## AMONG THE ASHANTI:

## It's The Women Who Count

In parts of Africa, the line of succession is passed on through the mother, even though she may live in a husband's home.

By Warren Brown

The role of women in Africa varies from one - --- to another, and there is a common saying in some regions, "a society without the participation of women is like a man without a neck."

In Ghana, known as the Old Gold Coast during the colonial rule of Great Britain, the Ashanti nation is controlled by a matriarchal system.

Oral historians have preserved the saga of the Ashanti, and the chronicle beings in the village of Awukugua, where Akomfo Anokye, creator of the nation, was born. He was the Great Spiritual Leader who "called the Golden Stool'' from heaven. The stool became the seat of authority for governing the nation.

Pile of sand

In his youth, Anokye first attracted attention when he demonstrated supernatural power by putting his hand in a pile of sand and pulling out chickens.

He later climbed a tall palm tree and his footprints became embossed on the bark of the tree at least hatch marks seen on tree, the chroniclers say are footprints.

Anokye later stretched out a tight rope across a long distance and walked on it from one end to the other. Then came a significant

Anokye went to a nearby creek and scooped out a mysterious man and woman. Neither one of them would mingle with others in the village, but they were married and their descendants were called

The authority

The Asantes migrated to an area now known as Kumasi. Even Anokye settled in that area and there established the temporal authority for the nation when he



This map of Africa was issued in January, 1979, and to our knowledge is the most complete around today. It might be a good idea to clip and file this map for future

summoned from heaven the Golden Stool to seat the chosen ruler - the King.

This early society had an elaborate primitive social system, sophisticated in its political structure and to a certain degree in matters of law.

Although they came under the British protectorate at the close of th Ashanti war of 1873-1874, and remained under the British until 1952, they never relinquished some of their legal and social

The foundation of the Ashanti political structure is the maternal lineage, a social group consisting of the descendants, reckoned through the female line, of a known female ancestor who lived not more than five or six generations back.

Ashanti precepts set forth two principles of biological continuity. Blood (mogya) is inherited by direct transfer from the mother. I

is the basis of the clan (abusua) and the lineage within it.

The Ntors (spirit), of a person is received through the semen of the father. Blood, is female; Semen is

Mere control The spirit principle has some religious manifestations beyond mere control of marriage.

But the blood principle controls land rights, succession to other kinds of property, to offices and titles; it determines political status almost entirely, as well as legal responsibilities, and it is the focus of the ancestor cult.

The emotional ties of blood outweigh those of spirit.

Although the Ashanti have organized their society in terms of double descent, only the matrilineal principle figures prominently in law and politics. The blood forms the body, and so the physical links between the

generations of today, yesterday mothers.

The male line within the lineage is spatially identifiable; for males stay ideally in place of their birth, while wives go to their husband's place. In this way they are patriarchal.

Bach lineage is centered in a special section of a given town and the males are all theoretically members of the same lineage, and widowed mothers, unmarried sisters and daughters are "in," their wives are "outsiders."

Family Houses

Unity of lineage is further cemented by the grouping of individual family houses about the dwelling of the lineage head in whose home all the men take their evening meals.

When a male dies, he is buried in the village so as to join his ancestors.

The lineage head is chosen by all the adult men and senior women of the lineage. In most cases the headship is hereditary within certain families within the

All males are eligible and if nominated, the name has to be submitted to the district chief for

If approved, he is presented to the chief, but not until all the adult members of the lineage have met in the house of the senior woman and each kinsman is sworn to serve ''you whom we have chosen to occupy the stool of our ancestors, so that you in turn serve the chief."

The stool is the seat of authority. When a chief dies, the stool is painted with his blood and permanently retired to a storage house controlled by the priest.

He is considered the earthly agent of the ancestral spirits. The newly elected chief is provided with another stool.

The most overriding of all Ashanti traditions is that "the well being of a society depends upon the maintenance of good relations with ancestors on whom the living depend for help and protection."

#### By Ulysses W. Watkins, M.D.

As a general precaution against disease and as a measure that you will probably take most commonly for the rest of your life to preserve your health, it is important that you become familiar with some common danger signals of

As a firm believer in home remedies as a treatment for certain ailments, I also believe that prayer always helps even after everything else has failed. But in most cases, if the symptoms do not go away or get worse after both of these two have been tried please see a doctor.

The following are some of the signals that you should watch for:

PAIN - Persistent or sharp pain anywhere in the body, whether it is chest, abdominal, head, or limbs, particularly if it occurs over and over, is the first of the danger signals. Pain is your friend because it often drives you to find out the cause and get rid of it before it's too late.

Pain is a positive indication that something is wrong so do not play the hero by trying to bear or neglect it. Taking pain killers to try and get rid of pain that will not go away or that is becoming more severe is not a smart thing to do

Special mention needs to be abdominal pain [or stomach ache]. A number of serious medical emergencies, including appendicitis, will cause sharp abdominal pain. With the exception of cancer, most gastrointestinal (the system that your food goes through) problems or diseases produce pain in the abdomen.

The important thing to remember here is, never take a laxative in the presence of abdominal pain and if the pain lasts more than an hour, avoid food and drink also [except for a few small sips of water] and get in touch with your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room.

FATIGUE - "That tired feeling" without immediately obvious cause (such as a late party the night before), that general day-after-day weariness of mind and body, is a second great danger signal. Chronic (or long standing) fatigue wears many disguises but you should learn to recognize them.

You are probably fatigued if your speech is hesitant and strained . . if you are ready to snap

### YOUR HEALTH:

# Danger Signals

people's head off at the least little thing they say or do to you . . if your posture droops and your

head and shoulders bow forward . . if your eyelids are red . . If dark circles appear under

your eyes . . . if you always get up tired in the morning . . . if you are exhausted always by noon or sooner . . . if you have lost your sense of humor . . . if you find it difficult to concentrate on your work or play . . . if you find yourself failing to "catch on" to things that you have had no problems understanding before (Continued next month)

The National Fund for Minority

leave to assist the fund. And IBM continued to pay him his full salary. Engineering Students is a very worthwhile program. We think so. Lauchland Henry thinks so. But most important of all, lots of minority engineering students enrolled at colleges and universities all over the country think so.

#### LAUCH HENRY HELPED FIND THE MISSING INGREDIENT TO EDUCATE MINORITY ENGINEERS. MONEY.

Lauchland Henry is a teacher. And a scientist. And an engineer. He's genuinely concerned about other people. And he has expressed some of that concern in his participation with the National Fund for Minority Engineering Students.

The fund is a non-profit organization attempting to increase the number of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Mexican-Americans and American Indians enrolled in engineering schools.

These under-represented minorities constitute a rich untapped resource for helping fill the growing need for engineers, a need that is expected to continue through the mid-1980's.

IBM's social leave program enabled Dr. Henry to take a year's



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