CHAPTER 1

THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

When the British moved their administration to Tamale in 1907, it was a village of 1,435 people. Now it is a sprawling town of 80,000, and the morning plane from Accra swings down to land over shimmering iron rooftops, concrete offices, and a web of asphalt roads, masts, and aereals. Around Tamale stretches the flat orchard savannah of northern Ghana, a thinly populated land across which the main north road to the Upper Volta border runs as smooth and straight as the drive of a country park. To reach Dagomba villages in this country might now take as little as eight hours by jet from London: when the British first came to Tamale, the journey took a month or more.

At the time of colonial partition the Dagomba kingdom spread over some 8,000 square miles of the savannah plains. The kingdom had then been in existence for about four hundred years, ruled over by the paramount chief, the Ya-Na, from his capital at Yendi, sixty miles east of Tamale. On the eastern edge of the kingdom lay the Konkomba, a stateless people, treated as subjects of the Dagomba. The Mamprussi to the north and the Nanumba to the south were related to the Dagomba: they migrated into the area at the same time and retained myths of common origin. The other neighbours of the Dagomba – the Gonja, Tampolensi, and Chokosi – were of entirely different stock, although the principal chief of the Chokosi (the Chereponi-fame) had become, and still is, a member of the Dagomba State Council.

In 1960 the total population of Dagomba origin enumerated in Ghana was 217,640, of whom 186,970 were at that time actually resident in the Northern Region (in which the whole area of Dagomba settlement now lies). It is impossible to give precise figures for the growth of Dagomba population in this century. The 1931 census indicated a total population of 191,956 for the two Dagomba districts (although this figure included the adjacent Nanumba). In 1948 the Dagomba population of the then Gold Coast was estimated at 172,379, roughly 150,000 of whom were living in the Dagomba administrative district. The most useful recent figures are perhaps those given for the six main Dagomba constituencies by the Siriboe commission on electoral and local government reform in 1967: these suggest a total population of 267,907.

As large towns, Tamale and Yendi are quite distinct from the majority of Dagomba settlements. Indeed, Tamale is more an administrative and commercial centre within Dagomba than a Dagombatown. Yendi, although a market town, has not changed to the same extent as Tamale: it has a moderately large population (around 16,000) but lacks many of the facilities...
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of a developing urban centre, such as banks and chain stores. Yendi only acquired a secondary school in 1970: it is still essentially the royal capital of pre-colonial times, with modern amenities added to but not supplanting the traditional structure of the town.

In Dagomba generally population density is low and villages are typically small. The average population density is roughly 31 persons per square mile: it is highest in the west, around Tamale. Yet it has been calculated, by Christine Oppong, that of 382 settlements in western Dagomba, 285 (74.6 per cent) have less than 200 inhabitants. The larger villages are, for the most part, also the capitals of divisional chiefs under the Ya-Na. It is, in fact, interesting that these capitals, such as Savelugu, Kumbungu, Samba, Gushiegu, and Karaga, have kept their pre-eminence under colonial and post-colonial government, though in no case has population risen dramatically. Their continuing importance is a result of administrative policies concerned with chieftaincy and local government in the area, policies which preserved or restored earlier spheres of authority and gave new functions to those vested with authority.

The main features of Dagomba economy and social structure are discussed in Chapter 2, but some general characteristics may be pointed out here. The predominant activity of the Dagomba is still subsistence agriculture: in 1960, 82 per cent of Dagomba men were classified as engaged in ‘farming, fishing, and hunting’. Conversely, only 0.2 per cent were in occupations described as ‘administrative, executive, and managerial’ and only 1.1 per cent in those classed as ‘professional, technical and related’. The Dagomba are, moreover, known as skillful farmers, and successive governments, noting the apparent availability of land in the area as well as the rising demand for foodstuffs in the towns, have looked upon this part of the north as a potential granary for Ghana.

Yet Dagomba has no obvious advantages as an environment for agriculture, let alone for intensive cash-crop farming. It lies within the Sudanese climatic zone. Rainfall is moderate, highly seasonal, and unreliable: water supply has been a chronic problem, especially in western Dagomba. Although there has not yet been a detailed soil survey, it is clear that the top-soil is thin and the sub-soil lateritic. Yields are not high in any of the major crops and, as Levitzon remarks, ‘neither cereal nor root crops are very successful’. Finally, the Dagomba farmer has not been compelled, by shortage of land, to abandon shifting cultivation. Thus, while easy access to an urban market has stimulated farmers to sell surplus foodstuffs (and even to increase acreages in order to produce a surplus), there is as yet no question of cash-crops assuming priority. At present, the major initiative in the area of extensive commercial agriculture seems to be coming from civil servants and merchants in the local towns rather than from village farmers – understandably enough, given the comparative advantage of the former in respect of capital. Some chiefs have also moved into large-scale farming, but the basic unit of Dagomba economy remains the subsistence family farm, producing millet, maize, guinea-corn, and yams.
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Nor has migration been a factor of sufficient importance to bring about significant change in the local economy. Unlike, for example, the Frafra of north-eastern Ghana, the Dagomba have not been encouraged to migrate because of overcrowding on the land. Only 10 per cent of the Dagomba population has moved south, compared with 18 per cent of the Frafra. There has not been any substantial exodus from the land on account of schooling and the search for non-agricultural employment. For until very recently the level of literacy was very low and there were very few schools in Dagomba. In 1960 only ten male Dagombas in the age-groups over 25 had received secondary or post-secondary education (another eighty in the younger age-groups were at that time passing through post-primary courses). Further, the Dagomba have not been one of the ‘military tribes’ from which soldiers and policemen have been recruited by central government. At the time of the 1960 census, only 460 Dagomba were enumerated as resident in ‘service barracks, army and brigade camps’, compared to 3,050 from the Frafra, Buisa, and ‘Grusi’ of the Upper Region – groups which in total represented only 3.6 per cent of Ghana’s population, as against 3.2 per cent made up by the Dagomba alone.

DAGOMBA HISTORY

The Dagomba kingdom was one of a cluster of states created by groups of migrant cavalymen moving south and imposing themselves as a ruling class on established stateless peoples. Of the latter, little is known: they spoke a language belonging to the Gur group and had earth priests (tindamba). The indigenous people figure in Dagomba myth as ‘the Black Dagomba’. Although the name ‘Dagomba’ itself may have been that of the indigenous people, assumed by the invaders, the great body of mythology is clearly that of the migrants and in this sense ‘Dagomba’ history is that of the kings since the fifteenth century.

The migrants who established Dagomba were part of a movement which, as I have noted, also led to the creation of the Mamprussi and Nanumba states, as well as to the formation of the Mossi kingdoms now within Upper Volta. The mythology of all these states refers to a common ancestor, Tohajie, ‘the Red Hunter’, whose grandson Na Gbewa, settled at Pusiga, near Bawku, in north-eastern Ghana. The migrants seem to have been pagans of Hausa origin, possibly from Zamfara, one of the old Hausa ‘Banza Bokwoi’ states located in the area of Nigeria to the north of Borgu. According to Fage, they moved westwards and for a time supported themselves by raiding the towns of the Niger valley. This period is symbolised in Dagomba history by the story of the hunter who helped the king of Mali in war. The raiders were pushed south in the fifteenth century by the Songhai kings Sonni Ali and Askia Muhammed.

Thus we arrive at the settlement of Na Gbewa at Pusiga. Na Gbewa is said to have had seventeen children, the eldest being Zirile who succeeded him. According to Phyllis Ferguson, in the period following Zirile’s accession,
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The other brothers moved away from Pusiga, Tohagu to found the Mamprussi dynasty at Nalerigu and Sitobu to establish the branch which subsequently controlled Dagomba. The Mossi kingdom of Ouagadougou was created by the offspring of Yantaure, a daughter of Na Gbewa. There followed an extended campaign of conquest, led by Sitobu’s son Nyagse, at the conclusion of which Nyagse was invested by his father with the regalia of the new kingdom. Nyagse then established a capital at a place now known as Yendi Dabari, some twenty-nine miles north of Tamale.21

The conquest of western Dagomba was undertaken by the Dagomba cavalry, who killed or removed the indigenous divisional chiefs and replaced them by members of the royal dynasty and captains of the army. Younger brothers of Sitobu were installed in (or took) divisional chieftdoms: one, Biemone, became Karaga-Na, while another, Biyumkomba, became Mionlana, and a third, Bojeligu, became Sunson-Na. The first Kuga-Na (an important court elder) is said to have been yet another brother of Sitobu, Sibie, who became soothsayer (baga) to Nyagse.22 The two most important non-royal chieftdoms established during the conquest were those of Tolon and Kumbungu: the Tolon-Na is traditionally head of the king’s army and the Kumbung-Na commander of the archers.

Although a large number of tindamba were killed by the Dagomba, the institution itself was not destroyed. Indeed, in a few places the tindana was allowed to remain as village chief under a Dagomba divisional chief. An important example is Tamale, where the chief, known as the Dakpema, seems to be descended from the earlier tindana. Moreover, the imposition of new chiefs did not destroy the jurisdictions of the tindamba. According to some writers, the Dagomba chiefs assumed some of the authority of the earth priests – the Ya-Na himself wearing regalia taken from them. The Dagomba state was certainly not strongly centralised, at this or any other period, and the survival of the tindana divisions may have helped the emergence of a federal structure.23

The conquest of eastern Dagomba took place later than that of the west and apparently with less slaughter of earth priests. The final settlement of this area may have occurred in the seventeenth century when the capital was moved towards present-day Yendi.24 The Dagomba pushed back the Konkomba and established divisional chiefs among them. The main towns, such as Nakpali and Zabzugu, had the character of outposts, strategically located on the east bank of the River Oti. Despite this assertion of suzerainty, the Dagomba kingdom seems never to have exercised close control over the Konkomba: administration took the form of slave raiding and punitive expeditions. The Konkomba were by no means assimilated. Relations between them and the Dagomba were distant and hostile: there was little, if any, mixing by marriage.25

The wars with Gonja and Ashanti

In the early seventeenth century Gonja was invaded by a conqueror of ‘Mande’ origin, Sumaila Jakpa.26 Like Sitobu and Nyagse in Dagomba,
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Jakpa moved across country installing his relatives as chiefs. He came into conflict with the Ya-Na when he seized control of Daboya, north-west of Tamale, and made himself overlord of the Tampolensi. Daboya had been a useful asset to Dagomba as a salt-producing centre and the Ya-Na had claimed suzerainty over the Tampolensi in the area. Having appointed his son as chief of Daboya, Jakpa moved south to attack the Dagomba, defeating (and killing) Na Dariziegu in battle at Yapei. Subsequently Jakpa caused the trade in kola nuts to be directed through the town of Salaga, which, under his patronage, became an important caravan centre. Raiding continued, with Konkombas being taken as labourers to grow food for Gonja chiefs. 27

There seems to have been an appreciable economic element in the Dagomba wars with Gonja and, indeed, in the subsequent clash with Ashanti. For example, Phyllis Fergusson argues that the Dagomba, in competition with the Gonja, had been drawn eastwards in search of iron ore and slaves: the Gonja had then moved into the vacuum formed in western Dagomba. 28 Further, the ‘Ashanti hinterland’ was the meeting point of two important caravan routes. One went north-west from Begho (in the present Brong-Ahafo Region) via Bondoukou and Kong (in the Ivory Coast) to Djenné on the Niger; the other went north-east from Salaga via Sansanne-Mango in Togo and Nikki in Dahomey to Kano. These routes were linked at their northern ends to the trans-Saharan caravans and along them passed kola nuts, gold, salt, and other goods, not to mention the creed of Islam. The rulers of Gonja and Dagomba were naturally anxious to profit from control of this trade and it is probable that competition for control was an important factor in the wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 29

For Dagomba, an important consequence was the movement of the capital eastwards to Yendi (originally a Konkomba town called Chare). The movement seems to have taken place under Na Luro, the twelfth Ya-Na, though the oral (‘drum’) history of Dagomba attributes it to his successor, Tutugri. 30 From Yendi, as Tamakloe writes, ‘Na Luro found it easy to drive the Ngbanye [Gonja] away from some of the Dagbamba towns occupied by them.’ 31 The final eviction of the Gonja from Dagomba, however, only occurred in the early eighteenth century, under Na Zangina. The Gonja had mounted a new campaign against western Dagomba under Kumpati. Zangina, who was old, apparently had difficulty persuading his divisional chiefs to lead troops against Kumpati and few of the eastern Dagomba chiefs took part in the campaign, which lasted about seven years. Finally, Andani Sigili, chief of Kpoge, with the assistance of the Yo-Na (chief of Savelugu), killed Kumpati. Zangina was remembered by the Dagomba as ‘the man who loosed the ropes from their necks’ (Andani Sigili succeeded him as Ya-Na). 32

Zangina is also remembered as the king who brought Islam into Dagomba (having, according to some accounts, travelled as a trader to Timbuktu and Hausaland as a young man). Islamisation was no doubt assisted by the location of Yendi on the trade route from Salaga to Kano. Although
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Phyllis Ferguson sees the introduction of Islam as marking the start of ‘the Second Kingdom’ of Dagomba. Islam was by no means universally adopted, even at court: the generality of Dagombas remained pagan and the Ya-Na himself never developed into a theocrat. Indeed, his regalia and the ritual surrounding his office kept a substantial pagan element. The significance of the Na’s conversion was that it entailed the attachment of Muslim officials (limannnemen) to the court at Yendi and to the courts of lesser chiefs. The liman could be a powerful figure in the court not only because of his spiritual authority but also because, as Northcott wrote, ‘he is able to read and write, and etiquette forbids that any member of the royal family should compass these accomplishments’.

Another contribution of Islam to Dagomba culture is said to have been the wearing of clothes. The ‘drum history’ records this innovation: ‘At that time everyone wore skins as clothing. When Zangina became chief, he went to the Mosque at Sabali and prayed that God might grant the Dagomba clothing. It was thereafter that God enabled the Dagombas to know the art of weaving clothing.’

Very soon after the Gonjas had been expelled from Dagomba, the kingdom became subject to raids from Ashanti. These raids may have been spread over a period of as much as fifty years (as Fage suggests). They culminated in an episode which reveals the same kind of internal disunity as had been evident in the Gonja wars. The chief of Kpatina, Zibili (a son of Andani Sigili and grandson of Zangina on his mother’s side) is alleged to have invited the Ashanti to attack Na Gariba. Gariba, deserted by all the major western Dagomba chiefs, was captured by an Ashanti army and was to have been taken to Kumasi. However, he was released en route, at Yeji, following an appeal by some of the Dagomba princes. In return, the Ya-Nas were required to send a fixed number of slaves, cattle, sheep, and some cloth to Kumasi each year. In addition, an Ashanti representative was stationed at Yendi. The payments continued irregularly until 1874, when they ceased with the decline of Ashanti power.

There was thus a period of perhaps 130 years during which Ashanti was a strong influence in Dagomba. Historians disagree about the strength and character of this influence. Wilks and Fage have said that it amounted to the creation of a protectorate, the payments being a form of tribute; Tamakloe described Dagomba as a ‘vassal state’. Not surprisingly, the Dagomba ‘drum history’ minimises Ashanti influence, declaring that the incident of the capture and release of Gariba ‘was the only occasion that the Dagombas came under the Ashantis’, though it admits that payments to Kumasi continued for some years.

Duncan-Johnstone and, more recently, Iliau have argued that the Ashanti influence was more limited and symbolic and that the relationship between the states was mutually beneficial. Duncan-Johnstone reported that ‘the Ashanti always treated Dagbon with respect as a powerful kingdom although tributary to their King’. Iliau sees the relationship as one of ‘politico-economic symbiosis rather than conquest’. In his view, the
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Asantehene did not interfere with the internal affairs of Dagomba and the payments made were not ‘tribute’ but rather instalments of the ransom paid for the return of Gariba. Iliasu further remarks that the Ashanti presence was ‘highly profitable to both sides’. Yendi was on the north-eastern caravan route which became more important in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the result of troubles disrupting trade on the route via Kong).

Contemporary descriptions seem to confirm Iliasu’s interpretation. Dupuis, writing in the 1820s, commented: ‘Yandy forms no part of the [Ashanti] empire, but it is true that Ashantees influence carries great weight in the councils of the sovereign of Dagomba.’ Bowdich, travelling at the same period, gave a vivid, if second-hand, picture of Dagomba:

Yahndi is described to be beyond comparison larger than Coomassie, the houses much better built and ornamented. The Ashantees who had visited it told me they frequently lost themselves in the streets . . . The markets of Yahndi are described as animated scenes of commerce, constantly crowded with merchants from almost all the countries of the interior. Horses and cattle abound, and immense flocks are possessed even by the poorer class.

Bowdich saw Dagomba’s submission to Ashanti as the result of intelligent calculation:

As it was, [the Ashantis] still respected her resources, and were content to secure him [the Ya-Na] as a tributary. A triumph of policy was in the view of the King of Dagwumba, equivalent to the small diminution of personal dignity; and at the expense of an inconsiderable tribute, he established a commercial intercourse which, his markets being regularly supplied from the interior, was both an advantage and a security to him.

For the internal politics of Dagomba, one consequence of Ashanti influence was the creation of a wing of Ashanti-trained musketeers within the state army. It is unclear whether these musketeers (kambonse in Dagbane) were originally trained in Kumasi or were trained in Yendi by Ashanti ‘technical assistance’. In either case, the result was the formation of five chieftaincies (the kambon naanema), within which the titles of offices and organisations show marked Ashanti influence – the chiefs, for example, sitting upon stools rather than the skins used by Dagomba chiefs.

While the establishment of the kambonse obviously increased the military power of Dagomba, it also added another potential force for instability. The kambonse became notoriously independent-minded and could easily have developed the role of a Praetorian Guard manipulated by factions within the royal family.

The Ashanti presence seems to have stimulated such factionalism. Iliasu suggests that the annual tribute was a significant factor in factional competition and remarks on

the immense opportunities the annual payments afforded for intrigues against the paramountcy. Unsuccessful candidates to the paramountcy, chiefs and princes who desired to court favour in Kumasi and others who, for a variety of reasons,
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wanted to score points against the paramount chief, invariably sneaked out to Kumasi where, with little difficulty, they were able to persuade the Asantehene to be more assiduous in demanding slaves from Yendi.47

The nineteenth century

On at least one occasion in the nineteenth century, intervention came about in exactly this way48 and in general Dagomba was seriously affected by the movement of events further south. After 1874 Ashanti control of its hinterland declined. This decline, though relieving the Yendi authorities of the obligation to send tribute, removed the imperial protection which traders had enjoyed. Ashanti merchants and officials were killed or imprisoned and both Salaga and Yendi lost their prestige as commercial towns.49 By 1890 there was apparently no security on the route from Ouagadougou to Salaga, as Binger reported: ‘The chiefs are extremely rapacious. The traders frequently alter the routes they use . . . the wisest course to take is to get on good terms with the strongest tribes, this is the only way of getting through.’50

The British had tried to supplant Ashanti as a southern trading partner for Dagomba and to this end a Travelling Commissioner, Dr Gouldsbury, had visited Yendi in 1876. But, though the Ya-Na was willing to arrange for the dispatch of ivory to the coast, Ashanti power was still sufficient to stop the establishment of a really substantial trade by-passing Kumasi.51

Politically, the middle and late nineteenth century was a period of endemic dispute in Dagomba.52 The character of the disputes will be examined in the next chapter, since they are only intelligible when related to an analysis of the dynamics of pre-colonial politics and are certainly of no intrinsic interest, being complex and often quite obscure.

Broadly, what seems to have happened was a weakening of the authority of the Ya-Na over his divisional chiefs. Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks argue that the intensification of conflict over the Yendi skin in fact reflected a rise in the prestige of the office, caused by the development of a court bureaucracy which provided ‘a new and powerful executive instrument’ for the paramount.53 Certainly there was no real suggestion in any of the disputes of a movement in favour of partitioning the kingdom. But on several occasions the Ya-Na went to war with divisional chiefs over disputed successions and one Ya-Na was killed by a rival from another branch of the royal family.54 Further, many of the wars arose from princes seizing chiefdoms, without or against the authority of the Ya-Na.

In a system of indeterminate succession, such as obtained in Dagomba, the king was almost bound to act as a partisan in quarrels over succession. For in most cases his own side of the royal family would have some interest in the settlement – some hope of gain, however trivial, or some fear of loss, however remote. It does, however, seem that contests were more frequent in the nineteenth century and that the divisional chiefs were readier than before to defy their paramount.

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The instability of nineteenth-century Dagomba may have been partly due to the withdrawal of Ashanti, though, as noted above, the relationship with Kumasi could as well undermine the paramount as reinforce him. Another factor was the availability of mercenaries. Probably in the early 1860s, Ya-Na Abdulai began to employ a number of Zabarima horsemen from the region of Fada N`Gourma in Upper Volta, to help in capturing people to make up the annual consignment of slaves for the Asantehene. According to Cardinall, the Zabarima were difficult to get rid of. They eventually settled to the north of Dagomba, in the ‘Gurunsi’ area, where they continued raiding. From time to time, says Cardinall, ‘their services were in request by petty Chiefs of the Dagomba or Moshi blood who were endeavouring to set themselves up in the old way’. The old way was the use of force in defiance of Yendi and the rulings it imposed. It was a procedure sanctioned by many precedents, though obviously not one formally embodied in tradition.

Fish from the sea

Shielded by Ashanti from the coast, the rulers of Dagomba knew little about Europeans until the 1890s, when German, French, and British expeditions began criss-crossing over their territory, bringing with them flags, treaties, and offers of protection. Their innocence persisted until the very day of military defeat, 4 December 1896, when a Dagomba army of 7,000 was routed by a tiny German force of 100, at Adibo, south of Yendi. Ya-Na Andani had told his soldiers to go out and capture the Europeans, encouraging them with the words, ‘Seremingga yi-la kuom-na, o-nye la zaham’ (‘The white man is come from the water, he is a fish’). On 5 December the Germans marched into Yendi and burnt it; the Ya-Na himself was smuggled out of the town and went into hiding.

The Germans had first laid claim to Togo in 1884, when Nachtigal landed near Lomé and declared a protectorate. Their occupation was accepted by the other powers and, unlike the French in Dahomey and the British on the Gold Coast, their progress was not impeded by a powerful African state behind the coastline. In 1886, and again in 1888, German expeditions were sent north. The first, under Krause, passed through Savelugu in July 1886 on its way to Ouagadougou, and the second, led by Captain von François, visited Yendi, Salaga, Gambaga, Karaga, and Nanton between March and May 1888, getting the chiefs to accept German protection.

Unfortunately for von François, his own government had by this time reached agreement with the British for the establishment of a ‘neutral zone’ in the area. The zone was to extend northward from the Daka–White Volta confluence as far as 10°N. and westward from 0°33′E. as far as 1°27′W. Within these limits the powers agreed ‘to abstain from acquiring protectorates or exclusive influence’. This ‘neutral zone’ survived, in principle, until 1899.

The next move came from the British. Under pressure from commercial
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interests at home, the Government in 1892 authorised the dispatch of a mission, led by G. E. Ferguson, to arrange treaties with the ‘native authorities’ in Dagomba, Gonja, ‘Gurunsi’, and Mossi. The treaties were mainly commercial in character. In 1894 Ferguson was sent north again and he arrived in Yendi on 17 August. Ferguson reported that conditions in the north were unsettled: “In all the countries mentioned, there are frequent civil wars between rival claimants for regal ascendancy . . . In many cases, however, they are willing to submit their feuds to arbitration . . . the numerous princes who seize goods from traders are a pest to the community and put restrictions on trade.” The question of trade also arose in his advice to the Governor on dealings with the Germans. Concerned about suggestions of a partition of the ‘neutral zone’, he remarked: ‘Considering the political condition of the people, the arrangement is unfavourable to the civilization of our Hinterland . . . The strip of country which is owned by Dagomba and Bimbla [sc. Nanumba] between the eastern boundary of the Neutral Zone and the Oti River, is of the greatest strategic importance.’ Ferguson warned that concessions to Germany might result in the cutting of communications between the Gold Coast and British territories on the Niger and would give the Germans command of ‘the principal caravan route from the Hausa countries to Salaga and the neutral zone’.

During the next eighteen months two more German expeditions visited Yendi. In December 1894 the Ya-Na accepted protection from Germany (adding to that he already had from the British) and in February 1896 von Carnap-Quernheim passed directly across the neutral zone to Gambaga. Although he was recalled following protests from London, it was clear that a partition was imminent. Negotiations between the two powers on a possible boundary (leaving Yendi to Germany and Salaga to Britain) had broken down in November 1895.

The final impetus to partition was provided by the occupation of Kumasi in January 1896. Worried by the German expeditions (and by a French mission which had crossed from Dahomey to Kong in the Ivory Coast in 1895), the Colonial Office decided on an effective occupation of the Ashanti hinterland. The partition finally took place in a rush at the end of 1896, with British, French, and German expeditions converging on the neutral zone in the last weeks of December. The German force, under Gruner and von Massow, moved up from Kete-Krachi, defeated the Dagomba at Adibo, and then went on to occupy Sansanne-Mango before a French mission could get there. The French arrived too late, on Christmas Day. But when a German detachment moved on to Gambaga, they in turn found that a British expedition under Captain Stewart had arrived there before them. The French withdrew to the east, while Stewart entertained the German commander over Christmas.

For the Dagomba, however, the agony continued throughout 1897. A band of Zabarima, under Babatu, entered Dagomba from the north, having been pushed south by French and British troops. The Zabarima joined forces with a number of western Dagomba princes who were in revolt