

Kafɔnɔ Katoo, Banda-Ahenkro¹

Kafɔnɔ Katoo is one of the seven founding families of Banda-Ahenkro. The Kafɔnɔ family came to Banda from a place known as Gbeɛ or Gbɛɛnɛ Nyambie. Gbɛɛnɛ Nyambie was a place with a mountain and a gold pit with plenty of gold. The pit took the shape of three stones with a hole in the center. The people of Gbeɛ spoke Nafaanra, but it differed from the Nafanra spoken by the people today. Although the people had a leader at Gbeɛ, they served no paramount chief. There came a time when the Asantes contacted the people at Gbeɛ, wanting gold. The people of Gbeɛ sent the Asante messenger back without any gold; however, they feared Asante reprisals. They therefore left Gbeɛ or the small village of Wela, inhabited then, as now, by Mo people. The man who led them from Gbeɛ to Wela was named Pɛ Kɔshia, the first head of the Kafɔnɔ family.

The people stayed at Wela for some time, but when the Mo learned of their interaction with the Asantes, the Mo people told the Gbeɛ people that they feared attack by the Asantes so long as the Gbeɛ remained with them. They were told to find their own place to settle. From Gbeɛ, the people had seen the Banda range of hills—so they decided to go and settle beyond those mountains so that the Asantes would not be able to trace them. Upon reaching the vicinity of Ahenkro, they came upon the Nafana. The first people they met were the Krontihene Siepe* and some of his family hunting bush pig. They stopped the Gbeɛ people and asked them of their mission, after which they decided to take the Gbeɛ people home. At this time the Gbeɛ people outnumbered the Nafana for this was before some of the seven families had come to join them. The Gbeɛ were allotted a place to live which was called "Kafɔnɔ" or "new town"—located near the present town of Kanka.

After a time, the paramount chief at Ahenkro began to be concerned because there were so many Gbeɛ people. They were troublesome and there was quarreling between the children of Kafɔnɔ and Ahenkro. The chief and his elders decided to get rid of the head of the Kafɔnɔ family. They fixed a date for a large community meeting to discuss community matters. Before the meeting, which took place at Gbankɔ, near the present Kanka, they dug a deep hole which they covered over with an animal skin and sand. A stool was placed on top of this, and the head of the Kafɔnɔ family was directed to sit there. The man, Pɛ Kɔshia, fell into the hole and hot pito was poured in on top of him. There he died.

After this, the family decided to leave the area and to go back where they had come from. The first group set off and departed for Wela, where their descendants still live. A second group stayed in Ahenkro with Yeli Wulo, wife of Pɛ Kɔshia, who was too old to walk back to their former place. A third group set off to leave but at Kanka, the Muslims begged them to stay. The Muslims advised them that the Nafanas had moved here because of war and now the Kafɔnɔ were leaving because of a quarrel—but there was war everywhere. They counseled the Gbeɛ to bury their differences and remain. The Muslims acted as intermediaries between the Kafɔnɔ and Nafana, and subsequently helped the third group put up their houses at Gbao where they were to settle.

The Kafɔnɔ family provides the paramount chief's body guard and executioner. They provide the sword bearer at the royal palace. In war, the sword bearer would take lead of the chief. In the event that the paramount chief died, the sword bearer guards the body along with the Krontihene and the Gyasehene. As executioner, the swordbearer was responsible for killing those people designated to accompany the paramount chief in death. It is the sword bearer who leads the corpse of the paramount chief to the burial site and is responsible for punishing any offenses at the burial site. The executioner is also responsible for dealing with individuals who have been identified as witches.

The position of executioner came to rest with the Kafɔnɔ family because of the bravery of an ancestor. During the reign of the paramount chief Gyara, a man (name unknown) had an affair with the Chief's wife and took her away to a town in the north. When the paramount chief learned of this violation, he chose some men to go and pursue the offending couple. The man who led the chase was Ofori from the house of Kafɔnɔ. Prior to leaving for the north, Ofori performed some rites at his fetish so that the adulterers could not hide from him. Upon reaching the town to which the couple had fled, Ofori encountered the adulterer in the street and killed him straight away. When the chief of this town learned of the killing, he confronted Ofori as to why he had killed someone without informing the chief. Ofori countered that he had done his duty—that he had followed his orders. The chief, upon hearing Ofori's story, agreed with his actions. Both the man and the woman were killed and their heads taken back to the Paramount Chief of Banda. The chief and his elders congratulated Ofori and conferred upon him the title of executioner and it has remained the duty of the Kafɔnɔ family ever since.

[A second version of the above story was related by other members of the Kafɔnɔ family, as follows].

There was a former head of the Kafɔnɔ family named Pɛ Fori. During his time, a man named Donkosi had an affair with the wife of the chief. He was a very strong man, and when the Chief discovered the affair, he devised an elaborate plan to catch Donkosi. The man was asked to go and help catch a cow from the kraal. Donkosi went with the other youths from town. Donkosi entered the Kraal and caught the cow by the leg. As the other youths looked on, Donkosi struggled with the cow until he began to look tired. At this point, the youths jumped into the Kraal to try and catch Donkosi. Donkosi let go of the cow and sprang out of the kraal. He ran away from town and went to the village of Senyon.

Tolɛɛ was looking for someone brave enough to trace the man Donkosi. Pɛ Fori had acquired a reputation as a brave man during the war with the Bouna people when he killed many people and carried away most of the heads. He was also the owner of a very powerful fetish (called Twa) that was appeased by the blood of human beings. Ofori had acquired the fetish from another man and, upon seeing the man off from the village, Pɛ Fori killed him. Due to his reputation, Tolɛɛ came to Pɛ Fori to pursue the man Donkosi.

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