



History of Ghana

Early History

The earliest recorded human habitation within the boundaries of modern Ghana, dates back to circa 10000 BC on the Oti River. The oldest date for pottery at the Stone Age site near Accra is 4000 BC.

Empire of Ancient Ghana

The empire of ancient Ghana is not geographically, ethnically, or in any other way related to modern Ghana. Ancient Ghana would have been found 400 miles northwest of modern Ghana, in the areas now known as Northern Senegal and Southern Mauritania.

Ancient Ghana came into existence when, at the start of the first millennium, a number of clans of the Soninke people, a Mande speaking people living in the region bordering the Sahara, came together under the leadership of Dinga Cisse. It is likely that the Soninke was formed in response to the attacks from nomadic raiders suffering from drought and seeking new territory.

Ancient Ghana derived its power and wealth from gold, and the introduction of the camel increased their ability to transport goods. The majority of the knowledge of Ghana comes from Arab writers who reported that the Soninke people also sold slaves, salt, and copper in exchange for textiles, beads, and finished goods. Their capital city, Kumbi Saleh, was built on the edge of the Sahara and quickly became the most dynamic and important terminus of the Saharan trade routes.

The wealth of ancient Ghana is mythically explained in the tale of Bida, the black snake. The snake demanded an annual sacrifice in return for guaranteeing prosperity in the Kingdom. Each year a virgin was offered as a sacrifice, until one year, the fiancé of the sacrificial virgin rescued her. Feeling cheated, Bida took revenge on the region - a terrible drought took hold of Ghana and gold mining began to decline. There is actually archaeological evidence confirming that until the 12th century, sheep, cows, and even goats were abundant in the region.

While numerous reasons are given for the decline of ancient Ghana, perhaps the greatest factors were that the King lost his trading monopoly at the same time the drought began, resulting in long-term damaging effects on the land and its ability to sustain cattle and cultivation.

Pre-Colonial Period

By the end of the 16th century, most ethnic groups constituting modern Ghanaian population had settled in their present locations. Migrations from the north and east to present day Ghana resulted in part from the formation and disintegration of a series of large states in the western Sudan, the Soninke Kingdom of Ancient Ghana being one of them. While “Ghana” was the title of the King, the Arabs applied the term to the King, the capital, and the state.

Although Ghana succumbed to attacks by its neighbors in the 11th century, its name and reputation endured. (In 1957, when the leaders of the former British colony of the Gold Coast sought an appropriate name for their newly independent state, they named their new country after ancient Ghana. The choice was more than merely symbolic, as modern Ghana was equally famed for its wealth and trade in gold as ancient Ghana.)

The trans-Saharan trade that contributed to the expansion of Kingdoms in the western Sudan also led to the development of contacts with regions in northern modern Ghana and in the forest to the south. This growth of trade stimulated the early Akan states located on the trade route to the goldfields in the forest zone to the south. The forest itself was thinly populated, but Akan speaking people began to move into it toward the end of the 15th century with the arrival of crops from Southeast Asia and the New World that could be adapted to forest conditions. These new crops included sorghum, bananas, and cassava.

It can be said, based on oral traditions and archaeological evidence, that the Mole-Dagbani states of Mamprusi, Dagomba, and Gonja, as well as the Mossi states of Yatenga and Wagadugu, were among the earliest Kingdoms to emerge in modern Ghana. They were well established by the close of the 16th century.

Although the rulers themselves were not usually Muslims, they either brought with them or welcomed Muslims as scribes and medicine men. Muslims also played a significant role in the trade that linked southern with northern Ghana. Muslim influence has been recorded even among the Asante in the south. Although most Ghanaians retained their traditional beliefs, the Muslims brought with them skills, such as writing, and introduced certain beliefs and practices that became part of the cultures in which they were settled.

Of the components that would later make up Ghana, the state of Asante had the most cohesive history and would exercise the greatest influence. The Asante are members of the Twi-speaking branch of the Akan people. Before the mid-17th century, the Asante began an expansion under a series of militant leaders that led to the domination of surrounding peoples and to the formation of the most powerful states of the central forest zone. At the end of the 17th century, Osei Tutu became Asantehene – King of Asante. Under his rule the confederacy of Asante states was transformed into an empire with its capital in Kumasi. Osei Tutu was strongly influenced by the high priest, who, as traditions says, caused a stool of gold to descend from the sky to seal the union of Asante states. Stools already functioned as traditional symbols of chieftainship, but the Golden Stool of Asante represented the united spirit of all the allied states, establishing a dual allegiance that superimposed the confederacy over the individual component states. (The Golden Stool remains a respected national symbol of the

traditional past and figures extensively in Asante ritual.) By the mid-18th century, Asante was a highly organized state.

Early European Contact and the Slave Trade

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in 1471. Under the patronage of Prince Henry the Navigator, they had reached the area that was to become known as the Gold Coast. (Europeans knew of the area as the source of gold that reached Muslim North Africa by trade routes across the Sahara.) In 1482 they built their first permanent trading post on the western coast of present-day Ghana. This fortress, Elmina Castle, was built to protect the Portuguese from European competitors, and still stands today.

The establishment of plantations in the New World during the 1500s increased the demand for slaves, and the west coast of Africa became the principal source. The seemingly insatiable market and the substantial profits to be gained from slave trade attracted adventurers from all over Europe.

The Portuguese position on the Gold Coast remained secure for almost a century, leasing the right to establish trading posts to individuals or companies. During the 17th and 18th centuries, adventurers – first Dutch, later English, Danish, and Swedish – were granted licenses by their governments to trade overseas. They built fortified trading stations on the Gold Coast and challenged the Portuguese.

The early struggle between the Dutch and the Portuguese resulted in Portugal's loss of Elmina in 1642. The Portuguese then left the Gold Coast permanently. The next 150 years were characterized by change and uncertainty, local conflicts, and diplomatic maneuvers by Europeans trying to dominate the area. Both the Dutch and the British formed companies to advance their African ventures and to protect their coastal establishments. The Dutch West India Company operated throughout most of the 18th century; the British African Company of Merchants was founded in 1750.

The Danes remained until 1850. After they withdrew from the Gold Coast, the British gained possession of all Dutch forts, making them the dominant European power on the Gold Coast.

The volume of slave trade in West Africa grew rapidly from its start around 1500 to its peak in the 18th century. It is estimated, that roughly 6.3 million slaves were shipped from West Africa to North and South America, about 4.5 million of which were sent between 1701 and 1810. Perhaps 5,000 a year were shipped from the Gold Coast alone. The demographic impact of slave trade was probably substantially greater than the number actually enslaved. This is because a significant number of Africans perished during slaving raids or while in captivity awaiting transshipment. All nations with an interest in West Africa participated in the slave trade.

The growth of anti-slavery sentiment among Europeans made only slow progress. Although individual clergymen condemned the slave trade as early as the 17th century, the church did little to further early efforts to abolish it. The Quakers publicly declared themselves against slavery as early as 1727. Later in the century, the Danes stopped trading slaves; Sweden and the Netherlands soon followed.

In the United States the importation of slaves was outlawed in 1807. In the same year, Britain outlawed slave trade by its citizens and began a campaign to stop the international slave trade. These efforts, however, were not successful until the 1860s because of the continued demand for plantation labor in the New World.

Because it took decades to end the slave trade, historians doubt that it was the humanitarian impulse that inspired the abolitionist movement. They argue that Europe abolished the slave trade because its profitability was undermined by the Industrial Revolution. Mass employment caused by the new industrial machinery, the need for new raw materials, and European competition for markets for finished goods are seen as the real factors that brought an end to the trade in human cargo.

Slave Castles

At the height of the slave trade there were over sixty European castles, forts, and trading posts on a stretch of coast less than 300 miles long. Thirty of them can still be seen today - one of Ghana's most distinctive features

Elmina Castle and Cape Coast Castle are both well preserved and open for tourists to visit. The Smithsonian Institute set up a Museum of Slaving in the later one, which is visited by an increasing number of African Americans – the descendants of slaves in search of their roots. Other strongholds are used as police stations, prisons, post offices, lighthouses, schools, or official residences.

Ghana's slaving past was long regarded as too sensitive to even discuss, but is now becoming a lively issue. A group of Ghanaians, led by lawyers and tribal chiefs, have convened an Africa-wide meeting to seek "retribution and compensation for the crime of slavery". They were inspired by the successes for Jews whose property was confiscated by the Nazis and have called on Western bankers and governments to compensate them by lifting the burden of Third World debt.

Colonial Rule in Ghana

In several important ways the British colonial system in West Africa differed from the neighboring French pattern. The entire French Africa was placed under one administration with headquarters in Dakar. Great Britain, however, set up a colonial system aimed at local self-determination. Most likely because its four territories in West Africa were each separated by non-British possessions, the British instituted four colonies separate and independent of one another. At the head of the colonial administration in Ghana was a governor, appointed by and representative of the British Crown. There were two types of local government: town councils, and native administration. Town councils were not only created for Cape Coast and Accra, but also for Sekondi. The presidents of the councils were also the white district commissioners of the area concerned.

In the time before colonialism, the indigenous ruler occupied a unique position. He was the religious, political, and judicial head of the kingdom, the spirit and embodiment of the nation, and the custodian of the people's ancestral cultural heritage. The British colonial system made him the central figure for local administration. This system referred to as "indirect rule" was introduced in Ghana under Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg. Chiefs

were granted powers of controlling local tribunals, with limited jurisdiction relating to customary and testamentary matters, and of making by-laws, as long as they did not contradict the British concept of law.

Guggisberg's eight years of administration (1919-1927) were the most revolutionary in the development of the country in the colonial days. He linked the existing railroad at New Tafo and Kumase, to boost the cocoa and timber production in the Eastern Region and Asante. He also established Achimota College and built the Korle Bu Hospital, both in Accra. (Prior to his time, formal education was run mainly by Christian churches.) Guggisberg also extended the medical service to areas other than big cities, to cater for the indigenous population.

A Native Authority Ordinance passed in 1944 introduced a revolution in respect of the position of the traditional rulers. Native Authorities were to be appointed by the government, and members remained in office at the pleasure of the governor. Also, actions taken by the native Authorities could be nullified by the government.

Independence

The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was the first nationalist movement with the aim of self-government "in the shortest possible time". Founded in August 1947 by educated Africans, the organization called for the replacement of Chiefs on the Legislative Council with educated persons. It also criticized the government for its failure to solve problems, such as unemployment and inflation, at the end of the war. UGCC members were conservative in the sense that they did not seek drastic or revolutionary change. This would soon change.

Educated in the United States and London, Kwame Nkrumah created a Convention People's Party (CPP) in June 1949. Calling for "self-government now", the party leadership identified itself more with ordinary working people than with the UGCC and its intelligentsia. Nkrumah's style and promises appealed directly to the majority of workers, farmers, and youths.

The constitution of 1951 gave the Executive Council a large majority of African ministers. It also created an assembly: half of the elected members of which were to come from the towns and rural districts, and half from the traditional councils, including, for the first time, the Northern Territories. Although this constitution was a huge step forward, executive power remained in British hands. In February 1951, the first elections were held for the Legislative Assembly under the new constitution. Nkrumah, although in jail then, won an impressive victory with a two-thirds majority. The governor released him and offered him a position similar to that of a prime minister. Nkrumah accepted. During the first few years of his term, the government was gradually transformed into a full parliamentary system.

After the elections in 1954, a new party, the Asante-based National Liberation Movement (NLM) was formed. It advocated for a federal form of government, with increased powers for the various regions.

In August 1956, Ghana passed a motion authorizing the government to request independence within the British Commonwealth. On March 6, 1957, the former British

colony of the Gold Coast became the independent state of Ghana. Nkrumah continued as prime minister of the first independent African country south of the Sahara. The Queen of England was represented in the former colony by a governor general.

Nkrumah Ghana

In 1964, Ghana officially became a single-party state, and an act of parliament ensured that there would be only one candidate for president. Nkrumah had been re-elected president for less than a year, when members of the National Liberation Council (NLC) overthrew the CPP government in a military coup on February 24, 1966. Nkrumah took asylum in Guinea, where he remained until his death in 1972. The military coup was seen as a nationalist one, because it liberated the country from Nkrumah's dictatorship.

Despite the vast political changes that were brought about by the overthrow of Nkrumah, many problems remained. There were underlying ethnic and regional divisions within the society, for example. New leaders faced the challenge of forging disparate personal, ethnic, and sectional interests into a real Ghanaian nation.

Ghana After 1966

The leaders of the coup that overthrew Nkrumah opened the country's borders and its prison gates to allow the return of all opponents of Nkrumah. The NLC assumed executive power. By the election of August 1969, five parties had been organized. The major contenders were the Progress Party (PP) and the National Alliance of Liberals (NAL). Kofi A. Busia, the PP leader, became Prime Minister. Despite popular support, the Busia government fell victim to an army coup within twenty-seven months. The crucial causes were related to the country's continuing economic difficulties, such as the dramatic decline in income from cocoa exports – half of the country's foreign currency earnings. Reasons for this included foreign competition, a lack of understanding of free-market forces, and the smuggling of crops into Côte d'Ivoire.

A new government that took power in 1981 was the eighth in the fifteen years since the fall of Nkrumah. In 1983 a first phase of an Economic Recovery Program with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was introduced. Jerry Rawlings, the chairman of the council at that time, adopted conservative economic policies, abolished subsidies and price controls, and privatized many state enterprises, devaluing the currency.

In 1993, Ghana's Fourth Republic was inaugurated with Jerry Rawlings as president. The year after, there were ethnic clashes between the Konkomba and the Nanumba in the Northern Region over land ownership, which led to the killing of one thousand people and the displacement of another 150,000. As this ethnic violence was renewed in 1995, the government imposed curfews in the Northern Region. That same year, President Rawlings visited the United States, the first such visit by a Ghanaian head-of-state in more than thirty years.

In 1996, Rawlings was re-elected president for a second term.

Ghana in the 21st Century

In 2001, opposition leader John Kufuor was sworn in as the new president. In that same year, petrol prices rose by 60% after the government decided to remove fuel subsidies. In April 2001, Ghana accepted a debt relief as designed by the World Bank and the IMF.

Economy

By West African standards, Ghana has a diverse and rich resource base. The country is mainly agricultural. Cash crops consist primarily of cocoa and cocoa products, which provide about two-thirds of export revenues; timber products; coconuts and other palm products; shea nuts, which produce edible fat; and coffee. Ghana has also established a successful program of non-traditional agricultural products for export, including pineapples, cashews, and pepper. Cassava, yams, plantains, corn, rice, peanuts, millet, and sorghum are basic foods. Fish, poultry, and meat are also important dietary staples.

Minerals that are produced and exported include gold, diamonds, manganese ore, and bauxite. The only commercial oil well in Ghana was closed after seven years.

Ghana's industrial base is relatively advanced compared to many other African countries. Import-substitution industries include textiles, steel, tires, oil refining, flour milling, beverages, tobacco, simple consumer goods, and car, truck, and bus assembly. Tourism has become one of Ghana's largest foreign income earners.

Traditional Religion

Despite the presence of Islam and Christianity, traditional religions have retained their influence in Ghana. There is the belief in a supreme being - referred to by the Akan as Nyame, or by the Ewe as Mawu - which is thought of as removed from daily religious life and therefore not directly worshipped. Other, lesser gods take "residency" in streams, rivers, trees, and mountains. These gods are perceived as intermediaries between the supreme being and society. For all Ghanaian ethnic groups, the spirit world is considered to be as real as the world of the living, both being linked by mutual relationships and responsibilities. Thus, the actions of the living can affect gods or spirits of the departed.

The ancestors are believed to be the most immediate link with the spiritual world. They are thought to be constantly near, observing every thought and action of the living. To ensure that a natural balance is maintained between the world of the sacred and that of the profane, the roles of the chief within the state, family elders in relation to the lineage, and the priest within society, are crucial.

Because many diseases are believed to have spiritual causes, traditional priests sometimes act as doctors or herbalists. Shrine visitation is strongest among the uneducated and in rural communities. This is not to say, however, that the educated Ghanaian has totally abandoned tradition.

Language

There are around 100 ethno linguistic groups in Ghana, all further divided into numerous cultural and linguistic units. English is the official language used in government, large-scale businesses, national media, and schools beyond the primary level. Other languages used in radio and television broadcasting are Akan, Ewe, Ga, Nzema, Dagbane, and Hausa.

The important linguistic groups are as follows:

- **Akans**, which include the **Fanti** along the coast and the **Ashanti** in the forest region north of the coast;
- **Guans**, on the plains of the Volta River;
- **Ga** and **Ewe** speaking people of the south and south-east;
- **Moshi-Dagomba** speaking tribes of Northern and Upper Region.

Tribes of Ghana

AKAN:

- Bono
- Denkyira
- Twifo
- Heman
- Asen
- Asanta
- Fante
- Awowin
- Nzima
- Sehwi
- Wasa
- Adanse
- Akwanmu
- Akyem

NON-AKAN:

- Ga-Adangbe
- Ewe
- Mole-Dagbani
- Mamprusi
- Mossi
- Gonja