

Philip (Kwaku) Quaake (1740- 1816)

Philip Quaake was an extraordinary character. A Fanti from Gold Coast, his parents had called him "Kwaku". The name "Philip" was added later when he was baptized in England. Rev. Thompson, chaplain to the garrison at Cape Coast Castle, had found it difficult to convert "the masses" to Christianity. Therefore, in 1756, he selected three boys from most likely chief families for education in England. The expenses were carried by the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" (S.P.G.) which was a missionary organization of the Church of England. It had been founded in 1701 and was active in the British Atlantic world in the 18th and 19th centuries. Thompson hoped that after the training, the boys would be ordained into priesthood and form the nucleus for the local Anglican Church. Of the three, only Philip Quaake survived and was able to complete his education. In 1765, he was ordained as the first African minister of the Church of England and married the English Catherine Blunt.

They both went to Cape Coast, where Catherine died within the first year. Quaake could no longer speak his mother tongue Fanti, so he needed the help of an interpreter. He decided to open a small private school for Afro- European children in the Castle where he aimed to train clerks for public service. The school was maintained jointly by the "Committee of Merchants Trading to Africa" and the S.P.G. through its committee in London. Later, this responsibility was entrusted to a local educational authority called the "Torridzonian Society" which had been formed in 1787 by Quaake and others. They transformed the school into a boarding school and were the first to introduce school uniforms. At Cape Coast Castle, Quaake served not only as an S.P.G. missionary, but also as the chaplain of the Committee of Merchants. At the same time, this building housed thousands of slaves prior to their being shipped to the West Indies or North America. The S.P.G. expected its missionaries to report back regularly on the progress which they were making and preserved these in their archive which is today held by the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House in Oxford. It contains around forty letters written by Quaake between 1765 and 1811.¹ In one of these, he told about a revolt of 150 slaves who had been brought on board of a Dutch ship with a very rude captain. Quaake stated a general criticism of the trade, including the assumption that not only the current treatment before his eyes, but also the future expecting the slaves to where they were being brought, was

¹ Vincent Carretta and Ty M. Reese, eds., *the life and letters of Philip Quaake- the first African Anglican missionary* (Athens and London: Univers. of Georgia Press, 2010) 180ff.

inhuman. He compared it to the treatment of the Israelites in Egypt.² In 1790, Quaake was quoted by a witness against the slave trade before a select committee of the House of Commons. The regular references to his African mission in popular magazines made him well known in the English-speaking world. Initially writing when the Transatlantic Slave Trade went largely unquestioned, Quaake's letters trace the period of abolitionist fervour leading up to the ban in 1807/'08.

His life offers a fascinating perspective on transatlantic identity, missionary activity, pre-colonial European involvement in Africa, the early abolition movement, and Cape Coast society. Quaake was an early Black Atlantic epistolary hero with remarkable rhetorical skill and a verbal self-fashioning. He did not gain much evangelical success or social respect. The English slave traders distrusted, his Anglican sponsors second-guessed, and his native people disowned him. He did not find mention in the lists of Gregoire and Armistead, but his activity was rediscovered in its importance when the history of the S.P.G. was written after 1900.³ Carretta and Reece have done an excellent job of tracking down other letters of his, primarily to other Anglican ministers in North America. They included a number of key documents, both from the S.P.G. archive and other sources as the National Archives. Through these references, we know today that in the last years, the S.P.G. owed Quaake a five years' salary of £369 together with another sum of £100. Though everything that he had achieved, before, his life must have ended very lonely, misunderstood and in poverty.

² Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig and Mariano Delgado, eds., „Außereuropäische Christentumsgeschichte- Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika 1450-1990“, Band VI of *Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte in Quellen* (Neukirchner Vlg, 2004), 126.

³ F.L. Bartels, "Philip Quaake 1741-1816" in *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society*, Vol. 1, Part V (Achimota: 1952-1955), 153-177.