



Massacre Over a ...Golden Stool: An Account of an Anglo-Ashanti War for the Symbol of a Nation

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“Massacre Over a ...Golden Stool: An Account of an Anglo-Ashanti War for the Symbol of a Nation” is an account of the War of the Golden Stool (1900). This armed conflict took place in what is now Ghana, and what was then called the Gold Coast. The war pitted the Ashanti (or Asante) people against the British Empire, which only recently taken control of the Ashanti kingdom.

The Ashanti are an Akan-speaking people who now form a large proportion of the population of Ghana. The once-powerful Ashanti kingdom emerged around the end of the seventeenth century, as the small Ashanti state began conquering surrounding Akan peoples and incorporating them into their growing empire.

By the eighteenth century the Ashanti had become the largest and most powerful kingdom in the Gold Coast region of West Africa. Their rulers had the title “Asantehene” (“king”), and the sacred symbol of their state was a gold-plated stool. Stools were the traditional symbol of royal authority in Akan societies. The Ashanti golden stool was said to have appeared from heaven due to the actions of the founder of the Ashanti Empire, king Osei Tutu and his priest Okomfo Anokye.

In the nineteenth century, the British gradually began to expand their influence along the coast of present-day Ghana. This brought them into conflict with the Ashanti, who derived wealth, and items such as muskets, from the coastal transatlantic trade. The Ashanti sold large numbers of enslaved Africans to European traders on coast, so British anti-slave trade efforts after 1807 must have antagonized them.

The Ashanti were defeated by Britain in the Third Anglo-Ashanti War (1873-1874),. In the Fourth Anglo-Ashanti War (1895-1896) they were defeated again. This time the Ashanti king, Prempeh I, was exiled, and the Ashanti kingdom was brought under direct British control.

The War of the Golden Stool, in 1900, is the subject of this article. This war was an anti-British rebellion sparked by a conflict over the symbolic golden stool. The British saw the stool as a symbol of Ashanti independence, so they demanded it be turned over to them. The Ashanti, for their part, saw the stool as so important that they refused to hand it over to the British. Instead they hid the stool and rose up in revolt against Britain. The revolt was suppressed after some bloody fighting and the Ashanti kingdom was formally incorporated into the British Gold Coast colony.

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