

# Akan people

## Akan



(Akan)

### Total population

over 20 million Ethnic Akan

### Regions with significant populations

 Ghana	~12 Million
 Côte d'Ivoire	~8 Million
 Togo	unknown
 Benin	unknown
 Burkina Faso	unknown
 Nigeria	unknown
 Liberia	~41,000
 United States	unknown
 United Kingdom	unknown
 France	unknown
 Mali	unknown
 Jamaica Jamaican Maroons	unknown
 Suriname Ndyuka	unknown
Other Caribbean countries	unknown

### Languages

Akan/Akan languages/Kwa languages

### Religion

Christianity, African traditional religion, Islam-very small minority.

Related ethnic groups
Akan people

The **Akan people** are a historically important ethnic group of West Africa. With over 20 million members the Akans are one of the biggest Ethnic groups in West Africa today. The Akan are the largest ethnic group in both Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The Akan speak Kwa languages which are part of the larger Niger-Congo family.

## Origin and Ethnogenesis

The greater Akan people (macro-ethnic group) speak Kwa languages. The proto-Kwa language is believed to have come from East/Central Africa, before settling in the Sahel.<sup>[1]</sup> The people who became known as the Akan migrated from the Sahel to coastal west Africa. The kingdom of Bonoman was firmly established in the 12th century by the Akan people. Bonoman was a trading state between the Akan and neighboring people especially those from Djenné. During different phases of the Bonoman empire groups of Akans migrated out of the area to create numerous states based predominantly on gold mining and trading of farm products.<sup>[2] [3]</sup>

## Brief Recent History

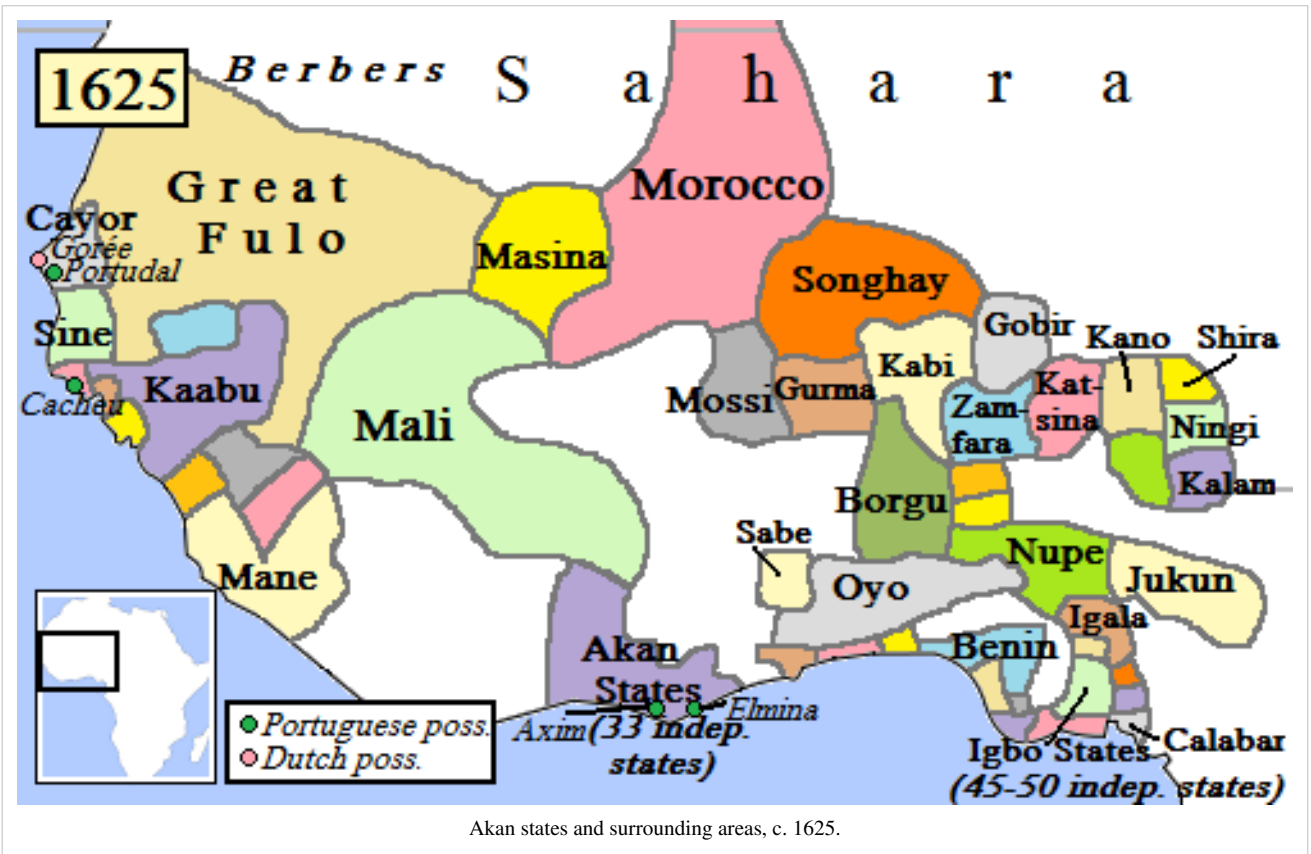
From the 15th century to the 19th century, the Akan people dominated gold mining and the gold trade in the region. From the 17th century on, the Akan were among the most powerful group(s) in west Africa. They fought many battles against the European colonists to maintain autonomy. During the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, enslaved Akans such as the Coromantins of Jamaica and descendants of the Akwamu in St. John, and many others were responsible for many slave rebellions in the new world.

By the early 1900s, all Akan lands in Africa were colonized or protectorates of the French and English. On the 6th of March 1957, Akan lands in the Gold Coast rejected British rule, by the efforts of Kwame Nkrumah, and were joined with British Togoland to form the independent nation of Ghana. The Ivory Coast became independent on 7 August 1960.

## Akan Subgroups

The Akan Ethnic group includes the following subgroups: Ashanti, the Akwamu, the Akyem , the Akuapem, the Denkyira, the Abbron, the Aowin, the Ahanta, the Anyi, the Baoule, the Chokosi, the Fante, the Kwahu, the Sefwi, the Ahafo, the Assin, the Evalue, the Wassa the Adjukru, the Akye, the Alladian, the Attie, the M'Bato, the Abidji, the Avikam, the Avatime the Ebrie, the Ehotile, the Nzema, the Abbe, the Aboure, the Coromantins, the Ndyuka people and other peoples of both modern day Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire or of origin in these countries

1625 historical map of west Africa



## Culture

Akan culture is one of the purest West African cultures that still exist today.<sup>[4]</sup> Akan art is wide-ranging and renowned, especially for the tradition of crafting bronze gold weights, which were made using the lost wax casting method. The Akan culture is the most dominant and apparent in present-day Ghana.

Some of their most important mythological stories are called *anansesem*. *Anansesem* literally means 'the spider story', but can in a figurative sense also mean "traveler's tales". These "spider stories" are sometimes also referred to as *nyankomsem*; 'words of a sky god'. The stories generally, but not always, revolve around Kwaku Ananse, a trickster spirit, often depicted as a spider, human, or a combination thereof.

Elements of Akan Culture also include but are not limited to:

- Kente
- Adinkra
- Sankofa
- Akan goldweights
- Akan names
- Akan Chieftaincy
- Akan Calendar
- Akan religion
- Akan art
- Oware
- Adamorobe Sign Language

Akan philosophy and inheritance including:

- Abusua (Modja) - What an Akan inherits from his mother
- Ntoro - What an Akan gets from their father but, one does not belong to their Ntoro instead, they belong to their Abusua
- Sunsum - What an Akan develops from their interaction with the world
- Kra - What an Akan gets from Onyame (God)

## Matrilineality

The Akan rural and political organization was based on matrilineal *lineages*, which were the basis of inheritance and succession. A *lineage* was defined as all those related by matrilineal descent from a particular ancestress. Several lineages would be grouped into a political unit headed by a chief and a council of elders, each of whom was the elected head of a lineage. Public offices were thus vested in the lineage, as was land tenure and other lineage property. In other words, lineage property had to be inherited only by matrilineal kin.<sup>[5] [6]</sup>

The political units above were likewise grouped into eight larger groups called *abusua*, similar to clans in other societies: Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenie, Asona, Bretuo, Ekuona and Oyoko; or sometimes more than these. The members of each *abusua* were united by their belief that they were all descended from the same ancient ancestress, so marriage between members of the same *abusua* was forbidden. One inherited or was a lifelong member of the



Kente cloth

lineage, the political unit and the abusua of one's mother, regardless of one's gender and/or marriage.<sup>[5] [6]</sup>

According to this source<sup>[6] [7]</sup> of further information about the Akan, "A man is strongly related to his mother's brother (wɔfa) but only weakly related to his father's brother. This must be viewed in the context of a polygamous society in which the mother/child bond is likely to be much stronger than the father/child bond. As a result, in inheritance, a man's nephew (his sister's son) (wɔfase) will have priority over his own son. Uncle-nephew relationships therefore assume a dominant position."<sup>[6] [7]</sup>

"The principles governing inheritance stress sex, generation and age – that is to say, men come before women and seniors before juniors." .... When a woman's brothers were available, a consideration of generational seniority stipulated that the line of brothers be exhausted before the right to inherit lineage property passed down to the next senior genealogical generation of sisters' sons. Finally, "it is when all possible male heirs have been exhausted that the females" may inherit.<sup>[6] [7]</sup> Thus, simply put a person belongs to his mothers family. A person may inherit their Ntoro from their father but, they do not belong to their fathers family. Thus, the Culture is matrilineal.

## Outside Influence on Akans

It should be noted that the core fundamentals of the Akan culture has generally remained unchanged and very little of the core of Akan culture was from outsider influence. The Akans rejected the Islamization process that took place in West Africa and maintained a purely and authentic ancient West African/Akan culture. Trade with Islamic practicing Africans occurred both pre and post Islamization but, the fundamentals of Akan culture has stayed the same due to the rejection of Islamization. The coming of Christianity later on saw some Akans joining the Christian faith but, the fundamentals of the Akan culture did not change.<sup>[8]</sup> Thus, today when many look at the Akan culture they see aspects of what ancient West African cultures as described by different traders who visited them must have looked like prior to Islamization of much of West Africa<sup>[9]</sup>

## Akan influence

Elements of Akan culture can generally be seen in most Geographic areas of the world. Specific elements of Akan culture are especially seen in neighboring West African people and some Central African populations.

## Endnotes

[1] "Atlas of the Human Journey" (<https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/atlas.html>). The Genographic Project. . Retrieved 2009-01-10.

[2] [http://books.google.com/books?id=TpjwF--kPL4C&pg=PA334&dq=Akan+origin+chad+benue&hl=en&ei=8Gh0Td7IDYa8lQfjNhuAg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Akan%20origin%20chad%20benue&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=TpjwF--kPL4C&pg=PA334&dq=Akan+origin+chad+benue&hl=en&ei=8Gh0Td7IDYa8lQfjNhuAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Akan%20origin%20chad%20benue&f=false)

[3] [http://books.google.com/books?id=JolJRG\\_-5ecC&pg=PA28&dq=Bonoman&hl=en&ei=0ud0TaOnHIXcgQf4pKQy&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Bonoman&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=JolJRG_-5ecC&pg=PA28&dq=Bonoman&hl=en&ei=0ud0TaOnHIXcgQf4pKQy&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Bonoman&f=false)

[4] [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru2IvIO\\_G\\_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru2IvIO_G_0)

[5] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1970. William Benton, publisher (The University of Chicago). ISBN 0-85229-135-3, Vol. 1, p.477. (This p. 477 Akan article was written by Kofi Abrefa Busia, formerly Professor of Sociology and Culture of Africa at the University of Leiden, Netherlands.)

[6] [http://books.google.com/books?id=Fmf5UqZzbv0C&pg=PA52&dq=Abusua&hl=en&ei=iTRaTdj1N8P7lweKm7XfDA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Abusua&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Fmf5UqZzbv0C&pg=PA52&dq=Abusua&hl=en&ei=iTRaTdj1N8P7lweKm7XfDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Abusua&f=false)

[7] [http://ashanti.com.au/pb/wp\\_8078438f.html](http://ashanti.com.au/pb/wp_8078438f.html)

[8] [http://books.google.com/books?id=VOXO\\_jkE-aUC&pg=PA51&dq=Bono+manso&hl=en&ei=2CxbTbrCB8SDtgd\\_uHKCw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFIQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=Bono%20manso&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=VOXO_jkE-aUC&pg=PA51&dq=Bono+manso&hl=en&ei=2CxbTbrCB8SDtgd_uHKCw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFIQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=Bono%20manso&f=false)

[9] [http://community.africanloft.com/\\_-Part-2-History-of-Africa-Series-3-Caravans-of-Gold/video/178620/4392.html](http://community.africanloft.com/_-Part-2-History-of-Africa-Series-3-Caravans-of-Gold/video/178620/4392.html)

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## External links

- Kasahorow Akan Dictionary The Dictionary of Standard Written Akan (<http://dictionary.kasahorow.com/all/ak>)
  - Akan gold trade (<http://www.maltergalleries.com/archives/auction99/mar2799.html>)
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