

Culture contact, continuity, and change on the Gold Coast, AD 1400–1900

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Abstract

This article briefly examines the consequences of the European presence on the Gold Coast, focusing on archaeological, ethnographic, and historical data from the African settlement of Elmina, Ghana. Documentary sources indicate that there was extensive change in socio-political institutions, economic relations, and other aspects of Gold Coast society in the centuries following the advent of European trade in the late fifteenth century. Archaeological survey and excavation of some 30 structures at Elmina similarly indicates a great deal of change in construction technology and material culture during the post-European contact period. However, examination of artefact patterning and associations indicates that in certain respects there was little change in terms of people's shared world view and belief systems. This picture can be contrasted with data from sites in other areas which may have experienced a great deal of culture change during the post-European contact period.

Résumé

Cet article examine brièvement les conséquences de la présence européenne sur la Côte de l'Or, se penchant plus particulièrement sur les données archéologiques, ethnographiques et historiques du site d'Elmina au Ghana. Les sources documentaires indiquent qu'un changement de grande envergure affectant les institutions socio-politiques, les relations économiques et d'autres aspects de la société de la Côte de l'Or pris place durant les siècles suivant l'arrivée du commerce européen à la fin du quinzième siècle. Un survey archéologique et les fouilles d'environ 30 structures à Elmina, indiquent aussi qu'un changement étendu des techniques de construction et de la culture matérielle s'effectue après la période de contact européen. Toutefois, l'étude de la distribution et des associations des objets, indique que le système de croyance et l'idée du monde partagée par cette société furent peu affectés.

Cette image peut être comparée avec les données obtenues sur d'autres sites ayant fait l'expérience d'un changement culturel important pendant la période postérieure aux contacts européens.

Europeans on the Gold Coast

The Gold Coast, historically considered to extend from Assine in the Ivory Coast to the Volta River in modern Ghana, was first reached by Portuguese traders in the late fifteenth century. Ships are known to have been trading at the mouth of the Pra River by 1471, but isolated visits may have occurred much earlier (Pereira 1967:118; cf. Cortesão and Teixeira da Mota 1960:xxxii; de Oliveira Marques 1972:135). Guinea gold was the main Portuguese objective and it remained an important trade item despite the later pre-eminence of New World and Far Eastern commerce. On the Gold Coast, gold was found relatively close to the coastal regions and the area soon became known as 'Mina' or 'the Mine'. Trade was at first conducted from ships, but the Portuguese quickly decided that it was desirable to establish a fortress on the coast which would secure trade and allow for the storage of goods. The result was the founding of Castle São Jorge da Mina in 1482 (Vogt 1979:19–20; see Fig. 1). The castle was located near a sizeable African settlement to which oral traditions and early documentary sources variously refer as Dondou, Oddena, Dana, Anomee, or Anomeekwakurom (Wartemberg 1951:15; Meyerowitz 1952a:179; Blake 1967:45, 47). Later, both the castle and settlement would come to be known simply as 'Elmina'.

Portugal attempted to maintain exclusive rights to the Guinea trade through military action and papal decrees, but incursions by traders of other nationalities became increasingly common during the early sixteenth century. By 1530, the increase in the number of French interlopers was dramatic, ending Portugal's five decades of relatively 'quiet consolidation' (Blake 1977:106). By the close of the sixteenth century the Portuguese position was extremely tenuous and other European powers competed to fill the vacancy (Blake 1967; Vogt 1979; Teixeira da Mota and Hair 1988).

The growth of European trade on the West African coast did not create new commercial patterns as much as expand and redirect existing routes. However, increasing importance attached to the new frontier of opportunity provided by coastal settlements such as Elmina, Allada, and Whydah. More European trade-posts dot the Gold Coast than any other part of the African continent. Over 60 were eventually established along the 500-km coastline (Lawrence 1963; Van Dantzig 1980; Posnansky and DeCorse 1986). These monuments attest to the fierce competition between Portuguese, Dutch, French, British, Swedes, Danes, and Brandenburgers for the African trade. The number of Europeans involved in the trade was, however, relatively small and there were never more than a few hundred on the coast at one time. For the most part, these people were government officials, traders, and soldiers, not settlers interested in making a home. This is very different from the situation in portions of southern and eastern Africa where there was significant European settlement and where cultural transplantation was an integral part of the European presence.

Documentary sources on West Africa indicate that in some respects African societies exhibited a striking degree of continuity between initial European contact and the late nineteenth century. The distribution of ethnolinguistic groups remained much the same, and accounts of certain rituals, religious beliefs, inheritance patterns, material culture, and other features exhibited pronounced longevity (Blake 1967:53; Hair 1967). However, despite some degree of stability, there was a great deal of change in many aspects of African

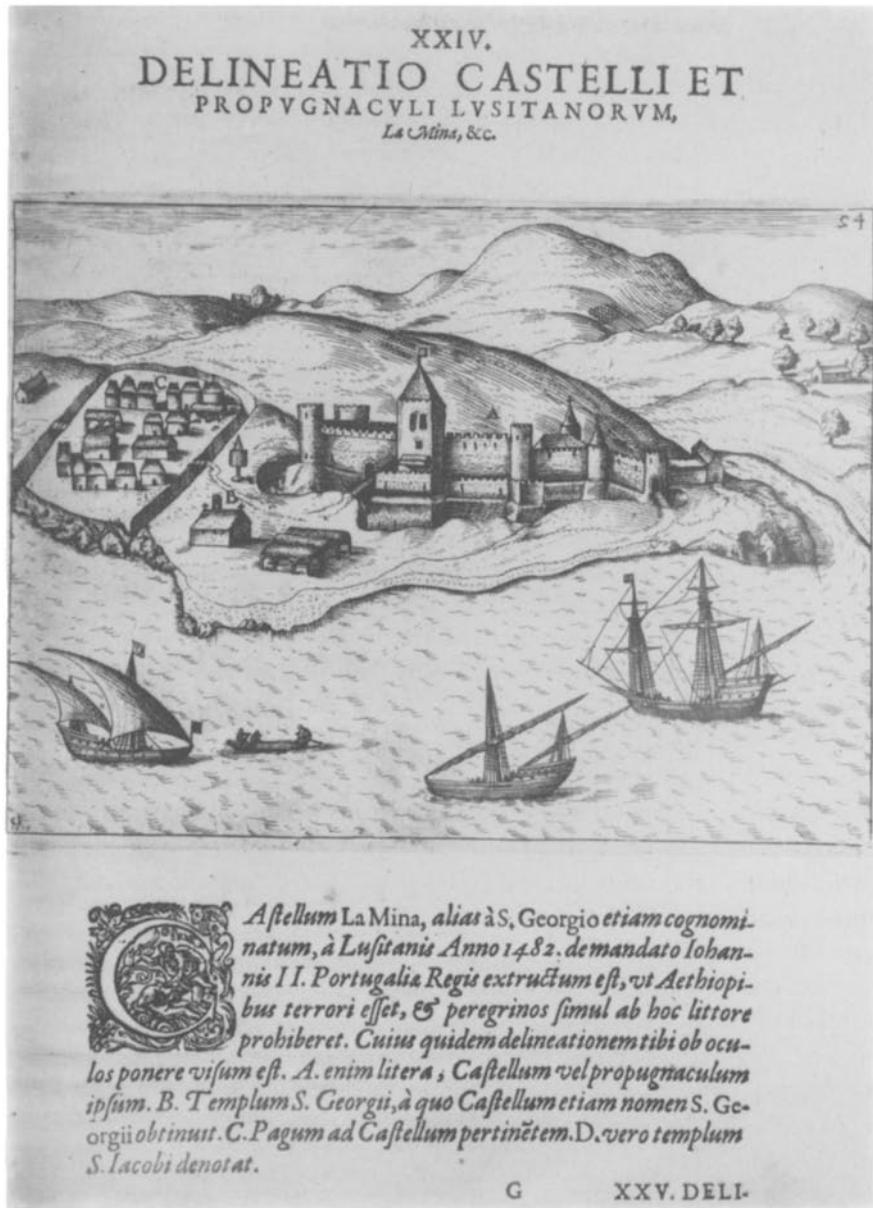


Figure 1 A sixteenth-century drawing of Castle São Jorge da Mina and the associated African settlement (after de Bry and Israel 1604, reproduced with permission of National Maritime Museum, London). Founded in 1482, the Castle remained the centre of European mercantile interest in Guinea for the next 400 years. Like many early illustrations, this drawing was probably completed in Europe by an artist who had never visited Africa (cf. Braun and Hogenberg 1574; De Bry and Israel 1603).

society (Arhin 1966; Dike 1966; Polanyi 1966; Daaku 1970; Rodney 1970; Reynolds 1974; Kea 1982; Wallerstein 1986). African economies were increasingly incorporated into a world economic system dominated by Europe. In many instances, political systems became segmented, as wealth from European trade became a means through which subordinates could usurp power. Many of the smaller states which had existed at the time of European contact were subsumed by larger polities, a process which was facilitated by the introduction of a widespread trade in European firearms. New cultigens were introduced and a vast array of European manufactures were added to the material inventory. Changes in settlement patterns, pottery forms, and decorative styles have been viewed as consequences of the European presence.

The archaeological record of the post-European-contact period

Studies of culture contact have been an integral part of historical archaeology in many parts of the world as much research has focused on sites associated with the expansion of western European hegemony from the late fifteenth century onwards. Archaeological data provide a useful perspective of culture contact situations as they afford a time depth not accessible through documentary sources or oral traditions. In addition, the rapid technological innovation and the great variety of material culture associated with the expansion of European mercantilism facilitate chronological control, allowing for more precise assessment of change. Variability in archaeological data has been helpful in defining many aspects of site function and past social systems (e.g. Deetz 1977; South 1977; Schuyler 1980; Beaudry 1988; Yentsch and Beaudry 1992).

The potential use of archaeological data in the study of culture change in West Africa has been recognized for some time. Paul Ozanne (1962, 1963, 1964) noted that, if the impact of the small European population in coastal Ghana on indigenous social institutions could be documented archaeologically, the study would have implications for the interpretation of archaeological variability in other parts of the world. Data collected by Ozanne, primarily from surface collections in the Accra–Shai area (Fig. 2), seem to provide an archaeological indication of the social and economic impact of European contact and trade. Ozanne noted ‘a dramatic difference’ between the pottery of the late prehistoric period and the early historic period between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. Ozanne (1962:65) argued that the difference in the later pottery was ‘essentially a change in attitude towards form, inspired by the brass [trade] vessels’. He interpreted greater standardization of wares and vessel forms as evidence of a widespread trade in pottery and the industrialization of crafts. Ozanne also recognized archaeological evidence for greater urbanization and state development in Accra and Shai during the seventeenth century. Although there were influxes of new ethnic groups, he emphasized that these developments were part of an ongoing system of change and not the result of invasions by replacement populations. Except in the coastal towns, direct contact with Europeans was limited throughout this area until the late nineteenth century.

Additional archaeological data relating to change during the post-European-contact period are provided by David Kiyaga-Mulindwa’s (1982) research on earthworks in the Birim Valley, approximately 100 km north-east of Elmina. Kiyaga-Mulindwa defined two ceramic types: an older ware associated with the construction of the earthworks, probably

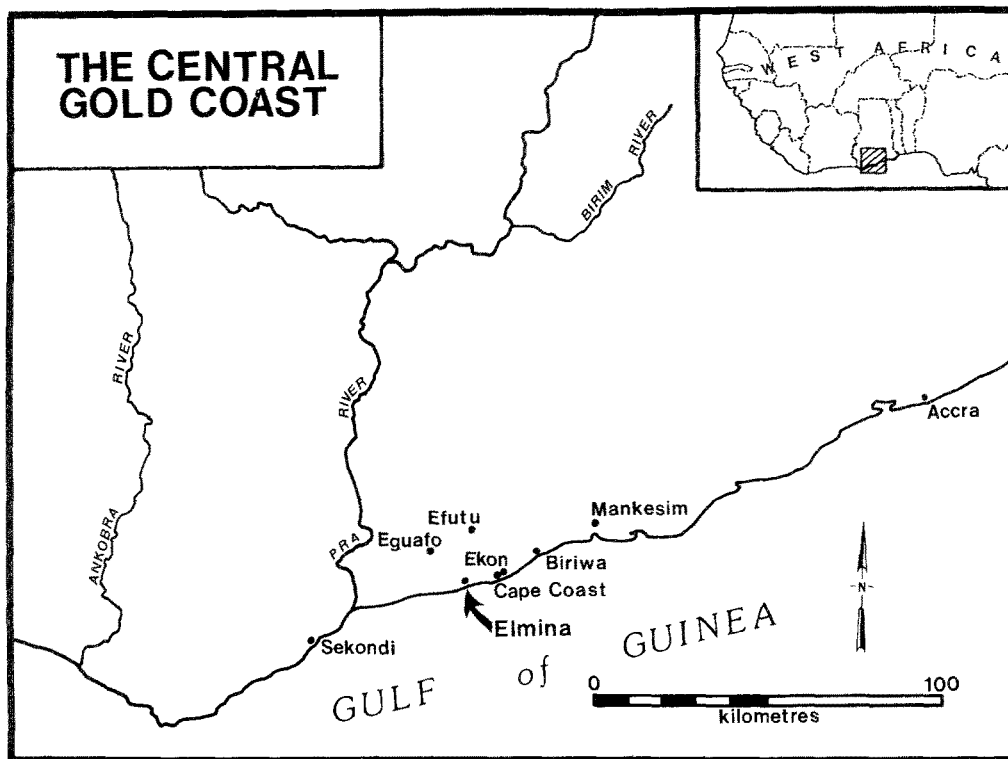


Figure 2 Map of southern Ghana showing locations mentioned in the text.

during the early historic period; and later Atweafo (Akan) pottery, possibly related to the arrival of the present occupants of the valley sometime between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Kiyaga-Mulindwa (1982:73) suggested that the earthworks may have served as a deterrent to small-scale attacks, petty slave-hunting forays, and kidnappings. He argued that increasing numbers of slave raids resulted in the abandonment of the valley by the early occupants and its eventual occupation by the Atweafo.

James Bellis (1987) has noted that the discontinuity observed by Kiyaga-Mulindwa appears to be present in pottery sequences throughout southern Ghana. As it is unlikely that this entire region was depopulated, Bellis argued that the change in ceramic types is more likely to represent 'radical change' throughout the entire cultural system than the arrival of a replacement population (Bellis 1987:49). He has suggested that, in addition to the impact of the slave trade, reasons for change may be traced to a variety of pressures arising after the fourteenth century, including the introduction of new diseases, changing economic relations, and other factors resulting from the arrival of the Europeans, as well as influences from sudanic Africa.

Ray Kea (1982), in his study of settlement, trade, and politics on the seventeenth-century Gold Coast, has tried to place the process of change in social structure, institutions, and organizations within a Marxist framework. Utilizing documentary sources, oral traditions, and archaeological data, he defined three periods extending from *ca* 1400 to the late eighteenth century. Each of the periods is represented by 'a different combination of production cycles in both time and space' incorporating changes in a wide range of social,

political, economic, and demographic factors (Kea 1982:7). According to Kea much of the change that has been noted was a consequence of expanded trade throughout the region resulting from the European presence. There was a gradual increase in the accumulation of wealth by privileged classes and greater social stratification. While the transition from Period I to Period II was free of 'major convulsions', the transition from Period II to Period III around the end of the seventeenth century was marked by 'social and political upheavals of serious proportions' (Kea 1982:7), and the nineteenth century was characterized by its own distinctive features.

While some of Kea's specific conclusions may require modification, his work is important in drawing together the diverse aspects of change in Gold Coast society and in placing the observed changes within an economic context. Direct interaction between Europeans and the local population was comparatively limited. Small numbers of Africans were employed in the European forts or were married to Europeans. There was also open conflict between Europeans and different African polities. However, prior to the late nineteenth century and the advent of colonial rule, European influence was primarily affected by emerging commercial relations with the interior, including the trade in gold, slaves, and an increasing variety of other commodities, especially during the nineteenth century. Europeans acted within the framework of the African social structure or risked the cession of relations and the interruption of trade (Priestley 1969:8-9; Daaku 1970:24, 33, 34).

Evaluating culture change

The research surveyed above illustrates some of the consequences of European trade on Gold Coast society. However, while a great deal of socio-economic change is represented, what has been less carefully examined is the degree to which this is indicative of culture change, in terms of people's shared beliefs or world view. There is a great deal of disagreement among social scientists regarding the underlying structure of culture and the causal factors which determine change (Barnett 1954; Geertz 1963; Murphy 1964; Beals 1967; Spicer 1968; Bee 1974; Harris 1979; Wolf 1982; Sahlins 1985; Hodder 1986; Alexander and Seidman 1990). Yet, although theories of culture vary considerably, it is clear that many variables influence the specific way culture change occurs in individual local settings. Historical, ethnographic, and archaeological data from Africa and elsewhere provide ample illustration of this point (cf. Bascom and Herskovits 1962; Foster 1962; Herskovits 1962; Mead 1963; Polanyi 1966; Headrick 1981; Fitzhugh 1985; Curtin 1986; Rogers 1990).

In the present study, change is seen as resulting from the complex inter-relationships of many factors. The articulation of these phenomena vary and therefore they should not be ordered hierarchically in terms of 'importance'. The relationships are not static, but part of an ongoing system of change. Variables that may affect different aspects of change include: culture, society, economy, historical context, demography, psychology, and technology (cf. Vayda 1969; Wallace 1970, 1980; Harris 1979; Skocpol 1979; Wallerstein, 1980, 1986; Headrick 1981; Wolf 1982; Roseberry 1988, 1989). The complex relationships which exist between these factors makes it impossible statistically to determine which are of prime importance in causing culture change.

Equally varied as the phenomena affecting culture change within different contact situations are the ways in which culture and culture change are manifested archaeologically.

The material record is regarded as a meaningfully constituted result of cultural phenomena, but its interpretation is not considered reducible to universal cross-cultural constructs. Culture is non-material: archaeological expressions of world view may be conveyed by different things and to varying degrees. Culture might best be reflected in material aspects of ideology such as shrines, ritual offerings, and burial practices (Huffman 1986; DeCorse 1989; Whitley 1989). However, belief systems are also expressed in inter- and intra-site patterning (Agorsah 1983a, 1983b; Huffman 1984, 1986), and in individual artefact classes such as pottery (David *et al.* 1988; Evers 1989; Berns 1990). Culture change cannot be directly equated with changes in these portions of the material record, but it may be best identified in these areas.

Elmina in historical perspective

Elmina is uniquely suited to an examination of culture change during the period of European contact, trade, and colonization. African settlement, which predates the arrival of the Europeans in West Africa, was one of the features which attracted early European traders. Castle São Jorge da Mina, founded by the Portuguese in 1482, was the first European outpost established in sub-Saharan Africa. For the following four centuries the castle remained a focal point of European mercantile interest in Guinea. It was captured by the Dutch in 1637, remaining their headquarters until 1872 when all Dutch possessions in West Africa were ceded to the British. This political manoeuvre was not well received by the people of Elmina, who had frequently sided with the Dutch and Asante in conflicts with the British and their African allies. Discontent within the settlement reached a crisis on 13 June 1873 with the arrival of an Asante army on the coast. When a British ultimatum to deliver all guns to the castle went unanswered, the British military contingent opened fire. The Elminans had evacuated the town and no lives were lost in the actual bombardment. However, the settlement was levelled and never reoccupied, the inhabitants relocating on the north side of the Benya Lagoon. The destruction of the town marks the beginning of much more overt European involvement in African affairs and the onset of the colonial era on the Gold Coast. The fact that the town was not rebuilt on the same site after the bombardment provides a unique archaeological opportunity to examine material aspects of African–European interaction.

European involvement in Elmina affairs was far more direct than in many adjacent parts of the coast. The society encountered at Elmina by the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century was not the same as that in the settlement destroyed by the British 400 years later. There was extensive change in political and social institutions, as well as in manner of dress, house construction, and other classes of material culture. The greatest change at Elmina arising from the European presence was the political independence of Elmina from neighbouring polities. Early documentary records suggest that Elmina was probably subservient to the neighbouring states of Commany (Eguafo) and Fetu (Efutu) (Müller 1673:138; Feinberg 1969:12; Blake 1977:99). However, by the seventeenth century the African settlement at Elmina was an independent state which maintained its sovereignty with, or without, the assistance of the Dutch (e.g. Fynn 1974:ii–v; Feinberg 1989:126–9).

Europeans also played a role in Elmina's internal affairs. Dutch officials settled disputes, levied fish tolls, and were called upon to recognize newly elected African rulers (Baesjou

1979b; Feinberg 1989:115–26). African institutions such as the *asafo* military companies may have their origins in Akan culture, but their functions were modified as a result of the European presence (Wartemberg 1951:53; Arhin 1966; Datta and Porter 1971; Chukwukere 1980; Kea 1982:133–7). Nevertheless, the power the Europeans exercised was not absolute and they made a conscious effort to limit their involvement in municipal affairs. If European policies became too difficult the Elminans simply abandoned the town, a situation the Europeans considered very serious as it was injurious to trade (e.g. Blake 1967:75; Feinberg 1969:125).

There were European efforts to educate and Christianize the local population: the Portuguese used their missionary activities to justify their monopoly of the Guinea trade. Periodic attempts were also made to establish schools for Elmina children (Graham 1976). However, European efforts in these areas were sporadic and had limited effect until the late nineteenth century, which is not surprising given the comparatively small number of Europeans that served on the coast. At Elmina Castle the number of expatriates ranged from between 20 and 60 during the Portuguese period to almost 400 during the Dutch occupation. In contrast, the African population at Elmina approached 20,000 during the nineteenth century.

The Elmina population

While rough size-estimates of the Elmina population were recorded, its ethnic and cultural affiliations are more poorly known. The present inhabitants can be classed as Fante on both linguistic and ethnographic grounds (Christensen 1954:11). Oral traditions record that the founder of Elmina and of the town's ruling lineage was Kwa Amankwaa, variously recalled as a member of the Eguafu royal family or of Asante royal stock (Feinberg 1969:8–11; Fynn 1974; Henige 1974). Early inhabitants of Elmina may also have come from Efutu to the north-east. This supposition is lent some support by early documentary sources which indicate that both Commany and Fetu claimed rights to Elmina. From the seventeenth century the Fante expanded westward from the area around Mankesim, encompassing earlier states along the coast (Meyerowitz 1952b:81–3; 1974:87–93). During later periods Asante from the interior constituted a particularly important part of the town's population. For example, at times in the early nineteenth century, Asante traders and officials in Elmina may have numbered as many as 1000 (Yarak 1986:35; 1990).

Although the specific ethnic and socio-political affiliations of the early settlers of Elmina remain uncertain, the salient consideration is the cultural similarity among all the groups considered. Linguistic studies, written accounts, and oral traditions all suggest that Akan speakers dominated the Gold Coast at the end of the fifteenth century (Hair 1966; Dalby and Hair 1968; Feinberg 1989). Despite some variation, there is generally a high degree of cultural homogeneity within this language family (Christensen 1954:1; Murdock 1959:253; Dolphyne and Kropp Dakubu 1988:50–1). For example, the ritual festivals and shrines of Elmina are unique to the town, but share a basic similarity with other coastal Akan groups. Certainly from an archaeological perspective subtleties in their world view would be difficult to interpret without documentary records or oral traditions.

Ethnic diversity within the settlement

While the majority of the early Elmina population can be classified as Akan, different cultural groups were represented in the settlement. The population of Elmina became increasingly heterogeneous following European contact, with additions of non-Akan African settlers, as well as Europeans and mulattoes. Documentary accounts record that much of the Elmina trade with the interior was conducted by 'Akani', a vague term frequently applied to Asante traders, but also referring to people from further north (Daaku 1970:146, 202; Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980). Drawn by trade, Dyula and Mande traders from far northern Ghana were probably well established on the coast by the fifteenth century (e.g. Wilks 1962; Meyerowitz 1974:79; Sutton 1981; Feinberg 1989:9–10). In addition, Ewe fisherman from eastern Ghana may also have formed an important component of the Elmina population: the modern village of Bantoma on the landward side of the Elmina peninsula has a large Ewe population.

Documentary references to people from other portions of the coast requesting permission to settle at Elmina have been noted during the Dutch period (Yarak 1986; Feinberg 1989:81–3). The relatively rapid growth which Elmina experienced during this time can probably be attributed to influxes of people from other areas. These 'strangers' may have retained distinctive identities within the settlement. It is possible that Elmina's third 'quarter' and other divisions which appeared in the seventeenth century were settled by different ethnic groups (e.g. Barbot 1732:156; Nathan 1904:31; Daaku and Van Dantzig 1966:15; Feinberg 1989:89). However, lack of detailed written records makes it impossible to determine what proportion of the town's population these groups may have constituted.

The slave population

Also contributing to the heterogeneity of the settlement were slaves brought from other parts of Ghana and West Africa. Beginning in the Portuguese period European factors make periodic references to labour shortages on the Gold Coast. Slaves were used to fill this need, but both the Portuguese and the Dutch considered a local trade in slaves detrimental to the trade in gold. For this reason few slaves were obtained on the Gold Coast prior to the late seventeenth century (Rodney 1969; Bean 1974; Van Dantzig 1978:8–9; Vogt 1979). Slaves were brought to Elmina from northern Ghana by African traders, but the record of their presence is ephemeral. In 1602, Pieter de Marees, describing women on the Fante coastland, noted that some wore bells around their ankles and had faces that were 'cut and punctured'. Albert Van Dantzig and Adam Jones suggest that this reference to scarification and dancing with ankle bells may describe slaves brought from the deep interior (de Marees 1602:175).

The demand for slaves frequently exceeded the supply which could be obtained on the Gold Coast. Beginning during the early years of the Elmina trade it became customary for Europeans to provide African traders with slaves to help transport goods to the interior. The Portuguese filled this need by bringing slaves from Liberia, Benin, and other parts of the coast (de Marees 1602:48, 176; Vogt 1973, 1974, 1979:72). Early in the sixteenth century, São Tome and Príncipe were used as distribution points for slaves obtained on the Slave Coast, and as many as 550 slaves per year were transported to Elmina (Blake

1967:59–60; Rodney 1969; Vogt 1973). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries letters from Dutch Director Generals on the Gold Coast frequently referred to the need to bring more slaves from Whydah (de Marees 1602:113; Hemmersam 1663:113; Müller 1673, 1983:198; Van Dantzig 1978:84, 138, 278–88).

Many of the slaves brought to the Gold Coast were taken to the interior but others remained at Elmina. Harvey Feinberg (1969:36) estimates that the West India Company maintained 600 slaves on the Gold Coast during the eighteenth century, approximately half of whom stayed at Elmina. In the early nineteenth century, Henry Meredith (1812:86) placed the number of slaves in the town at around 900 – 4.5% of the population if 20,000 people lived in the settlement. The *trainslaven* or ‘Company slaves’ lived within the town and formed a distinct segment of the Elmina population. Many were skilled labourers such as masons and carpenters (Yarak 1989; cf. Meredith 1812:86). Significantly, one of the *asafo* companies, the *Brofonkowa*, was made up of West India Company slaves (Feinberg 1969:37).

The ethnicity of the Elmina slave population is difficult to determine. Although some may have originated at Whydah or São Tome, these areas were collection points and it is likely that the slaves comprised a heterogeneous mix of different ethnolinguistic groups. At least occasionally they were embroiled in European–African conflicts. For example, during hostilities between the Dutch and Elminans in 1739 the *trainslaven* caught in town were either put to death or sold into slavery by the townspeople (Feinberg 1970a:361). The majority of Elmina slaves lived within the settlement; many subsequently became free members of society and were assimilated into families. In modern Elmina some families are reputed to be of slave origin, but culturally, linguistically, and socially they appear indistinguishable from the rest of the population.

The European component

While records of the African population are limited, more information is available on the European presence. When Castle São Jorge da Mina was founded, there were only 64 Europeans in the garrison. Throughout the Portuguese period the size of the garrison was never larger than this, and often much smaller (e.g. Vogt 1979:166, 187). The number of personnel increased under the Dutch, perhaps reflecting both the greater importance of Elmina as a trading centre and the growth of competition on the coast. The Dutch figures for 1645 indicate a Gold Coast staff of 170 on shore, plus a naval contingent of 49 (Feinberg 1969:33). As there were only five Dutch outposts in 1645, the majority of these people were probably stationed at Elmina. In the eighteenth century the number ranged from 171 to 377, averaging over 200 men (Feinberg 1974). These administrators, soldiers, and sailors can be collectively called ‘Dutch’ but, as Harvey Feinberg (1989:85–6) has emphasized, their actual cultural background varied. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the European staff was supplemented by Africans and mulattoes (Feinberg 1969:39–40), possibly as a means of cutting costs and replacing losses from illness. Diseases such as malaria, guinea worm, smallpox, and yellow fever sometimes accounted for 140 deaths per year during the eighteenth century (Feinberg 1974). During the nineteenth century the number of Dutchmen in Elmina was dramatically reduced. The small European population was by no means stable, as disease and the undesirability of the post caused constant staffing problems.

Mulattoes

A consistent feature at Elmina during the Portuguese and Dutch periods was the small number of European women. As a consequence, relationships, if not formal marriages, between European men and Elmina women were common. Though it is difficult to determine their numbers, mulattoes were already recognized as a distinct segment of the population during the sixteenth century. Some early writers distinguished them by their dress, which was in some respects influenced by European clothing (de Marees 1602:36, 217; Bosman 1705:142). By 1637, the mulatto population was of such importance that special approval was obtained for some of them to accompany the Portuguese garrison to São Tome after the Dutch takeover (Feinberg 1969:24–5).

There were formal marriages between Dutchmen and Elmina women but these were sufficiently uncommon in the early eighteenth century that the permission of the Dutch Director General was sought (Van Dantzig 1978:176). Dutch officers and merchants seem to have frequently maintained common-law wives. Mulattoes remained an important segment of the population during the Dutch period (Kerkdijk 1978:153–5). In Dutch they were called '*tapoeiyers*', probably because their skin colour was similar to the Tapuya Indians in Brazil (de Marees 1602:26). In 1700 the Director General and members of the Council decreed that Dutchmen fathering children out of wedlock would be required either to take their offspring back to Holland, or to provide 'a proper sum for honest maintenance and Christian education' (Van Dantzig 1978:60). It was also agreed that a communal house would be built in Elmina 'into which all such children will be brought at the age of 5 or 6 years and be separated from the natives, as well as from the Europeans, in order to be educated in the art of letters, the foundation of economics, some crafts, as well as the making of plantations such as those of cotton and corn...' (Van Dantzig 1978:60).

Some descendants of Elmina women and Dutchmen were granted special status. This group was known as the *vrijburgers*, which can be translated from Dutch as 'free citizens' or 'free people', and they were given the rights and privileges afforded by Dutch law (Ballong-Wen-Mewuda 1984; Brukum 1985; Yarak 1986; Feinberg 1989:88–92). During the late eighteenth century the *vrijburgers* were recognized as a distinct quarter within the town which organized *asafo* company number seven, 'Akrompa' (Feinberg 1969:124). They had their own *burgermeester*, or mayor, who signed agreements with the Europeans (Feinberg 1969:124; Yarak 1986:34). The *vrijburgers* were exempted from some duties, and were also allowed to have a crown on their company flag and to carry swords because of their special status (de Marees 1602:220).

Although the mulattoes were at times afforded high status, in some ways they appear to have been an anomalous group *vis-à-vis* the Europeans. William Bosman had a poor opinion of them, saying that: 'I can only tell you whatever is in its own Nature worst in the Europeans and Negroes is united in them or, to be short, they are altogether Whores and Crooks of one and the same kind' (Bosman 1705:141; cf. Smith 1744:213; Thompson 1758:53–5; Van Dantzig 1976:122). Along with other Africans they were generally not allowed to join religious orders and were not given West India Company employment until the 1740s (Feinberg 1969:124; Boxer 1972:42).

Unifying factors

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the Elmina population and the occasional conflicts between different segments, the town functioned as a political unit. Larry Yarak (1986:35) has pointed out that a variety of informal cross-cutting links served to unify the settlement. These included intermarriage, the general importance of trade, and economic competition with surrounding Fante groups. An additional feature was the pervasive Akan culture. These factors provided a cohesiveness in the settlement's internal political organization and relationships with neighbouring polities.

By the nineteenth century, Europeans could contrast inhabitants of the coastal settlements such as Elmina with people from the interior (Fig. 3). Even today, a distinction can be made between the coastal Fante and Fante from interior villages. It has been noted that by the seventeenth century the Elmina people regarded themselves as both politically and culturally distinct from the surrounding African population (Feinberg 1970b; 1989:158). Elmina's political independence is well documented: Feinberg notes that Elmina's close relationship with the Dutch, hostility with the neighbouring Fante population, and close ties with Asante served to isolate Elmina from the surrounding African population.

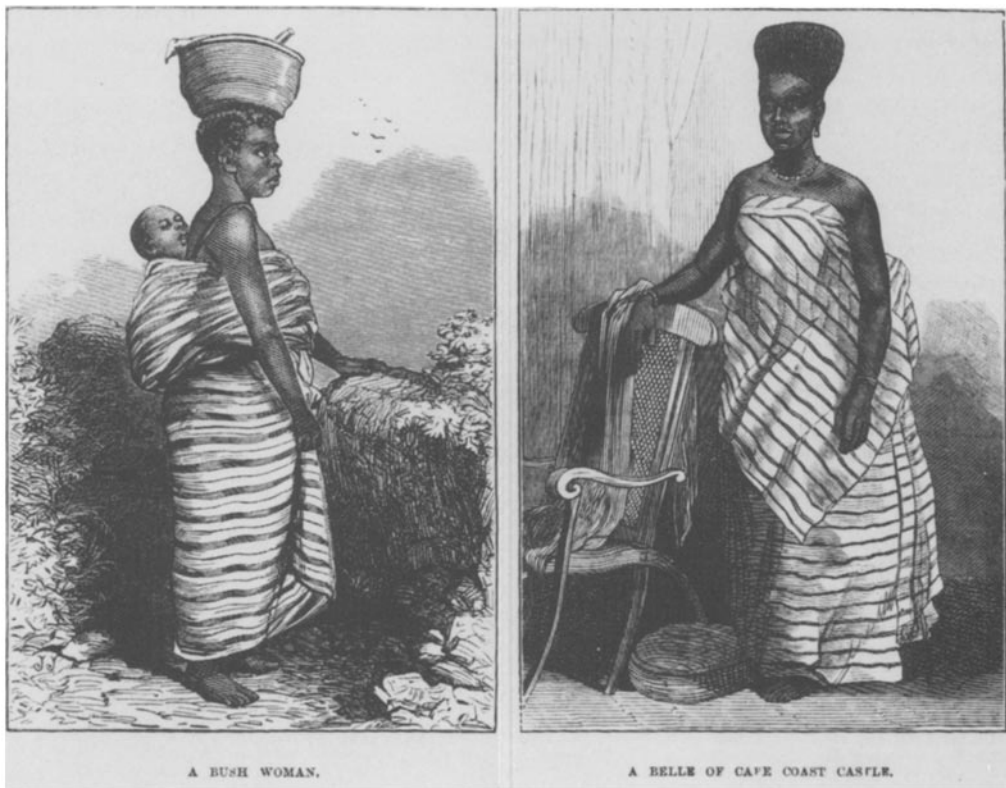


Figure 3 Nineteenth-century drawings of women in coastal Ghana based on photographs obtained at Cape Coast Castle in 1869 (from *The London Illustrated News* 63 (1873): 596, reproduced with the permission of the Illustrated London News Picture Library).

However, despite obvious changes in certain aspects of Elmina's society, there is no indication to what extent these represent culture change, that is, the degree to which the people modified their shared world view or system of beliefs. Archaeological research at Elmina has been aimed at addressing this issue. While the data provide evidence for a great deal of innovation, they also indicate that Elmina culture exhibited strong continuity with an African, largely Akan, cultural tradition.

Descriptions of Elmina

Documentary sources indicate that the old settlement of Elmina was concentrated on the narrow, rocky peninsula of Elminian sandstone which extends eastward between the Benya Lagoon and the Gulf of Guinea. The peninsula extends over 1.5 km from the tip to the mainland and generally only 100 to 250 m in width. The construction of breakwaters and dredging of the Benya channel since 1873 may have slightly increased the original width. The earliest surviving plan of Elmina town seems to have been made shortly after the Dutch takeover in 1637 (Fig. 4), and can be compared with ones of 1647, 1799, 1828, and 1829. Unfortunately, these plans provide only schematic representations of the African settlement.

Early descriptions of the town indicate that it was a crowded, convoluted place, with very few streets, many narrow alleys, and numerous cul-de-sacs. Its complex arrangement

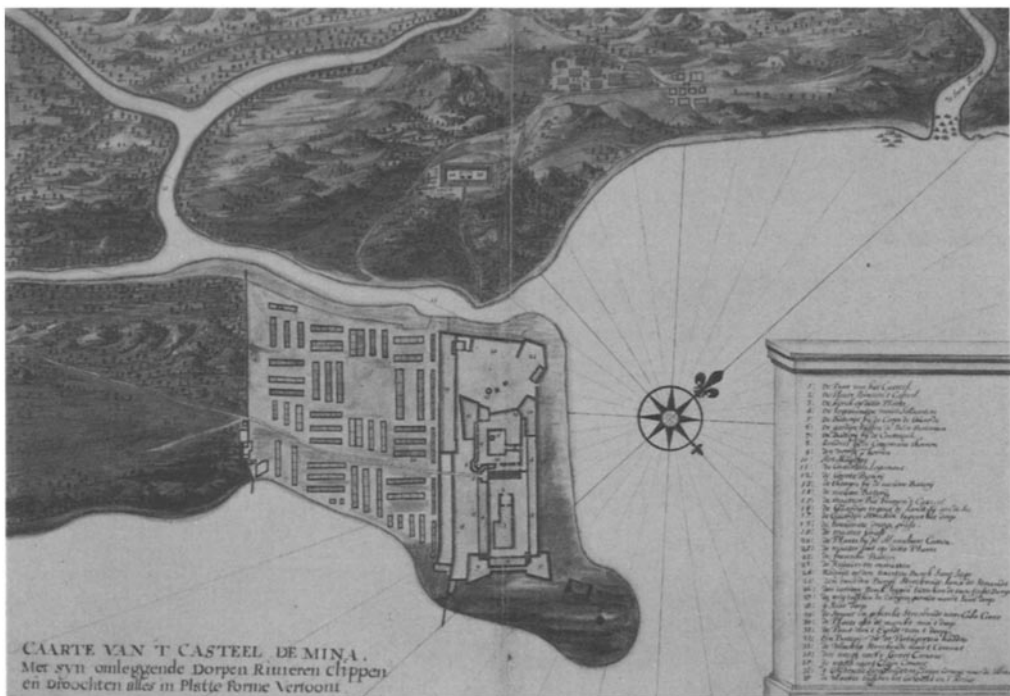


Figure 4 A map of Elmina Castle and town completed shortly after the Dutch takeover in 1637. Although many features are shown accurately, only a stylized plan of the African settlement is provided (Vingboon copy: Algemeen Rijksarchief, Afdeling Kaarten en Tekeningen, VELH 619–77).

probably explains why European illustrators failed to provide detailed maps. By the eighteenth century only two main roads ran through the town: one led along the front of the castle northward to the bridge which spanned the Benya Lagoon, the other road followed a tortuous route, west from the castle through the town, eventually ending at the lagoon. The paths were ill-kept, and many writers refer to the dirty, unhealthy conditions in the town (Barbot 1732; Meredith 1812:83; Robertson 1819:119; Gramberg 1861:88–90). Similar conditions were reported in many of the coastal towns. Often they were contrasted with the more open settlements in the interior.

A unique feature of Elmina was the large number of stone buildings (Bosman 1705:42–3; Barbot 1732:156; de Marree 1817:10; Meredith 1812:83; Hutton 1821:54–5; Bennet and Brooks 1965:118). In the late seventeenth century various estimates place the number of stone houses at *ca* 1000 (Feinberg 1969:114). By the nineteenth century the number was given as 3358 (Bacsjou 1979:214). Some of these structures were quite impressive: the 1792 drawing of the Jan Neiser house by C. Bergman (Feinberg 1989:79) shows a structure with three storeys and a stairway leading up to the flat roof; the windows have shutters and two lighting fixtures are located on the exterior walls. The western side of the town, towards the landward side of the peninsula, was less crowded and probably occupied by Elmina's less affluent members. In 1817 J. A. de Marree described this area as the place where most of the West India Company slaves lived.

Archaeological research at Elmina

Archaeological and ethnographic research has been undertaken at Elmina since September 1985. Five test trenches were dug to sample the site and provide stratigraphic profiles. Eight loci (A–H in Figs. 5 and 6) were tested to obtain more detailed information about certain structures and to define the extent of the settlement. Excavation was carried out in 1 × 1-m units by natural strata whenever possible, so as to maintain optimum horizontal and vertical recording. An effort was made to recover all artefacts *in situ*, but all soil was sifted through a one-eighth-inch mesh screen. A total surface area of 271 m² has been excavated. In addition, 54 m² were cleared of top soil to expose foundations. The entire peninsula and portions of the modern town on the north side of the Benya Lagoon were surveyed and all archaeological materials noted.

No features clearly predating European contact were excavated. A single quartz flake and two ground stone celts were found during excavation, but all were associated with European trade materials. (Stone celts, *nyame akuma*, are still ritually important today and can be purchased in markets: their presence is, therefore, not necessarily indicative of a prehistoric component within the site.) Archaeological survey identified a scatter of iron slag, ceramics, and stone beads at the western margin of Bantoma village, where two archaeological sites had been previously recorded by Oliver Davies (1976:77). These materials provide some indication of Stone Age and Iron Age occupations in the Elmina area, but none can yet be well dated.

Archaeological data suggest that, at the time of European contact, much of the Elmina peninsula may have been exposed bedrock. Undisturbed archaeological material dating between the late fifteenth and the early seventeenth century mostly consisted of small, sandy refuse deposits resting directly on bedrock. The stony nature of the peninsula is

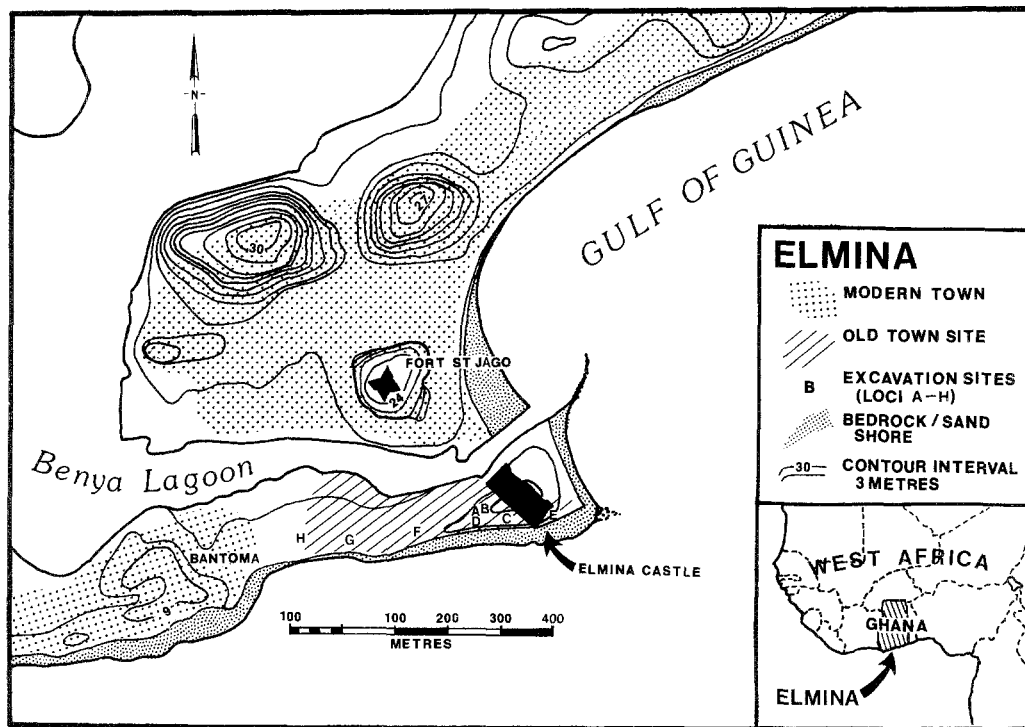


Figure 5 Plan of Elmina and vicinity in 1990.

noted in European accounts, and the ready supply of quarryable rock was one of the reasons the Portuguese selected the site for the castle (Blake 1967:72). Later Dutch accounts note the need to pave the market as it was difficult to walk on the uneven rock (Van Dantzig 1978:19).

During the pre-European-contact period, structures were probably built using the timber and clay (wattle and daub) method still characteristic of coastal Ghana. Written records indicate that the town extended into the area later occupied by the castle (Blake 1967:72). It is likely that archaeological excavations extended into a portion of the area of pre-European occupation. Some indication of the early settlement may have been preserved in the bedrock of the peninsula. Many sections of stone exposed during excavation bore rough depressions (not polished grooves) that appear to have been systematically cut into the soft, weathered sandstone. The depressions may have supported the poles of timber and clay structures. Some of the depressions seem to form lines, but the areas exposed were too small to determine larger patterns. The depressions do not correspond with the alignment of later stone foundations.

Features dating to the Dutch period (post-1637) are much more common than earlier material. Surface survey and excavation identified over 30 structures, some with stone walls still standing to a height of over 2 m. Approximately 15 buildings were sampled and the major portion of two structures, at Locus B and Locus E, were excavated. Foundations of the structure designated Locus B (Fig. 7) are located between 70 and 85 m from the entrance to Elmina Castle, probably at the western or north-western edge of the town's market. The structure was probably built in the seventeenth century, with rooms being

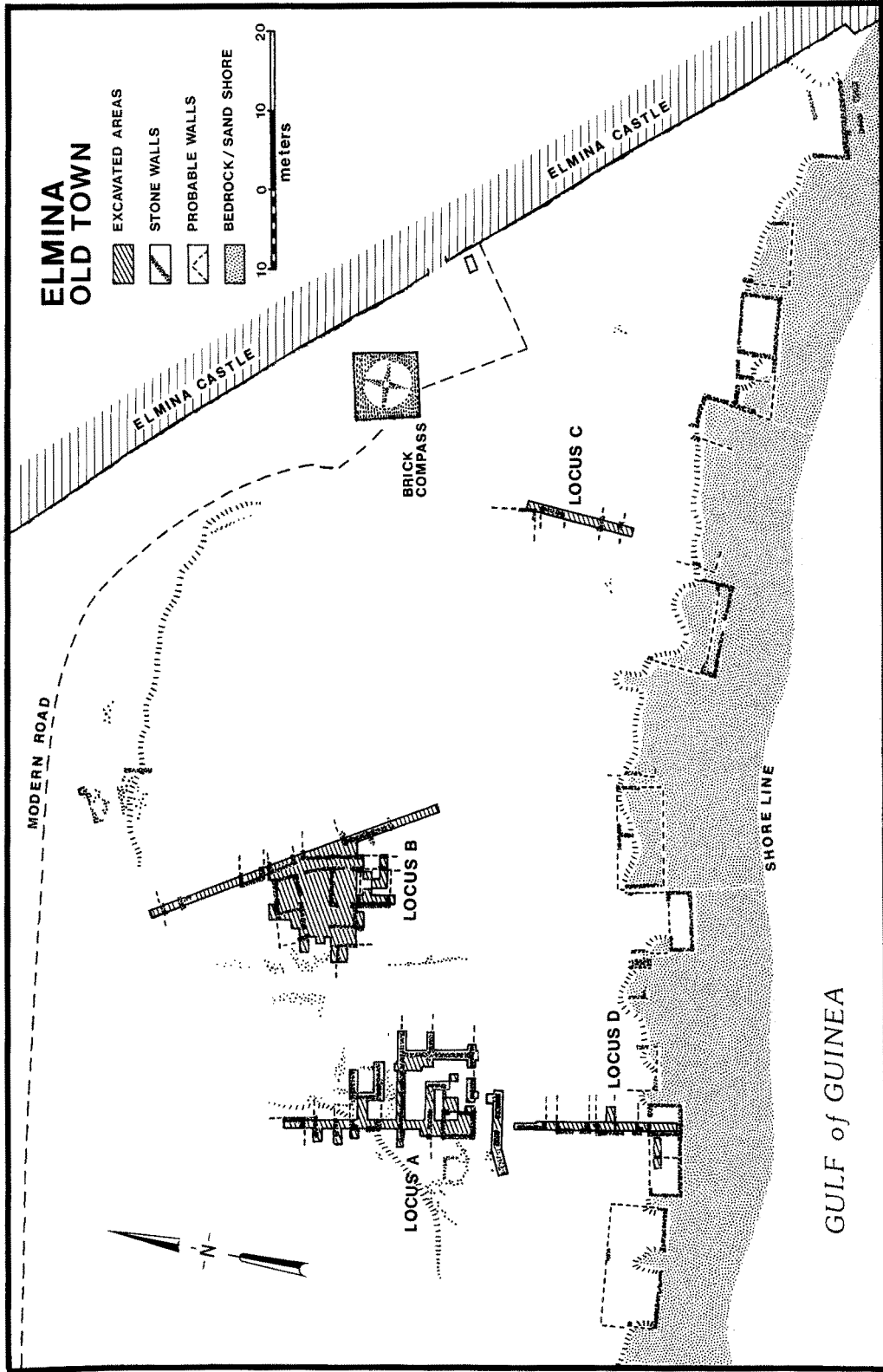


Figure 6 Plan of excavations on Elmina peninsula, 1986-1990.



Figure 7 View looking north-east across the Locus B excavation in 1986. The trench in the lower right corner is 1.0 m wide. The northern portion of Elmina Castle can be seen in the background.

added and modified during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Locus E is located immediately beneath the south-eastern bastion of the Castle. This eighteenth-century, multi-roomed structure was built over undulating bedrock and midden deposits of the Portuguese period when access to this portion of the peninsula may have been restricted. Plans and illustrations done shortly after the Dutch takeover show a wall running between the Castle's southern curtain wall and the ocean (e.g. Lawrence 1963: plate 7). The Dutch, however, apparently maintained no such barriers as later illustrations generally show structures in this area and no wall. Locus E is located within a portion of the old settlement that was sometimes referred to as the 'Fisherman's Village', a name which suggests specialized activities, though the documentary record offers little additional information.

Walls uncovered during excavation were generally made of roughly cut blocks of unmortared Elminian sandstone. However, shell mortar was used in some cases, particularly in exterior walls where extra support was presumably needed. Traces of whitewashed mortar plastering was present on some interior walls. Floors were of packed clay, sand, or dressed stone. In a number of instances floors of different materials were found superimposed one over the other.

A unique aspect of many of the buildings at Elmina is the frequent absence of builders' trenches (Fig. 8). Foundations seem often to have been positioned directly on exposed bedrock and the enclosed space levelled with fill. The few builders' trenches discovered were set into shallow middens of sixteenth–eighteenth-century age. All the buildings

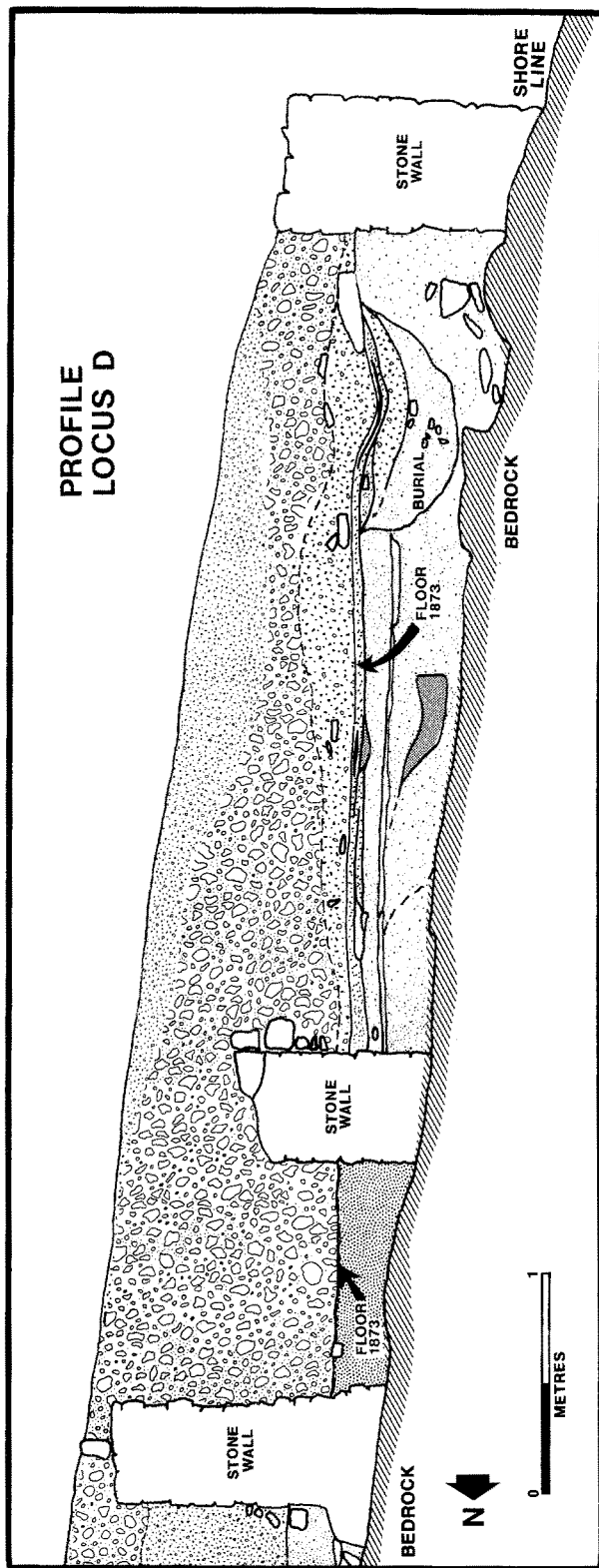


Figure 8 Profile of Locus D in 1986 showing thick layers of rubble and gravel fill covering 1873 floors. Earlier floor levels are visible lower in the profile. As in many parts of the site, stone walls rest directly on bedrock.

excavated were occupied at the time of the British bombardment, the destruction debris providing a useful *terminus ante quem* for occupation. The dates of initial occupations were determined from the European trade materials found in floor deposits and the age of middens disturbed by construction.

Archaeological research also provided some indication of the kind of roofing used. The roof of the Locus B structure was made by covering wood lathes with clay, as shown by numerous large fragments of burnt daub bearing impressions of wooden poles. No fragments of daub were found over the central courtyard, suggesting that this area was unroofed or covered with less permanent material. Illustrations of Elmina suggest that flat wood and clay roofs may have been a relatively recent innovation in the town: drawings prior to the eighteenth century seem to show only ridged roofs.

Ridged roofs, covered with palm, thatch, or similar material are still common along the coast today, where they may occasionally be seen covering two-storeyed structures (cf. Hyland 1970; Cole and Ross 1977). Flat clay roofs were not uncommon in coastal towns such as Cape Coast and Elmina 15 or 20 years ago (Adu Boahen; John Fynn; Albert Van Dantzig 1987: pers. comm.), and many can still be seen in the small settlements of Biriwa and Ekon east of Elmina. There is some archaeological evidence for their use in other parts of the coast in the early nineteenth century (DeCorse 1987:30). At Elmina, archaeological evidence for flat roofs was confined to the Locus B building and possibly one other structure.

The origin of flat roofs in coastal Ghana is unknown. They are less suited to the rainfall of the coastal zone than to drier climates such as those of northern Ghana and the West African Sudan, where they are commonly seen. This fact may suggest that the technique was brought to the coast by northerners. Alternatively, flat roofs may have become popular after the Dutch arrival in Elmina. The replacement of ridged roofs with flat surfaces was among the first architectural changes the Dutch made in the castle after 1637 (Lawrence 1963:151–2). Although not well suited to the coastal rainfall, flat roofs have the advantage of providing additional working and living space – a feature which might have been attractive in the crowded coastal towns.

The structures excavated at Elmina generally show evidence of long occupation and renovation. Modification and gradual extension of living areas is characteristic. Excavation has confirmed the crowded, convoluted picture of the settlement provided by documentary sources. With the construction of stone buildings the town plan seems to have become increasingly fixed. New housing extended outward from the margins of the settlement. In 1837, after fire destroyed 90 houses, the Dutch Governor attempted to lay out new streets, delineating areas with bamboo stakes. In response to this, the townspeople uttered riotous cries and removed the stakes (Algemeen Rijksarchief N.B.K.G.362 – Adam Jones pers. comm.). Archaeological testing of the western portion of the peninsula suggests that occupation did not extend beyond the area of the nineteenth-century Dutch redoubt Veersche Schans (Fort de Veer), designated Locus H in Figure 5.

Over 100,000 artefacts (excluding brick, burnt daub, bone and shell) spanning the fifteenth–nineteenth centuries were excavated (Figs. 9, 10). Large amounts of material were recovered from rubble fill and destruction debris dating to the late nineteenth century, but many artefacts were also obtained from a variety of more discrete features. Significantly, the artefactual assemblage is dominated by European trade items including ceramics,

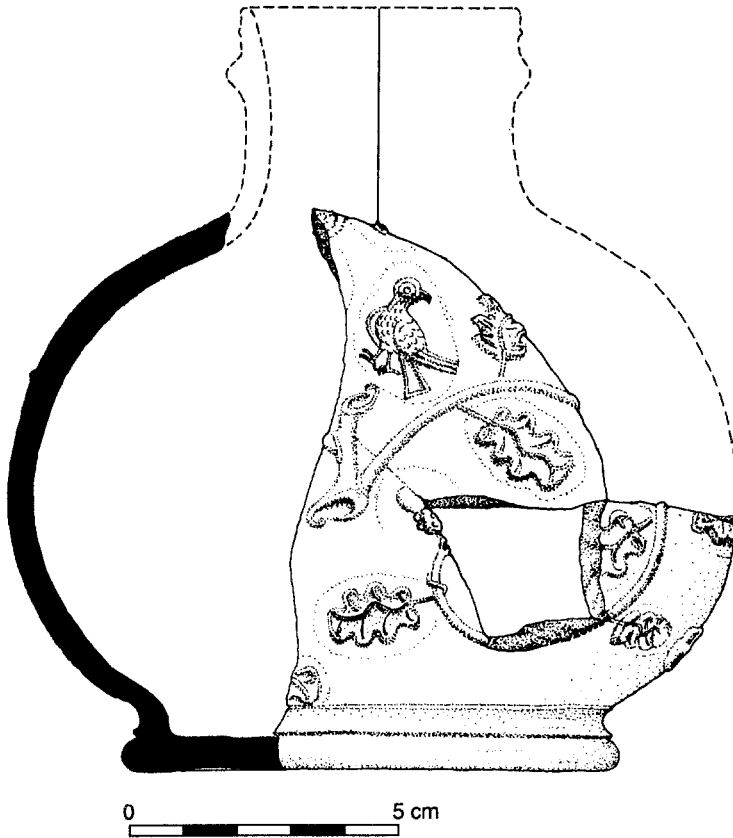


Figure 9 Fragments of a brown Rhenish stoneware *krug* ca 1500–1550. Over 100 European ceramic types are represented in the Elmina assemblage.

glass, metal objects, tobacco pipes, firearm parts, and beads. Imported items from Britain, Holland, France, Portugal, Spain, Germany, China, and the United States attest to Elmina’s extensive trade connexions and to the wealth of the African merchants in the settlement. The extensive array of European trade items also provides much more precise chronological control than is generally possible on African archaeological sites of the past 500 years.

Continuity and change in the artefact inventory

When research at Elmina was initiated it was hypothesized that the archaeological data would provide some indication of culture change within the African community. For example, it was anticipated that an outward display of ‘Europeanness’ might be important in situations where indigenous beliefs were in conflict with those of a European elite. Did the elite within the town possess an essentially Akan world view, or did they incorporate new values aligned with those of the Europeans? It was also posited that artefact patterning and archaeological features might provide evidence of continuity with pre-European-contact customs. Earlier belief systems might be evidenced in offerings, burial practices, and other rituals.

The absence of large deposits of pre-European-contact material at Elmina makes it

difficult to assess differences between the pre- and post-European periods. However, the information available supports some generalizations about certain aspects of change in Gold Coast society. For example, both archaeological and historical data from Elmina indicate increasing urbanization. The fixed nature of the town plan after the seventeenth century is probably a consequence of increasing competition for space on the narrow Elmina peninsula. Documentary evidence provides some indication of the great wealth of the merchant class at Elmina and the central role of trade. Similarly, the extensive range of trade goods recovered from the excavation contrasts with the small number recovered from other sites in the region (cf. Davies 1955, 1956; Nunoo 1957; Shaw 1961; Bellis 1972).

The artefactual record also provides information about technological innovations and changing behavioural patterns. Buttons, buckles, slate pencils, and writing slates are additions to the material inventory which reflect new activities and patterns of dress. In other instances, imported artefacts functioned in traditional contexts, as illustrated by the placement of Rhenish stoneware jugs, Chinese porcelain saucers, and European whiteware ointment jars with burials. New artefact types were also created, as in the case of *forowa*, ritual vessels made from European sheet brass (Fig. 10). Although made of imported material, the stylistic origin of these vessels may be traced to *kuduo*, cast brass containers of the pre-European period (Ross 1983; Silverman 1983).

Clearly a great deal of innovation is represented in the material record of Elmina. However, increase in the artefact inventory is not necessarily an indicator of culture change. In fact, continuity with traditional ritual practices is evidenced by much of the archaeological material, particularly the burials. Specialized out-of-town burial grounds, coffins, and brick tombs – all characteristic European practices – are common in coastal Ghana today. However, in earlier periods burial within the house appears to have been common. In lieu of a coffin, the customary practice prior to the late nineteenth century was to wrap the body in a specially prepared cloth. Burial ritual usually included the placement of grave goods with the body. De Marees (1602:182), writing in the early seventeenth century, observed that: ‘All his [the deceased’s] goods, such as his cloths, weapons, Pots, Pans, Stools, Spades and similar chattels which he has used during his lifetime, are brought

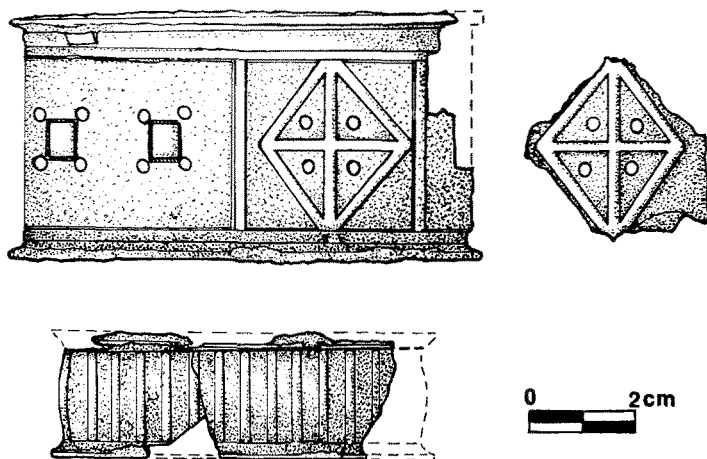


Figure 10 Fragments of an early nineteenth-century *forowa* recovered at Locus E.



Figure 11 Burial exposed beneath the floor of the Locus E structure.

to the Grave, buried with him and put around [the body in] the Grave, so as to serve him in the other World in the same way as they did during his life on this earth.'

The archaeological data are consistent with some of the observations recorded in early documentary accounts. Some 200 burials were excavated from a variety of contexts, in many instances disturbed by more recent interments or construction activities. Analysis of the data is still in progress, but it appears that the orientation of the body was less important than placement under the house floor, presumably the individual's place of residence (Figs. 8, 11). Burials were found beneath the floors of all of the structures tested despite the fact that in some cases only 30 cm of soil rested between the house floor and bedrock. Burial within the house continued throughout the period under study, despite European attempts at prohibition. In fact, chiefs may still be buried within the house today. There is no archaeological evidence for the use of coffins at Elmina prior to 1873. Grave goods, including *forowa*, beads, ceramics, and tobacco pipes were common.

Continuity in African practices is also represented by other archaeological evidence. Examples of ritual offerings placed in overturned earthenware pots under house floors were also noted. Human teeth with drilled holes for stringing were found in several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts. These may relate to divination practices referred to in

early European accounts. For example, in 1673, Müller (1673:166) commented that to question their oracles some people ‘... have cords into which are woven the teeth of dead people. With such teeth they have rules which depend on whether they end up straight or crooked, below or on top, when the cord is twisted.’ Collectively, these artefacts and features do not simply suggest continuity in African behavioural practices, rather they argue for a degree of conformity with a particular symbolic structure and perception of the afterlife.

Construction technology and spatial organization

The most visible changes in Elminan material culture are perhaps seen in the multi-storeyed, flat-roofed, stone construction of many of the dwellings. This unique aspect of the town was commented on by many European visitors who contrasted the hundreds of stone buildings with the timber and clay (wattle and daub) construction found in neighbouring areas (e.g. de Marees 1602:75; Brun 1624:85–6; Müller 1673:201–2; Bosman 1705:43; Van Dantzig 1975:205). Stone foundations and walls were used in some areas during the pre-European period, as for example among the Krobo, but multi-storeyed, dressed-stone structures are unknown. Elmina has readily available sources of building stone but, as stone can be obtained in other locales, this is not sufficient to explain Elmina’s unique building tradition. Likewise, as noted above, flat roofs are not indigenous to coastal Ghana.

Construction methods illustrate a unique aspect of Elmina architecture probably originating with African artisans trained by the Portuguese and Dutch. Many of the structures also clearly reflect European form. By the eighteenth century, some African merchants on the Gold Coast were building structures which were modelled on European prototypes (e.g. Hyland 1970). At Elmina, European influence can be seen in the neoclassical features of the surviving nineteenth-century buildings in the present town (Hyland 1970; Bech and Hyland 1978), and some of the structures located during archaeological work appear to have incorporated European elements.

Although outwardly indicative of European ideals, the use of space within the excavated structures probably exhibited more continuity with African traditions. Unfortunately, this is difficult to assess on the basis of documentary accounts, as house furnishings and plans are rarely detailed. Archaeological data provide much more information as *in situ* floor refuse offers a record of past activities. Because Elmina was destroyed and the buildings abandoned, the excavations produced more ‘*de facto*’ refuse than is often found in archaeological sites (cf. Schiffer 1987:89–98). This is reflected in a large percentage of intact and reconstructable vessels from floor contexts.

An example of a building which clearly shows evidence of African traditions is the Elmina Locus B structure (Figs. 7, 12). The linear arrangement of rooms around a central courtyard is comparable to traditional house construction throughout the Akan and Guan area (Fletcher 1975; Agorsah 1983b, 1986; Posnansky 1989: pers. comm.; ethnographic observations 1985–90). Many modern houses in Elmina retain a similar functional arrangement. The courtyard is of particular importance, serving as a semi-private area for cooking, eating, and a variety of other activities. It may even be used as a sleeping area on hot nights. In function it seems to have changed little between the early seventeenth century and the present: describing Fante housing de Marees (1602:76) wrote: ‘They link together

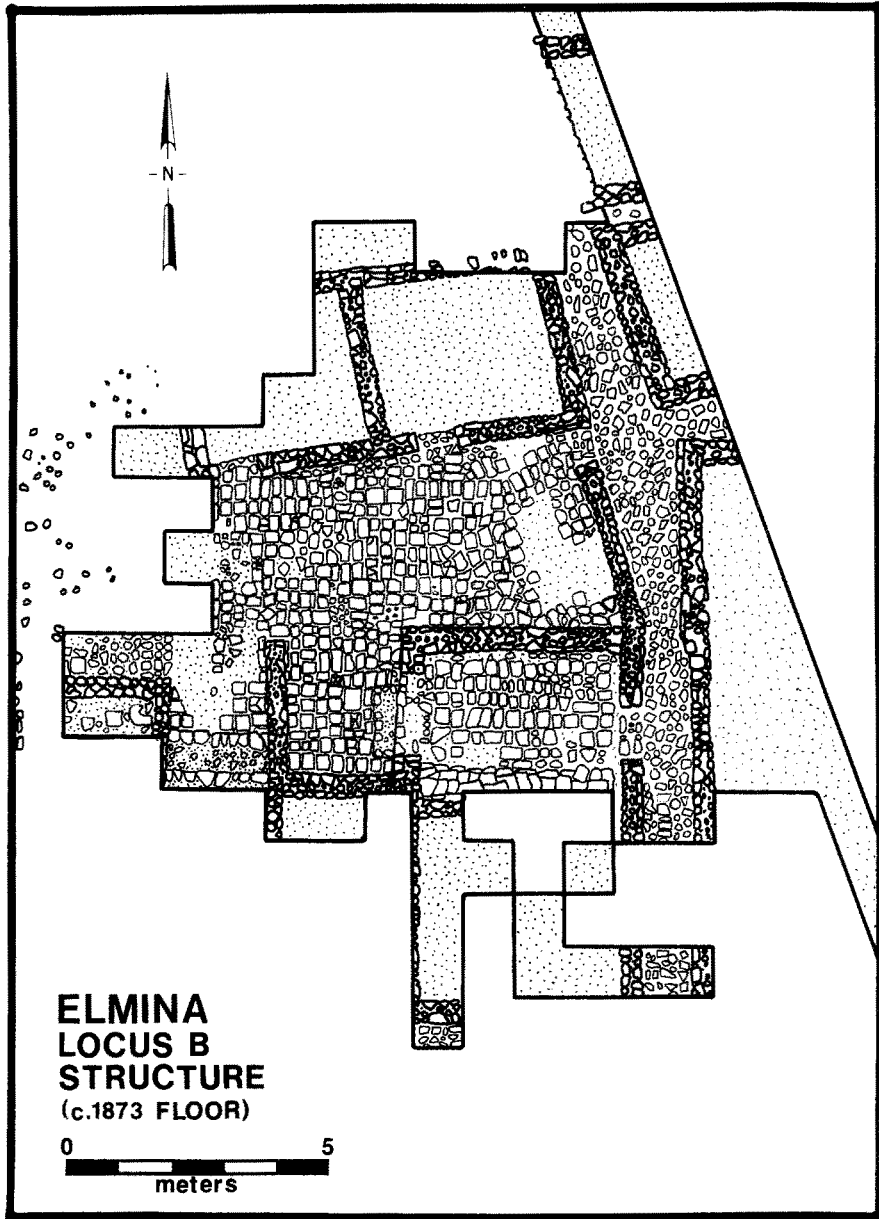


Figure 12 Plan of building foundations exposed at Locus B.

three or four such Huts, standing next to each other so as to form a square, so that women have a place in the middle where they cook' (cf. Brun 1624:86; Müller 1673:202; Agorsah 1986:33).

The stone and packed clay floors of the Locus B structure were probably kept well swept – most artefacts consisting of material that was in use at the time of the town's destruction. However, a small amount of residual primary refuse was found packed into the clay floors and between floor stones. Similar artefact distributions are seen in each of the Locus B rooms reflecting their multi-purpose living function. For example, direct evidence for

cooking activities (hearth areas and coal pots) was found in most of the rooms. A variety of ceramics, personal effects, and storage-related items was also recovered.

Ethnoarchaeological observations made by Kofi Agorsah (1986) in his study of spatial relations in Guan settlements are very relevant to an interpretation of the Elmina data. Agorsah (1983b, 1986:31) notes that the only rooms having a purely specialized function in the communities he studied were shrines. Other rooms were frequently shared by individuals and used as repositories for personal property. He noted that hearths, used both for warmth and cooking, and large stacks of pots, were characteristic of adult female rooms. A comparable distribution of features was noted in visits to Fante compounds during the present research.

The 'foodways' system

An additional aspect of Elmina culture which provides evidence of continuity is the 'foodways' system, a term James Deetz and Jay Anderson use to describe 'the whole interrelated system of food conceptualization, procurement, distribution, preservation, preparation and consumption shared by all members of a particular group' (Deetz 1977:50). Foodways are a culturally transmitted set of activities which reflect a particular suite of cultural preferences. Certain aspects of the system, such as cutlery, tableware, food remains, and food processing equipment, survive in the archaeological record and may be used to monitor changes in eating practices and customs.

A wide variety of cultigens were present in West Africa before the fifteenth century. However, many crops were introduced to West Africa by the Europeans, particularly from the New World and Asia. Introduced species commonly cultivated or utilized today include the cherry tomato, pineapple, peanut, guava, papaw, avocado, breadfruit, cashew, coffee, cocoa, sugar cane, coconut, cassava, orange, sweet potato, mango, wheat, maize, and several species of bean (Mauny 1954; Miracle 1965, 1972). Some of these plants were domesticated, or were known, in other parts of Africa prior to the fifteenth century; but European sea-trade facilitated their spread throughout West Africa. Introduced animals, including species of sheep, pig, cow, and geese, also supplemented earlier food resources (de Marees 1602:126–30, 158–65). Many of these innovations were probably introduced to the coastal areas around Elmina during the Portuguese period. There is no doubt that *en masse* these introductions had great impact on West African diet.

Direct archaeological evidence of diet at Elmina is limited, but the data collectively offer some insight into Elmina foodways. The majority of food-related waste consists of marine shell. Mussels and oysters are mentioned in documentary sources, but it is not clear to what extent they were exploited by the African population (de Marees 1602:124; Müller 1673:238–9). Interpretation of the excavated material poses some difficulties as shell was commonly used in non-food-related practices. During the historic period, in particular, shell was widely gathered for the manufacture of mortar. Before European contact, shell may have been associated with burial practices in some areas (Davies 1961), and also seems occasionally to have been laid down as a floor surface.

Ethnographic and archaeological information suggests that shell fish have been widely exploited in the past as a food resource. A midden consisting solely of *Arca senilis* shell was excavated by David Calvocoressi (1977:120) at Bantoma, beneath the site of the Dutch

redoubt at the western margin of the Elmina settlement, and probably dates to the late prehistoric or early contact period. An assemblage that may be of comparable age, but which includes a greater diversity of species, was excavated by Davies (1956:67) at Sekondi. Similar midden deposits have been identified at other coastal sites. At Elmina several discrete midden deposits of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century age were discovered. They consist almost entirely of *Arca senilis* shell, with small quantities of *Thais haemastoma*, *Ostrea* sp., *Tagelus angulatus*, *Donax rugosa*, *Semifusus morio*, and *Mytilus perna*. There is little doubt that in all of these instances the shell represents food-related waste. Informants at Elmina indicated that virtually all the 30 molluscan species represented in the archaeological collection are at least occasionally exploited for food, although the small size of many species gives them limited importance.

Faunal remains

Only 1201 fragments (4308 grams) of animal bone were recovered, approximately two-thirds occurring in well-dated contexts of sixteenth- to nineteenth-century age. There was no dramatic change in the types of animals represented. The generally high percentage of fish bone is consistent with documentary and ethnographic information on Elmina diet. There may have been a tendency towards increasing reliance on fish and a corresponding decrease in sheep and goat during the nineteenth century, but this is a conclusion best evaluated when larger faunal collections are available. Notably, non-domesticated fauna make up a consistent though varying portion of the assemblage. One consequence of increasing urbanism along the coast during the historic period may have been a gradual decline in the wild fauna through over-hunting and destruction of habitat (cf. Crosby 1986). Small game, especially the cane rat (*Thryonomys swinderianus*), is still common in the coastal thickets and grasslands east of Elmina. On the other hand, larger species, such as leopards and elephants which are noted in early documentary accounts, are absent (e.g. de Marees 1602:133–53). Even with decreasing numbers in the coastal zone, wild game probably continued to be widely eaten by Elmina's elite. Cane rats are still regarded as a delicacy today and command high prices.

Significantly, the majority of the animal bone consists of shattered fragments. Butchering marks of any kind are limited. Only one nineteenth-century fragment showed clear evidence of saw marks. The saw became a popular butchering implement in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century (Deetz 1977:125). Its use related to changing dietary preferences in favour of separate portions of meat over mixed stews and soups. Sawn cuts of meat are still uncommon in Ghana today: meat is generally chopped with a cleaver, and sold by weight rather than cut, and bone is also frequently cracked during consumption to extract marrow.

Excavations at Elmina produced a total of seventeen pestles and eight grinding slabs. Most date to the nineteenth century, including four pestles and one grinding slab from 1873 floor contexts. Two pestles and two grinding stones were found in eighteenth-century levels, while a single pestle of seventeenth-century age was discovered. Vegetables today are commonly pulverized using a grinding stone or pottery mortar prior to cooking. The occurrence of grinding stones, the shattered nature of the bone, and the absence of

palaeobotanical remains from archaeological contexts are consistent with the modern diet of mixed dishes of soups and sauces.

Ceramics

Information on foodways is also provided by ceramics as the majority relate to the storage, processing, and consumption of food. African pottery excavated at Elmina may reflect influence from several different areas and provide some indication of Elmina's heterogeneous nature. This is evidenced by the presence of 'coal pots' (charcoal braziers) characteristic of the Ewe area in eastern Ghana and Togo. The appearance of distinctive, heavy, black carinated wares may indicate influence from Asante during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, new bowl forms with very sharp basal angles appear in the nineteenth century.

A great diversity of imported ceramics, including the products of Germany, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, United States, and China are also represented. Well over 100 different ceramic types of fifteenth- to nineteenth-century age were recovered. Numerous forms have been identified, including vessels used in food storage, preparation, serving, and consumption. Examples of jugs, jars, bottles, tea cups, mugs, pitchers, plates, bowls, ointment pots, creamers, sugar bowls, platters, drainers, salt cellars, crocks, and chamber pots are represented.

The key aspect of the data on both local and imported ceramics is the predominance of bowls in consumption-related forms, a fact which suggests continuity in Elmina foodways. Plates, bowls, tea sets, coffee mugs, and other forms are all indicative of culturally determined choices. In western Europe, the use of plates, along with knives and forks, is associated with foodways practices which emerged in the eighteenth century. Like sawn cuts of meat, they are consistent with a diet stressing individual servings of various kinds of food, as opposed to mixed dishes (Deetz 1977:122–5). By the early nineteenth century some of Elmina's residents were clearly familiar with these European-style eating practices. For example, in the 1820s George Howland, an American ship captain, wrote: 'I, having to do all the business of trade ashore, was often invited to dine with them [the local African merchants]. They live in good style, having rich chased silver plates and dishes and silver and gold handled knives and forks and spoons. Their dinners consist of several courses, soup, meats, chickens, fish &c, all well cooked, and fruits, nuts, and sweet-meats for desserts, and choice wines, licquors, and porter, for drink' (Bennett and Brooks 1965:118). Dinners such as those noted by Captain Howland are suggested by some archaeological evidence. Plates are represented in the Elmina assemblage but, significantly, it is bowls, both imported and domestic, that predominate forms used in consumption.

The archaeological data available indicate a lack of change in Elmina foodways practices. While some individuals at Elmina may have adopted European mannerisms in certain contexts, most traditional food preparation and consumption practices probably remained much the same. Bowls are much better suited for serving Ghanaian foods such as *fufu* and light soup, which are eaten with the hand or a spoon. Many early documentary accounts of West Africa refer to eating with the hand (de Marees 1602:43). Although a great variety of new crops was acquired during the European period, the primary impact

was in the cultivation of plant species with greater caloric value, not in the manner in which food was prepared and eaten. The cultivation of introduced food crops may have facilitated the increasing population and urban growth within the coastal zone. Undomesticated terrestrial fauna and marine resources continued to be exploited. In contrast to African foodways, the European diet at Elmina was probably modified to a much greater degree as a result of their dependence on local food resources and cooks. John Super (1988:2) noted a very similar pattern in his study of food in Spanish colonial America.

The presence of numerous European ceramic types in the artefact inventory should not be seen as an *ipso facto* indicator of culture change in Elmina society. They are best viewed, initially, as indicators of changes in the European mode of production which allowed the mass production of pottery. Although varied European ceramic types are present in all temporal contexts at Elmina, nineteenth-century pieces are most common. Before the late eighteenth century, the low fired lead- and tin-glazed European ceramics may have aroused little African interest in the face of a vibrant local potting tradition. This pattern changed with the increasing industrialization of European ceramic manufacture, particularly in England. Products became more durable and output was increasingly directed at non-European markets. Although some factory and inventory overstock may be represented in the Elmina assemblage, the colourful whiteware bowls of the nineteenth century are more indicative of specialized production for an African market.

Conclusion

Studies of African–European interaction in West Africa have tended to emphasize the impact of European contact on indigenous cultures, focusing on discontinuity rather than resilience and continuity. In the present work, an effort has been made to emphasize persistence as well as change within the cultural system. There was change in many facets of Elmina socio-political institutions, material culture, and economic relations. However, archaeological data suggest that there was cultural continuity in the midst of this social and technological change. Ritual practices, the use of space, and foodways all indicate resilience. This combination of behavioural patterns argues for cultural continuity throughout the period under study. Rather than drastic replacement and modification of African culture, the Elmina data are more characterized by adaptation within certain portions of the social system and by addition to the material inventory.

Indications of changing values appear more prominent in nineteenth-century Elmina, particularly after the advent of colonial rule. During this period, British involvement in African affairs was much more overt. This included very direct influence in the selection of leaders and structuring of the political hierarchy. In addition, imported products, including items specifically made for the African trade, became much more readily available. More importantly, there may also have been change in people's ideological beliefs. There is some indication of this in the archaeological data: during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the use of coffins and masonry tombs became increasingly common, while houses conforming to European floor plan may also have become more frequent. There may have been corresponding changes in other facets of Elminan beliefs.

Unfortunately, very little detailed information is available about the archaeology of the period immediately preceding European contact. Very limited data were provided by the

Elmina excavations and only a small amount of excavation has been undertaken in other areas. It is therefore difficult to assess observations about Elmina in the light of information from other parts of the coast. While extensive comparative data on Akan culture of the pre-European contact period is lacking, the absence of clearly European cultural patterns at Elmina is perhaps the most significant point.

The data from Elmina should not be considered typical of the contact situation throughout West Africa or even the Gold Coast. Within the region, patterns varied as a result of local conditions. At Elmina, the foundation of a Portuguese fortress in 1482 resulted in earlier and more direct European contact than in adjacent parts of the hinterland. Even within the settlement individual response undoubtedly differed. Varying response among different societies is illustrated by the advent of the slave trade. Some polities were directly involved in slave procurement, while others were primarily subject to raids (Van Dantzig 1982:188; Feinberg 1989:155–8; DeCorse 1991). The consequences of European contact would be expected to be much more deleterious in the latter populations – ultimately, the removal of large segments of the population interfering with the societies' ability to reproduce biologically. In contrast, Elmina's special position *vis-à-vis* the Europeans in some ways afforded the town a unique intermediary position between the coastal frontier and the interior.

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