Peasant Studies, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter 1985)

RELIGION AND FACTIONALISM IN THE ASANTE HINTERLAND: THE NON-PEASANT POLITICS OF A PEASANT SOCIETY

Patrick Manning

Maier, D. J. E. *Priests and Power: The Case of the Dente Shrine in Nineteenth-Century Ghana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Pp. xiv, 258. Illustrations, maps, tables, bibliography, index.

This book on the Krachi people of Ghana sidesteps the usual focus of peasant studies — social and economic life — to concentrate on rural politics.[1] While the Krachi are manifestly a peasant society, the term "peasant" is absent from the book. Nevertheless, the author's attention to politics yields a revealing perspective, one which deserves to be pursued within the paradigm of peasant studies. As such, however, it focuses on aspects of peasant societies which are deserving of further emphasis. That is, the politics of peasant societies include not only revolts of peasant masses against expropriating landowners and colonial conquerors, but also the struggles of priests, kings and merchants against each other, in which the numerically dominant peasants participate mainly by throwing their support, at key junctures, to contending leaders of these more privileged classes.

D. J. E. Maier portrays the politics of east–central Ghana in the late precolonial and early colonial years — roughly 1870 to 1930 — through the story of the *Dente Bosomfo*, the priest of the great Dente shrine. This priest rose to great political and economic power — as leader of the nascent Bron Confederation — in the tumultuous atmosphere of late–nineteenth–century Africa, only to meet sudden defeat at the hands of his erstwhile Muslim merchant allies and the newly arrived German colonial rulers. Maier thus fills out a previously neglected chapter in the history of Asante, the empire which, from modest beginnings as a defensive coalition in the late seventeenth century, rose by the mid–eighteenth century to control virtually all of modern

Ghana, with great roads radiating in all directions from the capital of Kumase.[2]

The Krachi were but one small people on the northeastern fringe of the empire. The geology of Krachi, however, paved the way for its eventual rise to prominence: the rock formations of the area created the rapids on the Volta River, making Krachi the head of navigation, two hundred kilometers from the sea, and a focal point on the trade route dominated by the northward movement of salt purified on the Volta estuary. The same geology provided for a fertile river valley above the rapids, which provided the fields for Krachi's famous yams. Finally, these rock formations included a cave — located in the river bank above the rapids — which became the home of the god Dente, whose renown as an oracle, a mediator and an arbiter of fate spread throughout Asante.

While the existence of the god Dente can be traced at least to the eighteenth century, the assertion of political leadership by its priest began in earnest in 1874, when the British inflicted a military defeat on Asante and sent a shock wave throughout the empire. The Dente Bosomfo pitted his energies against those of other Krachi leaders, of immigrant Muslim merchants, of allies and enemies throughout greater Asante, and of British and German officials. The climax of the drama, in 1894, brought the tragic, violent fall of the priest. The author completes the saga with a long denouement, continuing nearly to the present day.

Maier displays, with a wealth of detail, the elements of her story. Yet those elements remain dispersed among her three chapters of background and six topical chapters: they are never pulled together into a comprehensive analysis nor into an integrated narrative. Her themes include Krachi origins, Asante–Krachi relations, the formation of the Bron Confederation, political and religious conflicts among Muslims and with the Dente priest, and German colonial rule. Yet when she attempts to summarize them in her concluding chapter, it is under the rubric of a narrow and confining analytical structure: the analysis of factionalism in Krachi, and thus of the institutions and styles of political interaction. While her description of factional patterns is insightful, it leaves out of consideration much of the most interesting material she has presented in earlier chapters. The key question, to which she gives only a partial answer, is: what were the issues separating the factions?

I seek therefore to revise her interpretation, and to recast it more explicitly in terms of political economy. In so doing, I hope to link her study of Krachi politics to the tradition of social and economic analysis of peasant studies, by drawing out some of the hidden implications in Maier's study and by suggesting that peasant studies might fruitfully focus more seriously on the political issues she has addressed.

The key to the organization of factions among the Krachi, I will argue, lay in a struggle for control of profitable resources. Each faction, rather than

forming an arbitrary or customary grouping born to achieve political balance, developed out of a principled espousal of a social policy which would maximize the source of wealth upon which it relied most heavily. In nineteenth–century Africa there were fortunes to be made in land and its produce, in trade, and in governmental power to tax. Planters, merchants and princes, each with a base of wealth in one of these areas, sought to maximize their own holdings, and to divert resources from other types of wealth to their own.[3] This dynamic, perhaps long underlying politics in the region, became especially prominent in the late nineteenth century, a time of extraordinary changes in political structure and economic life, and a time of rapid growth in the profitability of land, of trade, and of the power to tax.

In this recapitulation of the rise and fall of the Dente Bosomfo, I condense Maier's nine sections into two: one summarizing the ethnographic and economic background, and one presenting an integrated narrative of political conflict, emphasizing struggle to control profitable resources.

Maier's study focuses on the homeland of the Krachi people, who now number some 60,000 inhabitants of a sparsely-populated section of east–central Ghana. Their region, situated along the eastern bank of the Volta River, above its confluence with the Oti, is now partly flooded by the lake behind the Volta Dam. The Krachi speak a dialect of Guang, itself closely related to Twi, the dominant language of the Akan peoples. The Guang dialects are spoken by peoples along the eastern and northern fringes of Asante. The Krachi are therefore closer in ancestry to the peoples of the coast and to their northern neighbors the Gonja (whose territory centered on the great market town of Salaga), than to the more northerly Dagomba, who speak Voltaic languages related to Mossi. In the old terminology of Africanists, the Krachi would have been labelled people of the forest rather than of the savanna. But they live in savanna, as do all the northern Guang peoples; southern Guana peoples such as the Akyem, however, live in the forest. Thus the cultural frontiers of Ghana are not those one might expect from simple ecological considerations.

The Krachi are divided into a set of clans, each dominant in a set of villages, and each playing a particular role in Krachi society as a whole. Thus the Kantankofore Krachi controlled the stool (i.e., the throne) for the region, for which the title was Krachiwura; and the Dentewiya Krachi controlled the office of Dente Bosomfo or Dente priest. Other clan and village groups — that is, the bulk of the peasantry — tended to be pulled between the influence of these major groupings.

The commerce and economy of the Krachi homeland can, as Maier argues, be written in terms of yams and salt. Yams are the major starchy staple of the region, and the export of yams to surrounding regions surely goes back into the distant past. In the late nineteenth century, however, the production and commerce in yams expanded sharply, as a result of the region's economic boom.

Salt trade too must surely have originated in the distant past. The main point of production of salt was the village of Ada, at the mouth of the Volta, where William Bosman described an active salt industry in the late seventeenth century. Salt was sent north along the Volta by canoe to the interior areas in which it was lacking. The rise of Asante in the eighteenth century led to restrictions on trade along the Volta, but it did not cut off the salt trade, nor did it divert the trade to go overland via Kumase — 150 kilometers to the west — rather than up the Volta. Where did the salt go? The areas of final demand remain unspecified, but some hint is provided by the prominence of one inland salt source, Daboya at the northern edge of Asante: this would imply that salt was consumed by inhabitants of the more populated areas of the savanna in general.

This Volta salt–trade route, it should be noted, was one of several parallel salt routes leading northward from West Africa's Atlantic littoral. The next two to the east, for instance, led inland from Grand Popo in modern Benin to Djougou, and from Porto–Novo to Save and Shaki. Figures collected at the turn of the twentieth century for the Grand Popo–Djougou route suggest that the volume of the trade there, roughly one thousand tons per year, was of much the same magnitude as that up to Volta.[4] The difference was that along the Volta route some 200 kilometers were by water, while along the route from Grand Popo, only some 50 kilometers were by water. Salt trade, therefore, was a mainstay of regional commerce all along the West African coast, and we owe to Maier the first serious study of the political interests and conflicts associated with this commerce.

The rise of the Bron Confederation, and its leadership by the Dente Bosomfo, took place in the context of a significant commercial expansion and transformation. The commercial changes stemmed, in turn, from several sources. The Central Sudan trade network, centered to the northeast of Asante and dominated by Hausa merchants, experienced a nineteenth–century boom for which the underlying causes have yet to be elucidated, though its reality can no longer be doubted. Hausa merchants brought textiles and a wide range of other goods to Salaga, and there exchanged them for the kola nuts of Asante. An analogous if less brilliant commercial boom took place in the Western Sudan, to the northwest of Asante, under the leadership of Dyula merchants: the major market for this trade was at the town of Kong, in modern Ivory Coast. A third, and doubtlessly related, cause of commercial expansion was the nineteenth–century transformation in slavery and slave trade: the virtual end of the trans–Atlantic trade in slaves had reduced the price of slaves in Africa and had thus increased the demand for and utilization of male and female slaves in agricultural production in this and other regions. Finally, agricultural production, both by peasant producers and by the increasingly available slaves, increased in response to two sources of expanded demand: the increased demand for foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials for the now

expanded domestic African market, and the new European demand for African agricultural commodities, particularly palm oil and palm kernels.[5]

These were the sources of economic opportunity in late–nineteenth–century Gold Coast. Political influences served in some cases to change the beneficiaries of such opportunity, and in other cases even to create new opportunities. The British expedition of 1874 against Kumase, which burned the capital and shook the Asante state, led to moves for autonomy by outlying and even central provinces: both Krachi and Gonja in the northeast took this option. As a result, commerce in Krachi grew both because Asante's centralizing hand was no longer felt with such force, and becaue Salaga, the great market center of Gonja, by virtue of its independence from Asante lost its earlier prominence on the kola route from Asante to Sokoto. Much of the kola trade was diverted to Kintampo, a new market center established by Asante to the west of Salaga; some of it, however, was diverted to Krachi. Thus a Muslim merchant community grew up rapidly in Krachi after 1874. The pivotal position and political skill of the Dente Bosomfo led to concentration of much of the new trade in Krachi and its new twin town, Kete.[6] At the same time, a market for foodstuffs to service the caravan trade grew up. The Dente Bosomfo benefitted from this development, because he received gifts of land and slaves in the course of performing his duties, and he thus became a great landowner and planter. In yet another role, the Dente Bosomfo collected taxes on the salt trade and on other trade passing through Krachi. One final pair of events in 1892 concentrated commerce more fully on Krachi: the collapse of the Asante kola market at Kintampo, and the civil war in Salaga, which devastated the market, divided Gonja country into factions, and sent an additional number of merchants into Krachi. By 1893, Kete–Krachi was the greatest market town of the Asante hinterland.

Geography and economic interests thus contrived to support the development of contending political interests. The Asante state asserted a princely role, that most reliant on tax revenue, drawn both from producers and merchants. The Hausa played a mercantile role, seeking freedom from state taxation and regulation of commerce, and focusing on buying cheap and selling dear in their contacts with clients. The Dente Bosomfo played, at base, the role of planter, though he moved steadily toward assuming an additional identity of prince. That is, his revenues from yams, along with his power as a landholder and slaveowner, were more important than his revenue from trade taxes and religious tribute, though each was necessary to the other. Further, the Dente Bosomfo, though a great planter who seized as much land as he could, was still able to maintain the loyalty of the peasantry, by advocating the interests of agriculture in general.

The other main parties to this history may be categorized analogously.[7] The Krachiwura was a prince, though of only local significance: it appears that his office was established by Asante authorities to provide local contacts

for the empire. The role of the Krachiwura was thus to aspire to princely wealth through taxation, but only in association with some greater state power, such as Asante, the Dente Bosomfo in his time, and colonial administrations in later years. The Gonja Muslims, while merchants like the Hausa, differed in that they sought to expand their commerce through close alliance with and frequent intervention of the state. Thus, the Gonja merchants traded most heavily in slaves, while the Hausa merchants traded most heavily in kola and textiles. Finally, the two colonial power of the region, while both acting a princely role, carried out quite different policies and sought out different alliances. The British, trumpeting their devotion to free trade at every opportunity, followed a generally non–interventionist economic policy, which tended to facilitate commerce. The Germans, while entering the scene as critics of the restrictiveness of African princes, nonetheless followed a far more interventionist policy, extracting economic surplus through taxation, regulation, and direct appropriation of labor. Each group, of course, had to make realistic compromises of their interests: thus, at Salaga one saw that Asante needed commerce in order to extract revenue, while Hausa merchants benefitted from the concentration and protection of commerce under the aegis of the Asante state.

Such were the contending interests that struggled to achieve power and to set the political direction of Krachi at the close of the nineteenth century. These multiple party interests were forced by political exigencies to draw themselves into two opposing camps in facing each great issue. The alliances shifted in response to changing issues and changing power relations. But underneath the apparently pragmatic shifts in alliance lay the systematic and principled pursuit by each group of the public policy which would maximize its own form of wealth. From 1874 to the late 1880s, the inhabitants of Krachi were united in their effort to withdraw from Asante domination, an effort of which the greatest beneficiaries were the peasants and the rising landed interest led by the Dente Bosomfo. From 1888 to 1894 this unity was undermined by the Muslim merchant community's challenge to the steady consolidation of power by the Dente Bosomfo. Then the Germans irrupted onto the scene and ruled for twenty years, first in alliance with the Gonja Muslims and then in association with the Hausa. Despite the alliances with merchants, German rule was associated with a decline of the commerce in salt, kola, textiles and yams, because of colonial taxation and trade restrictions. The eventual end of slave trade and slavery under the Germans hurt the interests of Gonja merchants and of big Krachi landowners, especially the Dente Bosomfo. With World War I, the British annexation of trans–Volta Togoland to Gold Coast and the establishment of a less extractive British regime meant that salt trade along the Volta grew again, and yam output grew as well in the interwar years. The British political alliance, however, was with the Krachiwura and therefore with that interest which sought its fortune in alliance to a broader state structure.

Let us turn, now, to the drama of political struggle for control of these valuable economic resources in land, commerce, and taxation. The Bron Confederation, in its rise and fall between 1874 and 1894, was a more successful reenactment of an earlier move for regional autonomy. In both cases, the movement linked Krachi on the periphery with Dwaben at the core of the Asante empire. Dwaben was the region just south of Kumase which, as one of the founding members of the Asante confederacy, was the immediate overlord of Krachi. In the first episode — following an 1820 Asante defeat at the hands of the British — Dwaben sought to revise the constitution and distance itself from the Asante court. In so doing, this princely interest may be seen to have renounced the strategy of princely centralization, and to have enunciated instead an agrarian strategy.[8] In the years from 1820 to 1840, Krachi and the northeast hinterland generally, in association with Dwaben, attempted to move to a policy of free trade and to break with Asante. In the course of this effort, the Dente oracle became increasingly prominent; even in the days of Krachi secession, the Dente oracle continued to be consulted and held in high esteem by the rulers of Asante.

But in the interim, several wars pitted Asante troops against troops from Krachi, Gonja and other areas of the northeast hinterland. In the course of these wars, the Dente Bosomfo, Akenten by name, lost his life. His death became the occasion for the *Dente Kwasida* oath, the strongest oath which could be sworn before the god Dente: in the tradition of oaths sworn among the Akan peoples, any person swearing this oath undertook to suffer a fate as unhappy as Akenten if he did not maintain the terms of the oath. The oath was sworn before Dente from that time forth in the course of litigation, the resolution of disputes and, most important for our purposes, in cementing alliances. Meanwhile, by 1840 Dwaben had agreed to reenter Asante on its previous terms, thus ending the movement for autonomy in the northeast as well.

Breakaway movements began again in 1874. In that year, a British expedition burned Kumase, and retired to the coast. In the wake of this effective, surgical blow at the heart of the empire, Dwaben signed a separate peace with the British and revolted against Asante: Dwaben was crushed, but Dwaben refugees moved east and south to support other moves of independence from Asante. Salaga and all of Gonja broke off from Asante, but by that very move lost its position as the key entrepot in trade between Asante and the Sokoto Caliphate. Atebubu asserted its leadership of the northeast Asante fringe, but soon lost its predominance to the Dente Bosomfo, who by 1877 had become the leading figure in what the British referred to as the Bron Confederation. In this defensive coalition, many of the northern Guang peoples asserted their independence of Asante: its membership varied with time, but the participants included Krachi, Gonja, Atebubu, Kwahu, Nsuta, Buem, Mampon, and Nkoransa. The accession of Kwasi Gyantrubi to the

office of Dente Bosomfo in 1877 gave the office and the confederation a particularly dynamic leader.

As this new center of political power developed, and as Salaga declined, Muslim merchants came south from Salaga to settle in Krachi, to conduct their commerce in kola, textiles and slaves. The initial contact seems to have been between Gonja Muslims and the Krachiwura: the merchants settled first at the royal town of Kantankofore, but thereafter established a separate zongo or Muslim quarter, the new town of Kete, two kilometers from Krachikrom. Kete and Krachikrom, or Kete–Krachi, thus became a twin town in the style of such towns throughout West Africa. Mayaki, a "Hausa" who was perhaps a Gonja as well, was recognized as sarkin zongo, or chief of the Muslim community.[9]

For something over a decade, all the factions in Krachi and the broader Bron Confederation united in hopes of ending Asante power in their region and of opening freer trade to the coast. They looked to the British in Accra as allies in this effort. In fact, according to the belief of many Krachi at this time, Queen Victoria and the god Dente were allies who were so close that no one, aside from themselves, could distinguish between them.

The structures which governed this suddenly booming community remained rather informal. The Dente Bosomfo collected taxes on the salt trade and on other commerce, he collected fees for the services of the oracle, and he welcomed refugees and collected slaves rendered as tribute. As such, he built his control of land, agricultural output and tax revenue. To maintain political unity, the Dente Bosomfo led in calling members of the confederation together to swear the Dente Kwasida oath. A weakened Asante gave the secessionist confederation a few years of peace, but then turned to a more revanchist policy: in response to this threat, the Dente Bosomfo gathered the members of the Bron Confederation in Krachi to swear an oath of mutual support in May of 1881; a renewal or extension of the oath is recorded for 1884.

> Thus the Bron Confederation was bound by an oath based on the Dente shrine and the ultimate sanction or retribution for a member betraying the alliance was the religious wrath of the god Dente, but this might be augmented by any physical or financial force that could be brought to bear by the Dente Bosomfo on the wavering member.[10]

During the late 1870s and the 1880s, as this composite community expanded, disputes broke out among the leaders in Krachi. The primary conflict was between the Muslim merchant community and the Krachi under the Dente Bosomfo: the merchants complained about high taxes and arbitrary exactions by the religious leader. A second conflict emerged, opposing the Gonja to the Hausa within the Muslim community: Sofo, a Hausa, became sarkin zongo in 1887 after the murder of his predecessor Mayaki, who may

have been Gonja; in any case Sofo himself was opposed and eventually replaced by Abdullah Badi, a Gonja. The policy differences between Hausa and Gonja merchants are related to the differences between kola trade and slave trade, and to the relatively closer ties of Gonja merchants to state power. A third conflict emerged about 1890, separating the Krachiwura from the Dente Bosomfo: as the strength of the factions and the possibilities for enrichment from taxation increased, the Krachiwura began considering alternatives to his close alliance with the priest. These disputes notwithstanding, the strength of the confederation and the hegemonic power of its priestly leader continued to grow in the 1890s.

A new period began, however, in roughly 1889, as a result of the partition of the region into British and German spheres of influence. This partition began with the signature of German treaties of protection on the coast of Togo in 1885, but it was not completed for some years. More importantly, it was not clear to the Krachi and other peoples that a line of demarcation had been drawn at the Volta until 1890. In that year the first German officials came to Krachi and, in a feeble effort to establish German authority, affirmed the duty of the Krachiwura to collect trade taxes and to send a portion to the Germans. The result was to leave the Dente Bosomfo bereft of his British alliance. But the leader of the confederation was nevertheless able, from 1889 to 1894, to improve his position and to win key tests of strength. The agricultural prosperity and commercial importance of Krachi continued to grow and, as the stakes grew higher, the seriousness of political struggle deepened.

In 1891 Nkoransa, west of the Volta, moved to join the Bron Confederation, and Asante immediately threatened punishment. The British, though they had formally declared a protectorate over the area in 1890, refused to intervene when requested to do so by the Dente Bosomfo. Skirmishes took place in 1892 and 1893, and in October of 1893 the Dente Bosomfo mobilized the Bron Confederation for what was surely to be a losing war against a superior invading Asante force. But at this moment the British sent a small force into the area, and the Asante forces withdrew. The British also ordered the Dente Bosomfo to withdraw his forces across the Volta.[11] The Bron Confederation was now effectively partitioned into British and German spheres, with the Volta as frontier, and yet the Dente Bosomfo had once again improved his standing, surviving a show of force, containing internal disputes, and strengthening the unity of his confederation.

In 1892 two external developments concentrated commerce even more fully on Kete–Krachi. The Kintampo kola market, set up by Asante after it lost control of Salaga, collapsed in 1892, diverting commerce to its competitors. At much the same time, civil war erupted in Salaga — or, more precisely, in Kpembe, the non–Muslim twin town of Salaga. The losing faction in that war, including the Kpembewura and his merchant allies, both Hausa and Gonja Muslims, came to Krachi. Their leaders were Abdullah

Badi, a merchant of both Hausa and Gonja extraction who had been in Kete as far back as 1888, and Lempo, son of the Kpembewura.

Thus, in 1894, business was booming in Kete–Krachi as never before, and the Dente Bosomfo was hoping to strengthen his structures of dominance. At the same time, the merchants, both Hausa and Gonja, sought to build up the trade of the region, but to minimize taxation. And at this point the German administration came in to impose a new agenda: it wanted both the trade and tax revenue, and it wanted to divert the trade from the British–controlled towns of the west to the German capital of Lome.

The decisive conflict came in 1894 at the moment of the *Akwammoa Naneba*, the annual festival of the god Dente. In 1893 the minions of Dente had informed the Muslim merchants that they should close their market on the day of the festival, and had beat some people to punctuate the point. For this and other reasons, the conflicts had sharpened between the Dente Bosomfo, who sought to maintain control of the region and to build his wealth based on tax revenue from trade, his revenue from the proceeds of the oracle, and his income from his plantations of yams; and, on the other hand, the Muslim community — itself divided into the Hausa who focused most heavily on long–distance trade and thus sought mainly a reduction in trade taxes and restrictions, and the Gonja who were also involved in trade, and yet had ambitions for state power both in Krachi and in neighboring Kpembe. In July of 1894 Sofo, the Hausa sarkin zongo, dressed in his best Hausa finery, visited the German administrator Herold at Misahohe and begged for assistance. The Germans, seeking to benefit from Kete–Krachi's thriving commerce, made plans to open a post at Kete; at the time of the 1894 Akwammoa Naneba festival, the administrator was forming an expedition to Kete. This year the merchants kept their market ostentatiously open, and as a result they not only underwent more beatings at the hands of the Krachi, but also received direct and personal threats from the Dente Bosomfo that they would die for their blasphemy: these were not threats of murder but announcements — taken seriously by the recipients — that the wrath of the god Dente would soon be felt. In the face of this threat, the Muslim factions united, and sent again for help from the Germans. The German administrator Gruner was only too happy to oblige, and arrived on a November night with a small armed force. Within a day he had captured the Dente Bosomfo — retrieving him from the British side of the Volta — and had tortured him and executed him, along with his chief assistant. The Bron Confederation was no more, and the colonial era had begun.

The Gonja Muslims were triumphant. The Hausa and the Krachiwura were pleased in part yet fearful as well. Some of those fears were justified: within a year, the Germans had 'destooled' Sofo as sarkin zongo and replaced him with Abdullah Badi of the Gonja faction. The Gonja Muslims were thus to have an alliance with the Germans: neither slavery nor slave trade were abolished in the first few years of German rule. But the alliance did not bring the Gonja all they sought. German taxes were soon found to be stiff indeed. And if the Dente Bosomfo had limited trade, so too did the Germans, by restricting trade across the Volta in attempt to divert it to Lome; the British on the right bank responded with a blockade of their own in 1898. While the Gonja–German alliance continued, increasing numbers of Krachi fled across the river into British territory.

The German administration remained allied with the Gonja faction from 1894 until 1907, when it allowed Abdullah Badi to be removed as sarkin zongo, and threw support to the learned Hausa scholar, al–hajj 'Umar, who became imam. From 1907 to 1914 the Hausa were the leading force in Krachi. One aspect of this new alliance was that the German administration had become enamored of Muslim learning, and allied with the most pious of its subjects. On the other hand, the abolition of slavery and slave trade, which alienated the Gonja, along with extraction of head taxes and forced labor from the Krachi, left the Hausa long–distance traders as the most obvious German allies.

In the meantime, two succeeding Dente Bosomfos managed to rebuild the economic and political power of their office, more through control of land than through taxation. One method of priestly land accumulation was that the god Dente killed persons who had violated its strictures, and the Dente Bosomfo, on announcing that the god had so acted, assumed control of the land of the deceased. News of one case of just such an action brought a violent intervention by German authorities: administrator van Rentzell in 1912 executed the Dente Bosomfo and desecrated the Dente shrine by dynamiting it. The force of this German retaliation brought about a nine–year interregnum in the priesthood, and effectively ended the political leadership of the Dente Bosomfo. In fact it created such terror that not only the supporters of the fallen priest but also the Krachiwura fled to the British side of the Volta. The faction of those who had been allied with the priest, however, has since continued as a discrete political grouping: Maier labels it the "Other Krachi," in distinction to the Kantankofore Krachi, those with the strongest claims to the office of Krachiwura.

The conquest of German Togo by the British in 1914 led to the unification of the former Bron Confederation under one colonial power. But the Dente Bosomfo was never again to hold political power, and the office remained empty until 1921. Instead the British, in line with their policy of seeking out Native Authorities, raised the Krachiwura to a position of dignity. The Muslims thus lost their previous primacy, and politics in Krachi was transformed into a struggle of two Krachi factions — the Kantankofore Krachi and the Other Krachi, the governmental party and the agrarian party — for control of the office of Krachiwura.

The factions of Krachi, as Maier emphasizes, have been enduring. But the reason for their endurance is more than the logic of factionalism: it is that the logic of factionalism coincided with the lines of conflict in economic interests, and with the contending strategies for appropriation of wealth. Agrarian, commercial and governmental interests have remained in something of a standoff, with one getting the lion's share of surplus in a given era, only to lose it later. Dominance shifted from the agrarian interests in precolonial years to commercial interests in the early colonial years and to princely interests in the interwar years; decolonization and independence brought further shifts in dominance and policy direction. The agrarian interest is most clearly identified as such in the years after 1914, when it took the form of the Other Krachi and contended with the princely Kantakofore Krachi, who had now become clients of the British state. But the agrarian interest was more powerful, if less unambiguously identified, in the earlier days when it coalesced around the influence of the Dente Bosomfo, whose leadership brought prosperity to the region without heavy taxation on the peasantry.

Maier emphasizes, in her concluding remarks, the persistence of factions in Krachi through to the present day, and she pleads for an end to mindless factionalism in order to permit the growth of the Ghanaian nation. Her identification of current factionalism with a historical pattern is to be praised, and her call for the dissolution of factions before the need for a greater unity is equally laudable. But she might have added that factions are unlikely to dissolve until the causes of factionalism have been overcome. No higher unity will be lasting until the sources of current and past divisions are understood, and the most significant dimension of that disunity lies in the contradictory economic and public policy interests of the various Ghanaian social strata. Maier's investigation into the story of the Dente oracle, if incompletely drawn together, nonetheless provides the elements of such an understanding.

NOTES

1. For definitions and analyses of African peasantry, see Alan K. Smith and Claude E. Welch, Jr., eds., "Peasants in Africa," special issue of *African Studies Review 20*, 3 (December 1977); Margaret Jean Hay, " 'Peasants' in Modern East African Studies," *Peasant Studies 8*, 1 (Winter 1979): 17-29; Martin A. Klein, ed., *Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Beverly Hills, 1980); and Joshua B. Forrest, "Defining African Peasants," *Peasant Studies 9*, 4 (Summer 1982): 242-249.

2. Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975). Maier was a student of Wilks, and her study fits well within the corpus of work he has directed on Ghanaian history; Maier does not, however, adopt the materialist outlook which is characteristic of Wilks's analysis.

3. I have left out of the analysis a fourth valuable resource: labor. Each of the contending interests relied on labor in order to increase its wealth, and the expansion of slavery at this time made labor more mobile than before.

4. Patrick Manning, "Merchants, Porters, and Canoemen in the Bight of Benin: Links in the West African Trade Network," in *The Labor of Long-Distance Trade in Africa*, eds. Paul E. Lovejoy and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (Beverly Hills, forthcoming).

5. Paul E. Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: Hausa Trade with Asante, 1700-1900* (London and Zaria, 1980); Jean-Louis Boutillier, "La cité marchande de Bouna dans l'ensemble économique Ouest-Africain pré-colonial," in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (London, 1971), 240-52; Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807-1874* (London, 1974).

6. The term Krachi refers to the Krachi people and to the territory they inhabit. Krachikrom (Krachi town) was the village at the rapids where both Dente Bosomfo and Krachiwura resided. Kantankofore, five kilometers northeast, was the town of the royal Krachi lineage. Kete, half way between Krachikrom and Kantankofore, was the Muslim zongo founded in the 1870s. Kete-Krachi referred to the twin towns of Kete and Krachikrom.

7. Wilks discusses Asante politics in terms of mercantile ("peace") and imperial ("war") parties. Maier is unwilling to extend this reasoning to Krachi, arguing that its factions "do not seem to have articulated philosophies, ideologies, or policies." On the contrary, I argue that Krachi contained systematic interest groups, not simply oppositional segments, even though they lacked the institutions on which parties rely in more elaborate political systems. Wilks, *Asante*, p. 482; Maier, *Priests and Power*, p. 174.

8. Wilks presents Dwaben's drive for autonomy as a case of sub-imperialism, in which Dwaben sought to equal or even displace Kumase as an imperial center. The interpretation I propose, especially in the light of events of the 1870s, is that Dwaben pursued an alternative policy, based on wealth from marketable produce of land rather than from taxation. Wilks, *Asante*, pp. 115-119.

9. Maier's tracing of the Muslim factions is not strong, especially before the 1890s, in part because the sources tend to describe all Muslims as Hausa. She describes Mayaki as a Hausa, but it seems likely (given the pattern of factional conflict and the close ties between Gonja Muslims and the Krachiwura) that he was of Gonja origin. Maier, *Priests and Power*, pp. 122, 127-28.

10. Maier, *Priests and Power*, p. 106.

11. Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante Before the British: The Prempean Years, 1875-1900*, (Lawrence, Kansas, 1978), pp. 168-174.