asante tottered, its rivals, the British colonial authorities watched its 'commercial decline and political discomfiture' with overt contentment.²⁵ For a while, Nkoransa kept the route through it to external markets open.

Nkoransa and Asante Imperial Reconstruction Efforts.

Despite the threats to its unity at the centre, the Asante imperial government made some feeble attempts, between the middle 1870s and early 1880s, at the re-conquest of some of its northwestern provinces as an initial step towards rebuilding the whole northern empire. Nkoransa became involved in this campaign. Partly through the instrumentality and help of the *Nkoransahene*, *Asantehene*, Mensa Bonsu, succeeded in re-imposing his authority over Takyiman by military means in 1875. Bonsu also secured the allegiance of Wankyi by negotiation.²⁶ Furthermore, Nkoransa assisted the Asante in 1882-83, to check Gyaman aggression against Banda whose

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allegiance the *Asantehene* had been trying to regain. ²⁷At this crucial moment, however, Nkoransa-Asante relations twisted.

Breach in Nkoransa-Asante Relations.

In the course of the 1880s Nkoransa began to drift towards the Eastern Brong confederation and to pursue secession. ²⁸This unexpected twist was largely in reaction to harsh Asante imperial policies, particularly Mensah Bonsu's extortionate commercial tariffs and fines imposed on traders who operated to central Asante. In the face of economic crisis, *Asantehene* Mensah Bonsu 'resorted to force, extortion and political violence'. Court fines and tolls on goods in transit within central Asante were increased abnormally. ²⁹ Extortion was a major cause of the revolts in the metropolis while the high trade tariffs aroused anti-Asante sentiments in Nkoransa.

In reaction to the high tariffs, Nkoransa closed the great road linking Kumase and Kintampo in 1881-82. ³⁰ The *Nkoransahene*, however, reopened the road in 1884 following the intervention of a British colonial official, Brandon Kirby, who was on a Gold Coast government mission to Kumase and the north. Kirby succeeded in impressing on the Nkoransa, the profitability of 'again inducing traders to pass through their country'. ³¹ He also negotiated with the *Asanhehene* Kwaku Duah II and got him to agree to end practice of imposing heavy fines on traders and 'cease the custom prevalent during the reign of ex-king Mensah of levying heavy taxes on Koranza[Nkoransa]'. ³²

Kirby's softened policy on Kumase in relation to Nkoransa signifies a slight British retreat from its harsh anti-Asante policy. The British had realized the growing importance

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of the Kintampo market, over which the *Asantehene* had some influence. In addition, Kirby may have recognized the importance of Kumase and central Asante in the whole north-south transit trade network. He, for instance, observed in connection with the *Nkoransahene*'s decision to reopen the road: 'I have not the slightest doubt that as soon as the new state of things becomes known to the various merchants frequenting the market of Quantampo [Kintampo], a good influx of trade will come down to the coast'.³³ Furthermore, it may have been the case that the greater part of the volume of the north-south trade diverted from Asante through the Volta basin only ended up in German controlled territory.

The Kirby mediation of the Nkoransa-Asante commercial conflict proved transient as internal political crisis in Kumase soon impelled Nkoransa to move towards secession.

Nkoransa and the Kumase Succession Crisis.

A succession crisis in Asante which culminated in a civil war in 1887-88 encouraged Nkoransa to take definite secession steps. As the only Asante 'colony' in the north, the Nkoransa may have recognized the oddity of their status. The price of her allegiance to Asante-heavy trade tariffs- had been too high to pay. Nkoransa therefore began to defy the authority of the *Asantehene*. In 1888 its chief, Kwasi Poku, refused to go to Kumase to prove his fealty to the *Asantehene*, Prempeh I but Poku managed to trivialize his defiance.³⁴

Asante faced a serious threat to imperial reconstruction due to Nkoransa's dwindling loyalty and the formalization of British relations with the northern states.³⁵ In 1889 and 1890 the British, 'alarmed by the revival of the Asante Empire',³⁶

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signed treaties of protection with Gyaman and Atebubu.³⁷ The treaties secured for the British, ‘a jumping board’ for imperial expansion in the Asante hinterland.³⁸ With Nkoransa’s defiance of the *Asantehene*, Asante faced the threat of a possible coalition of British-supported dissident states spreading uninterruptedly across the entire Asante hinterland from the northeast to northwest, particularly if Nkoransa too signed a treaty with the British.³⁹ The agreements enabled the British to undertake an indirect political assault on Asante.

The efforts of the British aimed at securing their imperial interests in northern Ghana in the face of serious threats posed by German and French imperialism inevitably brought it into intensified rivalry with the Asante who considered the area the British were trying to dominate politically as their legitimate imperial domain.

British Request for Asante Submission: Its Effects on Nkoransa

In early 1891 the Gold Coast Governor, Brandford Griffith, took advantage of the crisis in the Asante Empire to request the *Asantehene* to place all his territories under British protection.⁴⁰ The *Asantehene* and his advisors declined the offer. Possibly to prove to the British that they remained a strong imperial power, the Asante began to mobilize their forces to invade Nkoransa. A successful invasion would strengthen Asante’s control over Nkoransa, enable Asante to consolidate what remained of her empire and help her to rehabilitate her badly bruised imperial image.⁴¹ A conquest of Nkoransa would also guarantee for Asante, a reliable outlet for

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her north-bound exports and a share in the north-south transit trade.

In the course of 1892 Asante launched its invasion of Nkoransa. The immediate pretexts for the Asante military assault included the refusal of the new *Nkoransahene*, Kofi Fa, to go to Kumase to show his allegiance to Prempeh and to send the annual tribute of thirty young men and thirty young women to serve the *Asantehene* as well as his conclusion of a definite anti-Asante alliance with the leaders of the anti-Asante Brong coalition.⁴²

An underlying economic factor in the Asante action related to the attempted seizure of Kintampo by the British and their northern allies. By 1892, the British had renewed their efforts to isolate Asante commercially. The British themselves had lost the bulk of the Volta basin trade through Krakye to the Germans. To meet the German competition in the northeast the British found it essential to expand their own trading interest in the northwest.⁴³ In the latter half of 1892, Governor Griffith brought to the notice of the Colonial Office, the flourishing market at Kintampo and its indispensability to a successful north-south trade.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in the 1890s Nkoransa was probably the only state in the Asante hinterland which had viable rubber plantations beside ivory and some gold.⁴⁵ It was in the light of these economic factors that the British considered the control of Nkoransa, particularly the town of Kintampo, imperative. Such control would ensure the unimpeded flow of the bulk of the trade between the Asante hinterland and the Gold Coast while avoiding the diversion of more trade to the German controlled areas to the east.⁴⁶

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For their part, the Asante regarded the full control of Nkoransa as critical to her economic survival and a precondition for the rebuilding of her northern empire.⁴⁷ Thus, they attacked Nkoransa to preempt the attempt by the British and the eastern Brong states to seize control of Kintampo and again block all northern trade routes to Asante commerce.⁴⁸ The Asante feared a recurrence of the devastating economic situation of the mid-1870s. Furthermore, Asante reckoned that her loss of Nkoransa would leave her totally encircled by hostile territories. Such encirclement would not only lead to the total collapse of her economy, but also her demise as an imperial power in the north. Thus, the *Nkoransahene's* defiance of Prempeh only provided the pretext for an Asante action which aimed at achieving a goal higher than just strengthening his hold on Nkoransa's allegiance.

Outcome of the Asante Attack

Although the Asante invasion suffered initial reverses it eventual succeeded. In spite of the limited assistance Nkoransa received, she managed to force the Asante army to retreat in the first encounter. In a renewed attack of 1893, however, Asante decisively defeated Nkoransa. The *Nkoransahene* and several of the Nkoransa people fled eastwards to Atebubu, but the Asante took between 2,000 and 3,000 women and children captive.⁴⁹

By 1894 the British colonial authorities in the Gold Coast had begun to move towards a 'forward policy' in terms of northward imperial expansion. In line with this policy shift, the Gold Coast colonial government authorized a Fante colonial civil servant, G.E. Ferguson, to conclude treaties with

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all the states to the north of Asante.⁵⁰ This policy was the most ambitious political step the British had taken to destroy all Asante imperial authority in her hinterland yet. On January 25, the British concluded a treaty of 'Friendship and Freedom of trade' with the *Nkoransahene*.⁵¹

This treaty gave Nkoransa partial British protection and somewhat secured her against any immediate Asante attack. In 1896, the agreement was converted to a treaty of Friendship and Protection. This guaranteed for Nkoransa, full British protection and marked the end of Nkoransa subservience to Asante.

Samori in Asante Imperial Reconstruction Politics

British legal protection for Nkoransa dealt a severe blow to Asante attempts at rebuilding her northern empire. This impelled the *Asantehene* to seek assistance from an external power strong enough to strengthen Asante militarily and to aid her in her struggle with the British over Nkoransa. In pursuit of this goal, Asante, in late 1895, entered into some sort of diplomatic relations with the powerful Sofa Chieftain, Samori Toure, who had occupied Bonduku. The *Asantehene* solicited military assistance from Samori against Nkoransa as an initial step towards the re-conquest of the north as a whole.⁵² Rumours about an impending Samorian attack on Nkoransa engendered considerable apprehension among the Nkoransa but the attack did not occur. However, the Samorian factor influenced British policy towards Asante in the last half decade of the nineteenth century. In articulation with other factors, particularly the vigorous campaign of Christian missionaries in the Gold Coast for the annexation of Asante, as a pacifist

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measure, the British launched a military campaign against Kumase in 1896.⁵³

British Offer of Kumase Rulership to the *Nkoransahene*

As a result of seething anti-Asante sentiments in Nkoransa in the mid-1890s, the Nkoransa joined the colonial militia at Kintampo to participate in the 1896 assault on Prempeh.⁵⁴ Following the arrest and detention of Prempeh in the colony, the British invited the *Nkoransahene*, Kofi Fa, to Kumase where they asked him to accept regency over the town. The British had been in close working relationship with Kofi Fa since 1894 and may have found him trustworthy.

The British may have calculated that making the *Nkoransahene* regent of Kumase would completely emasculate the Asante and kill all Asante imperial reconstruction initiatives. To the disappointment of the British, Kofi Fa declined the regency offer. He argued that he was genealogically the son of the *Asantehene* and that the succession rules in both Asante and Nkoransa forbade him from ascending his father's stool.⁵⁵ Even without a customary disqualification, the *Nkoransahene* may still have rejected the offer of regency because he knew it was impossible for him to secure the Asante allegiance he needed to function as a regent. He was probably also afraid of the resilience of the Asante. An Asante mobilization would leave him trapped in Kumase since the British troops would have withdrawn to the coast and he could not count on any friendly forces to rescue him.

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Asante and the Anti-Nkoransa Alliance

Prior to the 1896 British military action against Prempeh, Asante had succeeded in mobilizing a number of northern states into an anti-Nkoransa alliance. The main objective of this alliance was to invade and dismember Nkoransa. In Asante calculation, the success of such a scheme would deprive the British of a major anti-Asante ally in the northern area. The restoration of trade links with Salaga must also have been an important factor in the Asante scheme. Prempeh concluded negotiations with Banda and Bole to join the Anti-Nkoransa alliance.⁵⁶ He promised Banda rulers a large portion of Nkoransa territory in the event of a successful invasion.⁵⁷ Salaga soon evinced their preparedness to join the alliance. The rulers of Salaga had apparently been envious of the Kintampo market which had been competing strongly with the Salaga market since the mid-1870s.⁵⁸ The Salaga chiefs were therefore anxious to rebuild their trade relations with Asante in order to recapture their town's former position as the leading trading centre in the Asante hinterland. Prempeh's orchestrations in the north posed a serious threat to the security of Nkoransa and British efforts aimed at absolutely displacing Asante in the control of the north-south trade. This situation was vividly captured in a correspondence by the Colonial Secretary. He wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

any step which brings the Salaga nearer to the Ashantis is much deprecated...I have already represented to the Secretary of State the extreme desirability, indeed necessity, of preventing an alliance between the Salagas and Ashantis... were such an alliance effected, Kintampo would cease to exist as a market town, and the greater part of trade which now finds its way into the Gold Coast would be diverted.⁵⁹

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Had the Asante threat materialized, Nkoransa as a state, would have been obliterated. The British arrest of Prempeh, however, completely removed this threat.

Nkoransa under British Control

From 1893, the British had steadily strengthened their presence and influence in Nkoransa. After the first treaty with the Nkoransahene they stationed a garrison in Nkoransa and established a telegraph link between the town and the coast through Atebubu. In July 1896, the British stationed another detachment of twenty-five soldiers at Kintampo and distributed weapons to a number of men in Nkoransa.⁶⁰ By all these measures the British militarily fortified Nkoransa.

The colonial government's military support for Nkoransa had a dual purpose. Firstly, it was intended to secure a foothold in the near northwest to ensure the complete success of the expansion of British imperial authority well into the north. The British also found that Nkoransa would serve as a strategic military base to be used for a contemplated annexation of Asante, the one formidable force which could thwart their efforts.⁶¹

Secondly, the British wanted to secure Nkoransa against a possible attack on her by Samori whom Prempeh had been courting into a military alliance in order to be able to recover all lost Asante provinces in the north. The Gold Coast colonial government was resolutely determined to prevent any joint Prempeh-Samori imperial design from materializing since it would foil British moves to establish its political authority in the Asante hinterland.

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Asante Influence on Internal Politics in Nkoransa.

Despite strong British protection, a section of the Nkoransa government advocated support for Prempeh and the restoration of Asante political control over the polity. The supporters of Prempeh and Asante rule included such leading divisional chiefs as the *Krontihene* (second-in-command), *Nifahene* (right wing chief/commander), *Benkumhene* (left-wing chief/commander), *Adontehene* (commander of the main army) and the *Akyeamehene* (chief state spokesman).⁶² An opposing faction consisted of those political leaders who were committed to practically upholding the treaty of protection with the British. The *Nkoransahemaa* (Queen of Nkoransa), Afua Boahen, was the leader of the 'pro-British' group.

The cleavage in the government of Nkoransa stemmed from the dilemma involving the relative protective capacities of the two imperial powers in whose rivalry the state was inextricably entangled. The leaders debated over which of these powers, the British and Asante, could provide Nkoransa with maximum security and at the same time allow the people greater freedom of action.⁶³ Generally, the leaders of Nkoransa were concerned about the growing unity and strength following Prempeh's triumph in the succession crisis of the late 1880s. With the failure of a British expedition to the Wa area, owing to the defeat of Hinderson's forces by the warriors of Samori early in 1897, some of Nkoransa's leading chiefs naturally became skeptical about the dependability of British protection. In the light of the disastrous Hinderson campaign in Wa, the pro-Asante faction questioned the ability of the British to decisively defeat Asante in any military engagement, particularly in the event of Asante securing the military

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assistance of Samory. At this time, some elders anticipated an Asante attack on Nkoransa. The elders presumed that the Asante could be planning a pre-emptive attack on Nkoransa in view of the British military fortification of the state. Apart from the issues of security, some of the Nkoransa chiefs may have anticipated that British protection entailed certain hidden obligations which the people might find difficult in meeting.⁶⁴

As a result of Nkoransa's deep involvement in the Asante-British rivalry, the Nkoransa became sharply divided. Early in 1897, factional differences in Nkoransa nearly degenerated into a civil war, as tension mounted in the wake of the sudden and mysterious death of the *Nkoransahene*, Kofi Fa. On the strength of circumstantial evidence, the *Krontihene* was accused of poisoning the chief possibly to pave the way for installing a pro-Prempeh candidate.⁶⁵ British intervention in the crisis, however, averted a serious breakdown of law and order.

Nkoransa and the 1900 Asante Resistance

The crucial importance of Nkoransa in the Asante-British imperial rivalry in the north became clearly evident in the 1900 struggle for supremacy between the two powers. As is well known, Governor Hodgson's attempted seizure of the Asante Golden Stool precipitated this conflict. The Asante resistance to British attempts to dominate and supersede her as an imperial force began in Kumase and quickly spread to other towns including those of the northern districts of metropolitan area. One of the northern Asante towns which rebelled with Kumase was Sekere Dumase or Sekyedumase, situated a few kilometers to the south of Nkoransa. The outbreak of the rebellion put Nkoransa's allegiance to the British to a severe

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test. Was she to join the revolting Asante or remain on the side of the British and oppose the rebellion? The pro-Asante group had won the new *Nkoransahene*, Kwame Kudom, to its side and so he favoured joining Asante in militarily resisting the British imperial domination. Kudom had attended the ceremony of the first visit of Governor Hodgson to Kumase at which the Governor arrogantly demanded the golden stool. Thus, while Kudom was still in Kumase, he sent orders to his war chiefs in Nkoransa to join in a revolt against the British.⁶⁶ The Asante chiefs, in fact, compelled Kudom to swear an oath as a demonstration of his commitment to joining the Asante resistance.⁶⁷

In spite of the *Nkoransahene*'s command, the war party failed to carry Nkoransa into the rebellion. The people of neighbouring Sekyere Dumase, already up in arms, came to Nkoransa to try to pressurize the *Nkoransahene* to order his men into action. But the peace party, led by the *Nkoransahemaa*, was able to neutralize the initiative of the militant faction. The Queen intelligently exploited her prerogative to manipulate the war provisions of the Nkoransa constitution in favour of her party. For instance, while the *Nkoransahene* had not returned from Kumase, she managed to prevent the convening of a full state council meeting, which alone could have decided to take the state to war.⁶⁸ Even after the return of the *Nkoransahene*, the Queen and her party were able to hold out against the fiery agitation of the 'war-mongering' faction for some time. Later, the war party seemed to have won considerable support, particularly from the young men and there was every indication that Nkoransa was going to join the resistance against the British.

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The young men had indeed loaded their guns and were waiting for an order to join the soldiers of Sekyere Dumase for action. At this point, British troops which had been marching from Gambaga to Kumase under the command of Major Morris to put down the Asante resistance to British authority arrived at Nkoransa.⁶⁹ Earlier, the *Nkorasahemaa* who had been overwhelmed by the militant action of the war party had sent a distress message to British officials at Kintampo. The *Ohemaa*, whose supporters had dwindled in number, could not hold on to their opposition to war much longer. As soon as the British troops arrived at Nkoransa, they fired a maxim gun to a nearby tree to demonstrate the power of the British.⁷⁰ This frightened and broke the spirit of the pro-Asante group. The young men, therefore, gave up the idea of joining the Asante resistance.

The final stand of Nkoransa was one of the decisive factors that determined the outcome of the 1900 Anglo-Asante conflict. Nkoransa's failure to join the Asante resistance contributed to the success of the British in suppressing the uprising and, eventually, destroying Asante imperial authority and bringing the Asante themselves under British imperial domination.

One can argue that control of Nkoransa during the 1900 Asante-British conflict over imperial superiority was strategically important to both the British and the Asante. To the British, the co-operation of the Nkoransa would deprive Asante of a strong ally which alone could prevent the formation of a complete ring of enemies around her in order to cut off all external help to the Kumase imperial regime. Owing to this, the British made strenuous efforts to ensure that

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Nkoransa remained loyal to them or, at least, maintained neutrality in the conflict

On the other hand, Asante saw the support of Nkoransa as vital in the sense that it would cut off the rear reinforcements the British would get from the north. In fact, the war party in Nkoransa had been contemplating seizing the garrison and an important supply depot at Kintampo. Had they been able to do this, British efforts would have been seriously jeopardized. Reinforcements from further north may not have passed through to reach Kumase. The supplies could also have gone to strengthen the Asante militarily. But Asante failed to win the support of Nkoransa and this gave the British a crucial advantage.

Conclusion.

The intense Anglo-Asante imperial competition for the control of the northwest during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, stemmed from a struggle for the exercise of maximum control over the commerce of that part of the country. Nkoransa, the only state in the northern area of Ghana to remain loyal Asante following the British defeat of Asante in 1874 and the consequent collapse of the northern empire of Asante, played a decisive role in this economically motivated imperial competition.

Asante's resolve in this rivalry was to maintain its hold on its only remaining northern province, re-conquer the lost ones and maintain her dominance of the north-south commerce in Ghana. On the other hand, the British were intent on breaking Asante hold on Nkoransa, preventing the Asante from regaining its lost territories and thereby permanently isolate

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Asante economically. The British were, at this time, determined to end all Asante political and commercial superiority and replace the Asante as the controllers of the north-south transit trade in Ghana. But the British imperial designs in the Gold Coast hinterland, particularly the north, also represented efforts to win in an imperial competition with the French and Germans in which each power was determined to direct the flow of most of the trade in the Gold Coast hinterland to its sphere of influence.

Around the middle 1890s, British imperial ambition compelled her to shift from her position of non-interference in the affairs of the Gold Coast hinterland to one of vigorous expansion. This relatively aggressive policy involved the extension of British political control deep into the interior. This policy was bound to generate friction between the British and Asante who, as the pre-existing imperial power, had politically dominated its hinterland over a century and a half and would not countenance any encroachment by foreign imperialist powers on its territorial possessions.

Nkoransa's involvement in this imperial rivalry was so deep that it generated fissiparous conditions in its government. Its ruling group, thus, became split into pro-Asante and pro-British factions. The intensity of the tension associated with factional groupings linked to external power sources seriously compromised unity in the state and only the strong hand of British averted a civil strife.

The Asante resistance to British attempts at totally unmaking their imperial construction in 1900 revealed the crucial importance of Nkoransa to both powers in their contending imperialisms. With the outbreak of the conflict both

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the British and the Asante realized the necessity to annex the loyalty or support of Nkoransa and they vigorously solicited it, although the British succeeded in forcibly wringing this loyalty from the Nkoransa.

There is no doubt that the Hobsonian interpretation of imperialism is applicable to the Anglo-Asante imperial rivalry in the northwest. Asante was resolutely determined to cling to her hold on Nkoransa to, at least, maintain the only outlet for her northbound exports as well as to control a substantial part of the north-south transit trade nearly all of which she had controlled prior to 1874. On the other hand, the British wanted to cut off and completely exclude Asante from this trade and stem the diversion of a substantial portion of the trade to areas controlled by other European powers.

In seeking to edge out each other in the control of the north- south trade and secure dominance, both imperial powers recognized that it was important to exercise political control over the states in the northern area. In this regard, Nkoransa, which acknowledged the power of both the British and the Asante and occupied a strategic location in the north, became a pawn in the hands of the two powers. In their struggle for greater economic advantages, the Asante and the British all sought to achieve territorial enlargement by first gaining the political control of Nkoransa.

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