

Materiality and Real Estate: Evolving Cultural Practices of Security on the Urban Gold Coast in
the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

By

Hermann Wilhelm von Hesse

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

James H. Sweet, Professor, History

Neil Kodesh, Professor, History

Emily J. Callaci, Associate Professor, History

Pernille Ipsen, Associate Professor, History

Larry W. Yarak, Professor Emeritus, History, Texas A & M University

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Dedicated to my father,
Conrad Charles Hesse (1951-2015)
and his beloved grandma, Sarah Maa-Aba Malm (1893-1978)
and to all my ancestors.

“To live in the hearts of those who love you most is not to die.”
– As etched on a nineteenth century Christiansborg tombstone.

ABSTRACT

In discussing cultural and economic transformations as well as European capitalist expansion in the African Atlantic world, scholars have largely overlooked how West African merchants deployed property and real estate in negotiating these processes. This dissertation situates Gold Coast merchant households in these broader transformations. I emphasize how stone houses and material goods were crucial in informing evolving Gã and Fante ideas about value in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I argue that notions of value were connected to local anxieties about security, wealth, power and vulnerability during and in the aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade. If “wealth” was but “the things people imbue[d] with value,” then Gold Coast merchants’ investments in stone houses, heirlooms, sacred property or domestic slaves and pawns followed a logic that was not solely economic but also cultural and political. In that vein, merchant houses simultaneously functioned as spaces of spiritual/ancestral and material accumulation and protection. While fortified stone houses functioned as spaces of power and protection by attracting a larger group of kin and dependents, home burials only reinforced this sense of fortification.

From a “wealth in people” perspective, houses were only as valuable and powerful as the living and dead people buried in it, around it, and about it. But the introduction of private real estate at the beginning of the nineteenth century, created a new tool for generating wealth and power. Consequently, Gold Coast merchant families began to contest which measure of security, protection and power was more important – monetary wealth through real estate or family/ancestral wealth and heritage. With the increasing subjection of stone houses to the market as mortgages and collaterals, indebted Gold Coast merchants and families became more vulnerable as they risked losing their ancestral spaces and family heritage.

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Over the years, I have returned to the Deeds Registry to read nineteenth century Gold Coast wills and testaments. I'm grateful for the assistance I received from the Deeds Registry archivist, Mr. Agbeko. Special thanks also go to Bright Botwe, David Blebo, Robert Titus-Glover, Aisha Ibrahim Kwetso and Millicent Aryee; all staff of the Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra, Ghana. I always counted on their selfless assistance in locating documents useful for my research. I'm also appreciative of the access Rev. Danquah granted me to the archives of the General Assembly Office of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Osu, Accra. To my surprise, I found deeds and property records in that archives in Danish, German and English, the earliest of which dated back to 1838. I also thank Esmeralda Kale and Florence Mugambi of the Melville Herskovitz Library of African Studies for showing me some of their rare newspaper collection in the summer of 2019.

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GLOSSARY

A note on Gã, Fante and Twi pronunciation and orthography: The Gã letters /ŋ, ɲ/ are pronounced ‘ng’ as in ‘singing.’ /ɔ, ɔ/ ‘or’ as in orange and /ɛ, ɛ/ as in ‘err’ is common to Gã, Twi and Fante. The Gã and Akan (Twi/Fante) languages have undergone several orthographical revisions since the nineteenth century publication of missionary bibles and dictionaries. This dissertation has used the most current orthography, which has been in use since the 1970s. The Akan language in Ghana is made up of about seventeen mutually intelligible dialects. In this dissertation, I have made references to only Asante Twi and Fante. In both Twi and Fante “ky” is pronounced “ch” as in “church” and “de” in Twi is rendered “dze” (pronounced ‘zi’) in Fante. For example, the Fante “egyapadze” is “egyapadeɛ” in Twi. “Gy” in Twi and Fante is pronounced as “j” as in “jam.”

Afaban (Gã): Physical or spiritual protection broadly construed; palisade or stone wall.

Gboshinii (Gã) — Lit: “things left by the dead;” Akan: *egyapadze/ egyapadeɛ*

Kinkã — Dutch Accra (renamed Ussher Town in 1868).

Kooseɛ (Gã) — literally, beyond the bush/forest; Akan: *akurase*.

Koowie (Gã) — Akan: *Kwae/kwaa*; bush/forest.

Kuro (Akan) — town.

Sebe (Gã): charm/amulet; Akan: *asuman*.

Mãŋ (Gã; Plural: *mãjii*) — (Akan: *ɔman*) *polity/town*.

Mɔŋ (Gã) or *aban* (Akan/Fante): Fortress/Castle or stone house.

Ntwuma — Red clay (used as a building material).

Tsushwe (Gã) — a dilapidated house.

Nleshi (Gã) — British Accra/James Town.

We (Gã) — Clan house; Fante-Akan: *efie kessim*.

Weku (Gã) — Family; Akan: *abusua/ebusua*.

Wɔŋ/Jemãwɔŋ (Gã) — deity/divinity; Akan: *Obosom*

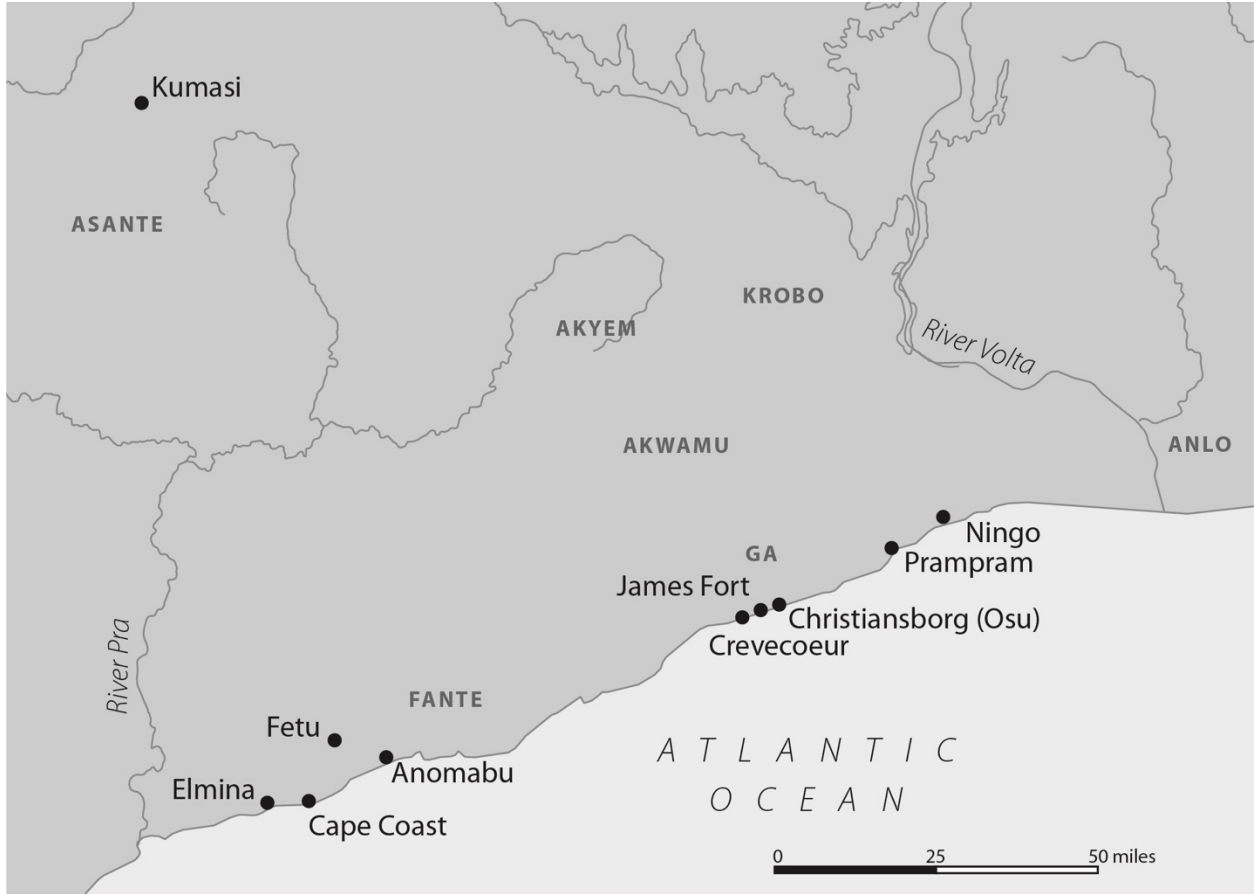


Fig. 1. Map of the Gold Coast and Asante in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Courtesy: University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Lab.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the history of Gold Coast merchant families and their well-secured commercial stone houses and intramural graves began well before I enrolled into the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s PhD program in the fall of 2015. I was born in Osu – a town in coastal Ghana – and a suburb of the national capital, Accra. Osu’s earlier seventeenth century growth and expansion were largely tied to the founding of the Danish-Norwegian Christiansborg Castle in 1661. This castle became the headquarters of the Danish slave trading establishment on the Gold Coast in 1685. The castle and several extant but mostly dilapidated stone houses along the coast of Ghana inspired many of the ghost stories my grandparents and other aged family elders told me as a child. One such historic house was the Wulff House or *Frederiksminde* (also spelled *Frederichs Minde*). The house, which even today is in a relatively good shape, was built in 1840 by a Danish Jew named Wulff Joseph Wulff (1809-1842).¹ The graves of Wulff and that of his Gã-Danish daughter, Wilhelmine Josephine are interred in the cellar of the house.

Wulff’s burial in his own house was however not typical of European residents of the Gold Coast who mostly derided (including Wulff) the practice of intramural sepulture. But this Gold Coast burial practice provided Wulff, a staunch Jew, with an option to avoid being buried in the Danish Christian cemetery across the street from his house. In his lifetime, Wulff had clearly desired in his will not to be buried in the same resting place as that of his Danish Christian neighbors whom he felt discriminated against him because of his “mosaic religion.”² For the Gã and Fante however, the internment of deceased relatives was a significant cultural

¹ *Frederichs Minde* is Danish for Frederik’s Memorial. The Wulff House was named after King Frederik VI of Denmark-Norway.

² Christiansborg, 27 March 1837 in *Frederiksminde Under the Danish Chief Fort Christiansborg in A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff; Biography and Letters 1836-1842*, ed. Selena Axelrod Winsnes, (Trondheim: Faculty of Arts, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004), 107.

practice that ensured the protection of corpses from being devoured by wild animals or grave looters. It is most likely that Wulff's Gã wife and the dominant local practice of home burials influenced his decision to be buried in the cellar of his house.

From a Gold Coast spiritual perspective the home burials of deceased family members who died natural deaths were central to local beliefs about the unity of the living and dead relatives and the protection that ancestors could offer surviving kin. For this reason, while on his deathbed in 1858, a prominent but bankrupt Anglo-Gã merchant, James Bannerman expressed anxiety about the possibility of not being buried in his stone-built commercial house in Accra. The indebted Bannerman feared that his creditors, a British firm, W.B. Hutton & Sons would confiscate his house and therefore stated in his will that he should be interred at "the House called "Commodore"" belonging to his niece and wife. Fortunately, Bannerman's house was not confiscated and he was buried in his own house.

As a child growing up, I was simultaneously fascinated and terrified by home burials and ghost stories along the coast of Ghana. Because of this fear, I exercised a great deal of caution whenever I treaded Wulff's and Wilhelmine Josephine's burial cellar. I had on a number of occasions gone to the entrance of the cellar to pick soccer balls my playmates and I had mistakenly kicked in that direction. But I never really went into the cellar until 2010 in my final year at the University of Ghana. Nonetheless, this fascination with intramural graves would later open up broader academic and historical avenues for me to explore how Gã, Fante and Euro-African families of the Gold Coast deployed stone houses and material goods to answer new security, economic and political challenges during and at the end of the slave trade.

In situating merchant houses and material goods in the context of African Atlantic history, this study, examines how such buildings and their material goods are crucial for our

understandings of evolving ideas about value and how that is connected to security, wealth, power and vulnerability during and after the slave trade along the West African coast. If “wealth” was but “the things people imbue[d] with value,” as anthropologist Jane Guyer argued, then Gold Coast merchants’ investments in stone houses, heirlooms, sacred property or domestic slaves and pawns followed a logic that was not solely economic but also cultural and political.³ The investment in real and movable property reinforced one’s political and social status. This dissertation shifts the analytical lens of the literature on African Atlantic history and materiality away from objects most often associated with ‘African’ material cultures in the western imagination and toward property and real estate.⁴ In emphasizing evolving cultural practices of security on the Gold Coast – African merchants’ harnessing fortified buildings, household deities and material goods to negotiate their livelihoods and politics – my research pushes for broader understandings of materiality that varied across African cultures and pasts.

By the seventeenth century, the promises of Atlantic commerce had largely redirected the trade in gold, metals and captives away from trans-Saharan routes to the coast.⁵ The emergence of Atlantic commerce and particularly the slave trade and raids led to unprecedented violence, mainly due to Akan state expansion and militarism on the Gold Coast and its interior. Akan states such as Denkyira, Akwamu, Akyem and Asante vied for control of the coast and the various trading posts. Consequently, Akan expansions led to state collapse and chaos on the Gold

³ Jane I. Guyer, “Wealth In People, Wealth In Things – Introduction,” *The Journal of African History*, 36, No. 1 (1995):83.

⁴ See for example, David T. Doris, *Vigilant Things: On Thieves, Yoruba Anti-Aesthetics, and The Strange Fates of Ordinary Objects in Nigeria* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders eds, *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014) Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019)

⁵ See Margaret Priestley, *West African Trade and Coast Society: A Family Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Kwame Y. Daaku, *Trade and politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: a study of the African reaction to European trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco, 1980).

Coast littoral. Nonetheless, state fragmentation on the Gold Coast created new opportunities for the emergence of the so-called “merchant princes” (Gã: *oblempɔŋmɛi*; Fante/Akan: *abirempɔn*) who became important trade brokers beginning in the seventeenth century.⁶

In reaction to the ensuing violence of Akan expansions, the denizens of Gold Coast towns often sought refuge in European-built forts and castles, but increasingly these fortifications would influence the erection of African-built stone houses, a few of which had mounted cannons. However, unlike the larger and well-fortified European forts and castles, most African-built castellated buildings in reality could not withstand an Akan siege. Rather, African-owned stone houses secured its inhabitants and families from local intruders and robbers and thus protected imported merchandise. Overtime, African and Euro-African merchants began to closely tie the value of their investments to the greater need for security in an era of Akan state expansion and instability. In reaction to the growth in Atlantic commerce, prominent Gold Coast merchants not only invested in stone houses, but also protective deities, pawns and a retinue of slaves and militiamen.⁷ Infact, Atlantic commerce was a corollary to the violence that engulfed the Gold coast during the slave trade. Therefore investments in material and spiritual forms of protection helped African merchants address new security challenges as a result of the collapse and reconfiguration of states and polities on the Gold Coast in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁶ See Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720*.

⁷ Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720*. In 1869, James Bannerman stated that “Kings Tackee [Taki Tawia I] and Cogoe [Kojo Ababio] depended on him and other merchants for their militia and could not even raise “a contingent of 2000 men” to “the seat of war.” See also James Bannerman [Jr.] to J.A.B Horton, on the formation of the Accra Native Confederation, Cape Coast, September, 21, 1869 quoted in J.A.B. Horton, *Letters on the Political Condition of the Gold Coast; Since the Exchange of Territory between the English and Dutch Governments, on January 1 1868, together with a Short Account of the Ashantee War, 1862-4 and the Awoonah War* (London: Frank Cass, [1870] 1970), 37.

The intensity of Atlantic commerce, the lure of gold and later the trade in African captives, brought the Portuguese, Dutch, English, Danes, Swedes and Brandenburgers to the Gold Coast. These European visitors and competitors all founded a chain of rival trading posts, forts and castles along the coast with the permission of local rulers. The legacies of these interactions are reflected in the numerous European-built slave holding fortifications and stone-built African merchant houses dotted along Ghana's Atlantic coast.



Fig. 2. Descendants of Wulff Joseph Wulff and Sara Malm; the sisters, Therese Svanekiær (née Wulff) and Matilda Wulff-van der Puije (née Wulff) standing in front of a flight of staircases and balustrades leading to the first floor. Photo taken on September 18, 1957 by Nils Kjølsten. Reproduced with the permission of the late Leslie Wulff-Cochrane and H. Nii-Adziri Wellington.

Despite the gruesome functions of these castles as holding spaces for African captives, my grandparents often compared and drew similarities between the architecture of Christiansborg Castle and the old merchant houses of Osu and Accra – our “family houses” (Gã: *weku shiãï*; Fante/Akan: *efie kessim*). Like Christiansborg Castle, many historic coastal family houses had distinct cobbled stone floors, portals leading to courtyards and extensive stone staircases and balustrades connecting the ground floor to the living quarters upstairs. While the ground floors of European fortifications served as dungeons and warehouses for securing captives and merchandise that of the Gold Coast merchant houses were mostly used as stores for securing imported goods.

The stark similarities between stone-built African merchant houses and European fortifications were not accidental. Stone houses or castellated buildings on the Gold Coast were known as *mɔŋ* (Gã) or *aban* (Akan/Fante). These terms are often translated as “fort” or “castle” with connotations of security and protection from real and imagined danger. When Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants and potentates began to build in stone rather than mud or adobe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were concerned not only with their security and vulnerability but also with their power and social status.

The sheer magnitude of Gold Coast merchant’s two-three story flat-roofed Palladian style edifices reinforced their wealth and power. Overtime, castellated buildings reflected Gã and Fante ideas about security, vulnerability and power. In the context of the Gold Coast, power and vulnerability must be understood as a shifting field of discourses, practices and ideas about political and economic security as well as spiritual self-assurance and safety. It is important to note that these practical ideas – what I call the cultural practices of security – were steeped in the material cultures of the African Atlantic world. When one examines the Gã proverb, “*tsu shwe hi*

fe koowie,” (“a dilapidated house is better than a bush”) or the Fante male name “*Abandɔ*” (“love of stone houses”), they both point to the physical security of castellated buildings. Indeed, the name, “*Abandɔ*” and its appellation, “*fi ɔko*,” meaning “from war” are important oral historical clues.⁸ These historical clues in naming practices can be dated to the volatile years of slave raids and Akan state expansion particularly in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

With this background, it is not difficult to understand why Gold Coast merchants would invest in castellated buildings to protect their families, merchandise and livelihoods. In emphasizing architectural innovations and merchant houses, this research goes beyond descriptive or art historical analysis of evolving building styles and aesthetics or their role as symbols of new consumption patterns.⁹ To be fair, however, archeological, art historical and anthropological literature on materiality – the cultural uses and meanings of material goods – highlight how the changing practices of society “affected the ways objects” were used and understood.¹⁰ What this means is that material objects must be discussed and analyzed in the context of the larger society that created such artefacts.

Apart from constructing castellated buildings, Gold Coast merchants and potentates were also interested in spiritual protection that could be derived from inherited or purchased “things” such as war deities and heirlooms and material goods and artefacts associated with the dead. Though African merchants’ investments in deities and relics predate the emergence of Atlantic

⁸ Gã and Akan personal names have specific appellations or ‘official’ nicknames that describes the supposed character trait (e.g. bravery) of an individual.

⁹ See Peter Mark, “*Portuguese*” *Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016); Stephanie Wynne-Jones, *A Material Culture: Consumption and Materiality on the Coast of Precolonial East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁰ See Doris, *Vigilant Things*, 39-40; For the quote in the sentence see Wynne-Jones, *A Material Culture*, 10.

commerce, the building of stone houses on the Gold Coast was the consequence of European and African cultural and commercial interactions. One important spiritual and mortuary function of stone buildings on the Gold Coast was that its durability accorded better protection to the mortal remains of deceased people than the degradable and less physically secured mud or adobe structures. The practice of intramural sepulture within the secure precincts of one's home or family house not only ensured the protection of an interred corpse but also reinforced the belief in the ancestral protection of the living.

Under these Atlantic political and commercial conditions, Gold Coast merchants and their European commercial partners ascribed new and "different regimes of value" to properties and commodities.¹¹ These developments were crucial in shaping and transforming local cultural ideas about the meanings of property, security, self-aggrandizement and vulnerability on the Gold Coast. Thus, when Gold Coast merchants built in stone, they not only better protected their merchandise, but also their ancestral memory and family integrity.

The show of wealth and social prestige through commercial stone houses also attracted "wealth in people" (slaves, dependents, retinue) and in "things" (heirlooms, deities and merchandise).¹² Wealth in people or as Anglo-Gã merchant James Bannerman Jr. unwittingly described in September 1869 included "personal followers" or "slaves" and these were according to him, the "sinews of war."¹³ The lack of a personal retinue as James Bannerman Jr. observed about the kings of Accra, made them vulnerable and by extension not able to protect their

¹¹ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 4.

¹² Jane I. Guyer, "Wealth In People, Wealth In Things – Introduction," *The Journal of African History*, 36, No. 1 (1995):83. Jane Guyer and S.E. Belinga. "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *Journal of African History* 36 (1995).

¹³ James Bannerman [Jr.] to J.A.B Horton, on the formation of the Accra Native Confederation, Cape Coast, September, 21, 1869 in *Letters on the Political Condition of the Gold Coast*, 36.

“wealth in things.” For this reason, these Accra kings had to rely on powerful merchants who possessed these forms of wealth. Merchants for their part not only deployed these forms of wealth to acquire more resources through exchange but also used accumulated resources to protect their livelihoods and enhance their security.

Meanwhile, the spacious and elegant Palladian-style homes that Gold Coast merchants built also signified their incorporation within wider Atlantic and West African regional commercial circuits. These transformations in cultural practices and the significance of merchant houses were contingent on internal developments as well as the slave trade, legitimate commerce and eventually British colonialism in the late nineteenth century. The different material cultural tools that Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants employed in negotiating these different epochs in Gold Coast history is the subject matter of this dissertation.

Until about two decades ago, scholars typically framed the transition away from the trade in captives to “legitimate” goods in West Africa in the context of economic history and debates about whether there was a “crisis of adapting” to forms of economic activity apart from selling captives.¹⁴ Most of these narratives and debates were linked to questions about economic development and the transition away from the slave trade. Such discussions, however, overlook how European capitalism and ambitious African merchants co-created market-oriented value systems in the Atlantic world. Most importantly, the inordinate focus on export-oriented cash crops or “legitimate commerce,” obscures the diversified economic alternatives that Africans created – including the practice of real estate. This phenomenon not only popularized private as

¹⁴ Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*; Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807-1874* (New York: Longman, 1974); Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast*, Robin Law, ed. *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce*; Silke Strikrodt, *Afro-European trade*.

opposed to communal home ownership but also transformed the cultural understandings of the value of family houses solely from ancestral sites into commercial commodities. While current trends in African Atlantic history, have opened up the discussions about cultural, religious and material transformations, real estate is conspicuously missing from the historiography.¹⁵

Nonetheless, this “cultural turn” has broadened the historical discussion to include themes about gender, inter-racial families, sexuality and the biographies and lived experiences of African and Euro-African merchants as well as captives in Atlantic port towns.¹⁶ The emphasis

¹⁵ For earlier studies on African Atlantic history that focused on economic history, “trade and politics” or “merchant princes,” see Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885*; Kwame Yeboah Daaku, *Trade and politics*; Anthony Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973); Joseph Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Phyllis Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1576-1870: the effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Robin Law, ed. *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); R. Austen and J. Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and their Hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Silke Strikrodt, *Afro-European trade in the Atlantic world: the western Slave Coast, c.1550-c.1885* (Rochester: James Curry, 2015). Margaret Priestly and Phyllis Martin were one of the earliest Africanists to emphasize social and family history in the study of Atlantic Africa at a time when there was an overwhelming emphasis on economic and quantitative approaches to the study of West and West Central Africa in the era of the slave trade. See Margaret Priestly, *West African Trade and Coast Society: A Family Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) and Phyllis Martin, “Family Strategies in Nineteenth-Century Cabinda” *Journal of African History*. 28, No. 1 (1987): 65-86. By the early 2000s, historians began to emphasize more social and cultural themes in addition to economic and statistical history. See Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727-1892* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Peter Mark, “Portuguese” *Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 2007); Alex van Stripiaan, “Watramama’s Transatlantic Voyage: Legacy of the Slave Trade with Suriname,” in *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Landmarks, Legacies, Expectations*, edited by James Kwesi Anquandah, Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang and Michel R. Doortmont (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007); Ray Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: The Gold Coast in the Age of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012); Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa*; Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ See James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); James H. Sweet, “Mistaken Identities? Oludah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora,” *American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 279-306; James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); James H. Sweet, “The Evolution of Ritual in the African Diaspora: Central African Kilundu in Brazil, St. Domingue, and the United States, Seventeenth—Nineteenth Centuries” in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, edited by Michael Gomez, New York: New York University Press, 2006, 64-80; Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast* (University of Pennsylvania, 2015).

on cultural change, biographies and family history provide an important background and context for this dissertation. While this study engages with the “cultural turn,” this dissertation shifts focus to highlight how African merchant families on the Gold Coast transformed and deployed material culture – stone houses, heirlooms and sacred objects into forms of collateral and mortgages that they could use in real estate and other commercial transactions. In doing so, Gold Coast merchants expanded the cultural and religious repertoire as well as the commercial value of houses and material goods in ways that gave meaning and form to the changing political and urban realities of the West African coast and its immediate interior.

Unfortunately, the subject matter of real estate and property are largely focused on the twentieth century. Apart from a few important exceptions, most studies on real estate and property disputes have been intertwined with land tenure and chieftaincy in colonial and postcolonial Africa.¹⁷ Such studies however, hardly discusses how West African merchants used property and real estate to define or negotiate their changing worlds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or in pre-colonial contexts. Though Kristin Mann’s and Gareth Austin’s respective historical studies about land tenure, property and mortgages in Lagos and Asante predate the twentieth century, their focus was largely on the economy and changing dynamics of slavery and slave holding.¹⁸ While acknowledging the importance of these earlier studies, this

¹⁷ The few exceptions include, Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones ed. *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability and Mobility, 1660-1880* edited by (New York: James Currey, 2019). Notable works that largely focus on land tenure, property and urbanism in colonial and/or twentieth century Africa: R.J.H. Pogucki, *Gold Coast Land Tenure* (Accra: Government Printer, 1955); S.S. Quarcoopome, “The Impact of Urbanisation on the Socio-Political History of the Ga Mashie People of Accra: 1877–1957” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 1993); John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford, UK: James Currey, 2000); John K. Osei-Tutu, “Space and the Marking of ‘Space’ in Ga History, Culture and Politics,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, n.s., 4–5 (2000–2001), 55–81; Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch, *The Politics of Chieftaincy: Authority and Property in Colonial Ghana, 1920–1950* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014).

¹⁸ See Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*. See also Mariana

dissertation discusses real estate, mortgages and property in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century West African/Gold Coast history. In doing so, this dissertation discusses the antecedents of property and real estate in colonial and twentieth century West Africa.

The mortgaging or pawning of property in itself had been an age-old commercial and legal practice of the peoples of the Gold Coast and Asante. Gold Coast merchants and their counterparts in the Akan interior often pawned their close relatives, slaves or heirlooms as collaterals to both European establishments and Africans alike. What was new on the Gold Coast over the course of the nineteenth century, however, was the mortgaging of stone-built family houses. In the Gã and Akan languages the terms *awoba* (pl. *awobai*) *awowa* (pl. *nwowa*), is usually translated as “pawn,” but could also be rendered as “mortgage.” This rendering makes sense especially when the security, usually real property remained in the hands of the borrower. And in cases where debtors failed to pay their debts or credits, their mortgaged or real property was auctioned or confiscated.¹⁹

Despite European-based firms’ increasing preference for stone houses rather than enslaved people as mortgages, human pawning and slaveholding continued to thrive within the local Gold Coast and Asante economies until the end of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Gold Coast merchants’ mortgaging of their family houses on the international market, proved economically expedient. However, this practice undermined Gã and Fante beliefs about home burials and dwellings as permanent spaces of internment, family and ancestral habitation and veneration. It

P. Candido and Adam Jones ed. *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability and Mobility, 1660-1880* edited by (New York: James Currey, 2019).

¹⁹ Austen, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana*, 142.

²⁰Ibid.

is important to note that declining European interest in human pawns or mortgages was a direct consequence of the British-led abolition of the international slave trade in 1807.

These international developments crucially shaped how local African and Euro-African merchants adapted older systems of cultural and commercial valuations of stone houses and material goods to accommodate this new regimen for the conduct of business. Put simply, the changing economic and political contexts in the Atlantic world and on the Gold Coast, had a direct bearing on Gã and Fante merchants' cultural understandings about security, power and vulnerability. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Gã and Fante merchants and potentates like Nuumo Odoi Kpoti of Labadi, Sodza Duamlɔ of Osu and Labadi, ɔbirempon Kodwo of Cape Coast and Nii Kwaku Ankra of Kinkã (Dutch Accra) mortgaged or pawned human beings and sacred heirlooms to European establishments on the Gold Coast.²¹ But by the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, emerging Gold Coast merchants like the older James Bannerman, Jacobus van der Puye, Joseph Smith and several major African businesspeople began to subject their houses to the market.²²

By subjecting their stone-built family houses to the market, nineteenth century Gold Coast merchants and families accessed greater amounts of credit and capital but risked losing

²¹ See Daaku, *Trade and politics on the Gold Coast*; Irene Quaye, "The Ga and their Neighbours" (PhD diss., University of Ghana, Legon, 1972); Ray Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century: The Gold Coast in the Age of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012); Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2011). For Ankra's illegal slave trading activities in the first half of the nineteenth century see Report from Accra, Appendix No. 1, Instructions to Commissioner of Inquiry in *British Parliamentary Papers: Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa, Together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index Part II: Colonies, Africa* (Irish University Press, Shannon, 1968), 5; Carl Christian Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel: 1895), 152; 255.

²² For the increasing mortgaging of family houses see Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-66; 1858-67; 1859-85; 1880-2; 1882-3; William J. van der Puy and brothers, Dutch Accra, November 26th 1857 to Governor, Elmina Castle, Archief van de Kust van Guinea, 810, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands.

their establishments and ancestral spaces which had symbolized local power and commercial success. The transition from human to house pawning/mortgages became a major source of insecurity and anxiety to many Gold Coast merchants. But at the same time, these insecurities also provided the opportunities for Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants and families to expand their cultural perspectives and negotiate the meaning and relevance of sacred family houses, relics and property in general. While nineteenth century Gold Coast merchants understood the risks in mortgaging their stone houses, they also embraced the potential returns of such business investments.

However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, a combination of factors, including colonial prohibitions and increasing conversion to (Protestant) Christianity facilitated new ideas about wealth, security and property that discouraged the practice of home burials. Prominent African Christian merchants like Henry Barnes of Cape Coast would reject “home burials” in favor of being interred “in the Public Burying Ground on such a place as my Executors should choose.” Barnes and several other merchant families represented an emerging cultural trend that imagined other forms of security apart from home burials or communal ownership of houses. But these cultural shifts were not without spiritual anxieties or consequences as many older houses contained revered graves.

In discussing how Gold Coast merchants employed material goods and stone houses in negotiating power and security, I used four main types of sources: documentary/archival, Fante and Gã oral traditions, ethnography and linguistics. My archival sources were mainly missionary and colonial records on deeds, property inventories and legal cases involving Gold Coast merchants and local families. In Ghana, I consulted the colonial administrative (ADM) and Supreme Court Transcripts (SCT) of the Public Records and Archives Administration

Department and the records of the Deeds Registry of the Lands Commission of Ghana. I also studied the deeds records of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (the successor church of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society).²³ At the Rigsarkivet in Copenhagen, I consulted the *Koloniernes centralbestyrelse Kolonialkontoret 1849-1893 sager til guineiske journaler*. From The National Archives, Kew, England, I obtained colonial correspondences, catalogued as the CO 96. And from the Netherlands via Larry W. Yarak, I obtained files from the Archief van de Kust van Guinea, Nationaal Archief kept at The Hague.²⁴

These disparate archives not only reveal the transnational connections of Gold Coast merchants but also shed light on local politics, economy, deeded properties, family genealogies and private business dealings which would otherwise be hidden. Many of these archival sources, particularly African-authored letters, wills and testaments reveal actual African voices and perspectives on property transactions, real estate and the cultural anxieties of a Gold Coast world transitioning into colonialism.

Besides archival research, I consulted European travelogues and memoirs as well as nineteenth and early twentieth century Gã and Fante scholarly, legal and ethnographic writings to fill crucial historical gaps in my work.²⁵ Scholars have cautioned that many of these European travel writings do not ways capture the nuances of cultures on the Gold Coast/West Africa and are written from prejudiced racial and colonial perspectives. Identifying prejudiced perspectives in European travelogues is certainly not as challenging as tracing plagiarized ideas contained in

²³ The particular records that I consulted were originally kept at the Basel Mission Archives, Basel Switzerland.

²⁴ Larry W. Yarak was kind enough to provide me with some translations of the Dutch, but some of the original documents from the Hague which I used for this dissertation were in English.

²⁵ See for example, Carl Christian Reindorf's *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel, 1895) and the unpublished Gã version of this book also written by the same author in 1889; John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws: a Brief Introduction to the Principles of the Native Laws and Customs of the Fanti and Akan sections of the Gold Coast, with a Selection of Cases thereon Decided in the Law Courts* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1897).

these writings which were ultimately derived from earlier accounts. By carefully comparing multiple travelogues, it was possible for me to identify which ideas and descriptions were more original and thus reflected eyewitnesses' perspectives.²⁶ Despite these shortcomings, early travelogues, particularly that of Europeans who had resided on the Gold Coast for several years contain useful ethnographic and scientific information.²⁷

Besides my reliance on documentary sources, I conducted ethnographic research in coastal Ghana, first in the summers of 2016/2017 and subsequently in the winter of 2018/2019.²⁸ The families living in these historic houses possessed rich oral family histories and ritual practices of ethnographic and historical importance. Central to many of these household narratives were inter and intra family property disputes and stories about the protective power of home burials, family relics, deities and also domestic slavery. I discuss many of these ethnographic encounters in chapters one, two and three. Overall, my ethnographic field trips enhanced my understandings of the legacies of historic merchant houses in coastal Ghana.

Most importantly, oral traditions, historic merchant houses and surrounding landscapes constitute a historical archive that reveal how the material culture of these establishments reinforced ancestral memory, family disputes and social hierarchies and cleavages as it related to power, security and the contestation of real and movable property. In this dissertation, I weave

²⁶ See Adam Jones, "Double Dutch? A Survey of Seventeenth-Century German Sources for West African History," *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 141-153; Adam Jones, "Decompiling Dapper: A Preliminary Search for Evidence," *History in Africa* 17 (1990): 171-209.

²⁷ See for example Paul Erdmann Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Carribean Islands in Columbia* (1788), Edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2007); Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa: Including an Account of the Native Tribes and their Intercourse with Europeans* 2 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1853).

²⁸ Over the course of my graduate student career, the following awards made it possible for me to do my dissertation research: IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award, 2017; History Summer Support, Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017; University of Wisconsin-Madison's Graduate School Fellowship, 2018/2019 and the Mellon Wisconsin Fellowship, 2020.

together disparate sources and research methodologies to produce five overlapping chapters and an epilogue. In doing so, I attempt both a chronological and thematic approach to my chapters. Chapter one examines Gold Coast merchants' stone houses as assertions of power and security in a socio-cultural, military and economic sense. As spaces for the accumulation of ancestral and material power, merchant houses attracted wives, traders, and free and enslaved militia men. Though stone dwellings projected the power and social status of Gold Coast merchants and potentates, these families also expressed their vulnerability and security concerns during and at the end of the slave trade. Gã and Fante merchants used stone houses as bulwarks and warehouses to protect their families, livelihoods, merchandise and commercial interests from robbers, rogues, political and commercial competitors.

In chapter two, I examine debt, death and real estate in Gold Coast history. If stone houses functioned as spaces of power and protection by attracting a larger group of kin, then home burials only reinforced this sense of fortification. From a "wealth in people" perspective, the house was only as valuable and powerful as the living and dead people in it, around it, and about it. But the introduction of private real estate at the beginning of the nineteenth century, created a new tool for generating wealth and power. Consequently, Gold Coast merchant families began to contest which measure of security, protection and power was more important – monetary wealth through real estate or family/ancestral wealth and heritage. With the increasing subjection of stone houses to the market as mortgages and collaterals, indebted Gold Coast merchants and families became more vulnerable as they risked losing their ancestral spaces and family heritage.

In chapter three, I further examine the idea of ancestral power through "things" – heirlooms, "trinkets" and material goods left by the dead. Like real estate, Gold Coast families

mortgaged or pawned “trinkets” and other valuable goods. Most importantly, however, the value of pawned artefacts resided ultimately in their connection to ancestors – hence the Gã and Fante terms – *gboshinii/egyapadze* or “things left by the dead.” The artefacts themselves were as valuable as the deceased relatives who left them. However, the demands of the Atlantic market expanded the commercial value of these sacred artefacts that were supposed to bind the living to the dead. This chapter ultimately explores the tensions between the overlapping sacred and expanded market value of these artefacts and the consequent dangers, anxieties and opportunities that arose with the parting of “things.”

Atlantic commerce and European market principles did not just change the value of property but also gender and conjugal relations. In chapter four, I center real estate and property in the history of conjugal disputes and gender conflicts on the Gold Coast over the course of the nineteenth century. Gold Coast mercantile women increasingly employed the written word of wills and testaments, title deeds and other forms of documentation – rather than oral evidence as legally binding in colonial courts. In an era of commercial real estate, Gold Coast women employed such legal documentation rather than oral evidence in order to better secure their claims to property of a European or Euro-African husband who died intestate. The struggles for control of movable and real property were crucial to how merchant families negotiated inter and intra-racial conjugal and household disputes in emerging colonial courts. Most importantly, African and Euro-African women on the Gold Coast harnessed different aspects of Gã, Fante, British as well as Dutch laws of marriage and succession with the hopes of safeguarding their property rights and autonomy.

In the final chapter, I discuss how Gold Coast merchants used property and stone houses to leverage – albeit unsuccessfully in the long run – their waning power on the Gold Coast as

rental spaces for colonial officials. Through their role as important intermediaries between the burgeoning British administration and the masses, Gold Coast merchants envisioned a greater colonial role in the provision of security, public infrastructure and the expansion in trade. While both local merchants and the British had agreed that the collection of a poll tax of one shilling per head was the only way to provide these services, the execution of such policies drove the masses into greater poverty, insecurity and subsequently rebellion against assumed British authority. In reaction, the British bombarded Osu in 1854 and threatened to destroy Cape Coast and other towns. This measure not only stifled the Gold Coast merchants' in-between roles, but also crushed their extended local networks and thereby threatening their future livelihoods. In examining these complex political relationships, I discuss how the British exercised their hegemony through local merchants and their infrastructures in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the conclusion and epilogue, I connect the past with the present. I discuss the legacies of how European imperial designs and African merchants' commercial ambitions conspired to undermine houses and sacred objects as permanent spaces and signifiers of ancestral veneration and family memory. While eighteenth and nineteenth century political, economic and cultural changes were crucial for how Gold Coast Africans practiced security and conceptualized power and vulnerability, it also served as important precedents for contemporary Ghanaians. I highlight the modern resonance of stone buildings, private "castles" and historic family contests over the meaning and relevance of ancestral property and home burials in colonial and postcolonial Ghana. I discuss these legacies in the context of the conflicting demands of heritage preservation and the alluring profits of real estate in contemporary coastal Ghana.

My recollections of family elders' tales about African and European cultural and commercial interactions crucially informed my initial academic understandings of property, wealth accumulation and power. Family tales about (domestic) slavery, magnificent stone houses and wealth revealed a lot about the accumulative prowess of coastal merchants during the slave and legitimate trades in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But the fortified nature of many Gold Coast merchant houses – vaulted arches, thick stone walls and in some cases defensive cannons – point to the power of Gã and Fante traders and their establishments within the context of Atlantic commerce. However, these expressions or signifiers of power through stone buildings and wealth accumulation did not exclude the fact of Gold Coast merchants' vulnerability and insecurity. By projecting their power in stone, human dependents and “things” (inherited or purchased merchandise), influential Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants sought to counteract their vulnerability and insecurity. This dissertation is an attempt to tell the story of my Gã, Fante and Euro-African ancestors and how they rode the currents of Atlantic commerce, politics and its attendant cultural anxieties, losses and opportunities.

CHAPTER ONE

“A DILAPIDATED HOUSE IS BETTER THAN A BUSH” (“TSU SHWƐ HI FE KOOWIE”)

The houses in Coomassie [Kumase] are all of one story, and built of same materials [i.e. mud]; with the exception of the stone-house, called the Castle [aban], which was erected by Osai Tutu Quamina [Ɔsee Tutu Kwame], in honour of the king of England. – John Beecham, 1841.²⁹

On June 1, 1748, Frederik Pedersen Svane, a former Gã-Danish merchant and lay deacon at Osu penned a litany of grievances he had against the then Governor Jørgensen at Christiansborg Castle in Osu. Svane who at the time of writing resided in Copenhagen, complained bitterly about how Jørgensen and “others” were “jealous” of his “good fortune,” and therefore caused his stone house to be demolished.³⁰ Jørgensen according to Svane was convinced that the latter’s real “intention” was not to build an “ordinary [stone] house, but more a fort and a castle in order, as revenge, to destroy and ruin the Company’s fort and castle of Christiansborg.” Such was Jørgensen’s fear of Svane’s ambitious stone house that he believed without any evidence that the latter “would demolish the fort of Christiansborg and not only dethrone him [as governor] but even aimed at his life and welfare.” To humiliate Svane, Jørgensen “shamefully and illegally”

²⁹ John Beecham *Ashantee and the Gold Coast: Being a sketch of the History, Social State and Superstitions of the inhabitants of those countries with a notice of the state and prospects of Christianity among them* (London, 1841) (reprinted; London: Wm. Dawsons and Sons, 1968), 145. Ɔsee Tutu Kwame alias Ɔsee Bonsu (1802-23) definitely did not build The Aban or Castle of Kumase in honor of the King of England as Beecham suggested. See Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993), 44.

³⁰ 1st June anno 1748: “A brief and truthful, clear, explicit and thorough general declaration and report of the events of ten years at the fort of Christiansborg in Acra on the Coast of guinea in Africa on the gracious orders of Your Excellency, the High and Noble etc. Lord, Mr. Carl A. von Plessen, President of the Royal Chartered Danish West India and Guinea Company [...] composed by Frederich P. Svane, former Parish Clerk and Catechist” in *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657-1754: 2 Vols: 1657-1735*, ed. Ole Justesen, translated by J. Manley (Viborg: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2005), 736.

imprisoned him in the “black hole” of Christiansborg Castle.³¹ Svane was later discharged of all wrong doing and released from prison but was never made to rebuild his stone house.³²

The tensions and struggles between Svane and Jørgensen was perhaps based on a highly personal feud, likely racial in nature. It is also likely that Jørgensen saw Svane’s commercial ambitions as rivalling the interests of the Danish West Indian and Guinea Comapany, since the latter was a former employee of the establishment. Svane’s own complaints about his harassment point to an emerging discursive link between vulnerability, power, wealth, security and fortified stone houses on the Gold Coast. In attempting to found an emporium, within the secure precincts of a stone house of “three floors,” Svane was hoping to consolidate his slave trading and other commercial activities.³³ Even before his stone house could be completed, Svane erected “a pole like a flagpole” with a “white platille or Silesian linen sheet, marked and painted with the Danish Merchant’s flag emblem in the top corner.” In doing so, Svane sought to signal his power, commercial success and enterprise. Ironically, it was these showcases of power and success – though borne out of the “whim of my extreme good humour” as Svane later admitted – that attracted the “jealousy” and harassment of Jørgensen and sections of the Osu townspeople.³⁴

In appropriating stone houses, Gã and Fante merchants and prominent families, people like Svane, used this new building technology to protect their families and to secure their commercial goods and interests. The changes in local building technologies from mud (the so-called wattle and daub) and adobe to stone, partly underscored how many Gold Coast merchants imagined and

³¹ See 1st June anno 1748 in *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana*, 725; 736.

³² Ibid.

³³ See Gunvor Simonsen, “Belonging in Africa: Frederik Svane and Christian Protten on the Gold Coast in the Eighteenth Century,” *Itinerario*, 39(1) 2015: 99.

³⁴ 1st June anno 1748 in *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana*, 735.

practiced security from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.³⁵ Security in this context must be understood as a shifting field of discourses and practices that were tied to the tangible and spiritual protection of dwellings and built spaces and the deities they housed. In tracing the material and spiritual dimensions of dwellings, this chapter highlights how powerful Gold Coast houses were at once embodiments of power, security and vulnerability. Though studies of architectural forms in the African Atlantic world are not new, such studies tend to focus on how built spaces and landscapes “materialized” the “values of [West African] elites.”³⁶ In that same vein, scholars such as J. Cameron Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran have emphasized the ways in which the built environment was a “potential tool of hegemonic power” in Atlantic Africa.³⁷

While this chapter draws on these important scholarly perspectives, I complicate the narratives of power and hegemony ascribed to elite built forms. Stone buildings at once marked the vulnerability and security concerns of Gold Coast merchants. African merchants used stone houses as bulwarks and warehouses to protect their families, livelihoods and commercial interests from robbers, rogues or political and commercial competitors. Thus, the projections of merchant power and security through stone houses must be understood as a corollary of vulnerability on the Gold Coast during the height of the slave trade and Akan militarism.

Discussions of fortifications in West Africa during the slave trade, tend to emphasize European-built forts and castles and their gruesome function as holding spaces for African captives

³⁵ The wattle and daub technique was made of interwoven stakes with mud pressed in between them and plastered to make smooth walls. Such houses had strong earthen foundations. See Hermann W. von Hesse, “Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians and the Evolution of Social Space in Nineteenth Century Accra,” (Mphil thesis, 2014).

³⁶ See J. C. Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran, “Introduction: Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa,” in *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. J. Cameron Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-46.

³⁶ N.L. Norman and Kenneth D. Kelly, “Landscape Politics: The Serpent Ditch and the Rainbow in West Africa,” *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 106, no.1 (Mar., 2004): 98-110

³⁷ Monroe and Ogundiran, *Power and Landscape*, 15.

in transit to labor in the Americas.³⁸ Such narratives also highlight the violence of the slave trade and raids. However, what is missing in these discussions is how Africans appropriated castellated buildings for their own commercial, social and political purposes. Drawing on European archival and published travel sources, oral traditions, historical linguistics and ethnography this chapter examines a history of evolving Gã and Fante ideas about security, vulnerability and family integrity on the Gold Coast. African-built stone houses and merchant establishments were not just structures that reinforced African merchants' hegemony but also very much tied to the vulnerability and security concerns of these elites during the slave trade. To put simply, though stone buildings signaled the power and social status of prominent African merchants, their investments in physical fortifications (stone walls) and household deities and amulets also marked out their vulnerability. In this vein, African ideas about power, security and vulnerability must be discussed as intertwined rather than distinct cultural and political realities.

Security, the “House” and the “Bush” in Gã and Fante architectural thought

Historically, Gã and Fante (and other Akan peoples') understandings of the security of the homestead was deeply rooted in their ideas of kinship, architectural thought and cosmology. The house (Gã: *shiã*; Akan: *efie*) itself was a physical architectural manifestation of the family (Gã: *weku*; Akan: *ebusua/abusua*). For this reason, the *shiã* or *efie* in Gã and Akan thought is virtually synonymous with notions of security, kinship and the protection of the family. Though Gã and Fante cosmologies were different in their details, they included the belief in a creator Supreme Being (Akan/Fante: *Nyame*; Gã: *Ataa Naa Nyɔŋmɔ*), deities and divinities (Akan/Fante: *bosum*; pl. *abosum*; Gã *wɔjii/jemãwɔjii*) and the ancestral shades (Akan/Fante: *nananom nsamanfo*; Gã:

³⁸ See A.W. Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London: J. Cape, 1963); Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727-1892*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*; Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*.

sisai). Central to the cosmologies of the peoples of the Gold Coast and its Akan interior was the distinction between the safe spaces of human habitation – homesteads located in towns and villages – and the precarious forest or bush. The forest (Gã: *koo*; Akan: *Kwae* or *Kwaa*) was thought to be inhabited by *asãmānukpai* (Gã; sing. *asãmānukpa*) or *mmoatia* (Akan/Fante; sing. *moatia*) – dwarf-like, mischievous and dreaded creatures with their feet and head facing backwards.³⁹ There was also *sasabonsam* or *abonsam* – “the fearsome denizen of the high forest” – a monster-like creature and prankster who fed on children.⁴⁰

The widespread beliefs about forests as spaces of spiritual danger, ritual and insecurity were rooted in historical realities. The forest was also a place of misfortune (Gã: *mùsú*; Akan: *musuo*) where the vengeful spirits of people (Gã: *otɔfoi*; sing. *otɔfo*) who died unnatural deaths were believed to lurk. In September 1857, David Mill Graves, an Elmina-born Euro-African official observed at the outskirts of “[t]he city of Coomasie [Kumase]” that “[b]ehind the main street lies the so-called Forest of Spirits, because the trunks of sacrificed people are thrown there.”⁴¹ For this reason, the house (Akan: *efie*; Gã: *shiã*) located in the town (Gã: *mãŋ*; Akan: *kuro*) with its deities and ancestors existed to protect the family from evil and vengeful spirits and also bless their means of livelihood.

For the coastal Gã (and related Dãŋme people) who inhabited the southeastern Gold Coast, the heavily forested Akan interior also began to pose a real political danger from the late seventeenth century onwards. Akan invasions beginning with the Akwamu in 1677 led to the

³⁹ See Margaret Field, “The Asamanukpai of the Gold Coast,” *Man*, Vol. 34 (Dec., 1934): 186-189; Margaret Field, “The Otutu and the Hionte of West Africa,” *Man*, 43 (Mar. - Apr., 1943): 36-37.

⁴⁰ Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995) 44. See also Gérard Chouin, “Forests of Power and Memory: An Archaeology of Sacred Groves in the Eguafopolity, Southern Ghana (c. 500-1900 A.D.),” PhD Diss., University of Syracuse, 2009.

⁴¹ Larry W. Yarak, ed, “A Dutch Embassy to Asante in 1857: The Journal of David Mill Graves” *History in Africa*, Vol. 24 (1997): 375.

destruction of the once powerful centralized Gã polity centered at Ayawaso or Great Accra, about eleven miles from the littoral settlement of Aprãṅ (Little Accra).⁴² Akwamu forces beheaded the Gã king, Okãi Koi (reigned c.1644-1677) and his successor, Ofori (or Foli) who fled to Aprãṅ to seek the protection of the Dutch fort. However in 1680, Akwamu sacked “Little Accra” and as Jean Barbot observed “it [was] almost all burnt down, scarce 60 houses being left standing.”⁴³ From Accra, scores of Gã refugees and royalty fled across the Volta river to found Glidzi and Anɛɔ (Anɛhɔ) in modern Togo.⁴⁴

After Akwamu, the Akyem (1730-42) and Asante (1742-1826) successively invaded and occupied the southeastern Gold Coast. One can only speculate the full extent to which these invasions from the forest transformed Gã cosmological and urban spatial settlements. In the 1930s, Gã informants would recount the Akwamu invasion to British colonial anthropologist, Margaret Field as when “all the world was spoilt.”⁴⁵ Such memories are preserved in the entire corpus of the *Kpele* ritual songs many of which were composed at the end of the seventeenth century. The *Kpele* texts – which were first recorded by anthropologists in the twentieth century – orders Gã cosmology and “social categories” into “dualistic oppositions.”⁴⁶ In the construction of such dual social and spatial attributes, one opposite is always deemed superior to the other. The Gã imposed such thinking on what they thought was a belligerent, “uncouth” and culturally “rustic” Akan interior or “*koowie*” (Gã: “bush” or forest) as opposed to the “civilized” urban order of Accra.⁴⁷

⁴² See Paul Ozanne, “Notes on the Early Historic Archaeology of Accra,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6 (1962): 51-70.

⁴³ See John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 10.

⁴⁴ See James Anquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana's Past* (Accra and Essex: Sedco Publishing Ltd and Longman Group Ltd, 1982), 114-115; Parker, *Making the Town*, 8.

⁴⁵ M.J. Field, *Social Organisation of the Gã People* (London: Crown Agents Publishers, 1940), 74.

⁴⁶ Kilson, *Kpele Lala*; Kilson, *Dancing with Gods*, 126-7.

⁴⁷ See John Parker, “The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra,” in *Africa's Urban Past*, ed. David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 207.

This socio-spatial divide between the “koowie” or interior and the town is preserved in Gã social or collective memory through proverbs and rituals. A well-known historic Gã adage, “*tsushwε hi fe koowie*” (a dilapidated house is better a bush) illustrates this sharp contrast between the urban enclaves of the coast and the Akan interior.⁴⁸ Thus a “*tsushwε*” (dilapidated house), located in the “civilized,” “cultured,” secured and close-knit *mãŋ* (town) though treated with contempt, was considerably safer and more habitable than the precarious *koowie* (bush). Unlike the open and easily accessible savannah of the southeastern Gold Coast, the forest extended close to the shores of the Fante and Ahanta-speaking central and western Gold Coast.⁴⁹ It is likely that the proximity of the dense forest to the central and western Gold Coast served as natural fortification in these areas prior to the construction of the Portuguese-built Elmina Castle.⁵⁰ This may explain why the open savannah country of Accra and the southeastern Gold Coast had some fortified towns and settlements even prior to the expansion in Atlantic commerce and Akan militarism in that region.

While visiting the Accra littoral and its vicinity in 1556, English traveler, William Towerson noted that towns were hedged in with “fences” and with “thickets and bushes” and walled with “long cords.” At the end of the sixteenth century, Dutchman Pieter de Marees, observed that the Gã town of Labadi was “a fine, clean place surrounded by walls and bulwarks.”⁵¹ Besides these modest protective measures, other urban settlements on the Accra Plains such as Ayawaso had quite substantial fortifications. Sometime in the 1690s, Danish factor Erick Tilleman

⁴⁸ My Junior Secondary School Gã teacher, Ms. Adeng, first mentioned this proverb to me in c. 2001.

⁴⁹ The southeastern Gold Coast formed the western extremity of the Benin Gap (formerly Dahomey Gap) – a sudden intrusion of savannah grassland into the forest region that extends to Badagry in southwestern Nigeria. See John Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa: 1500–1800* (UCL Press, London, 1999), 59; Parker, *Making the Town*, 2.

⁵⁰ Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa*, 59.

⁵¹ Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* translated and edited by Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 74.

observed that “the proper capital, Acara [Great Accra], which was very large and very well built, according to the manner of the land, was ruined by [the Akwamu] and finally totally burned to the ground, whose walls and half the road to Qvambu [Akwamu] can still be clearly seen [today].”⁵² Though Tilleman did not specifically mention the materials used in the construction of the wall, it was likely a portion of the settlement was at least partly built in stone. Archaeological excavations at the Ayawaso site in the 1960s confirmed “that a number of stone house foundations have been destroyed.”⁵³ Despite these archaeological findings, there is no evidence of the widespread use of stone on the Accra Plains prior to the nineteenth century.

The early fortified settlements of the western Accra plains could be contrasted with that of Fante-speaking coastal towns like Elmina and their immediate interior which according to contemporary European residents lacked fortifications. While visiting Elmina from the Dutch Fort Nassau at Mouri, de Marees observed that “[t]hey surrounded their dwellings with a fence of maize stalks about the height of a man.”⁵⁴ Even less concerned with fortification were towns in the interior of Elmina and the central Gold Coast which had “no Gates, Walls or Moats, nor do they have defences against the ravages of war: these Towns are open to their friends on all sides and not sealed off. I gather from the Negroes that further Inland there are even bigger Towns with larger populations than those on the coast.”⁵⁵ De Marees’ line of enquiry suggests he was surprised by the lack of fortifications in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Despite the lack of African-built domestic fortifications on the central Gold Coast prior to the eighteenth century, Fante-speaking communities understood the physical house as a bounded

⁵² Erik Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account of the Country Guinea and its Nature* (1697) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 28.

⁵³ Paul Ozanne, “Notes on the Early Historic Archaeology of Accra,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 6 (1962): 52-53.

⁵⁴ De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 76.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

space of physical protection and family integrity. “[E]ach man fence[d] off his own dwellings with a reed partition,” de Marees observed and “the houses [were] separated from one another and the reed partitions form Streets which divide each quarter of Houses from the other.” De Marees’ observations clearly point to an important feature of the urban and spatial layout of pre-colonial Gold Coast towns which is still extant. Towns were divided into quarters or wards (Gã: *akutsei*; Fante/Akan: *abrono*). Each quarter comprised a collection of clearly demarcated extended family houses and kinship groups. In Accra, the incorporation of aliens of diverse origins into Gã society became a marked feature of the *akutsei* following the collapse of Ayawaso. Mainly for security reasons, the Gã valued “strangers” (Gã: *gbɔi*) for their martial prowess. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several Gã military engagements “reinforced the equation between military participation and citizenship” in Accra.⁵⁶ However, the increasingly diverse *akutsei* in Gã towns also created deep ethnic fault lines and conflicts within Accra society.⁵⁷

Fihankra

The virtual synonymy of the house (Gã: *shiã*; Akan/Fante: *efie*) in Gã and Akan thought with notions of security, kinship and protection were rooted in historical experiences and philosophical expressions. For example, by the early nineteenth century, the Akan/Asante began to depict *Adinkra* symbols (philosophical pictographs), including *fihankra* and *aban* which connoted security.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Pre-colonial Ga Society,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, no.1, *History* (2002): 41.

⁵⁷ M. J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 2; John K. Osei-Tutu, “Space and the Marking of ‘Space’ in Ga History, Culture and Politics,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, nos.4-5, (2000-2001).



Fig. 3. *Fihankra*, symbol of household security.
Source: Rattray *Religion and Art in Ashanti*.

The former more specifically, symbolized the house as a place of security, safety and family integrity.⁵⁸ The *Fihankra* pictograph itself represented the basic floor plan of the enclosed quadrangular-shaped Gã and Akan courtyard house which usually had a single portal or entrance. Though ideas about the security of the homestead predate the early nineteenth century, those earlier idioms found their expressions in adinkra visual culture.

Historically, the Gã conceptualized three overlapping corporate units based on cognatic descent – *shiã* (pl. *shiãĩ*), *we* and *weku*.⁵⁹ The term *shiã* could be translated as “household,” “home” or “building” and this incorporated a person’s immediate family, usually three generations of people related by blood or biological descendants of a grandparent. The term “*we*” was a broader category which embodied a clan household (Gã: *adebɔɔ shiã*). The founding of an *adebɔɔ shiã* was usually attributed to a putative ancestor. Membership of such a clan household was usually based on patrilineal descent or through adoption.⁶⁰ Members of the same “house” or *we* were

⁵⁸ See Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 266; Daniel Mato, “Clothed in Symbol: The Art of Adinkra Among the Akan of Ghana,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1987), 433.

⁵⁹ Marion Johnson, *Dancing with the Gods: Essays in Ga Ritual* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013), 112.

⁶⁰ See Marion Kilson, “The Ga Naming Rite,” *Anthropos*, Bd. 63/64, H. 5. /6. (1968/1969): 904-920.

known as “*webii*” or “children of the *we*.” Similarly, in the Fante coastal towns most people of non-servile origins could trace their lineage to a putative female ancestress in either one of several established ancestral houses or *efiekessim*.⁶¹ Most importantly, houses functioned as a “sociogram of kinship groups which established their territoriality on the terrain.” The house was therefore regarded as the physical architectural manifestation of the family.⁶²

The primordial or ancestral house was surrounded by satellite houses, inhabited by kinsmen who were usually descendants of the patriarch or *wetsɛ* (Gã: “housefather”) or a female ancestress in the case of the Fante.⁶³ In the 1740s, Ludewig Rømer, an official of the Danish West Indian and Guinea Company, visited the “extensive courtyard” of a Gã priest and ruler, Nuumo Nôte Tsie in Teshi. Tsie’s house, Rømer noted was “surrounded with his family compounds.”⁶⁴ European residents on the Gold Coast from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries often commented on the close-knit residential patterns of coastal towns as “congested” “tortuous,” labyrinthine and “insanitary.”⁶⁵ Such close-knit urban settlement patterns served as security buffers between familiar spaces and the unpredictable world of enemies and evil spirits.

Houses along the Gold Coast and its interior had deities and protective charms (Gã: *sebe*; Fante/Akan: *asuman*). By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was evident that wealthier merchant families acquired more deities and protective charms than ordinary families. While residing in Accra in the 1690s, Tilleman observed that “[t]here [were] also some among the

⁶¹ Augustus Lavinus Casely-Hayford, “A Genealogical History of Cape Coast Stool Histories,” (PhD dissertation, 1992), 11.

⁶² Labelle Prussin. “An Introduction to Indigenous African Architecture,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 33, no.3 (Oct., 1974): 191.

⁶³ See Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws*, 31.

⁶⁴ Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)* ed. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 93-94.

⁶⁵ Letters from Guinea, 18 December, 1836 in *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff; Biography and Letters 1836-1842*, S.A. Winsnes ed. (Trondheim: Faculty of Arts, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004), 65; W. Daniell, “On the Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampé, Gold Coast, Western Africa,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 1848-1856, 4 (1856): 26; Rømer. *A Reliable Account*, 93-94.

wealthy and those who have sufficient resources who have a sacred object (in their opinion) in their houses, which is also called Fitissie [“fetish” or more specifically a deity].” Though the possession of more deities was a sign of power and prestige, it also signaled the vulnerability and powerlessness of wealthy coastal merchants and rulers in the face of Akan military expansion. In March 1742, Daku the trade broker for the Dutch at Accra was reportedly beheaded in Akyem during a battle with Akwamu forces who were in alliance with the invading Asante.⁶⁶ Knowing full well the extent and details of Daku’s wealth, the victorious Asante demanded “5 big strings of comte de terra, worked and loose gold, a box with cloth, and anything that could be got from the deceased’s household, wives and slaves to the old Assiantyn [Asante] ambassador.”⁶⁷ Even more intriguing, the Asante “ambassador” also demanded “6 big bottles filled with gold, which he said are buried inside this fort [Crève-cœur], and the first wife of the deceased.” Despite their weakened position, the Dutch resolved to protect Daku’s relatives by lodging “them if need be in the fort.”⁶⁸ Evidently, within the highly volatile eighteenth century, neither the physical or the supposed spiritual aura of merchant houses but the European-built forts could provide adequate security against invaders.

Though practically ineffective against invading armies, household deities often provided hope and a psychological sense of control for many merchants. In the 1740s, Rømer had an interesting but difficult conversation with Nuumo Nɔte Tsie on the effectiveness of what the former considered useless “knick-knacks” and “foolish trinkets” in providing spiritual fortification from

⁶⁶ From van Kuyl, 28th March 1742, Accra; Received from van Kuyl, Accra, a copy of a letter written to him by Commies Quaron at Apam, 1st April 1742 in *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674-1742: A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at the Hague* edited and translated by Albert van Dantzig (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences), 358; Received a letter from Raams & Vershueren, 23rd April 1742, [received letter] dated, Accra, 20th April, in *ibid.*, 356.

⁶⁷ Received a letter from Raams & Vershueren, 23rd April 1742, [received letter] dated, Accra, 20th April, in *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast*, 356.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

invading armies. Tsiε according to Rømer expressed some doubt about his household deities in their conversations:

He swore by his father – a great oath among the Negroes – that he did not know one hundredth part of the amount of good that had come [from the collection of sacred objects], but that all of it (perhaps with the exception of some one hundred items) had been collected by his forefathers, and each piece which I saw had helped his forefathers, in some way, because of the help of God and the fetish.⁶⁹

From Rømer’s conversations with Tsiε, it was evident that the latter oscillated between skepticism and faith (Gã: *hemɔkeyeli*) in his household deities. And yet he became “vexed” when Rømer asked “what he had done with all these things [i.e. sacred objects/deities] during the last war” with Asante. Perhaps Tsiε was annoyed with Rømer’s line of questioning which may have come across as disrespectful of the amulets, sacred objects and deities his ancestors had collected. For whatever reason, Tsiε became angry and Rømer’s outright skepticism did not entirely resonate with him. For Rømer, Tsiε “could in a very short time collect many of these [“fetishes”]” – an exercise which did not prevent the Asante forces under Akyempenhene (General) Owusu Afriyie from burning down “the entire town” in 1742.⁷⁰ Evidently, Rømer and Tsiε were on different levels of understanding. Rather than rejecting his household deities, Tsiε insisted they were the reason he was able to win the “friendship of the Danes who protected and pleaded for him.”⁷¹ Though Nuumo Tsiε and his people fled to the safety of Christiansborg Castle, he gave partial credit to his deities for his security. He tried to convince Rømer that one of the deities he took with him – “a stone,” helped to “acquit him” when “he lacked words to respond to the speeches of [his] opponents.”

⁶⁹ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 94.

⁷⁰ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 94-95; See also T.C. McCaskie, “Asante and Ga: The History of a Relationship” in *The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century*; C.C. Reindorf and Samuel Johnson Paul Jenkins ed. Paul Jenkins (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2000), 142.

⁷¹ *A Reliable Account*, 95.

These opponents were presumably Danish officials who were against their establishment's interference in local politics.⁷²

In response to the volatile nature of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a profitable economy of trading in deities and other household artefacts of protection emerged on the Gold Coast. Johann Müller, a German-born chaplain of the Danish fort at Fetu near Cape Coast noted in the 1690s that “in addition to [...] household idols, which [one] inherited from [an] ancestor, buys yet another for a certain sum of gold from a heathen priest, paying ten, twenty or even more bände of gold for it.”⁷³ Decades later, Rømer observed among the Gã that “[i]n all the houses of the Negroes you see signs and evidence of the fetish, many in some homes, few in others.”⁷⁴ In Osu and Accra, Tilleman observed that household deities were usually made of “a special image of clay or a stuffed bird or a snake skin or even a stone or some other such things animal parts or rocks.”⁷⁵ The acquisition of deities functioned as a sort of stockpile of spiritual fortifications or ammunitions. And wealthy families who possessed more deities either by inheritance or acquisition or both were deemed more powerful by their neighbors.

However, “one summàn [asuman] or household idol” was not just considered “stronger and more powerful than another” as Müller noted but the deities themselves were thought to possess metaphorical qualities or attributes such as bravery, speed and agility. Müller provided a list of names of some “hereditary fitiso or household fitiso” in Fanteland. In analyzing these names, it is possible to deduce the attributes of the deities. The deities had names like “Abboa [àbóá; beast]” “Tuttu” [Otútu; “the one who uproots”]; “Effrimmum [mfráma; wind],” and

⁷² *A Reliable Account*, 95.

⁷³ Johann Wilhelm Müller, “Description of the Fetu Country 1662-9” in *German Sources For West African History: 1599-1669*, edited and translated by Adam Jones (Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH: Wiesbaden, 1983), 163.

⁷⁴ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 93.

⁷⁵ Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 28.

“seraquu [sra kwan; to scout, spy (out)].”⁷⁶ For example, names like “àbóá” or “beast” would have referred to the ferocious animal-like or beastly strength of such a deity. Likewise, a household that possessed a deity whose duty it was “to scout” would have been well suited for scouting the enemy camp or warding off military incursions. The connection, however, between the names of household deities and their expected duties or actions were often lost on European observers.

From an African perspective, such illustrative names or attributes of household deities could be spiritually harnessed by the family for the protection of the political and economic fortunes of the household. As recently as 2018, descendants of a nineteenth century Anglo-Gã merchant and warlord (Gã: *tatsɛ*), John W. Hansen (d. 1840) still believed that one of their most powerful war deities named “Afieye is an eagle” and a “warrior” as well as “a spirit” that hovered around “with its eyes and wings.”⁷⁷ By the 1820s, Hansen was among an emerging class of influential and politically ambitious Euro-African merchants in Accra and Osu. Merchants such as Hansen, James Bannerman and William “Nanka” Bruce (d. 1856) had found wealth in legitimate commerce. And because of their increasing wealth these Euro-Africans began to overshadow the wealthy but declining traditional Gã *ablempɔŋ* (grandees) or “big” men like the slave trader and *makelaar* of Kinkã (Dutch Accra), Nii Kwaku Ankra (d.1840).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Johann Wilhelm Müller, “Description of the Fetu Country 1662-9” in *German Sources For West African History: 1599-1669*, edited and translated by Adam Jones (Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH: Wiesbaden, 1983), 162.

⁷⁷ Interview with Emmanuel Mark-Hansen Jr., Hansen Fort, James Town, Accra, 16th December 2018.

⁷⁸ Parker, *Making the Town*, 35;50.



Fig. 4. A Family *obosum* or deity in the form of a turtle shell in the courtyard of a nineteenth century Cape Coast *Efiekessim* founded by Nana Kɔw Amoesi I of Effutu Mampon. The recent cement plastering of the walls and staircase has hidden the original stone and burnt brick masonry. Photo by author, February 2019.

Hansen had served as a British magistrate and commandant of James Fort in Accra.⁷⁹ With his powerful connections and strong economic base, Hansen was able to afford not only the protection and security of a stone house, but also of deities and armaments to help the Gã prosecute wars. The Hansen family's war deities were acquired sometime in the 1820s either prior to or during the Nsamankow (1824) and Katamanso (1826) Wars – fought between the Gã, Fante, Akyem, British and Danes on one hand and the Asante on the other. To prosecute the wars, Hansen contributed a 100 men out of 600 which was partly provided by Henrich Richter and James Bannerman and munitions including the newly invented Congreve rockets and two brass one-pounder field pieces.⁸⁰ Despite the superior fire power of the Gold Coast alliance, the oral traditions of the Hansen family partly attribute their victory to their household deities. Interestingly, generations of

⁷⁹ See Parker, *Making the Town*, 35;50.

⁸⁰ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, 206-7; See Ole Justesen, "Henrich Richter 1785-1849: Trader and Politician in the Danish Settlements on the Gold Coast," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 7 (2003):119.

Hansen's descendants incorporated one of the Congreve rockets used in the Asante wars into their repertoire of ritual and sacred objects.⁸¹ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading African and Euro-African merchants harnessed a combination of the protective power of deities, armaments and their stone houses to secure themselves and to repel attacks.

***Abandɔ* (“Love of Stone Houses/Castles”)**

Abandɔ is a popular Fante male name which probably evolved as a title in the various wars and skirmishes involving the Fante and their neighbors. The name roughly translates as “love of stone houses/castles.” Any Fante male who bore this name had the appellation, “*fi ɔko*,” meaning “from war.”⁸² The name and its appellation conceptually shows how Gold Coast Africans imagined the greater protection and security that castellated buildings offered compared to mud or adobe houses. Additionally, the name and appellation clearly highlight an early growing appreciation on the Gold Coast of fortified stone buildings as ideal bulwarks from invading enemy nations. For example, during the Asante invasion of 1742, Danish official, Ludewig Rømer described an important architectural feature of Christiansborg Castle – the “outwork” – and how it sheltered the Osu townspeople:

It is between this wall and the fort that our Negroes [i.e. the people of Osu and other towns allied to the Danish establishment] are placed when enemies threaten to attack them in the town. In the walls, as well as on the fort's parapet, are elongated arrow loopholes, wide on the inner side and narrow on the outside, so if the enemy should come close enough the Negroes can fire their muskets at them [i.e. Asante], and yet remain safe from gunshot themselves.⁸³

⁸¹ Unfortunately, I have only seen pictures of this Congreve rocket. I was told I could only see it during the annual harvest thanksgiving *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival of the Gã people.

⁸² Telephone conversation with Kweku Darko Ankrah, January 23, 2020.

⁸³ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 211-212.

These conflicts informed Gã and Fante conceptions of how to guard against insecurity and vulnerability. The Akan word “*aban*” and its Gã cognate, “*afabãŋ*” could be translated as “fence,” “wall” or “enclosure.” Both terms also had a deeper meaning – “protection.”⁸⁴ Dwelling spaces whether built of stone or mud was thought to offer spiritual and physical protection. In the Gã language, the term *aklabatsa*, specifically referred to a fence that cordoned off a sacred grove, most of which were anthills (Gã: *gbɔtsui*; *pl. gbɔtsuii*) dotted across the Accra Plains.⁸⁵ The cordoned off *gbɔtsuii* metaphorically represented the protected Gã world.

In Akan, the word “(a)*ban*” when used as a verb metaphorically expressed the protective spiritual fence or wall of household deities and the ancestral shades. For example: “*efie bosom ne nananom nsamanfo na ɔmo bɔ yɛ ho ban oo*” (“it is the deities and ancestral shades that protects us”). In other contexts, the protection of an *aban* was understood in a physical sense. At the end of the sixteenth century, Dutchman, Pieter de Marees observed that “each man” on the Fante coast “fence[ed] off his own dwellings with a reed partition, the houses are separated from one another and the reed partitions form Streets which divide each quarter [Akan/Fante: *borɔno*; Gã: *akutsei*] of Houses from the other.”⁸⁶ The local Fante would have referred to the “reed partitions,” which predated stone-masonry walls as *aban*.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Fante and other Akan-speaking communities had broadened the term *aban* to include the protective walls of European and African-built stone or castellated buildings.⁸⁷ In the 1820s for example, the Dutch Governor at Elmina Castle and a

⁸⁴ The Gã words, “*aklabatsa*” (also spelt and pronounced *akrabatsa*) and “*afabãŋ*” are synonyms.

⁸⁵ See for example Johannes Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch and Vocabulary of the Akra- or Gã-Language with an Appendix on the Adãme-Dialect* (Gregg International Publishers Ltd [Stuttgart: 1858], 1972), 11.

⁸⁶ De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 74-75.

⁸⁷ See Mary E. Kropp-Dakubu, *Korle Meets the Sea: A Socio-linguistic History of Accra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997),

British envoy in Kumase, Thomas Bowdich at different times commissioned Asante craftsmen to make the prestigious funerary Adinkra cloth.



Fig. 5. Aban (Castle). Source: R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford, 1927)

Both cloth specimens ended up in the Rijksmuseum voor volkenkunde in Leiden and the British Museum in London where they are still kept.⁸⁸ Among the various pictographs stamped on both cloths was that of the “aban” – an X-shaped geometric adinkra symbol depicting a stone-built double story courtyard plan.

This particular pictograph was one of the earliest known Asante-documented references to stone buildings or castles.⁸⁹ Indeed, the kings of Asante in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were already familiar with and enamored by the trappings of European style security edifices – stone-built forts, castles and cannons. In 1822, Dutch and Elmina artificers at the

⁸⁸ Daniel Mato, “Clothed in Symbol: The Art of Adinkra among the Akan of Ghana,” (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1987), 78;97.

⁸⁹ Local oral traditions maintain that Adinkra cloth with the “aban” pictographs were only reserved for the Asantehene. See Mato, “Clothed in Symbol,” 78;97-98.

request of Asantehene Osee Tutu Kwame, alias Osee Bonsu (1802-23) completed a stone palace known in Kumase until its bombardment by the British in 1874 as “the Aban.”⁹⁰ The Aban stood in the center of the city of Kumase obviously reinforcing the power and wealth of the Asantehene. On September 14, 1857, David Mill Graves observed in Kumase that: “[t]he houses are built of wood and clay, [the so-called wattle and daub construction method] except for a house that is joined to the palace, which is built of clay, stones and lime. It bears the name of the Castle.”⁹¹

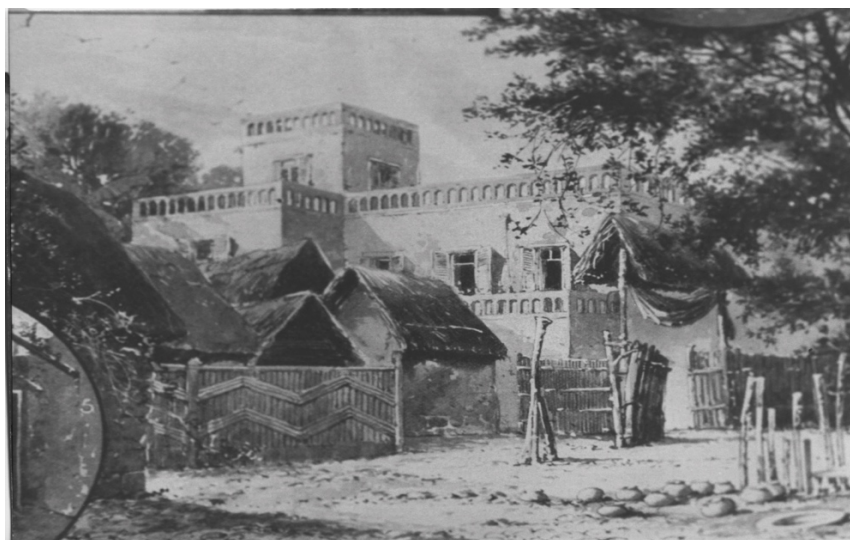


Fig. 6. The Aban in Kumase, just before the British bombardment in 1874.
Source: *Illustrated London News* (1874).

Unlike Fante or Akan speakers, however, the Gã did not really broaden the meaning of the term “*afabãŋ*” to include forts or castles. Rather, the Gã used the word, “*mɔŋ*” in reference to a “fort” or “any stone-house with a flat top [i.e. roof]” or parapet.⁹² Despite their slightly different but related spiritual and physical meanings – *aban*, *afabãŋ* and *mɔŋ* – provided Gold Coast merchants with the ideological and technological expressions and tools to better address

⁹⁰ Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 200-201.

⁹¹ Yarak, ed, “A Dutch Embassy,” 376.

⁹² Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch*, 202.

security challenges posed by the volatile nature of Atlantic commerce and Akan militarism. Put simply, Gã, Fante and Euro-African urban merchants and families expressed political and economic vulnerability and anxieties in “real” security concerns (stone construction and walls), as well as an investment in spiritual and intangible forms of protection.

Though local African rulers monopolized Atlantic commerce, the militarism that characterized inter-state competition and expansion led to political fragmentation on the Gold Coast. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these political phenomena had created new openings and opportunities for the commercial, political and social advancements of private individuals or the so-called “merchant princes.”⁹³ Through trade and political acumen, these merchant princes, became a defining feature of the Gold Coast and they played an important role in the changing European demands from gold and ivory in favor of captives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of these merchants such as John Kabes of Komenda and John Conny (Gyan Kɔne) of Pokesu resided in fortified stone buildings. At various times between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries both Kabes and Kɔne worked for the competing Dutch, English and Brandenburger companies often on their own terms and interests.

In 1698, Kabes facilitated the building of the English fort at Komenda much to the consternation of the Dutch.⁹⁴ By 1704, the London Board of the Royal Africa Company had approved for Kabes to become its local agent. That same year, Kabes fell out with Sir Dalby because of the former’s trade with interlopers instead of the established English company. In retaliation, Dalby ordered warships which “demolished the houses of Jan Kabes.”⁹⁵ Regardless of Kabes’ powerful position as the defacto ruler of Komenda and a person whom “[t]he kings of

⁹³ See Daaku, *Trade and Politics*.

⁹⁴Ibid, 116.

⁹⁵Ibid, 117.

these places love[d] and fear[ed]” he was still vulnerable.⁹⁶ It was therefore not surprising that by 1715, Kabes had “built himself a large and strong [stone] house on which he had mounted more than twenty-four guns,” ostensibly to protect himself from his African and European enemies.⁹⁷

In 1717, the departing Bradenburgers “left the Government of this Fort” of Gross Frederichsburg in the charge of John Conny (or Kɔne) who was known by the sobriquet, “the Last Negro Prussian Prince.” The Brandenburgers gave “strict Orders” to Kɔne not to deliver it [i.e. the fort] up to any Nation but the Prussians.”⁹⁸ When the Brandenburgers got to Europe, they sold the fort to the Dutch without informing Kɔne. The Dutch on the Gold Coast demanded the fort and Kɔne refused. These disagreements resulted in a long drawn violent struggle between the Dutch and Kɔne. The fort then also known as “Conny’s Castle,” was a bulwark from which Kɔne launched successful attacks on the Dutch. Englishman Thomas Astley, noted that Kɔne “pav’d a little path from the Outside Gate to the linear Apartments of his Castle, with Dutchmen [’] s skulls slain in his Engagements with them.” This tactic must have struck fear in the Dutch and their allies. Nonetheless, in 1724, Kɔne was dislodged from the fort and fled to the Fantyn [Fante] Country from the incensed Dutch.”⁹⁹

Though an *aban or mɔŋ* may have addressed the real security concerns of Gold Coast merchants, such undertakings on the Gold Coast were expensive and required huge investments. With the exception of Elmina, which had many substantial one or two story African-owned houses built in local sandstone by the seventeenth century, there were virtually no African-

⁹⁶ In 1704, Kabes became the defacto ruler of Komenda after helping to enstool the puppet ruler, Tekyi Addico. See Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 117.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations which have been hitherto published in any Language, 4 vols.* (1745-47) (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1968), 116.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 117.

owned stone buildings anywhere on the Gold Coast until the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ In the mid-eighteenth century, Rømer observed that Danish masons sent to the “[Gold] Coast” had “to be trained for a couple of years before they can work with African stone.” Stones, Rømer noted, were quarried “regardless of whether they emerge[d] round or flat the vaults as well as any other necessary masonry, must be made of them.”¹⁰¹ By the 1780s, the few Africans who were trained in stone masonry were mostly enslaved laborers owned by the Danish establishment.¹⁰²

Unlike the Elmina townspeople who had earned the Fante-language sobriquet, “*Edina botwe ku*,” (“Elmina the stone cutters”), Osu and Accra-based merchants like Frederik Svane, clearly understood the difficulties in building in stone.¹⁰³ “[At] a great expense,” Svane “had stones carried from Labadeye [Labadi],” a distance of about 1.9 miles from Osu.¹⁰⁴ Svane also hired “a considerable number of workers not only to carry broken stones” to his construction site at Osu “but also to do the actual work[of putting up the edifice].”¹⁰⁵ Svane employed a Dane, named Christian Lochau, the “Company’s builder” who “was idle at the time.” Lochau agreed to “supervise the Black builders” for a salary of “6rdl.” [6 rixdollars]. Svane trusted Lochau’s competence “that everything would thus be done properly, and a straight, even wall could be built without irregularities or the least damage or flaw.” The laid foundation of the building was “almost a whole foot in height” and according to Svane was “built in a few days’ time; square: 2-3 foot [wide] in the foundations and later narrower and narrower as it grew in height.” Svane had

¹⁰⁰ K.B. Dickson, “Evolution of Seaports in Ghana,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55, No. 1 (Mar., 1965):103.

¹⁰¹ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 222.

¹⁰² Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 202.

¹⁰³ Elmina-based tour guide, Felix Nguah, first mentioned the well-known sobriquet, “Edina botweku” to me in 2014.

¹⁰⁴ “Svane, former Parish Clerk and Catechist” in *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana*, 734.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 734-35.

wanted the building “to be of three floors with a future garden around it for pleasure and amusement.” Given the dimensions and grandeur of Svane’s stone house, the edifice must have intimidated his Gã and Danish enemies alike.

As part of this celebration of power and grandeur, Svane revived an old Gã ritual – the “housebuilding custom” (Gã: “*shiã mãã kusum*”) in 1742.¹⁰⁶ The custom was to announce and celebrate his ongoing process of creating a *shiã* (homestead) and lineage. The fact that Svane’s *shiã* was embodied in stone and not mud or adobe (Gã: *su tsu*) not only communicated his material success but also the durability of his Danish wife, their infant son, extended Gã relatives and household slaves. Eighteenth century Danish sources mention Svane and Ashãṅmɔ (Ashangmo), a Gã warlord and ruler of “Little Popo” (Anɛxɔ) as the only personages who participated in housebuilding customs.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that the sheer expense of such rituals and festivities must have made such celebrations very costly for many ordinary Gã who would have desired self-aggrandizement and powerful networks. Svane invited leading Gã merchants and public office holders including trade broker Sodza Duamlɔ, as well as Danish officials. The latter probably included Rømer.¹⁰⁸ From Osu, Svane extended the celebration to the Dãṅme-speaking town of Great Ningo, located thirty-two miles to the east. Besides paying for the transportation of his guests, Svane ordered expensive gold jewelry for himself and gold rings for them. The guests in turn presented Svane with captives, gold and merchandise. One could link Svane’s lavish show of power and wealth through his building project to the commercial logic of Atlantic commerce.¹⁰⁹ He was simply marketing his yet to be completed stone emporium in Osu and making connections with important Gã and Dãṅme traders along the eastern Gold Coast.

¹⁰⁶ Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*, 297.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Simonsen, “Belonging in Africa,” 98.

In his housebuilding custom, Ashāḡmō, “had his entire residence, which [was] of great size, built with brandy, but, at every half-span of the walls he stuck on all manner of European goods, such as cotton [cloth], Silesian linen, etc.” To Rømer, who “lodged in” Ashāḡmō’s residence for “six weeks,” the edifice could have “cost easily as much as a [European-style stone] fort” despite its structural deficiencies.¹¹⁰ The rains washed “some of the clay walls,” exposing “the [textile] fibres.” Despite the structural deficiencies of Ashāḡmō’s house “the Negroes of Popo,” Rømer wrote “called this residence a fortress.” Though Ashāḡmō’s residence was not a stone fortress, he intended it to function like a European castle. He mounted “four cannons without their gun carriages,” presumably on the parapets of his adobe fortress. And “shortly before” Rømer arrived at Anexō, Ashāḡmō “had caught four of his enemies (“Dahomet Negroes”), likely spies or envoys from the neighboring powerful slave trading kingdom of Dahomey. In what seemed like a carefully orchestrated ritualized execution, Ashāḡmō had the heads of the Dahomey “Negroes” “cut into small pieces, placed them in the cannons, and shot them away.” Ashāḡmō believed that with this kind of execution, “his enemies would have to hunt for a long time before they could recover their heads.”¹¹¹ More significantly, Ashāḡmō would have intended for his victims to be tormented forever in the afterlife without their heads.

The ritualized humiliation of enemies or prisoners of war was connected to elaborate spiritual ceremonies that supposedly ensured the protection of households. After contributing to a successful Gold Coast campaign against Asante in 1826, Gã merchant Nii Kwaku Ankra partially buried in the “threshold” of his “handsome” three-story “white-washed house,” “skulls of Ashantees [Asante soldiers].”¹¹² In the “vestibule” of Ankra’s house, British travel writer,

¹¹⁰ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 180.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 181.

¹¹² James Edward Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation Among the Colonies of Western Africa &c. 2 Vols.* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), 186.

James Edward Alexander saw “war-drums, ornamented with white skulls and jawbones.”¹¹³ By dint of Ankra’s wealth, slave trading, war lordism and power, he became the Dutch establishment’s *makelaar* (chief broker) in Accra by the 1820s. With that immense power and influence, Ankra was able to create an *oblempɔŋ* or richman’s (or grandee’s) stool which became an alternate source of authority to that of the established *māŋtse* (literally “town father”/ruler) in the Otublohum *akutso* (quarter) of Kinkā.¹¹⁴

In 1840, shortly after Ankra’s death, American missionary, the Rev. Thomas Savage visited his house in Kinkā. Despite Savage’s condescending remarks about Ankra’s house as an “adjoining pile of stone buildings, imitating a castle, with its fort,” he also stated that:

Upon the high walls several large cannon were mounted, and the Dutch flag flying. This was the dwelling house of a native black, called Ankra, built by himself at an expense of several thousand dollars. It afterwards appeared that he had just died, and it was supposed had left a large amount of gold, obtained by selling his own countrymen, almost to the day of his death. In the hall, large and airy, were stuffed couches, chairs, a mahogany sideboard, loaded loaded with heavy cut-glass decanters, goblets, &c., and tables, while the walls were crowded with indecent French pictures. In the vicinity of almost all the forts will be found some one or more natives who have thus distinguished themselves by superior energy and management.¹¹⁵

Savage’s visit to the late Ankra’s house gives us one of the rare opportunities to examine the descriptions of the interior decoration, furnishings, imported luxuries and tastes of an African merchant’s house in the first half of the nineteenth century. But most importantly, Ankra’s connection to Dutch patronage and his well-secured *mɔŋ* or castle with its canons, reinforced his local power as a holder of an *oblempɔŋ* stool.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 186.

¹¹⁴ Parker, *Making the town*, 14;125.

¹¹⁵ Rev. Thomas Savage, “Journal of a Visit to the Gold Coast in the Fall of 1840,” *The Spirit of Journals*, 7 (1840):47.

¹¹⁶ Today, Ankra’s house is still extant and in front of the portal adjacent the former Dutch Fort Crèvecoeur sits two early nineteenth century cannons.

Unlike Ashāṅmō and Ankra who were potentates, Svane was more vulnerable and dependent on the Danish establishment and local Gã authorities for his protection. Prior to and after his troubles with Governor Jørgensen, Svane had courted the friendship of the ruler and chief priest of Labadi, Odoi Kpoti and his brother Kwashi [“Qvassi”]. Kwashi was Svane’s brother’s father-in-law. The “honest and sensible” Kwashi, Svane wrote, “made great efforts” in “all possible ways to be of service” to him.¹¹⁷ It is important to note that Svane’s alliances with powerful Gã also shows the extent of his vulnerability. The building project not only attracted the jealousy of Jørgensen but the latter also collaborated with some Gã who arrested Svane.¹¹⁸

Though African merchants in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had different ideas about how to protect their trade or imported wares many either built or aspired to have fortified and secured houses. Most importantly, all of these early African experimentations with castellated buildings and its attendant elaborate rituals gave true meaning and power to the name, Abandō, “the love of stone houses/castles.”

Trade, Security and “Big” Stone Houses in the Nineteenth Century

The construction of stone houses on the Gold Coast was crucial to the protection of African merchants’ commercial interests. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the old *feitora* (or “factory system”) where trade in the importation of European luxury goods was monopolized by European forts slowly gave way to the emergence of an independent commercial class of Gã, Fante and Euro-African traders who had direct commercial ties to European trading houses.¹¹⁹ This period also saw the gradual shift away from the slave trade to the so-called legitimate

¹¹⁷ Simonsen, *Belonging in Africa*, 98.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Per Hernæs, “‘Fort Slavery’ at Christiansborg on the Gold Coast: Wage Labour in the Making?” in *Slavery Across Time and Space, Studies in Slavery in Medieval Europe and Africa*, ed. Per Hernæs and Tore Iversen (Trondheim: Department of History, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2002), 197.

commerce. Denmark had abolished its official slave trade in 1803, Britain in 1807 and the Netherlands in 1814. Despite these European measures, Gã and Fante merchants as well as resident “Brazilian negroes” transported captives from Elmina, Cape Coast and Accra to agents on the Volta Estuary and the so-called Slave Coast.¹²⁰ Until his death in 1840, Nii Kwaku Ankra was the acknowledged “general broker” of the slave trade in Accra. With the permission of the Gã Māntse (King of Accra), in 1829, Ankra invaded and raided Krepe across the Volta River and sold his captives to Portuguese/Brazilian slavers off the Accra coast.¹²¹

However, by the 1820s and 1830s, the rising tide of legitimate commerce, particularly the exportation of oil palm and ivory in exchange for European manufactured imports began to overshadow the slave trade. In 1831, the Gold Coast imported £130,851 13s.111/2 d worth of goods from England and this increased to £423,170 l the following year. Similarly, “legitimate” exports from Cape Coast to England increased from £ 90,283 l. 9s 6 d. in 1831 to £ 431, 269.1 in 1840.¹²² A British magistrate and merchant of Anomabo and Cape Coast, Brodie Cruickshank observed that “[t]here was not a nook or corner of the land” without “its festoons of [imported] Manchester cottons and China silks hung upon the walls of houses or round the trees in the market-place.”¹²³

It was likely that the steady rise in legitimate commerce influenced the choice of huge stone houses that became more of a feature of all major Gold Coast towns in the first half of the nineteenth century. Naturally, the modest low-elevated mud buildings particularly on the eastern

¹²⁰Edw. Carstensen/W. Wulff, Chief Fort Christiansborg, 6 September 1842, in *Closing the Books. Governor Edward Carstensen on Danish Guinea 1842-50*, ed. Selena Axelrod (Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2010), 3; Reindorf, *History*, 152-3.

¹²¹ Reindorf, *History*, 152; 255.

¹²² Appendix, No. 3 Cape Coast: Gold Coast Commissioner's Report. Minutes of Evidence” in British Parliamentary Papers: Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa, Together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index Part II: Colonies, Africa (1842) (Irish University Press, Shannon, 1968), 15-19.

¹²³ Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 32.

Gold Coast could not serve as adequate store or warehouses for the increasing volume of goods that local merchants imported from Europe and the Americas.



Fig. 7. “Part of the town of Accra seen from the east.” The street has been known since the early twentieth century as High Street, the busiest in Old Accra. Creator: Christoph Wilhelm Locher. Date: 01.01.1861-31.12.1880. BMA QD-30.011.0028

While visiting Tsie in the 1740s, Rømer only “stuck [his] head and half [his] body in through the narrow door, thus casting a shadow inside [the room].”¹²⁴ Decades later, in the 1780s, Isert also observed that: “[t]he Akras [Gã], for example, [built] their huts like normal buildings, yet so low that you cannot stand upright inside them. This is not regarded as a fault.”¹²⁵ In Cape Coast, less prominent merchants who could not afford to build in stone, often constructed two story mud houses with stores on the ground floors to secure their imported merchandise.

By the first half of the nineteenth century, “the [mud-built] aboriginal tenements” of Cape Coast rose to “the altitude of two storeys,” compared to Accra where “they seldom advance[d]

¹²⁴ Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 93-94.

¹²⁵ Paul Erdmann Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert’s Journey to Guinea and the Carribean Islands in Columbia (1788)* edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra 2007), 53-4.

beyond the ground floor, save in a few instances which are to be noticed as exceptions to the general rule.”¹²⁶ However by the 1850 and 1860s, the “oblong or quadrangular,” “unroofed courtyard” and “whitewashed” mud houses in Accra looked considerably bigger and more suited for storing or securing imported merchandise than the type that was constructed in the eighteenth century.¹²⁷

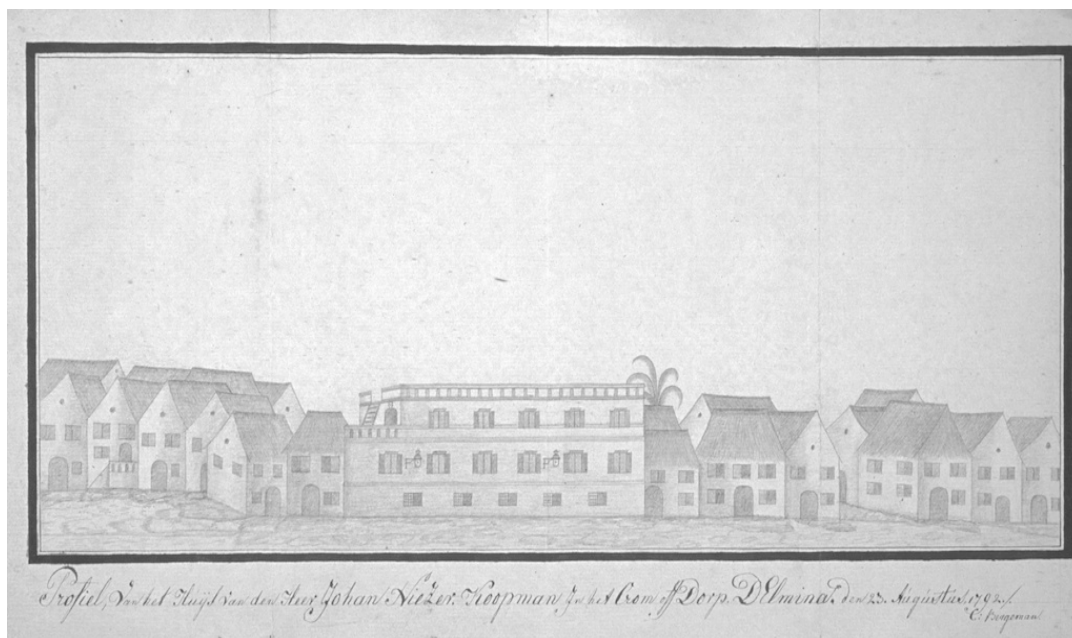


Fig.8. A 1792 engraving by Dutchman C. Bergeman of Jan Nieser’s three-storied house and surrounding dwellings in Elmina. Courtesy, the Leiden University Library, Collectie Bodel Nijenhuis [p.314-IN.97].

Despite these ‘improvements’ in mud houses, European visitors to Accra and other Gold Coast towns often contrasted these “low and dusky habitations” with the “high walls” and “dignified altitudes” of the “castle[s]” owned by “white and mulatto merchants and the influential natives.”¹²⁸ As early as the 1790s, Elmina *Vrijburgers* (upper class Euro-Africans) such as Jan

¹²⁶ William Daniell, “On the Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampé, Gold Coast, Western Africa,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1848-1856), 4 (1856): 28.

¹²⁷ Daniell, “On the Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampé,” 27.

¹²⁸ See Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampé,” 27; James Edward Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation Among the Colonies of Western Africa &c. 2 Vols* (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1837), 180.

Nieser owned “several [stone] buildings within and near Elmina” and a mansion in Accra which was ninety-seven miles to the east.¹²⁹ Another Vrijburger, Carel Hendrik Bartels owned skilled slaves which included seventeen carpenters, thirteen smiths, four coopers, four stonebreakers (Dutch: *steenbrekers*) who maintained his stone house.¹³⁰

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, a distinct elite “coastal style” architecture had become firmly established along the Gold Coast and to some extent in some inland polities. While on a visit to Okyenhene (King of Akyem Abuakwa), Atta Panyin at Kyebi, in 1845, Edward Carstensen, the then Danish governor at Christiansborg Castle noted that:

This house (Cabuceer Atha’s) is an exception here, since it is built in the coastal style, i.e. with two storeys. The ground floor is very low, containing storehouses; the first floor [has] a hall and two bedrooms. The façade has a gallery (balcony) with stairs down to the yard, all built in timber and clay. After a quick change, I presented myself to Cabuceer Atha, according to the customs of the country.¹³¹

This distinct “coastal style” showed some influences of the Mediterranean/Italian Palladian style particularly in its heavy stone-walled masonry with vaulted arches and columns.¹³² Many of the Gã and Fante merchant houses also had “arched balconies or corridors in front and rear.”¹³³ Palladian architecture itself was “well ventilated” and therefore suited for the tropical climate and was also adapted to the Gã and Fante/Akan courtyard plan.¹³⁴ Typically, these buildings had “pleasant promenades,” which in the opinion of contemporaneous European ethnographers like

¹²⁹ Larry W. Yarak, “West African Coastal Slavery in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of the Afro-European Slave owners of Elmina,” *Ethno History and Africa*, 36, no. 1 (Winter, 1989): 47.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Edw. Carstensen, Chief Fort Christiansborg, 19 September 1845 in *Closing the Books*, ed. S.A Winsnes, 141.

¹³² Palladian architecture was popularized by Andrea Palladio (1508-80), who lived and worked in northern Italy and studied the remains of Greek and Roman buildings, especially temples. He published his findings in the book *I Quattro Libri Dell-architettura (The Four Books of Architecture)* in 1570. See Courtney Micots, “African Coastal Elite Architecture: Cultural Authentication during the Colonial Period in Anomabo, Ghana” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2010), 136.

¹³³ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampé,” 27.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

William Daniell, served as “a protection against the rays of a fervid sun, and likewise reduced to a mellowed softness the disagreeable glare and temperature that would otherwise pervade the internal partitions.”¹³⁵

It is important to note that building in stone also meant that wealthy African and Euro-African merchants invested more in the security of the homestead. It was not surprising that not only the Gã and Fante labelled their fortified houses as “castles” but European and American visitors did as well. The Rev. Thomas Savage noted that Accra merchants’ establishments “were all whitewashed” and “some of which, surrounded by high walls, look more like castles and fortifications than simple dwellings.”¹³⁶ James Bannerman, an Anglo-Gã merchant lived in a two-story mansion with “twelve or fifteen steps” the “under part forming a store house, in which everything arriving from England was deposited; a high wall surrounded the building, securing the premises from any sudden irruption either of thieves, or of other enemies, within which Mr. Bannerman transacted all the trading business that came before him.”¹³⁷ Bannerman, like many of the well-established coastal merchants hosted traders from Asante and other Akan polities in the interior.

These Asante traders “came in and weighed what Gold dust they had brought for the purchase of Goods.” This arrangement meant that the security of the stores was of utmost priority to Bannerman. Cruickshank who lived on the Gold Coast for eighteen years, cynically noted that imported goods kept in the stores “attract[ed] the attention and excite[d] the cupidity of the villagers” and traders from the interior.¹³⁸ It is likely that many African merchants shared

¹³⁵ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampé,” 27.

¹³⁶ Savage, “Journal of a Visit to the Gold Coast in the Fall of 1840,” 46-47.

¹³⁷ Sir Henry Veel Huntley, *Seven Years’ Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa, Volume 1* (London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1850), 81.

¹³⁸ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast*, 32.

Cruickshank's cynical and stereotypical views. To that effect, Bannerman, would often caution his son, Charles to be vigilant because "all these fellows" presumably including traders from the interior and idlers "will rob if they get a chance."¹³⁹

Though it may be difficult to know the extent or frequency of highway robbery and burglary on the Gold Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, merchants guarded themselves against such vices.¹⁴⁰ As a matter of precaution, many European and African merchants preferred keeping their goods in well-secured or fortified merchant houses whenever they transported their merchandise outside of their town of residence. In May 1849, Brodie Cruickshank who then resided at Anomabo had to request through the Danish establishment for the safe return of a consignment of goods he had sent to Henrich Richter's fortified house for safekeeping and eventually to have him sell them. The goods included, "One Case," "One Trunk," "Five Casks" and "Five Trunks," "Forty Barrels [gun] Powder," "Four Bales," "Seven Boxes," and "Twelve Bales."¹⁴¹ However by the time the goods arrived in Richter's house in Osu, he was indisposed and was reportedly "often out of his mind and had continued so since under these circumstances." For unexplained reasons, Cruickshank did not trust the goods with the safe keeping of Richter's son Johan Emanuel Richter.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Charles Bannerman, "The Recollections of an Old Sinner," *The West African Herald* April 18, 1859.

¹⁴⁰ See Larry W. Yarak, "Murder and Theft in Early Nineteenth-Century Elmina" in *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* edited by Donald Crummey (London: James Currey/Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986); Ray Kea, "I am here to plunder on the general road': Bandits and banditry in the pre-nineteenth-century Gold Coast," in *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* edited by Donald Crummey (London: James Currey/Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986).

¹⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, Judicial Assessor and Acting Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Honorable Mr. Schoening, Principal Judicial Functionary, Danish Accra, 25th May 1849, *Sager til guineiske journaler, 1849-1893, 1175 Koloniernes centralbestyrelse Kolonialkontoret*, Rigsarkivet.

¹⁴² Fitzpatrick, Judicial Assessor and Acting Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Honorable Mr. Schoening, Principal Judicial Functionary, Danish Accra, 25th May 1849, *Sager til guineiske journaler, 1849-1893, 1175 Koloniernes centralbestyrelse Kolonialkontoret*, Rigsarkivet.

Besides the threat or fear of robbery and burglary, the commercial establishments and houses of leading African and Euro-African merchants were often directly drawn into the volatile and complicated politics of the Gold Coast and Asante.¹⁴³ Between April 16 to May 8, 1823, the Gã with the support of the British began to harass Asante traders in Accra and Osu.¹⁴⁴ In one such confrontation, Asante traders in Osu shot a “mulatto” man coming out of Christiansborg Castle and four other unarmed townspeople.¹⁴⁵ In retaliation, the townspeople of Osu and Accra seized the goods of about 300 Asante traders.¹⁴⁶ Fearing for their lives, the Asante traders sought refuge in the house of Gã-Danish merchant, Henrich Richter. The rulers of Osu on “fetish oath” (Gã: *kitã*; Akan/Twi: *ntam*) demanded that Richter hand over the Asante traders and promised that they would not be mistreated.

Rather than honoring their oath, the chiefs and the townspeople failed to protect the Asante traders and many were either killed or captured. Richter would probably have offered his Asante hosts better protection and negotiated from a stronger position had he lived in a more fortified house. It was not until 1829, that Richter moved into his new house – an enclosed two-story house with solid stone works fitted with bastions and cannons.¹⁴⁷ The surrounding stone-walled masonry had a height of three meters and had five cannons mounted on the bastion.¹⁴⁸ The yard measured

¹⁴³ Christiansborg, 18 December 1836, in *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff; Biography and Letters 1836-1842*, edited and translated by Selena A. Winsnes (Trondheim: Faculty of Arts, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004), 65.

¹⁴⁴ See Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 116.

¹⁴⁵ H.J. Ricketts, *Narrative of the Ashantee War with view of the present state of the colony of Sierra Leone* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1831), 25.

¹⁴⁶ Reindorf, *History*, 188.

¹⁴⁷ Henrich Richter was the son of Johan Emanuel Richter, (who was governor at Christiansborg shortly before his death on October 5, 1817) and Anna Barbara Khüberg, daughter of Frantz Joachim Khüberg, governor *pro tem* at Christiansborg in 1769 and a Gã woman. See Ole Justesen, “Henrich Richter 1785-1849: Trader and Politician in the Danish Settlements on the Gold Coast,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, no. 7 (2003): 188. According to family traditions Governor Khüberg’s wife hailed from the Alata quarter of Osu. Today the family is still very much connected to the Agblanshi enclave of Osu Alata.

¹⁴⁸ The positions in which the cannons were mounted had been blocked, probably since the end of the nineteenth century or earlier.

about 40 by 55 meters, which was comparable with the cross section of the Danish Christiansborg Castle, which was about 43 by 57 meters.¹⁴⁹

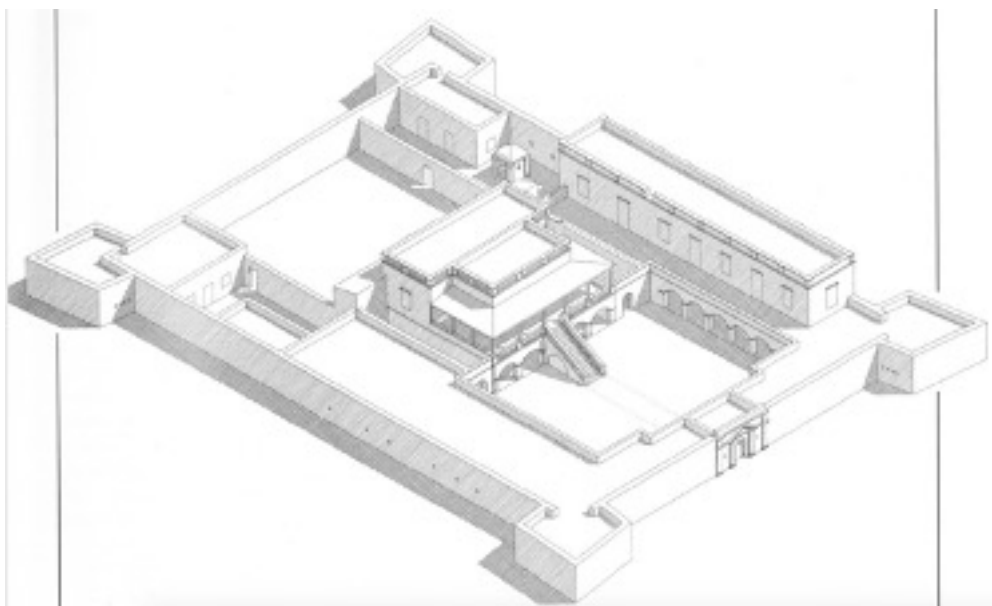


Fig. 9. A reconstructed model of the Richter Fort (House) also known as Tolo Mɔŋ. See Niels Bech, “Christiansborg i Ghana 1800-1850: det tropiske hus af europæisk oprindelse” *Architectura*, 11, 1989: 81.

The events of 1823, must be understood in the context of growing Gã resentment against Asante domination since the second decade of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰ And these anti-Asante sentiments had been widespread on the Fante coast since that kingdom’s invasion of that region between 1806-1811.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile in recounting Gã preparations and anxieties in anticipation of Asante retaliation for the events of 1823, Gã historian Rev. Carl Christian Reindorf wrote that: “All splendid [stone] houses at Akra [Accra] and Christiansborg [Osu] were portioned out among [the Asante] beforehand.”¹⁵² Despite the synonymy between protection and stone houses on the Gold Coast, it is important to note that unlike European forts and castles, which had several

¹⁴⁹ Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 127.

¹⁵⁰ See McCaskie, “*Asante and Ga: History of a Relationship*,” 136-137.

¹⁵¹ McCaskie, “*Asante and Ga: History of a Relationship*,” 136-137.

¹⁵² Reindorf, *History*, 205.

mounted canons, African-built stone houses had little or no fire power and could hardly withstand sieges except for more local attacks. Reindorf's views reflected not only this reality, but also a broader Gold Coast resentment of Asante hegemony in the nineteenth century. The genuine fear that an Asante invasion would lead to the destruction and plunder of stone houses and merchandise was rooted in history. For this reason, the memories of past invasions and the destruction of property put a lot of pressure on Accra's leading merchants to abandon their pro-Asante stances.

Many merchants like Richter had initially reasoned that war with Asante would disrupt their trade with that kingdom. However, in the ensuing tensions with Asante, Richter had to retreat from his pro-Asante gesture due to mounting pressure from the *mãntsemei* (rulers) of Accra and the British and Danish establishments.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, in participating in these wars against Asante, many coastal merchants nurtured hopes of gaining direct diplomatic and economic access to Kumase. Powerful coastal merchants built commercial and political capital out of their extensive local, regional and Atlantic trade networks. In the hopes of consolidating their economic and political security, Accra's leading merchants contributed to the Gold Coast wars against Asante in 1824 and 1826.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, the Danish King Frederik VI decorated Richter in early 1826 as "Chief War Commissioner" and in 1836 made him a knight of Dannebrog, Denmark's highest award.¹⁵⁵

To further bring their personal influence in the negotiation for peace and trade concessions with Asante, Henrich Richter and James Bannerman bought thirty elite Asante war captives including Akua Pusuwa, the "favorite wife" of Asantehene, Osee Yaw Akoto and two of their daughters, Yaa Hom and Manuaa. Akua Pusuwa had been taken captive in the battle by a certain

¹⁵³ Justesen, "Henrich Richter," 127.

¹⁵⁴ Reindorf, *History* 206-7.

¹⁵⁵ Justesen, "Henrich Richter," 119.

Tɛtɛ of Osu who was a pawn of the Danish establishment. Despite the ensuing political and legal banter between the Danish establishment, and Tɛtɛ on the issue of who rightfully owned her, Akua Pusuwa never remained passive.¹⁵⁶



Fig. 10. Henrich Richter (1785-1849). Source: Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*.

Tɛtɛ had refused to sell his captive to Richter or the Danish establishment much to the obvious consternation of Akua Pusuwa who was fully aware of the economic and social benefits of being associated with the House of Richter. She got the priests of the Sakumɔ shrine in Kinkã to declare Richter as her owner.¹⁵⁷

For Bannerman and Richter, it seemed their connections with the Asante and the Akan interior yielded some powerful dividends. Bannerman married Yaa Hom and Richter married Manuaa. Richter resided in his new fortified house “with his family, slaves and Asante hostages,” which included “10 Asantes.” These hostages included Akua Pusuwa, whom Richter

¹⁵⁶ The Asante royal women captured included Akyaawa Yikwan (Yaa Akyaa) of Akorase, a daughter of Asantehene, Ɔsee Kwadwo (1764-77), who was also a paternal granddaughter of the Akyempenhene, Ɔheneba Owusu Afriyie. The latter had first brought the southeastern Gold Coast under Asante control in 1742. See McCaskie, “Asante and Ga,” 142; Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, 329-61.

¹⁵⁷ Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 125.

“gratuitously and with gifts return[ed] [...] as intermediary for himself and Danish Accra.”¹⁵⁸ By 1836, a newly arrived Danish Jewish administrator at Christiansborg Castle, Wulff Joseph Wulff described his visits to the “wealthy merchant[s]” Richter and Bannerman, both “born Africans” who resided in “veritable palace[s].”¹⁵⁹ In a letter to his parents in Randers, Denmark, Wulff recounted that:

There is also a man by the name of Richter living here, who is said to own 8-10 barrels of gold. He has 400 slaves and carries on considerable trade. He is married to a princess from Asante, which lies about 100 miles up country. This man has provided us [European] newcomers with many services. I have often been invited to his home, both for dinner and for an evening. He holds the title of Chief Military Commissioner. I have never seen in my life so much gold and silver and other costly articles; as I have seen there. The tables are decked with silverware, and one enjoys all manner of rare [foods] that he imports from all the corners of the earth.¹⁶⁰

Richter and Bannerman’s immense material wealth, the extent of their trade and their connections to Asante royalty was well-noted by Europeans who lodged in their respective houses. Prominent merchant houses like that of Richter, Bannerman or Ankra held a large number of merchandise and this may partly explain their huge fortified houses.

At Richter’s death in July 1849, a public auction in Osu of his household effects and merchandise revealed 1,059 movable items valued at about \$18,138. These personal effects included important intellectual works produced in eighteenth century England such as “[Abraham] Ree’s Cyclopædia,” and Sir Walter Scott’s “Waverly Novels,” and “Life of Napoleon.”¹⁶¹ Richter’s merchandise, particularly his books showed the extent of his cosmopolitan outlook and

¹⁵⁸ Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 129.

¹⁵⁹ Christiansborg, 18 December 1836, in *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 65.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Protol for Behandling af de Richterske Affairer ved den I den Anledning nedsatte Commission- 1849” in *1175 Koloniernes centralbestyrelse Kolonialkontoret 1849-1893 sager til guineiske journaler*, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen.

his connections to Atlantic and West African commercial circuits. The auction itself attracted prominent Euro-African and European merchants of the Gold Coast including James Bannerman, Philip and Wilhelm Lutterodt, Christian Holm, John Hansen, Carel Hendrik Bartels and Brodie Cruickshank. These merchants purchased all of the movable property.¹⁶²

Typically, prominent Gã and Fante merchant houses on the Gold Coast functioned as huge retail and lodging spaces for “native” traders some of “who come from two or three hundred miles in the interior.”¹⁶³ These traders could lodge for several days or weeks in coastal merchant houses as they bargained and haggled over the prices goods to be purchased.¹⁶⁴ Coastal merchants were in turn responsible for the security of their Asante or Akyem hosts and their properties or merchandise. These security arrangements were held to be legally binding by the Asantehene on one hand and the coastal African and Euro-African merchants and the Dutch, British and Danish establishments on the other. On October 11 1855, an Asante trader with the backing of the Asantehene summoned a certain Cape Coast merchant named Robinson at Cape Coast Castle. The Asante trader had “taken lodgings” in Robinson’s house and had lost “a small quantity of Gold Dust.” The Asante trader and the officials of Cape Coast Castle held Robinson liable “as the Keeper of an inn.” Besides his liability, Robinson was initially suspected of the theft and “as he would not or could not pay the amount he was put into prison.”¹⁶⁵ But without any proof of his stealing the “OZ 5.11” of gold dust, he was declared a “debtor” of the Asante trader.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Protol for Behandling af de Richterske Affairer ved den I den Anledning nedsatte Commission- 1849” in *1175 Koloniernes centralbestyrelse Kolonialkontoret 1849-1893 sager til guineiske journaler*, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen.

¹⁶³ Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 142.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Henry Connor, Ag Governor, Cape Coast Castle to the Right Hon. Sir William Molesworth Bart, Downing St. [London], 11th October 1855, CO 96/35, TNA, Kew, 65-66.

¹⁶⁶ George Musgrove, British resident, Coomasie, to Gov. Hill, Cape Coast Castle, 26th October [1854], CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 93.

In appropriating castellated buildings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants employed a new technology not only to protect their livelihoods and merchandise, but also as forms of investments. Merchants benefited from the use of their houses as “commodious hotel[s]” or inns for visiting Asante, Akyem and European merchants.¹⁶⁷ In tracing Gold Coast merchants’ historical appropriation of stone houses, this chapter emphasizes the functions of these buildings as spaces of spiritual and physical protection and security. Such an approach enhances our understanding of Gold Coast merchants’ use of new building technologies to define and order their material, spiritual and social worlds. Thus the adage, “a dilapidated house is better than a bush,” is key to our appreciation of Gold Coast merchants’ evolving notions of how to ensure economic, spiritual and physical security during and in the aftermath of the slave trade.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Jeffersen Bowen, *Central Africa : Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, from 1849 to 1856* (New York : Sheldon, Blakeman, 1857), 85.

CHAPTER TWO

DEATH, DEBT AND REAL ESTATE

The [Gold Coast] African has a strong desire to lay his bones among those of his own kindred, and dead bodies are frequently brought from long distances to be buried in the family house. On the approach also of a mortal illness, many strive to reach their homes to die among their friends.

– Brodie Cruickshank, 1853.¹⁶⁸

I claim the house because my mother and grandmother were buried there. I have lived in it since my father's death. I can't say how long.

– Hannah Smith, Cape Coast, 1870.

In his last will and testament, dated May 13, 1858, an ailing and bankrupt Anglo-Gã merchant named James Samuel Bannerman (1790-1858) expressed anxiety about the possibility of not being buried in his stone-built commercial residence “in Simpey [Sempe] Street” in Accra. Home burials were in accordance with popular Gã and Fante mortuary and funerary practices on the Gold Coast, but Bannerman had recently slipped into insolvency and so a British company, W.B. Hutton and Sons of London, threatened to auction his house. Pressed by the circumstances, Bannerman indicated this in his will: “At my decease (if at Accra) I desire I may be interred at the House called ‘Commodore’ belonging to my niece Helen Coliver and my wife Yowah Hoom [Yaa Hom].”¹⁶⁹

Fortunately, James Bannerman's house was spared the auction and he was interred in his own premises.¹⁷⁰ But within two years of Bannerman's death, his financially distressed son Charles, “conveyed and assigned” a piece of land near the family house to Robert Hutchison, “a

¹⁶⁸ See Parker, “The Cultural Politics,” 213.

¹⁶⁹ Last will and testament of James Samuel Bannerman, 13th May 1858, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

¹⁷⁰ In 1912, Bannerman's family exhumed his mortal remains from his house and reburied him in the Wesleyan cemetery in Accra in line with colonial regulations that outlawed intramural sepulture. See Parker, “Cultural Politics,” 212-213.

native of Cape Coast” residing in “James Town, [A]ccra.”¹⁷¹ The Bannerman family’s financial difficulties were hardly unique among West African coastal merchants in the nineteenth century. Many Euro-African, Gã and Fante merchant families faced a similar struggle as their houses underwent transformation from ancestral burial sites to commodified real estate, up for sale or mortgage.



Fig. 11. James Samuel Bannerman (1790-1858) Source: PRAAD, Accra.

Though West African merchant families transformed their cultural understandings of material goods, security and the sacred, such changes were premised on an increasingly unequal political and economic relationship with Europe. Beginning in the sixteenth century and reaching its peak in the nineteenth, debt became a crucial point of West Africa’s unequal relationship with Europe. The Gold Coast world that Bannerman and other African and Euro-African merchant families inhabited had seen tremendous cultural and political transformations and growing British influence in the decades after that country abolished the Atlantic slave trade in 1807. In the face of an emerging nineteenth century British colonial supremacy on the Gold Coast – a

¹⁷¹ R[obert] Bannerman v Charles Bannerman, Magistrate Court held at James Town Accra, this eighteenth day of August 1863 before A.B McIntyre, SCT 2/4/4, Civil Record Book 1 A, 15th May 1861 – 15th June 1861, Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Hereafter PRAAD), Accra.

phenomenon that resulted in the latter outbidding the Danish and Dutch trading establishments in 1850 and 1872 – many Africans began to invest in stone houses and slaves.¹⁷²

The “first cycle of credit” in West and West Central Africa as Toby Green rightly stated was tied to the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁷³ However the abolishment of the slave trade by various European nations in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, ensured that the credit worthiness of West African merchants became tied to their stone houses rather than their human collateral/mortgage or enslaved people. In discussing economic and cultural transformations in Atlantic Africa, few historians have discussed how trade simultaneously transformed the religious/spiritual and commercial value of material culture.¹⁷⁴ Apart from a few exceptions, scholars have not historicized the moral, social and the religious value of material goods beyond their economic significance during the slave trade.¹⁷⁵ This chapter examines the lives and times of a number of prominent Gold Coast mercantile families including the Bannermans, van der Puyes, Nelsons, Barnes’ and Smiths. In doing so, I draw on how African merchants simultaneously harnessed the spiritual/ancestral and the economic value of material goods and

¹⁷² See Andrew Swanzy, “On Trade in Western Africa with or without British Protection,” *The Journal of the Society of Arts*, 22, no. 1117 (April 17, 1874): 479.

¹⁷³ Green, *Fistful of Shells*, 13. Compare with Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*; Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*.

¹⁷⁴ For studies on the transformations in religious beliefs, socio-cultural, moral economies and material practices in West and West Central African due to the Atlantic slave trade see John M. Janzen, *Lemba, 1650-1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World* (New York: Garland Pub., 1982); Robert Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*; Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders eds, *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Jihād in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016); Roquinaldo Ferreira *Cross-cultural Exchange in the Atlantic world: Angola and Brazil during the era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); G. Ugo Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian and Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ For more discussions of the religious and commercial value of material goods on the Gold Coast/West Africa during the slave trade see Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century*, 241; Greene, *Fistful of Shells*, 271.

their stone houses to negotiate their livelihoods and security in the context of Atlantic commerce and European imperialism. In placing houses and family lineages in the context of a European-dominated Atlantic commerce, I explore how the Gã and Fante transformed otherwise inalienable “family houses” into pieces of real estate which they could use in Atlantic business transactions at the end of the legal slave trade.

While current studies on property and real estate in Africa and the Atlantic world are largely confined to the twentieth century, this chapter discusses these themes in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This chapter shifts the analytical lens of the literature on the materiality of African Atlantic and black diaspora history away from objects such as trade goods and sacred relics most often associated with African material cultures in the western imagination and toward property and real estate. In doing so, this chapter pushes for broader understandings of materiality – the cultural uses and meanings of material goods – that varied across African cultures and pasts.

Most importantly, the twin assaults of European capitalism and the ambitions of Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants undermined the permanence of Gold Coast houses as longstanding spaces of ancestral memory and family heritage over the course of the nineteenth century. While Gold Coast merchants’ increasing subjection of their family houses to the market gave them greater access to European credit, they also became vulnerable as they risked losing their ancestral burial spaces and family heritage.

Consequently, Gold Coast merchant families began to contest which measure of security, protection and power was more important – monetary wealth through real estate or spiritual/ancestral wealth, and the function of the house as sites of patron-client exchanges. With the volatile markets of the era of legitimate commerce, mercantile families could lose the

economic security and social space of their houses and the ability to project the power of their “wealth in people.” In tandem with these economic and cultural transformations, the spread of Christianity – and its assurances of greater otherworldly security – not only appealed to sections of the Gold Coast mercantile elite – but also provided an ideological basis for the gradual rejection of home burials.

Intramural Burials, Ancestral Memory and (Merchant) Houses in Gold Coast History

Prior to and during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Gã and Fante family houses (Gã: *weku shiãĩ*; Fante: *ebusuaŋie*) on the Gold Coast functioned as physical manifestations or embodiments of patrilineal and matrilineal lineages, which encompassed the ancestors, the living and those yet unborn. Houses – the very physical manifestation of the family – underscored Gã and Fante beliefs and cultural practices through home burials and ancestral veneration. They were both physical and spiritual bulwarks. Historically, whenever Gã mediums (*wɔyei*; *singular: wɔyoo*) or ritual specialists invoked an ancestor, they often asked “what house it belongs to, for the Ga people believe[d] that the soul is in his physical house.” For this reason, Gã scholar E.A. Ammah (1900-1980) noted that “[a] person who builds a house will be remembered, because of the physical building.”¹⁷⁶

The house was also a space of ritual remembrance through the sprinkling or placing of food and the pouring of libations on intramural graves. Historically, the Gã and Fante did not mark graves with tombstones or tiles, but red clay – as a substitute for blood and therefore death – was usually smeared on home graves.¹⁷⁷ The burial of the aged in their rooms was widely

¹⁷⁶ E.A. Ammah, Kings, *Priests & Kinsmen: Essays on Ga Culture and Society*, edited by Marion Kilson (Accra/Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2016), 124.

¹⁷⁷ Compare with *ibid.*

believed among the various cultures and peoples on the Gold Coast to ensure spiritual intimacy and the “physical and spiritual health of their families and communities.”¹⁷⁸

As a conduit between the world of the living and that of the dead, family houses functioned as microcosms of Gã and Fante sociability. To foster this link between the netherworld or the ancestral realm and abode of the living, new-born babies were introduced into the world in family houses. During funerals, deceased relatives were also bade farewell in the house. The burial of the umbilical cords of babies and the internment of corpses with its attendant funerary and mortuary rituals cemented the family house as a permanent space connected to the cycle of life and death (or re-birth). Such was the connection between the concept of the “house” and the ancestors that Ammah recounted in the 1960s that “*wɔke amɛ yɔɔ*.” (we live with them [ancestors]).¹⁷⁹

Though houses were valued as ancestral spaces, they also functioned as corporate entities that were connected to important markets and centers of power on the Gold Coast and in the Akan interior. With the onset of Atlantic commerce from the late fifteenth century onwards, trade was gradually re-oriented away from trans-Saharan market centers in the interior, towards the Gold Coast littoral.¹⁸⁰ African and European commerce on the Gold Coast coincided with the militarism and expansion of Akan states such as Denkyira, Akwamu, Akyem and Asante. While Akan conquests of the Gold Coast littoral led to state collapse and chaos, the ensuing political created new opportunities for the emergence of the so-called “merchant princes” (Gã: *oblempɔɲmɛi*; Fante/Akan: *abirempɔn*) or trade brokers. Through their trade with European

¹⁷⁸ Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 61.

¹⁷⁹ Ammah, *Kings, Priests & Kinsmen*, 124.

¹⁸⁰ See A. Adu Boahen, *Britain, The Sahara, and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964); Green, *Fistful of Shells*.

companies, these merchant princes and their households participated in the “internal distributive networks” of gold, crafts, ivory, textiles and captives.¹⁸¹ By the end of the seventeenth century, merchant princes such as Jan Snees (d. 1675), the “chief revenue collector” of Cape Coast, had a large household of forty wives, fourteen sons, twelve daughters and a hundred slaves and traded with the Danish fort, Frederiksborg. Snees reportedly spent a great deal on household expenditures.¹⁸² In the Gã kingdom of Great Accra, a certain “St. Jago,” likely a relative of the king, Okāi Koi, conducted a large trade in gold and merchandise which was worth between 230,000 and 310,000 dambas a year in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁸³

In participating in Atlantic commerce in captives, gold, metals and textiles, local rulers and merchants negotiated with various European trading establishments – Portuguese, Dutch, British, Brandenburgers, Danes and Swedes – and more importantly among themselves over the meaning and form of commercial and political networks along the Gold Coast.¹⁸⁴ By the end of the slave trade, Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants’ use of sacred (stone) family houses as collateral to secure imported goods became one of the ways of negotiating and participating in a European-dominated Atlantic commerce. Consequently, Gã and Fante merchants painstakingly transformed their sacred family houses into commercial value to meet the exigencies of an Atlantic and emerging colonial economy and legal framework on the urban Gold Coast.

¹⁸¹ Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 12; Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade*. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), 180.

¹⁸² Kea, *Settlements*, 315.

¹⁸³ Kea, *Settlements*, 317. A *damba* was an Akan/Gold Coast unit of measurement. It was ½ of a *teku/taku*, the smallest gold weight valued at 2 ½ pence. See Robin Law ed. *The English in West Africa, 1691-1699: The Local Correspondences of the Royal African Company of England, 1681-1699, Part 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), XVII.

¹⁸⁴ The Dutch captured the Portuguese forts São Jorge da Mina (built 1482) in 1637 and Fort São Sebastião (built 1520-26) in 1642 and ended the Portuguese presence on the Gold Coast. Similarly, the Danes with the permission of the Gã drove away the Swedes from Osu and erected Fort Christiansborg on the ruins of that nation’s trading post. In 1717, the Brandenburgers sold their possessions to the Dutch and left the Gold Coast for good. See Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Enterprise, 1980); James Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana* (Paris: Atalante, 1999).

The history of how indebted Gold Coast families mortgaged or sold houses to each other and to European firms and its consequences for family heritage and ancestral veneration is very much part of local oral traditions. While doing field research in Accra in December 2018, I visited the Hansen Fort, residence of a prominent nineteenth century Anglo-Gã merchant, John Hansen. Before the current caretaker of the shrine in Hansen Fort could talk to me about his ancestors, he poured libations on the unmarked intramural graves of John Hansen and his wife. John Hansen's descendants regard him as a protector and provide offerings of the festive meal, *kpokpoi* (steamed corn dough mixed with palm oil) and palm nut soup and schnapps on his grave, especially during the annual harvest thanksgiving/new year festival of *Hõmõwõ*. Such offerings of food and drinks at the burial sites of ancestors is widely practiced in Ghana today and such rituals are evident in the darkened edges around intramural graves. That I have visited.

The particular reverence and invocation of prayers, I witnessed around Hansen's grave was closely connected to the numerous war deities that he bought during the Gold Coast Asante wars of 1824-1826. While John Hansen's descendants own their ancestor's house, the Afro-Brazilian descended Nelson family do not own the mansion in which their progenitor was buried. In 1899, the Lawson/Hansen family bought the Nelson family home in Accra and allowed the family to perform annual rituals to their interred ancestors in their former home. By this practice, the Nelsons could still secure the blessings and protection of their ancestors, insuring future spiritual empowerment, years after reaping their financial rewards in the real estate market.¹⁸⁵ Specifically, the juxtaposition of the Hansen/Lawson case point to how ancestral veneration in

¹⁸⁵ Indenture between Lamiorkor Nukpa Lawson and Gustavus Adolphus Hansen, Private Collection of Emmanuel Stanley Mark-Hansen Sr, Accra.

extant houses entailed Gold Coast families negotiating the loss of deeply sacred houses and ancestral spaces.¹⁸⁶

The practice of intramural burials was deeply rooted in Gã and Fante belief in the union between dead and living relatives and this became the basis of ancestral veneration in family houses. It is however, not quite clear from oral traditions or archival sources when the practice of home burials began. Some of the earliest European ethnographic writings on Gold Coast funerals and mortuary practices date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unfortunately, many of these earliest sources are either silent on home internments or describe extramural burials. In the 1660s, Wilhelm Müller, a German chaplain at the Danish Fort Frederiksborg near Cape Coast, made no claims about home burials: “[In] burying the dead they have special places and cemeteries, which generally lie in front of the village, beneath many beautiful trees, although some people are buried in the village.” Müller’s reference to those “buried in the village” could have been wealthy individuals, royalty or people of non-servile origins. Evidence from eighteenth and nineteenth century European residents’ accounts of home burials suggest that “inherited slave[s],” “unattached Negroes,” children or people who died in violent deaths or accidents were interred at the outskirts of town and not in homes.¹⁸⁷

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, several European observers mentioned the prevalence of home burials on the Gold Coast. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Frenchman Jean Barbot, who visited Accra, Cape Coast, and Elmina, related that “[t]he dead are usually interred in the hut where they died, because they have no cemeteries or special [burial]

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Emmanuel Stanley Mark-Hansen Sr., December 16, 2018, Accra.

¹⁸⁷ Jean Barbot, *Jean Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa: 1678-1712 2 vols.* Ed. Paul Hair (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 640.

places.”¹⁸⁸ In 1859, colonial physician at Cape Coast, Robert Clarke noted that “[t]he mass of the inhabitants bury their dead in the basement floor of their houses – a practice not confined to the pagan part of the population but also practiced by many respectables and wealthy families.” From a public health perspective, Clarke described the practice as a “hurtful custom” which “cannot be too soon discontinued.” Interestingly, Clarke’s informants told him that “It [i.e. home burial] is not done by the natives of the interior, but by all accounts it has been an ancient custom on the coast towns.”¹⁸⁹ Indeed, in Kumase the *Asante ahenfo* (Asante kings) and *adehyee* (royalty) were not buried at home or in the *ahenfie* (palace), but in a well designated royal mausoleum at Bantama. This Asante example of extramural burials are reminiscent of Barbot’s observations of internment practices on the Fante coast in the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁰

For the peoples of the Gold Coast, the practice of home burials provided a greater sense of physical and spiritual security for deceased people. Many people while alive generally abhorred the cemeteries attached to the European forts and castles on the Gold Coast. European disdain for intramural sepulture unwittingly provides a lot of insight into African and Euro-African abhorrence of extramural burials. At Christiansborg, Danish chaplain Hans Christian Monrad and other officials could “hardly persuade the Christian Mulattos to bury their dead” at the graveyard.

¹⁸⁸ Jean Barbot, *Jean Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa: 1678-1712 2 vols.* Ed. Paul Hair (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 640.

¹⁸⁹ Dr. Robert Clarke, Colonial Hospital Cape Coast, to Acting Colonial Secretary Mr. R.S. Ross, Medical Report for the year 1858, 10th May 1859 in Enclosure no. 4 in Despatch no. 43 of the 11th July 1859, CO 96/45, TNA, Kew.

¹⁹⁰ See R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1927/1969).



Fig. 12. Reference: BMA QD-30.014.0027 Title: "Christiansborg, old Danish graveyard." The cemetery was demolished by the Kwame Nkrumah government in 1960, ostensibly to make way for a car park that never got built. Creator: unknown. Date: 01.01.1871-31.12.1900

Monrad's informants told him that "earlier, they had disappointed the chaplain by letting him cast earth in the cemetery on an empty coffin, while the body was buried at home. To prevent this, in my time the body had to be shown in the morgue."¹⁹¹ Gold Coast families opposed burial in public cemeteries because they feared that their deceased relatives could be harmed or dismembered. The mutilation of corpses was anathema so far as Gã and Fante ancestral beliefs and mortuary practices were concerned. Many European graveyards, including the ones at Christiansborg/Osu and Cape Coast, were poorly secured and there were reports of jackals and other wild animals digging up and eating corpses before some of these graveyards were effectively secured with a wrought iron gate and a stone-masonry wall.¹⁹² Though he strongly disapproved of home burials, British merchant and commandant of Winneba Fort, Henry Meredith lamented in the 1810s that "the [the Gã and Fante] natives whom we call barbarous

¹⁹¹Hans Christian Monrad, *Two Views from Christiansborg Castle; Volume II: A Description of the Guinea Coast and Its Inhabitants (1822)*, edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2008), 67.

¹⁹² Monrad, *A New Description of Guinea*, 44.

savage people, possess delicate ideas respecting attention to the dead: they are careful in preserving the body against the attacks of ferocious animals by burying it in their houses.”

Meredith advocated for Europeans to adopt “an inclosed [sic] place (no matter how rude, or how inelegant)” to “preserve the repositories of the dead from violation.”¹⁹³

Likewise, a Danish Jewish resident of Osu, Wulff Joseph Wulff, had a strong preference for intramural burial security. When he arrived on the Gold Coast in 1836, Wulff, like many European residents held strong views against home burials and considered it “filthy” and “insanitary.” However, as a Jew, Wulff could not be buried in a Danish-Norwegian Protestant cemetery, across the street from his house, *Frederiksminde*.¹⁹⁴ “The burial of my body,” Wulff wrote, “I wish to be in my own house, as long as there are no obstacles to it.”¹⁹⁵ It likely that Wulff’s choice of an intramural internment was partly influenced by his Gã-Danish wife, Sara Malm and the dominant Gã cultural practice at the time. Otherwise Wulff would have been buried in the wild wilderness at the outskirts of the town, a space reserved for all outsiders not part of the family or the broader kin unit. But Wulff was a *shiãtse* (lit. ‘house father’) and a future ancestor – at least from a Gã perspective and therefore qualified for a home burial. Interestingly, after Wulff completed his mansion, he expressed the desire to live in Osu “as well as a native.”¹⁹⁶ Wulff died at age thirty-three, the founder of a *shiã*, and a father of three children, Theodor Ulysses (1837-1885), Frantz Wilhelm Joseph (d.1914) and Wilhelmine Josephine.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Henry Meredith, *An Account of the Gold Coast of Africa: With a Brief History of the African Company* (London: Paternoster, 1812), 221.

¹⁹⁴ The German spelling “*Frederichs Minde*” was used on the stone inscription Wulff ordered for his house before his death. Nevertheless, following Selena A. Winsnes I have maintained the Danish spelling (“*Frederiksminde*”) throughout the dissertation. See *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 167.

¹⁹⁵ Wulff Joseph Wulff’s Death: Last Will and Testament [8 June 1842] in Winsnes ed., *A Danish Jew*, 258.

¹⁹⁶ Chief Fort Christiansborg on the Gold Coast of Guinea, 3 June 1840, in Winsnes ed., *A Danish Jew*, 168.

¹⁹⁷ See Death Register, Osu Presbyterian Church (as copied and typed by Ole Justesen in 1967). The Osu church registry wrongly recorded Theodor’s date of birth as April 1 1837. While Theodor simply stated 1837 as the year of his birth, his teacher, the Rev. Zimmermann wrote “27 Sept” as the day and month and April 1 1838 as the date of



Fig.13. The revered intramural graves of Wulff Joseph Wulff (square-shaped grave below) and daughter, Wilhelmine Josephine, *Frederiksminde*, Castle Drive, Osu, Accra. Though family lore insists that Wilhelmine was buried beside her father, there is however some evidence that this may be the burial space of Sara Malm, who had requested in 1889 to be buried near her husband (See discussion on page 100). The darkened edges around the graves may indicate historic offerings of food which is no longer practiced in the Wulff House. Photo by author, November 2018.

Wulff's sense of intramural burial security was somewhat analogous to Africans and Euro-Africans who did not want to be buried among the multitude of strangers but with their own kith and kin.

Despite the strong desire of Gold Coast Africans to be buried at home and be recognized and remembered as ancestors, there were limited burial spaces in family houses. This was even true for lineages that owned multiple family houses. For this reason, blood relatives and not enslaved members of the household were generally accorded the security and protection of home burials. While in Accra, in the 1850s, British ethnographer William Daniell observed that “[deceased] slaves, unless they are favourites, lie scattered around in the environs of town, in

his baptism. See D-1, 6, “Biography of Theodor Wulff,” 1855, Catechist Biographies, Mission 21 Archives, Basel, Switzerland.

some convenient spots selected for the purpose.”¹⁹⁸ In that same decade, in Cape Coast graves were “dug on the beach for certain of the pagan population, and slaves are buried without restriction to position along the pathways of the suburbs of the Town, in the common area, the Salt pond, and elsewhere.”¹⁹⁹ The discussions and negotiations about who gets buried at home was deeply rooted in the social hierarchies that defined Gã and Fante families.

In many households, the inferior social status of slaves or their assimilated descendants were not forgotten even in death. On January 11 1865, John Dawson sued his cousin Aba Ekum in a Cape Coast court for “trespassing” and desecrating the latter’s father’s remains. Aba Ekum went to Dawson’s “portion of the building to a room which my father had been buried & dug up my father’s grave – packed up his bones in a heap above side [sic] & buried the son [there].” Aba had apparently thought Dawson’s father’s “bones” were that of her slave and therefore could make way for her son’s corpse. An outraged John Dawson, insisted that his “father’s father originally built the house &” and his late “father [having] rebuilt” and therefore reminded the court of his ownership rights. More so, John Dawson insisted that Aba’s actions were intentional, as it was an attempt to enforce the Akan matrilineal law of inheritance in which maternal cousins and nieces rather than one’s own children inherited property.²⁰⁰ This case not only illustrates how lineage and ancestry are invoked to determine who gets buried where but how intramural sepulcher crucially reinforces family hierarchies through narratives and practices of belonging. A Fante expert witness explained to the court that “slaves are generally buried in a place at the Eastern End of the town,

¹⁹⁸ William, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 16.

¹⁹⁹ Dr. Robert Clarke, Colonial Hospital Cape Coast, to Acting Colonial Secretary Mr. R.S. Ross, Medical Report for the year 1858, 10th May 1859 in Enclosure no. 4 in Despatch no. 43 of the 11th July 1859, CO 96/45, TNA, Kew, 325-326.

²⁰⁰ John Dawson v abbah Eccoomb, 11th January 1865, “Summons for removing and destroying [and] causing to be removed & disturbed out of its grave in plaintiff’s house the remains of plt’s [plaintiff’s] late father and otherwise trespassing on plt’s land & house.” SCT 5/4/8, PRAAD, Accra, 71.

between here and amanfool [Amanfur].” Even in the case of “old slaves” it is “customary” not to bury them in “the same room with [the] family – not in the same graves.”²⁰¹ Since the homestead was an ancestral shrine and a space of family remembrance, enslaved members of the household or strangers were usually not given the dignity of intramural burials.

Since intramural sepulture was crucial for ancestral veneration and spiritual security of the household, rival families or towns allied to different European establishments often destroyed and burnt each other’s houses and intramural graves during wars or civil unrests. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not uncommon for enemies to exhume, plunder, desecrate and humiliate corpses buried in intramural graves. In 1853, Lt. Governor Cruickshank reported that “the Natives of Dutch Secondee [Sekondi]” with the help of Dutch Shama set the “English Town” of Sekondi in “flames.” Since “they had no time to save their property a general sack took place, and some of the Graves, in which the Natives are in the habit of burying Gold with their dead were opened and ransacked.”²⁰² The following day, Lt. Governor Cruickshank sent a detachment of troops from the fort’s garrison to the scene. The troops “found nothing but the ... Walls of the Houses, and even the graves opened.”²⁰³ Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the greatest threat to ancestral memory, was not the violent destruction of intramural graves in Gold Coast wars, but local merchants’ use of their houses as mortgages and collaterals.

Merchant Houses as Collaterals and Mortgages

As estates and social spaces, houses were intended as embodiments of agnatic and cognatic relations and as centers of family integrity, security and accumulated urban wealth.²⁰⁴ However,

²⁰¹ “Testimony of William Jones,” in John Dawson v abba Eccoom, SCT 5/4/8, PRAAD, Accra, 73.

²⁰² B. Cruickshank, Lt. Gov Cape Coast Castle to His Grace, the Duke of Newcastle, Downing Street, London, 4th November 1853, ADM 1/1/2/7, PRAAD, Accra, 129.

²⁰³ B. Cruickshank, Lt. Gov Cape Coast Castle to His Grace, the Duke of Newcastle, Downing Street, London, 4th November 1853, ADM 1/1/2/7, PRAAD, Accra, 132.

²⁰⁴ Ray Kea, *A Cultural and Social History*, 241.

in response to Atlantic commerce, merchant houses also evolved discourses, etiquettes, usages and laws that regulated and provided parameters for the conduct of trade.²⁰⁵ These rules and negotiations included negotiations about the commercial value of stone houses. Consequently, the increasing Gã and Fante reliance on European credit required collateral from the latter in the form of human-pawns and valuable heirlooms. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, stone houses began to replace captives as collaterals or mortgages.²⁰⁶

Some of the earliest references to the monetary worth of merchant houses on the Gold Coast date to the mid-eighteenth century. In 1762, Sodza Duamlɔ, a prominent trade broker of Osu and an employee of the Danish establishment at Christiansborg Castle, owed the Danes an amount of 197 rigsdalers (approximately 12^{1/2} ounces gold). Though none of his residences were required as collateral, Duamlɔ provided the total real estate value of his twenty-two houses at 41^{1/2} ounces of gold. This estimate included Duamlɔ's own personal residence, valued at two adult male slaves and three other houses, worth a total of 5 ounces of gold. For the other seventeen houses, Duamlɔ provided valuations ranging from ½ an ounce to 4 ounces of gold. Sodza Duamlɔ deposited 45 rigsdalers worth of gold (nearly 3 ounces), cowrie shells (worth 8 rigsdalers or ½ ounce gold) and an adult male and female slave each, valued at 144 rigsdalers or 8 ounces gold, as security for the goods he received on credit from the Danes.²⁰⁷ It is not clear why the Danes would demand the real estate value of Duamlɔ's houses. It is likely that

²⁰⁵ See Kea, *Settlements*; Kea, *Cultural and Social History*.

²⁰⁶ See Kea, *Settlements*; Kea, *Cultural and Social History*; Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*; Ty Reese, ““Eating” Luxury: Fante Middlemen, British Goods, and Changing Dependencies on the Gold Coast, 1750-1821” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 66, No. 4 (Oct. 2009):851-72.

²⁰⁷ See Ray Kea, *Cultural and Social History*, 243. In addition to his own debts, Sodza Duamlɔ agreed to service the debts of two other Danish company servants – Kwabena Nyankum and Nɔi Afadi (d. 1745) both of whom were his subordinates in the form of an enslaved woman (valued at 56 rigsdaler or 3^{1/2} ounces gold). See Ray Kea, *Cultural and Social History*, 260.

Duamlo's houses, were probably built in stone unlike most dwellings on the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century.

Houses on the Gold Coast were generally built of interwoven stakes pressed with mud (wattle and daub) or constructed in the ramped earth technique which is based on a heavy earthy foundation. The lack of structural durability of mud and adobe houses was well known to European residents on the Gold Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many European observers expressed utter derision for the lack of permanence of earthen houses, which had to be rebuilt after every rainy season. Wulff Joseph Wulff observed at Osu in the 1830s that "Negro houses collapse[d] daily," whenever it rained.²⁰⁸ However, in 1842, Richard Madden noted that "the natives" of Cape Coast "live[d] in very comfortable 'swish' houses built of mud and become hard and durable and lasts so long as the roof resists the rains."²⁰⁹

Nearly a decade later, William Daniell similarly described in detail, local architectural innovations in Osu and Accra, that prevented mud buildings from being washed away by heavy rain: "the foundations [of mud buildings] invariably consist[ed] of small fragments of sandstone, embedded in an earthy cement, and elevated two or three feet above the ground." This "foundation" technique which sloped "obliquely inwards" was supposed to "correspond to the eaves of the roof" to make mud buildings more durable to rain "as it pours from above." Despite the apparent structural improvements in the construction of mud houses by the 1840s and 1850s, European-based firms preferred stone houses as collateral from African or Euro-African merchants.

²⁰⁸ Letters from Guinea, Christiansborg, 18 December, 1836 in *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 65.

²⁰⁹Ibid.



Fig. 14. A nineteenth century engraving of Elmina town showing St. George's Castle to the southeast and the Atlantic Ocean to the north. From the northeast facing the bridge is the "Bridge House." And flowing from the northwest to the northeast is the Benya Lagoon. To the north is the Atlantic Ocean. Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-T-1994-99.

It is important to note that the European preference for stone houses goes beyond mud houses' structural deficiencies and impermanence. Deeply entrenched European 'civilizational' discourses have tended to privilege the cultural superiority of stone houses, a move which reinforced nineteenth century colonial racial hierarchies. Elsewhere in Senegambia and on the East African coast, Africanists have argued that such racial hierarchies often denied the "Africanity" of the creolized Luso-African or Swahili architecture by assuming they were mere alien imports from Europe or the Arab world.²¹⁰ While at Ningo on the eastern Gold Coast, Governor William Winniett described the houses as looking like "beehives" and not "worthy" to be "called houses" or "human dwellings." For Winniett, though "built with switch [sic] (clay)" and "thatched with grass" and with double courtyards, the two story residence of Portuguese/Brazilian slave trader

²¹⁰ See Mark, *Portuguese style and Luso-African identity*, 107; Meier, *Swahili Port Cities*, 182.

Gonçalves Baeta “stands in strange contrast with the rude huts around it.”²¹¹ It is not surprising that Baeta’s two-story adobe house (likely built with sun-dried mud blocks) would have looked ‘Europeanized’ enough – like what Winniett was used to in Cape Coast – to have won his admiration.

In fact, so closely connected was the idea of stone houses with “civilization,” that American missionary Thomas J. Bowen would write in the 1850s that: “The Fantee people, who are the most civilized of all native tribes, live at El Mina, Cape Coast, and other towns in this region. Even the houses of the natives on this coast are well built of stone, and this, with the Europeans residences, and the extensive castles, presents a civilized appearance which one is hardly prepared to see in Africa.”²¹² Racist and condescending attitudes like Bowen’s misses the underlying security and material considerations underlying African merchant’s choice of stone rather mud or adobe. To put simply, the functionality of stone houses as protective spaces and warehouses probably more than aesthetics led to its popularity among Gold Coast merchants.

While in Cape Coast in 1842, British official Richard Madden noted that “[t]he dwellings of the natives, both at Cape Coast and in the interior, are far superior in size, cleanliness, and comfort to the miserable huts of the Egyptian peasants, or the no less wretched cabins of the Irish peasantry.”²¹³

²¹¹ “Danish possessions on the coast of Africa” in Copy of a Despatch from Governor Sir W. Winniett to Earl Grey, Cape Coast, 30th March 1850 (received 25th June 1850), CO 96/18, TNA, Kew.

²¹² Bowen, *Central Africa : Adventures and Missionary Labors*, 85.

²¹³ “Slavery on the Gold Coast, Appendix no. 3, Gold Coast Commissioner’s Report,” in *Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers: Report from the Select Committee on the West Coast of Africa, Together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index Part II: Colonies, Africa* (Irish University Press, Shannon, 1968), 32.



Fig. 15. An 1874 engraving of adobe houses in Cape Coast showing both flat-and thatched pitched roofed techniques. The projecting crossbeams on which mud roofs were laid are still extant in Cape Coast. Courtesy: “Cape Coast to Coomasie: An Illustrated Narrative of the Ashantee War” in *The Illustrated London News* (London:1874).

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of dwellings on the Accra Plains and the Fante coast (with the exception of Elmina) were mud or adobe buildings, usually constructed around a courtyard. Elmina had some substantial houses built in local sandstone.²¹⁴ French travel writer Jean Barbot observed in the late seventeenth century that in Elmina, “most of the houses are of masonry, one or two storeys high.” Comparatively, Barbot described Cape Coast as having “500 huts” and “Soko” (“British Accra”) and “Little Acra” (“Dutch Accra”) as having about “100 houses” and

²¹⁴ K.B. Dickson, “Evolution of Seaports in Ghana,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55, No. 1 (Mar., 1965):103.

“60 houses” respectively.²¹⁵ Even as late as the early nineteenth century, Accra (excluding Osu) reportedly had fewer than ten stone houses.²¹⁶

By 1827, the number of stone houses at Cape Coast had increased to fourteen, but most dwellings were still built in mud or adobe.²¹⁷ The gradual proliferation of stone houses on most of the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century was closely tied to the transition away from the slave trade. In the years following the abolition of the British slave trade, European-based trading firms such as Forster and Smith, W.B. Hutton & Sons and several others preferred stone houses rather than enslaved men and women as collateral or security for manufactured goods purchased by African merchants on credit. The representatives of such firms on the Gold Coast often undertook a systematic valuation of the stone houses of their African trading partners. In 1842, Richard Madden – a British official tasked to investigate allegations of illegal slave trading in the British Forts and Settlements on the Gold Coast – noted that “Accra [had] several excellent stone houses” and Cape Coast had “18” of such buildings “supposed to be worth from 1,000 *l.* to 2,000 *l.* sterling each.”²¹⁸ Other contemporary estimates suggest that stone houses on the Gold Coast cost as much as £2500.²¹⁹

Though James Bannerman’s anxiety about losing his stone house to London-based creditors was rooted in Gã and Fante beliefs, it must also be understood in the context of the transition away from the slave trade. Nearly sixteen years before James Bannerman’s death in 1858, he had met Madden in Accra and the latter made it clear that the auctioning of slaves to defray debts owed to London or European trading houses by British subjects – European and

²¹⁵ Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea*, 373.

²¹⁶ Dickson, “Evolution of Seaports in Ghana,” 103.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ “Slavery on the Gold Coast, Appendix no. 3, Gold Coast Commissioner’s Report,” in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 32.

²¹⁹ Dickson, “Evolution of Seaports.”

Anglo-African alike – was in violation of the Slave Trade Act of 1824.²²⁰ For Madden, there was no difference between domestic slavery or internal slave dealing and that of the Atlantic or export slave trade out of the Gold Coast. Madden’s views represented the official metropolitan position in London.²²¹ While in Accra in 1842, in the presence of James Bannerman and another Anglo-Gã merchant named William “Nanka” Bruce (died 1856), Madden freed “between 400 and 500 slaves” belonging to a deceased British merchant. The slaves of this unnamed merchant were intended “for the benefit of his creditors Chiefly in London.”²²² Likewise, Bannerman and Bruce held a “considerable number of slaves.” Yet on Bannerman’s death-bed in 1858, he could not auction his slaves to defray his debts in London. The Slave Trade Act had completely outlawed the use of slaves as collateral to secure imported goods or to defray debts.²²³ The abolition of the monetary value of slaves by the British rendered many African and Euro-African merchants bankrupt and indebted to their overseas European suppliers.

The demonetization of slaves in Atlantic commercial transactions represented a sharp break from earlier usages and practices that governed the commercial relationships between Gold Coast African merchant households and European firms prior to 1807. In 1822, Charles McCarthy, governor of the British Forts and Settlements in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, tried to stop British and Anglo-African subjects in West Africa from holding slaves or participating in the slave

²²⁰ “Slavery on the Gold Coast, Appendix no.3, Gold Coast Commissioner’s Report,” in *British Parliamentary Papers* 32.

²²¹ The expansion in legitimate commerce saw an increased demand for the labor of enslaved people who were needed to cultivate cash crops and serve as carriers in long distance trading expeditions. See Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*; Law ed. *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce*; Law, *Ouidah: The Social History*; Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*; Strikrodt, *Afro-European trade in the Atlantic world*; Sandra Greene, *Slave Owners of West Africa: Decision Making in the Age of Abolition*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017.

²²² “Slavery on the Gold Coast, Appendix no.3, Gold Coast Commissioner’s Report,” in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 32.

²²³ *Ibid.*

trade.²²⁴ In what appeared to be a “humanitarian” gesture, McCarthy tried to enforce the aspect of the Act of Abolition of the Slave Trade by the British Parliament that sanctioned the placement of liberated Africans under terms of indentured servitude to ease their transition to a responsible state of freedom. In enforcing the law, McCarthy sought to ameliorate the harshness and abuses inherent in the institution of slavery as practiced by Anglo-Africans and other British subjects on the Gold Coast.²²⁵

To demonstrate his determination, McCarthy directed inquiries into allegations of a “man of colour” in British Accra/James Town who “brutally” and “cruelly” flogged several of his slaves and “caused some degree of anxiety in the minds of the principal Cabboceers [“chiefs”].” In a trial that followed, the said “man of colour” admitted ordering the “punishment” of four of his slaves. The unnamed “man of colour” dubiously maintained that in doing so he simply followed “the custom of the country” which had never prevented slave owners from “inflicting punishment” on their slaves.²²⁶ McCarthy’s findings regrettably confirmed the widespread abuses of Gold Coast slaveholders.²²⁷

It is likely, the unnamed “man of colour” was James Bannerman or some other Anglo-Gã merchant. However, in May 1822, James Bannerman and an unnamed Anglo-Gã merchant (probably William “Nanka” Bruce) both “native merchants of Accra, educated in England, and of English descent” possessed “upwards” of “two hundred slaves.” Both men applied for and were granted indentures by Governor McCarthy. The indenture was meant to curb the slave trade and slavery. By the terms of the indenture, James Bannerman agreed to “place and bound Amah,

²²⁴ Extract of a Report from Governor Sir Charles M'Carthy to Earl Bathurst, dated Cape Coast, 16 May 1822 (Enclosure No.2, Indenture), Appendix no.44 in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 511-518.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 520.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

a male liberated negro, of the age of twenty-eight years, or thereabouts, as an apprentice” in indentured servitude in his household. Bannerman was required to treat Amah humanely, provide him with “good and sufficient” food, lodgings “and all other necessaries during the aforesaid term.” McCarthy stipulated clearly that failure of any British subject (White or Anglo-African) honoring the terms would render “the indenture null and void.”²²⁸

In 1842, Madden explained to Bannerman and Bruce that slaveholding by British subjects was illegal. Bannerman, fully aware of the penalty of slaveholding, hypocritically remarked to the admiration of Madden that “his strongest desire was to meet the views and desire of the home Government.” Bruce similarly “pursued the same course as in the case of Mr. Bannerman and with similar results.”²²⁹ In Cape Coast, Madden’s enquiry and a later “Proclamation” from the Colonial Office against slave holding or dealing was met with stiff opposition from the Anglo-Fante merchants and Western-educated elite. In 1852, the Proclamation specifically targeted “those persons who spoke and wrote the English language, imported Goods from Europe, and enjoyed the same privileges as their fellow White men.”²³⁰ By this criteria, the Proclamation permitted local kings and unlettered Africans to own slaves, while expressly forbidding “educated Natives” from the act. The latter, the Proclamation argued, “enjoyed the same privileges as white men” and fully understood the consequences of the illegality of slaveholding.²³¹

In a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Henry Barnes, Joseph Smith and a host of “Native Traders and others of this Town” protested for being “stigmatized” as slaveholders. The

²²⁸ Enclosure No. 2 Indenture, Governmnet of Sierra Leone in Appendix, No. 44, Extract of a Report from Governor Sir Charles M’Carthy to Earl Bathurst, dated Cape Coast, 16 May 1822 in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 520.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Joseph Smith, Thomas Hughes, Isaac Robertson, James Robt. [Robert] Thompson, Willm. Hooper John Carr, Wm. Josiah Tavia [Tawia], John Hagan, F.C. Grant Wm. [William] De Graft, merchants of Cape Coast to the Rt. Hon. Sir John Packington Bart, Downing Street, London, May 13th, 1852, CO 96 /25 TNA, Kew, 408.

²³¹ Joseph Smith, Thomas Hughes, Isaac Robertson, James Robt. [Robert] Thompson, Willm. Hooper John Carr, Wm. Josiah Tavia [Tawia], John Hagan, F.C. Grant Wm. [William] De Graft, merchants of Cape Coast to the Rt. Hon. Sir John Packington Bart, Downing Street, London, May 13th, 1852, CO 96 /25 TNA, Kew, 408.

merchants made a distinction between domestic slave holding or dealing from the Slave Trade abolition act of 1807. The latter, the Cape Coast merchants argued, “referred solely to the exportation of slaves” across the Atlantic “but in no respect interfered with the possession of domestic slaves within the Gold Coast.” In challenging the legality of London’s attempt to criminalize slaveholding on the Gold Coast, the mostly Anglo-Fante merchants emphasized the sovereignty of Cape Coast by insisting that “English law is not in this Country.”²³² To put it less ambiguously, English law could not be recognized beyond the walls of the forts and settlements.

The Cape Coast merchants’ agitation struck a sympathetic chord with British Judicial Assessor, Brodie Cruickshank who maintained that the slaveholders, Henry Barnes and Joseph Smith could not be removed from the “Commission of Peace” and the colonial “Magistracy,” at Cape Coast Castle simply on charges of slaveholding. Unlike Europeans, who were “entirely subject to English Law,” Africans were not. For Cruickshank, “Messrs. Barnes and Smith” were “natives of a Country, where slave holding is not only permitted but is universal.”²³³ Cruickshank advocated “persuasion,” since neither him nor the “English Government” had “the right to deprive them of their Slaves, if they held any.”²³⁴

Like many other Gold Coast African merchants, Barnes and Smith had “[s]ervants in their establishments, for whom they had paid purchase money or had advanced to them funds to pay debts, for which they were to render service.”²³⁵ Barnes later explained to Cruickshank how “five” members of an “Insolvent Debtor’s Family had come into his Wife’s service.” Mary

²³² Joseph Smith, Thomas Hughes, Isaac Robertson, James Robt. [Robert] Thompson, Willm. Hooper John Carr, Wm. Josiah Tavia [Tawia], John Hagan, F.C. Grant Wm. [William] De Graft, merchants of Cape Coast to the Rt. Hon. Sir John Packington Bart, Downing Street, London, May 13th, 1852, CO 96/ 25 TNA, Kew, 408.

²³³ Brodie Cruickshank, Cape Coast Castle to His Grace, The Duke of Newcastle, Downing Street, London, 22nd Sept 1853, CO 96/ 25, TNA, Kew, 242.

²³⁴ Brodie Cruickshank, to The Duke of Newcastle, 22nd Sept, 1853, CO 96/ 25 TNA, Kew 243.

²³⁵ Brodie Cruickshank, to The Duke of New Castle, 22nd Sept, 1853, CO 96/ 25 TNA, Kew, 244.

Barnes “had advanced two Ounces of Gold upon the security of each of them, and had received them into her service, until the money should be repaid.”²³⁶ Despite Barnes’ admission of domestic slave dealing, Cruickshank insisted that dismissing him and Smith from the British administration would have “served no other end, than to raise a strong opposition to the views of the Government.”²³⁷ The British administration at Cape Coast Castle knew very well that their limited authority in their spheres on the Gold Coast depended on the “mutual consent” of the towns and polities they were allied with.

Despite the seeming tolerance of slaveholding on the Gold Coast, many local African and Euro-African merchants were well aware of anti-slavery sentiments in Victorian Britain. Even more intriguing, local Gold Coast merchants felt scandalized that the anti-slavery Proclamation alleged “that we receive goods from England and with them purchase slaves for domestic service to the injury of the English Creditors.”²³⁸ Consequently, Gold Coast merchants felt strongly that the Proclamation “injure[d]” their “character” and “commercial interests” in Britain. In a protest letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, local merchants stated that they “have not ever received such a death” to their “character and credit” even from their rival European competitors on the Gold Coast than the Governor’s Proclamation.²³⁹

Saving and Losing Mortgaged Family Houses

Gold Coast merchants’ resolve to clarify the difference between internal slave dealing/ slaveholding and the exportation of captives, was directly connected to their dwindling sources of

²³⁶ Cruickshank to Duke of New Castle, 22nd Sept, 1853, CO 96/ 25 TNA, Kew, 245-246.

²³⁷ According to Cruickshank, Barnes “renounced,” the transaction, once he was told the British government equates this practice with slavery. See Cruickshank to Duke of Newcastle, 22nd Sept, 1853, CO 96/ 25 TNA, Kew, 246.

²³⁸ “Native Traders and Others of this Town to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cape Coast 7th May 1852, CO 96/25, Kew TNA, Kew, 175-176.

²³⁹ “Native Traders and Others of this Town to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cape Coast 7th May 1852, CO 96/25, Kew TNA, Kew, 176.

local capital. For the peoples of the Gold Coast and Asante, slaveholding was quantifiable wealth.²⁴⁰ Therefore had the Anglo-African merchants not clarified the distinction between local slaveholding and the export slave trade, the British would have declared domestic slavery illegal. This move would have worsened Gold Coast merchants' dire financial situation since the abolition of the international slave trade. The end of the legal Atlantic slave trade, had virtually rendered the use of enslaved people as collateral or mortgages practically worthless in legal international transactions.

Consequently, Gold Coast merchants mortgaged their houses, knowing full well they could lose them. In order to prevent this from happening, local merchants employed a number of legal as well as fraudulent strategies in order to challenge the 'lawful' auctioning of their houses. These strategies stemmed from the African merchants' widespread bankruptcy, lack of autonomy and dependence on European credit in the nineteenth century – a phenomenon widely known to Africanist economic historians.²⁴¹ For example, Samuel Collins Brew initially imported merchandise directly from W.B. Hutton and Sons and Forster & Smith. Like his Irish great-grandfather Richard Brew (d.1776), he gradually over-extended his business with debts amounting to £8,000 or £9,000 by 1867. Similar credit facilities accounted for the rise of Fante merchant George Blankson, who visited Forster & Smith in England in 1854, and became one of the first African members of the Gold Coast Legislative Council before his slide into insolvency in 1872.²⁴² Similarly, on July 3, 1874, R.J. Blankson of Anomabo, "having involved" himself "into

²⁴⁰ See Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

²⁴¹ See for example, Hopkins, *An Economic History*; Law ed. *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce*; Law, *Ouidah*; Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*; Strikrodt, *Afro-European trade in the Atlantic world*; Sandra Greene, *Slave Owners of West Africa*.

²⁴² See C.W. Newbury, "Credit in Early Nineteenth Century West African Trade," *The Journal of African History*, 13, no. 1 (1972): 85-86.

bad debts and losses in trade thereby mortgaged [his] houses at agah [Egyaa] and anamaboe [Anomabo] with my lands at Donacie [Donasi].”²⁴³

Though these difficulties largely hampered African and Euro-African business potentials in West Africa, local merchants were neither passive nor hapless victims of British economic domination. Resident British merchants on the Gold Coast regarded African and Euro-African merchants as “competitors” and strongly protested what they considered as the “injustice” of their trading practices because it “prejudice[d]” “the European Creditor.” African and Euro-African merchants could purchase “slaves” from Asante and beyond to be “employed as labourers and Domestic about their master’s Establishment.” In many cases of African or Euro-African insolvency, while the other “property of the Native trader is available to his Creditors,” the portion so invested in slaves “escapes confiscation.”²⁴⁴ At the same time, African and Euro-African merchants could hire out the labor of their pawns and slaves for profit or could make them work on rural farms to produce cash crops. This practice encouraged the expansion in local slaveholding and therefore merchants indebted to British creditors could preserve their wealth.

In the 1840s and 50s, British merchants on the Gold Coast advocated for “the slaves [and pawns] of Insolvent” African or Euro-African merchants to be made “serviceable to the Estate.” However this proposition was met with legal setbacks, since an adoption of such an approach would mean that the British administration would be condoning slave dealing.²⁴⁵ Andrew Swanzy, an Irish representative of the well-known British firm F&A Swanzy at Cape Coast, bemoaned that

²⁴³ Last will and testament of R.J. Blankson of Anomabo, 3rd July 1874, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 10th July 1872-27th February 1875, 804.

²⁴⁴ At a meeting of the Sessions held at Cape Coast Castle on Wednesday the 1st day of December 1847 – present Brodie Cruickshank, J.A & JP; Francis Swanzy J.P.; Thomas Hutton J.P.; Henry Smith J.P.; Andrew Swanzy J.P. – “CO 96/21, TNA, Kew, 127.

²⁴⁵ See Andrew Swanzy, “On Trade in Western Africa, With or Without British protection” *The Journal of the Society of Arts*, 22, No. 1117 (April 17, 1874): 479.

many “Native African” traders invested in “houses” and “slaves” once they obtained credit and goods from European firms, only to “fraudulently” declare bankruptcy in the colonial courts.²⁴⁶ Once declared bankrupt, these “native merchants” served a short prison sentence and retained control of their property without paying their European trading partners “a farthing.”²⁴⁷ Just like their investment in slaves, Gold Coast merchants could also invest in stone houses, only to plead in the Judicial Assessor’s Court that such mortgaged properties were “family houses” rather than private possessions.

Since the Assessor’s Courts upheld “native law,” in the British spheres of influence, such purported family houses could not be confiscated unless all members of the family were part of the mortgage. In an itemized ruling by the Judicial Assessor’s Court in *Halm v Rebecca Hughes* in November 1869, Judge Chalmers, ostensibly based on the advice of his Fante informants defined a “family house” and upheld the rights of the family to such real estate:

1. A family house is when a person had an ancestor and that ancestor died, he inherited the property and the ancestors house, such house is called family house.
2. A house would also be called a family house if it was built from the proceeds of inherited property.
3. A family house descends to the heirs in succession ; the succession is by the Mother’s side.
4. Owner is not at liberty to sell family house.
5. The next succeeding members of the family would oppose him, and if he persevered, would turn, him off the possession, saying, “you are likely to ruin this house.”
6. A person who has not inherited, however rich he may be, cannot constitute his house a family house.
7. If a family house should be sold to a stranger it would cease to have the qualities [of a family house?].
8. Under some circumstances a brother might be bound to provide a married sister with a house, i.e. if she and her husband were poor and he had means, and also to keep it in repair.
9. Such a house would be considered a family house.
The sister would leave children who must inherit the house.

²⁴⁶ Andrew Swanzy’s brother Francis (also known as Frank) was married to an Anglo-Fante merchant named Catherine (Kate) Swanzy (née Dawson, died 1874), alias Ewuraba Efua Ketsi of Cape Coast.

²⁴⁷ Swanzy, “On Trade in Western Africa,” 479. A farthing was worth ¼ a penny. See Robin Law ed. *The English in West Africa, 1691-1699: Part 3*, XVII.

The sister could not sell the house.

10. This form would be used in making over such a house. The donor must say : "I dash this, or give it to you."

11. When a house is presented to a sister, it belongs also to the children and descendants. (This in answer to question, if it is necessary in the gift to make express mention of the children.)

12. If the sister is not poor, and the brother, nevertheless, gives her a house, that also would be a family house.

13. Could the house be seized for the sister's debts ? When a brother made a present of a house to his sister, knowing that she had children, but when there was debt incurred by the family or debt incurred by the sister, it would not follow that the debt should be paid, and she must consult with the children : " there is this debt which I have incurred, let us consult how we can contribute towards its payment." If the family could contribute, well and good. If they did not, and the mother proposes to sell the house, the house would be sold.

14. But if the children did not consent? Then the mother could sell the house.

15. If children did not consent to their mother's making away with the house, they must pay the debt, or work for it.

16. If neither mother nor children were willing to sell the house, what would the creditor do ? The mother and children must pay the debt.*

17. If house is not occupied, could the creditor take possession for his debt without consent of the mother and children ?

The creditor could not.²⁴⁸

Put simply, a family property could not be confiscated if that real estate was mortgaged without the express consent of the *ebusua*.²⁴⁹ Though rulings like *Halm v Rebecca Hughes*, made clear distinctions between family and private property, Gold Coast merchants could often pass their private property as family ones. In such cases, European firms had to prove that such properties were indeed private and not family property. Nonetheless many African and Euro-African merchants saved their houses from being auctioned.²⁵⁰

In mobilizing new legal discourses about property and manipulating colonial bankruptcy laws, African and Euro-African merchants sought to preserve the integrity of the family. It is important to note that the mortgaging of houses was a relatively recent phenomena therefore the "native law" that Gold Coast merchants invoked to protect their (family) houses from being seized

²⁴⁸ Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws*, 144-146.

²⁴⁹ Samuel Tokoo v. Kwow Asima, January 26, 1870, Before Judge Chalmers quoted in Sarbah *Fante Customary Laws*, 147.

²⁵⁰ Swanzy, "On Trade in Western Africa," 479.

was as contested as their mortgaged properties. Sarbah explains that “originally,” in early nineteenth and pre-nineteenth century contexts, a creditor could “put the debtor and her children in logs, panyarr [forcible seizure of persons] any of them or their family till debt is paid or sit dharna.”²⁵¹ However, in the context of the Gold Coast’s post-abolition economy, Europeans and African merchants alike considered mortgages as more secure forms of collateral in international business transactions.

By the 1860s, African indebtedness, poor trading practices and the controversies surrounding mortgages on the Gold Coast not only reduced the profit margins of European firms but also drove them into “ruinous competition.”²⁵² Andrew Swanzy stated that during his “residence” on the Gold Coast from 1844 to 1850, such debts were “fairly met.” He intimated that even in small towns on the southwestern Gold Coast such as “Dixcove and that neighbourhood, amounted generally from £12,000 to £15,000.” However, Swanzy blamed the slump in trade on “a number of partially educated natives” given the “privileges of Englishmen.” But Swanzy somewhat qualified his earlier distrust of African commercial competence by admitting that there were “important exceptions” and singled out Henry Barnes’ widow, Mary Barnes as “about the Only native at Cape Coast who trades on her own capital.”²⁵³ To safeguard their commercial interests and to reduce risks, Bristol ships and merchants as well as London and Liverpool firms had by the end of the 1860s stopped advancing goods to local Gold Coast merchants. These British firms would rather consign goods to agents who were “either paid by fixed salaries, or salaries and commission.”²⁵⁴ Clearly, global trade not only influenced local laws and customs regulating the

²⁵¹ Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws*, 146.

²⁵² Swanzy, “On Trade in Western Africa,” 479.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 480.

use of property but also these developments had consequences for intra-and inter family relations on the Gold Coast.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the practice of real estate led to a deeply fraught contestation over the meaning and relevance of family houses as spaces of intramural burials, family heritage and ancestral veneration. The leasing, mortgaging or selling of real estate generated elaborate negotiations between and within African merchant families and with European commercial firms. Discourses about the distinction between family houses or private property and what could be sold or retained were at the very heart of the anxieties, opportunities and vulnerability that African merchants experienced in their negotiation of emerging colonial legal and commercial frameworks. While these cultural transformations generated anxieties and upset beliefs associated with family houses, they also provided new opportunities for merchants and families to negotiate the commercial and power structures of British and European legal systems.²⁵⁵

Despite the economic expedience in using one's family home as collateral or mortgage, there was also the constant fear of losing sacred ancestral spaces. On November 26, 1857, members of the van der Puye family of "Dutch Accra" "[gave] up all the [movable] property to be sold," to defray the debt of their deceased father, Jacobus van der Puye. The family "humbly beg[ged]" the Dutch governor at Elmina Castle to spare their "family house" from being auctioned since Jacobus was buried in that premises.²⁵⁶ The van der Puyes maintained that the "family house" "belonged to them by right according to the fashion of the country." Fortunately,

²⁵⁵ Historian Tom McCaskie rightly explained that British imperialism on the Gold Coast evolved from "from one that asked to one that demanded and at last commanded." See T.C. McCaskie, "Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The nineteenth century*, Andrew Porter ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 688.

²⁵⁶ William J. van der Puy and brothers, Dutch Accra, November 26th 1857 to Governor, Elmina Castle, Archief van de Kust van Guinea, 810, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands.

for the van der Puye family, the Dutch court at Elmina Castle acceded to its request. One of the judges, a Euro-African merchant named Carel Bartels, affirmed the view that the property was a family house.²⁵⁷

Being a Euro-African and a native of the Gold Coast, it was likely Bartels used his influence in the Dutch establishment to ensure that the ruling conformed to the “fashion [customs] of the country” or indigenous laws in order to save the van der Puye House.²⁵⁸

Otherwise the van der Puye family house would have been auctioned like several others on the Gold Coast. Today the van der Puye house, or “Jacobus House” is still standing in Kinkã.



Fig.16. The now dilapidated Jacobus House, Ussher Town, Accra, December 2018. Photograph by author.

It is opposite the former Dutch fort Crèveccœur (renamed Ussher Fort in 1868) in the vicinity of Amuginãã, one of the most important ritual and political spaces in the Gã State, where the

²⁵⁷ William J. van der Puy and brothers, Dutch Accra, November 26th 1857 to Governor, Elmina Castle, Archief van de Kust van Guinea, 810, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands. Carel Bartels should not be confused with his father, Euro-African merchant Carel Hendrik Bartels (1786-1850).

²⁵⁸ William J. van der Puy and brothers, Dutch Accra, November 26th 1857 to Governor, Elmina Castle, Archief van de Kust van Guinea, 810, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands.

ancestors reside and also the place where the Gã Māntse (Paramount ruler of Accra) is sworn into office.

While the van der Puye family successfully saved their family house from auction, many more Gold Coast merchants lost theirs. In giving testimony in a Cape Coast court, Anglo-Fante auctioneer, Francis Chapman Grant stated that he had “taken over many homes from persons who could not pay their debts.” Over several years, Grant held mortgages which “had been granted by the owner of the homes.” In other cases, mortgages were “claimed on a family house,” but involved members of the family joining “in the mortgage.” In the case of a “Mr. Woods” and a “Mr. Mills,” Grant explained that “Woods was an old house. I believe it has always been known as a family house. There were dead persons buried there. I don’t know how many.” Grant explained to the court that:

I have a family home myself, I never built a house [of my own]. The house I live in is not my own property. It was built by relatives in my lifetime. The house I was owning as an office was built by my mother & left by her to the family. It is considered the property of my sisters. The other house I have mentioned was I think built by a man & his father. My object in retaining the house was for my own comfort – also I had an interest in it through marriage & I paid no rent, so I considered I was bound to make some improvement upon it.”²⁵⁹

Grant’s testimony shows how kinship ties on the Gold Coast assured one an accommodation in life and in death. In that regard, the Gã and Fante understanding of family houses as sacred or as

²⁵⁹ Testimony of “auctioneer” Francis Chapman Grant in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, Accra, 120.

communal spaces were incongruous with the commercial practice of real estate in which houses could be mortgaged, bought, or sold.²⁶⁰

African merchants' bankruptcy was a major feature of the nineteenth century Gold Coast economy and mercantile families clearly understood the risks involved in mortgaging their (family) houses to European firms. In the 1860s and 1870s, one of the most publicized of these bankrupt cases involved the well-known Anglo-Fante merchant and colonial official at Cape Coast Castle, Joseph Smith (1823-1870). Joseph Smith had been educated in Cape Coast Castle and through his mentor, Governor George Maclean (1801-1847; 1830-47), he was recommended to a London-based trading firm, Forster and Smith. But Joseph Smith's family discouraged him from becoming a merchant. More so, his kinsmen "did not like Joseph giving into house [i.e. mortgaging the family house]." Having experienced so many loss [sic] of houses on the Gold Coast, Joseph's extended family "feared F&S [Forster & Smith] wd [would] sell the house." The family felt that Joseph "[should] have continued his occupation of colonial secretary and school master" at Cape Coast Castle.²⁶¹ Losing the family house would also mean that the surviving relatives may not have the opportunity to continue venerating or serving the dead.

Like James Bannerman, Joseph Smith's economic power was tied to the vicissitudes of European imperialism and global capitalist expansion. While Joseph's family had had apprehensions about his mercantile pursuits, his mother, Mrs. Smith had used his son's connections at Cape Coast Castle to obtain a piece of land in 1839. The British establishment had

²⁶⁰ Testimony of "auctioneer" Francis Chapman Grant in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, Accra, 120.

²⁶¹"Mr. Brew opening his case" in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, 103.

originally purchased the land, but Governor Maclean gifted it to the Smith family who built one of two family houses on the plot. When Joseph Smith became bankrupt in 1864, he and his family for more than a decade had to prove that their two houses – located “in the Intri [Ntri] Quarter” and “[t]he other in the Street opposite Coffee Coomah’s [Kofi Kuma’s] house,” both in Cape Coast – were indeed collectively owned. “Smith Hall,” the older of the two-family houses, was built in 1822 of swish. However, the foundation of the gallery was built of stones and was thatched but afterwards “was slated by Joseph at his own expense.” It is quite evident from the testimonies that the Smiths were connected to a number of allied Fante and Anglo-Fante families by ties of marriage, consanguinity and mutual dependency. All shared a number of connected houses with similar mercantile and business interests and had invested in the building and renovations of each other’s houses over the decades.

The Smiths tried to marshal all their blood and non-blood relatives alike to argue that since the entire family contributed money and labor to the completion of the “two houses” they could not be considered Joseph Smith’s private property. Even though “Joseph built the house,” his older brother John “made an addition to the House” and “the roofs, rooms & windows of a part which had been given [to] him specially as his own share. He also fitted jalousies in other part.” Another brother, James, who resided at Cape Palmas, Liberia, also contributed an unspecified amount of “money, cloth, beads, guinea pan[s], rings and jugs” to be sold to buy building materials for the project.²⁶² A few years later, Joseph left “the family house entirely in care of John Smith”²⁶³ due to overcrowding, because “all the members of the family liv[ed]

²⁶² “Mr. Brew opening his case” in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, Accra, 103.

²⁶³ John Francis Smith was the youngest son of Kyuba and was born 17th August 1823. He was employed as a printer from 1839 to 1844 at Cape Coast Castle and paid “3 pieces of cloth a month valued at £ 1.10.” See John F.

there.”²⁶⁴ Joseph Smith’s family clearly distinguished between the collectively owned “family house” and the private property known as “Fort House” which Joseph later purchased. The court was however not convinced that the claims that the house belonged to the family.

In July 1864, an insolvent Joseph Smith lost Fort House, his personal property of “14 or 15 years,” to his creditors, Forster & Smith of London. Afterwards, he moved to one of the family houses, “Smith Hall” where he resided for “3 or 4 years.”²⁶⁵ Joseph Smith would later sell Smith Hall to Forster & Smith on December 23, 1864 for £1010, apparently without the knowledge of his extended family.²⁶⁶ By 1865, Forster & Smith was renting the premises to the “municipal Government” and then to a “Mr. Moseby at £130 per annum.”²⁶⁷ That same year, Joseph Smith “gave up all his property in Cape Coast” which included a “piece of land with the ruins of a House.”²⁶⁸ An “[a]ssignee Mr. Moffatt, gave” Smith the “freedom to buy the house” at a price of “£180 Gold Coast currency” or “One Hundred and sixty two pounds sterling.” Smith failed to buy the property and was unsuccessful in getting his in-law Thomas Forson to bid for it

Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, Accra, 109.

²⁶⁴ Testimony of John Francis Smith in Francis Chapman Grant in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, 106.

²⁶⁵ Testimony of William Henry Selby, Agent of Forster & Smith of London in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, Accra, 122.

²⁶⁶ The copy of the original transaction was reportedly lost in a “shipwreck.” Other letters about the transaction was corroborated in a letter of 19 January 1864 from Olivenow, Sarie & Peach to Forster & Smith” and confirmed by a cash book kept by Mr. A. Black McIntyre are admitted. See Testimony of William Henry Selby, 122.

²⁶⁷ See Testimony of William Henry Selby, 122.

²⁶⁸ Joseph Smith with Concurrence A.B. McIntyre, Esq. Assignee on his Insolvent Estate.

Agst Thomas Forson – “Joseph gave up all his property in Cape Coast” and that “any property was to be exposed on a certain day.” “To shew cause why the Def. should not disclaim his alleged ownership of the ruins of a certain House and Land in Cape Coast, the property of the plaintiff Joseph Smith.”

on his behalf.²⁶⁹ Forson rather bought the property for himself. In Badagry (modern southwestern Nigeria), Smith lost a house which he had purchased for £1460 in 1858.²⁷⁰

Joseph Smith not only lost his properties but was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for fraudulently concealing the details of his assets. After serving three months of an eighteen-month prison sentence, he was pardoned by Acting Governor Ross. Joseph died in 1871, but his family's woes were not over yet. Later that year, the court ordered Joseph Smith's brother, John Francis Smith to pay some of the former's liabilities, since they were business partners. The brothers had made use of the ground floor of one of the family houses as a storehouse where they kept "imported goods."²⁷¹ All in all, the loss of the Smiths' place of family internment was particularly heartbreaking for Hannah Smith, one of Joseph's daughters. Hannah helplessly maintained in court that the house should not be seized since her mother and grandmother were buried there.²⁷² The court rejected Hannah Smith's pleas and seemed not convinced that the family did not consent to his late father's mortgaging of some of the family houses.

Capitalism, Christianity and the Contestation of Real Property

Despite the deep sense of attachment to houses as spaces of family internment, increasing number of merchants saw the income-generation potential of real estate investments. A thorough reading of nineteenth century legal and deeds records from the Gold Coast show an emerging cultural trend where many Gold Coast merchant families emphasized the financial rather than the spiritual and ancestral wealth and value of houses. Over the course of the nineteenth century,

²⁶⁹ Testimony of Archibald Black McIntyre, In the Court of Criminal and Civil Justice, 15th January 1870, 62.

²⁷⁰ Testimony of Archibald Black McIntyre, In the Court of Criminal and Civil Justice, 15th January 1870, 62.

²⁷¹ Testimony of John Francis Smith in John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, 107.

²⁷² Testimony of Hannah Smith, daughter of Joseph Smith, John F. Smith and the family of the mother of Joseph Smith against Samuel Davies, assignees of the said Joseph Smith and George Blankson, Senior Executor of the estate of late A.B McIntyre, deceased, Record Book Vol. 19 From 6th February 1871 to 23 June 1871, SCT 5/4/94, PRAAD, 120.

many Gã and Euro-African merchants enlarged older stone houses or built entirely new houses besides their family houses, which they could rent out to Europeans and Africans alike. Though historically the expansion and re-modification of houses was necessary to make more space for growing families, such a practice was adapted to accommodate leases.

The conversion to (Protestant) Christianity by some African merchants facilitated new ideas about wealth, security and property. While Christianity itself was not incompatible with home burials, there was increasing pressure from the nascent colonial regime and the Basel and Wesleyan missionaries and from some Western-educated Africans to abandon home burials. The growing acceptance of Victorian social mores and medical ideas in some African mercantile circles, worked together to modify burial practices. Prominent African Christian merchants like Henry Barnes would reject home burials in his 1862 will and testament in favor of being interred “in the Public Burying Ground on such a place as my Executors should choose.”²⁷³

Though the Basel and Wesleyan missionaries and the officials of the colonial outposts regarded home burials as “pagan” and insanitary, the intimate connection between the dead and the living in Europe had only been recently been decoupled by legislation. On the Gold Coast, colonial pressure to end intramural burials were a consequence of sanitation and burial reforms in Britain and elsewhere in Europe by the 1850s. Consequently, the supervision of burials and/or the disposal of mortal remains became a civic function of the state and not churches or religious establishments.²⁷⁴

While missionary and colonial pressure compelled denizens of Gold Coast towns to abandon home burials, many African Christian merchants began to imagine other forms of

²⁷³ Last will and testament of Henry Barnes, 8th day of March 1862, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866, 236-9.

²⁷⁴ John Parker, *In My Time of Dying: A History of Death and the Dead in West Africa* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021), 195.

security apart from intramural burials or communal ownership of houses. Nonetheless, these cultural shifts were not without spiritual anxieties or consequences as many older houses contained graves. The transition away from home burials was neither uniform nor consistent until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1870, John Francis Smith, a brother of Joseph Smith would reveal in court that his “mother was [a] member of [the] Wesleyan Church – she was buried in her own house” in 1860.

Despite professing Christianity, many Gold Coast converts were still attached to ancestral beliefs. While these converts feared that they may not be able to honor and receive blessings from dead relatives not buried at home, they also were convinced that a deceased person could be harmed in the public cemeteries. The dead, it was believed when abandoned in public cemeteries or properly interred could provoke their ire. Writing as late as 1897, the Basel Mission-trained Gã catechist from Labadi, Isaac Odoi Philipps, noted that the “fear” of being interred in the Basel Mission cemetery in Osu was a major bane that discouraged conversion to Christianity in the more stubbornly “pagan” and “traditionalist” town of Kinkã.²⁷⁵ At the same time, elderly converts approaching death reportedly left the Christian community to be interred at home. In a letter to Basel in 1889, the Rev. Reindorf cited “Mrs Sarah Wulff” (Sara Malm) as desiring to be buried at her home in Osu beside her husband Wulff Joseph Wulff.²⁷⁶

Such beliefs and actions were consistent with Gã beliefs about burial in cemeteries or at the towns’ outskirts as akin to being “thrown away” unburied.²⁷⁷ The strong familiar and spiritual

²⁷⁵ See Parker, “Cultural Politics of Death and Burial,” 214.

²⁷⁶ See Reindorf to Committee, BMA D-1, 48/62, 16 Jan 1889 quoted in Parker, *In My Time of Dying*, 207. In the Death Registry of the local Presbyterian Church in Osu, a Sarah Lucia Wulff, aged eighty is recorded as dying at “Osu” on June 15, 1895. See Death Register, Osu Presbyterian Church (as copied and typed by Ole Justesen in 1967). It is not clear to me if she was buried at home near her husband. According to family lore the grave beside Wulff’s is that of his and Sara Malm’s daughter, Wilhelmine Josephine.

²⁷⁷ Parker, “Cultural Politics of Death and Burial,” 214.

connections that many Gã and Fante had with their deceased relatives discouraged burial in public cemeteries often located in the outskirts of town where strangers, slaves and kinless people were often dumped or buried. Even when few of Cape Coast's Christians opted to be buried in the "two badly situated graveyards," Clarke noted that the "Christian" cemeteries in Cape Coast were "surrendered by a dense population." In Clarke's view as a physician, "these cemeteries from their position are very injurious to the health of the community" and advocated for their relocation to the "leeward of the Town where there [was] an abundance of lands lying waste."²⁷⁸ In his campaigns for public health, Clarke was probably oblivious of local concerns of the security and integrity of the corpses buried at home which public cemeteries may not offer. In fact, the decision to have a cemetery close to human habitation may have been a Fante Christian compromise to burying relatives far from home.

Despite the inconsistencies in the adoption of extramural burials, many more Gold Coast African merchants opted for Christian internments from the 1870s onwards. In Cape Coast, Fante merchants explicitly requested a "Christian burial" in the hope of the "resurrection of the body in Christ." Other wills, like that of Joseph Akromansah Fynn, stated emphatically that: "[it is] appointed unto all men once to die and after death judgement."²⁷⁹ Christian Davis "would commit [his] soul to God who gave it and my body to the earth with Christian burial." While several factors including public health concerns and the real estate market contributed to the decline of home burials, Christian ideas about the after-life and Victorian abhorrence of intramural internments cannot be discounted. Mission-educated African merchants' allusions to Christian eschatological

²⁷⁸ Dr. Robert Clarke, Colonial Hospital Cape Coast, to Acting Colonial Secretary Mr. R.S. Ross, Medical Report for the year 1858, 10th May 1859 in Enclosure no. 4 in Despatch no. 43 of the 11th July 1859, CO 96/45, TNA, Kew.

²⁷⁹ Last will and Testament of Joseph Akromansah Fynn, 5th January 1874, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 469-74.

ideas in late nineteenth century wills may have been an ideological rejection of home burials with its assurances of bodily, spiritual and ancestral protection in favor of burial in Christ.²⁸⁰

The gradual rejection of home burials in some circles would have been the consequences of “conversions” that had reached some “maturity” over “several generations.”²⁸¹ Kenyan theologian John Mbiti has rightly cautioned that “full conversion [was] never a point in history: it [was] always a process affecting the inner man and his total environment.”²⁸² Not surprisingly, many of such African and Euro-African Christian merchants were realtors. Anglo-Fante merchant Samuel Davis expressed indifference about “the houses both in Cape Coast and Elmina being the property of my family at Elmina.” Davis stated that “they can dispose of them as they please.” Better still, Davis “recommended that” the house in Cape Coast known as “Saleon House” “be sold” and the proceeds given to his sister Mary Blewett. Alternatively, the house could be “rented to some decent person who will keep same in good condition.”²⁸³ Barnes himself had “purchased” “DeGrafts’ Hall” from his father-in-law.²⁸⁴ This clearly indicates that Barnes and his wife’s family had little or no concerns about home burials.

Despite the seeming ease with which some local realtors invested in houses, many older homes contained extant graves. In 1902, the European trading firm United Africa Company acquired the freehold of “Swanzy Mills,” a three- and four-story stone-built residential and commercial facility, from John Brodgington Jackson. The property was built in 1840 and jointly

²⁸⁰ See Lands Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1872-1875;1875-1880.

²⁸¹ Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast*, 67.

²⁸² Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 257. Compare with Philip T. Laryea, “Reading Acts 14:8-12 and 17:22-31 in Ga: A Critical Examination of the Issues, Meanings and Interpretations Arising from Exegesis in the Mother Tongue,” *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 6, no. 1 (June 2003) :35-43; see also Pashington Obeng, “Religious Interactions in Pre-Twentieth-Century West Africa” in *Themes in West Africa’s History*, edited by Emmanuel Akyeampong (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 141-163.

²⁸³ Last will and testament of Henry Barnes, 8th day of March 1862, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866, 236-9.

²⁸⁴ See Last will and testament of Henry Barnes, 8th day of March 1862, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866, 236-9.

owned by John's mother, an Anglo-Fante merchant named Catherine Swanzy (née Dawson). Catherine was likely buried in the house, but "a brick tiled paving" in one of the rooms on the ground floor marked the graves of her Irish husband, Frank Swanzy, who drowned at Cape Coast and not her brother-in-law, the Scotsman James Jackson as A.D.C Hyland suggested.²⁸⁵ It is almost certainly the case that financial considerations might have influenced John B. Jackson's willingness to alienate the house containing his mother's grave.²⁸⁶ While it would have been easier to part new houses as emerging realtors did, alienating a family with an intramural grave might have generated lots of anxiety for John Jackson.

The widespread bankruptcy of African and Euro-African merchants in the second half of the nineteenth century was also a period of real estate boom. In addition to these financial difficulties, the British bombardment of Osu/Christiansborg in 1854 left many merchants of the town virtually destitute and without compensation from the colonial authorities.²⁸⁷ In desperation, many sold their properties to Christian missionaries – the most important property buyers – in Osu and Accra – in order to make ends meet. On December 30, 1857, William Addo, a merchant of British Accra, sold his "dwelling house" and an "adjoining ground attached" in the "town of Christiansborg" for "three hundred Spanish Dollars to the Basel Mission Society."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ A.D.C Hyland stated that after the death of Mary Jackson (née Mould), the widowed Mrs. Catherine Swanzy married her half-sister's husband, John Jackson (Hyland wrongly named him as James Jackson). It seems Hyland confused Catherine Swanzy's husband, Robert Jackson (with whom she had a son, John Brodington Jackson) with her brother-in-law, who was incidentally also surnamed Jackson. Compare "Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased," 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866 with A.D.C. Hyland, *Documentation and Conservation: Report on the Vacation Training Programme: Documentation of Ghana Buildings, held at Mampong/Akwapim and Cape Coast, 1969* (Kumasi: Faculty of Architecture, University of Science & Technology, 1970), 51-52; Hyland "Architectural History of Cape Coast," 177.

²⁸⁶ Hyland alleged without any supporting references that John and Mary Jackson owned Swanzy Mills, which passed on to Catherine after her supposed marriage to her brother-in-law. On the contrary, Swanzy Mills was built by Frank Dawson and inherited by Catherine upon his death. See Last Will and Testament of Francis or Frank Swanzy, 28th day of February 1853, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

²⁸⁷ See chapter 5 for a thorough discussion of the bombardment of Osu and the destruction of property.

²⁸⁸ "Purchase of House at Christiansborg," 30th December 1857, SCT 2/4/1, PRAAD, Accra, 185.

Nearly two years later, on June 7, 1859, a Gã-Danish merchant Wilhelm August Lutterodt would “agree to sell” to the same Basel Mission, his substantial “dwelling house” for “two thousand Spanish or American Dollar [sic]” to be paid “in three instalments in the course of this year.”²⁸⁹

Elsewhere in James Town/British Accra, Gã merchant John Sackey, was unable to pay a debt of “three hundred and ninety seven pounds sterling money of Great Britain.” In 1860, Sackey and his creditor agreed that he would pay the debt with interest at “four pounds per cent per annum.” In what seems like a desperate situation, Sackey belatedly offered his premises, known as “Sackey’s House,” including “all buildings now or hereafter to be erected there with the yards, gardens orchards” and “appurtenances thereto belonging with all the estate” as security for his indebtedness.²⁹⁰ In that same year, another Gã merchant of James Town, William Quartey, granted his American creditor William Hill “the right and title of my house situated at Prampram near or next to House known as Mr. Moffat[‘s].” Quartey gave Hill the “liberty to sell the same with sundry articles as per agreement, between us – and the proceeds of such sale the said Hill is to place to my credit towards payment of first installment of debt due said Hill by me.” The legal records are silent on the outcome of the transaction but apparently Quartey retained his Prampram house. The fact that the house was located in Prampram – a Dãñme-speaking town – twenty-eight miles to the east of the Accra littoral suggests that it was a private investment and not a family property. In 1872, Quartey sued Gã-German merchant Christian Rottmann²⁹¹ for an unpaid rent of \$37½ (£ 8.8.9 sterling) which was due on “30th June.”²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Wilhelm Lutterodt received \$ 2500 from Hermann Ludwig Rottmann of the Basel Mission at Dutch Accra on October 20th 1859. See “Indenture of Purchase.” SCT 2/4/1 June 7th 1859, PRAAD, Accra, 184. By the time W.A. Lutterodt sold this house, he had moved to Kinkã and married a Mary Cleland and built his property “Lutterodt Hall” there. See chapter four.

²⁹⁰ SCT 2/4/1 “Mortgage of premises called Sackey’s House in James Town, Accra, West Coast of Africa.” Dated 3rd February 1860.

²⁹¹ Christian Rottmann was a son of German-born Basel Missionary, the Rev. Hermann Ludwig Rottmann and Regina Hesse of Osu.

²⁹² SCT 2/4/9 William Quartey of Accra v. Christian Rottmann of accra, PRAAD, Accra, 445.

In order to take advantage of the booming real estate market on the Gold Coast, English merchants Peter Spinok and Charles Lintott registered their real estate firm, Lintott Spink & Co in London. The firm was to “make, sign, seal and execute all such Conveyances, assignments or other assurances by way of Mortgage with all proper and usual power clauses and covenants (including power of sale)” of the “real or personal or immovable property, assets or effects” on the “Gold, Windward and Leeward Coasts.” In Cape Coast, the firm appointed William Henry Selby and later George Amissah as their agents on the Gold Coast. The agents received commissions on any house which was leased or sold.²⁹³

Though formal real estate firms like Lintott Spink & Co were virtually one of a kind, by 1874 many on the Gold Coast invested in or saw their properties as potential sources of alternative income. In 1878, Anglo-Gã attorney and civil servant Edmund Bannerman would complain in court that Christian F. Svanekiær’s “building has materially diminished the value of my house” at Osu/Christiansborg.²⁹⁴ Emerging urban realtors and homeowners on the Gold Coast expanded the cultural understanding of the different uses to which houses could be put. To avoid the anxieties of selling or losing family houses, which contained intramural graves, many Gã and Fante began to invest in private homes which they could use as collateral or for rent. With the subjection of houses to the market non-relatives and strangers of diverse backgrounds began to make legal claims on property in unprecedented ways.

²⁹³ Appointment of Henry William Selby of Cape Coast as Agent for Lintott Spink & Co, 6th January 1873 Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1875-80, 173-76.

²⁹⁴ Edmund Bannerman of Christiansborg v Christian F. Swanikier [Svanekiær] of Christiansborg. The 2nd January 1878, Summons No. 27, SCT 2/4/12, PRAAD, Accra, 633-655.

CHAPTER THREE

GBOSHINII: “TRINKETS” AND “VALUABLE THINGS LEFT BY THE DEAD.”

Within the coffins of the more affluent are deposited a great variety of native cloths, gold rings and other valuable trinkets and occasionally a few bottles filled with gold dust while upon their exterior surface are placed the brass ewer and basin, with the spoon, which the family now deemed an indispensable accompaniment towards the comfort to be attained in the next world.

– William Daniell, British ethnographer, Accra, 1856.

In January 2019, I visited Leonard Crossland, a seventy-eight year old Senior Lecturer Emeritus in archaeology at the University of Ghana, Legon. Crossland owns a large collection of imported and locally manufactured glass and clay beads as well as some gold and silver jewelry and waist girdles, the oldest of which were purchased by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁹⁵ Mr. Crossland had inherited many of these artefacts from his mother, Eliza Hansen (1917-2002). The artefacts had been passed down from Eliza Hansen’s great great great grandmother, a Gã woman named Efia. In our conversations, Crossland carefully detailed the stories of the artefacts, while connecting each item to successive descendants of Efia who added to the collection. In emphasizing the importance of these heirlooms, Crossland showed me the last will and testament of his late maternal grandmother, Adorkor Akwei. The document was dated September 23 1974. In this will, Adorkor charged her “[e]xecutors to make a meticulous inventory of all [her] Trinkets and

²⁹⁵ Leonard Crossland informs me that though his family collection dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, many of the beads in the collection were manufactured between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Interview with Leonard Crossland January 11, 2019, Accra.

costly Beads.” She further warned the “trustees” of the artefacts “to show a high degree of diligence in dealing with these treasures.”²⁹⁶

But the interchangeable use of the term “trinkets” and “treasures” in the will and testament to refer to heirlooms seems strange or even incongruous as the two words do not seem to be synonymous. After all, in English language usage, “trinkets” connote “trifles” or any object without an intrinsic commercial or spiritual value. Nonetheless, Adorkor’s “trinkets” were valuable and sacred because the collection could be traced back to their ancestress, Efia. According to family tradition, Efia was originally of non-Gã servile origins and became assimilated into the Gbèsé *akutso* of Kinkã. By dint of her entrepreneurial skills, Efia attained the status of an important trader in beads and merchandise.²⁹⁷

In this chapter, I explore the competing and evolving spiritual and commercial value of material goods – “trinkets,” ritual objects, beads, jewelry, textiles, furniture and other movable property left by the dead. Scholars and historians of the African Atlantic world tend to discuss material goods and property accruing from Atlantic commerce mostly in economic terms without adequately centering the religious and ancestral significance of artefacts and “things.”²⁹⁸ This chapter blurs this divide in the history of Africa’s material pasts by discussing the spiritual/ancestral and commercial value of material goods in a single analytical frame. I

²⁹⁶ See “The Last Will of Adorkor Akatoi Akwei of Accra, dated at Nyonmowokweo Chambers, Accra this 23rd day of September 1974.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Leonard Crossland, January 11, 2019, Accra. Crossland was also interviewed in the documentary film, “Controlling the Fire: The Value of the Bead: Beauty and Personhood in Contemporary Ghana (2014)” 30:48, YouTube, posted by Kearsley Stewart/Duke University, March 7, 2014, <https://youtu.be/u5RowXphvCg>.

²⁹⁸ See for example Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast*; Susan Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation and Traditional Social Relations on the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 12, No. 1 (1978): 19-36; R. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500-1891* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981); Robin Law, ed. *From Slave Trade to ‘Legitimate’ Commerce*; Silke Strikrodt, *Afro-European trade in the Atlantic world*; Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*; Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*.

combine both oral, ethnographic and archival sources to examine the history and legacies of how Gold Coast families broadly conceptualized the physical and spiritual protection of material goods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most importantly, I examine how ideas about power and ancestral veneration connected to material goods were constantly reworked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These transformations in the cultural utility of material goods were largely the consequences of the expansion in the market value of “sacred things” in the context of Atlantic commerce.

Material goods were sacred insofar as they were connected to the ancestors, the dead or obtained from shrines, but such artefacts could also be commercially valuable. In eighteenth century Accra, the Tete Kpeshi We were among families who specialized in manufacturing and selling protective amulets (Fante: *asuman*; Gã: *sebe*) in local markets for “two acyys to two bendes” a piece.²⁹⁹ In the 1780s, Isert rightly observed that the Gã “nobility w[ore] aggreys, a variety of bead made of mosaic, on their wrists and around their necks. They set the greatest store by these aggreys.”³⁰⁰ These accumulated imported Aggrey (Gã:*adiagba*) beads would have attained a sacred value over the generations.³⁰¹ For Africans on the Gold Coast, the intrinsic value of family artefacts were derived from their connection to lineage history and ancestral connections and such material goods could fetch higher prices on the market. Isert noted in Osu and Accra in the 1780s that beads which appeared to be of the same value did not necessarily command the same prices on the market:

[the] thickness of a finger and one inch long, are at times worth the price of seven persons, while others of the same do not exceed the price of one

²⁹⁹ Kea, *Social and Cultural History*, 145. A bende (“bendy”) was worth two ounces of gold (valued at £ 8) and an Ackie (“acuy”) was equivalent to 1/16 of an ounce of gold (valued at 5 shillings or £ 0.25). See Law ed. *The English in West Africa, 1691-1699: The Local Correspondences of the Royal African Company of England, 1681-1699, Part 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), XVII.

³⁰⁰ Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*, 153.

³⁰¹ Aggreys were highly valuable blue beads of West African manufacture. See Law ed. *The English in West Africa, 1691-1699*, XVIII.

ounce of gold. The reason for some being so much expensive is that these had gold. The reason for some being so much expensive is that these had been worn by such-and-such a great general or a king, and the more such great men one can prove to have used them, or the more important battles they had been in, the greater their worth. The dregs of our European nobility are not alone in being proud of their ancestors!³⁰²

It is important to note that the use of the demeaning term “trinkets” in Adorkor’s postcolonial will was simply an appropriation of colonial language that came to be understood as valuable heirlooms empowered by ancestors. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European travel writings, colonial deeds and legal records referred to mortgaged or pawned gold and silver pieces as “(family) trinkets” or “knickknacks.” However, many of these so-called “trinkets” had a commercial value beyond their sacred worth and Gold Coast merchants recognized these artefacts as valuable property. The language of Adorkor’s will must therefore be understood as an African appropriation of European legal terminology for solely administrative purposes and did not in any way diminish the sacred value of the artefacts. In employing the use of a written will, Adorkor sought to determine without the ambiguity of a traditional oral testament who in her family could inherit and keep her sacred property for posterity. Evidently, the descendants of Efia, including Adorkor Akwei and Leonard Crossland never lost sight of the sacred and commercial significance of their family “trinkets” or property.

In Gã usage, the word for property, *gboshinii*, loosely translates as “things left by the dead” and this is closely related to the Fante-Akan, *egyapadze* (Twi: *egyapadɛɛ*). Similarly, *egyapadze* connotes “valuable things that have been left.”³⁰³ As “things” associated with the dead and ancestral veneration, all forms of inherited property, whether movable or immovable

³⁰² Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*, 154.

³⁰³ I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Kweku Darko Ankrah of the University of Ghana for confirming my English translation of *egyapadze*.

including dwellings, heirlooms, jewelry, textiles and clothing were invested with various degrees of spiritual, symbolic and commercial value and power.³⁰⁴ Though pre-colonial Gold Coast Africans recognized *gboshiniilegyapadze* as sacred their European trading partners mostly thought otherwise.

Despite being sacred, the raw materials used in the manufacture of these artefacts could either be sourced locally or obtained from regional or Atlantic trade networks. Most importantly, material objects – sacred or commercial – communicated the powerful status and “privileged essence” of wealthy merchants and rulers who participated in Atlantic commerce.³⁰⁵ Material goods obtained in Atlantic or regional markets could be incorporated into funerary or mortuary practices or could be inherited over several generations and thus attain a sacred quality or mystique. I examine the blurry lines between the sacred and commoditized functions of objects. In doing so, this chapter highlights the tensions in subjecting “sacred” things to the Atlantic and colonial market while simultaneously valuing their ritual significance as artefacts of ancestral veneration.

Commercial Exchange and the Making of Sacred “Things”

As corporate structures, households on the Gold Coast did not have equal access to commercial inflows and markets. From the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, Gold Coast ruling families and grandees (*Gã: oblemponmei*; Akan *abirempɔn*) monopolized the distribution of imported commodities. By the early nineteenth century, however, emergent Euro-African households also became important in the “exchange of commodities” of diverse origins.³⁰⁶ In the

³⁰⁴ Sea Kea, *Social and Cultural History*, 229; Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Sanders, “On the Materiality of Black Atlantic Ritual” in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic* of the black Atlantic, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Sanders (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014).

³⁰⁵ Kea, *Social and Cultural History*, 291.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

1780s, Paul Erdmann Isert observed at Osu and Accra that textiles, “usually of coarse cotton cloth” were “brought here from East India or of printed cotton, or of chintz, or of half-silk or silk cloth.”³⁰⁷ With the emergence of reliable commercial shipping in the nineteenth century, Gold Coast merchants could add “fresh acquisition” of “mercantile novelties” to their “private stock every year” from both European and West African sources.³⁰⁸



Fig.17. A 19th century coral waist bead. Reproduced with the permission of Leonard Crossland. Photo by author January 2019.

William Daniell, observed that local merchants in Accra imported a “testaceous product” (coral), which was used in the manufacture of necklaces (coral beads) which was then in “vogue” on the Gold Coast and “among the multitudinous tribes of the interior.” In Accra, Gã “fetish men and

³⁰⁷ Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade*, 152.

³⁰⁸ Daniell, “On the Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampé,”

their families” considered coral beads as “sacred” and arrogated to themselves “the function of conservators” for “all articles of aboriginal foundation.”³⁰⁹

Such an assessment could be broadened to include the major towns along the Gold Coast. Archaeological evidence suggests that imported European and regional trade goods and ceramics “were far more common in undisturbed articulated Elmina burials” in pre-nineteenth and nineteenth century contexts.³¹⁰ Compared to the eighteenth century, the importation of beads increased in the nineteenth. The average commercial value of beads imported into the British spheres of influence on the Gold Coast was £ 6,162 between 1846-1855; £ 7,354 between 1846-1850; £4,970 between 1851-1855. However, the value of imported beads varied and fluctuated in any given year in the nineteenth century. For example, while the total cost of imported beads were valued at £ 8,660 in 1846, it cost £11,000 in 1847, £ 9000 in 1848 £ 2,200 in 1858 and £ 4,835 in 1855.³¹¹

Besides beads, the Gold Coast imported European or Indian textiles and other luxury goods and these material goods not only transformed local dress culture but also funerary and mortuary rituals. In fact, general imports in “Manchester goods” which comprised “cottons, damasks &c” and other “wearing apparel” increased in 1846 from £ 19, 650 to £ 82, 238 in 1855.³¹² Given their preeminent access to the Atlantic market, Euro-African households had access to many of these imported material goods. These imported goods played crucial roles in the ritual praxis and fashion culture of merchant households. In the 1840s, US naval officer, Horatio Bridge noted that “native wives [sic]” married to “Europeans [and Euro-Africans],”

³⁰⁹ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 6.

³¹⁰ Christopher DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400-1900*, (Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 189.

³¹¹ Unsigned, Cape coast Castle to the Rt. Hon H. Labouchere, 25th October 1856, CO 96/38, TNA, Kew, 529-30.

³¹² Unsigned, Cape coast Castle to the Rt. Hon H. Labouchere, 25th October 1856, CO 96/38 TNA, Kew, 528.

including Yaa Hom dressed “in a modest, but peculiar style; of which the lady of [James] Bannerman may give an example.”³¹³ Having been hosted by James Bannerman in his house, Bridge offers us one of the most detailed European descriptions of the fashion tastes of a named West African before the twentieth century. Yaa Hom, Bridge noted, “wore a close-fitting muslin chemisette, buttoned to the throat with gold buttons, a black silk tunic extending to the thigh, a colored cotton cloth, fastened round the waist and falling as low as the ancles [sic], black silk stockings and prunella shoes.”³¹⁴

Bridge’s description of Yaa Hom’s choice of fashion shows her cosmopolitan outlook and connections to global commercial circuits. Unfortunately, there is no known surviving photograph or portrait of Yaa Hom. Nonetheless, contemporary photographs of Gold Coast merchants’ spouses or daughters give us a good sense of how elite women with such global connections adorned themselves. Mid to late nineteenth century studio photographs like this one of Okāñle of Osu, a daughter of Gā merchant Nii Okāñte Shikatse expresses the confidence and sense of cultural sophistication of the mercantile class. Okāñle is wearing a dress made of imported chintz fabric. She is also adorned with rings, bracelets, a necklace and a hairpin, all made of gold. It is likely she also wore expensive waist beads beneath her dress. With centuries of African and European trade, articles of adornment such as chintz, damasks, brocades and other expensive textiles were accumulated as “sacred things” which were used in ritual and funerary adornments.

³¹³ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser*, 141.

³¹⁴Ibid.



Fig. 18. Okāñle of Osu, (a daughter of nineteenth century Gā merchant Nii Okāñte Shikatse) in dress made of imported chintz fabric. She is also adorned with gold rings, bracelets, necklace and hair pin. Courtesy: David Solomon Okantey, Osu, Accra.

In the African Atlantic world, material goods were not just associated with commerce but also central to social status, ritual and funerary praxis. Though Copper manillas were used as currency in the Niger Delta during the peak of the slave trade, they were also required to enter the powerful Èkpè secret societies.³¹⁵ Likewise cloth currencies were used in elaborate royal burials in the Kongo in the late eighteenth century.³¹⁶ In the coastal towns of the Gold Coast and its Akan interior, silk (Gā: *sliki*; Akan: *sirikye*) became the preferred textile for making the loin cloth or undergarment known as *tekle* (Gā) or the *danta* (Akan/Fante). For many Gā and Fante,

³¹⁵ Manillas were also worn as bracelets in West Africa. Law ed. *The English in West Africa, 1691-1699*, XVIII.

³¹⁶ Green, *A Fistful of Shells*, 21.

sliki tekle or *sirikye danta* also became the undergarment of choice for deceased people and this survived into the twentieth century. Towards the end of his life, a Gã man named Archibald Mensah Wellington (1896-1987) would make a death wish to be buried in a *sliki tekle*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such death wishes were epitomized in the popular Gã expression “*matse sliki tekle*” or to wit, “I shall don the silk loin cloth.”³¹⁷ Apart from the *sliki tekle*, other articles of mortuary adornment very much expressed Gold Coast families’ connection to Atlantic commerce and wealth accumulation.

In 1859, Charles Bannerman recounted seeing the body of his deceased “mulatto aunt” dressed in the “gayest raiment” at Accra. The deceased was fitted with gold and other valuable ornaments in addition to “a [Spanish] doubloon” “tied over each eye” and laid in state in “a large stone house.”³¹⁸ Unfortunately, Charles did not explain the significance of tying doubloons on the eyes of the corpse. Having being raised and educated in England, Charles returned to Accra as a young man and was probably ignorant of what he observed. Several years later as a mature Accra man in 1859, Charles could still not give the full cultural details of his observation. He seemed quite detached from the funeral and described the events in very ethnographic language: “That [same] day she was buried, and the noise, and bristle and excitement of an African funeral were for the first time since the days of my infancy presented to my notice.”³¹⁹ Besides his odd distance from his own kith and kin, as evident in his writings, Charles’ observations hint at the ritual significance of imported artefacts like the doubloon in Gã and Fante burial practices and beliefs about the usefulness of these artefacts in the netherworld (Gã: *gbohiiajey*; Akan:

³¹⁷ H. Nii-Adziri Wellington, “*Matse Sliki Tekle: A Cultural History of the Ga Funerary Cloth*” *Research Review Supplement* 17 (2006): 166.

³¹⁸ Charles Bannerman, “The Recollections of an Old Sinner,” *The West African Herald* April 18, 1859.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

nsamando). But what could Spanish gold coins or doubloons (also known as Spanish dollars) do for a Gold Coast “mulatto” lady in the netherworld?

The spectacular display of doubloons and gold ornaments on the body of the deceased reinforced the popular belief in the importance of wealth in the afterlife. In the early nineteenth century, Hans Monrad observed at Osu and Accra that “Negroes” were buried with “goods, beads, gold, etc. which the deceased takes with him in his coffin or grave, all the cowries used to pay for the funeral will appear in the other world, along with the deceased to his advantage.”³²⁰ What this means is that the netherworld, though considered spiritual or ethereal, very much mirrored the material world of the living. In Gã and Fante belief, grave goods were considered animate objects with souls. In that case, the spirit of the deceased could “put” the goods “to use” in the netherworld “although physically the objects remain untouched.”³²¹ While grave goods underscored the belief in the afterlife, such movable property also reflected the material cultural influences of Gold Coast merchants’ commercial networks.

The display of such wealth also reinforced the social status of elite merchant families. In the 1830s and 40s, Cruickshank observed that “doubloons” were among several gold ornaments such as “sovereigns, figures of serpents, fish, alligators, and crosses” that “completely covered the hair” of Fante (and by extension Gã) girls undergoing puberty rites.³²² Such displays of the doubloon points to its important cultural resonance as *gboshinii* or *egyapadze* which could be used for rites of passage such as puberty rites and burials.

In tying a Spanish gold coin on each eye of their deceased relative, the Bannerman family portrayed the elaborate symbolism that characterized Gã and Fante obsequies. These elaborate

³²⁰ Monrad, *A Brief and Truthful Description*, 38.

³²¹ Ako Adjei, “Mortuary Usages of the Ga People,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 45, no.1 (Jan. - Mar., 1943): 91.

³²² Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 217-18.

rituals involved the artistic re-enactments of the lifestyle, vocation or pastime of deceased persons. As a member of a wealthy mercantile family, Charles' "mulatto" aunt was probably an importer of luxury goods from Europe and the Americas. And as such one needs doubloons to participate in such international commercial exchanges. In that regard, the funeral could be read as a celebration of the accumulative prowess of African merchant households on the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. It is not clear from Charles' writings which of the "large" Bannerman "stone house[s]," the funeral was held. But many of their family establishments including that of James Bannerman's had "some twelve or fifteen steps" and "the under part forming a store house, in which everything arriving from England was deposited."³²³

Brodie Cruickshank similarly observed at a Fante funeral in which the deceased was dressed "with great care in the richest robes" and "[t]hus appareled, it [was] then propped up in a chair or sofa, and [was] ready to receive the visits of those who come to do the honours of its burial."³²⁴ More importantly, "[s]pirits and food are placed upon a table before it, and a close observation is necessary to satisfy one that life is extinct, so closely do the arrangements resemble the ordinary occasions of show and festivity, which he was wont to observe in his lifetime."³²⁵ While the re-enactment of past lives during funerals and the burial of the dead with grave goods further cemented the belief in the afterlife, it also reveals how imported artefacts communicated prestige and economic status. Material goods obtained in Atlantic or regional markets were kept as family relics. Many of these material goods were also incorporated into funerary and mortuary practices.

³²³ Huntley, *Seven Years' Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa, Volume I*, 81.

³²⁴ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, 217-18.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

Pawning Sacred “Things” buried with the Dead

While family relics signified the power and status of Gold Coast merchants, they could also be pawned or used as collateral to obtain credit for goods. Though the pawning of heirlooms or other movable property was somewhat controversial due to their connections to family heritage, the available records suggest that it was not uncommon. By the eighteenth century, Gã and Fante trade brokers possessed a vast knowledge of the material goods that numerous households had accumulated and were willing to use as collateral. The availability of such sacred goods determined the credit worthiness of a number of prominent families from whom coastal middle men secured European credits for. Such knowledge facilitated trade in household objects in lieu of human cargo. In November 1727, Ofori Tibo of Kinkã (Dutch Accra) acted as broker on behalf of an unidentified Akwamu merchant whose 70 rigsdaler (or about 4^{1/3} ounces of gold) worth of gold jewelry, he pawned to the Danes in exchange for varieties of cloth. Two months after the transaction, the Akwamu merchant failed to pay for the merchandise as he had promised and the Danes sold the jewelry.³²⁶ It is not clear from the evidence, the extent to which this unidentified merchant attached emotive or spiritual value to the gold jewelry or how he acquired it.

In conserving heirlooms, surviving families formed an enduring connection with their deceased relatives. But such goods could also be pawned or mortgaged in commercial and legal transactions. When Abenaba Kwessel, a native of Cape Coast died in 1845, her niece Abenaba Mansa “cut off one string” of “Coral Beads” for her Anglo-Fante son, William Scott and “buried” the “other three with her” in the family house. Abenaba Kwessel also possessed “2 gold combs the large one was used for her hair when she was buried and the smaller one was kept in

³²⁶ Kea, *Social and Cultural History*, 251.

the box for her son.”³²⁷ This symbolic division of the property was meant to bind the living and the dead. After Abenaba Kwessel’s death her son, William “pawned” her “silver keys” to a certain Kodwo Ampia. The keys had been given to Abenaba by her British husband (William’s father) upon their marriage in Cape Coast.³²⁸ Despite pawning the silver keys and “1000” coral beads, William Scott and Abenaba Mansa still regarded the *egyapadze* as sacred.

In 1877, Abenaba Mansa would have cause to complain in court that “the [silver] keys originally were 80 in no. [number],” but since the time of “Coesy [Kwessel] having lent them from time to time their number got reduced to about 70.”³²⁹ Prior to her death in 1845, Abenaba Kwessel pawned her own trinkets for monetary loans; a practice that her niece and son would continue. Abenaba Kwessel’s possession of keys which were at once ornamental, ceremonial and sacred points to the ways in which urban Gold Coast Africans incorporated aspects of European material objects into their own cultural repertoire. As early as the end of the sixteenth century, Dutchman Pieter de Marees, observed that Gold Coast African women put imported European keys “together in a bunch and hang on their bodies” but such artefacts were brought in “such quantities that they were no longer wanted or valued.” The reason being that the “keys did not fit their [Gold Coast African] wives’ chests.”³³⁰ De Marees’ observation is one of the earliest accounts of ornamental keys and its connection to marriage. Rather than dying out as de Marees observed in about 1602, the ‘tradition’ of keeping imported keys persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³³¹

³²⁷ Abinabah Mansah v Samuel Watts, Judicial assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Thursday 22 January 1877, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 324.

³²⁸ Abinabah Mansah v Samuel Watts, Judicial assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Thursday 22 January 1877, SCT 5//19, PRAAD, Accra, 324.

³²⁹ Abinabah Mansah v Samuel Watts, 312.

³³⁰ Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, translated from the Dutch and edited by Adam Jones and Albert van Dantzig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 54.

³³¹ Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade*, 157.

By the eighteenth century, imported keys had become a part of elite women's fashion on the Gold Coast. Paul Isert, observed at Osu that "[i]n the knot in front of the *Regio Critica* [critical area] hangs a large bunch of silver keys, small bells and Spanish thaler [doubloon], which makes a jingling sound while the woman is walking so that one can hear her at a distance of some hundred paces when she appears in public."³³² In the 1850s, William Daniell wrote that a "bunch of keys" were part of "gifts of connubial import" that was central to the consummation of marriages between European and Euro-African or African women on the Gold Coast.³³³ Keys were supposed to lock such connubial relationships. Abenaba Kwessel, like other African or Euro-African women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have proudly worn her bunch of silver keys "suspended" on the "girdle by [her] side."³³⁴ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the wearing of keys around the girdle was still popular among elite African and Euro-African women. In an engraving in his travelogue, published in London in 1821, William Hutton depicted a "Mulatto Woman" of the Gold Coast wearing an imported white long-sleeved blouse; a long skirt of chintz fabric with a traditional Gold Coast-style bustle underneath, an imported white long-sleeved blouse and a colorful girdle with a bunch of hanging silver keys. The engraving also shows a medallion necklace, rings, dangling elaborate earrings, anklets on both legs, a toe ring and a bracelet, all made of gold as well as beads and an imported umbrella. Hutton's engraving may express his fascination with these 'exotic' and wealthy Gold Coast women. But most significantly for our purpose, Hutton's of the silver keys and other artefacts, supports evidence from other documented sources which suggests that interracial marriages provided Gold Coast women an avenue to accumulate valuable goods.

³³² Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade*, 157.

³³³ Daniell, "Ethnography of Akkrah and Adampe," 7.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*



Fig. 19. An engraving of a Euro-African woman of the Gold Coast with a bunch of silver keys tied to her girdle. Some of the gold ornaments in her hair may include Spanish gold doubloons. Source: William Hutton, *A Voyage to Africa*, 1821.

These valuable materials, which could either be trade goods or marriage gifts, like in the case of Abenaba Kwessel, could also acquire spiritual or ancestral value in addition to its commercial worth.

Elsewhere along the West African coast and particularly in Senegambia, European men gifted ornamental keys made of gold, silver or brass to their African wives and these became important status symbols.³³⁵ In many cultures along West Africa's Atlantic coast, keys and locks functioned as objects through which desires were spiritually brought to fruition.³³⁶ A bunch of keys would have been a perfect metaphor to celebrate inter-racial marriages, since such unions conferred trade concessions and economic opportunities for the couple and their respective communities.³³⁷

As family houses served as centers for accumulating wealth and material goods, relatives were responsible for adorning the bodies of their deceased members. Clothing and jewelry used in adorning the dead could be the deceased's own property or a family possession. In his *Fanti Customary Laws* (1897), John Mensah Sarbah, explained that in instances of severe financial crises "ancestral property" even if buried with the dead could be pawned, mortgaged or sold.³³⁸ In this Fante legal practice known as "*pūn*," ("redemption"), "[w]here family or ancestral property has been alienated for value, the original owners, or those descended from them, can repurchase such property, provided the proper [animal] sacrifice is offered, the necessary libations are made, and the family or persons in possession are not residing on such property or using it."³³⁹ It is not clear from Sarbah's explanations the extent to which *pūn* was successful or widely practiced among the Fante. Evidently, the Fante framers of this law or practice

³³⁵ See Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 45; 125.

³³⁶ Suzanne Preston Blier, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 289.

³³⁷ See Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*; George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*.

³³⁸ Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws*, 62.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

understood the spiritual consequences of alienating ancestral property of any kind without appeasing the ancestors.

More so, property buried with the dead was absolutely necessary for the deceased. British ethnographer William Daniell observed in the 1850s that deceased women in Gã-speaking towns were “seldom interred until bedecked with a zone of [“fufua”] shells” obtained from the Ewe and Dāŋme-speaking regions of the southeastern Gold Coast. The reason being that they would not be recognized by “their friends and ancestors in the next world.”³⁴⁰ Apart from the *fufua* shells, *bɔdɔm* and *akoso* beads made from pulverized and heated glass were used to adorn deceased relatives.³⁴¹ In that regard, many Gã and Fante believed that an uneventful funeral or lack of expensive jewelry or clothing for deceased people could provoke their anger or disappointment. Surviving relatives also showcased their power and social status through ostentatious funerals. All these beliefs and practices were translated into expensive funerals, grave goods and costly adornment for the deceased.³⁴²

However, in instances of family indebtedness, the surviving relatives could recover jewelry and other goods buried with the dead after necessary rituals have been performed to appease the dead. Brodie Cruickshank vividly described instances where surviving relatives recovered from graves “valuables in gold and handsome cloths” in dire times.³⁴³ Cruickshank observed that “we find these provident caterers for their deceased relation, sometimes disturbing his bones to rake from them the gold which had been buried with him.”³⁴⁴ In Cruickshank’s

³⁴⁰ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 5.

³⁴¹ Interview with Leonard Crossland, Accra, January 11, 2019.

³⁴² See for example, de Marees, *An Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; Rasmus Rask, *Two Views from Christiansborg Castle; Volume I: A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea (1713)*, edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2008); Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*; Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast*; Winsnes ed. *A Danish Jew*. The belief that a non-costly funeral or adornment may cause the deceased relative to be angry or would mar the prestige of the family is still popular in Ghana.

³⁴³ Brodie Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast*, 136.

³⁴⁴ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast*, 137.

interpretation, the recovery of burial goods “glaringly contradicted” the African belief that the dead had any use for these valuables in the afterlife.³⁴⁵

Cruikshank would not have made such a conclusion if he knew about *pūn*. Without downplaying the belief in the afterlife, Robert Clarke, observed that “[w]here the deceased is wealthy valuable articles as gold ornaments, gold dust and aggergy [Aggrey; Gã: *adiagba*] beads are place in the coffin and the body is sprinkled with gold dust.” Clarke further noted that “these tombs in many ways become family banks and in time of trouble the gold so deposited is applied to meet pressing claims or other family purposes.”³⁴⁶ Clarke’s observations unwittingly describe the practice of *pūn*. To be fair to Cruickshank and Clarke, many Fante found the practice of *pūn* quite controversial since it involved the pawning or selling of grave goods. Despite Cruickshank and Clarke’s shock and dismay, the practice of *pūn* was by all accounts not uncommon. The prevalence of indebtedness on the Gold Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, may have given rise to the custom of *pūn*. The custom may have provided options for families who wanted to pay debts or obtain credits without having to sell or pawn a close relative.

The spiritual and social significance given to funerals ensured that they were very expensive undertakings and also a major source of indebtedness for many Gã and Fante families. The surviving relatives of deceased persons often borrowed huge sums of money to please the dead with elaborate funerals and huge celebrations. Several European ethnographic accounts recorded between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries provide details about the ostentatious nature of Gã and Fante funerals. Many such commemorations often extended several days or

³⁴⁵ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast*, 136.

³⁴⁶ “Medical Report for 1858” enclosed in Bird, Ag Gov. Cape Coast Castle, Gold Coast to The Rt. Hon. Sir E.B. Lytton, M.P. 11th July 1859, CO 96/45, TNA, Kew.

even months depending on the social or political status of the deceased.³⁴⁷ Since households functioned as a jural collective or corporate entities, all relatives whether dead or alive were required to help in servicing family debts.³⁴⁸ Such debts included the ones incurred after funerals. Isert observed among the Gã that “[e]very single house or family is obliged to take care of its own members, and if one among them is suffering privation, the whole family must suffer as well.”³⁴⁹ In line with this jural principle, many believed that a deceased person would rather permit his or her grave goods to be sold to defray family debts rather than risk the pawning or enslavement of relatives to serve that purpose. The prevalence of indebtedness on the Gold Coast ensured that relatives – dead or alive – served as a form of social security that prevented their members from being “panyarred” or seized as slaves or pawns by Africans and European companies alike.³⁵⁰

By the first half of the nineteenth century, pawning had assumed a new form that was popular enough to catch the attention and curiosity of European residents on the Gold Coast. If the fear of Atlantic enslavement compelled African merchants to meet their debt obligations, the threat to deny pawns a decent home burial also had a similar effect on local trading families. Deceased pawns on the Gold Coast were denied home burials unless the family paid their monetary value or replaced them. Otherwise, creditors risked cancelling out the debts should they bury the deceased and this was in line with African legal regulations on the Gold Coast.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ See Pieter de Marees, *An Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; Rasmus Rask, *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea*; Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*; Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast*.

³⁴⁸ See Ray Kea, *A Cultural and Social History*, 197.

³⁴⁹ Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*, 189.

³⁵⁰ See de Marees, *An Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*; Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*; Rasmus Rask, *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea*; Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*; Monrad, *A Description of the Guinea Coast*. For more discussions about panyarring and indebtedness on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast*, 19-20; Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 32, 92, 131, 146, 178-79.

³⁵¹ See Monrad, *A Truthful Description*, 94; Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*; Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 16-17.

In observing a practice called “*agba*” (or “*akpa*” in Monrad’s rendering), Monrad noted that in Accra, “Negro pawns [were] not buried” but placed “on poles” located a “short distance from the town.” Four poles of about “4 to 5 alen” (approximately 251.08 – 313.85 cm) in length were “pound[ed]” into the ground to “form an irregular rectangle the length of a person’s body.” On this pole, the deceased pawn was “laid either in a gun crate or wrapped in a mat.” To European residents in Accra, this practice “spread a disgusting stench.” Nonetheless the practice proved to be an effective means of recovering debt since “the pawn laid there is quickly redeemed.” The relatives of deceased persons did not want to suffer the indignity of not burying their dead family members. In instances where birds or animals devoured the corpses, the “pawnbrokers” did not lose claim to their debts on the family. The destruction or mutilation of corpses by animals or the elements did not absolve surviving relatives of the debt of their deceased relatives. Europeans on the Gold Coast began to “[make] use of this practice with their subjects.” This unfortunate fate was meted out to an indebted “Christian Mulatto soldier,” named Lindberg “who had shot himself.” The deceased was laid on “poles” because his Gã family in Osu could not pay his debts.³⁵² It is likely that since Lindberg committed suicide, his family did not want to give him a home burial since he would have been considered an *otɔfo* or vengeful and restless evil spirit who would torment them.

More than forty years after Monrad left Osu and Accra, William Daniell, would similarly observe that “[p]awns, or other individuals who die heavily in debt are denied the rights of sepulchre” and are “exposed on an elevated platform on the outskirts of town enshrouded by mats or enclosed in boxes.”³⁵³ Though Monrad did not state how widespread the practice was on the Gold Coast and its interior, Daniell noted that a “similar interdict is said to exist in Kumase

³⁵² Monrad, *Description of the Guinea Coast*, 94.

³⁵³ Daniell, “Ethnography,” 16-17.

and other Ashante [Asante] towns,” a fact his Gã or Asante informants would have told him.³⁵⁴ In denying deceased pawns the right to be interred, African and European creditors exploited a deep-seated fear on the Gold Coast about the belief that bad omen may befall a family who fails to accord their dead relatives a home burial or a decent funeral. In Gã and Akan belief, those who were denied the dignity of decent burials and funerals supposedly became angry and vengeful spirits and wreaked havoc on their surviving relatives. Apart from the supernatural consequences, the denial of burial and funerals to a deceased relative was considered a disgraceful act.

Elsewhere in the Fante-speaking part of the Gold Coast, there was a similar practice of not burying deceased strangers for fear of becoming liable for their debts. In cases where a deceased person’s properties were not enough to service their debts, Cruickshank observed that the family could avoid liability by carrying “a small present to the authorities of the town, and deliver the body to them for internment.” Though this legal dispensation could absolve surviving relatives of any debt obligations, “it is not frequently had recourse to, as great disgrace is attached to any family who thus declines to bury their dead, and they prefer to incur debt, and even slavery to this reproach.”³⁵⁵ These various European observations underscore the ways in which debt, mortgaging or pawning of human beings and property were closely tied to local mortuary and funerary practices as well as beliefs about the afterlife.

“Redeeming” “Family Trinkets” in Colonial Courts

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the pawning of sacred heirlooms became a major source of litigations within and between families. By the 1850s and 1860s, a good number of

³⁵⁴Daniell, “Ethnography,” 16-17.

³⁵⁵ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*, 222.

cases brought before the courts of the British “Forts and Settlements on the Gold Coast” involved the theft or (un)lawful pawning of “trinkets.” As British “justice” expanded beyond the walls of “the Forts and Settlements,” African and Euro-African families asserted the importance of “trinkets” in structuring their social and commercial relations. In that regard, British judges and magistrates increasingly recognized the monetary worth of “trinkets” or family heirlooms as collateral or security for loans.

In 1860, Catherine Swanzy, a respected Anglo-Fante merchant sued her employee and lover, Thomas Hughes, also a Cape Coast native to “deliver up certain family Trinkets pieces of gold Rock and plate value[d] at [about] £100 sterg [sterling].” Though Catherine had permitted, Hughes to pawn the “trinkets” “twice” for his own purpose a few years earlier while both of them were on a business trip to England, Catherine vehemently denied knowledge of the transactions for which reason she sued him.³⁵⁶ It appears the confusion was largely due to the fact that, Catherine was unlettered and Hughes was not very transparent about his transactions in England on behalf of his employer.

A decade later, in 1870, another Anglo-Fante merchant Joseph Smith, recalled his family consenting to his selling of a “gold plate” for “400 dollars” “33 years ago.” Joseph Smith had been reluctant to sell the artefact since he “had given” it to his “family as a family relic” and “[t]herefore did not Consider [he] should give it up.”³⁵⁷ What is interesting about this Smith case was his power to designate a gold plate as a family relic even though he had not inherited it. As a future ancestor, Joseph Smith had the power to confer on such material goods he obtained in trade as family relics to be kept for posterity. But Smith was not a novice in selling “trinkets”

³⁵⁶ Catherine Swanzy agst Thomas Hughes, 27th August 1860, SCT 5/4/27, PRAAD, Accra, 299-300.

³⁵⁷Re: Joseph Smith Application for discharge. E. Bannerman for petitioner in the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice, Cape Coast 13th January 1870, SCT 5/4/92, PRAAD, Accra,43.

whenever he was in financial crisis. He had earlier sold a “silver plate” to an “American,” a “Mr. Fitch” for “4 dollars.” Smith himself had obtained both the silver and gold plates “[w]hilst trading with Forster and Smith” of London.³⁵⁸

The emotional and spiritual attachment to “trinkets” were expressed in several attempts at legal redress regarding people who felt unlawfully dispossessed of such valuables. While giving testimony in court in 1869, “Mrs. [Christiana] Musgrove” claimed that before her husband, “Mr. Musgrove” died in Cape Coast the previous year, he left “one gold neck chain, one Gold Hair comb, one pair Gold earrings, 66 Trinkets for waist, one ditto for neck, six ditto for feet and gold Trinkets called *obiah* [i.e. *ɔbede*; *lit.* “shiny or glowing thing”] to the property of” his daughter, Susanna.³⁵⁹ In seconding her stepmother’s claim, Susanna insisted that the “gold trinkets” “were made for me by my father and understood that I should have them when married.” With the exception of Mrs. Musgrove who supported her step daughter’s claims, the entire extended family maintained that the valuables were a “residue” of the late Mr. Musgrove’s estate.³⁶⁰ James Cataline, a maternal cousin of Mr. Musgrove, would insist in court that “no mention was made of the trinkets” in “the will.” Though Susanna was not successful in convincing the court, her case illustrates the multiple ways in which families deployed heirlooms. For Susanna, wearing “trinkets” that “were made expressly for [her]” by her late father to be worn on “her wedding day” would have added more prestige and spiritual significance to her marriage.

However, the validity of Susanna’s claim rested on the credibility of her assertion that her father made a death-bed declaration bequeathing the “trinkets” and other valuables to her. The fact that Susanna’s claims were not mentioned in the actual will speaks to how colonial courts

³⁵⁸ Re: Joseph Smith Application for discharge. E. Bannerman for petitioner in the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice, Cape Coast 13th January 1870, SCT 5/4/92, PRAAD, Accra, 42.

³⁵⁹ Susanna Musgrove v Cataline & Ghartey, June 16th 1869, SCT 5/4/91, PRAAD, Accra, 193.

³⁶⁰ See Testimony of James Cataline in Susanna Musgrove v Cataline & Ghartey, SCT 5/4/91, PRAAD, Accra, 193.

regarded the written word of a European-style testament as more credible than oral ones. Though oral wills (Akan: *samansew*; literally, “ghost’s oath”; Gã: *shamãṅsho*) could also be administered in a court of law, feuding relatives as evident in the Musgrove case often undermined the credibility of non-written testaments. Sometime in the 1840s, Cruickshank noted that in typically making a non-written will, a man on his deathbed “instructs them [i.e. heirs] about the state of his affairs, and how his property was acquired, and how to be disposed of.” This involves the furnishing of “heirs with proofs respecting the acquisition of his pawns and slaves, mentions the names of the witnesses to the transactions, the circumstances under which they took place and the sums paid for them.” This formal process also included the naming of “debtors” and “the sums they owe.” Such “[d]eath-bed declarations” made in the presence of “responsible witnesses are always received as evidence in the event of litigation.”³⁶¹

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the registration of wills increasingly became popular with the mercantile class. In that vein, colonial courts established in Osu, Accra and Cape Coast determined how several feuding Gã and Fante families conserved or inherited “family trinkets” or heirlooms. Otherwise, owners of material goods chose whom to pass such possessions to. On August 26, 1875, wealthy Cape Coast merchant, Mrs. Mary Barnes (died May 19, 1876) of “Prospect House,” bequeathed to her sister “Mrs. Mary anne Smith of Cape Coast the sum of Five hundred pounds sterling; also [,] one third of my Gold Trinkets and all my wearing apparel.” Mrs. Barnes also bequeathed other “chattel” to Henry William Selby to hold in trust for the former’s “grandson” who was then not of “sufficient age.”³⁶²

³⁶¹ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*, 214.

³⁶² Last Will and Testament of Mary Barnes of Cape Coast dated 26th day of August in the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice of the Settlement on the Gold Coast, Land Registry Documents: Deeds Registry, Accra, 93-94.

Similarly, a “Thomas Acquah of Anomabo now residing at Winnebah [Winneba]” conveyed to his wife Elizabeth Johnson alias Ambah Elizabeth, “all the furniture therein and all the Gold Trinkets possessed by me To have and to hold said tenement absolutely forever and without any incumbrances or restrictions.”³⁶³ In bequeathing movable property to his wife, Thomas Acquah clearly marked his property as one for his Christian nuclear family.³⁶⁴ Declarations such as Acquah’s in a colonial court often protected the future widow from any claims on the property by extended family members. Since colonial courts generally upheld the property rights of Christian-wedded wives away from the claims of matrilineal (in the case of the Fante/Akan) or patrilineal (Gã) kin groups. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, rival claims to property rights became a source of serious tensions between nuclear and extended family groups.³⁶⁵ While at the same time, Christian marriages reinforced many western-educated African and Euro-African merchants’ desire for more privacy, autonomy and less obligation to the *weku* or *ebusua* (extended family).³⁶⁶

By willing their personal property to their wives, husbands could ensure a greater preservation of movable and immovable property, and “trinkets,” for example, would not have to be shared among a large number of legatees within the extended family. Most importantly, many Christian African merchants’ desire to concentrate wealth in their own hands or within their immediate family, “ran counter to the working principles of Akan [and Gã] society.”³⁶⁷ In the

³⁶³ Thomas Acquah conveyance, Cape Coast dated October 9, 1876 in the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice of the Settlement on the Gold Coast, Land Registry Documents: Deeds Registry, Accra, 111-112.

³⁶⁴ The gradual adoption of monogamy in some elite Gold Coast Christian circles may have been motivated partly by economic necessity. The cash-based colonial economy made it increasingly difficult to earn enough wages or salaries to cater for large compound families. See Hermann W. von Hesse, “Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians and the Evolution of Social Space in Nineteenth Century Accra” (M.Phil. thesis, 2014), 131.

³⁶⁵ Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 98.

³⁶⁶ See Susan B. Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation and Traditional Social Relations on the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 12, No. 1 (1978): 19-36; Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 98;. von Hesse, “Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians,” 131.

³⁶⁷ Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation,” 25

1880s, the tensions between the extended and the nuclear families came to the fore in the Gold Coast media. Writing under the pseudonym “Vanderbilt,” (ostensibly styling himself after the famous American business family of the same name) a Cape Coast merchant whose “stores were filled with all sorts of merchandise” argued that he was successful because he “scrupulously shut [his] heart against the distress of the needy, the orphans and the widows; and solely minded [his] own P’s and Q’s.”³⁶⁸ For Vanderbilt, like the capitalistic Vanderbilts, his only obligations were to his “own sons and daughters,” and who he intended “to make the most prominent in the country.” Though it is impossible to know for certain, Vanderbilt was probably in a bitter family feud over property. In his feature article in the *Gold Coast Echo*, he felt “impregnable” to the mounting pressure of Fante society that demanded that wealthy family relatives helped the less privileged.

³⁶⁹

Vanderbilt’s views may sound extreme as historian Roger Gocking noted. However, Fante Wesleyan clergyman, John Sarbah refused to accept the responsibility for the debts of his *ebusua* in Cape Coast.³⁷⁰ Sarbah’s son, the younger John Mensah Sarbah interpreted these social changes as “the advance of civilization tend[ing] to break up the unity of the family.”³⁷¹ In his own will, the younger John Sarbah sought to ameliorate the tensions that resulted in the exclusion of the extended family from wills. He appointed his mother and sister as executors of his will. However, after Sarbah’s early and sudden death in 1910, this move would drive a wedge between his wife, Ekuia Marian Sarbah (née Wood) and his mother, Sarah (née Dutton). Naturally, Sarbah’s matrilineage wanted all of the property. During his lifetime, Sarbah had hoped that his children and widow would inherit half of his property. In fact, such a compromise to the demands of the

³⁶⁸ See *Western Echo* 10 Feb 1886 cited in Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 98.

³⁶⁹ Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 98.

³⁷⁰ 1 Dec 1876, Sarbah Collection 6/4, NAG, Accra, cited in Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation,” 26.

³⁷¹ See Sarbah, *Fante Customary Laws*, 61; Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation,” Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 104.

matrilineage as Sarbah argued in *Fante Customary Laws*, could be traced to “the early years of the missionaries... [in which at her husband’s death] his children and widow took half of his moveable property, while his own family took the other half.”³⁷²

At a deeper level of analysis, the Musgrove, Barnes, Acquah and Sarbah cases illustrate the ways in which wealthy Gold Coast families used colonial courts to strengthen their claims to “valuable things left by the dead.” In making oral or written wills, people also sought to determine who inherited their property or how such artefacts were conserved. These cases also relate to struggles within extended families over the rightful person to keep such important relics since the stakes involved in such pursuits were high. In keeping family relics, one could clandestinely pawn or repurpose such ornaments for commercial gains. While legal records do not always mention how or where families acquired material goods in contention, extant litigation documents hint at what could be described as clandestine or unauthorized dealings in family heirlooms.

In 1849, Charles Bannerman gave a Cape Coast blacksmith “6 ackies worth of gold to make trinkets” and a “bunch of silver keys” ostensibly to be melted down. The blacksmith “admitted that he received these articles” but could not give any “satisfactory account of them [i.e. “trinkets”].” Already in custody, the accused was “sentenced to be once privately whipped and to be confined for six months.”³⁷³ The records are silent about how Charles Bannerman got the “bunch of silver keys.” It is likely he got it from his mother Yaa Hom. If that was the case, the keys could have been Yaa Hom’s marriage gift from her husband, James Bannerman. One could only speculate if Charles had forcibly obtained this artefact. Such a speculation, however, may not be completely unfounded. Nearly thirteen years after the “silver keys” incident, Charles

³⁷² 1 Dec 1876, Sarbah Collection 6/4, NAG, Accra, cited in Kaplow, “Primitive Accumulation,” 26; see also Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 102.

³⁷³ Fosuah Parker v Accosuah, Assessors Court 11 July 1849, SCT 5/4/20, PRAAD, Accra.

forced his mother to pawn a “family trinket” to obtain a loan of “\$102.” In compelling his mother to pawn the heirloom, he “threatened to sell her slaves and land” if she refused to comply with his dictates. Upon failing to redeem the “trinkets,” after eighteen months, Charles’ siblings got the colonial court in Accra to redeem the heirloom.³⁷⁴



Fig. 20. Old “King George V” commemorative cookie container housing nineteenth century gold “trinkets” or figurines in the form of mud-fish and gold “chains” as well as unstrung glass beads. Courtesy Leonard Crossland. Photo by author, March 2019.

So frequent were cases of unlawful “pawning” of heirlooms on the Gold Coast that in May 1858, there were two such cases in the “Police Court” in James Town (“British Accra”). The first case involved a Carl Linkendorf who connived with a certain Kwamina and “pawned” some “gold trinkets,” belonging to Sophia Holm of Osu.³⁷⁵ The court ordered both Linkendorf and Kwamina

³⁷⁴ R. Bannerman v Charles Bannerman “To shew Cause why certain trinkets should not be delivered up the property of Yarwah Bannerman” Magistrate Court Held at James Town Accra this Eighteenth Day of August 1863 before A.B McIntyre, JP., SCT 2/4/2, PRAAD, Accra.

³⁷⁵ Before the commandant and the Mayor of James Town in the case of Sophia Holm v. Carl Linkendorf,” May 21, 1858, SCT 2/4/1, PRAAD, Accra.

to pay a total of £ 2.3.6 and £ 2 .6.8 respectively as the monetary value of Sophia's "gold trinkets." Three days later on May 25, the same court charged an Accra woman named "Hep" for unlawfully pawning a "a silver waist chain [read: girdle]" belonging to Gã merchant William Addo.³⁷⁶ In all, "Hep" had borrowed "24 coral beads and a silver waist chain" for the purpose of adorning herself at a "custom." In European sources, the term "custom" referred to any African gathering of a ritual, festive, funerary or religious nature. It is not clear which of these ceremonies Hep attended.

But what is certain is that personal adornments in public spaces were particularly important in West African cultures as a way of communicating personal status or wealth even if that was imagined. Isert observed in Accra that "[when a woman] is to make a public appearance, she calls in three or four other women in order to hear their opinions on which patterns or colours would be best for the occasion." In dressing up for public events, wealthy or noble Gã women in the 1780s adorned themselves with "masses of strings of beads made of multi-coloured glass, or of shells from a species of small snail obtained from the Assianthee [Asante] kingdom, or of blue lapis lazuli or polished agate, etc." These beads were worn in combination with "silver or even gold bracelets" with "pendants of gold pieces, such as louis d'or or Johannes, which they obtain by trade with the Europeans." Such women also wore gold and silver rings and ornaments on their "fingers and toes" as well as a "stout anklet fashioned from silver which can weigh from 16 loth to pound."³⁷⁷ Given all the expensive accoutrements a woman had to portray to be considered well attired for a public function, many from wealthy families simply wore valuables

³⁷⁶ Before the commandant and the Mayor of James Town in the case of W. Addo v Hep, May 25, 1858, SCT 2/4/1, PRAAD, Accra,

³⁷⁷ Isert, *Letters on the Slave Trade*, 156.

that they had inherited from their ancestors. Poorer families on the other hand, often borrowed such valuables to attend public events or official ceremonies.



Fig. 21. Young Fante woman, Cape Coast, Ghana, wearing Tekua (Gã: oduku) hairstyle with gold “trinkets.” Photographer unknown, c. 1885- 1910, Ghana Photographic Album, EEPA 1995-018-0002, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In the case of “Hep,” she was probably not wealthy herself. In her pleas, she stated that she had ran into “debt” and had to “pawn” Addo’s property to a man in “Dutch Accra” named Laate. Though “Hep” produced the 24 coral beads, the court sentenced her to two weeks in imprisonment for knowingly “pawning property which did not belong to her.” The ornaments, particularly the silver waist girdle, Addo lent to “Hep” were probably heirlooms inherited from a female ancestor or relative. Though not a woman, the possession of inherited female jewelry would have been a source of family pride as well as social and economic capital. Likewise, the above late nineteenth century photograph of a “Young Fante woman,” may have originated from a local photo studio in Cape Coast and is likely an attempt to capture for posterity the splendor of

displaying hairdo with gold ornamentation as well as beaded necklaces and bracelets for a public “custom.”³⁷⁸

In a related but more dramatic case, an Accra woman, Abnah Marman sued a “Mr. Thomas Halm” for the theft of her “trinkets” – gold pieces which included a “chain” (necklace).³⁷⁹ Abnah Marman had lent her daughter Sarah Marman some “trinkets” while she was going to Cape Coast with a British man named Mr. Cleaver. Upon reaching Cape Coast, Sarah Marman without her mother’s knowledge, permitted Halm, her husband according to “country fashion” to pawn the “trinkets.” Sarah maintained that she “did not give [Halm] any permission to sell the trinkets when the time for Redeeming them expired.” Rather, Thomas Halm tried to persuade her in a written “document” to “forfeit the trinkets” but she refused.³⁸⁰ However, Sarah had falsely told Halm that the “trinkets” had been gifted to her by her mother. Abnah Marman’s enquiries into the matter revealed that the financially “distressed” Halm had lost at least some of the gold pieces on the “gambling table” – a charge that Halm did not deny.³⁸¹

In order to save the family “trinkets,” Sarah Marman’s sister, Elizabeth Bannerman (née Marman) “borrow[ed] money” and redeemed the gold pieces from a Euro-African merchant of Accra, Charles L. Vanlare at a cost of \$37½.³⁸² It is likely that Abnah Marman had inherited her “trinkets” from her own mother or grandmother and could have been regarded as an important sacred relic of the family. Stories such as Abnah Marman’s were not uncommon. Most

³⁷⁸ For more on early photography on the Gold Coast see Larry W. Yarak, “Early Photography in Elmina,” *Ghana Studies Council Newsletter*, 8 (1995); Erin Haney, “Film, Charcoal, Time: Contemporaneities in Gold Coast Photographs” *History of Photography*, 34:2:119-133.

³⁷⁹ Testimony of Sarah Marman in *Abnah Marman v Thomas Halm*, SCT 2/4/4, C 16th April 1867-8th June 1868, PRAAD,65-68.

³⁸⁰ Testimony of Sarah Marman: *Abnah Marman v Thomas Halm*, SCT 2/4/4, 16th April 1867-8th June 1868, PRAAD, Accra, 67.

³⁸¹ *Abnah Marman v Thomas Halm*, SCT 2/4/4, C 16th April 1867-8th June 1868, PRAAD, Accra, 65-68.

³⁸² See testimonies of Elizabeth Bannerman and Charles L. Vanlare in *Abnah Marman v Thomas Halm*, SCT 2/4/4, C16th April 1867-8th June 1868, PRAAD, Accra, 65-68.

importantly, the loss of such valuable heirlooms would have also betrayed the trust and friendship that existed between Halm and the Marman family as well as with his wife, Sarah.

While residing in a rented house in James Town, a certain Abenawaa, a “sweet-heart of a soldier,” and a native of Cape Coast, lost some “gold trinkets” kept in her jewelry box. Abenawa was apparently robbed after temporarily moving out of the house. After the incident, she suspected a certain “Quashie Boodor [Kwasi Budu],” a “pawn of Old attor [Atɔ]” and “a native of Aquapim [Akuapem]” – an Akan state located to the north of Accra. Kwasi protested his innocence that he “never took the Gold” and was later vindicated. Court litigations and discourses about “trinkets” and other valuables such as the one involving Kwasi Budu, enhance historical understandings about the monetary functions of sacred “things.” The fraudulent acquisition of valuables also points to the various ways in which less privileged people in Gã and Fante society sought to acquire the “valuable things” of others to project a sense of upward social mobility and power through the material acquisition of other families’ valuable “things.”

For example, in 1867, Akua Milba “deposited some coral beads with Sarah Broenner as security to borrow \$ 30.” But Sarah Broenner later discovered that half the contents of the security deposit were not coral beads but rather a “parcel” containing “sand and a Bullet” supposedly “worth \$32.” Sarah Broenner insisted that the entire “security” was not sufficient as collateral and demanded her money. Upon Akua Milba’s refusal to pay the principal and interest Sarah Broenner demanded, she sued her in an Accra court. On June 25, 1867, the court gave a default judgement in favor of Sarah Broenner.³⁸³

³⁸³ Sarah Broenner agt accoah Milbah, 25th June 1867, Divisional Court Civil Records Book, 16th April 1867-8th June 1868, SCT 2/4/4, PRAAD, Accra.

In all of these cases, nineteenth century Africans on the Gold Coast evidently deployed material objects in ways that showed the competing sacred and commercial functions of these artefacts. More so, the commercial or market value of sacred “things” had expanded in the context of Atlantic commerce. Historically, and in contemporary times, as Leonard Crossland explained to me, “selling the valuable things left by the old women [and men] was not uncommon in the time of financial crisis. And yet those who sold (or continue to sell) such heirlooms fully understood that unless they re-purchased these valuables, the power of their households could be depleted.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONJUGAL AND PROPERTY PALAVERS

The property of the man is not held in common with that of the woman, but each keeps his own privately.³⁸⁴

– Paul Erdmann Isert, Osu/Accra, 1788

On March 24, 1855, Mary Cleland (d. 1877) of Kinkā (Dutch Accra) requested Hero Schomerus, “governor of the Netherlands Possessions on the Coast of Guinea” to transfer “a piece of land measuring fifty-five roeden and twenty-nine ellen Netherlands square measure, to build a house.”³⁸⁵ It is likely that the Dutch had earlier acquired the land from local Gā authorities in Kinkā. Nonetheless, by obtaining the land from the Dutch establishment, Mary Cleland was able to secure a “Deed of Ownership.”³⁸⁶ Less than a decade after Mary Cleland bought the property, her Osu-born merchant husband, Wilhelm August Lutterodt,³⁸⁷ acquired some “real property in [Dutch] Accra,” and this included his wife’s land. However, on January 1, 1861, Wilhelm, in the “presence of witnesses” and “wholly in his handwriting,” gave back the land to his wife and

³⁸⁴ Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 209.

³⁸⁵ “Proof of Ownership,” Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Nederlandse Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea, nummertoeegang 1.05.14, inventarisnummer 976. I am greatly indebted to Michel Doortmont for agreeing to translate this legal document into English for me. A roede (plural roeden) approximately equals 15 meters or 18 square yards and an el (plural ellen) was roughly about 68.8cm or 2.7 feet. See “Cor Snabel’s *Old Dutch measures*,” [www.https://rabbel.nl/Olddumes.html](https://rabbel.nl/Olddumes.html). Retrieved August 17, 2020.

³⁸⁶ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Nederlandse Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea, nummer toegang 1.05.14, inventarisnummer 976.

³⁸⁷ Wilhelm August Lutterodt was also known locally as Owula Nii Viɛn, (being the Gā rendering of “Wilhelm”). He switched allegiance to Dutch service following the departure of the Danes from the Gold Coast in 1850. He established his residence, now known as Nii Viɛn We with his wife on Lutterodt Street, in Kinkā. In the 1860s, he served as commandant of the Dutch Fort Crèveœur in Kinkā. In 1868, he was considered as an “acknowledged leader of the educated class,” and was elected leader of the anti-British colonial protest movement, the Accra Native Confederation following the defacto British acquisition of Kinkā. See James Bannerman, Letter to J.A.B Horton, on the formation of the Accra Native Confederation, Cape Coast, September, 21, 1869 quoted in J.A.B. Horton, *Letters on the Political Condition of the Gold Coast; Since the Exchange of Territory between the English and Dutch Governments, on January 1 1868, together with a Short Account of the Ashantee War, 1862-4 and the Awoonah War* (London: Frank Cass, [1870] 1970), 18.

children as a “present.” Wilhelm’s gift included various articles of furniture and “[t]he house in which we are living,” as well as “stores and yard and etc. built on her [i.e. Mary Cleland’s] ground for which she got a document from the Dutch Government.”³⁸⁸

It is important to note that neither Mary Cleland’s application for a title deed from a European establishment nor her husband’s use of the “written word” to legally secure or gift property to his wife was unique to this household. It was not uncommon for the elite contemporaries of Mary Cleland who owned private real estate in Kinkā and elsewhere on the Gold Coast to secure “proof of ownership” for their properties from European establishments. In 1849, Elisabeth Chitchman obtained land in the Otublohum *akutso* (quarter) of Kinkā located “to the west of H.M. Fort [Crève-cœur], east of English Accra; to the northeast adjacent to the house of Marie Hingston, to the north [of the house of] Adamah and to the south the street leading through Dutch Accra.”³⁸⁹ In the British sphere of influence, the practice of registering, deeding and the documentation of property even became more widespread by the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁹⁰

While Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast had participated in each others legal systems since the late fifteenth century, local merchants’ use of European-style deeds and other forms of legal documentation to determine how conjugal property was to be utilized, gifted or inherited was an important cultural innovation that became quite widespread in mercantile circles

³⁸⁸ See G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra, 156.

³⁸⁹ Acte van Eigendom, 17 December 1849, De Kommandant, H. Schomerus, Nederlandsche Bezittingen ter Kuste van Guinea, 0975. I am indebted to historian Larry W. Yarak for calling my attention to and translating this document into English.

³⁹⁰ See Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-66; 1858-67; 1859-85; 1880-2; 1882-3; SCT series, PRAAD; Archives of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, General Assembly Office, Osu, Accra (Formerly categorized as D12 and kept at Basel, Switzerland).

in the nineteenth century. These cultural innovations must be understood within the context of the different legal options available to Gã, Fante and Euro-African mercantile households.³⁹¹ By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Dutch, Danish and British forts on the Gold Coast were not mere commercial establishments but also offered legal services by settling commercial, political and conjugal disputes involving African and European merchants.³⁹²

As centers for contesting property within marriages and families, these courts were an extension of mutual European and African commercial and diplomatic interests on the Gold Coast. For Gold Coast women, particularly those married to European or Euro-African merchants, the written word of these courts in the form of deeds, wills and testaments more than the orally-based indigenous courts – became a more secure way of laying claim to or negotiating their property rights. Put simply, Gold Coast women could enact customary arrangements in writing as legally binding in colonial courts. While Gold Coast women manipulated European and African legal systems to get the best possible outcome, colonial courts favored the evidential value of written documents and contracts. Therefore Gold Coast women’s failure to provide written or documented evidence such as deeds or wills in colonial courts could also undermine their property claims.

The legal influence of Europeans beyond the walls of the forts and castles often with the consent of local rulers became more pronounced particularly in the so-called British spheres of

³⁹¹ For a thorough discussion of legal pluralism and its setbacks in global colonial histories, Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14; 25.

³⁹² See for eg. Storsveen ed. *Closing Closing the Books. Governor Edward Carstensen on Danish Guinea 1842-50*; Larry Yarak, “‘Creative and Expedient Misunderstandings’: Elmina-Dutch Relations in the 19th Century” in *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* edited by John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Inge van Hulle, *Britain and International Law in West Africa: The Practice of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-2; Natalie Everts, “Parrying Palavers: Coastal Akan Women and the Search for Security in the Eighteenth Century” in *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability and Mobility, 1660-1880* edited by Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones (New York: James Currey, 2019), 109-130.

influence on the Gold Coast.³⁹³ By 1843, the British establishment at Cape Coast Castle with the support of local rulers had established two different courts – a magistracy for British subjects and a Judicial Assessor’s court only answerable to the “Native Sovereigns.”³⁹⁴ With the proclamation of the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate and the establishment of British sovereignty in 1874, the distinction between the magistracy and the Judicial Assessor’s courts and their functions became blurred. In 1876, the newly established Gold Coast Supreme Court formally created a single court system and two years later, the Judicial Assessor’s Court was finally abolished.³⁹⁵ Consequently, the Gold Coast Supreme Court and not the indigenous rulers became the ultimate arbiter of justice, even in cases involving indigenous or so-called customary law. In his *Fanti Customary Laws* (1897), most of the cases that Fante legal scholar and attorney, John Mensah Sarbah (1866-1910) analyzed were litigations related to property and inheritance heard in the Assessor’s court and the Supreme Court.³⁹⁶

In this chapter, I center real estate and property in the history of conjugal and gendered conflicts in mercantile households on the Gold Coast over the course of the nineteenth century. In many ways, Gold Coast women’s legal struggles in colonial courts reflected their concerns about economic security which became increasingly premised on the investment in real estate at the end of the legal slave trade. Women’s claim to real estate in conjugal and family disputes, as I show in this chapter was a consequence of the monetization of houses away from their explicit ancestral value and connections to one premised on market-oriented principles. By exploring the

³⁹³ Van Hulle, *Britain and International Law in West Africa*, 131.

³⁹⁴ James Bannerman, Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street, London 6th May 1851, TNA, Kew, 218.

³⁹⁵ Roger Gocking, *Facing Two Ways: Ghana’s Coastal Communities under Colonial Rule* (New York and Oxford: University Press of America, 1999), 74.

³⁹⁶ See John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws: a Brief Introduction to the Principles of the Native Laws and Customs of the Fanti and Akan sections of the Gold Coast, with a Selection of Cases thereon Decided in the Law Courts* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1897; Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 74.

different African and European legal systems available to them, Gold Coast women began to enshrine customary enactments and their wishes in writing in order to enforce their executions in colonial courts.

Though historical discussions of gender, sexuality and conjugal relations in the commercial world of the African Atlantic world are not new, women's roles in the expansion of diverse set of market-oriented principles and real estate before the twentieth century are often missing from the historiography.³⁹⁷ In this study, I examine how colonial courts upheld indigenous laws of marriage and yet privileged the written word as opposed to oral evidence in litigations. While this practice undermined women's property claims, many others manipulated this legal system by enacting their wishes and customary arrangements in writing to be enforceable in colonial courts. Though these conjugal palavers originated in domestic conflicts, these litigious cases help us frame the broader social, cultural, and legal transformations in the understandings of property and economic security on the Gold Coast, especially in the transition away from legitimate commerce to colonial rule.

Emerging Colonial Courts and “Customary” Law

While the authority of European courts were limited to the forts and castles dotted along the Gold Coast, they became – particularly in the case of the British – more influential beyond the walls of these trading posts by the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1843, Captain George Maclean (1830-44), President of the Council of Cape Coast Castle through his influence and popularity

³⁹⁷ See George Brooks, “A Nhara of the Guinea-Bissau Region: Mãe Amelia Correia,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire Robertson and Martin Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Brooks, *Euro-Africans in Western Africa*; Adam Jones, “Female Slave-Owners on the gold Coast: Just a Matter of Money?” in *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*, ed. Stephan Palmié (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995); Edna Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (University of Virginia Press, 1998); Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*; Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*; Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*; Carina Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

helped create the office of the Judicial Assessor. Technically, the Judicial Assessor was not answerable to the magistrate or the Governor of Cape Coast Castle but was to assist the “Native chiefs” who were “professedly the judges.” But in reality, Maclean and his successors presided over the magistracy and also served as Judicial Assessors and thus blurring the lines between the two offices.³⁹⁸

Infact, James Bannerman noted in 1851, that given “the deference” that Cape Coast’s sovereign rulers “paid to [the Judicial Assessor’s] superior sense of justice,” they “elevated [his office] to the supreme judicial authority” even in matters pertaining to “native law.”³⁹⁹ This defacto elevation was beyond the “Commission of the Judicial Assessor.”⁴⁰⁰ Following the abolition of the Assessor’s Court in 1878, all the “native” cases were heard in the magistracy and the Supreme Court. Most importantly, the judgements from the former Assessor’s courts formed some of the earliest written corpus of the future Gold Coast Colony’s customary laws. Thus by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, British judges had become the ultimate interpreters of customary law including cases of divorce, property and succession. At the same time, the courts provided avenues for Gold Coast women to enact customary arrangements by themselves and/or through their husbands in writing to make them legally binding in litigations.

To understand the aforementioned point further, we need to go back to Wilhelm Lutterodt’s deeding of land to his wife and children in 1861 and its subsequent legal consequences for their diverse household in the early twentieth century. Following the Dutch cession of Fort Crèvecoeur and the so-called “Netherlands Accra” to the British, in 1868,

³⁹⁸ Gocking, *Facing Two Ways*, 74.

³⁹⁹ James Bannerman, Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street, London 6th May 1851, TNA, Kew.218

⁴⁰⁰ James Bannerman, Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street, London 6th May 1851, TNA, Kew, 218.

Wilhelm and Mary Lutterodt “legalised” the property “by British law” on January 10 that same year.⁴⁰¹ In successively registering their property under Dutch and English laws, Wilhelm and Mary disinherited the “illegitimate” children that the former and his sons had with the enslaved women of their household.⁴⁰² This legal move, became a source of conflict decades later. In 1915, British colonial Chief Justice King Farlow ruled that the children that Wilhelm and his “legitimate” sons – Georg and Wilhelm – fathered with household slaves were “permanent tenants” of the house and not legatees.⁴⁰³ But in Gold Coast laws of succession children born to enslaved women (in the case of the Gã) and men (in the case of the Fante/Akan) were no less legatees or illegitimate. In that context, neither could the (non) marital status of one’s mother affect their chances of succession or inheritance of property.⁴⁰⁴

The exclusive nature of Euro-Christian or monogamous marriages gave Gold Coast women the option to disinherit extended family members or slaves of the household. At the same time, these urban mercantile Gold Coast women insisted on older forms of property rights that required married couples to keep their properties separately. Sometime in 1915, the colonial Gold Coast government acquired a piece of land which formed part of the land the late Wilhelm Lutterodt had bequeathed to his wife Mary Cleland. The government had paid a compensation of £ 200 but this led to a fierce legal battle to determine who in the Lutterodt household really qualified to receive the amount. In July 1915, forty seven years after Wilhelm Lutterodt “legalised” his property under English law, Chief Justice King Farlow ruled “that the deed of

⁴⁰¹ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, 162.

⁴⁰² G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, 162.

⁴⁰³ See G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, 162.

⁴⁰⁴ See Sarbah, *Fante Customary Laws*, 108.

settlement shows he [Wilhelm Lutterodt] desires that the settled property shall pass and be confined to the issue of himself and his wife Mary, then to the lawful or legitimate children of such issue and to the heirs or their body *ex justis nuptis procreati*, i.e. his lineal descendants, according to the English and not the native law of inheritance or descent.”⁴⁰⁵

It is not clear from the available legal records what really triggered Wilhelm Lutterodt to ‘delegitimize’ the children he fathered with “Adjadom,” an enslaved “Grunshie girl” and “several other slaves” in his household.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, two of Wilhelm Lutterodt and Mary Cleland’s “legitimate” sons – Georg August Godfrey and Wilhelm August (who died in 1914) – also fathered “illegitimate” children with Naa Tsuāñ (“Na Tchuan”) and Okra Akua who were also household slaves. Georg Lutterodt fathered Albert Georg with Naa Tsuāñ in “July 1869” and the younger Wilhelm had Frederik with Okra Akua in 1871.⁴⁰⁷ It was likely that Mary Cleland may have wanted to protect the property interests of her own children and not that of Adjadom or the “illegitimate” children of Georg and Wilhelm.⁴⁰⁸ “As general rule,” the trial judge, King Farlow explained that “parties” who “employed English legal forms” raised “presumption[s] that they agreed to be bound exclusively by English law, and not partly by native and partly by English law.”⁴⁰⁹

The complicated conjugal relations within Wilhelm Lutterodt’s household, including concubinage (co-habiting without marriage consummation) with household slaves “was not

⁴⁰⁵ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, 166.

⁴⁰⁶ The issue of Wilhelm Lutterodt and Adjadom was Abraham Augustus (or August) Lutterodt.

⁴⁰⁷ Okrawa were slaves who served as the spiritual guardians or “soul washers” of their masters or mistresses. It was believed that they could ward off any spiritual attack. Despite this belief, okrawa were socially inferior to free-born Gã/Dãñme or Akan men and women.

⁴⁰⁸ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra 162.

⁴⁰⁹ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra, 164.

unusual in native families of some substance in Accra” and on the Gold Coast prior to and during the nineteenth century.⁴¹⁰ In many prominent households on the Gold Coast and its interior, masters could have children with their slaves.⁴¹¹ In patrilineal societies like the Gã, children did not inherit their mother’s servile status and the opposite was true in matrilineal cultures like the Akan. Most importantly, among the Gã and the Akan the non-marriage or concubinage status of a woman did not disqualify her children or descendants from inheriting property.⁴¹² What changed over the course of the nineteenth century especially in supposed ‘Christianized’ and monogamous households was that children born to household slaves could be considered illegitimate and not legatees. In the case of Wilhelm Lutterodt and Mary Cleland, they simply limited property rights to their “legitimate” children and their heirs. Mary Cleland’s own position may have been strengthened by the fact that she was married to Wilhelm in accordance with Dutch law. In a March 1862 legal document, Mary Cleland was listed as “Mrs Lutterodt” and in a posthumous court case in 1915, she was named “Mary Cleland Lutterodt.”⁴¹³ In any case, a monogamous marriage empowered the couple with the legal option to delegitimize the several children and grandchildren both “men and women” born to the enslaved women of the household.

While in court, Naa Tsuāñ and Okra Akua argued that they entered into a recognized “union” with Georg and Wilhelm Jr. in 1873. Chief Justice King Farlow dismissed their claims as not “a marriage valid by native customary law.” He noted that “[g]reat stress” or emphasis had

⁴¹⁰ Statement of Chief Justice King Farlow, SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra, 156.

⁴¹¹ See Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Ties that Bound: Slave Concubines/Wives and the End of Slavery in the Gold Coast, c.1874-1900,” in *Essays in Honour of Ama Ata Aidoo at 70: A reader in African Cultural Studies*, ed. Anne V. Adams (Banbury: Ayebia, 2012), 231-240.

⁴¹² See Akosua A. Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from 1500-1900* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004).

⁴¹³ Court held at James Fort Accra 7th March 1862, SCT 2/4/2, PRAAD, Accra.

“been laid on the position of the Okrawas of a master or mistress” in households prior to the passage of the British Slave Emancipation Act of 1874. However, King Farlow maintained that “no case or authority has been cited, nor have I been able to find one, in support of the contention that a union of Okrawas belonging to sons of the head of the house or family,” constituted marriage. In addition, the judge dismissed the popular Gã legal maxim, “the money that buys a slave buys a wife” (Gã: “*shika ni heɔ nyɔŋ lɛ, ehɛɔ ŋã*”). As a judge, Farlow must have heard this maxim several times in cases similar to Naa Tsuãŋ, Okra Akua and the Lutterodts. For Farlow, this and “many other sayings is not one which can be accepted as of any good validity at law without very considerable reservation.”⁴¹⁴ The union between the household slaves and the enslaved women that Farlow dismissed could be considered as a lawful marriage in an indigenous Gã or Fante court.⁴¹⁵

In his interpretation of the “marriage” between the Lutterodts and the enslaved women of the household, Farlow declared those unions could only have been consummated with “the payment of a dowry.”⁴¹⁶ However, Farlow’s views failed to take into consideration the fact dowries may not be necessary for kinless slaves who married their master’s or mistress’s sons. King Farlow also held that the unions lacked “the publicity which” in his opinion was “a necessary feature in every native marriage valid at law.”⁴¹⁷ What Farlow actually did was to interpret indigenous laws of marriage and succession from an English legal perspective – an exercise which the “legitimate” heirs of Wilhelm Lutterodt and Mary Cleland had wholly

⁴¹⁴ SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, PRAAD, 156.

⁴¹⁵ See Akyeampong, “Ties that Bound,” 231-240.

⁴¹⁶ SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, PRAAD, 168.

⁴¹⁷ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, 168.

supported. By the end of the nineteenth century, rulings like the Lutterodt family case in which English law took precedence over indigenous law, frustrated local attorneys like John Sarbah. For Sarbah, “[t]he custom relating to marriage, simple in the extreme, has, by some inexplicable process, been the stumbling-block to the [European colonial] foreigner, and to the native who considers himself better than his forefathers.”⁴¹⁸ Though Sarbah points to European judges’ lack of appreciation of indigenous institutions, he did not quite realize or probably ignored how Gold Coast Africans used the colonial courts to enforce their own prejudices.

In his interpretations of indigenous Gã marriage arrangements, Farlow concluded that the relationship between Georg Lutterodt and Okra Akua as well as between the younger Wilhelm Lutterodt with Naa Tsuāñ was opportunistic on the part of the household slaves. Farlow believed that the slave women, simply took advantage of the young “educated men” who “had returned from England and were leading a somewhat wild life.”⁴¹⁹ King Farlow’s views resonated with Wilhelm Lutterodt and Mary Cleland and their “legitimate” children and grandchildren who deliberately deeded their real property to prevent any succession claim by household slaves and their children. What is most important here is that Wilhelm and Mary and “their legitimate” descendants appropriated these colonial legal discourses and criteria of what constituted “legitimate” marriage to ultimately determine who in their household could inherit. Ultimately these colonial discourses resonated with families like the Lutterodts who wanted to maintain special privileges for their chosen legatees.

By English law, Albert Georg and Frederik Richardt Christian Lutterodt, the “illegitimate” grandsons of Wilhelm Lutterodt and their respective slave mothers were not

⁴¹⁸ Sarbah, *Fanti Customary*, 38.

⁴¹⁹ G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD.

qualified for any compensation since they were not legatees. However, Albert and Frederik demanded that the court compensate them from the compensation fund provided by the government for acquiring the family land.⁴²⁰ Despite lack of evidence, Albert was able to convince the judge that he had acquired a “possessory holding” on the family land. This simply meant that the rest of the Lutterodt family had used the family land as collateral to obtain a loan from Albert and his unnamed “representative.”

Though Chief Justice King Farlow admitted that Albert did not produce “any books in support of his assertion, and though his statement [was] somewhat vague” the judge recommended that he be awarded £ 40 by way of compensation.”⁴²¹ Frederik on the other hand claimed that he repaired and rebuilt the family house, “Lutterodt Hall” by “Order of the Town Council” and by his “expenditure” saved the building from certain “demolition from the local authority.” But Lutterodt Hall, “a building opposite the property in question,” was “quite separate and distinct” from the alienated land for which the government paid compensation. Moreover, Frederik “carried on his business as a photographer” in Lutterodt Hall where he “resided for some time past.” Meanwhile, the judge found “no evidence that” Albert had “been dispossessed.”⁴²²

In making claims on the property, Albert and Frederik did not invoke kinship ties, but rather justified their rights through their maintenance of the family house. In doing so, the brothers emphasized their financial stake in the property and thereby towed English as opposed

⁴²⁰ Wilhelm Lutterodt and two of his “legitimate” sons, Gerhardt and Georg had fathered several children with their household slaves. See SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, PRAAD, Accra, 1915.

⁴²¹ Albert's lawyer had claimed “50 pounds” as compensation. See Statement of Chief Justice King Farlow, SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, PRAAD, 171.

⁴²² See Statement of Chief Justice King Farlow, SCT 2/6/5, G.A.G Lutterodt and another (plaintiffs) v A.G. Lutterodt and another (Defendants), July 31, 1915, PRAAD, 171.

to Gã legal principles in order for them to find favor with the judge. What distinguished many Euro-African or “Christianized” households like the Lutterodts from other Gã and Fante establishments was that on the death of “any individual,” his or her paternal or maternal relatives and not their own children or wives could inherit the property.⁴²³ Though Gã and Fante laws of succession permitted household slaves to inherit their master’s or mistresses’ estate in the absence of a suitable heir, their marriage or ties of concubinage to the house could strengthen the property claims of their progeny.⁴²⁴ Apart from loyalty and filial connections, concubinage and marriage could also strengthen property claims of household slaves.

While courts in the forts and castles recognized and upheld customary unions, European judges and observers increasingly moralized or disparaged indigenous marriage arrangements from narrow Christian and Victorian perspectives.⁴²⁵ British ethnographer, William Daniell rightly distinguished between “the ordinary nuptial right,” or what he thought was proper marriage and the “concubinage,” and “temporal union[s]” that “the slaves and lower ranks of females,” subscribed to.⁴²⁶ But what Daniell missed in his general observations of Gã (and by extension, Fante/Akan) connubial practices was that rites of marriage was expensive and could therefore be contracted in several stages and these processes were no less legitimate or of an “[un]orthodox fashion” than the “ordinary nuptial right.”⁴²⁷ For poorer men, however, such “temporary unions” allowed them to raise money to pay the dowry. By 1856, the value of a dowry for such “lower ranks” in Accra “seldom exceed[ed] the value of four dollars,” and

⁴²³ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 21.

⁴²⁴ Akosua A. Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from 1500-1900*.

⁴²⁵ See Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws*, 38.

⁴²⁶ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 12. The practice of marriage as a process or one of stages prior to consummation survived into the twentieth century. See also Jean Allman and Victoria Tashjian, *I Will Not Eat Stone: A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000).

⁴²⁷ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 12.

included “24 Strings of cowries,” “4 Fathoms of cloth,” “1 Silk handkerchief,” and “2 Bottles of rum.”⁴²⁸

The tendency to deride and/or delegitimize indigenous connubial institutions and particularly “cassare” between European men and African women, predated the emergence of formal British colonial rule on the Gold Coast in 1874.⁴²⁹ By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Dutch, British and Danish officials married to African or Euro-African men secured the material interests of their local wives with whom they had contracted non-Christian unions. Many of these European men either willed or deeded movable and real properties to their local spouses. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Danish and Gã-Danish officials and merchants who lived to the north and west of Christiansborg Castle in Osu began a tradition of “legitimizing” their children born to Euro-African or African women. This practice of using the written word as opposed to oral testaments was meant to forestall any future legal impediments that may prevent their Gold Coast-born heirs from inheriting them.⁴³⁰

In effect, Europeans and Euro-Africans locally married to Gold Coast women, used written legal attestations recognizable in European courts to secure the property interests of their wives and so-called illegitimate issues. On October 12, 1807, a Danish resident of Osu, Johan Emanuel Richter signed a “legitimacy declaration,” acknowledging the paternity of his son “Hendrich, who was born on 30 August 1785.” To emphasize the Christian circumstances of his son’s birth, J.E. Richter stated that he “was then baptized and confirmed at the main fort of Christiansborg in Guinea, and who is presently residing with me” and was born of the “Mulatta

⁴²⁸Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 12.

⁴²⁹ “Casare” from the Portuguese “*casa*,” meaning to make a house. See for example, Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 11.

⁴³⁰ See Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 98.

Anna Barbara Kuberg.”⁴³¹ J.E. Richter acknowledged his son in the same way that his children in a future “lawful” Danish marriage would be recognized.

In doing so, J.E. Richter sought to neutralize any legal impediments that would have disqualified Henrich Richter from inheriting his real and movable property.⁴³² Like his father did, Henrich Richter in 1838 stated in the “legitimation of his two sons born out of wedlock,” – Robert Wilhelm and Henrich – both of whom then resided in England where they were educated.⁴³³ Henrich Richter had married a Danish woman, Amalie Wilhelmine Nicholine Hein, on June 20, 1820. Henrich needed this strategic Danish marriage to prove his allegiance to Denmark more than any other cultural or political entity. This strategic marriage was to help Henrich Richter overcome any legal impediments that may undermine his right as the legatee of his late father.⁴³⁴ Consequently, the issues of his subsequent local marriage to Asante Princess, Manuaa and his Gã concubines would have been considered illegitimate in accordance with Danish laws of succession had he not legitimized children born to these women. In 1836, Henrich Richter, according to his friend, a Danish Jewish official, Wulff Joseph Wulff was “married to many wives,” and this was in line with “the custom of the country [Accra and the Gold Coast].”⁴³⁵

In lieu of a “legitimacy declaration,” Euro-African children and their mothers were entitled to compensation from pension funds of their deceased fathers and husbands.⁴³⁶ The rest

⁴³¹ Anna Barbara Khüberg had died 13 ½ years before J.E. Richter’s “legitimation” of their son. See Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 98.

⁴³² Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 99.

⁴³³ Robert Wilhelm Richter was born January 13 1831 to Manuaa, daughter of Asantehene Osee Yaw Akoto and was baptized February 23 1831. Henrich Jr. was born to “Kasky” on August 9 1827 and baptized on 27 December 1829. In 1831, yet another son, John (or Johan) Emanuel lived in his father’s house in 1831. See Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 129.

⁴³⁴ Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 129.

⁴³⁵ Christiansborg, 19 December 1836 in *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 85.

⁴³⁶ Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 110.

of the property was inherited by surviving relatives in Denmark. Apart from legitimizing their children, many European and Euro-African men increasingly began to will their real and movable property (including household slaves) either in whole or in part to their Gold Coast-born wives and families.⁴³⁷ In 1842, Wulff willed his house, *Frederiksminde*, “which lies near the tower Prøvesten, and the grounds [on which it stands]” in Osu to his “Mulatinde Sara Malm.”

Furthermore, he wished his “slaves and pawns, whether these be men, women or children as her exclusive property.” In addition, Wulff requested that “upon my death, the [Danish] government” must “name a curator for” his “Mulatinde and children.” The “curator,” as Wulff instructed, should have the discretion “to exclude from my auction ... such things as he judges they [i.e. Wulff’s wife and children] should retain.” For Wulff’s other remaining “fortune,” he “wished to be divided into two parts, of which” his “European heirs shall be given the one part, and” his “Mulatinde and [sic] the other half.” Though the first half of the funds was “to be paid out immediately,” Wulff instructed that “the second half remain in trust in the royal treasury here, to be paid out to my Mulatinde and children monthly in as large amounts as the ward deems necessary for the basic maintenance.”⁴³⁸

In 1842, when Wulff penned his will, European attitudes about interracial marriages and indigenous African connubial institutions and practices in West Africa had grown more intolerant. During the slave trade, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, interracial marriages were crucial to the sustenance and execution of African and European commercial networks on the Gold Coast.⁴³⁹ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the forces of colonialism, ‘scientific’ racism and Christian missionary education tended to privilege

⁴³⁷ Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 110.

⁴³⁸ “Wulff Joseph Wulff’s Death: Last Will and Testament” 8 June, 1842 in *A Danish Jew*, 257-258.

⁴³⁹ See Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 28. See also Ray, *Crossing the Color Line*; Stephanie Newell, ed. *Marita: Or the Folly of Love: A Novel by A. Native* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002), 11-16.

monogamous marriages over indigenous African marriages and interracial connubial arrangements and these had legal repercussions for local rules of succession.⁴⁴⁰ European ethnographers and observers like William Daniell, thought of these interracial marriages as “promiscuous alliances of Europeans and their descendants with the aboriginal women.”⁴⁴¹

Attitudes like Daniell’s undoubtedly informed the legal opinions of British colonial courts in their interpretations of interracial marriages based on local customary connubial principles in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In the absence of wills or any written attestation, Gold Coast women in non-Christian marriages with their European or Euro-African spouses could be denied full inheritance rights. But in denying Gold Coast widows access to their deceased husband’s estates, colonial judges failed to take into consideration, the contribution of these women to the wealth accumulation of their husbands.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the crucial role of African women in their European or Euro-African husband’s establishments had become evident in the major coastal towns of Accra, Cape Coast, and Elmina. For instance, Wulff, who was an employee at Christiansborg Castle, admiringly approved of his literate “*Mulatinde*” (“Mulatress”), Sara Malm who eased his burden by catering for his “small trade” in palm oil, which was exported from their home in Osu to the Danish West Indies.⁴⁴² British private merchants and officials including William Topp, commandant of James Fort, often left their “native” wives at the “head of affairs” for many “months in sole charge” whenever he was in England.⁴⁴³ Similarly, James

⁴⁴⁰ Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 172.

⁴⁴¹ Daniell, “Akkrah and Adampe,” 21.

⁴⁴² Wulff indicated that Sara Malm was literate in Danish and knew arithmetic. See *Frederiksminde* under the Danish Chief Fort Christiansborg, 9 Sept. 1842, in *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 181.

⁴⁴³ Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruise: Comprising Sketches of the Canaris, the Cape de Verde, Liberia, Madeira, Sierra Leone and other Places of Interest on the West Coast of Africa; by an Officer of the U.S Navy*, edited by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York and London: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 141.

Bannerman entrusted his Asante royal wife and “jet black lady” “of pleasing countenance,” Jheneba (Princess) Yaa Hom with his commercial transactions whenever he was indisposed or in England. Similarly, “Mrs [Mary Cleland] Lutterodt” jointly sold “casks of tobacco” with her Gã-Danish husband Wilhelm Lutterodt in their commercial residence in Kinkã.⁴⁴⁴

Besides supporting their European and Euro-African husband’s commercial pursuits, the families of these local wives often granted land to their foreign in-laws. Shortly after the death of Elmina-born Euro-African merchant, Jan Nieser in 1822, two Dutch officers from Elmina occupied his stone house, “Harmony” in Kinkã and prepared to auction it. However, the “Accra king and his counselors” objected to the sale, arguing that the land on which the house stood belonged to the family of the “broker,” Nii Kwaku Ankra and not Nieser. The Gã Māntse (King of Accra) maintained that materials from an older house were used in building “Harmony.” Nieser’s Gã wife, Aba (also known as Nuama) was a relative of Ankra who like Nieser was a well-known slave trader.⁴⁴⁵ With extensive trade connections to Eguafo and Asante, Nieser had relocated to Accra in 1793 since the slave trade at Elmina “was not favourable.”⁴⁴⁶ Though it is not clear from the sources how the case was finally resolved, the Dutch officers had suggested to the “King of Accra” to place his case before the Dutch governor at Elmina.⁴⁴⁷ This case clearly illustrates that the late Nieser only had usufructuary rights over “Harmony” and the land on which the mansion stood and therefore could not at least on Gã and Fante legal principles be used to defray debts incurred by Nieser when he was alive.

⁴⁴⁴W. Lutterodt v W. C. Finlason, Court held at James Fort Accra 7th March 1862, Divisional Court, Civil Record Book 1 A 15th May 1861 to 10th February 1861, SCT 2/4/2, PRAAD, Accra.

⁴⁴⁵ See Part II-The Slave Trade, Case of the “Dos Amigos,” Report Appendix No.3, Gold Coast Commissioner’s Report in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 20.

⁴⁴⁶ See J.T. Lever, “Mulatto Influence on the Gold Coast in the Early Nineteenth Century: Jan Nieser of Elmina” *African Historical Studies*, 3, No. 2 (1970): 254-55.

⁴⁴⁷ See Archief van de Kust van Guinea, 983, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands, 103-107.

Like their eighteenth and early nineteenth century forbears, Euro-African and African women in the late 1800s were very much aware of their immense contributions to their husbands' wealth and fought for their property rights. Regretably, many of these women who contracted non-Christian marriages were largely not successful in laying claim to the estate of their European husbands who died intestate. In their interpretation of indigenous connubial arrangements, some colonial judges even delegitimized such marriages by insisting that they were not properly consummated under "country custom."

In 1872, Catherine Meyer, a Euro-African woman of Kinkã, lost her Barcelona-born husband of twelve years, named Pedro Curco. Catherine Meyer had two children with Curco, one of whom was an "infant" when Curco died.⁴⁴⁸ At the time of his death, Curco was the Spanish Consul in Accra.⁴⁴⁹ He died intestate and left an estate worth about "\$12,000."⁴⁵⁰ Upon Curco's death, the Commandant [of James Fort], and a certain "Mr. Banus" "sealed the property." Banus transferred the administration of the deceased's estate to Spanish Consul-General, Francisco Vives.

Vives who was resident in Freetown, Sierra Leone, maintained that he did not recognize the jurisdiction of the Gold Coast colonial court over Curco's estate. Fearing that the Spanish consulate would deny her claims to Curco's estate, a troubled Catherine Meyer, pleaded with the colonial court through her Anglo-Gã attorney, the younger James Bannerman. Bannerman argued that Catherine Meyer was Curco's "rightful widow" and that she was legally married to the Spaniard in accordance with the "Country custom." In giving their testimony in court, two

⁴⁴⁸ "Catherine Meyer of Accra against Francisco Vives agent for the estate of late Pedro Curco," SCT 2/4/8, Civil Record Book 4A 17th May 1870 to 1st November, PRAAD, Accra.

⁴⁴⁹ Sir A.E. Kennedy, Downing Street I May 1868 to Lord Buckingham, ADM 1/1/26, PRAAD, Accra.

⁴⁵⁰ Several foreign currencies including US Dollars and Spanish doubloons (sometimes called Spanish Dollars) and Pounds Sterling in addition to the local, gold, gold dust and cowries and other commodity currencies were used as currencies on the Gold Coast until the British colonial administration demonetized all but British currency.

prominent Accra merchants, Antonio Ankra (d. 1897) who was Catherine's uncle and realtor William Addo (d.1876) both testified that Catherine Meyer was "customarily" married (i.e. married in accordance with Gã laws) and that they personally knew Curco. In proving the validity of her marriage, Catherine stated that Curco "paid" her family "thirty-two dollars," but "paid no rum and made no custom." The groom's gift of drinks and public celebration of marriages were usually regarded as public approval of unions. However, in her previous marriage to a certain "Carina," she had stated that her family "made all the native Customs, necessary for a Country marriage."⁴⁵¹

The absence of rum per se should not have made a marriage less valid since monetary value could substitute actual material gifts.⁴⁵² In order to consummate the marriage, Curco had paid the dowry solely in cash. However, the court ruled that there were contradictions in Catherine Meyer's narratives concerning her first marriage to "Carina" which involved rum and that of Curco which did not. On that score, therefore, the judge ruled that Curco's "country marriage" with Catherine Meyer, was not valid in accordance with "custom." In all of these legal struggles, the court headed by English-educated Sierra Leonean judge, James Africanus B. Horton, quite explicitly assumed that Catherine Meyer did not contribute to Pedro Curco's fortune.⁴⁵³ As part of her defense, Catherine tried convincing the court that she assisted "Curco in his Trade; measuring Oil selling cloths and paying Oil-people" and that she lived with him "up to the time of his illness." African and Euro-African women contemporaries and those who lived a

⁴⁵¹ "Catherine Meyer of Accra against Francisco Vives agent for the estate of late Pedro Curco," SCT 2/4/8, Civil Record Book 4A 17th May 1870 to 1st November, PRAAD, Accra.

⁴⁵² See Sarbah *Fanti Customary Laws*, 38; 99.

⁴⁵³ Horton (1835-1883) was a Sierra Leonean nationalist, British army-surgeon and political activist who drafted the constitutions for the Fante and Accra Native Confederation. See Agbodeka, *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast, 1868-1900: A Study in Forms and Protest* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 22.

generation or two before Catherine were known to have substantially contributed to their European or Euro-African husband's commercial establishments.

It is likely that many Accra townspeople and those present at the court hearings would have known Catherine Meyer's contributions to Curco's estate. Catherine Meyer's maternal roots lie in the politically and commercially powerful Dadebāŋ We (House of Dadebāŋ).⁴⁵⁴ This establishment was an offshoot of the house of Otu Blafo, an early eighteenth century Akwamu-born governor of Accra. By the early nineteenth century, Antonio Ankra's father and Catherine's maternal grandfather, the broker Nii Kwaku Ankra had transformed Dadebāŋ We into an important emporium for the slave and legitimate trades.⁴⁵⁵ Ankra and his brother Ayi Kōkōsaki (d. 1866) successively served as defacto or shadow rulers of the Otublohum akutso and they owned many of the prime lands in and around Kinkā.⁴⁵⁶

Given Dadebāŋ We's extensive slave and legitimate trading ties to Spanish and Portuguese/Brazilian ships and establishments, it is likely that Curco and Antonio Ankra were business partners.⁴⁵⁷ Through his marriage to Catherine Meyer, Curco as a "Spanish Consular Agent" in "Dutch Accra" would have benefited immensely from the patronage and commercial networks of Dadebāŋ We.⁴⁵⁸ Historians of the Gold Coast/West African Atlantic world have extensively discussed how interracial marriages were crucial to the slave trade and legitimate

⁴⁵⁴ Dadebāŋ is the name of the deity of this family.

⁴⁵⁵ See Parker, *Making the Town*, 125.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ See Parker, *Making the Town*, 125; Part II-The Slave Trade, Case of the "Dos Amigos," Report Appendix No.3, Gold Coast Commissioner's Report in British Parliamentary Papers, 20; Edw. Carstensen, Fort Christiansborg, 14 January 1845, in *Closing the Books*, ed. Winsnes, 91.

⁴⁵⁸ Sir A.E. Kennedy, Downing Street to Buckingham, 1 May 1868, ADM 1/1/26, PRAAD, Accra.

commerce.⁴⁵⁹ Though the available legal records did not mention how Curco obtained the land for his house, it is likely that he got the property from Ankra's successor, Ayi Kòkòsaki.⁴⁶⁰

When Kinkā came under British jurisdiction in 1868, Curco was reappointed as consular agent with the support of the new British administration. Unfortunately, Catherine Meyer lived in a rapidly changing Gold Coast world in which emerging British colonial legal systems often did not recognize the material contributions of African and Euro-African women to their European men in the absence of a confirming legal document or a will. What this meant was that African or Euro-African women like Catherine Meyer who found themselves in such circumstances were left with very little or no economic security at all. The younger James Bannerman pleaded that Catherine had been “left totally destitute but also for the infant child now left without support.” Bannerman further pleaded that the court grant Catherine “one hundred pounds to support her infant child now left without support.” The child, Bannerman argued “has always been brought up with all the Comforts of a European life” and that Catherine “has always assisted her husband in his Trade and [Curco] have allowed her five dollars a month.”⁴⁶¹

In giving judgement, Horton not only declared the marriage invalid under “Country Custom” but also maintained that having lived “publicly with Pedro Curco for the last twelve years as a “country wife,” during which time he allowed her five dollars per month” was enough compensation. For this reason, the late Curco, according to Horton had already “fulfilled his

⁴⁵⁹ See Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*; Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*.

⁴⁶⁰ The fact that Kwaku Ankra and Ayi Kòkòsaki gave Portuguese/Spanish names to their sons Antonio and Pedro was neither coincidental nor surprising. Dadebāñwe had welcomed Afro-Brazilian ex-slaves into Accra in 1836. In 1915, a son of Antonio Ankra of the same name recalled that “Brazilian men married Accra women and the women Accra men.” See testimony of Antonio Ankra in *Jemima Nassu and others v the Basel Mission* and another, July 10, 1915, SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra.

⁴⁶¹ “Catherine Meyer of Accra against Francisco Vives agent for the estate of late Pedro Curco,” SCT 2/4/8, Civil Record Book 4A 17th May 1870 to 1st November, PRAAD, Accra.

obligations towards her.”⁴⁶² For Horton, “[t]he child is without doubt the Bastard Child of Pedro Curco” and ordered Vives to pay a sum of “[t]hirty seven pounds sixteen shillings and Costs for the maintenance of the Infant daughter of Pedro Curco” in accordance with English law that provided for the father of “a Bastard” to “support a child until the age of ten.”⁴⁶³

Had Curco bequeathed his estate to his wife in a signed will and testament, like Wulff did for Sara Malm and their children, Catherine Meyer would have been secured. However, the fact that Catherine Meyer lost all claims to Curco’s estate also signifies the waned power of Dadebãñ We and that house’s subordination to British colonial courts. Barely three decades before, Catherine Meyer’s case, Dadebãñ We functioned as a powerful autonomous slave trading and warring entity within the Gã polity. Had that house maintained that power, it could have negotiated a better deal for Catherine Meyer. But Dadebãñ We would have realized that the colonial context in which they found themselves in 1870, meant that the British courts could not simply be harangued into granting their wishes.

However, in many instances in which European or Euro-African men willed or deeded properties to their spouses the former framed these gifts as tokens of their benevolence. In the six-volume “Ancient Documents” kept at Accra’s Deeds Registry, that I have examined, I found at least five examples of European or Euro-African men who did not mention the direct contributions of Euro-African or African women to the properties that was willed or deeded to them.⁴⁶⁴ Though Wulff was “not ungrateful to” Sara Malm and never “forg[o]t her in [his] will and testament,” he never stated in his diary or will that he obtained the land on which his house

⁴⁶² “Catherine Meyer of Accra against Francisco Vives agent for the estate of late Pedro Curco,” SCT 2/4/8, Civil Record Book 4A 17th May 1870 to 1st November, PRAAD, Accra, 83.

⁴⁶³ “Catherine Meyer of Accra against Francisco Vives agent for the estate of late Pedro Curco,” SCT 2/4/8, Civil Record Book 4A 17th May 1870 to 1st November, PRAAD, Accra, 84.

⁴⁶⁴ See Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-66; 1858-67; 1859-85; 1880-2; 1882-3

stood from his wife's relative, Nɔ̄tɛi Nā̄ŋtsi, the then Osu Mā̄ŋkralo (Danish: *Mægler*; chief broker).⁴⁶⁵ The Gã-Danish Malm family had maternal connections to the Mā̄ŋkralo who was the second highest office holder in Osu after the Osu Mā̄ŋtse (lit. “town father”). The Mā̄ŋkralo resided in the Ashanté Blohum akutso (Asante quarter) of Osu. All members of this akutso, including Sara Malm were entitled to the usufruct of any vacant piece of land belonging to that *akutso*.⁴⁶⁶

In an 1872 legal case, the Osu Mā̄ŋtse, Nā̄ Dɔ̄wuonā̄ stated that the land “where Wulff [built his house]” in 1840 “belongs to ashanti-blohum” and “If any white man wished to build in ashanti quarter he would go and ask the second chief [i.e. Mā̄ŋkralo].⁴⁶⁷ In case the white “buyer” gave a “present” to the “second chief,” the Osu Mā̄ŋtse got “a share of the present.” However, given that Sara Malm was a relative of Nɔ̄tɛi Nā̄ŋtsi, and also a member of his quarter, it was unlikely that Wulff would have paid for the land since his wife had a right to the property. Even in the case of Henrich Richter's Asante widow, Manua (“Mrs. Richter”), Nɔ̄tɛi Nā̄ŋtsi refused any payments from her as a foreigner, when she applied to buy land belonging to the Ashanté Blohum akutso.

In explaining his reason for not accepting the payments, Nɔ̄tɛi Nā̄ŋtsi, reportedly stated that: “[t]o build a house is only to bring amusement into a town. I will not sell it to you.”⁴⁶⁸ Evidently, Wulff himself had a good relationship with Nɔ̄tɛi Nā̄ŋtsi, and that friendship may have been brokered by Sara Malm. On August 25 1838, “Mr. Wulff [Joseph] Wulff” and another

⁴⁶⁵ Clearly cognate with the Dutch term for trade broker, *makelaar*.

⁴⁶⁶ See Testimony of Na Daoonah: Edmund Bannerman of Christiansborg v Christian F. Swanikier [Svanekiær] of Christiansborg. The 2nd January 1878, Summons No. 27, SCT 2/4/12, PRAAD, Accra, 642.

⁴⁶⁷ Asante Blohum was so-called because Asante traders frequented that *akutso* from 1742 onwards as this was the residence of the Mā̄ŋkralo (also known as and cognate with “*makelaar*” in Dutch Accra) or trade broker of Osu.

⁴⁶⁸ See Testimony of Na Daoonah: Edmund Bannerman of Christiansborg v Christian F. Swanikier of Christiansborg. The 2nd January 1878, Summons No. 27, SCT 2/4/12, PRAAD, Accra, 642.

Dane, “George Lutterodt” served as witnesses in a land deal between “Nortei Nantzi,” who was “mægler amongst the black people in Ussu [Osu]Town” and Gã-Danish schoolmaster at Christiansborg Castle, Christian Holm.⁴⁶⁹ Inferring from the Wulff and Sara Malm case, it was almost certain that Danish private traders such as Governor Schiønning, Hans Christian Truelsen, Johan Emanuel Richter and Tønne Bloch Rasmus as European foreigners, obtained the land on which they built their stone houses from their spouses’ family. Like Wulff, none of these Danes stated how they got their land in their wills, deeds, private or official correspondences. Nonetheless, these Danish men, took keen interests in the future of their wives and children and bequeathed property as a way of securing their families’ futures in a world which was transitioning away from the slave trade and its economic uncertainties.⁴⁷⁰

Prior to the Danes’ departure from Osu in 1850, it was the custom – at least since the 1790s – that the wife and children of Danish men inherited their houses. The Gã or Gã-Danish wives of Danish men could only lose property if their husband died in debt. In June 1814, the stone house of deceased private merchant Truelsen, which was located in the akutso of the Osu Māntɛ, was put out for auction.⁴⁷¹ Truelsen left behind his Gã-Danish wife, Maria Elisabeth and four daughters, namely; “Johanne Kristine born August 17, 1796, Caroline born March 10, 1800, Sophia Charlotte Lovise born May 24, 1803, and Birthe Elisabeth born July 16, 1807.”⁴⁷²

Henrich Richter had unsuccessfully bidden 800 rixdollars “cowries price” on behalf of his Danish father, J.E. Richter, at an auction of Truelsen’s house. Governor Schiønning decided

⁴⁶⁹ “Ussu [Osu] Town under the Danish Fort Christiansborg the 25th august 1838, Nortei Nantzi, mægler & the Fetishmen Noi & adumua together with the Paynins [i.e. elders] Tei Badu, Note Krocko, and Nortei Odua; The above mentioned are all from the *mægler's* Quarter or which is called Ashantey Broun” and “Schoolmaster Christian Holm & his heirs” kept in File No. 1/A-J, Kuku Hill Area, Christiansborg, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, General Assembly Office, Osu, Accra. This other Dane was Georg August Christoph Lutterodt (d. Nov. 1851), father of Wilhelm August Lutterodt.

⁴⁷⁰ Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 146-148.

⁴⁷¹ Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 106.

⁴⁷² RA 450 Det kgl. Guvernement på Guineakysten, 1806-1815, Rådsprotokol, Ks. 50-54 1811, 93.

that Richter's bid was too low since the previous owner Jens Jacobsen had paid 2,400 rixdollars in "cowries" for the house. In a legal deed of April 1, 1812, Ako ("Acco") of Labadi relinquished his claims on the property to Danish merchant Jens Jacobsen.⁴⁷³ Sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century, a Gã merchant from the Ashanté Blohum akutso, Nii Okãnte Shikatse acquired the property and his descendants still reside in the house. Clearly by the first half of the nineteenth century, the Danes/Europeans and Gã in Osu and Accra bought and sold each other's real property. These purchases and exchanges of real property between Africans and Europeans could explain how Mary Lutterodt and other Euro-African women had bought their land from the Dutch establishment in 1848 in Kinkã.

Married while keeping separate properties.

Though historically, married couples in Gã and Fante (Akan) societies on the Gold Coast kept their properties separately, many spouses could lend each other money or join their resources to facilitate their participation in Atlantic commerce. Despite having "no community of Goods," in common, Dutchman Willem Bosman noted at the beginning of the eighteenth century that "[t]he Man and his Wives generally adjust the matter together; for that they are to bear the charge of House-keeping, while the Cloathing [sic, clothing] of the whole Family is at his sole expence."⁴⁷⁴ Bosman's ethnographic observations, unlike Paul Isert's writings nearly eighty years later, went beyond describing conjugal legal prescriptions, but also noted how African or interracial couples could join their property and resources for practical commercial purposes when necessary. However, joining resources and properties posed a lot of challenges especially if such property was a family one and not individually owned.

⁴⁷³ See Bookkeeper Krogh, Christiansborg to Council, 5 March, 1814, Minutes of the Council, Christiansborg 1814, 63-65 quoted in Justesen, "Henrich Richter," 106.

⁴⁷⁴ Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (London: J. Knapton, 1705), 202.

Property disputes involving Europeans or Euro-Africans and their wives and families like that of Nieser and Aba's family may have been common on the Gold Coast to have attracted Wulff's and other Europeans' keen observation. For Wulff, "[t]he Mulatto woman [read mercantile women]," "often own[ed] a great deal of gold and many costly beads, but she does not seem to share in the ownership of her husband's possessions, nor he in hers. On his arrival the newcomer [European] is surprised at these customs, and believes that he himself will never become accustomed to such a life. But when he has been in the country for a fortnight or three weeks it becomes a habit; if he values his life, and wishes to avoid a dose of an extremely unpleasant medicine, it is wisest for him to follow the customs and habits here, and sing with the birds among which he finds himself."⁴⁷⁵ Wulff's observations of the importance of keeping separate properties in local marriages becomes clear in legal records from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁷⁶

Prior to this period, the actual voices of women were largely silent in many of the deeds and legal records. The expansion of British (and to some extent Dutch) "authority" beyond the cannon shot range of the "Forts and Settlements" undoubtedly expanded women's participation in colonial legal systems. Increasingly from the 1850s and 1860s, Euro-African or African women married to European or Euro-African men in accordance with Christian rites, could also maintain older patterns of property holding. Gold Coast women manipulated different European and Gold Coast legal options available to them in order to secure the best possible outcome. When Mary Jackson (née Mould) "bequeath[ed] all [her] real and Personal Estate" to her "half sister," Catherine Swanzy, on July 11, 1848, she meant it "for her sole and separate use and benefit, free from marital Control." Mary Jackson further decreed that "after her decease

⁴⁷⁵ Christiansborg, 19 December 1836, in *A Danish Jew*, ed. Winsnes, 86.

⁴⁷⁶ See the Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-66; 1858-67; 1859-85; 1880-2; 1882-3

[Catherine Swanzy],” the property should be passed on “to her Daughter Sarah Mary Spinks and such other child or children as may hereafter be begotten of the body of the said Catherine Swanzy alias Jackson or Dawson share and share alike and as to females free from Marital Control.”

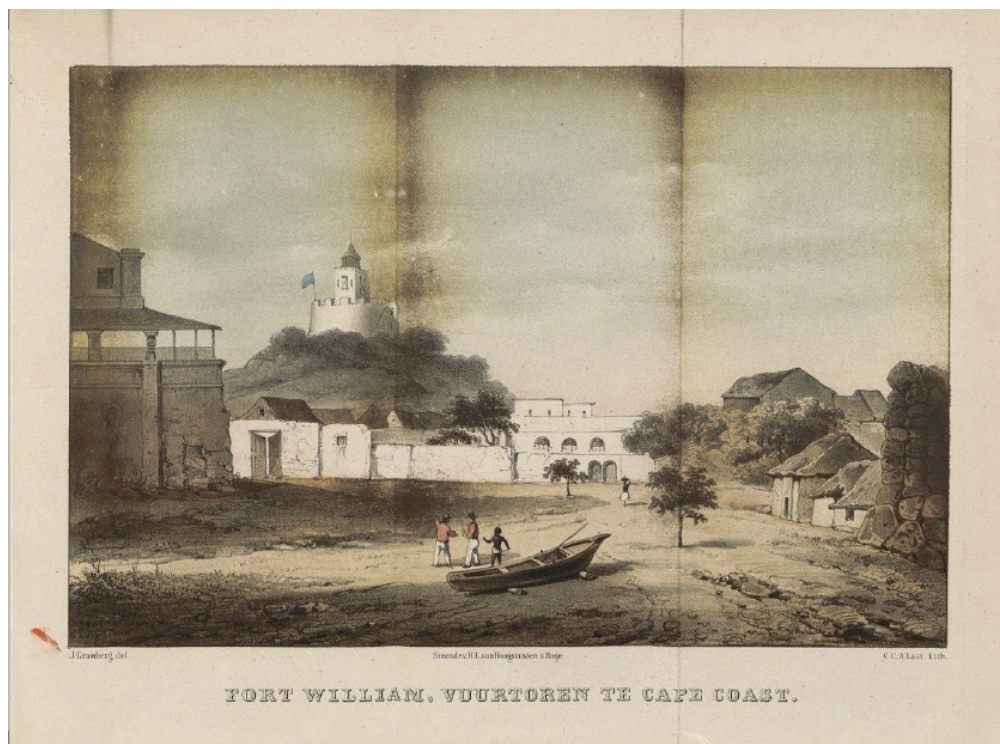


Fig. 22. Dutchman J.S.G Gramberg’s engraving of John and Mary Jackson’s former residence “at the bottom of Fort William Hill,” Cape Coast. Catherine Swanzy was occupying the house at the time of the engraving. Source: Gramberg, *Schetsen van Afrika's Westkust* (Amsterdam Weijtingh & Brave, 1861).

Despite Mary Jackson’s insistence on separate marital properties, she had inherited her deceased Scottish husband, John Jackson’s property. She also hoped to pass on her husband’s property which consisted of the “House, Premises, and Garden situated in Cape Coast, at the bottom of Fort William Hill” to Catherine Swanzy and after her “decease” to “her son John Brodington Jackson (at present in England) son of the late Robert Jackson; for his sole and separate use and

benefit.”⁴⁷⁷ In order to secure her wishes, Mary Jackson had to enshrine them legally in her will.⁴⁷⁸

Similarly, while other members of the Gold Coast mercantile elite married in accordance with Christian rites, they still enshrined their desire to hold on to the age-old practice of keeping their properties separate. Before their marriage on March 18, 1851, Anomabo-born Anglo-Fante notable, Robert Hutchison and his Elmina-born Dutch-African wife, Anna Sophia Swarte entered a pre-nuptial arrangement. Robert Hutchison and Anna Sophia Swarte belonged to well-established mercantile and propertied families with connections to European-based firms such as Forster & Smith, W.B. Hutton & Sons of London and Messrs Louis Régis of Bordeaux and Marseilles.⁴⁷⁹ Robert was a son of Scotsman William Hutchison, an Anomabo-based merchant and his Anglo-Fante wife Adelina Williams who hailed from a respectable Cape Coast mercantile family.⁴⁸⁰ Robert Hutchison was a “London House agent”⁴⁸¹ and owned properties along the Gold Coast in places as far afield as the Dãñme-speaking town of Ningo, located nearly 124 miles to the east of Cape Coast.⁴⁸² Given their respective families’ business interests, it was very likely that the marriage between Anna Sophia Swarte (c.1834-1904) and Robert Hutchison was contracted to protect their commercial fortunes. In fact, before their marriage could be solemnized, Anna Sophia’s maternal grandfather, Elmina merchant, Carel Hendrik Bartels (1792-1850) and mother, Charlotte Bartels, (1817-1873) widow of Dutchman, “Mr.

⁴⁷⁷ See “Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased,” 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

⁴⁷⁸ See Sarbah, *Fante Customary laws*.

⁴⁷⁹ Personal communication via email with Larry Yarak, September 13, 2018.

⁴⁸⁰ See Michel Doortmont, “Introduction” in Charles Francis Hutchison, *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities, a Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony*. Edited by Michel R. Doortmont. (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2005), 17.

⁴⁸¹ Henry Connor, Acting Governor, Cape Coast Castle, to the Rt. Hon. Lord John Russell, Downing Street, London, 10th September 1855, CO 96/34, The National Archives, Kew.

⁴⁸² William Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew.

[Martinus] Swarte,” and her brother Jacob Bartels gave legal consent for the “minor,” Anna Sophia to marry Robert Hutchison.⁴⁸³

The pre-nuptial arrangement in itself may have been a manifestation of the misgivings that Anna Sophia and Robert Hutchison as well as their respective families had about married couples absolutely owning property in common. It is therefore not surprising that the couple maintained separate properties over the course of their marriage. The pre-nuptial agreement was an acknowledgement of the equal economic value that Anna Sophia and Robert brought to the marriage. The couple agreed to jointly own only property acquired over the course of their marriage. What this meant was that only property acquired prior to the marriage would be owned separately in accordance with custom. While property acquired during the course of the marriage would be held in “common good.”⁴⁸⁴ The couple probably saw the practical benefits that could accrue from joining resources generated over the course of their marriage. Such capital could have been used to purchase goods from European-based firms.⁴⁸⁵

On the death of Robert, ostensibly of malaria during his enlistment into the Gold Coast Corps against the Asante invasion in 1863, “Mrs. [Anna Sophia] Hutchison” served as “the administrator of the estate of [her] late husband.”⁴⁸⁶ Anna Sophia would not have enjoyed this privilege had she not “been married to [her] husband first according to the Dutch law and afterwards by country marriage.” Being a “Mrs.,” from a European-style marriage came with

⁴⁸³ Notarial Act No. 3, dd. 18 March 1851: Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Nederlandse Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea, nummer toegang 1.05.14, inventarisnummer 987. Commander Martinus Swarte (May 13 1813 – April 8 1835) was interim governor of the Dutch establishment on the Gold Coast in 1833. See Doortmont, “Introduction” in *Pen-Pictures*, 17.

⁴⁸⁴ Notarial Act No. 3, dd. 18 March 1851: Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Nederlandse Bezittingen op de Kust van Guinea, nummer toegang 1.05.14, inventarisnummer 987.

⁴⁸⁵ Henry Connor, Acting Governor, Cape Coast Castle, to the Rt. Hon. Lord John Russell, Downing Street, London, 10th September 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew.

⁴⁸⁶ See SCT 5/4/8: Testimony of Anna Sophia Hutchison, In the Matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison deceased, A.B. McIntyre v A.S. Hutchison, Friday 6th January 1865 Before Chief Justice and Judicial Assessor.

greater legitimacy, which strengthened Anna Maria's claim against the estate of her deceased husband in the Judicial Assessor's Court. On March 24, 1865, Anna Sophia stated in court that her husband owed her "a hundred & fifty two ounces [of gold] = £5470.4.00." Anna Sophia explained to an initially skeptical court, that her "mother's sister Christina Bartels who died in the year 1854 left me a hundred ounces of gold" and "W. Bartels handed that sum of money to me in 1859."⁴⁸⁷ Though Anna Sophia had inherited the gold nugget from her maternal family, she "lent the money to [her] husband" who "said he was in difficulties at the time and asked me if I wanted [to] help him [with] money." Anna Sophia explained that though "[t]here was no special time mentioned for having to give the money back," she provided "a receipt in the hand writing of [her] late husband on this amount." And the court "admitted [the receipt] as sufficient part of the evidence" of Anna Sophia's claims.

Sometime "in or about 1861," Anna Sophia "also advanced to [her] husband fifty-two ounces [of gold]" making 150 oz in total. Robert Hutchison needed the 52 oz to pay his maternal uncle Kɔw Ampim ["Quow Appim"] from whom he had borrowed money to pay his debtor a certain "Mr. Colter."⁴⁸⁸ Like the earlier 100 oz which he had loaned to her husband, Anna Sophia kept documentation on the transaction. Though not a receipt, a "Mr. Colter" "produced ... a copy of [a letter] written by" Anna Sophia's "mother" to her "husband," Robert concerning the 1861 transaction. Though Anna Sophia was "unable to bring [a copy] of [her] husband's papers, the original" the court accepted evidence of other copies after "an affidavit" had been filed.⁴⁸⁹ By

⁴⁸⁷See SCT 5/4/8: Testimony of Anna Sophia Hutchison, In the Matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison deceased, A.B. McIntyre v A.S. Hutchison, Friday 6th January 1865 Before Chief Justice and Judicial Assessor.

⁴⁸⁸ Testimony of Anna Sophia Hutchison, In the Matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison deceased, A.B. McIntyre v A.S. Hutchison, Friday 6th January 1865 Before Chief Justice and Judicial Assessor, See SCT 5/4/8, PRAAD, Accra, 164.

⁴⁸⁹ Testimony of Anna Sophia Hutchison, In the Matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison deceased, A.B. McIntyre v A.S. Hutchison, Friday 6th January 1865 Before Chief Justice and Judicial Assessor, See SCT 5/4/8, PRAAD, Accra, 164.

scrutinizing Robert Hutchison's receipts, it became evident that he had invested the initial 100 oz of gold his wife lent him, in the British-led military expedition to Krobo without his wife's knowledge. The court recognized Anna Sophia's claims as a creditor and agreed that the dividends "would revert to the estate."⁴⁹⁰

In an earlier legal claim on January 6, 1865, Anna Sophia's attorney, Charles Bannerman stated that "Mrs. Hutchison had advanced £ 300 to her husband to bring furniture [from England]." The Chief Justice accepted the claim on condition that "the furniture was bought with her money."⁴⁹¹ Anna Sophia undoubtedly saw her husband's death as an opportune time to make claims on his estate just like the European commercial firm from which Robert Hutchison had obtained imported goods on credit. In many ways, Anna Sophia's case is illustrative of the ways in which the written word – receipts, letters and bookkeeping – as records of transactions between married couples reinforced the older Gã and Fante understandings of marriage in which properties were kept separately. At the same time these receipts and other documentation could be marshalled in colonial courts to support claims that particularly African women had on their deceased spouses' estate. Had it not been for the receipts, the court may not have accepted oral claims from Anna Sophia. The preference for written documentation in colonial courts signaled an increasing bias against oral testimonies which was preferred in non-colonial courts.

Records from the newly established colonial courts in British and Dutch Accra from the 1860s, reveal how documented transactions between married couples were crucial in the ways in which they protected and demanded their property rights. On April 30, 1868, Mary Bruce

⁴⁹⁰ Supreme Court 14th Feb. 1866, In the matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison Deceased, SCT 5/4/85, PRAAD, Accra, 80.

⁴⁹¹ See Testimony of Charles Bannerman, In the Matter of the Estate of the late Robert Hutchison deceased, A.B. McIntyre v A.S. Hutchison, Friday 6th January 1865 Before Chief Justice and Judicial Assessor, SCT 5/4/8, PRAAD, Accra, 313-23.

claimed in a James Town court that she and her then husband, Godson Bruce, had agreed that the latter could put his “goods” in her store” sometime between October and November 1865 for “one year and six months.”⁴⁹² Though Mary did not keep an “[account] Book” on her supposed transactions, she maintained G. Bruce agreed to pay “4 years Rent at \$ 7 per month.” G. Bruce according to Mary, reneged on the payment and as a way of compensating her, G. Bruce, supposedly “made a verbal agreement with her.”

In this agreement, G. Bruce was supposed to use that rent money to build his own house and afterwards help her (Mary) also build hers. Mary also alleged that she gave her then husband “50 Bricks – at \$ 50 per 1000 Bricks” and “Hds [i.e Heads] 75 cowries,” which he never paid back. G. Bruce denied making any such “verbal agreements” to pay rents and insisted that his ex-wife’s other monetary claims far exceeded what he “gave her credit [for] in my Books” on “30th April 1868.” G. Bruce was able to convince the court that his wife may have wanted “to extort money from me.”⁴⁹³ Since Mary could not provide written evidence of her claims, the court passed judgement in favor of G. Bruce. Mary Bruce’s claims on her ex-husband may have been triggered by a bitter divorce battle in a Dutch Accra court months earlier. G. Bruce had sued Mary for \$ 400 for leaving him “without cause,” a claim the latter denied. This amount was supposed to compensate G. Bruce for the dowry he had paid to consummate his marriage with Mary. The court ruled in favor of G. Bruce and Mary’s family pleaded for a reduction to half the amount.

A few months after the Bruce case, the younger James Bannerman on June 8, 1868, sued Sarah Broenner in the same court in Accra for £ 100.00. Sara Broenner had accused James

⁴⁹² Mary Bruce agt Mr. G. Bruce, SCT 2/4/4, Divisional Court, Civil Record Book 2A, 16th April 1867 to 18th June 1868, PRAAD, Accra, 29.

⁴⁹³ Mary Bruce agt Mr. G. Bruce, SCT 2/4/4, PRAAD, Accra, 29.

Bannerman Jr. of stealing “some account book” or “books” from “the premises” of her late husband, Sigismund Broenner.⁴⁹⁴ A number of prominent witnesses, including William Addo testified that the late Broenner kept his “goods” in “my [house] store” to “protect them” from his wife who is heavily indebted to him and “who would take them without payments.”⁴⁹⁵ Sarah and others alleged that James Bannerman Jr. who was a family friend of the Broenners, stole the books because he owed the deceased. There was no evidence for the basis of Sarah’s allegations especially in the light of revelations that “it is rather possible that the defendant [i.e. Sarah Broenner] might derive material advantage” from concealing the deceased’s books.⁴⁹⁶ The court ruled in favor of Bannerman and fined Sara Broenner an amount of £ 25.3.6.

Evidently, these cases illustrate how nineteenth century mercantile urban women and families on the Gold Coast could employ literacy and record keeping to safeguard their separate property rights and interests as guaranteed by indigenous connubial laws. However, what seemed unique to African and Euro-African women who contracted monogamous marriages was the ease with which they could simultaneously claim the benefits or securities which both colonial and African connubial arrangements provided. A European or Christian marriage may limit the extended family’s claims on the property of a deceased spouse, but a Gã or Fante marriage does not offer such protection. Clearly, mercantile women understood colonial courts and used it to their benefit, particularly where such legal institutions helped them enforce contractual laws related to conjugal property.

⁴⁹⁴ SCT 2/4/4 James Bannerman v Sarah Crabb otherwise Sarah Broenner, 8th June 1868. Divisional Court, Civil Record Book 2A, 16th April 1867 to 18th June 1868, 16.

⁴⁹⁵ SCT 2/4/4 James Bannerman v Sarah Crabb otherwise Sarah Broenner, 8th June 1868. Divisional Court, Civil Record Book 2A, 16th April 1867 to 18th June 1868, 16.

⁴⁹⁶ James Bannerman v Sarah Crabb otherwise Sarah Broenner, 8th June 1868. Divisional Court, Civil Record Book 2A, 16th April 1867 to 18th June 1868, SCT 2/4/4 , PRAAD, Accra, 18.

While Gold Coast women could benefit from the Judicial Assessor's courts, the patriarchal and Victorian mores on which these courts were partly founded could also potentially undermine women's property claims and moral rights. In a bitter divorce and property dispute involving Anglo-Fante woman, Elizabeth Brown and her husband, a Jamaican-born British-subject named Charles Cuthbert Brown. The couples' troubles started a few years after their marriage in 1867. After two years of litigation, Elizabeth filed for divorce in 1874, stating that she "caught" her husband having extra-marital affairs at different times with a Mrs. Musgrove, Maria Smith and a Miss Augusta Ruhle, all of Cape Coast. In addition, Elizabeth also accused her husband of "cruelty" and having "flogged" her on a number of occasions "four and half years ago."⁴⁹⁷

In Charles' response, he insisted that Elizabeth's "temper is very bad" and that she provoked the mistreatment, a claim the judge upheld and sided with. While the Chief Magistrate and Judicial Assessor, James Marshall, found Charles guilty of adultery with Miss Ruhle, he declined to grant divorce on account of cruelty since Elizabeth is not a person of "good character" and "did not behave well." However, the judge granted divorce based on Charles' proven marital infidelity.⁴⁹⁸ The *Brown v Brown* case is one of many that shows the moralizing and Victorian nature of the Judicial Assessor's court which was supposed to adjudicate "native law."

But beyond the moralizing and patriarchal tone of the Assessor's court, the dispute between Elizabeth and Charles also underscored the conflicting European and Gold Coast understanding of ownership and conjugal property rights. On November 4, 1872, Charles ejected

⁴⁹⁷ Elizabeth Brown v Charles C. Brown and Augusta Ruhle co respondent, 10 March 1874, SCT 5/4/99, PRAAD, Accra, 11.

⁴⁹⁸ Elizabeth Brown v Charles C. Brown and Augusta Ruhle co respondent, 10 March 1874, SCT 5/4/99, PRAAD, Accra, 11.

Elizabeth from their home and demanded the “title deed of the land” on which their house stood as well as Elizabeth’s “Cash box.” Charles had threatened that he would allow Elizabeth to return to their home on condition that she returned the title deed document and the cash box to him.⁴⁹⁹ Infact the Browns residence, located on “the extreme West end [of] Jackson Street,” was one of the most affluent neighborhoods in nineteenth century Cape Coast.⁵⁰⁰ The house’s location meant that it had many financial or real estate prospects should it be leased or rented.

As the Browns’ conflict progressed over the years, it became evident that their struggles over property became the main contention in their conjugal dispute. In many of her court testimonies, Elizabeth tried to prove ownership of the house by insisting that she had stabilized her husband’s life financially. Charles Cuthbert Brown, Elizabeth maintained was a “debtor” who could neither “support” her financially nor afford to rent a house as “his salary was not sufficient.”⁵⁰¹ Charles Cuthbert was once an employee of Elizabeth’s relative, Anglo-Fante merchant Francis Chapman Grant. And because of Charles’ low income, Elizabeth explained that both of them had to stay in her mother’s house. From Charles Cuthbert’s mother-in-law’s house, the couple moved into a new house which belonged to the latter. While in court, Charles Cuthbert had claimed ownership of the land on which the house stood, insisting that he had paid his mother-in-law, £ 8 pounds for it, a payment, Elizabeth insisted was for “housekeeping,” which the court upheld. Elizabeth on the other hand maintained that she worked as a “trader” and

⁴⁹⁹ Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st August 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra; See also Elizabeth Brown v Charles C. Brown and Augusta Ruhle co-respondent, 10 March 1874, SCT 5/4/99, PRAAD, Accra, 11.

⁵⁰⁰ Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st August 1872, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra.

⁵⁰¹ Testimony of Elizabeth Brown: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 260.

a “laundress and a dress-maker” and even imported goods from England through a “gentleman,” one “Mr. Mullings.”

From her profits as a trader, Elizabeth insisted she was able to build the house in 1868 which consisted of “[t]wo lower rooms and two upper rooms” and a “hall” overlooking “a gallery” built in 1868.⁵⁰² Over the course of the trial, however, Elizabeth conceded that she did not exclusively contribute to the building of the house and that her husband, Charles Cuthbert paid for the upper floors. In portraying her British husband as non-entrepreneurial and non-ambitious, however, Elizabeth sought to undermine his claim to partial or full ownership of the house. But such claims did very little to sway the court.

Despite being married to Charles Cuthbert Brown in accordance with the “rites and ceremonies of the Church of England,” Elizabeth invoked Fante laws of marriage to safeguard her property rights. “By the custom of the country,” Elizabeth argued that “a wife is entitled to such property as she acquires herself from her own labour, and I never heard any elderly person state the contrary.” Using her own parents’ divorce as an example, she explained that: “my father and mother were married according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England at the Wesleyan Chapel. They had a dispute they lived apart but my father did not take my mother’s property.” For Elizabeth, Charles Cuthbert was:

the first example that I have seen in Cape Coast – I have done the work myself [i.e. building the house] and he seeks to deprive me of it. There are many men in Cape Coast who have assisted their wives in building their houses but they have not been turned out (that they have been allowed to enjoy the houses to the building of which their husbands had contributed) But in the defendant’s case, he turns me out of the house and receives others into the house.)⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² See Testimonies of Elizabeth Brown and brick layer Ouessie Peruba: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 260; 271.

⁵⁰³ Testimony of Elizabeth Brown: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 286.

In response to Elizabeth's defense, Charles insisted he was a "British subject" and "not a Fantee" and "takes an exception to the jurisdiction of the court" of the Judicial Assessor and that the case be brought before the "Court of Civil and Criminal Justice."⁵⁰⁴ Moreover, Charles Cuthbert "demur[red] against being judged by" the Judicial Assessor's court that applied both "British and native law." Charles Cuthbert insisted that his wife could sue him in a British Court, where he contended that he would have "both equal privilege with my wife" in determining property rights.⁵⁰⁵ Ironically, Charles Cuthbert who had wanted to deny Elizabeth of her property rights claimed that Fante laws were discriminatory towards him.

By invoking his British identity, Charles Cuthbert sought to tap into his assumed colonial privilege as a British subject on the Gold Coast. Though Charles Cuthbert was born on Jamaica, he was likely of European extraction.⁵⁰⁶ In distancing himself from Fante society into which he had been immersed since his marriage to Elizabeth Brown on "30th September 1867," Charles tried to explore a more favorable legal outcome in English law.⁵⁰⁷ In rebutting Charles Cuthbert, Elizabeth told the court that she "look[ed] upon" her husband "as a native of the place because he does what the natives do, therefor[e] if defendant [i.e. Charles Cuthbert] has done anything for me in regard of my house and he could no longer live with me I think he should do the same thing as others do, that is I should hold my property without

⁵⁰⁴ Testimony of Charles Cuthbert Brown: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 264.

⁵⁰⁵ Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1872, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 290.

⁵⁰⁶ See Charles Cuthbert Brown v. Quacoe Tivali and Coffee Benyin, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, 30 June 1974, SCT 5/4/99, PRAAD, Accra, 306.

⁵⁰⁷ Testimony of Charles Cuthbert Brown: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 264.

being disturbed. I cannot understand that because the marriage was according to the rites of the Established Church that he should throw me out and take my property.”

In appealing to different and contradictory Fante and British legal principles about property rights in marriage, Elizabeth and Charles Cuthbert Brown’s case point to the deep fault lines that the cross fertilization of colonial and indigenous connubial laws and property rights generated. Charles Cuthbert seemed alarmed and intimidated that Fante connubial laws guaranteed that “females in this Country are entitled to hold property independently of their husbands.” For Charles Cuthbert, since Elizabeth was married to him in the Church of England in Cape Coast, “she has no claims because she is barred by the [English/church] law she sought for as protection as a wife.” But the English legal principle of “coverture” – the idea that upon marriage, a woman’s legal and property rights became subsumed under her husband – simply did not apply in the Judicial Assessor’s court in Cape Coast.⁵⁰⁸ Clearly, since the “native law” cases brought before the Judicial Assessor could not be appealed to the magistracy, Charles Cuthbert felt stuck and thus invoked his privilege as a British subject.

Many of Cape Coast’s indigenous authority figures and jurists such as Joseph Martin well understood the fact that “[w]hen English marriage Laws came into operation they were not one and the same as the Fantee Laws.” In his expert testimony as “a chief of Cape Coast,” Martin further explained that “[a] Fantee woman [,] a native of Cape Coast intermarrying with a European or British subject according to the rites and ceremonies of the English Church would be entitled to enjoy any property that she might have at the time of such marriage without the control of her husband.” Like Elizabeth stated in her opening defense,

⁵⁰⁸ Testimony of Joseph Martin: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 286.

Martin reinforced the idea that “[a]ll women nearly in this Country whether Spinster or married carr[ied] on trade independently of their husbands” and were therefore entitled to the fruits of their own labor and property.

Charles Cuthbert and Elizabeth’s case proved complicated. Charles Cuthbert, who had lived in the house for eight years, had once mortgaged the property without his wife’s consent. By not consulting his wife, Charles’ conduct was in clear breach of trust, particularly given the possibility of losing one’s mortgaged house. Prior to the trial, Elizabeth in a letter dated December 11, 1874, had asked Charles Cuthbert to vacate the house. In a reply, Charles Cuthbert ostensibly operating on the coverture principle and backed by his Anglo-Fante lawyer, James Hutton Brew, agreed to vacate the premises on condition that Elizabeth “pay him £400” out of an estimated value of the property of £ 664. Otherwise, Charles Cuthbert, threatened that “he intends to reside in it [i.e. the house] and offering plaintiff the refusal of the house when he quits the country.”⁵⁰⁹ Elizabeth rejected Charles Cuthbert’s offer and maintained that it was at variance with the “rules and customs of cape Coast” which the former had formerly “lived by.”⁵¹⁰ The dispute between Charles Cuthbert Brown and Elizabeth Brown is probably the first of its kind on the Gold Coast in which a (Euro)African woman in a Christian marriage with a European or non indigenous African man, tried to use the courts to claim her property from him.

On September 16, 1875, after a year of divorce and property litigations in the Judicial Assessor’s Court, the parties had not resolved ownership of the house and the land on which it stood. The parties later withdrew the case to be settled at home using “arbitrators” to which the

⁵⁰⁹ Testimony of Joseph Martin: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 268.

⁵¹⁰ Testimony of Elizabeth Brown: Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor’s Court, Cape Coast, Tuesday 31st august 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 268.

judge agreed.⁵¹¹ Though court records were silent on who the arbitrators were, they were definitely family elders or indigenous authority figures in Cape Coast. Though the arbitrators' ruling or the arguments advanced by Charles and Elizabeth were likely oral and we may never know what exactly transpired. It is important to note that Charles' willingness to subject himself to a local arbitration and/or customary law is indicative of how well integrated he was in Fante society as Elizabeth stated.

However, after two years, Elizabeth and Charles Cuthbert, could not reach a settlement and returned to the Assessor's Court for judgement.⁵¹² The Chief Magistrate and Assessor, James Marshall, agreed to give his final ruling on the case.⁵¹³ Unfortunately, for the historian it has not been possible to trace, the court's final judgement. But considering the fact that the Judicial Assessor's Court to which both Elizabeth and Charles submitted themselves was to enforce "native law," it was likely the ruling went in favor of the former. It is important to note that in a different litigation heard in Marshall's court about the same property on June 30, 1974, Charles Brown had stated that "at the end of January last," and "after a good deal of correspondence," he submitted himself to an arbitration, in which "[t]he arbitrators decided the land belong[ed] to my mother-in-law." Charles Brown and the parties involved in that case, "had agreed the decision should be binding." After the case, the "authorities decided I should pay £22. 10.0 as the value of the land."⁵¹⁴ Charles Brown, almost certainly did not pay this amount and the issue of

⁵¹¹ Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, 16th September 1875, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 286.

⁵¹² Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, Monday 12th February 1877, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 304.

⁵¹³ Elizabeth Brown v Charles Cuthbert Brown, Judicial Assessor's Court, Cape Coast, Monday 12th February 1877, SCT 5/4/19, PRAAD, Accra, 304.

⁵¹⁴ SCT 5/4/99: Brown v. Quacoe Tivali and Coffee Benyin,

ownership would resurface again the following year as part of his property disputes with his ex-wife, Elizabeth Brown.

The *Brown v Brown* case is interesting on different levels. Elizabeth Brown rejected the polygyny of her husband – an indigenous practice largely accepted in Fante and Gold Coast society and was one of the reasons why she filed for divorce. While rejecting polygyny, which evidently did not favor her, Elizabeth clung to the historic Gold Coast practice where couples owned property separately. Clearly, Elizabeth understood the different legal options available to her and thus invoked customary law when it suited her the most.

Nearly a year later in a related but much less complicated case at Osu, the Evangelical Missionary Society of Basel and the civil court granted a “dissolution of marriage” between Gã woman, Mary Jane Koikoi alias Mrs. Wulff and her Gã-Danish husband, Theodor Ulysses Wulff for “taking a concubine,” Dorothea Quist.⁵¹⁵ The couple had been married in a monogamous Christian ceremony “on 12th September 1869” and unlike Gã and Fante connubial laws, such Christian unions legally prohibited polygyny or the taking of concubines. But most importantly for our discussion, besides filing for a divorce in the civil courts, Mary also sued her husband in the court of the Osu Māntse and demanded that he return all of her father’s property, which she had presumably given to him. Theodor denied having any such property, but he conceded that Mary had given him “two small studs” of which he misplaced one. In place of the lost stud, Theodor gave Mary a “Zodiac ring.”⁵¹⁶ Clearly Mary got the Osu Māntse’s court to enforce the Gã legal ruling that couples had a right to separate properties. At the same time, he got the civil authorities and the Basel Mission to annul her marriage to Theodor Ulysses. What is remarkable

⁵¹⁵ In the suit between Mary Jane Wulff petitioner and Theodore Wulff Respondent, in the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony Central Province A.D. 1878. SCT 2/4/12, PRAAD, Accra, 695-696.

⁵¹⁶ Mary Jane Wulff petitioner and Theodore Wulff Respondent, in the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony Central Province A.D. 1878. SCT 2/4/12, PRAAD, Accra, 695-696.

in these cases from the second half of the nineteenth century are the ways in which Euro-African and African women navigated parallel Gã, Fante as well as the Judicial Assessor's court in attempts to safeguard their property rights and security.

Despite touting the “sinfulness of polygamy” and how “very popular” “the institution of Christian marriage” had become, by the 1850s, British magistrates like Cruickshank failed to understand the fact that many literate urban women simply manipulated different legal traditions to their benefit. In doing so, mercantile women sought the best possible legal outcomes in the Judicial Assessor's Courts as well as local traditional courts.⁵¹⁷ Women could also use colonial courts to enforce their property rights through written customary arrangements and attestations. By the mid 1870s, however, the British administration had co-opted the Judicial Assessor's Court, which supposedly represented and was answerable only to the “Native Sovereigns,” into the emerging colonial state and legal system.

⁵¹⁷ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*, 98.

CHAPTER FIVE

REBELLIOUS MERCHANTS AND WHITEWASHED FAMILY HOUSES

Discontinue [hostilities], O people of
Christiansborg [Osu] for in condolence there
is no riches.
– The Rev. Carl Christian Reindorf of Osu
(1834-1917).

On February 19, 1855, Johan Emanuel Richter, “son of the late Mr. [Henrich] Richter Merchant in Danish Accra,” wrote a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Rt. Hon. Lord John Russel in London. Richter asked to be compensated for the destruction of his “late father’s house” during the British bombardment of Osu in September 1854. Johan maintained that he was “born under the Danish flag,” and that in “1822, [sic, 1823]” his late father “went with two hundred of his own people [slave militia] and volunteered his services to the English Governor of Cape Coast” in the Gold Coast-Asante wars. Johan also stated that besides the house which his late father built for his family, he “and his brother [Robert Wilhelm] have also built some years since two large and good stone Houses in Christiansborg.” The new houses, according to Johan “were occupied, until ... recently” before being pulled down by the “order of Major Stephen Hill, the Governor of Cape Coast.”⁵¹⁸ In the aftermath of the bombardment, the British demolished all houses within “100 yards of the Fort [Christiansborg].”

Unfortunately for Johan and Robert Wilhelm, their other stone houses were among those structures pulled down due to their closeness to Christiansborg Castle.⁵¹⁹ In bombarding the Gã-speaking towns of Osu, Labadi and Teshi, the British not only sought to crush the rebellion of

⁵¹⁸J.E. Richter, Christiansborg, Accra, West Coast of Africa, to Right Honourable, Lord John Russell, Secretary of State For the Colonies, Downing Street, London, February 19 1855, ADM 1/2/7 PRAAD, Accra, 575.

⁵¹⁹ J.E. Richter, Christiansborg, Accra, West Coast of Africa, to Right Honourable, Lord John Russell, Secretary of State For the Colonies, Downing Street, London, February 19 1855, ADM 1/2/7 PRAAD, Accra, 575.

these settlements but also to enforce their limited authority in the area. Prior to the disturbances, the “rebels” had expressed misgivings about the British presence in the former Danish spheres of influence and the imposition of a poll tax. The Danes had sold Christiansborg Castle and other “possessions” on the southeastern Gold Coast to the British in 1850 for £10,000 without expressly consulting their African allies in that region. This caused disaffection among many Gã. However, British promises of infrastructure, security and enhanced trade with the interior, through a poll tax, somewhat toned down earlier Gã misgivings about the new administration.

By 1849, the high cost of running the British administration and the desire of the *Oguaahen* (King of Cape Coast) and Gold Coast merchants for modern infrastructure led to an agreement for a poll tax to be levied at a cost of “one shilling per head for each man, Woman and child” under British protection.⁵²⁰ The poll tax was first implemented in 1852, but nearly two years later, the scheme largely failed and the promises of infrastructure was never realized as the revenue was largely used to pay colonial bureaucrats rather than enhancing the security of trade in the interior. Besides these problems, the insurrectionists had rightly cited financial impropriety and mismanagement on the part of both European and Euro-African tax collectors. Moreover, paying one shilling per head ensured that larger and/or poorer households could not afford to pay and many reportedly sold or pawned their children and dependents to service the poll tax. In reality, the tax weakened and destabilized the “house” as a physical representation of lineages and kin groups. In reaction to these difficulties, the Osu townspeople and their traditional officeholders and other “leeward Gã,” in their own words, resolved in 1854 “not to serve” (Gã:

⁵²⁰ Gov. Stephen J. Hill, Cape Coast Castle to Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, SOS, Downing Street, London, CO 96 25, TNA, Kew, 70. See also Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*.

“sɔmɔɔ”) the Cape Coast Castle government (Gã: *Gua amralo*) or pay the poll tax.⁵²¹ The Gã word, “sɔmɔɔ” used in the various anti-British and anti-poll tax durbars that the Gã held prior to the incident, underscored their repudiation of any form of dependence and political and economic reciprocity on the British administration. After all, from a Gold Coast African perspective, social dependency and relations of reciprocity was meant to empower and not to disempower. This fact is better captured in the popular Gã and Akan adage, “if you don’t have a master, a beast will devour you.”⁵²² But one need not serve a dangerous or a less powerful master, particularly one whose actions or inactions threatened the security of livelihoods and households.

By discussing the intermediary position of the mainly Euro-African merchants as negotiators between the British administration and the local populace, I highlight the existence of different levels of power and hegemony on the Gold Coast. While local merchants’ intermediary role in the emerging British administration resonated with their visions of “progress,” it also jeopardized their positions as patrons for their extended African families and allies. While Gold Coast merchants desired greater British protection and the provision of public infrastructure to support their trade, they ultimately had to balance such interests with the imperatives and political visions of their local African dependents and allies.

Local merchants were impressed by Britain’s industrial development and desired to replicate that form of “progress” on the Gold Coast through taxation. In the thinking of Gold

⁵²¹ The German-born Rev. Johannes Zimmermann attended the meetings of the political leaders of Osu, Labadi and Teshi and transcribed and translated their speeches into English. See Johannes Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch*, 187.

⁵²² Writing in 1897, John Sarbah explains that: “As in feudal Europe, unprotected peasants commended themselves to a powerful or influential neighbour, even so in former days on the Gold Coast, persons and whole families, threatened with danger or pressed by hunger in a time of famine, were accustomed to throw themselves at the feet of one who could protect them from the foe, give them sustenance, or employ them.” See *Fante Customary Laws*, 8.

Coast merchants, the larger populace, including enslaved persons, poor commoners and households stood to benefit from this arrangement as well. But the poll tax led to disastrous consequences and the larger populace and indigenous authority figures were not convinced by the merchants' and the Oguahen's initial optimism. The precarious role of Gold Coast merchants as mediators between Africans and the British establishment was further strained by local agitations against the poll tax and increasing British colonial demands.

In negotiating their in-between roles, Gold Coast merchants, ultimately, wanted to protect their economic interests and stone houses, but that protection ran through their local dependents just as much as it did through the British. More over, the poll tax and the bombardment, crushed the extended local networks of merchants, thereby threatening their future livelihoods. In examining these complex political relationships on the Gold Coast, I discuss how the British exercised their hegemony through local merchants, including their perceived enemies such as the Richter and Lutterodt families of Osu.

While the bombardment signaled British power, their use of brute force also points to their inability to consolidate their colonial presence on the Gold Coast. Meanwhile the strong anticolonial lobby that emerged in the British Parliament in London in the 1850s and the limited finances of the Cape Coast Castle government, worked together to limit the administration's authority on the Gold Coast. Consequently, the British administration not only relied on and exercised their hegemony through Gold Coast merchants but also on their infrastructures, properties and expertise. While Africanist scholarship on architectural history and imperial building or housing projects tend to focus on how colonial regimes used the built environment to reinforce its power and hegemony, the Gold Coast shows how the British depended more on

African-owned properties for their infrastructural needs.⁵²³ In examining nineteenth century Africa and the Gold Coast prior to the Berlin Conference, historians have famously labelled this era as a period of “informal empire” and “free trade imperialism.”⁵²⁴ However, such “face value” readings of the archival record, as Larry Yarak has rightly argued, tends to obscure the real limitations of European and particularly British political and judicial authority, even in the period of “formal empire” on the Gold Coast in 1874.⁵²⁵

Gold Coast Merchants as Patrons and In-between Negotiators

In the struggles with the British administration, the mainly literate and Danish-descended merchants of Osu – an elite group – were not only concerned about their properties and the safeguarding of their commercial interests but for the welfare of their dependents and extended African kin and therefore tried to mediate the stalemate. While Gold Coast merchants certainly desired greater protection and infrastructure to support trade, they ultimately lost the faith of their local dependents when the poll tax grounded them into deeper poverty.

More than a year before the poll tax was enforced, the people of Osu, Labadi and Teshi had foreseen the future debilitating effects of the tax. By January 16, 1853, these Gã towns and some Dãŋme-speaking settlements to the east of Accra, had began an open rebellion against British rule. The rebellion erupted at a time when there was a political power vacuum in Osu. The Osu Māŋtse and his *Otsiami* (“linguist” i.e. spokesman of the *māŋtse*) had died.⁵²⁶ Reindorf, on

⁵²³ See *Verandahs of Power: Town Planning and Development on the Other side of Ng'ambo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Martin Murray, *City of Extremes: The Spatial Politics of Johannesburg*, (Duke University Press, 2011); Bissell, William. *Urban Design, Chaos and Colonial Power in Zanzibar* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011); Vivian Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis: Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵²⁴ See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “Imperialism of free trade” *Economic History Review*, Second Series, VI, 1 (1953).

⁵²⁵ Larry Yarak, “Creative and Expedient Misunderstandings,” 73.

⁵²⁶ Though the Danish-educated heir apparent and baptized Christian, Frederik Nɔi Dɔwuonã (reigned 1856-1866) had accepted the position of Osu Māŋtse in 1853, he was reluctant to assume a “pagan” office. It was not until 1856

hindsight believed that the late Osu Māntse could have discouraged the rebellion and averted the “rush folly” of the *oblempɔ̃mɛi* (sing. *oblempɔ̃*; “grandees”).⁵²⁷ The principal Osu grandees and officeholders including the Osu Alata Māntse Badu Asɔ̃nkɔ and the Klɔte priest (wulɔmɔ) Nɔi Osekā̃. The agitators from Osu closely collaborated with the Labadi Māntse Akɔnɔ and his Mā̃nkralo Tɔ̃gbɔ Tɛko Asere and the Tɛshi Māntse.⁵²⁸

Prior to the bombardment, these Gā-Danish merchants namely; Julius Briandt (alias Nii Yul), Wilhelm August Lutterodt, Niels Holm, Johan Emanuel Richter, Joseph Fleischer, Hans Svanekiær and Lebrecht Hesse occupied a precarious position. Despite having mixed feelings about the poll tax in the wake of agitations, these merchants served as “Justices of the Peace” and tax collectors in the new British regime. Prior to the exit of the Danes, many of these Gā-Danish merchants like their counterparts elsewhere on the Gold Coast and the generation before had since the early nineteenth century benefited from trading with and acting as agents for British firms such as Forster & Smith and W.B. Hutton & Sons.⁵²⁹ In fact, many of the stone houses and investments in real estate that had proliferated coastal towns such as Osu, Accra, Anomabo, Cape Coast and Elmina between the 1820s and 1840s stemmed from the commercial prosperity derived from “legitimate commerce.”⁵³⁰ However, British warnings to bombard Osu aroused the consternation of many Euro-African merchants as it threatened to destroy their investments, livelihoods and properties.

that finally ascended the Osu stool after years of negotiations with elders who finally agreed that Dɔ̃wuonā could adapt his office to his Christian beliefs. See Reindorf, *History*, 336; Parker, *Making the Town*, 75.

⁵²⁷The principal *ablempɔ̃* were Omabo Okwei, Adotei Tswi, Sewa Kwawushi. See Reindorf, *History*, 336.

⁵²⁸ Reindorf, *History*, 336.

⁵²⁹ See Justesen, “Henrich Richter.” See also chapter one of this dissertation.

⁵³⁰ See Michel Doortmont, “Introduction,” in Charles Francis Hutchison, *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities, a Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony*, ed. Michel R. Doortmont (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2005), 26.

In January 1854, Julius Briandt, whose commercial and property interests spanned the entire “eastern districts” of the Gold Coast had failed in convincing the Gã to negotiate with the British administration. Briandt and many Gã-Danish merchants in Osu had conveyed several petitions for clemency to James Bannerman and to Governor Major J. Stephen Hill.⁵³¹ However, repeated harassments of British and local Euro-African colonial officials by the Osu “rebels” and their Teshi and Labadi allies exacerbated the conflict. By August 27, 1854, the “leeward” Gã of “at least 4000 men,” scaled the walls of Christiansborg Castle. Elsewhere, angry Gã mobs from Osu attacked a group of unarmed British soldiers.⁵³² Meanwhile, the Osu people imposed a blockade on Christiansborg Castle, “preventing any provisions being sent in the Fortress,” except on the pain of “an ancient” form of execution by drowning in the sea.⁵³³

Between September 12 and 13, the British took steps to “[vindicate] the insulted honour of the British flag” by “punishing” the “rebels.”⁵³⁴ With reinforcements from the man-o’-war, *HMS Scourge*, which had arrived from Freetown via Cape Coast, the British “with a well-orchestrated fire,” bombarded first Teshi and then Labadi, four miles to the east of Osu, where the “rebels” kept their armory. In Osu, the combined fire from the guns of Christiansborg Castle and the *Scourge*, destroyed the town and “dislodged the rebels.” Prior to the destruction of Osu, the armed militia were bent on attacking “James Town and [James] Fort,” which was about three

⁵³¹James Bannerman served variously as acting governor, and civil commandant of Christiansborg between March 1850 to 1858. See Reindorf, *History*, 329-333.

⁵³² Rebellion of Natives at Christiansborg: Extract from a Dispatch from Governor Hill to the Secretary of State, James Fort, 1st October 1854 in *Military Report*, 338-340; CO 96/36 Stephen J. Hill, Lt. Colonel Commanding, James Fort, Accra, The Rt. Hon. The Secretary of War, London, Oct 5. 1854, TNA, Kew, 237; CO 96/32 Scourge, Accra Roads, 30th September 1854, TNA, Kew.

⁵³³ Scourge, Accra Roads, 30th September 1854, CO 96/32, TNA, Kew; For the dead and wounded see “Few Remarks on the Current State of the Gold Coast” Accra 10th March 1858, CO 96/37, TNA, 432. Reindorf relates that the “ancient” Gã custom of execution for high profile criminal offences was drowning in the sea and that the custom of beheading learnt was adopted from the Akan. See Reindorf, *History*, 340.

⁵³⁴ Reindorf, *History*, 340.

miles to the east of Osu.⁵³⁵ In the aftermath of the bombardment on September 19, the bombarded towns were “reduced to a heap of Ruins,” with an estimated “four hundred dead and wounded.” In the Christiansborg Castle garrison, four British soldiers were reportedly killed and fifteen wounded.⁵³⁶

In assessing the destruction in Osu, Reindorf recounted that “[t]heir whole property, consisting of several beautiful [stone] buildings, twenty-two of which were supposed to be worth from £ 400 to £ 3000, money, jewels, goods, furniture, besides their influence and glory, and their influential men and people were lost in the bargain, and themselves dispersed in the country!”⁵³⁷ Defeated and dejected, the rebel towns “submitted to the authority of the Government ,” and provided “two hostages” each to the Christiansborg Castle garrison as “securities” for “their further obedience and good” behavior.⁵³⁸

The leaders of the so-called rebels were indigenous authority figures and extended relatives and key allies of many of the merchants who worked for the British administration as bureaucrats. In the case of Johan Richter, though he had paid the poll tax, the loyalty of his extended Gã family in Osu remained in doubt. Johan Richter sought to prove his allegiance to the British establishment in order to possibly obtain compensation for his family’s losses. However, Johan’s petition was rejected. Garrison officer, Captain Bird admitted that the late Henrich Richter’s house “suffered much from” Christiansborg Castle’s “9 Pounder Guns.” And yet, Bird insisted, the destruction was in retaliation for the Richter family’s use of their fortified “double [story] House,” which “overlooked Christiansborg Castle,” as a bulwark for “armed

⁵³⁵By John Adams. Comm 2 Class, Scourge, Accra Roads, 30th September 1854, CO 96/32, TNA, Kew, 13-14.

⁵³⁶ By John Adams. Comm 2 Class, Scourge, Accra Roads, 30th September 1854, CO 96/32, TNA, Kew, 16

⁵³⁷ Reindorf, *History*, 340.

⁵³⁸ Stephen J. Hill, Gov, James Fort, Accra, to Commodore Adams, Scourge, West African Coast Nov 4th, 1854, TNA, Kew, 40.

men” who fired rockets at “the Batteries of the Fort and from which” a number of the British troops “were killed and wounded.”⁵³⁹ The “relatives of Mr. Richter,” according to Bird had “more than once refused to obey Summonses issued against them from the court in the Fort [Christiansborg].” In Bird’s judgement, the “occupants of that House” were “by no means faithful to our flag.”⁵⁴⁰ On the basis of these reports, the British government refused to compensate Johan Richter for the destruction of his properties and that of his brother.

In quelling the insurrection in Osu, the British administrators specifically saw the magnificent stone-built houses of “rebellious” Gã and Gã-Danish merchants of the town which had recently become “British” – as threats to the emerging colonial order.⁵⁴¹ Johan Richter himself like many of the Osu and Accra merchants worked for the British administration as Justices of the Peace or as collectors of the poll tax/customs. It is not possible to know exactly the extent to which Johan and his brothers participated in the rebellion. However, given the public hostility of sections of the Osu, Labadi and Teshi people towards the British administration, Johan’s extended Gã family undoubtedly pressured him to take a stand. Besides Capt. Bird’s reports, Reindorf noted that Osu’s leaders had threatened to execute by drowning anyone who aided or provided supplies for the blockaded Christiansborg garrison.⁵⁴² One of such powerful Osu leaders was Osu Alata Māntɛ, Badu Asɔŋkɔ. Asɔŋkɔ was Johan Richter’s late father’s maternal relative. During the rebellion, there was no substantive Osu Māntɛ and

⁵³⁹ H. Bird, Cape Coast Castle to Governor Stephen Hill, July 19, 1855, in Enclosure no. 3, Despatch no. 69, ADM 1/2/7, PRAAD, Accra.

⁵⁴⁰ H. Bird, Cape Coast Castle to Governor Stephen Hill, July 19, 1855, in Enclosure no. 3, Despatch no. 69, ADM 1/2/7, PRAAD, Accra.

⁵⁴¹ See H. Connor, Ag Governor, Cape Coast Castle to Lord John Russell, Downing Street, London, ADM 1/2/7, 571.

⁵⁴² See John Adams, Comm 2 Class, Scourge, Accra Roads, 30th September 1854, CO 96/32, TNA, Kew, 13-14; For the dead and wounded see “Few Remarks on the Current State of the Gold Coast” Accra 10th March 1858, CO 96/37, TNA, 432.

officeholders like Asɔŋkɔ took advantage of the power vacuum and helped steer the course of the rebellion.⁵⁴³

The bombardment of Osu may have reinforced British authority in the Gã towns, but this did not end Gã contestation of British power and call for redress and compensation following the destruction. In Osu, the “white houses” of “four memorialists” who had paid the poll tax were “levelled to the ground” and “much of their property destroyed.” These included “Messrs. W[ilhelm] & P[hilip] Lutterodt and Swaniker [Svanekiær], Mulatto Merchants of Christiansborg, and also a Native Man, ‘Owoo’ [Nii Owu], applying for compensation for alleged losses during the Christiansborg insurrection in September last.”⁵⁴⁴ The Lutterodts demanded “a fair and moderate compensation,” and maintained that the authorities did not give “notice” to the “memorialists before the bombardment” commenced on September 12. Based on assurances, the Lutterodts claimed that the Commandant of Christiansborg, Lt. Brownell had “positively assured” them “on the evening before” the incident, “that [the bombardment]” would “not take place as yet.”⁵⁴⁵ For this reason, they did not take “steps to remove their property which suffered much from the bombardment.” On the day of the bombardment, Philip Lutterodt had “hoisted the British flag on the top of his house when the firing Commenced trusting this step might have the effect of saving his residence – But it was [rather] disregarded.”⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ See Justesen, “Henrich Richter,” 100.

⁵⁴⁴ W.A. Lutterodt and Philip Lutterodt, “The Memorial of the Undersigned, Native Merchants of Christiansborg on the Gold Coast of Africa,” Accra to the Right Honorable Lord John Russell, Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies”, 16 May 1855, May 30th 1855, CO 96/33, TNA, Kew, 429.

⁵⁴⁵ W.A. Lutterodt and Philip Lutterodt, “The Memorial of the Undersigned, Native Merchants of Christiansborg on the Gold Coast of Africa,” Accra to the Right Honorable Lord John Russell, Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies”, 16 May 1855, May 30th 1855, CO 96/33, TNA, Kew, 429.

⁵⁴⁶ W.A. Lutterodt and Philip Lutterodt, “The Memorial of the Undersigned, Native Merchants of Christiansborg on the Gold Coast of Africa,” Accra to the Right Honorable Lord John Russell, Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies”, 16 May 1855, May 30th 1855, CO 96/33, TNA, Kew, 429.



Fig. 23. Reference: BMA 9717B. “Gold Coast Colony. Plan of Christiansborg [Osu],” showing the layout of the town about thirty years after the bombardment. Christiansborg Castle is shown in pink. Prior to the bombardment the settlement was closer to the Castle. The prominent merchant’s stone houses which “overlook[ed]” the Castle (painted in pink) were situated in the open space labelled “New Garden.”

In a response to the acting governor Henry Connor on the Lutterodts’ allegations, Captain Bird described the details of their claims as “incorrect.”⁵⁴⁷ Bird insisted that in a proclamation issued on “6th of September 1854,” he warned “to the effect that the then existing rebellious spirit, would be put down by force of arms.” Bird explained that prior to the commencement of the “hostilities” on the September 13, rather than September 12, he had “personally” told the merchants “to remove their Goods from their Houses.” To further make his

⁵⁴⁷ H. Bird, Capt. G.C. Corps, Cape Coast Castle to His Excellency acting Governor H. Connor, May 30th, 1855, CO 96 33, TNA, Kew, 432.

point, Bird contradicted the Lutterodts and claimed that he had advised Philip on September 12 to “hoist a British Flag” with the promise that he “would do all I could to protect his house.”⁵⁴⁸ Bird was right that the bombardment started on the 13th as confirmed by a Basel Missionary report. In all of these accusations, claims and counter-claims, Bird was quite suspicious of the Gã and Gã-Danish merchants of Osu and tried to undermine their claims to compensation.

Bird’s suspicions were not completely unfounded. Though he lacked any evidence of Owu’s role in the insurrection of September, the latter was “an instigator of the disturbances in February 1854.”⁵⁴⁹ Nonetheless, Nii Owu, who was a member of the royal/ruling family of Osu, had an anti-British posturing which drew Christiansborg Castle’s garrison’s attention on to him. Nii Owu’s material success as a merchant may have well intimidated a young Bird. Bird would report that Nii Owu’s “[h]ouse which [was] formerly of sufficient lowness, as not to interfere with the Fort, was raised without authority, to such a height, as to overlook the Fort, being distant about fifteen yards, only and from which house the Garrison of Christiansborg suffered greatly, it being fitted with armed Men, as also all the other Houses in the neighbourhood, and I do not consider this man deserving of any remuneration. I beg in conclusion to observe that the garrison of Christiansborg did not receive the slightest attempt at assistance from any of the memorialists.”⁵⁵⁰

The role of the so-called “memorialists” and Gã-Danish merchants must be understood contextually. Many of these merchants worked for the British administration and had paid the poll tax, despite the “threats of the natives to plunder and attack them if they did so” as the

⁵⁴⁸ H. Bird, Capt. G.C. Corps, Cape Coast Castle to His Excellency acting Governor H. Connor, May 30th, 1855, CO 96 33, TNA, Kew, 432.

⁵⁴⁹ H. Bird, Capt. G.C. Corps, Cape Coast Castle to His Excellency acting Governor H. Connor, May 30th, 1855, CO 96 33, TNA, Kew, 432.

⁵⁵⁰ H. Bird, Capt. G.C. Corps, Cape Coast Castle to His Excellency acting Governor H. Connor, May 30th, 1855, CO 96 33, TNA, Kew, 432-3.

Lutterodts explained. The Lutterodts and the Richters and other Osu merchant families, while under pressure from local rulers and townspeople, concealed their opposition to the British. There is little doubt that many Gã-Danish merchants participated in or sympathized with the rebellion, however they tried not to incriminate themselves while asking for compensation. Bird's intelligence revealed that the Lutterodts, "and others not named here did urge on the Rebels, against the British Government."⁵⁵¹

However, what Bird and the British administration failed to admit was their destruction of the houses of merchants and notables who were publicly known by the Osu townspeople and the British administration alike as "Government" loyalists. In the heat of the conflict, the stone house of the Danish-educated British loyalist, and future Osu Māntse, Frederik Nōi Dōwuonā was destroyed. Despite having saved the life of a British soldier from the "insurgents," the administration not only denied him any compensation, but also declined his request for the use of "one of the two Government Houses called Fredericksberg [Frederiksberg]" on Kuku Hill, Osu, which had served as a country residence of the Danish governor.⁵⁵² Governor Connor had made it clear to Dōwuonā he "could not let him have [any] of these Buildings" since he "could not tell when the Government might not again use them."⁵⁵³

The British administration also destroyed "a large amount of property," belonging to the Basel Mission which consisted of "a Chapel, mission Houses & furniture," costing £ 800.⁵⁵⁴ The

⁵⁵¹ H. Bird, Capt. G.C. Corps, Cape Coast Castle to His Excellency acting Governor H. Connor, May 30th 1855, CO 96 33, TNA, Kew, 421.

⁵⁵² H. Connor, Christiansborg to the Rt. Hon. The Sec of State for the colonies., 12th December 1855, ADM 1/2/8,28; See the same letter in CO 96/35, TNA, Kew, 335-336.

⁵⁵³ H. Connor, Christiansborg to the Rt. Hon. The Sec of State for the colonies., 12th December 1855, ADM 1/2/8,28; See the same letter in Henry Connor, Acting Gov, Christiansborg Castle to the Right Hon. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Downing Street [London], 12th December 1855, CO 96/35, TNA, Kew, 335-336.

⁵⁵⁴ Adolphus Christ-Sarasin, President of the Missionary Society of Basle, Switzerland, to Rt. Hon. Lord John Russell, M.P., Clairmont Place, Pentonville, London, May 1855, CO 96/36, TNA, Kew, 293 ; J. Stanger, J. Zimmermann and A. Steinhauser, James Town to his Excellency Stephen John Hill, 7th November 1854, CO 96/36,

missionaries' properties, as Adolphus Christ-Saracen rightly noted, were "in an opposite quarter of the Town from the 'white houses' of the Insurgents which fired upon the Fort, and that the direction conveyed to the Man of War to fire 'upon the white houses' was obviously a mistake of the moment as the position of the houses might easily have been described as on the other side of the Fort."⁵⁵⁵ Probably wary of the possibility of legal suits, the financially-troubled British administration tried to shift the blame on the insurgents.⁵⁵⁶ The bombardment was not only costly to the peoples of the Gold Coast but also undermined merchants' visions of harnessing British industrial development for the benefit of the wider African populace.

Commerce, Infrastructure and "Progress" on the Gold Coast

While examining the precarious mediator position of Gold Coast merchants and the destruction of Osu, it is important to know that the prominent traders' initial support of the poll tax was rooted in their visions of "progress." For many Gold Coast merchants who depended on overseas and local trade with the interior, modern infrastructure and security – the very essence of what they called "progress" – was not only crucial for their own livelihoods and commercial interests but that of the larger populace as well. Gold Coast merchants not only valued European-style schools and literacy but also their practical relevance in the conduct of business with European firms. These merchants also called for the construction of roads and the provision of security along the trade paths to Asante.

In Accra, powerful merchants like James Bannerman had long thought of partnering with the British administration in order to provide public infrastructure through a polltax. Bannerman

TNA, Kew, 300-301; For the £ 300 compensation see Henry Venn to Rt. Hon. Sir Molesworth Barth M.P. , 19th Sept 1855, CO 96/36, TNA, Kew, 310.

⁵⁵⁵ Adolphus Christ-Saracen, President of the Missionary Society of Basle, Switzerland, to Rt. Hon. Lord John Russell, M.P., Clairmont Place, Pentonville, London, May 1855, CO 96/36, TNA, Kew, 293.

⁵⁵⁶ Stephen J. Hill, Gov, James Fort to Revds. J. Stanger, Ch. W. Locher., J. Zimmermann and A. Steinhauser, 10 Nov. 1854, CO 96/36, TNA, Kew, 293.

believed that the provision of European-style infrastructure and legal institutions was the key to African “progress” and economic and political security on the Gold Coast. For this reason, Bannerman held that the anti-poll tax “disturbances” and “rebellion” in Osu and elsewhere on the eastern Gold Coast against British rule could derail “progress” as he envisioned it. In line with this thinking, Bannerman had warned the insurgents in Osu to cease the rebellion and pay the poll tax “quietly,” otherwise force would be used to compel them to do so. Though Bannerman had reminded Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, that the British had no “territory,” on the Gold Coast, he believed “progress” could be achieved through Britain’s partnership with local rulers and potentates.

To keep British influence going, Bannerman had suggested to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey earlier in 1851 that the chiefs be given salaries in order “to bind them to the Government and to the execution of its orders.”⁵⁵⁷ The British later adopted this policy in Cape Coast by paying monthly stipends to local chiefs from the poll tax.⁵⁵⁸ But the larger Gold Coast populace did not share this vision of progress that prominent Euro-African merchants like Bannerman envisioned.

Elsewhere on the eastern Gold Coast, various constituents within the Gã polity challenged British authority almost immediately after the Danes ceded their forts. In 1851, Governor Winniett reasoned that relocating the “Head Quarters of the Cape Coast Castle government” to Accra would “greatly increase our physical power, and the presence of the Executive would induce to better order and discipline, and possibly correct such abuses as have lately occurred at

⁵⁵⁷ James Bannerman, Lt. Governor, Cape Coast Castle 6th May 1851 to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street, CO 96/33, TNA, Kew, 225.

⁵⁵⁸ See James Bannerman, Lt. Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, Downing Street, CO 96/22, TNA, Kew, 221. Henrich Richter had in the 1840s, similarly “bribed” the kings of Akyem and Akuapem with gifts valuing up to “£ 300” in order to secure their loyalty and trading rights much to the exclusion of the Danish and British establishments. See Chief Fort Christiansborg, 26 October 1842 in *Closing the Books*, ed. Winsnes, 15-17.

[A]ccra].” Winniet was concerned that “seventeen months” since occupying the “Former Danish Forts,” the British administration had “undertaken” not “less than three Expeditions” in order to enforce their authority on the southeastern Gold Coast.⁵⁵⁹ However this position was quickly revised due to the high financial costs involved and the lack of “infrastructure” and “public schools” in Accra and Osu. Compared to Cape Coast, “which is far advanced,” discussions about transferring the capital to Accra were shelved until 1877.⁵⁶⁰

In their erroneous assumption of sovereignty, the British administration assumed that the “leeward” Gã and “the people” “to the Eastward [Dāngme and Aṅlɔ-Ewe], are undisciplined having always held their own against the weak forces of the Danish Government.” But in reality, the Danes never wielded such authority. During his tenure as lieutenant governor in 1851, James Bannerman summed up his vision of “progress,” for the “sovereign” African states adjacent to the British Forts and Settlements:

As one deeply interested in the welfare of the Country, I grieve that I can point out no way of Africa helping herself – She must still look to the fostering hand of England, until greater progress has been made. This progress is rapidly going on and the time I believe is not far distant, when she may be prepared for very great modifications of the present system. This can best be hastened by affording instruction to the young and justice to all.⁵⁶¹

It is important to note that James Bannerman was a man of strong convictions. His determination for the development of modern infrastructure and “progress” crucially informed his support for the British administration and the poll tax. By contributing his quota to “progress” on the Gold

⁵⁵⁹ Governor Hill, Cape Coast Castle 26th November 1851 to Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, Downing Street, London, CO 96/23, TNA, Kew, 240.

⁵⁶⁰ Governor Hill, Cape Coast Castle 26th November 1851 to Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, Downing Street, London, CO 96/23, TNA, Kew, 237.

⁵⁶¹ James Bannerman, Lt. Governor, Cape Coast Castle 6th May 1851 to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, Downing Street, CO 96/22, TNA, Kew, 225.

Coast, Bannerman almost singlehandedly embarked on massive infrastructural and logistical projects to literally prop up the British presence at James Fort, Accra. James Bannerman “in conjunction with the late Mr. [John] Hansen,” a fellow Anglo-Gã merchant, “erected” a “£ 200” “public wharf” and “handed [it] over to the Government.”⁵⁶² The wharf was a major infrastructural support for shipping services which European, Euro-African and African merchants in Accra depended on. Besides the wharf, Bannerman “put a new roof upon, and generally repaired James Fort, at the cost to himself of £ 150.”⁵⁶³ In responding to the poor nature of roads, Bannerman also built “a carriage Road at his own expense from this town [James Town] to Christiansborg [Osu],” a facility “which was still in existence,” in the 1850s and 1860s “and [was] of great service.”⁵⁶⁴

As far back as 1823, when the British and their Gold Coast and Danish allies were preparing for the Nsamankow War with Asante, then thirty-three year old Bannerman “garrisoned the Forts with 130 men paid, clothed, and equipped at his own expense” at a cost of £5000.⁵⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the ensuing death of Governor Sir Charles MacCarthy in that conflict, worked against Bannerman who was “many years later,” paid “£ 500 as a cost of compromise for [the] £ 5000 which he state[d].” Bannerman’s white British colleague, Benjamin C.C. Pine had “no doubt truly, was the expense of the service performed.” Despite Bannerman’s great financial sacrifices in maintaining the dignity of the British establishment through the provision of infrastructure, it was not sustainable in the long run.

⁵⁶² Benjamin C.C. Pine, James Fort Accra, to Rt. Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.[London], 28th November 1857, ADM 1/2/9, PRAAD, 74.

⁵⁶³ Benjamin C.C. Pine, James Fort Accra, to Rt. Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.[London], 28th November 1857, ADM 1/2/9, PRAAD, 74.

⁵⁶⁴ Benjamin C.C. Pine, James Fort Accra, to Rt. Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.[London], 28th November 1857, ADM 1/2/9, PRAAD, 74.

⁵⁶⁵ It is likely these armed men were the same household militia Bannerman employed in the Nsamankow and Katamanso Wars. See chapter 1 of this dissertation and Reindorf, *History*, 206-7.

In the twilight of the life of the now virtually bankrupt Bannerman in 1857, Pine would plead for a pension of “not less than £ 300 per Annum” in recognition for his “long unrequited services” of about thirty years in “assisting the Government.”⁵⁶⁶ By the late 1850s, Bannerman had neither the resources nor the physical strength required to pay frequent visits to “the late Danish Possessions,” a territory Governor Hill considered as “the most turbulent people under our Rule.”⁵⁶⁷ Regardless of Bannerman’s waned power at the end of his life in 1858, he probably labored more than anybody else to entrench British influence on the eastern Gold Coast. In all his labors, Bannerman had hoped to harness the fruits of modern British industrial development and infrastructure for the benefits of the peoples of the Gold Coast. In order to achieve this, Bannerman strongly believed that the British administration must be run by long-resident merchants like himself rather than officials appointed by the colonial office in London who may not understand the customs and laws of the Gold Coast. This move could have solidified Bannerman’s own political position and likely that of his sons on the Gold Coast.⁵⁶⁸

Despite Bannerman’s enthusiasm and support, the poll tax began to fail by the mid 1850s. Even though the people of Osu and Accra initially paid the poll tax “quietly and cheerfully, yet some complained they had pawned their sons and daughters in paying it.”⁵⁶⁹ Ironically, the poll tax and its promises of security and “progress” became synonymous with insecurity and deprivation. There were also allegations of impropriety and embezzlement by tax collectors including the Anglo-Fante merchant Thomas Hughes. Given the controversies and difficulties,

⁵⁶⁶ Benjamin C.C. Pine, James Fort Accra, to Rt. Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.[London], 28th November 1857, ADM 1/2/9, PRAAD, 75.

⁵⁶⁷ Benjamin C.C. Pine, James Fort Accra, to Rt. Hon. Henry Labouchere, M.P.[London], 28th November 1857, ADM 1/2/9, PRAAD, 75.

⁵⁶⁸ See Kofi Takyi Asante, “Intimate Knowledge of the Country”: Factionalism in the mid-Nineteenth-Century Gold Coast Administration” *African Economic History*, 46.2 (2018): 63-92.

⁵⁶⁹ Reindorf, *History*, 331.

many Gã had questioned the wisdom in paying taxes that would be used in providing amenities for Fante towns. Clearly, Bannerman's vision of "progress" and the Gold Coast merchants' support for the British administration did not resonate with the inhabitants of the eastern Gold Coast.

"We have not forgotten the good old fable, 'the frogs desiring a king.'"

On August 14, 1850, four years before the bombardment of Osu, "the native merchants of the Gold Coast" led by Henry Barnes wrote a letter to the newly-appointed Governor Winniett. The merchants expressed support for British rule and gratitude to Winniett whose administration they claimed brought "peace and tranquility but are now brought under the immediate notice of Her Majesty's Government." Among other things, the "educated" Euro-African merchants felt "highly favoured by civilization that" they were "as fully alive to and sensible to the benefits of good Government as able to speak for ourselves from our long associations and habits in this country." Curiously, among the signatories to the letter were Wilhelm August and Philip Lutterodt and Johan E. and Robert Richter and virtually all the Gã-Danish merchants who would be affected by the 1854 bombardment. In the letter, the signatories alluded to Æsop's (c. 620–564 BCE) allegory of "frogs desiring a king."

As "frogs," the Gold Coast merchants maintained their preference for the "form of government here directly under the Queen [Victoria]" rather than "under the president and council, guided by a body of merchants is the best for the colony." The signatories likened direct British rule of the forts and settlements to "a child" who "would be more cared for and better provided for by its natural parents." To drive home their point, the merchants stated that "it is our

unequivocal unanimously decided opinion that the existing form of Government that we now enjoy under the Queen is the best, and it is our wish that it remains unaltered.”⁵⁷⁰

By alluding to the “frogs desiring a king” allegory, the merchants hoped for better security and greater autonomy from the Cape Coast Castle government that would facilitate their commerce and enhance the stability of the administration.⁵⁷¹ In various versions of this allegory, a group of frogs desired a king and called on Jupiter (or Zeus in some versions) to give them one. Jupiter threw a log into their pond and caused a splash and the bewildered frogs thought it was indeed a “fearful giant.” However, upon realizing that “King Log” was “tame” and “peaceable,” they demanded another king. This time Jupiter sent a crane (or a water snake, heron or stock in some versions) “who gobbled up the poor Frogs right and left and they soon saw what fools they had been.” Consequently, the terrified frogs asked Jupiter for a new king to which he refused and asked the frogs to deal with the consequences of their choice.⁵⁷²

There is no evidence from the sources to show if the Euro-African signatories to the letter understood or acknowledged the irony of the insecurity and hardships that the “king” (British administration) brought unto the “frogs” (the peoples of the Gold Coast). But they must have thought about this irony in their private musings. Rather than boosting trade and security with the interior and providing infrastructure, African merchants’ “desire for a king” led to agitations and the destruction of towns. Prior to the bombardment, the key concern of Cape Coast, Osu and British Accra merchants was the safeguarding of their own commercial interests through infrastructure and security provided by the British administration. But after the “tragedies of

⁵⁷⁰ Henry Barnes, Joseph Smith, Thomas Hutton, W. Hutchison etc, Cape Coast to Gov Winniett, Cape Coast Castle, 14th August 1850, CO 96/19, TNA, Kew, 93. See also Asante, “Intimate Knowledge of the country.”

⁵⁷¹ It is quite evident that the mostly Euro-African signatories to the letter had a classical education.

⁵⁷² See “The Frogs who wished for a King,” in *Aesop for Children*, <http://www.read.gov/aesop/048.html> retrieved June 26, 2020.

Christiansborg,” Gold Coast and particularly Cape Coast merchants began to revise any such notions about the British administration as a harbinger of “civilization,” protector of “property” or as an embodiment of “good Government.”⁵⁷³ Most importantly, debates between African-born merchants and British officials revolved around the failure of the Cape Coast Castle government to use revenue from the poll tax to “improve the interior” for purposes of “facilitating trade.”⁵⁷⁴

By the 1840s and 1850s, major trade depots with African agents “on the main line of communication with Ashantee [Asante]” had been established.⁵⁷⁵ And many white or African agents of European firms or small-scaled Gold Coast traders were employed to “sell goods in the interior upon the merchant’s account to become one of simple credit.” For the purposes of commerce, Cape Coast merchants demanded good roads and security in order to safely ply their trade to Asante. The failure of the British administration to redress these concerns further fueled local resolve not to pay the poll tax.

Amidst threats from the British administration to bombard Cape Coast and other coastal towns after the Osu disaster, Gold Coast merchants demanded more accountability and proof for the infrastructural projects and uses to which the poll tax was put. In 1855, Cape Coast’s most prominent merchants simply refused to pay the poll tax. Since the poll tax was a paltry sum for the elites, it is not far fetched to suggest that the poorer larger Cape Coast populace, including those who depended on prominent traders, as was the case of Osu, put pressure on the merchants not to pay. In an agitated letter to Governor Connor, Cape Coast merchant Catherine Swanzy expressed deep frustrations about the failed objectives of the poll tax:

⁵⁷³ M.N. Harman [Marman?], Henry Barnes, W.B. Hooper, Thomas Hughes etc, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Henry Labouchere, Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, 11th October 1856, CO 96/38, TNA, Kew, 511.

⁵⁷⁴ John Sackey, William Addo, L. Hesse, Swanikier, Philip Lutterodt, “Few Remarks on the Current State of the Gold Coast” Accra 10th March 1858, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew, 432.

⁵⁷⁵ Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years*, 33.

I have paid the tax two years and instead of getting some good from it, since that time I have only been disturbed with hearing of threats of the destruction of the town when of course my house would be broken house and being a female living without any protection, I think it is a great hardship for me to suffer, and as it appears to me that it has arisen from this poll tax being gathered against the wish of the people. I don't feel incline [sic] to pay for this year unless some security is given to me, that my property and probably my life will be secured against the continual disturbances which I constantly see coming round. I however pray as the weaker party and wish you to understand that it is against my wish unless I see something done for the good of the country as I heard was to be done when the tax was first begun instead of being continually in terror of my life and property [.]⁵⁷⁶

In response to Catherine Swanzy's letter, on behalf Governor Connor, G.B. Andrews, the colonial secretary chided her for not being grateful for the "superior civilization" that the "British Government" had spread through the "judicial system," which according to the colonial secretary "was one of the objects to which the Poll Tax was expressly dedicated." Though Andrews admitted the financial strains affecting the British administration, he blamed it on the expenditure of the "Rebellions" in Osu, the welfare of British soldiers and "stipends" paid to "Chiefs."⁵⁷⁷ The poll tax itself as Andrews stated was "paltry." Moreover, "the [t]erritory to be expended on is large and therefore if persons residing in Cape Coast were to see much done it would only prove that other parts were neglected for Cape Coast the object of so much other British expenditure."⁵⁷⁸

In an angry response, Catherine Swanzy, stated that Andrews had not answered any of her queries or concerns. Catherine Swanzy maintained that she had "paid" the poll tax "fifty times over but that was not what I wrote about, this paltry shilling has been the cause of all these disturbances." The poll tax, Catherine confidently stated had made "this

⁵⁷⁶ Kate Swanzy, Cape Coast to Lt. Gov. H. Connor, Cape Coast Castle, August 17th, 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew Gardens, London, 337.

⁵⁷⁷ St. G. B. Andrews, Colonial Secretary." Cape Coast Castle, to Kate Swanzy, Cape Coast, 18th august 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew Gardens, London, 338.

⁵⁷⁸ St. G. B. Andrews, Colonial Secretary." Cape Coast Castle, to Kate Swanzy, Cape Coast, 18th august 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew Gardens, London, 340

Country [the Gold Coast] people poor, the large part that might be spent for the benefit of the poor people in my Country is taken to yours.”⁵⁷⁹

Catherine’s anger reflected a general disaffection with the British administration due to their misappropriation of the poll tax rather than providing infrastructure in Cape Coast and to build roads which would facilitate trade to the interior. Indeed Catherine Swanzy like other Gold Coast merchants voiced the frustration of the large dependents associated with her household for whom she paid for. Nearly twenty years after Catherine Swanzy’s angry exchanges with the administration, a British journalist G.A. Henty described her largehousehold as typical of “[t]he great woman movement.” In all likelihood this term referred to Cape Coast’s powerful households headed by women, many of whom were widows of Europeans and Euro-Africans.⁵⁸⁰ Genty, who was in Cape Coast to cover the Anglo-Asante war of 1874, described how “[t]he wealthy ladies of the town” including “Mrs. Swanzy” and “Mrs. Barnes,” mobilized their slaves and dependents to support the war effort.

In the case of Catherine Swanzy, she sent down “no less than eighty of her own people to the castle.”⁵⁸¹ Henty likened these enslaved and free dependents attached to Catherine Swanzy’s and several other merchant’s households to “Roman clients.” Some of these dependents and their “children and descendants, together with a number of others” have according to Henty, “chosen one or other of the great houses as their protector.” In the light of Henty’s observations of social dependencies in the Swanzy and other

⁵⁷⁹ St. G. B. Andrews, Colonial Secretary.” Cape Coast Castle, to Kate Swanzy, Cape Coast, 18th august 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew Gardens, London, 340.

⁵⁸⁰ G.A. Henty, *The March to Coomasie*, Second Edition (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1874), 205.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

merchants' households, it is quite evident that these wealthy traders were paying the poll tax for their dependents – those men, women and children Catherine Swanzy called the “the poor people in my Country.” In demanding accountability from the British administration, Catherine Swanzy was simply insisting on the benefits associated with her dependence on a “master” (Akan: “wura”; i.e. the British), just like her own poor household dependents expected protection from her. But the provision of public infrastructure and security was not a top priority for the administration when revenue from the poll tax began to trickle in.

As early as 1851, the British administration had decided that James Bannerman's and other officials' arrears and salaries would depend on local revenue generation.⁵⁸² In 1858, Osu and Accra-based merchants openly criticized Governor Hill for rewarding his appointees “with handsome salaries” without “improving the facilities for trade.” Meanwhile, “[it] can be proved by the collectors that in various towns people were compelled to sell their children to raise the money [to pay] this voluntary Tax.” The Accra and Osu-based merchants went as far as demanding for the abolition of the Gold Coast Corps in order for the “natives” to protect themselves “as it was before.”⁵⁸³

For the African and Euro-African mercantile community, the British administration not only failed to provide the necessary infrastructure to enhance their businesses but its repressive measures further became a major point of agitation. In voicing his grievances, Anglo-Fante merchant, Robert Hutchison, stated that “Bombardments and threatened

⁵⁸² See J. Bannerman and B. Cruickshank, Cape Coast to Gov. Winniett, Cape Coast 30th April 1850, CO 96/18, TNA, Kew, 224.

⁵⁸³ John Sackey, William Addo, L. Hesse, L. Holm, J. Briand[t], J.E. Richter etc, “Few Remarks on the Current State of the Gold Coast” Accra 10th March 1858, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew, 432.

Bombardments regardless of their circumstances,” had resulted in more insecurity.⁵⁸⁴ Hutchison had business interests and “large amounts of property” that “spanned the whole line of settlements under the British Flag on the Gold Coast and also in the Bight of Benin.”⁵⁸⁵ As a “London House agent,” Hutchison claimed he held property “amounting to £60,000 and taking into account the large amounts in the hands of the other Merchants that I ask on the part of the Mercantile Community better Guarantee for the safe conduct of Mercantile pursuits, than the antecedents of the present representatives of the Local Government.”⁵⁸⁶

To drive home his point, Hutchison alluded to the “lessons” of “one Bombardment (Christiansborg)” and that “those who lost property during that period are unable to meet their engagement with that promptitude which is so essential to a prosperous business.”⁵⁸⁷ Hutchison, strongly believed and rightly so that “the purchase of the Danish settlements,” overstretched “the responsibilities of the Local Government in its relationship towards the Native Tribes,” resulting in the failure of the poll tax to achieve the desired results.⁵⁸⁸ This together with the fact that the “Council” of Cape Coast Castle had people “who have no sympathy ... which has given rise to this present coercive system.”⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁴ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 371.

⁵⁸⁵ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 372.

⁵⁸⁶ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 372.

⁵⁸⁷ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 373.

⁵⁸⁸ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 373.

⁵⁸⁹ Robert Hutchison, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable Sir William Molesworth, London, 10th Sept 1855, CO 96/34, TNA, Kew, 372.

Hutchison's diagnosis of the causes of the bombardment of Osu and the ensuing political crisis would be repeated in the bombardment of Elmina in 1873. Like Osu, sections of Elmina's townspeople and their Asante allies opposed the Dutch cession of Elmina Castle to their avowed enemies – the British. In a series of failed diplomatic attempts by Asante envoy Akyampon Yaw at resolving the crisis, that kingdom invaded Elmina in 1873 with a force of 3000 soldiers. The allied Asante-Elmina force was defeated.⁵⁹⁰ On June 13, 1873, the British bombarded the “disaffected portions of town.” The so-called “disaffected portions” was indeed the oldest and most populous part of the town, which was a peninsular stretching from east to west, and abutted on the north was the Benya lagoon and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean. On the easternmost most part of the peninsula was St. George's Castle which overlooked the town. A Dutch survey of 1858 revealed that the town had over 3,350 “houses” and that each was inhabited by “five to six” persons with an estimated population ranging from 18,000 to 20,000. Based on this estimate, the town was the most populous on Africa's Atlantic coast by the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁹¹

After the bombardment, the town's stone houses and infrastructure were reduced to rubble and nearly a year later, Elmina's former denizens were “living in temporary buildings in the neighbourhood while many who went into the villages in the interior after the bombardment [had] not yet returned.”⁵⁹² Elmina's Euro-African merchants were among the most adversely affected in the bombardment. Samuel Davis' “stores” were “plundered

⁵⁹⁰ Akyampon Yaw died from his wounds in “subsequent military engagements and died near the coast in October 1873.” See Larry W. Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch: 1744-1873* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 242-243.

⁵⁹¹ Personal communication, Larry W. Yarak, Accra, February 7th, 2015.

⁵⁹² George C. Strahan, Government House, Cape Coast to the Right Honorable, 13th August 1874, ADM 1/2/19, PRAAD, Accra.

of everything” and “lost” his “property and Goods considerably over £ 1000” and this may be an underestimation as his “Books and accounts up there [in the house] were taken away.”⁵⁹³ Similarly, J.A. de Veer complained that “we have lost our property” since the English Government Bombarded the Elmina Town.”⁵⁹⁴ In response to the various letters from the Elmina merchants, the British government denied “any liability on their part to compensate the persons” affected by the bombardment.⁵⁹⁵

The British Administration in Need of Infrastructure

The period between 1850 and 1874 were tumultuous and uncertain years for the Gold Coast and the British administration. The series of military crises, bombardments, financial difficulties and London’s skepticism about its string of costly forts and castles along the Gold Coast threatened the stability of the British administration.⁵⁹⁶ These challenges coupled with the lack of infrastructure – housing for colonial officials, jails and courthouses – meant that the emerging administration was far from secure. In order to survive, the British administration had to rely on African and Euro-African merchants’ properties to support their infrastructure needs. Ironically, many of these merchants and families had demanded infrastructure from the British administration through the poll tax. This era was also one of opportunity for many merchants who benefited from the real estate boom.

In Cape Coast for example, many of the important stone and burnt brick houses were located on Jackson Street, Coronation Street, Commercial Street, Garden Street and Beulah

⁵⁹³ Samuel Davis, Cape Coast 20th June 1873, ADM 1/1/32, PRAAD, Accra, 191.

⁵⁹⁴ J.A. de Vier [sic], Elmina to F. Fitzgerald, Editor of the African Times, London, ADM 1/1/32, PRAAD, Accra, 192.

⁵⁹⁵ H.T. Holland, The Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, Downing Street, London to Mr Fitzgerald Esq., Editor “African Times,” London, 17th July 1873, ADM 1/1/32, PRAAD, Accra, 194.

⁵⁹⁶ See Parker, *Making the Town*, 35.

Lane.⁵⁹⁷ These street names were connected to the properties of influential Fante and Anglo-Fante business women married to British merchants. For example, Jackson Street was connected to the house of British merchant John Jackson and his Anglo-Fante wife, Mary Jackson. Mary also owned the mansion known as “Garden House,” which was likely named after Garden Street.⁵⁹⁸ Mary’s half-sister was Catherine Swanzy. Like their Fante mother who was married to Governor Mould and upon his death to British slave trader John Dawson, her daughters also successively married British men. Mary Jackson was “previously Mary Dodd[,] Wife and Widow of Pressick Dodd, Merchant in Cape Coast, and formerly Mary Mould, Daughter of Jacob Mould Esquire[,] Governor of Cape Coast Castle.”⁵⁹⁹ Likewise, the more prominent Catherine Swanzy was successively married to three British men; a Mr. Spinks, Robert Jackson and Frank Swanzy, co-founder (with his brother Andrew) of the well-known Gold Coast trading company, F&A Swanzy.⁶⁰⁰ Interestingly, Catherine not only inherited “all the Remainder and Residue” of her deceased husband Frank Swanzy’s “Estate and property” as well as “Houses” but also that of Mary Jackson and John Jackson.⁶⁰¹

With these strategic marriage alliances and commercial connections, Catherine Swanzy and her family owned a number of prime properties in Cape Coast. These properties included

⁵⁹⁷ Hyland, “Architectural History of Cape Coast,”177.

⁵⁹⁸ “Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased,” 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

⁵⁹⁹ See “Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased,” 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

⁶⁰⁰ A.D.C Hyland stated that after the death of Mary Jackson, the widowed Mrs. Catherine Swanzy married her half-sister’s husband, John Jackson (Hyland wrongly named him as James Jackson). It seems Hyland confused Catherine Swanzy’s husband, Robert Jackson (with whom she had a son, John Brodington Jackson) with her brother-in-law, John Jackson. Compare “Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased,” 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866 with A.D.C. Hyland’s *Documentation and Conservation: Report on the vacation Training Programme: Documentation of Ghana Buildings, held at Mampong/Akwapim and Cape Coast, 1969* (Kumasi: Faculty of Architecture, University of Science & Technology, 1970), 51-52; Hyland “Architectural History of Cape Coast,”177.

⁶⁰¹ Last Will and Testament of Francis or Frank Swanzy, 28th day of February 1853, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

Gothic House, originally built by Catherine’s British father, John Dawson; Government House (Hope-Smith House), Fortgate House and Swanzy Mills. The latter was owned by Catherine and her Irish-born husband Frank Swanzy. In fact, Frank Swanzy stated in a will dated February 23, 1853 that “my Wife [“Catherine or Kate”] can let the House we live in, as she could live in her own House; or she might sell it if a good offer presented.”⁶⁰²



Fig. 24. “A Plan of Cape Coast” dated 1881, showing the British administration’s rented premises belonging to the town’s merchants. “[Catherine] Swanzy’s” residence is at the foot of Fort William Hill near Jackson Street. Government House and Gothic House is also indicated in the plan. The latter is opposite the “Military Hospital,” likely Fortgate House owned by Catherine Swanzy. Source: WO 792359, TNA, Kew.

⁶⁰² Last Will and Testament of Francis or Frank Swanzy, 28th day of February 1853, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

Indeed, two of Catherine Swanzy's properties, "Fortgate House was in occupation of govt since Nov 1856 at £80" as residence of the colonial governor and one other house, Swanzy Mills "was let to [F & A] Swanzy's agt [agent, Andrew Swanzy] at £ 90 stg [sterling]."⁶⁰³

Fortgate House remained a popular facility for colonial rent. Though Acting Governor Henry Connor did not mention that facility when he was negotiating for a lease renewal in October 1856 for the "colonial Hospital," one could infer that he referred to Fortgate House. The house, as could be corroborated from other sources was "formerly in the occupation of Lt. Governor Cruickshank" and was "situated about thirty yards from this fort [Cape Coast Castle] and opposite the principal courthouse." The mansion, Acting Governor Henry Connor explained was "well provided with Rooms and Stores" which "caused" him "to think it a desirable house to lease for the Government as it is in want of one."⁶⁰⁴ Despite his admiration for the building, Connor insisted the house must "be repaired by the owner and Govt is not to be held liable to any damage." "The owner," Connor insisted "reserves to herself [Catherine Swanzy] one room in the stores and the Government is to Pay Eighty Pounds a year Rent."⁶⁰⁵

Connor found the facility more "suitable" from another house that cost "Sixty pounds a year" but "was far from being as valuable to the Government from size a situation as the house in question." Connor had hoped that his preferred facility could "have a Hospital for natives and for Europeans and for Prisoners, also a room for a Dispensary [and] a place of confinement for female prisoners. Also a Room for a Girl's school for which at present a Room is hired in the Town and also additional accommodation to what there are various entrances to the premises all

⁶⁰³ Catherine Swanzy Against Thomas Hughes, Monday 27th August 1860, SCT 5/4/27, PRAAD, Accra, 305.

⁶⁰⁴ Henry Connor, Acting Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Rt. Hon. Laboucher, 3 October 1856, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew, 222.

⁶⁰⁵ Henry Connor, Acting Gov, Cape Coast Castle to the Rt. Hon. Laboucher, 3 October 1856, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew, 222.

these purposes can I hope suitably effected.” Though Connor expected to pay the lease by drawing on the “Local Colonial Revenue,” one could surmise his frustrations from his reports due to the lack of facilities needed to run the administration.⁶⁰⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, there was clearly a high demand for leases in Gold Coast towns. In 1851, Lieutenant Governor James Bannerman complained about the “high rate of house rent in the Country, which even for moderate accommodation, is not less than £ 60 per annum, for which it would be impossible to serve in this Climate.”⁶⁰⁷ Despite his complaints about rent, James Bannerman and his family like many other Gold Coast merchant families benefited from this property boom. In 1856, Connor, discovered that the recently deceased magistrate of Winneba, Samuel Bannerman had rented out commercial “stores” within his much “commodious house” as a “Court House and Gaol.” Connor thought the stores were “very small for the Rent” of £40 per year since 1851. Nonetheless Connor was impressed by the “good and imposing appearance” of the much bigger house which was the “only one in the Town habitable by a European Gentleman.” The Bannerman residence in Winneba was at the time of Connor’s visit going by the name “Government house,”(not to be confused with Government House in Cape Coast) – an appropriate designation, the Acting Governor thought, for a town with “no remains of the Former English fort, except perhaps an odd Gun or so.” However, James Bannerman who had originally built the house was not willing to extend the government’s lease over “any lengthened period as it belonged to his Grandson.”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ H. Connor James Fort accra to the Rt. Hon H. Labouchere, 27th March 1856, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew.

⁶⁰⁷ Lt. Gov. James Bannerman, Cape Coast Castle to Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, Downing Street, London 11th February 1851 ADM 1/2/8, PRAAD, Accra, 32.

⁶⁰⁸ H. Connor, Ag. Gov, Cape Coast Castle, the Right Honorable H. Labouchere, 30th May 1856, CO 96/37, TNA, Kew, 190.

The lack of infrastructure and accommodation further threatened the stability of the British administration. In the 1850s and 1860s, there was a fierce struggle between civil appointees and military personnel of the British administration over the limited accommodation and office space in the cramped conditions of Cape Coast Castle. Meanwhile, the colonial office in London tended to prioritize the accommodation needs of military personnel over civil appointees. Many “Civil Officers,” Bannerman wrote, “whose means or inclination or want of room in the Castle have led them to reside in [Cape Coast] Town have been compelled to pay their own House Rent” as far back as 1846. These tensions led to much friction because the same rule did not apply the “Military Service,” as well as the “Medical, Ordinance, and Commissariat Departments, where House Rent or lodging money is paid to them.”⁶⁰⁹

Seventeen years later in December 1863, Governor Pine took measures “for the removal of the whole civil staff of the Gold Coast Government from Cape Coast Castle to make room for the Military and Police.”⁶¹⁰ Pine had suggested “[t]he hire of Two Houses in the town of Cape Coast for the accommodation of the former.” But this move had legal consequences. Pine wondered if Cape Coast Castle’s “Legislative Council or the Supreme Court [could] legally exercise their functions in territory not comprehended in the British Settlements on the Coast.”⁶¹¹ For the Chief Justice in Cape Coast Castle, the extension of British jurisdiction to areas not within the settlements could make a convicted “criminal” “question, the validity of any laws passed or any judgements delivered beyond the proper limits.”⁶¹² To escape this “real difficulty,”

⁶⁰⁹ Lt. Gov. James Bannerman, Cape Coast Castle to Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, Downing Street, London 11th February 1851 ADM 1/2/8, PRAAD, Accra, 32.

⁶¹⁰ Downing Street, Gold Coast no. 106, 2 December 1863, ADM 1/1/21, PRAAD, Accra, 285.

⁶¹¹ Downing Street, Gold Coast no. 106, 2 December 1863, ADM 1/1/21, PRAAD, Accra, 285.

⁶¹² Downing Street, Gold Coast no. 106, 2 December 1863, ADM 1/1/21, PRAAD, Accra, 286.

the Chief Justice contemplated whether “the proposed Court House and Government House” can be “conveniently annexed.”⁶¹³ It is not clear from the sources whether the property was acquired. But two years later, Governor Pine presented a document for “the lease of [the] premises known as Gothic House which I reported to have engaged for Government offices &c dated March 1864.” The administration estimated that Gothic House, now owned by “Messrs Banner Brothers of 57 Fenchurch Street” in London was £ 4, 500 and waited for Parliamentary approval from London before making plans to purchase it.⁶¹⁴

The accommodation problems were so dire that the problem persisted into the 1860s and 1870s. By July 7, 1862, the Cape Coast Castle administration approved a rate of “£ 60.0.0 a year” and reported that [t]he quarters of the Civil Commandant in James Fort was no longer habitable.” The administration’s financial constraints ensured that “the dilapidations of the fort has been allowed to go on from year to year.” That same year, the British commandant of James Fort, Major de Ruvignes was “compelled to leave the fort and to live in James Town.” De Ruvignes had “appealed to” Pine “for means to meet a contingency for which no calculation was made in the apportionment of his small salary.”⁶¹⁵

Exactly a week after the report, a devastating earthquake hit Osu and Accra and “the stone-houses, without an exception, [were] either entirely overthrown or are, if standing, unfit for habitation.”⁶¹⁶ In Osu, Christiansborg Castle was heavily damaged; the “[v]ault roof in one of the stores” which was “built of large stones” collapsed.⁶¹⁷ The aftermath of the earthquake led to

⁶¹³ Downing Street, Gold Coast no. 106, 2 December 1863, ADM 1/1/21, PRAAD, Accra, 286.

⁶¹⁴ Gov. Pine, Government House, Cape Coast to the Rt. Hon Edmund Cardwell, MP, 18th March 1865, ADM 1/2/14, PRAAD, Accra, 87.

⁶¹⁵ W.A. Ross, Ag. Gov, Cape Coast Castle, Gold Coast to his Grace, The Duke of New Castle, K.G., 7th July 1862, ADM 1/2/14, PRAAD, Accra.

⁶¹⁶ W.A. Ross, Ag. Gov, Cape Coast Castle, Gold Coast to his Grace, The Duke of New Castle, K.G., 7th July 1862, ADM 1/2/14, PRAAD, Accra.

Cape Coast Castle, Gold Coast, 14th July 1862, ADM 1/2/14, PRAAD, 88.

⁶¹⁷ Cape Coast Castle Gold Coast, 14th July 1862, ADM 1/2/14, PRAAD, 88.

serious logistical challenges. Consequently, the Osu Māntse, Frederik Noi Dɔwuonã came to the administration's assistance by allotting "to the officer Commanding the Detachment the undivided use of many of the huts belonging to his people."⁶¹⁸

In the decade prior to and after the 1862 earthquake, many British and Euro-African colonial officials still rented local merchants' properties in the various towns along the coast even when they found it uncondusive. In 1859, Colonial Surgeon, Robert Clark had to use an old "unsanitary" Anglo-Fante family house in Cape Coast, likely Fortgate House, which contained intramural graves.⁶¹⁹ Clark reported that "several persons have been buried in the floor of the medical store of the Colonial Hospital." Some of the "Suitable Epitaphs," Clarke observed, were "engraved on the marble slabs which mark the spot where two of the dead rest."⁶²⁰ Colonial officials' rental of African properties sometimes revealed the administration's incoherent stances on urban sanitation policies.

In September 1874, Mrs. Mary Barnes (widow of Henry Barnes), sued the younger Samuel Bannerman for "raising the walls of his house" and thus "block[ing] up two of the principal windows of [her] house" in Cape Coast. In his testimony, a British "colonial surgeon," Dr. O'Reilly, a tenant in the house stated in court that if Bannerman "built up to the wall of the plaintiff's house" and "a stock yard is made there it will be injurious to health and the smoke from a kitchen is also injurious and if I find found there was anything injurious I should give up the house I occupy."⁶²¹

⁶¹⁸ Cape Coast Castle Gold Coast, 14th July 1862, ADM 1/2/14, 88.

⁶¹⁹ See "Last Will and Testament of one Mary Jackson, Widow of John Jackson Esquire Merchant of Cape Coast deceased," 11th July 1848, Land Registry, Accra: Deeds Registry Documents, 1845-1866.

⁶²⁰ Dr. Robert Clarke, Colonial Hospital Cape Coast, to Acting Colonial Secretary Mr. R.S. Ross, Medical Report for the year 1858, 10th May 1859 in Enclosure no. 4 in Despatch no. 43 of the 11th July 1859, CO 96/45, PRO, Kew.

⁶²¹ Testimony of Dr. O'Reilly in *Mary Barnes of Cape Coast v Samuel Bannerman of Cape Coast* 8th September 1874, SCT 5/4/15, PRAAD, Accra, 78.

Nearly two years later, a Cape Coast native, John Brown who owned a house in the “Bentill [Bentsir] quarter” of town, rented part of the premises to a “Mrs Eleanor Hilda Davison” a local “colonial Government School Mistress.”⁶²² Before her lease expired, John Brown let the premises in her absence to a Mr. Lawson, “assistant colonial surveyor” and the “upper part” of the house to Alexander Ross Campbell and a certain McKenzie – all colonial officials. Upon her return from England on a business trip, Eleanor Davison sued John Brown for “trespassing” and found her “Ladies Dresses,” “goods and chattels” “considerably damaged.” The Judicial Assessor granted judgement in Eleanor’s favor and insisted that a sum of “£120 and the £6 [she] paid into court” “must be returned to her” and with “costs.”⁶²³

While all of these challenges point to the British administration’s dire need of infrastructure it also shows their complete reliance on local merchants and realtors for their accommodation needs. Most importantly, British hegemony was largely exercised in concert with Gold Coast merchants’ own commercial and real estate interests. In leasing their properties and contributing to infrastructural development, many Gã and Fante merchants benefited financially from the British administration. Meanwhile Anglo-African merchants such as Bannerman, John Hansen and Henry Barnes who were part of the administrative core of the forts and settlements were partners in the founding of the British administration on the Gold Coast.

Ultimately, the early colonial administration’s dependence on the burgeoning African property market generated new avenues for the local merchant class and the British to negotiate urban policies and their respective positions within the emerging colonial hierarchy. However, while local merchants supported British efforts such as the poll tax, and public infrastructure,

⁶²² E.H. Davison v John Brown, SCT 5/4/19, Summons No. 282, PRAAD, Accra, 195-213.

⁶²³ E.H. Davison v John Brown, SCT 5/4/19, Summons No. 282, PRAAD, Accra, 120.

they ended up antagonizing the larger populace as such policies drove ordinary denizens of the towns along the Gold Coast into poverty and greater insecurity.

CONCLUSION

A gentleman of Danish Accra, (Mr. Richter) whose house is surrounded by walls of twelve or more feet in height.⁶²⁴

– The Rev. Thomas Savage, 1840.

On August 12, 1840, the Rev. Thomas Savage, landed in Accra after a sea voyage from Cape Coast. As Savage approached Accra, the town's stone buildings were one of the first landmarks he noted. In his travels along the Gold Coast, Savage like other European or American visitors before and after him, keenly observed and commented on the stone and swish dwellings of merchants and ordinary "natives."⁶²⁵ Interestingly, but not so surprising, Savage not only drew parallels between European-built forts and castles and African-built stone houses but also suggested the latter's "imitation" of the former. Like several other travelogues on the Gold Coast, Savage described these merchant houses as centers of commerce, while condescendingly assuming that by appropriating stone buildings, Gold Coast merchants and these coastal towns became more "civilized."

The equation of "civilization" to stone buildings in European travelogues, was a standard trope in nineteenth century racial and colonial thinking. However, such prejudiced European perspectives when read against African ones, particularly the security and commercial reasons for their appropriation of stone buildings, presents us with a more complex reality. Far from being mere imitations, the local appropriation of castellated buildings was not only a product of centuries-old European and African cultural exchanges, but also a functional reaction to the Atlantic economy, the violence of the slave trade, Akan state expansion, global debt markets and

⁶²⁴ Savage, "Journal of a Visit to the Gold Coast in the Fall of 1840,"52.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 46-47.

a burgeoning real estate market. Ideas of security and self-preservation – evident in Fante personal names like “Abando” (“love of stone houses”) – offer historical clues in how Gold Coast merchants’ crucially adapted castellated buildings to the local quadrangular courtyard plan by the eighteenth century.

For the Gã, Fante and Akan-speaking communities on the Gold Coast and its interior, the “house” was both a physical homestead as well as a metaphor for the family. For this reason, the house – whether used in reference to the physical homestead or as a metaphor for the family, primarily existed to ensure the physical and spiritual protection of its inhabitants or members. In appropriating castellated buildings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gã, Fante and Euro-African merchants employed a new technology to protect their livelihoods and investments. Tracing the historical processes of building stone houses for commercial and residential purposes enhances our understanding of how African merchants conceptualized and practiced security from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It is important to note that Gold Coast merchants’ ideas about security had seeming contradictions. Merchant houses may embody the power of the Gold Coast mercantile elite but these magnificent stone edifices also embodied their vulnerability and insecurity during and in the transition away from the slave trade.

The heavily fortified nature of Gold Coast mercantile houses and the canons that some of these merchants mounted on the flat-roofed parapets of their buildings, protected or at least provided these families with a sense of security and social status. Stone houses also served as warehouses and stores and thus secured imported merchandise. Unlike European-built forts and castles, however, there is no evidence that even the most fortified African-owned castellated house provided adequate security against invading Akan armies. Nonetheless, stone buildings complemented the older forms of spiritual protection that household deities and deceased

relatives interred in the house were thought to have offered. Additionally, stone houses more than mud or adobe buildings better preserved the mortal remains and memorials of deceased relatives.

However, local ideas of houses as permanent spaces of ancestral burials and family integrity, memory and security came under serious strain at the end of the legal slave trade. At this point, European and American firms regarded stone houses rather than mud or adobe buildings as more reliable form of collateral rather than the use of illegal captives. European firms also valued African-owned stone houses for its physical durability and structural integrity. In subjecting their stone houses to global debt markets, Gold Coast merchants undermined the homestead as a physical representation of the living, deceased and unborn family members. While the loss of houses became a source of anxieties, Gold Coast merchantile families began to contest the meaning and relevance of home burials and the homestead in the post-slave trade economy.

In an era of “legitimate commerce,” the Gold Coast merchants were partly compelled to expand their cultural perspectives about what constituted security, wealth and value. The transition away from the slave trade and the changing dynamics of global debt, directly influenced the evolution of family or ancestral houses to real estate. This period represents a crucial turning point in the history of the Gold Coast insofar as the economy shifted from an emphasis on building wealth in people, often through slaving, to the expansion of a more diverse set of market-oriented principles.

While European imperialism and capitalist expansion, shaped how Gold Coast merchants negotiated the global economy, Christianity also offered new ideas of security through nucleated families and wealth building. Though Christianity was not incompatible with the practice of

home burials, the Basel and Wesleyan missionaries as well as the British administration and some elite Africans began to condemn the practice as insanitary. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Christianity had provided an ideological and theological basis for sections of the Gold Coast mercantile community to reject the supposed security that home internments provided for the spirit of the deceased in the after life. By the 1880s, the British completely outlawed home burials and constructed public cemetery. This measure was undoubtedly the hardest blow to the practice of home burials. While this shift towards burials in public cemeteries were neither uniform, coherent nor without trepidation, these processes paved way for the effective commodification of stone houses. Despite the increasing investment in real estate, older houses which contained graves or family relics were still considered sacred, though such buildings could also be mortgaged in desperate financial times.

Apart from real estate, there was a similar market trajectory of family heirlooms, from so-called “trinkets” to treasures. The connection between property and changing ideas of security and vulnerability, provides a framework for the broader social, cultural, and political histories of the Gold Coast, especially in the transition to colonial and post-colonial rule. In doing so, this dissertation emphasizes the evolving but different regimes of value that Europeans and Africans placed on material goods of diverse origins as well as stone houses. These systems of value were at once spiritual and commercial. However, the ancestral value that Gold Coast merchants associated with their houses and heirlooms was mostly not recognized by their European trading partners.

Like family houses, inherited material objects and other forms of movable property derived their transactional power and value from ancestors and lineage history. Unlike family houses, however, heirlooms and sacred goods had a longer history as partible commodities that

predates the Atlantic economy. While the trading in beads, gold pieces and “trinkets” were at the heart of the trans-Saharan trade from the pre-Atlantic Gold Coast, the emergence of Atlantic commerce expanded the commercial value of such commodities.

Atlantic commerce also introduced new objects such as new varieties of beads, merchandise and manufactured commodities that replenished households’ stock of material goods. However, the indebtedness that came with Atlantic commerce led to the parting of sacred relics that was used to defray debts. Like the loss of family houses to the market, the permanent parting of sacred goods not only depleted Gold Coast families’ spiritual and commercial power but also undermined lineage history and heritage. This was because sacred goods were once owned by the ancestors or deceased relatives. Thus, the tensions between the evolving spiritual and commercial value of sacred material goods like family houses became a subject of family contestations and disputes. These globalized commercial connections were crucial in transforming notions of value across Africa’s epochal moments of economic transitions.

As ensconced as Gold Coast merchant households were in Atlantic commerce, it was not surprising that such commercial and cultural entanglements shaped conjugal and family disputes over the control of “things” and houses. In addition to negotiating their economic autonomy, sexualities and politics, Gold Coast mercantile women sought greater control of real and movable property either acquired prior to or during the course of a marriage. Inter and intraracial marriages among the mercantile elite, became synonymous with negotiating how to use European legal systems to execute written customary law arrangements. In an era of legitimate commerce, where houses and commodities were increasingly premised on market principles, Gold Coast women sought to protect their economic interests in marriages, divorce situations or in the event of their husbands’ demise. In the Danish, Dutch and British courts established in the

forts and castles, African and Euro-African women could use the written word (wills, deeds and testaments) to secure their property interests and rights. While Gold Coast women manipulated European and African legal systems to get the best possible outcome, their failure to provide written or documented evidence such as deeds or wills in colonial courts particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, could also undermine their property claims.

Beyond conjugal and family disputes over property, the flat-roofed parapets of magnificent stone houses became the basis of some of the earliest colonial infrastructure on the Gold Coast. Though Cape Coast merchants benefited financially by leasing their stone houses to the nascent British administration, they also recognized the lack of infrastructure, which they thought would hamper not only their trade and livelihoods but that of the masses as well.

While Gold Coast merchants desired greater British protection and the provision of public infrastructure to support their trade, such ambitions came at a greater cost in the form of the poll tax. The poll tax put a lot of financial strain on the masses, thus driving them into greater poverty and insecurity. In reaction, the masses, particularly the Gã rebelled against assumed British authority and this jeopardized the precarious role of Gold Coast merchants as mediators between Africans and the British establishment. The ensuing British bombardment of Osu, Labadi and Teshi and the threatened destruction of Cape Coast, crushed the extended local networks of merchants and thereby threatening their future livelihoods.

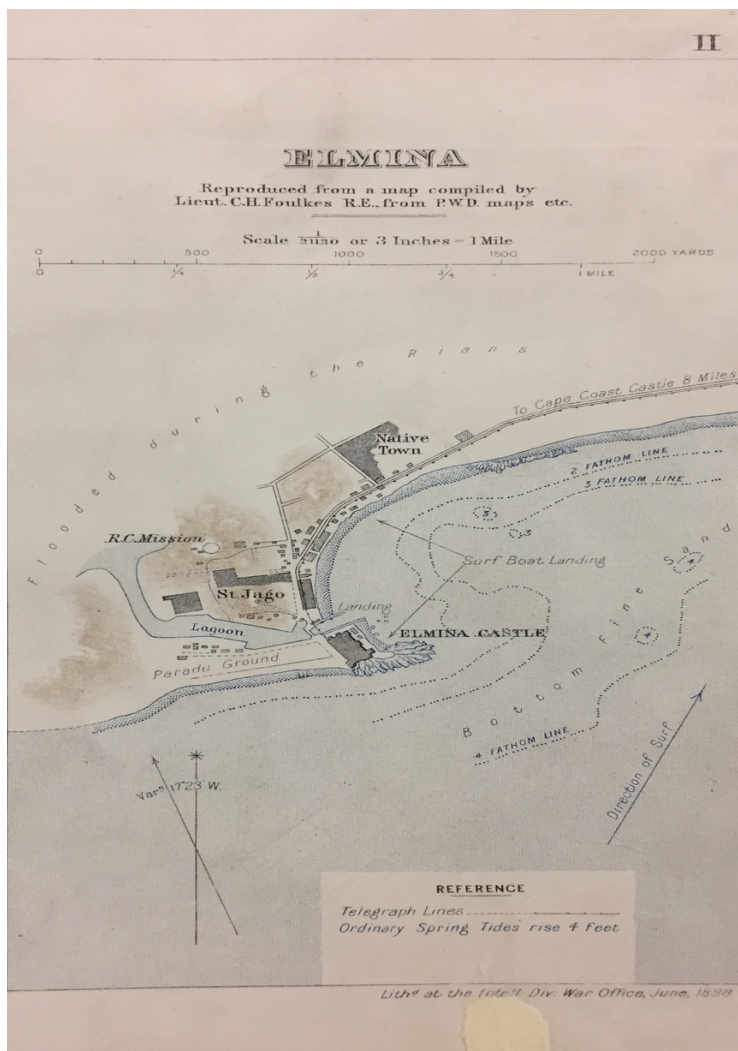


Fig. 25. An 1898 map created by the War Office showing the old site of Elmina, opposite St. George's Castle, designated as "Parade Ground." To the northwest across the Benya Lagoon is the new "Native Town." Source: CO 700 Gold Coast 35, TNA, Kew.

In all of these upheavals, the British administration not only relied on and exercised their hegemony through Gold Coast merchants but also on their infrastructures, properties and expertise. While scholars tend to emphasize infrastructure and public buildings as symbols of colonial hegemony, the Gold Coast case suggests otherwise. The emerging British administration depended more on the African property market for its schools, hospitals and missionary centers from about 1850 to 1874. Thus, British infrastructural needs provided a means for Gold Coast

merchant families to negotiate positions of power within the emerging colonial system. At the same time, British leases and /or purchases of Gold Coast merchants' properties shows the extent to which merchant stone houses were implicated in the global capitalist economy. But in Osu and Elmina, the British regarded sections of the Gold Coast merchantile community and their infrastructures – particularly their “castles,” as potential threats to the new colonial order emerging from the European-built forts and castles. In these instances, the British did not hesitate to bombard Osu and Elmina in 1850 and 1873 to consolidate their colonial position.

In both bombardments, many merchant houses and their historic artefacts and trade goods were destroyed. While the British forbade the re-building of houses within 100 yards radius of Christiansborg Castle, the site of the bombarded Elmina was reduced to a military parade ground. The new town was relocated to the northwest of the original site across the Benya Lagoon. These forms of colonial consolidation paved way for the declaration of the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate in 1874.

EPILOGUE

In this Castle I reside at present.⁶²⁶
 – Nii Kwabena Bonne III, *Osu Alata Māntse*
 and *Oyokohene of Takyiman*, 1953.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century Gold Coast merchants' fascination with the grandeur of "castles" was never lost on their twentieth century descendants. In 1936, wealthy Gã merchant and *Osu Alata Māntse*, Nii Kwabena Bonne III (born Theodore Kwamina Taylor, 1888-1968) returned from a six-month global business trip that spanned Africa, Europe, Asia and ended in Japan.⁶²⁷ Sometime after he returned to the Gold Coast Colony, Bonne "bought a piece of land at Avenor on the Accra-Nsawam Road and laid a foundation stone for the erection of a house." Bonne would later write in his autobiography that he drew the "plan of this house" himself, and that the drawing "was an original design and not a reproduced copy." By the end of 1940, Bonne who was also a trained mason had completed the house at a cost of "£ 12,300." But Bonne's story – the part most relevant to this dissertation – was that he christened his mansion, "The Rolyat Castle." Interestingly, "Rolyat" was actually the backwards spelling of his surname at birth, Taylor.⁶²⁸

The fact that Bonne built a "castle" or "mɔŋ" in the twentieth century, may sound amusing or even anachronistic to many non-coastal Ghanaians and foreigners alike. And rightly so, because the term "castle" is used in a historic sense. But Bonne was literally raised under the

⁶²⁶ Nii Kwabena Bonne III, *Milestones in the History of the Gold Coast: Autobiography of Nii Kwabena Bonne III Osu Alata Mantse also Nana Owusu Akenten III, Oyokohene of Techiman*, Ashanti (Ashford-in-Middlesex: Widderspoon & Co. Ltd., 1953), 45.

⁶²⁷ Bonne organized and led a boycott of European, Levantine and Indian shops and imported goods in the Gold Coast in 1948 to protest the harsh standard of living and discriminatory practices meted out to African merchants. His boycotts became a catalyst that set the Gold Coast on the path to independence from British rule on March 6 1957.

⁶²⁸ Nii Kwabena Bonne III, *Milestones in the History of the Gold Coast*, 45.

shadow of Christiansborg Castle – a fort which according to his family tradition, the people of the Alata *akutso* of Osu built as Danish-employed laborers. Besides Christiansborg Castle which was the seat of the Gold Coast government, African-owned castellated buildings were extant in Osu and coastal Ghana when Bonne was growing up. Therefore, he was certainly familiar with the few castellated buildings such as the Richter Fort, *Frederiksminde* or the Truelsen House (also known as Nii Okānte Shikatse We) that survived the Bombardment of Osu and the many that were built after that incident. In nearby British Accra, there was the Hansen Fort and the Adjiri Fort and the eighteenth-century Castle Brew or Aban Kakra (Little Fort) in Anomabo – all private homes.

Bonne's Rolyat Castle is probably the first private mansion in the twentieth century in the Gold Coast Colony to be named a "castle." For Bonne then, building The Rolyat Castle would have been neither accidental nor coincidental but rather the product of his and many Gold Coast merchant families' centuries old fascination with castellated buildings. Like the earlier Gold Coast merchants, the magnificent Rolyat Castle cemented Bonne's career and prestige as a merchant, mason, realtor, politician and *māntse* in the Gold Coast Colony.

The outbreak of World War II, presented Bonne the opportunity to lease Rolyat Castle to the British Army at a negotiated rent of "£ 300 a year as part of my war effort" from "August, 1940, to August, 1944." By renting out Rolyat Castle, Bonne was participating in an idea of security and private wealth accumulation in real estate rather than the non-monetary and deeply ancestral or spiritual understanding of castles. The leasing or mortgaging of houses had antecedents in the nineteenth century – a phenomenon that had become widespread on the Gold Coast at least two generations before Bonne's birth in 1888.

As the Gold Coast Colony transitioned to independent Ghana on March 6, 1957, the historic stone houses – which had inspired Bonne’s own Rolyat Castle – and the sacred “things” they contained began to face a new danger – neglect. Many descendants of earlier Gold Coast merchants began to move out of the overcrowded historic parts of town into the emerging outlying suburbs of Accra and Cape Coast.



Fig. 26. One of two imported nineteenth century whiskey bottles that is still kept at the Grant House, Cape Coast. The bottle is secured on a supporting stand at the base. Photo by author, March 14, 2019.

In Elmina, elite professionals and skilled laborers alike began to migrate to the new colonial twin port city of Sekondi-Takoradi in the 1920s and 1930s. These migrations were the culmination of decades of decline following the British bombardment of the town and the subsequent closure of

the port. Consequently, many family houses in Elmina were left decrepit and often in the care of less financially-resourced relatives or even squatters.

By the second half of the twentieth century, many family houses along the coast of Ghana also showed signs of disrepair. Evidently, the maintenance of these family houses had become a financial drain in some families. At the same time the family artefacts in some of these homes became more endangered. In my visit to a number of family houses including *Frederiksminde* in Osu and the Grant House in Cape Coast, I have been told about how unnamed whites/Europeans or Western visitors (Gã: *blɔfomei*; Akan: *abrɔfo*) sometimes negotiated to be given artefacts belonging to historic families. At *Frederiksminde*, I was told by an elderly descendant of Wulff Joseph Wulff, of how his ancestor's mahogany cabinet and library was given away to some Danes by his uncle presumably in the 1960s. When I enquired how the movable properties ended up in Danish hands, my informant insisted that it was not sold to the Danes. Similarly in the Grant House, sometime in the mid-1990s, a Western tourist bought one of two nineteenth century whiskey bottles likely owned by Francis Chapman Grant (1823-1889).⁶²⁹ Thankfully, one of the whiskey and several other alcoholic-beverage bottles as well as chinaware survived and many of these artefacts are kept by the current matriarch of the Grant House. Financial difficulties may explain why the family sold some of the artefacts to Western tourists.

In the twentieth century, Cape Coast and other coastal cities for example, retained many of their historic houses and their sacred “things,” nonetheless, a number of these homes were demolished and many are still endangered. The Richter Fort/House had deteriorated by the 1920s and in 1939, the upper floors collapsed in the earthquake of that year. Today the house is mainly occupied by some descendants of domestic slaves who once served in the Richter House as well

⁶²⁹ Interview with Charles Baiden, Grant House, Cape Coast, March 14, 2019.

as squatters. In Cape Coast, Braeside House and Swanzy Mills – properties which belonged to Catherine Swanzy’s family were demolished in 1939 and 1949. The former to make way for an “ugly modern Post Office” and the latter “to make way for a hotel that never got built.”⁶³⁰ The close-knit arrangements of historic houses in coastal towns ensured that state-sponsored road expansion schemes further threatened many of such buildings.⁶³¹ Thankfully, the descendants of Catherine Swanzy still keep her stool – a symbol of ‘traditional’ southern Ghanaian office holders – in a smaller house built at the foot of Dawson Hill where their ancestress’ mansion once stood.⁶³² In March 2019, I visited Emmanuel Kweku Ribeiro, a descendant of Catherine Swanzy and caretaker of the household shrine who took me to see the stool and other family paraphernalia kept in a sacred room.

Though the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board had been established on March 5, 1957 to preserve and restore historic buildings and antiques, financial constraints ensured that the parastatal paid inordinate attention to the country’s forts and castles, and to the total neglect of historic merchant houses and other heritage sites. The need for the preservation of these historic sites became even more relevant in the 1990s and early 2000s within the context of black heritage or “slave routes/roots tourism” to the former slave-holding forts and castles. However, in 2004, the European Commission in collaboration with local activists and descendants of historic Elmina merchant families provided two million Euros to restore fifteen homes.⁶³³ Most of these homes had been built after the 1873 British bombardment of Elmina and were located in what the colonial administration had designated the new town site. The restoration of the three-

⁶³⁰ Hyland, “Architectural History of Cape Coast,” 174.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² In March 2019, I visited Emmanuel Kweku Ribeiro, a descendant of Catherine Swanzy and caretaker of the household shrine who took me to see the stool and other family paraphernalia.

⁶³³ Ester van Steekelenburg ed. *Elmina: Building on the Past to Create a better future* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2008), 5.

story palatial van Dijke (or van Dyke) House in Elmina gave Anna Carson van Dyke the opportunity to express pride not only in her Dutch-African ancestors but also to showcase the *egyapadze* or “things left by the dead.” Anna stated this:

A house filled with memories from the past Vandyke house is our ancestral home, built in 1897 by a Dutch businessman who settled in Elmina.⁶³⁴ This house is full of history and we have captured its historical past with memorabilia, pictures and paintings. One of the pictures on the wall is that of the first Van Dyke to settle here in Elmina. These pictures and the decorative china pieces displayed are relics from the past to tell visitors our story. The living room here is the place that engages one’s attention in my house. This centre table is covered with what is called a “floor carpet” and this is what my ancestors used to cover their tables during their stay at Elmina, so I have kept it that way. The historical background of the house led to its selection for restoration under the Home Owners Scheme of the heritage project. I paid only ten per cent of the cost of rehabilitation and the rest was spread over a number of years. It was a very good bargain indeed. Before then, this house was virtually uninhabitable so it stood deserted. I only came once in a long while to ensure that there were no squatters in residence. History is alive again.⁶³⁵

While historic homes in coastal towns are “living museum[s]” and have tourist potential, these establishments particularly, the ones housing, clan or family deities, burials and historic artefacts remain important sites of family memory and ritual.⁶³⁶

Despite the huge tourist potential of these homes, descendants of these historic establishments like their eighteenth and nineteenth century forbears are faced with the conflicting demands of heritage and ancestral preservation and the increasing prospects of commercial real estate. This dilemma is partly the consequence of a booming tourist industry since the 1990s. But

⁶³⁴ The house was actually built by a local Elmina man of mixed Dutch and Gold Coast African parentage.

⁶³⁵ Van Steekelenburg ed. *Elmina: Building on the Past to Create a Better Future*, 105.

⁶³⁶ Elmina resident, D.H. Annan described Elmina as “a living museum.” See van Steekelenburg ed. *Elmina: Building on the Past*, 137.

if the spirals of postcolonial economic difficulties have weakened the “security” of the house and its members, then the tourist economy and the adaptive re-use of restored/renovated homes for commercial purposes could be the saving grace of the poorest and most vulnerable of coastal families.

APPENDICES



Plate 1. Eighteenth Century Gold Coast jewelry, artefacts and "trinkets." Source: Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations which have been hitherto published in any Language*, 4 vols. (1745-47) (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1968).

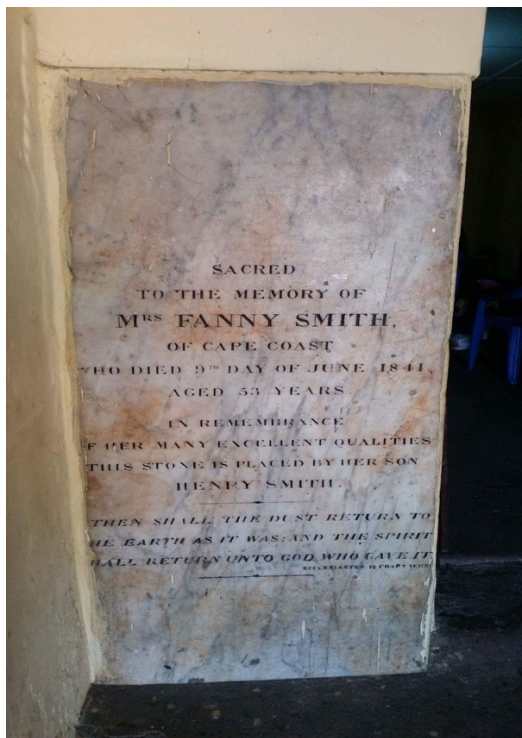


Plate 2. Fanny Smith's grave, Smith House, Cape Coast. Photo by author, 2018.



Plate 3. Mrs. Maria Viala's (née Bartels), Elmina. Photo by Larry W. Yarak, 1996.

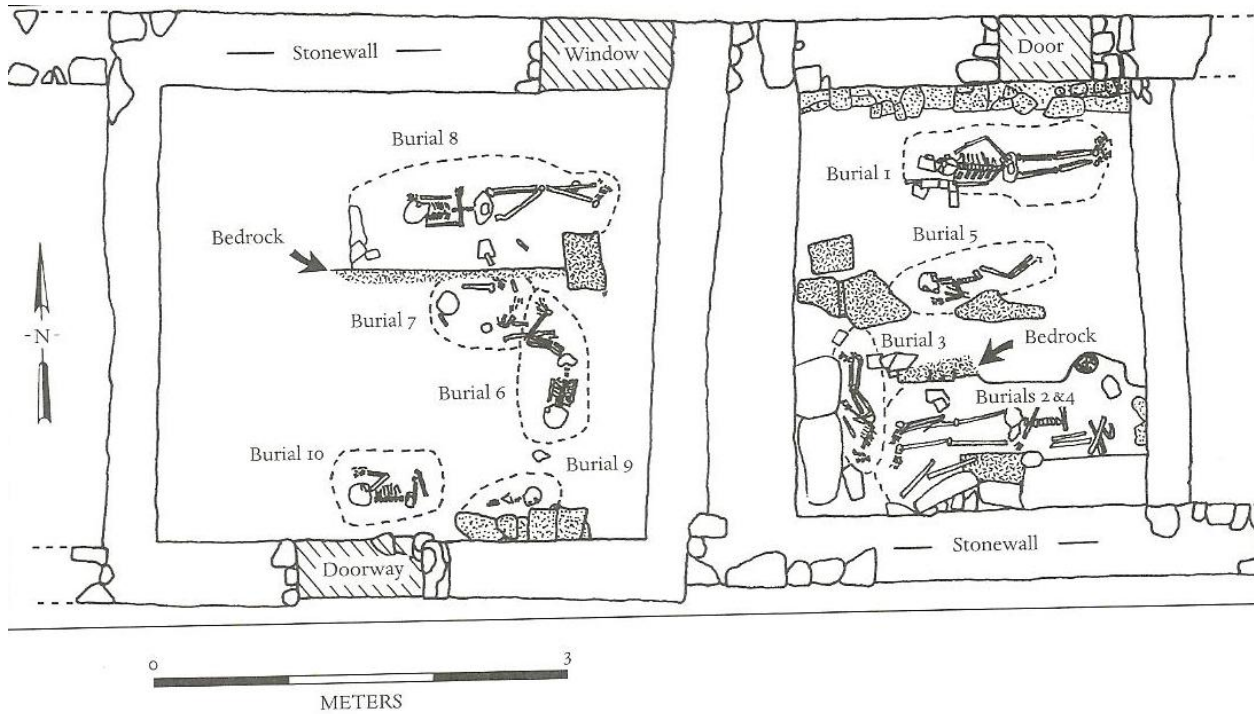


Plate 4. Archaeological excavation showing layout of intra-mural burials in an Elmina house. Source: Christopher R. DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina*.

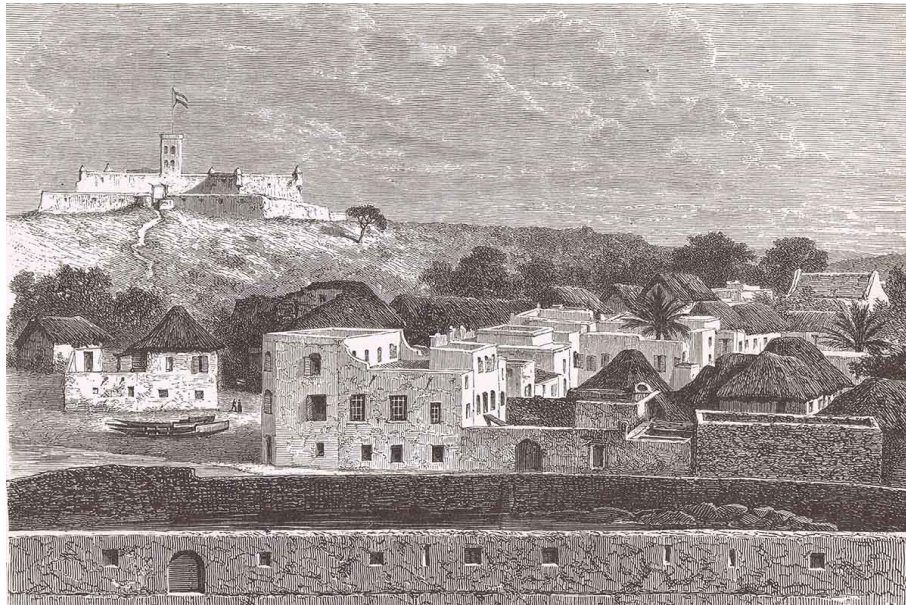


Plate 5. View of Bridge House, Elmina. Lithograph, 1870.



Plate 6. Elmina in 1806, showing thatched roofed stone houses opposite St. George's Castle. Source: Duke of Clarence Collection, British Library.



Plate 7. Model of indigenous southern Ghanaian courtyard House National Museum, Accra, Ghana. Photo by author, 2010.

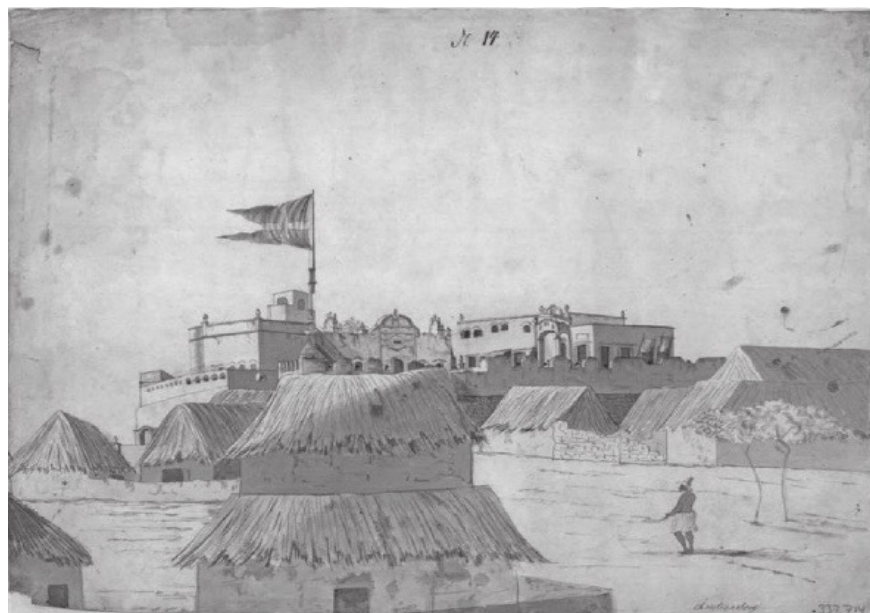


Plate 8. Peter Thonning's engraving of Christiansborg Castle and mud-built courtyard houses in Osu. Seen from the north, 1802. See: Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, 143. Original is kept at the Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen.



Main Street, Elmina. (showing old Dutch houses built about 1750)
 Plate 9. Elmina in the late nineteenth century. CO 1069-34-61, TNA, Kew.



Plate 10. Wooden-framed veranda, shutters and glass-panelled windows, Conduah House, Elmina. Photo by author, 2019.



Plate 11. Marble-tiled steps at Conduah House. Photo by author, 2019.



Plate 12. Makelaar Nii Kwaku Ankra's now partly ruined "castle," with re-mounted canons, adjacent the former Dutch Fort, Crèveceur (renamed Ussher Fort in 1868).

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