

Interview of Asantehene's Imam, Alhaji Abdul Mumin Haruna
Suame, Kumasi

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Prof: we are in Kumasi at Suame with Alhaji Abdul Mumuni Haruna, Asante-Kramo Imam, Otumfuo Kramo. We are researching how Islam came to Asante and how it was integrated into our traditional religion and how we have lived side by side in harmony to date. So we would like to learn the history of how you came to Asante and what Otumfuo's Imam does.

Imam: It is true if you heard "Ohene Kramo", I am Ohene Kramo. It dates very far back in Gonjaland when our great grandmother (our matriarch), a queen mother called Daboya Wurukye. This was the time of expansion and conquest. It is said that Nana Wurukye had a gold pan. So the Asantehene summoned her to come to Kumasi with her entourage. When she heard that, she thought they had come to declare war on her people so she surrendered readily. She was escorted back to Kumasi with about a hundred of her family members.

Around the time of their arrival, there was war between Asante and a northern chief. The northern chief had exceptional powers that that enabled him to transform himself into different things on the battlefield. Nana Wurukye cautioned them about his powers and confided that she knew the source of his powers. It was her husband who helped him (the northern chief) with such powers. His name was Osman Kamaate. He was very slim so the Asantes later nicknamed him *Kramo Teaa*. He was summoned and made to challenge a very powerful traditional priest called Tuuda. For the test, they locked a black cow in a room and asked them to describe what was inside the room. Okomfo Tuuda described it as a black animal with four legs. Then Kramo Teaa was asked to describe it. He described it as an animal with four legs, black in color with white spots. When they opened the door, the cow had white spots in the black. So he was "accepted" by Asantehene. He was made Otumfuo Kramo then and all his brothers that came were accepted into the royal fold. He was already an Imam at Daboya, so he administered all the war predictions and advised Asantehene on all possible outcomes. We would sometimes use sheep to test outcomes. We would name two sheep and put them together and see who would be victorious. One time, during the Gyaman war, he told them to wait for the right time, they ignored him and went. They lost a lot of people and the Gyamans were victorious. Then they consulted with him again, this time they took his advice and waited until he told them it was time to go. They were victorious and conquered the whole Gyaman and brought a lot of slaves back to Asante.

After that war, whenever Asantehene waged war, Kramo Teaa led the army. He did that until he was very old and frail, then he stayed home and prayed to support the war while his surrogate led the army.

In the beginning, we were settled at a place called Serebo-Sakyi. No, they were first placed at Pampaso, and then moved to Serebo-Sakyi (around present day high court). Pampaso is where Otumfuo puts on the Batakari Keseε when he is newly enstooled. Our great grand father, Kramo Teaa, made that Batakari. Asantehene only wears it twice in his lifetime. Then from Pampaso we were resettled at Domenase (current spare parts and laundries area). Then our family grew. So

during the reign of Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh II, he moved us to Suame and we have remained here ever since. So if you hear “Ohene Kramo” that is what it means and that is how it originated. I have my brother here. He can also add something if I forgot any. Every Friday, as Ohene Kramo, I go to Manhya to perform certain rites. We pray and ask for protection and peace for Otumfuo and Asanteman, and then we give alms (Salaka) to the disabled and children. So that is our contribution to the formation and development of the Asante kingdom. If you hear of Asante Kramo, it originated from this house, and this family. You won’t find us anywhere else but here at Suame.

When Kramo Teaa was old and incapacitated, Buo Kari took over. That was during the time of Kwame Tua. Asantehene asked Osman (Kramo Teaa) to allow Buo Kari to be sent to Boona [Buna] in the Ivory Coast to study Quran. He stayed in Boona and studied the Quran until his father died when he came to continue his father’s work. Buo Kari’s son also studied the Quran in the Ivory Coast. He was called Abdul Mumuni. He is the one who led us to Suame from Domenase. He was succeeded by Alhaji Suman and I succeeded Alhaji Suman. I am the nephew of Alhaji Suman and my name is Alhaji Mumuni Haruna. I am the fifth Asantehene Kramo.

Prof: (To Imam’s Brother) please, do you have anything to add? Then afterwards we would ask some questions.

Abdullah Osman (Imam’s brother): the Imam said everything. I just want to add some clarification. Our great grandmother, Nana Wurukye, at the time when Asantehene ordered her to be brought to Asante, it was a golden calabash, not a pan. Nana Wurukye surrendered peacefully to save the Gonjas from any attack. So the Gonjas and Asantes never fought and have lived in peace ever since.

Prof: The Gonjas originally came from old Mali, is there any connection, as with Boona in the Ivory Coast?

Imam: I believe that our forefathers, for example, the name Kamaate came from Mali, but now we just trace our roots to Daboya in Gonja. Our great grandfather (Osman) had two wives Nana Wurukye and Awurukyaa.

Prof: It seems that in the Gonja areas, Asantes got along with Daboyas and also Salaga. Asante and Salaga were even trade partners. But it seems that they did not get along with the Kpembes. In 1874, when the British burnt Kumasi, the Kpembes took advantage of that to free themselves from Asante. So they killed a lot of Asantes in Salaga, which forced Asantes to move the kola nut business from Salaga to Kintampo. Do you have anything to tell us about that period, the region and the relationships?

Imam: Throughout the north, it is well known that the Gonjas and Asantes were partners in a lot of Asante war efforts, and the Dagombas also liked Asantes. The Kpembe’s and the others never liked Asantes. For example, Gonja drums are very similar to Asante drums.

Prof: Now Mampong, Mamponghene Safo Kantanka had a lot of dealings with the Gonjas.

Imam: Yes, I wish I had some papers here for you to read. Some people came during my predecessor's time and recorded our history for a book. They gave us a copy, but someone borrowed it and never returned it. We have one elderly person who has authority on our history. She is still alive. She taught us what we know and what we just told you. Our great grandfather Abdul Mumuni did not allow anyone to return to Gonja but Alhaji Suman's mother went back. Some still go and come. When there is a funeral, they come. A very long time ago Abdul Mumuni's brother took some gold and ornaments to Gonja and they were never found. They were gifts to the family from Asantehene.

At Manhyia we are in the same category as Nsumankwaa. We work with him [the Nsumankwaahene] but we are not under his jurisdiction. For example, on Fridays and other occasions he provides the Massa (donuts) for the alms-giving. I report directly to Asantehene.

Prof: Yesterday, we spoke with Nsumankwaa Mmammahene. He mentioned Nurom and we also spoke with Nana Genfi (Pinkyendomkohene).

Imam: Yes, Nurom starts at the Nurom Hotel Annex here near me, to the Main Nurom Hotel on the main road. Then Buoso, then Suamehene is also here.

Prof: I ask because Nurom is also here, does it mean there are relationships.

Imam: Well, primarily, all the factions that serve Asantehene are represented here including Anonomsahene, Fontonfromhene etc. Mponponsuo is also here. You can call it an extension of Gyaase.

Prof: So now that there is peacetime and we don't wage wars anymore, what does the Asantehene's Imam do?

Imam: We pray to sustain peace. So when Otumfuo put on the Batakari Kɛsɛ during his enstoolment, he acknowledged that there are no frontiers to conquer and no wars to fight but he is wearing it to prepare for a different kind of war; war on health, poverty, education and spiritual protection. So he wears the Batakari Kɛsɛ twice; once at Asafo/Amakom, then at Pampaso.

Prof: When you look at Asante history, women were very important, especially the queen mother. For example, the purchase and acquisition of Kumasi was a transaction between two women

Imam: That is probably why the white men call it the motherland (joke, laughs)

Prof: So when you spoke of Nana Wurukye, it tied right into the history of women being significant.

Imam: yes, but these days women don't have power in the north. I can't explain how they lost their power. It could be the introduction of Islam in the region. Islamic religion states that a woman should not control men, because it impedes development. Then the same Islam teaches us that in every conceivable way, the woman should be your queen. According to Islam, women

should be pampered; they should not be forced to do anything, not even laundry if she does not feel like washing.

***** about menstruation and Islamic laws, not very audible*

If you want to have sex with a menstruating woman, the lower part of the body must be covered with cloth. Even then, you must pay a fine of half **dinar** in alms. In other words, do not do it. According to Islam, during menstruation women excrete/discharge blood that is filled with diseases and therefore anyone exposed to that through sex would get infected with those diseases.

Prof: How about the Hausa? How are they connected in this?

Imam: They were traders who came from Nigeria through the Gonja lands to buy kola nuts etc. so all the traders learned to speak and understand Hausa. History also tells us that the earliest Manhyia palace secretaries were Arabs; they took minutes/notes in Arabic. So it was long after them that our forefathers came from Gonja. As for Asantehene Osei Kwame, he almost converted to Islam and was destooled.

Prof: Thank you Alhaji. Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself?

Imam: I was born on 13th May 1950. My father's name is Haruna and my mother's name is Hajia Asat (Adwoa Kokoo). I was born and raised at Suame. I studied Arabic here on my father's veranda which has now developed into the Kumasi Muslim School. Then I returned to teach at the school for a while, until I moved to Magazine to be trained as an automobile welder [body works] at the Suame Magazine. Then I went to Nigeria and studied the Quran at Government College of Islamic Studies at Kano. Then my uncle passed away and I was called to return to Ghana and succeed him. I have been an Imam for 13 (thirteen) years; well, since 1991. Then in 1996 I went to Egypt for further studies. Egyptians are very good at training Imams. They train you properly; How to preach without provoking anyone. How to mediate a conflict diplomatically without anger etc. Egyptian universities would not train anyone to provoke anyone in the name of Islam. I was supposed to go back last year but I wanted to go to Haj [Mecca] that is why I couldn't go.

Prof: Saudi Arabia means a lot in the Islamic religion.

Imam: Well, that is where the Quran descended. But now there are many factions.

Prof: So for the Ghanaian Muslim where do you focus your education?

Imam: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt and some go to Iraq for studies. But those who sponsor more studies are Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. But those who study at Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia enjoy more amenities than their counterparts in Egypt. Egypt is not as rich as the other countries mentioned so a student must be exceptionally dedicated to survive, but they are the best educators.

Prof: So now we have an Islamic University in Accra.

Imam: Yes, the Lebanese also have one.

Prof: So, do you still prefer to go to the other countries for studies due to their Sunni traditions instead of this one at home in Accra?

Imam: It doesn't make much of a difference. Some people just condemn things. For example, Sunnis condemn Shiites and Shiites condemn Sunnis.

But they are just sects. The Islamic teachings are there to study, what separates the two factions is a different matter. You just advise yourself to ignore the politics and study the religion. At the school in Egypt, you are taught everything including the various sects and the source of their conflicts. For example, the Wadiya sect in Saudi Arabia does not accept any exceptions or conditions just the strict Islamic laws, even though the Quran has a supplemental law book for how to address exceptional or emergency situations. For example, alcohol and pork are forbidden in Islamic religion. But if you are traveling and you become stranded and starving, the Quran says eat the pork and drink the alcohol for survival. Because if you don't and you die, God will ask you.

Prof: We have almost finished. Can you tell us something about yourself? Are you married?

Imam: Yes. I have two wives and six children; five girls and a boy.