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ASANTESEM:

The Asante Collective Biography Project Bulletin No. 10, January 1979

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DATING ASANTEHENE OSEI KWADWO'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BANNA

Larry Yarak

The voluminous eighteenth century despatches sent by the Dutch Director-General at Elmina to the various administrative bodies of the West India Company in Holland, are a particularly useful source for establishing a more detailed chronology of events in Asante. Once such despatch from Director-General Pieter Woortman (an old Gold Coast hand who died at Elmina in 1780 at the age of 81!) allows us confidently to date Asantehene Osei Kwadwo's successful campaign against the Banna, an event which has not hitherto been accurately located in time. It occurred in the dry season of 1773-1774. The despatch in question is dated Elmina, 16 February 1774.

...In my Missive to Your Excellencies dated 12 January last, I had the honor to inform you that the Slave Trade at that time was languid. But now I am able to communicate to Your Excellencies that it has since improved markedly, and that there is presently a good trade here and at the Forts on the leeward coast.

That the trade here at the Chief Castle has now for some time been better than usual is principally the result of the King of Adsiantijn having marched to war against, and defeated, the Benda. The King has sent to us a considerable number of the Slaves captured by him with two of his Envoys (*Afgezanten*). These I have purchased...¹

A subsequent report from Woortman, dated 2 April 1774, indicates that the two envoys mentioned had been sent to Elmina before the Asantehene had returned to Kumase:

...Finally I must inform Your Excellencies of the present state of the Slave Trade. It is my heart-felt wish to be able to say something positive to Your Excellencies, but this is impossible. However it is my hope that some Assiantijnen will shortly make their appearance, since according to rumors the King Zaaŷ has now returned to his country. And according to the assurances given by the [envoys] sent here by him about two months ago, they would return here within three months, which I hope will occur...²

Woortman's wish was fulfilled, for on 13 November 1774 he was able to report, with regard to the slave trade, "that there is nothing to complain about" other than high prices. The renewed trade Woortman ascribed directly to the appearance of Asante traders who "from time to time...send a group of Slaves in this direction, but no Gold or Ivory..."³

Footnotes

1. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Archief van de Tweede West Indische Compagnie, No. 496: Despatch P. Woortman to Amsterdam Presidial Chamber, dd. Elmina, 16 February 1774, pp. 834-835.

2. *Ibid.*, Despatch P. Woortman to Amsterdam Presidial Chamber, dd. Elmina, 5 April 1774, pp. 920-921.

3. *Ibid.*, No. 497: Despatch P. Woortman to Amsterdam Presidial Chamber, dd. Elmina, 13 November 1774, p. 247.