

DO WITCHES ONLY FLY? A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION'S CLAMP DOWN ON WITCH FINDING SHRINES AMONGST THE ASANTE PEOPLE OF THE GOLD COAST (1907-1940)

Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, PhD

Daniel Owusu-Ansah, PhD

Department of History and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana

ABSTRACT: *The subject of witchcraft has been of keen interest to many writers of history. Prior to the advancement in scientific knowledge several societies attributed diseases, suffering and disasters to an act of misdemeanour against the deities that govern the affairs of communities from the supernatural realm or to persons who practiced bad medicine or witchcraft. In dealing with the witchcraft situation in several European societies, witches, that is those purported to practice witchcraft were burnt at the sticks. It is imperative to note that various civilisations or societies have handled the question of witchcraft differently in the past.*

KEYWORDS: Witches, British Colonial, Clam down, Finding shrines, Gold coast

INTRODUCTION

The subject of witchcraft has been of keen interest to many writers of history. Prior to the advancement in scientific knowledge several societies attributed diseases, suffering and disasters to an act of misdemeanour against the deities that govern the affairs of communities from the supernatural realm or to persons who practiced bad medicine or witchcraft. In dealing with the witchcraft situation in several European societies, witches, that is those purported to practice witchcraft were burnt at the sticks. It is imperative to note that various civilisations or societies have handled the question of witchcraft differently in the past.

Webster's defines witchcraft as the act or instance of employing sorcery, especially with malevolent intent: a magical rite or technique. It is also referred to as the practice of black magic, the use of spells and the invocation of spirits. The Etymological Dictionary's entry for "Witch" says:

O.E. wicce "female magician, sorceress," in later use esp. "a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their cooperation to perform supernatural acts," fem. of O.E. wicca "sorcerer, wizard, man who practices witchcraft or magic," from verb wiccian "to practice witchcraft" (cf. Low Ger. wikkēn, wicken "to use witchcraft," wikkē, wicker "soothsayer"). OED says of uncertain origin. Klein suggests connection with O.E. wīgle "divination," and wīg, wih "idol." Watkins says the nouns represent a P.Gmc. *wikkjaz "necromancer" (one who wakes the dead), from PIE *weg-yo-, from *weg- "to be strong, be lively."

The Bible gives us a reference to the Witch of Endor, who, using a familiar spirit, was able to bring up Prophet Samuel in a necromantic ritual. The first book of Samuel, chapter 28

mentions that Saul had "put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land." This doesn't stop Saul from seeking out the witch at Endor, as we see in this verse:

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor. And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee."

The Bible definition has been chosen based on the historical validity of the text and also traces some of the origins or possible earlier definitions to witchcraft. We do perceive that various communities across the globe have had their own traditional definitions and perceptions to the subject of witchcraft and as we go into the narrative as to how the British Colonial Administration made attempts to prevent the Asante people of the Gold Coast from practicing witchcraft we will come across some definitional issues in some Colonial records.

The people of Asante form part of the Akan group of the Ghanaian or the former Gold Coast population. Their language is Asante. Historical narratives suggest that they were a strong force to reckon with and by the turn of the nineteenth century had built a robust economy. It is noted that with the accumulation of wealth, the Asante developed the skill of making gold weights used for measuring monetary values and other rates of exchange unknown in any other Akan state. This degree of wealth enabled them to expand their influence and territory into one of the greatest in the annals of history in Africa. (Buah, 1995) To this day, it is believed the Asante are the leading custodians of Ghana's cultural heritage. However, by the turn of twentieth century, the British who still remained in some of the territories of the Gold Coast still saw Asante as a force that had to be broken and by 1902, that is after the Yaa Asantewaa war, Asante hegemony was broken and the territory then called Asante came under the full control of the British Colonial Administration. As a result of this British policies in relation to commerce, land administration and medicine among others would directly affect the people of Asante.

METHOD

This paper is based on primary and secondary sources. The major primary source used is from the Public Records and Archives Administration of Ghana (PRAAD), Accra and Kumasi respectively as well as the Manhyia Archives of the *Asantehene* (The Chief of Asante). Other written sources from books have also been sourced. These sources have been thematically arranged using the textual analyses. The narrative is purely historical.

EUROCENTRIC VIEWS ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS PRIEST HEALER

As part of their administration of the territory called Gold Coast the British sought to influence either through legislation or colonial executive orders to get the indigenous people to do away with certain practices they deemed harmful to the physical, psychological or social well-being of the populace. One of such practices was witchcraft and witch-finding. These practices were mostly associated with the Indigenous Priest Healers referred to by

various scholars as shamans, withc-doctors and traditionally as *Akomfo*. The roles of Indigenous Priest Healers seemed to have been identified by Bosman in eighteenth century when he hinted that the ministration of the *Okomfo* was as effectual as that of the Pope himself and by that you may observe what power the priest has over evil spirits.¹ Maier however, focused on some of the social implications of these methods. Some of these implications had earlier been spelt out by Bosman who articulates the view that the term “fetish” or *bosom* refers to a “false God”.² However, he proceeds by stating that the indigenous people mostly made offerings to deities, performed religious worship and mostly paid a fee at a shrine to inquire of their fate.³ In like manner if they were injured by another they made “fetishes” to destroy them in a similar manner.⁴ However, the contrast is that if any person was caught throwing this “poison” he was severely punished, sometimes with death.⁵ Significantly, according to Bosman the IPH was traditionally never accused of falsehood.⁶ If the whole land was ruined as a result of his ministration, his reputation remained secured and untouched and if by chance his predictions came to pass there was not in the world a wiser or holier man, and he was sure not to want his reward.⁷

The argument of Cruickshank is not different from what has been put forward by Bosman. He hinted that the ministration of the priest especially in the nineteenth century could not be questioned by European powers.⁸ The victims of the severe laws of the priests in reference to debt, false accusation and pretended crimes of which they had no evidence but their superstitious fears which had a correlation with the oracular dictates of the “fetish man” and the entire beliefs of the indigenous people as referred to by Cruickshank was a path the governor did not make an effort to traverse.⁹ It is as well essential that this nineteenth-century view of the governor still persisted in twentieth century Asante especially in matters pertaining to the operations of IPH. However, Cruickshank draws a contrast that within the nineteenth century it was only when the governor had noted the obnoxious nature of such custom that he cautiously led his attack against it.¹⁰

Significantly, Cruickshank buttresses the view about the authority that the priest exercised among the indigenous population. This is quite similar to some of the views shared by Bosman. Cruickshank argued that different kinds and degrees of power were attributed to different “fetishes”.¹¹ One might be celebrated for his success in exorcism, another for the detection of a thief and the recovery of a stolen property and a third for the curing of diseases and the making of the barren fruitful.¹² It is important to note that the specialization of particular shrines as to what they are noted for is something which is well noted in Asante traditional society. However, it is an established fact that the afore-mentioned specializations are sometimes noted to be embodied mostly in one particular deity or shrine. This notwithstanding, Cruickshank made notes about the extensiveness of the field of impostors in

¹ Bosman , *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* ,106

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Bosman , *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* ,106

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Cruickshank , *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa* , 152

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Cruickshank B, *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 152

indigenous priest healing who preyed on their victims.¹³ There were also numerous hosts of intermediaries or secretaries (*abosomfo*) also referred to by Cruickshank as “simple conjurers who assumed the “fetish” character as a very efficient field for all kinds of roguery, and made large gains out of the credulity of the indigenous people.”¹⁴ Would the Colonial Administration not be concerned in Asante in the first half of the twentieth century in matters pertaining to this roguery especially when it is found out that it persisted during the twentieth century? The “Priest craft”, that is the profession of the IPHs as referred to by Cruickshank was not only confined to the male portion of the indigenous community for there was also an established order of priestesses or “fetish women” who further swelled the ranks of what was described by Cruickshank as “religious harpies”.¹⁵

The world view or the character of the Gold Coasters and for that matter Asante, the nature of their traditional governance, their ideas of justice and administration, domestic and social relations, crimes and virtues were all more or less influenced by and formed upon what has been described by Cruickshank as their peculiar superstitions.¹⁶ Cruickshank argued that there is scarcely an occurrence of life into which this all-pervading element does not enter. It gives fruitfulness to marriage, it encircles the newly-born babe with its defensive charms, it preserves it from sickness by its votive offerings, it restores it to health by its bleeding sacrifices, it watches over its boyhood by its ceremonial rites, it gives strength and courage to its manhood by its warlike symbol, it tends its declining age with its consecrated potions, it stays the raging pestilence among other things.¹⁷

During the twentieth century, according to Cruickshank, the advanced natives saw the ancient landmarks of society disappearing and attributed much of it to the roguery of the fetish men who by their extortions have alienated the allegiance of the “fetish-worshippers” and have branded the whole system with the character of imposture.

CLAMP-DOWN OF WITCH-FINDING SHRINES

From 1907, as a result of gradual infiltration of new ideas and progressive trend of European rule, the IPH in Asante began to experience a diminution of power. This made the healers determined to make every effort to retain their practice and continue to have some form of control in the indigenous healing therapies.¹⁸ The IPH strategy to maintain the status quo was mostly couched in false accusation against their skeptics. For example, E.C Fuller the Chief Commissioner of Asante in 1907 upon investigating a false triple murder accusation brought upon one Cudjoe by an IPH, ensured that the chiefs who instigated this were severely dealt with and the fine imposed on the supposed offender was refunded including compensation. The chiefs were publicly censured for getting involved.¹⁹

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Cruickshank, *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 153-154

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/10, Correspondence between the Chief Commissioner of Asante and Acting Colonial Secretary, 1907

¹⁹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/10, Correspondence between the Chief Commissioner of Asante and Acting Colonial Secretary-1907

The Asante Confederacy Council found out that some IPHs in Asante engaged in witch-finding and the so-called curing of witches. According to the Colonial Administration, the practitioners used these claims to extort money from people. Countrywide, in the 1930s, the Colonial Administration paid close attention to the activities of the IPHs. Attempt on the part of the Colonial Administration to clamp down witch finding shrines dotted within and near Asante caused IPHs to defend their practices on account that they have throughout the period of their practice gained considerable experience in the practice of witchcraft and moreso they had officially gained the recognition of the respective chiefs or native heads.²⁰ Priests of witch-finding shrines argued for the need to counter the perception of an overwhelming force of sorcerers and witches in their respective communities in Asante and elsewhere. Witchcraft was believed to be dangerous to lives and property, so in instances where the Colonial Administration barred the witch- finding shrines from operating, according to the IPH, it meant that any believer in such shrines or deities of witch finding could not find a better place to sooth his sorrows especially when bewitched.²¹

Earlier, in 1929 witch-finding shrines dotted across the Gold Coast including Asante were believed to be engaged in giving of medicinal relief and cure to those bewitched or suffering from other ill effects of the practice of witchcraft and also the practice of giving facilities for those accused or suspected of witchcraft to confess or be given the facility to prove themselves innocent or otherwise.²² The IPHs claimed that the circumstances or rituals connected with their practices were voluntary. They argued that no one was compelled to make a confession unless of his or her own free will and no one was asked to drink the medicine against witchcraft except of his or her own free will and so far as the votaries of their beliefs were concerned, they did not indulge in practices harmful to persons or property or did what was contrary to the enactments of the Colony.²³ Witchcraft, according to the IPH, was a fundamental article of belief in the faith of a majority of the people of the Gold Coast and specifically Asante.²⁴

In the 1930s, complaint of witch-finding shrines flooded the office of the Secretary of Natives Affairs at Victoriasborg, Accra. Several enquiries were made and this resulted in the closure of such witch finding shrines. Several shrine tours were made by the Colonial Administration in the Gold Coast and particularly Asante. For instance, on 2nd January, 1931, at 10 am, the Provincial Commissioner, accompanied by Captain J.C Warrington as part of their inquisitorial tours paid a visit to Nana Tongo at Suhum but, to their utter surprise, they suffered sudden black ants' invasion at the shrine. This did not permit the Colonial Officers to prolong their enquiries at the shrine.²⁵ However, shrines which were considered harmless were not closed down especially those that did not arrogate themselves the right to pass judgment on matters that were pending before a Tribunal relating to witchcraft.²⁶ It is quite revealing to point out that within the same period Tribunals faced with witchcraft related issues sent persons accused of witchcraft to medicine men or IPHs to be tested and judged. It

²⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM11/1/886, Witchcraft- Persecution of persons accused of, 1932

²¹ Ibid

²² PRAAD, Accra, ADM11/1/886, Witchcraft- Persecution of persons accused of, 1932

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

²⁶ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

was a seeming contravention on the part of the hand that was instilling the discontinuance of witch finding to be seen not only patronizing but collaborating with the IPHs to satisfy their ends.²⁷ The extortionate demands from witches who had been proven guilty by the Tribunals were not emphasized but the indigenous remedy for witchcraft was considered worse by the Colonial Administration. According to J. de Hart, the Attorney General, in the native mind witchcraft could not be defined and since there was no definition for it, it could not be proven at the Native Courts.²⁸ The witch is eventually deluded by incantations offered by the IPH(s) and she comes forward to confess her guilt. According to J. de Hart she is always of mentally unbalanced type, and has suffered for years from a form of delusionary insanity hence she was more suitable for a mental institution than to a Native Tribunal or prison.²⁹ Moreso, J. de Hart concluded that there could be danger of miscarriage of justice in a trial for witchcraft before a local tribunal soaked with superstition and there could be no reason to suppose that a charge of practising witchcraft could not be fraught with the gravest danger of superstition hence, the amendment of the Order in Council of 1906 which gave recognition to witch finding.³⁰

One noticeable development in 1932 at the Gold Coast and for that matter Asante was that the subsequent amendment of the Native Administration Ordinance, followed by the Order in Council No. 28 of 1930 prohibited the practice of witch or wizard finding and any ceremony connected with it with a penalty of twenty-five pounds against those taking part or instigating others to take part in such practice. This notwithstanding, prior to 1930, operators of witch-finding shrines were already in practice and were supported by the Native Administration Ordinance which gave recognition to the fact that witchcraft was a practice indulged in by the inhabitants of the Gold Coast, and the belief that the practice was harmful to human life and to property was not publicly assailed.³¹

Again, on 26th September, 1931, Hon. W.J.A. Jones, Secretary for Native Affairs, stated on the floor of the Legislative Council that;

The Africans in this Colony do hold a very strong belief in the power of witchcraft, and that it was not for the members of government (i.e. Europeans) who had cast aside or outgrown the belief in witchcraft to ridicule those who believe in it and still maintain that belief.³²

It was the opinion of the Secretary for Native Affairs that the belief in witchcraft was left alone for in the course of time it would die a natural death. It was however based on the explanation of the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Provincial Members of Council, encouraging them that the amendment did not seek to break down their belief in the powers of witchcraft. It was based on this explanation that the Provincial Members of Council refrained on behalf of the indigenous people from opposing the amendment of Section 46 of

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between the Commissioner Eastern Province and The Secretary for Native Affairs, 1932

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between the Commissioner Eastern Province and The Secretary for Native Affairs, 1932

³¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

³² Ibid

the Principal Ordinance (Order in Council 1906) in its reference to the practice of witchcraft.³³

The IPHs were unsettled especially when they wanted to hold on to their positions in the face of incessant colonial action against some of the practitioners in the indigenous healing milieu in Asante. Firstly, they sought for the relaxation or the liberal interpretation of the Order in Council to give them a legitimate scope to operate since according to the IPHs it was impossible for a people (i.e. Asante) to maintain a religious belief or any other belief without seeking to propitiate the evil practices associated with that belief. Secondly there was also the need to seek remedies for themselves from those harmful influence created in their minds by the existent belief which they believed were exercised around them and against the safety of their lives and property.³⁴ Again, the IPHs requested from the Colonial Administration that the interpretation of the Order in Council should not be stretched to include those cases in which persons who believed they were witches or were possessed by evil spirits voluntarily appeared before an acknowledged medicine man or IPHs for such evil spirits to be exorcised or driven out of their bodies.³⁵ There was also the call for a distinction between legitimate practice of witch medicine and the illegitimate or prohibited practice of witch-finding.³⁶ The distinction sought was based on those who voluntarily sought to be relieved from their pains and those who were compelled by some superior authority, such as a family, a Tribunal or some other community to have themselves declared innocent or guilty of witchcraft.³⁷

In addition, the IPH both in Asante and elsewhere in the Gold Coast noted that strict interpretation of the Order in Council could result in people being made to fear for their lives as to the influence that witches or wizards have upon them without having the right under the Order in Council to consult a legitimate IPH or medicine man or a native doctor versed in the practices of witchcraft to analyze the cause of a person's troubles by a process of psycho-analyses, and to find remedies for the belief, whether baseless, hallucinatory or not, which that person entertains with regard to his own health and well being.³⁸ Of essence is a general anthropological view that in most non-western societies, including Ghana, traditional healers are the first resort in mental health problems and they continue to be used even after psychiatric systems are enlisted.³⁹ In mental health situations in developing countries there is not one that refuses to mention the role of the family or the kin group. It is noted that IPHs seemed to have in most cases been able to win the support and the involvement of the family or the kin group.⁴⁰ Significantly, the arguments put forward by IPHs in Asante and other practitioners at the Gold Coast were to enhance their position and also avoid being prosecuted for engaging in what they deemed legitimate.

³³ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Kwabena Asifu and His Excellency Sir Ransford Slater, Governor and Commander in Chief of the Gold Coast Colony, 1932

³⁹ Adler, L. L, Gielen, P. U, *Cross-Cultural topics in Psychology*, (USA: Greenwood Publishing Group) sites (Jilek, 1993)

⁴⁰ Ibid

Still, the persistence with which the Colonial Administration saw to the closure of witch and wizard finding shrines put the healers out of business. Witch finding became a lucrative business and as a result of increasing adherents at such shrines the practice became widespread. Significantly, amongst the indigenous people witchcraft was a crime, which did not bring death upon the witch or wizard but also death and bondage upon their relations.⁴¹ Cruickshank argued that witchcraft was chiefly discovered by “fetish men” who in this study are also referred to as IPHs. They suited their own purposes in denouncing the guilty.⁴² If sudden sickness or death overtook a person, who coincidentally quarrelled with another, this other person was considered to have bewitched him and rarely escapes punishment.⁴³ Appeals were also made by persons accused of witchcraft to be relieved of possible false accusation, and if declared innocent heavy penalties were decreed against the accuser.⁴⁴ It must be noted that the collaboration between Native Tribunals and these shrines made it gain foothold in 1932. Native Tribunals dispatched under duress, all suspected witches and wizards for treatment at shrines after which the cured parties were milked of considerable proportion of their income.⁴⁵ So great was the witch finding business, and so remunerative to both tribunals and Priests, that it is no wonder that it came to the notice of the Colonial Administration, and eventually led to the suppression of the practice.⁴⁶ However, in April 1932, Hugh Thomas, the acting Colonial Secretary, permitted that IPHs could continue with the practice of exorcising people who voluntarily came for treatment.⁴⁷

The late 1930s and 1940s saw an overwhelming growth of Christian influence countrywide. As an effort to evangelize and civilize the indigenous people, the missionaries taught that the belief in the spirit forces such as the gods, “fetishism”, dwarf and witchcraft was superstitious.⁴⁸ The reason for the growth of Christianity within this period was also partly due to the way the indigenous people attempted to deal with their threats and fears, especially witchcraft.⁴⁹ The emphasis was that an enlightened religion, education, medicine, and better social and racial conditions would help to dispel witchcraft beliefs.⁵⁰ The archival records have shown that some of the complaints made to the Secretary of State and the Secretary for Native Affairs concerning witch-finding shrines came from some Christian Priests.⁵¹ Reports from the Subcommittee appointed by the Gold Coast Christian Council to enquire into common beliefs in witchcraft and the subsequent recommendations made included a strong case against IPHs who were into witch finding:

It is our conviction that unscrupulous persons often take advantage of the prevailing belief, to acquire notoriety and importance by pretending to possess power which in fact they do not possess. We recommend to the Christian Council that, with a view of unmasking some at least of these designing persons, a reward of money be offered to any person who in the

⁴¹ Cruickshank, *Eighteen years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 179

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between the Commissioner Eastern Province and The Secretary for Native Affairs, 1932

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Onyinah, “Deliverance as a way of Confronting witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a case History”, *Cyber Journal for Pentecostal and Charismatic research*, 2009

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ PRAAD, Accra, ADM11/1/886, Witchcraft- Persecution of persons accused of, 1932

presence of two or three of the members of the Council can perform a feat, which it is often claimed can be performed- the feat, namely of “eating” a material object, a pawpaw for example without physical contact with it, at a distance of five yards.⁵²

The committee emphasized the general beliefs of the power witches possessed in the Gold Coast and Asante. It was believed that the powers possessed by witchcraft included self-transformation into a beast or a bird sometimes known by scientist as *zoanthropy*.⁵³ The belief that witches had power to inflict diseases and death upon human victim without physical contact or physical mediums among other things was emphasized. Generally, it was believed that witches are organized in non-material groups, thus, it was during such meetings the witch finder intervened to rescue a victim.⁵⁴ Even with this, the church suspected extortions on the part of the IPHs and doubted their integrity and moreover decided to trumpet the Order in Council No.28 of 1930.⁵⁵ It was the conviction of the sub-committee of the Gold Coast Christian Council that:

Whatever be the truth about witchcraft, the person who stands to gain most by the continuance of the belief is the witch-doctor. In one sense we hold that in the present sense of public opinion the witch-doctor is more dangerous than the witch. His power to terrorize the weak minded; his power to suggest to unbalanced persons that they are witches, when as a matter of fact they are as innocent in this respect as the members of this Council; his power to create or intensify an atmosphere of suspicion and malice, these are powers which make him a grave danger to society.⁵⁶

In 1934, the Chief Commissioner of Asante resident in Kumase continued to receive reports against various shrines in Asante concerning witch finding. It was realized that as a result of the passage of the Order in Council No. 28 of 1930, several witch finding shrines were proscribed under the Native Customs Ordinance in Asante.⁵⁷ These shrines reappeared with different names which made it difficult for the Chief Commissioner and any such officer of inspection to identify them.⁵⁸ On 6th July 1934, the acting Chief Commissioner of Asante in collaboration with the acting Governor of the Gold Coast on 14th July, 1934, passed the Native Customs Witch and Wizard Finding Order, 1934.⁵⁹ This sought to give a final blow to the practice of witch-finding shrines. The practice of witch or wizard finding and any ceremony connected with it was prohibited and any person who took part or instigated any person to take part in such practice in Asante was liable to a term of imprisonment with or without hard labour not exceeding three months or with a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds.⁶⁰ This notwithstanding, in 1938, it came to the notice of the District Commissioner,

⁵² PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Report of the Subcommittee appointed by the Gold Coast Christian Council, 1930

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Report of the Subcommittee appointed by the Gold Coast Christian Council, 1930

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ PRAAD, Accra, ADM 11/1/886, Correspondence between Chief Commissioner of Asante and the Colonial Secretary of State. 1934

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

Asante, that the practice of “fetishism” was still being abused and that witchcraft formed a large part of the programme of the priests’ healers.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

It can be surmised that the British Colonial Administration of the Gold Coast within the period under review, did not subscribe to certain of the practices that were considered to be obnoxious to the well-being of the indigenous people. They were much concerned with witch-finding shrines that were increasing in the territory of the Gold Coast as a whole. The effective techniques used were legislations against the practice, the making of inquisitorial visits at shrines and finally the closure of witch-finding shrines.

As a result of some form of indigenous representation at the legislature, the indigenous people of the Gold Coast including Asante arguably put out their defence for the practice of witchcraft and the need to have a cure to ameliorate it. This notwithstanding, it is known that Colonialism travelled with Christianity in the case of British-West Africa. This accentuated the position against what was referred to as heathenism that included witch—craft, witch-finding and other related practices.