

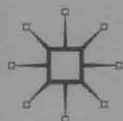
POWER AND STATE FORMATION IN WEST AFRICA

Appolonia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century



PIERLUIGI VALSECCHI

Translated by Allan Cameron



POWER AND STATE FORMATION
IN WEST AFRICA

APPOLONIA FROM THE SIXTEENTH
TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Pierluigi Valsecchi

Translated by Allan Cameron



palgrave
macmillan



POWER AND STATE FORMATION IN WEST AFRICA

Copyright © Pierluigi Valsecchi, 2011.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2011 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States – a division of

St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-0-230-11776-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Valsecchi, Pierluigi, 1956–

Power and state formation in West Africa : Appolonia from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century / Pierluigi Valsecchi.

p. cm.

A longer version of this book was first published in Italian by Carocci Editore in 2002 under title: I signori di Appolonia.

ISBN 978-0-230-11776-1 (hardback)

1. Ghana—History—To 1957. 2. Ghana—History—Danish Settlements, 1659–1850. 3. Ashanti (Kingdom)—History—18th century. 4. Ghana—Commerce—Europe. 5. Europe—Commerce—Ghana. 6. Slave trade—Ghana—History. 7. Nzima (African people)—History. I. Valsecchi, Pierluigi, 1956– Signori di Appolonia. II. Title.

DT511.V349 2011

966.7'01—dc23

2011026992

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by MPS Limited, A Macmillan Company

First edition: January 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

PRIMARY SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

The interviews carried out during field research have been fully explained in the notes.

The archive documents (full information provided in the notes) were taken from the following collections:

AN-OM	Archives Nationales, Section Outre-Mer, Paris, France
ANTT CC	Arquivo Nacional De Tôrre Do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico, Lisbon, Portugal
ARA	Algemeen Rjks Archief, The Hague, Netherlands
ARA AANW	Aanwinsten
ARA NBKG	Nederlandsche Bezittingen Ter Kuste
ARA OWIC	Van Guinea
ARA RKWI	Oude West Indische Compagnie
ARA SG	Raad Der Koloniën In West-Indië
ARA VEL	Staten Generaal
ARA VWIS	Verzameling Kaarten
ARA WIC	Verzameling Verspreide West-Indische Stukken (Tweede) West Indische Compagnie
BM	British Museum, London
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers. House of Commons
FC	Furley Collection, Balme Library, Legon, Ghana
GAR	Gemeente Archief, Rotterdam, Netherlands
KITLV	Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal, Land En Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands
PF SOCG	Archive "De Propaganda Fide," Scritture Originali Riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali, Rome, Vatican City
PRAAD	Public Records and Archives Administration Department (ex-National Archives Of Ghana – Nag)

PRAAD ADM	Administrative Records, Accra
PRAAD WRG	Western Regional Group, Sekondi
SGI	Società Geografica Italiana, Rome, Italy
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, United Kingdom (Ex-public Record Office-PRO)
TNA CO	Colonial Office Papers
TNA MP	Map Room
TNA T	Treasury Papers

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A longer version of this book was first published in Italian by Carocci Editore in 2002. I owe a debt of gratitude to the French Institute for Research in Africa, IFRA-Ibadan, for funding this English translation, and to Gérard Chouin, Claude Hélène Perrot, and Gérard Pescheux for encouraging and supporting this undertaking.

Many people have helped in the research for and then the writing of this work, but I am particularly indebted to Giampaolo Calchi Novati, Allan Cameron, Gianna Da Re, Fabio Viti, Virginia Vicario, and the late Cristiano Grottanelli. They were involved in this project from its inception to its completion. I also thank Alice Bellagamba, Roberto Bizzocchi, Stefano Boni, Thomas C. McCaskie, Anna Maria Medici, Claude-Hélène Perrot, John Thornton, and the late Bernardo Bernardi, for their insightful comments. Crucial contributions to my work in terms of understanding and interpretation were provided by the late Mōke Mieza (Thomas Morkeh Mensah), Kanra Attia Aka (J. S. Ackah), Daniel Atumo Amihyia, Bulu, Enokpole Ekyi, Ezonle Kanra, and Mensah Nyanzu and by Martin Buah, Nyameke Kwakyi, James Y. Ackah, *kōmenle* Bile Kofi, Adayi Quarm, and *nana* Tanoe Nyako (J. Ndabela). Invaluable help was given by my friends John Ackah, Franco Conzato, Carla Ghezzi, Sonia Grmela, Justice Nyanzu Mensah, and Teophilus Sapati, and the late Joe Nkrumah. I would like to thank *awulae* Annor Adjaye III (Western Nzema), *awulae* Agyevi Kwame II (Nsanye), *nana* Paniena Ackah III, *nana* Kwesi Homiah III, *nana* Takilika IV, and *nana* Nwia Azane IV for having assisted my research into Nzema. Many others proved helpful in fulfilling this task through the exchange of ideas, comments, useful pointers, and active assistance. I refer in particular to the late René Baesjou and Albert Van Dantzig, and to Alessandro Catastini, Antonino Colajanni, Armando Cutolo, Berardino Palumbo, Pepe Roberts, Gianvittorio Signorotto, Pier Giorgio Solinas, Giovanni Tocci, and Aarian Van Eijk. I also thank the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the archivists and staff of the National Archives of Ghana,

Accra and the Western Regional Archives, Sekondi. This study would not have been possible without the support of the NGO Ricerca e Cooperazione and the following Italian institutions: the Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche (CNR), the Ministero dell'università e della ricerca (MIUR), and the University of Urbino.

NOTE TO THE READERS

The spelling of the names of people and places (in normal lettering) and other Nzema words and expressions (in italics) generally follows the convention recognized and adopted by the Bureau of Ghana Languages. The same is true of terms in other local languages. Where, as often occurs, the current spelling (including the one used on maps) differs from this convention, other variants in use will be shown in brackets after the first mention: for example, Benyinli (Beyin). Personal names of people interviewed have retained the form provided by the person in question or in general use (e.g., Annor Adjaye rather than Anɔ Agyevi, and Morkeh rather than Mɔke) and the same rule has been applied to "stool names" (regnal names) of chiefs and other titles in use either currently or in colonial times. Indeed the spelling used in centuries gone-by and established through bureaucratic convention and the registration of births and deaths differs considerably from standard linguistic usage. The names of historical people and places, when they can be clearly and credibly ascertained, have been put into modern spelling, followed by historical variants in brackets after the first mention, for example, Awiane (*Abiani*, *Abyani*, etc.), otherwise they have been kept in their original spelling (followed by any variants) and written in italics, for example, *Maqua Affoo Ausy* (*Maquafo Ausy*).

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vi
Primary Sources and Abbreviations	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Note to the Readers	xi
Introduction	1
1 History and Identity	19
2 The Regional Landscape	41
3 Politics and Trade	59
4 Changes in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century	93
5 Warning Signs of a Shifting Balance	119
6 Big Men, Imperial Dynamics, and Local Powers	139
7 The New <i>Maanle</i> of Appolonia: Development of a Network	167
8 The Framework of Hegemony	199
Notes	221
Bibliography	281
Index	293

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1	Nzema in the regional setting	26
1.2	Major stools and present days local government districts	28
1.3	The Axim "commonwealth" in the seventeenth century	33
2.1	Detail of the western Gold Coast from the map of L. Teixeira and S. Rovelasco	43
2.2	The movements of the Ewuturo	51
2.3	The Ankobra and Tano river basins in the mid-seventeenth century	56
3.1	Portuguese "jurisdiction" on the western Gold Coast in the early seventeenth century	77
3.2	Dutch "jurisdictional" claims in the mid-seventeenth century	90
4.1	The principal political centers in the second half of the seventeenth century	99
7.1	The succession to the <i>ebia</i> of Appolonia. Outline of relations based on kinship and alliances	197
8.1	Map of Appolonia of 1766	206
8.2	Map of Appolonia of 1766 (detail)	211
8.3	The "Kingdom of Appolonia" in the late eighteenth century	212

INTRODUCTION



This book examines the history of the ancient Gold Coast in West Africa between the early sixteenth century and the second half of the eighteenth. It mainly focuses on the western extreme of the Gold Coast, the region known as Nzema, which today has been divided between Ghana and the Ivory Coast. In linguistic, cultural, historical, and political terms, Nzema is part of the Akan world, a larger formation of societies sharing many common elements.¹

I will examine the logic behind the manner in which political entities in the Nzema area were structured territorially, as well as the formation of ruling groups and aspects of their political, economic, and military actions. Our attention will be both on what we might call the local level and on the more general context of this part of West Africa. Such an approach is almost obligatory when it comes to writing about the Akan world. To ignore the specific and autonomous features of each component of the Akan world would be just as restrictive and misleading as to isolate each component from its wider context in which it was such an integral part, and specific situations provide us with opportunities to compare a set of general problems in the history of this part of Africa.

Hence this book is an attempt to fill a gap in our historical knowledge. During the second half of the twentieth century, historians showed a great deal of interest in Akan states and societies, particularly the great political structure built by the Asante in the eighteenth century and the composite societies of the coastal centers that had early European presences. The results of their work have been very fruitful. In many ways, this subject was one of the main training grounds for the newly born sub-Saharan historiography.² However, the emphasis on the great political, military, and economic centers was not counterbalanced with similar attention to the dynamics of the numerous entities that made up a complex and very particular “periphery,” although the emphasis on the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries was partially counterbalanced by a few studies into more ancient periods both of a general nature³ and on specific local and subregional situations.⁴

Nzema is an area that has been visited and revisited by anthropologists, particularly Italian ones,⁵ but ignored by historians with very few exceptions.⁶ This lack of interest is all the more remarkable when you consider Nzema's seaboard location and the early appearance of Europeans on its shores, which means there is a considerable amount of written sources of some antiquity compared to neighboring areas (especially those situated toward the interior). We have written records on this area going back to the end of the fifteenth century, although these are isolated, sketchy, and often indirect.

Nzema runs more or less from Cape Three Points, in the east, to the coastal lagoons formed by the Bia and Tano (Nz. Tanoë) rivers, in the west, and is cut in two unequal and distinct parts by the final reaches of the Ankobra River (Nz. Siane). Historically the main center of the western section was the hilly coast known as Cape Appolonia and its immediate hinterland, the upper basin of the Amanzule River. An important political entity was built in this area in the first half of the eighteenth century and lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. This "Kingdom of Appolonia," as the Europeans called it, is well known to anyone who has the least knowledge of the literature on the precolonial Gold Coast.⁷ This name has been adopted in this book in preference to *Amanabea* or *Amelhayia*, given that we only have reliable records of the latter dating from the nineteenth century (cf. PARA. 1.1) and for the moment we have no information on its use in the eighteenth century.

This study focuses on the western part of Nzema (between the Ankobra and the Tano), but it is worth emphasizing that it also gives weight to a determinedly regional analysis and pays careful attention to historical processes that clearly went beyond the boundaries not only of the area in question and its constituent human and political entities but also the larger units of Nzema and the Gold Coast, and even the black-African world in the strictest sense of the term. Africans and Europeans were in different ways inextricably involved in the events that from the late fifteenth century led this region to play its role in the theater of commercial, military, and political relations relating to the origins of the great Atlantic system. It follows then that the reference to the "powers" of Appolonia does not signify a precise provenance and identity, but rather various shades of meaning and entities differentiated by particular historical moments, which included African ruling groups and supporters or retainers of European

commercial interests. They acted within a local context of social relations founded on a relatively high degree of integration (suffice it to recall the network of matrimonial alliances and the role of the Eurafrican community).

Anyone who reads this book in the expectation of a historical monograph on the formation of a "black" precolonial African state or an ethnic account of the Nzema will therefore be disappointed. It is practically impossible to separate the history of the area from the wider phenomenology affecting the whole surrounding region in a constant and uniform manner, such as trade between the coast and the interior, the European presence, colonial aspirations and rivalries, the establishment of large polities in the forest region, migrations, and the continued interaction between various groups, whether ruling or not, within a macroregional network. While events concerning area and groupings that came to make up the "Kingdom of Appolonia" during the eighteenth century obviously dominate the foreground of this work, there is also systematic analysis of wider contexts of which specific situations in the area are simply components among many others. Moreover I have consciously attempted to avoid a deterministic reconstruction of history as a backward projection of later realities (the existence of a state or ethnicity in a given historical moment used to demonstrate their inevitable historical roots). Indeed there is no single definition of Nzema or Appolonia stretching back into the past that clearly delineates it. For instance, they are not the product of an eighteenth-century political configuration, but rather complex historical constructs whose contributing factors changed over time and often went on to become part of separate contexts outside Nzema and Appolonia.

However, faced with powerful regional and supraregional factors pressing for integration and the influence of an extensive network of interests, the local political community retained a fundamental importance for the various social groupings over the historical long term, as the place to mediate between the increasing regional homogeneity and the realities of the territorial settlement.

Modern perceptions of Akan history, in terms of both its local representation and academic interpretation, have been strongly influenced by the great sociopolitical changes that affected the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. R. Kea's study, which was published in 1982, is a brilliant description of the structural changes that led in those centuries to the creation and consolidation of various new political, economic, and military players. According to Kea, whose analysis is often indebted to the works of I. Wilks,⁸ this process

witnessed a transition from a prevailing form of social reproduction that was mercantile-agrarian (ruling groups structured through oligarchic commercial networks)⁹ to one that was imperial-agrarian (ruling groups based on concentrations of military power).

The change in the rationale behind production and commerce is supposed to have been brought about by a radical transformation of the region's social, military, and geopolitical framework, which occurred at the same time as the birth and expansion of the large state formations in the interior: Akwamu, Denkyira, and in particular Asante.¹⁰ From a sociopolitical point of view, this is supposed to have led to the demise of the previous forms of horizontal corporative organization of ruling groups around what Kea calls "brotherhoods of nobles," which operated across states. They were replaced by extensive exogamic matriclans, which became the prevailing criterion governing relations between ruling social groups and subject ones.¹¹ The matriclan thus triumphed as the universal form for structuring social hierarchy to the exclusion of almost every other type of grouping. According to Wilks, this completed a process that had started in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹²

The extent of the changes brought about by the new states was such that they color every attempt to examine the previous history of the greater Akan region. The "before" generally surfaces in the local historical memory as something nebulous and incoherent, and the consistency of its various pieces of historical wreckage is directly proportional to their usefulness to the political and ideological arguments of the new powers. The "Kingdom of Appolonia" is one such piece of historical wreckage. As we shall see, the strength of its legacy is such that it has thoroughly permeated the local memory and representation of the region's past.

The establishment and consolidation of the "Kingdom of Appolonia" represent the end of the period covered by this book, which in relation to the historiography of this part of West Africa is pretty much "ancient history" and is considered an obscure and uncertain past. In other words we are examining period before the political settlement of the eighteenth century rather than the period that followed it. It must be stressed that none of the sources I have used describe or even suggest that the area had ever lacked structured political formations of a notable territorial and demographic consistency, as well as complex institutions, differentiated production, and social hierarchy. It does not matter how far you go back in the period under examination, you will always find some form of state, even if you want to define it as a "proto-state," "early State," "micro-state," "weak state," or using a similar term.¹³

One of this study's principal aims is precisely to give greater historical weight to some significant trends in the process that led

from a fragmentary reality to the construction of the local society that we see documented in the second half of the eighteenth century, whose political organization certainly differed from the past, not least because of its larger territorial dimensions and its greater centralization of power. Hence, some basic aspects of the history of "before," however nebulous, can obviously provide an essential reference point for a discussion on the origins of the eighteenth-century state by attempting to identify the elements of continuity and discontinuity.

It is my hope that the results of this study will prove useful to an overall evaluation of the historiographical problems concerning the state not only in this specific area but in the wider regional context. On the other hand, this book also aims to increase our knowledge of an area that could in many ways be defined as a frontier area. Indeed during the eras in question, it was open to a great "frontier," as I. Kopytoff has defined the phenomenon,¹⁴ along an area that was made up of the Comoé and Bandama basins. These regions, into which the Akan world was expanding, were characterized by "low density" regimes in terms of demography, economics, production, and also the complexity and consistency of their institutions and political formations.¹⁵ Nzema and Aowin can be seen as key areas in the liaison and transition between the heart of the Akan world (i.e., central-southern Ghana) and the periphery made up of the seaboard and the southwestern river, lagoon, and forest areas. This role as a place where different worlds met, traded goods, exchanged ideas, and occasionally clashed is clearly demonstrated by the fact that even at the end of the seventeenth century the Cape Appolonia region constituted a linguistic frontier,¹⁶ where a language that was to develop into modern Nzema and was closely related to modern western Akan languages was expanding and supplanting languages related to those now represented by some groups in south-eastern Ivory Coast, such as Abure, Ewuturo, and Essuma.

This aspect proved to be lasting and had several implications. Even today Nzema experiences a frontier existence, divided as it is by the border between Ghana and the Ivory Coast, which separates not only two states but also different cultures, particularly given their membership of different "official" linguistic universes. The border also creates a fairly clear distinction in historiographical approach that on the whole is still in force today, in spite of significant attempts to develop areas of historical research that bridge the gap.¹⁷

From a theoretical and methodological point of view, this work shifts on several occasions between history and anthropology. This approach is almost unavoidable, given the types of sources used and the scarcity of written material in local society during the period

under examination, even in the case of the European and Eurafrican components of the population.

The chronological framework used in this work is based on the Julian and Gregorian calendars and the Christian system of dating. Clearly this method of calculating time was not the prevalent one in the society we are examining. It would have principally used a complex set of references to lunar and solar cycles, as well as a ritual calendar based on three-weekly cycles (the Akan week was made up of seven days), which organized days and periods in accordance with their extrinsic significance to individual and social life, and the relationship with the transcendent.¹⁸ Social and, for our purposes, political behavior was strongly influenced by a perception of time in which particular periods were suited to particular *negotia* (business, agriculture, fishing, war, funerals, travel, assemblies, etc.) and not to other aspects of life (worship, festivals, relations with the dead, ritual purification, etc.). This crucially important factor influenced also the behavior of resident Europeans in their dealings with local society.

However the inertia dictated by the available historical materials proved stronger than my awareness of the problem, and in any case constant "translation" between the different temporal environments would have been extremely laborious.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

This examines problems of very different orders, but is held together by four fundamental questions:

- (a) What are the essential parameters that define the subject matter (Nzema/Appolonia)?
- (b) How did the local geopolitical and socioeconomic framework develop as it felt the impact of increasing European interference and the great transformations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?
- (c) Who were the exponents of the new hegemonic system that produced these transformations, and what did they represent?
- (d) What mechanisms did the old and the new hegemonic systems use to operate and reproduce themselves?

THE CONTEXT OF IDENTITY

Chapter 1 deals with question (a), which relates to identity, and it attempts to define the subject of this study by reconstructing and

analyzing the linguistic, territorial, kinship, and political contexts into which the Nzema identity or rather identities were translated. The structure of this section is markedly diachronic, goes beyond the historical period under examination (i.e., past the second half of the eighteenth century) and touches upon current trends.

The modern Nzema identity, which is highly potent, complex, and equipped with a forceful ideology of self-legitimization (“tradition”), inevitably tends to project itself into the past, and hence to imbue and indeed “colonize” any historical reconstruction. We therefore have little choice but to commence with the identification of at least some of the principal elements of identity that intersected or were superimposed during the last few centuries, as well as the mechanisms used. We will then be able to move on with the historical analysis in the strict sense of the term.

The colonial period is often considered to have been one in which ethnic denominations took on an almost rigid form.¹⁹ Writing, as the instrument of translation and propagation of the colonial order, was supposed to have had a key role in turning loose definitions into inflexible categories with unprecedented power, as they became “performative” concepts, which are “capable of generating by themselves the groups they describe.”²⁰

But if we move from general questions of African studies to the specific Akan context, this broad interpretation comes up against interpretive concepts produced by a well-established historiography, founded on wide-ranging records that stretch back over a remarkably long period of time.

Leaving aside generalizations and categorizations, the regional situation is marked by the presence of varying factors all produced by very different periods and circumstances, which are all still influential to varying degrees and at different levels, but interconnected in a complex manner. Undoubtedly colonization brought a considerable break with the past, and did indeed act as a powerful catalyst in a process of actual change, but within a context where the elements of continuity were exceedingly strong and numerous.²¹ An “Asante identity” preceded, continued during, and survived the colonial period, and was in many ways autonomous and capable of putting forward and sustaining its own responses to the challenge posed by European domination. It was clearly the state, as a concrete reality long before the colonial period, which defined Asante as a specific category and which was used to include and exclude at various levels.²²

Historical argument takes on a different tone in the case of the many Akan areas and formations, which lack a structure comparable