

## From Anomansa to Elmina: The Establishment and the Use of the Elmina Castle – From the Portuguese to the British

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*The objective of this article is to trace the genesis of the foundation of Elmina, the establishment of the Elmina Castle, the initial purpose(s) for the building of the castle, and other issues such as socio-economic that took place. By this, the article examines the presence of the Europeans in Elmina (on the Guinea Coast), the genesis of the establishment of the Elmina Castle, and how the British eventually took over the Elmina Castle. From the historical background of Elmina (Edina, or Anomansa), the political organization, economics, and culture, the paper has been limited and focused on the coming of the Europeans (Portuguese early exploratory activities and some other reasons), and the building of the Elmina castle. This paper has also discussed into detail, the transfer of the castle from one European power to the other till the British era. It has considered the rivalry that existed between the Europeans (specifically, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English), the European-Local relation, the activities of which the Elmina Castle was used for, and the general impacts of the Castle on the lives of the people of Elmina and the Guinea Coast in general.*

### Introduction

The Elmina Castle in the Central Region of Ghana is the first castle built by the Europeans (the Portuguese) on their arrival at the then Guinea Coast or Gold Coast.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the establishment of the castle was initially for commercial purposes.<sup>2</sup> However, with time, the purpose for which the castle was built was shifted to something else. As time went by, the Portuguese who had held a monopoly of the Elmina (originally called “Anomansa”) and her surrounding villagers could not enjoy their monopoly due to the influx of other European countries. The questions that come to mind are: why did the purpose of the establishment of the castle abolish? Why were other European countries so interested in that particular site? What was the relationship between the indigenes and the various European countries who came to occupy Elmina? These and other intriguing questions have resulted in this article.

In an attempt to discuss the issue at hand, I have, first and foremost, traced the historical foundation of Elmina (from its original name to current); the economic activities that the indigenous people engaged in before the arrival of the Europeans; the activities that went on during the presence of the Europeans; the

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1. "Elmina Castle," Easy Track Ghana, <https://bit.ly/3cdb9Xh>.

2. Bryan Hill, “Elmina Castle and Its Dark History of Enslavement, Torture, and Death,” Ancient Origins (Ancient Origins, March 19, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3deCJVp>.

rivalries that existed between the European countries; and some benefits gained by both the indigenous people and the Europeans.

### The Founding of Elmina

Elmina, Edina, Anomansa, or Amankwaa Kurom are all names of one ancient town in today's modern Ghana. The Elmina or Edina town dates back 1300s.<sup>3</sup> History has it that three cousins, Takyi, Sama, and Kwaa Amankwaa, allegedly migrated from WALATA Empire in ancient Mali<sup>4</sup> with their people, settled briefly at *Obutokur* (now Takyiman in the Brong Ahafo Region) and finally wandered down to Eguafo, a village about 20 km from Elmina. We are told that among these three cousins, Kwaa Amankwaa was the most legendary hunter. One day, in his hunting expedition, he got lost. To the works of the *gods*, one can say that Kwaa Amankwaa's lost was symbolical. His fate was to be determined by his Creator. As history has it, his desire to find his way home was temporarily halted for a search of water to quench his thirst. He accidentally found water at a spot. We are told that the more he drank the water, the more it came in, so he called the area *Anomansa* ("inexhaustible water"), which became the name of the town before the European presence on the Guinea Coast.<sup>5</sup>

History has it that, later, Amankwaa followed the water downstream and discovered a lagoon. Overexcited, he exclaimed, "Be enya!" ("I have got it") which has since been the name of the lagoon. Amankwaa later found his way back to Eguafo. He returned to Anomansa with his people to settle there. It is said that the original township was just a strip of land about a mile directly opposite the site of the Elmina Castle, which was then a huge rock the town people perceived to be a sacred abode of some gods of the land Coast.<sup>6</sup>

Since Amankwaa was the founder of the area and because it was the practice, whenever people from the nearby village visited or went to trade there, they said they were going to *Amankwaa Kurom* ("Amankwaa's village"). To them, the town was known as such. As the town's population increased, Kwaa Amankwaa was installed the chief to see to the welfare of the people. This shows that, politically, the people of Anomansa were organized. They now have a leader to take up

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3. Steven A. Wilson, "St. George Castle," Elmina Castle - Easy Track Ghana, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2zJEhs7..>

4. Mark Cartwright, "Mali Empire," Ancient History Encyclopedia (Ancient History Encyclopedia, May 25, 2020), [https://www.ancient.eu/Mali\\_Empire/](https://www.ancient.eu/Mali_Empire/); J.Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. IV, Abridged Edition* (California: University of California Press, 1998); Manuel Campagnoli, "Ghana and Mali," Walata, accessed May 29, 2020, [http://www.walata.org/eng/itinerar\\_3.htm](http://www.walata.org/eng/itinerar_3.htm).

5. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 1.

6. *Ibid.*, 2.

executive, judicial, legislative, and religious functions. King Kwaa Amankwaa had a military unit known as the *Asafo*. The security of the people and the state were in the hands of the king, who discharged this obligation through the various *Asafo* companies (in ten divisions with specific roles). The *Asafo* could be described to be the embodiment of all the security agencies we know of today. During wars, the *Asafo* played a particular role just like the army, air force and navy when attempting to defeat an enemy or invader. The *Elminians* on a religious basis celebrates festivals. They have the *Edina Bakatue* (celebrating the opening of the Benya lagoon on first Tuesday of July) and *Edina Bronya* (Edina Christmas, celebrated from the first Thursday to the Saturday of January in the New Year). We can testify to these facts at hand that the local people were or are well organized before the coming of the Europeans.<sup>7</sup>

The populace of Elmina is into all types of business activities including buying and selling, running provision shops (both wholesale and retail), and chiefly and currently the making of salt, fishing, and fish smoking on commercial levels. However, up until this time of commerce, the people who lived in the past were hugely into agriculture, not necessarily for a business venture but for domestic purposes.

With its natural bay as described by the Arabs in about 1400s as *Al mina*, the then Anomansa, as the town was called, gradually metamorphosed into what we now call Elmina. With its natural harbour, many fishermen from different places in Ghana do fishing businesses in Elmina. At one moment, it is acknowledged that not less than 70% of the populace of Anomansa, at the time the Ashun (2004) wrote his account, were fishermen.<sup>8</sup> The rest of the population did their own little daily local jobs to survive or to support their basic needs. Currently, we can say the same issue about the people of Anomansa. Due to the relatively increasing rate of formal education, and handcrafts, the majority, especially the youth, have found different minor businesses (i.e. selling of computers, phone and accessories, provision shops, Masson, carpentry, vulcanizing, etc.) to keep life going.

### **The Early Exploratory Activities of the Portuguese, Factors That Motivated Them and the Establishment of the Elmina Castle**

Elmina Castle is well known as the premier construction built by the early Europeans in tropical Africa. It is recorded by DeCorse (2001, I) that in about 1550-1637, the castle was renovated and or expanded by the Portuguese. Its

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7. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 2, 8-10; "Edina Bakatue Festival," Visit Ghana, June 28, 2019, <https://visitghana.com/attractions/edina-bakatue-festival>.

8. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 2.

northern and western corners, as well as the gargantuan yard and the fortress at its north, have been identified as the handiwork of the Portuguese.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 1.** *The Early Exploratory Activities of the Portuguese*

Source: <https://bit.ly/3cbxKU3>.

First, we shall consider the early exploratory activities which landed the Europeans on the African continent. In the early part of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese, guided by the enlightened curiosity and zeal for the discovery of Prince Henry, the son of King John I, entered upon a career of maritime adventure, which has rendered the name of their nation famous in history. The exploration of the African Coast was the object of his grand ambition. Cruickshank (1966), tells us that as early as 1412, Prince Henry sent out a vessel for the exploration of the African Coast; and though this first expedition was not attended any distinguished success, it increased the Prince's ardour for discovery. We get to understand that by 1418 the Portuguese had traced the line of African coast beyond Cape Non, until within sight Cape Bojador, which first appeared an insurmountable barrier. We learned that in that year, two men of Prince Henry's household, John Gonzáles Zarco and Tristram Vaz Texeria, set out with the intention of rounding this Cape, but driven to sea in a gale, they reached an island, which they named Porto Santo, and soon afterward discovered Madeira, upon which there is a reason to believe that an Englishman whose name is Macham had been accidentally cast in 1334.<sup>10</sup>

Cruickshank continues by saying that the Canary Islands had previously been discovered by some Spaniards of Seville during the reign of Henry III of Castile, at the close of the fourteenth century. The king conferred the sovereignty of the island upon a Norman baron, Jean de Béthencourt, whose successors afterward sold it to Prince Henry. In 1433, we get to know that Galianez rounded

9. R. C. DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina* (Washington and London: Smithsonian, 2001), I.

10. B. Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa, Volume 1(2nd Ed.)* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966), 13-14.

Cape Bojador, which had been previously doubled by some Norman adventurers, who are said to have traced the African coast as far as south as Sierra Leon. Prince Henry anxious to secure the crown of Portugal the advantages, which he foresaw must arise from these discoveries, obtained from Pope Martin V a grant assigning to Portugal all lands or islands which had been or might be discovered between Bojador and the East Indies. The spirit of the age led the sovereigns of Europe to respect this grant for a time, and secured to Portugal the exclusive right of trading the coast.<sup>11</sup>

In 1441, Antonio Gonzales and Nuno Tritan examined the coast as far as Sierra Leone, beyond which it does not appear that the Portuguese had penetrated at the death of the Prince in 1463. According to Cruickshank, during the reign of Alphonzo in 1469, Fernando Gomez gave the trade of the coast of Guinea for rent of five hundred *ducats*, obliging himself to extend the discovery of the coast five hundred leagues during the period of his exclusive privilege. Cruickshank remarks that it is probably owing to this monopoly that we have no detailed accounts of progressive discovery from the time of Prince Henry's death until the accession of John II to the throne in 1482, during which period the whole coast of Guinea, with the Bights of Benin and Biafra, had been visited by the Portuguese.<sup>12</sup>

At this stage, we shall consider the presence of the Portuguese in Elmina, on the coast of Guinea. Elmina Castle, as the fortress eventually came to be known, played a crucial role in Portuguese attempts to monopolise the trade in coastal Ghana.<sup>13</sup> We also learn from Cruickshank that King John, alive to the advantages of the African trade, determined still further to secure and protect it, by forming establishments on the coast; and with this view, he sent out an expedition under the commander of Don Diego d'Azambuja, at the commencement of his reign. It consisted of a squadron of ten caravels and two means of transport, with five hundred soldiers and two hundred labourers. They landed at Elmina, the *mines*, upon the Gold Coast, which had been selected for this purpose, and they were prepared to carry out their intentions of building a fortification by force if the African King should seek to oppose them. We are told that the debarkation was effected with a great deal of ceremonial pomp. The Portuguese marched to the local village, unfurled the royal banner of Portugal upon a high tree, placed an altar under its shade, celebrated mass and offered up prayers for the speedy conversion of the Africans and the prosperity of the church about to be erected.<sup>14</sup>

From this point, we notice that the natives, accustomed to seeing the Portuguese arrive upon their coast in the simple guise of traders, were not

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11. Ibid, 14-15.

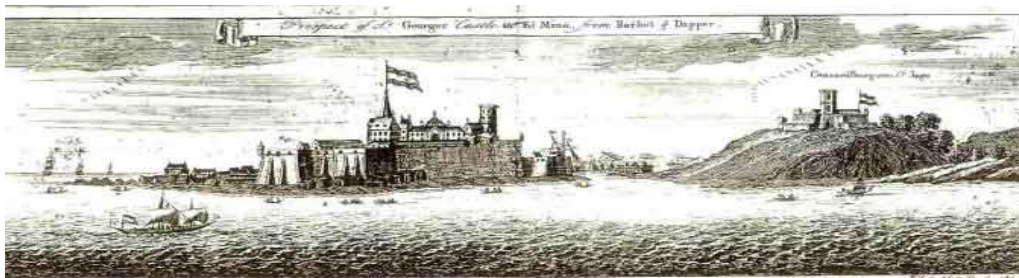
12. Ibid, 15-16.

13. R. C. DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina* (Washington and London: Smithsonian, 2001), 7.

14. B. Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa, Volume 1(2nd Ed.)* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966), 16-17.

prepared for this display of power, which they perceived with great distrust. The King, Camaianca (others render the name as Caramansa or Kwamena Ansa) objected to the establishment of a permanent settlement and does not seem to have yielded anything like a cordial assent when they commenced building their fortification. Overawed, however, by the superiority of the Europeans, Camaianca did not resort to any forcible opposition, until the Portuguese labourers began to quarry a rock, which the Africans considered sacred. Then they had recourse to arms. Several of the workmen were wounded, and Azambuja, who appears to have acted with great discretion, had much difficulty in appeasing them, which he preferred to do employing presents and excuses rather than to resort to force, rightly judging that their future intercourse would be rendered more agreeable by such forbearance.<sup>15</sup>

We become aware that it is very evident, however, that this, the first European settlement on the Coast of Guinea, was established in opposition to the wishes of the local Africans. The fort, which was built with great expedition, received the name of St. George; and Azambuja, after a government of two years and a half, returned to Portugal. At this juncture, we have been able to trace the genesis of the Elmina Castle. Other settlements were formed at different points of the coast and forts built. But it was not until Columbus had given a new world to Spain that the great importance of these African settlements was fully acknowledged.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 2.** *Anquandah, J, Castles, and Forts of Ghana, Ghana Museums & Monuments Board/Atalante, undated: 2000? (With fine photographs by Thierry Secretan) 59* (of Elmina Castle, quoting Jean Barbot, 1682): This castle has justly become famous for beauty and strength, having no equal on all the coasts of Guinea. Built square with very high walls of dark brown stone so very firm that it may be said to be cannon-proof (Source: [kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com](http://kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com))

Anquandah also says that the Portuguese were the first to have founded the Castle “Sao Jorge da Mina” in 1482. It is acknowledged that “Sao Jorge da Mina” was established by the Portuguese to protect the land endowed with gold discovered by the Portuguese in about 1471. By 1486, the castle had been fully

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15. *Ibid*, 17-18.

16. *Ibid*, 18.

constructed with its original plan intact. Since the construction of this building was its first kind on the “discovered” land, it (the castle) made the town now known as Elmina appeared as a city or citadel.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 3.** *St. George's Castle (Elmina Castle), Elmina [1482]*

Source: <https://bit.ly/3dfxuom>.

Amenumey (1998) shares the same views of other scholars that the Portuguese were the first to land on the Guinea Coast. He supports the view that the Portuguese were interested in finding a sea route to Asia by going around Africa to trade directly with Asia and not pass through any states controlled by Muslims. According to Amenumey, the Portuguese knew about the gold of West Africa from the people of North Africa, which for centuries had been carried across the Sahara to North Africa and Europe. We are told that the Portuguese, therefore, wanted to divert this trade into their own hands, and hoped at the same time to bring Christianity to the people of West Africa. The enterprise was inspired and organized by a member of the Portuguese royal family known as Prince Henry the Navigator. Prince Henry died, but the voyage was continued by the Portuguese sailors and finally Guinea Coast/Cape Coast (Modern day the Republic of Ghana).

Amenumey (1998) narrates that the sailors (the Portuguese) arrived off the coast of Elmina in 1482 as has been established by other historians. They took gold in large quantities from the area of Shama near the mouth of River Pra. To protect their monopoly, King John II sent one Don Diego d'Azambuja, together with soldiers, masons, carpenters to build a fort on the Gold Coast. Amenumey says that the Portuguese selected a site at the mouth of River Benya. Thus, they got the chief of Eguafo, Kwamena Ansah, to permit them to build a fort there. The fort they built was Sao Jorge de Mina (St. George of the Mine), which later became the Elmina Castle to date.<sup>18</sup>

The castle could have been built at any area along the coast but it was, however, regarding its location, strategically selected by the Portuguese who

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17. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 52.

18. D. K. Amenumey, *A Concise History of Ghana: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Twentieth Century* (Accra: Woeli Publishing, 1998), 99-100.

navigated the area at the time. The Portuguese opted to build the castle at the endpoint of narrow headland hemmed in at both sides by Benya River (a sort of Lagoon) and the Atlantic). The natural site provided a source of naturally protected port or waterfront. According to Anquandah (1999), at some point in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was some attack on the Portuguese. It appears that it was the Castilians who did the first attack then subsequently followed by the French in that chronological manner. Per the record, we are tempted to believe that these two groups were the Portuguese first encounter. Nonetheless, in all those attempts, the Portuguese managed to hold a monopoly on trade for a while until in about 1612 when the monopoly held by them was broken by the people of England.<sup>19</sup>

Ashun (2004, 23) also has the view that, in 1471, the Portuguese, led by their Captain Joao Satarem and Pedro D'éscober came to Elmina. Ashun also says that the information that led to the exploration was gathered from the Moorish prisoners after they conquered Ceuta in 1415. The Portuguese started their exploration for two main reasons as we are told by Ashun. The first was economic, they wanted to get to the gold-producing lands of sub-Saharan Africa, and also to find a new sea route to India and the Far East, where Europeans have been obtaining spices and other foreign goods. The Europeans wanted to find a sea route to eliminate the need for northern Sudanese caravans and the Muslim middlemen. The second reason was to spread Christianity to counteract Islam and more importantly, to get in touch with the kingdom of Prester John, which was a Christian kingdom in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>20</sup>

As usual, the system of trade that the Portuguese came to meet was barter which took the form of exchange of goods and services. No currency was necessarily required by the local market before one could buy or sell. Barter system of trading was to be later adopted by the Portuguese. As the locals became interested in European goods such as guns, liquor, used and unused clothes, tobacco, and many other items, the Portuguese became particularly interested in gold. As a result, gold was exchanged for European goods by the *Elminians*. The frequency and consistency at which gold was used as a medium of transaction for perishable items gave the idea that gold was really in abundance in the villages surrounding the town. By this impression, the Portuguese then called the town "El Mina" which simply means the mine or place of mining.<sup>21</sup> One can assume that probably the people of Anomansa did not know the use of gold for the reason that it (gold) was used to buy schnapps, second-hand clothes, and other perishable products. In that era, the locals needed what they thought was

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19. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 52.

20. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 23.

21. *Ibid.*



necessary, and since “exchange” is no crime, the Portuguese, knowing the value of gold, did not give any clue than to get as many as they wanted so far as the Elminians needed those of their perishable consumable products. We cannot say the same for today. Gold has become scarce comparatively, and valuable in the Ghana market and the globe. People of Ghana now know the value of gold, as a result, all attempts, both proper (registered small scale mining) and improper (unregistered miners known as “galamsey” in local terms), are being employed to extract/mine gold in various parts of Ghana.

Since the period of the Portuguese arrived, there was no single occasion, year, or single season that the Portuguese did not show up to exchange their goods with the local people for gold which they [Portuguese] saw more valuable than the local communities or villages. Gradually, step-by-step, and strategically, a monopoly was to be established on the Guinea Coast by the Portuguese.<sup>22</sup> The vision(s) of the Portuguese came to fruition. Nonetheless, the Portuguese were later to face rivalry from other European states.

### **The Construction of the Elmina Castle**

Daaku (1970: 8), has the thought that the Elmina castle was built by the support of one Dom Joao. He explains by saying that, after the discovery of the Mina, however, it once more attracted the attention of the Portuguese Crown. This is seen from the fact that the contract of Fernao Gomes, to whom the enterprise had been farmed out, was not renewed in 1474; but instead, the Guinea trade became a royal monopoly, under the charge of Dom Joao. Eight years later, Dom Joao, now king, caused a castle to be built at Mina, which was to protect the gold trade from interlopers and hostile Africans and to ensure that the Crown was not cheated out of it. To give a legal stamp to the Crown’s monopoly, the title ‘Lord of Guinea’ was added to the Portuguese royal titles and Mina was raised to city status.

Dantzig, in the *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, gives three main motives for the exploratory activities of the Portuguese. First was to establish contact with the legendary ‘Prester John’, leader of fable Christian Empire beyond the ‘Mountains of Moon’, and to attack together with him the Muslims in their rear. The second motive was to transform Lesbon, then still a mere re-distribution market for Asian goods from Venice (which in its turn received the goods via the land-route and many middlemen from India and the Far East) into the terminus of sea-route around Africa to India. The last motive was to gain direct access to the sources of Africa’s gold.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Ibid, 24.

23. Albert Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980), 1-3.

### **The Portuguese Monopoly Through Trading Activities with the People of [El]Mina**

As already discussed, currently, the people of Elmina are into all kinds of businesses of which fishing is the major activity among the many. Before this period and immediately after the building of the castle, the Portuguese regularly traded with the locals. All importations were done by the Portuguese in enormous quantities. These importations included both used and unused clothes, Moroccan linen and blankets, bracelets, kettles, and other less valuable items in exchange for gold dust and valuable ornaments supplied by the people of [El]Mina.

So extensive and popular was the cloth trade that a factor maintains a large shop for old linen c.1500-1507. Anquandah says that the commander of the castle wrote to King Manuel in 1503 that: "Sir, I Diego d'Alvarenga, kiss the royal hands of your highness and I report that I have received the old linen."<sup>24</sup> Daaku (1970) also reiterated and emphasized on this point and added that the Portuguese equally obtained cloths, leopard skins, and beads from Benin carried to their headquarters (Elmina) in Gold Coast.<sup>25</sup>

During the early part of the trading activities, in about the sixteenth century, there were relatively high numbers of imported slaves from the place called Dahomey to Anomansa. Polanyi and Rotstein (1966) have demonstrated how vital slaves and the overseas slave trade were to the archaic economy of the *Fon* ethnic group of then Dahomey, 'a region open "parkland" between the dense forests of what are now Central Ghana and Western Nigeria'<sup>26</sup> (today Benin) and their European trading partners such as the Portuguese, the British, and the French.<sup>27</sup>

The reason for the importation of slaves was that people or porters were needed to carry enormous quantities of consumable and non-consumable products from the port to the mainland Cape Coast. As a result, the Portuguese made it possible to bring in people from Dahomey to carry the goods for the exchange of gold and ivory in large quantities.<sup>28</sup> It is not only the kingdom of the Fons who engaged in slavery activities. Basil Davidson (1969, 281) has opined that Akwamu and Asante, Yoruba kingdom, Oyo, and coastal states like Allada equally engaged in slave raiding and commerce but not as effective as the Fon

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24. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 55.

25. K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1970), 6.

26. B. Davidson, "Polanyi K. and Rotstein A. (1966). Book Review," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (1969), 281.

27. *Ibid*, 281.

28. K. Polanyi and A. Rotstein, *Dahomey and the Slave trade. An analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

kingdom. Polanyi and Rotstein (1966), and Davidson (1969) have depicted how crucial slaves were to the then economic development of the Guinea Coast, and of the Fon kingdom and their European partners. Due to the impact of slaves in the economy of Dahomey, the king fully participated in the commerce of slaves to extent that “every year, for example, a nationwide census was taken of the population [including war captives/slaves]...”<sup>29</sup> According to Polanyi and Rotstein (1966), “the counting of slaves and captives was entrusted to two other officials [by the king]. With their reports made, the total tally could be arrived at”. According to Polanyi and Rotstein, “sacks containing the census tallies for each village were placed in four large bags....” Apart from these bags, their account holds that “there were three other sacks: one in black representing men killed in battle, one in red representing deaths from illness, and one in white indicating captives...”<sup>30</sup>

However, in about 1637, the Dutch were able to drive the Portuguese from Gold Coast and took over the trading activities. The possible reason is that Europe, at this period of trading, adventuring, and looking for more trade benefits or opportunities, saw a massive hit of Mexican gold which was more or less of higher value than the gold discovered so far in Elmina and other parts of Gold Coast. As a result, attention was turned from Elmina by the Portuguese government to elsewhere. To add to the reasons, it is observed that the Portuguese government in his attempt to strengthen his base at Elmina, pumped huge sums of money in building warships, convoys, artillery, etc. These investments made the government ran into deficits with less benefit from Elmina. It was therefore economically reasonable for the government to cut down his budget on Elmina and then back down in the end for the Dutch to have their way.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, until we get into 1637, the Portuguese benefited a lot from the gold trade.

In another account too, we read that in about 1529 the Portuguese still held trade monopoly in the Guinea Coast.<sup>32</sup> The interpretation given is that although the Portuguese faced rivalries, interlopers of other European states like Dutch, the Portuguese were able to fend them off the site. One of the mechanisms the Portuguese employed was to make sure that the local chiefs and those locals who engaged in the trading activities sold their gold only to the Portuguese. So, an agreement was signed between the Portuguese and their African trade partners. The terms of the agreement were that if anyone is caught trading with other

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29. B. Davidson, “Polanyi K. and Rotstein A. (1966). Book Review,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (n.p. 1969), 282.

30. Cited in B. Davidsson, “Book Review” (1969); Cf. Ibid, 282.

31. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 55-59.

32. K. Polanyi and A. Rotstein, *Dahomey and the Slave trade. An analysis of an Archaic Economy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

Europeans apart from the Portuguese, the fellow will be penalized, sentenced to prison, flogged, etc.<sup>33</sup>

The obvious thing is that Anquandah and Ashun are presenting the same issue under different periods. Nonetheless, what is clear to us is that there was a Portuguese monopoly on the Gold Coast. And that they were later ousted by the Dutch. Concerning Ashun's account of how the Portuguese regulated trade monopoly among themselves and the locals, it seems to appear that it had nothing to do with the agreement rather than an imposition of or appeal to threat and fear. The point that I am trying to raise is that the agreement favoured only a party.

## **The Portuguese Monopoly Faced a Challenge**

### The French Encounter with the Portuguese

We have been able to examine the presence of the Portuguese and their activities on the Guinea Coast (Elmina). We are next to talk about the first European power to challenge the Portuguese. The French were the first European power, who challenged Portugal's claim to Guinea. In 1542, a French ship that visited Cape Three Points carried back to France 1,000 ounces of gold. And although French activities were mainly confined to upper Guinea, the Portuguese were forced to establish a system of patrolling on the Mina coast to check intrusions into their preserve. However, much French wished to challenge Portuguese claims, their internal political troubles in the sixteenth century tied their hands.

France in the 16<sup>th</sup> century became an absolute monarchy and became firmly established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Absolute monarchy is a variation of the governmental form of monarchy in which all governmental power and responsibility emanates from and is centered in the monarch<sup>34</sup> It is said that in France, Louis XIV was the most famous exemplar of absolute monarchy. Louis XIV attempted in several ways to eliminate the remnants of medieval feudalism (a type of government organized according to the social system of ranking), which he succeeded, and established a centralized state under an absolute monarch.<sup>35</sup>

This attempt of Louis XIV brought about a series of civil wars. There was the problem of territorial boundaries which contributed to the civil wars between the

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33. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 25.

34. G. Le Bon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, trans. Bernard Miall (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001).

35. *Ibid.*

16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result of the civil wars, the French could not get support from *home*. Their (French) activities on the Mina coast, therefore, eventually died out, only to be followed by those of the English. There is one thing we should note about Daaku. He says in his *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast From 1600-1720*, 1970, page 9, that, the French were followed by the English in about 1554. In other words, Daaku opposes the idea that the French were followed by the Dutch as some scholars like Cruickshank, Acquandah, Amenumey, put it.

Nonetheless, we should equally acknowledge that sometimes historical facts are written from the perspective and in perspectives, which most often than not, culminates into what is called one of the biases of a historian.<sup>36</sup> And that what we can accept as historical facts depend on the interpretation given by the historian. Daaku<sup>37</sup> subjectively states that the Dutch arrived later on the Gold Coast scene than either the French or the English, but they were better organized and equipped for the trade than any of their predecessors. Whatever the case might be, there was the challenge of the Portuguese monopoly by other 'Europeans'.<sup>38</sup>

### The Dutch

Next, we shall examine the presence of the Dutch on the Guinea Coast. While the Native American race was fast disappearing under the harsh yoke of their Spanish taskmasters, as Cruickshank<sup>39</sup> will reiterate, the superior physical qualities of the African race marked them out as admirably suited to replace the extraordinary depopulation which was going on. Under these circumstances, Portugal was not allowed to enjoy African possessions unmolested. The Pope's grant (*Romanus Pontifex*, a *papal bull*, written in 1455 by Pope Nicholas V to Afonso V of Portugal, and it confirmed to the Crown of Portugal dominion over all lands south of Cape Bojador in Africa) was no safeguard against miserliness.<sup>40</sup>

In 1494, the *Treaty of Tordesillas* was signed. Under this treaty, the *world* was divided into two parts (the division/imaginary line was drawn from north to south of the globe); the western part for Spain, and the eastern part for Portugal. Cruickshank reports that the Dutch, at that time famous for their maritime power, was tempted to make encroachments upon the Portuguese rights, and commenced that career of hostility against them, which ended in driving them

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36. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (United Kingdom: University of Cambridge Press, 1961).

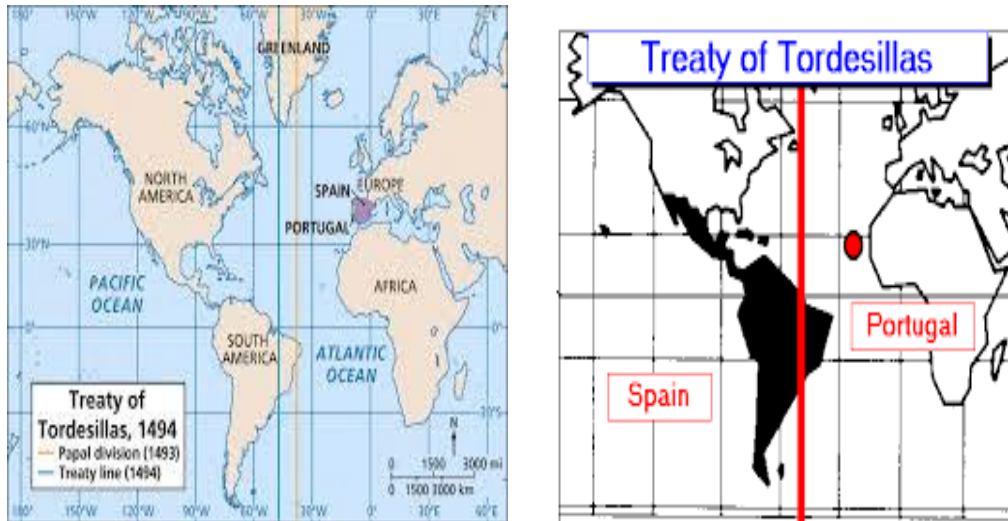
37. K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1970).

38. K. Y. Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1970), 9-10.

39. B. Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, Volume 1(2nd Ed.) (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966).

40. B. Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa*, Volume 1(2nd Ed.) (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966), 18-19.

out successively from most of their settlements. The Dutch established themselves at Mouree, only twelve miles from the chief settlement of the Portuguese at Elmina, from which they succeeded in expelling them (Portuguese) in 1637, and with the fall of Elmina the power of the Portuguese on the Gold Coast became extinct, the minor forts yielding, as a matter of course.<sup>41</sup> De Marees<sup>42</sup> also shares the view that in 1637, a fleet was sent by Count Maurice of Nassau-Siegen from the new Dutch colony in northern Brazil, mounted guns on St. Iago hill and forced the Portuguese in the Elmina Castle into submission.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 4.** *The Treaty of Tordesillas, 1494*

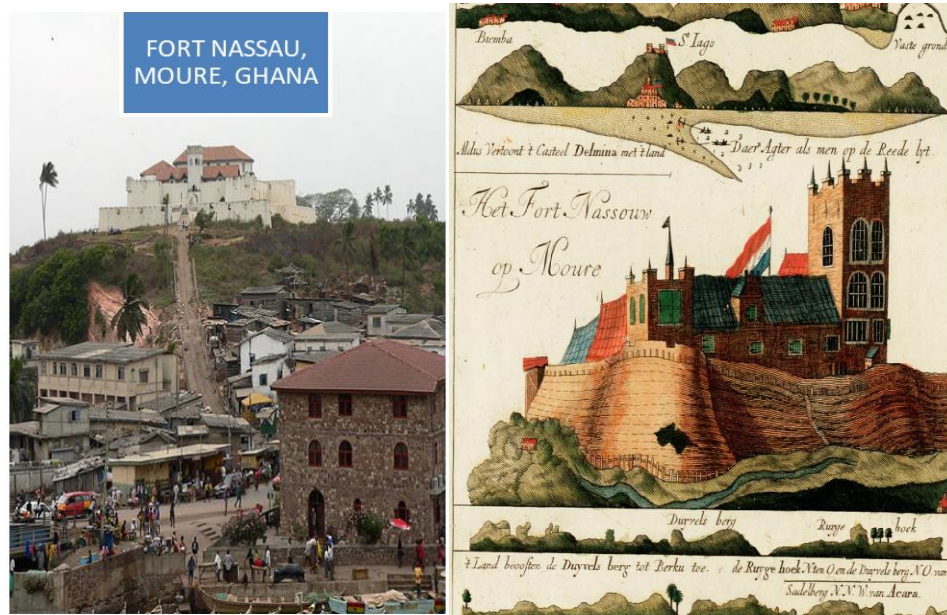
Source: <https://bit.ly/2Xb7k0s>; <https://bit.ly/2ZPnDCa>.

For Ashun (2004), around 1596, when the Dutch failed to win over Elmina from the Portuguese in 1596, the Dutch then went to establish a lodging fort called Nassau in Moree [also called Mowire] (20 km from Elmina) in about 1612. In 1625, the Dutch tried to take over Elmina the second time but were defeated once again. They were defeated the second time because the attack came from the sea, where the Portuguese were very strong.

41. Ibid, 18-19.

42. P. De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xv.

43. P. De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xv.



**Figure 5.** Fort Nassau

Source: pinterest.com

It has been documented that the generalissimo of the Dutch battalion was Hans Coine. He led the Dutch to attack the Portuguese in a well-organized form than before in about 1637. According to Ashun<sup>44</sup>, the final surrender of the Elmina Castle by the Portuguese came after three days of fighting, on the 29th day of August 1637. For the record and I think due to the harsh conditions of the terms imposed on the locals, the people of Anomansa assisted the Dutch to defeat the Portuguese. Nonetheless, three other possible reasons are given by Ashun: (1) the birth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade did not go down well with the people of Anomansa; (2) the indigenes were reduced to servitude/serves; and (3) the Portuguese adjusted the scale they were using for the measure.<sup>45</sup> At this time of the conflict, it was the Dutch whose tactics carried the day: the Dutch attack came from two strategic positions: seaward direction and then from land (where the locals threw stones from the top of the hill known as the San Jago that overlooked the castle). We do not, however, see that battle as an easy one. The Portuguese, for some time now, had tried as much as possible to control that territory they “garrisoned” and they would not lose guard. All that we can say is that the attack came to the Portuguese as “surprisingly unaware”.

44. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 26-27.

45. Ibid., 27.



**Figure 6.** Fort St. Jago, Elmina (the 1660s)

Source: <https://bit.ly/3dfj17c>.

Now, although it was the Portuguese who constructed the Elmina Castle, their monopoly still came to an end. Between the periods of 1637 to 1872, the Dutch took the stronghold of the castle. During these periods, and like many small villages or states, the population gradually increased from about 4,000 to about 10,000 (in the latter part of the seventeenth century), and from 10,000 to about 15,000 around the later part of the eighteenth century. We should not forget that slaves had been already imported from Dahomey to this part that we are examining. It is possible that those slaves never returned or did not have their freedom to go back or better still developed the interests of staying at Elmina forever and as a result, they married some of the locals and produced babies that help contribute to the population.

As the first castle built in tropical Africa, the Dutch, after taking over, reconstructed the castle. What they first did was to change the Portuguese church in the castle to something else, like *agora* (market place) or public sales center. At the riverside of the castle, the Dutch built their church. Other reconstructions took place. We are told that Jean Barbot, the author of the book *Description of the Coast of North and South Guinea* published in 1732, once visited the Elmina Castle at the time of the Dutch control. He is said to have celebrated Easter and participated in other religious activities in the Dutch new church in the castle. He also attested to the beautification projects that the Dutch took to make the castle a magnificent than before. However, in about 1872, the British took over the castle from the Dutch.<sup>46</sup>

Amenumey also tells that other European Nations began to challenge the Portuguese monopoly from about 1530 onwards. He says that the French and the English came, but the strongest challenge was provided by the Dutch. Starting from 1598 says Amenumey, the Dutch built forts at Mouree, Butri, Kormantin, and Komenda. In 1637, they captured Elmina Castle from the Portuguese, and in 1642 they took those of St. Anthony at Axim. The Dutch forced the Portuguese to surrender their forts on the Gold Coast and leave altogether. Amenumey says the

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46. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 59-61.



Dutch succeeded against the Portuguese because the latter had spread their activities and interests too widely.<sup>47</sup>

### The English

After the expulsion of the Portuguese by the Dutch, the English did not remain as idle spectators as Cruickshank (1960) puts it. Impelled by a similar spirit of adventure, and as eagerly alive to the motives of self-interest as their Dutch contemporaries, they turned their attention to the advantage of trade with Africa. In the later part of the reign of Edward VI, the English merchants commenced trade with the Coast of Guinea, but without any support from the government. They were, therefore, able to contend against the Portuguese, who endeavoured to maintain their exclusive right to trade, upon the strength of the Pope's grant. Nor had these early adventurers less to contend against after the Dutch who had altogether expelled the Portuguese from the Coast in 1637. But, the spirit of adventure which the discovery of new regions had roused, inspired them with energy and perseverance not easily daunted, and the prospect of gain made them insensible to risks attending the prosecution of their trade. The English, however, received some encouragement from James I., whose favour invested their enterprise with a higher degree of consideration.<sup>48</sup>

The English indeed took over the Elmina Castle in about 1872 as various historians (Daaku, Acquanda, and the likes) say. Their descriptions of how the Elmina Castle passed through the hands of one European power to the other is quite similar and quite divergent in terms of explanations. Ashun has his story to share with us so far as Elmina Castle is concerned and how the British took over it. He says that the Dutch upon the takeover of the Elmina castle extended the dungeons and continued the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In 1872, long after the trans-Atlantic slave trade had been abolished, the castle and other Dutch possessions became unprofitable and costly to maintain. On the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1872, therefore, the Dutch traded their possessions in northern Sumatra in Indonesia. Ashun says that the British were made to pay £3,790 l. 61/2 d for the stores and fixtures in the Dutch forts. The transfer of the Elmina castle to the British was truly a blow to the people of Elmina.<sup>49</sup>

Ashun further explains why the *Elminians* were not happy when the Dutch transferred the Castle to the British. Ashun starts by explaining that, in those days, one needs to understand that, the Europeans went into alliances with the

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47. D. K. Amenumey, *A Concise History of Ghana: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Twentieth Century* (Accra: Woeli Publishing, 1998), 100.

48. B. Cruickshank, *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa, Volume 1(2nd Ed.)* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966), 19-20.

49. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 27-28.

communities within which they had built the fort, lodge, or castle. Additionally, one group of African people saw other groups as enemies. In the case of Elmina, the *Elminians* never saw themselves as part of the Fantes but rather considered themselves to be friends of the Asantes. The *Elminians* assisted and supported the Asantes, who invaded the Fanteland and caused scores of trouble for the British.

During certain times, the British showed disapproval of the attitude of the *Elminians* and would support the Fantes to attack the people Elmina. Therefore, the *Elminians* now having to accept the British as their masters were seen as being sold to an enemy people. Thus, the Elmina people vowed never to allow the transfer of the castle from the Dutch to the British. To drum home their request, a delegation was sent to Holland to plead on their behalf, but sadly, they were not received. On the said date, Elmina castle became the property of the British. It is said that the chief and the people of Elmina showed some resistance and also alleged involvement with the conspiracy of the Asantes to invade the castle. The chief in question at that time, Kobena Gyan, was exiled to Sierra Leon. The township of Elmina was bombarded by the British as well.<sup>50</sup>

From the works of Amenumey, the Dutch did not succeed in keeping the trade of the Gold Coast to themselves either. They faced competition from England.<sup>51</sup> It is to be believed that the British took over the castle at the time the trans-Atlantic slave trade had been abolished and had almost completely stopped. They thus used the castle as a sub-administrative centre. However, this is not to suggest that the British did not take part in the trade. Rather, they used the Cape Coast castle; about 12 km east of Elmina, for their trade while the Dutch were at Elmina. During the Second World War, the British brought men from all English speaking West Africa except Liberia to the Elmina Castle, where they were trained and sent to India, and Burma called the Royal West Africa Frontier Force and fought for the British. Ashun also shares the same view with some historians that, in 1948, after World War II, the Elmina Castle was used as a police training school. The British ruled Elmina with iron hands until 1957 when Ghana became an independent state.<sup>52</sup>

### The Impact of the Elmina Castle

Now, we shall consider the impact, benefits, or gains (both positive and negative) derived by the people of Mina and Ghana in general so far as Elmina

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50. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 28.

51. D. K. Amenumey, *A Concise History of Ghana: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Twentieth Century* (Accra: Woeli Publishing, 1998), 101.

52. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 28-29.

Castle is concerned. Since 1872 when the British took over the Elmina Castle, it has served a variety of purposes: for many years it housed the Ghana Police Recruit Training Centre. In 1972, it was taken over by the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board and was included by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the World Heritage List. Recently, it has been used by the Edinaman Secondary School and now has historical museum exhibition themed "Images of Elmina Across the Centuries."

The historical name of Elmina has become immortalized in New World history and culture, manifesting itself in the "Mina Nations" of the Caribbean and South American black Diaspora. The "Mina Nations" were ethnic clubs that invoked ancestral spirits and preserved the language, art, culture, and cults of the West African slaves shipped to the New World from Elmina.<sup>53</sup>

The presence of the Europeans in Elmina changed some aspects of culture. Amateur type of education by the local people began to change to classroom-type as the Castle Schools were instituted by the Europeans. Foster (2001) says that recent research indicated the Portuguese undertook the earliest educational experiments on the Gold Coast. In a series of instructions to the captain at 'Edina' (Elmina) King Joao III advised his representatives to 'take special care to command that the sons of the Negroes living in the village learn how to read and write, how to sing and pray while ministering in church'.<sup>54</sup>

African traditional religion for the first time was challenged. Acquandah says that in 1503, according to historical narration by the Portuguese Diego de Alvarenga, a Portuguese missionary converted and baptized the paramount chief of the Efutu kingdom on the Mina coast together with 300 of his subjects. The chief permitted the Portuguese to build a church on the hill located opposite the Castle St. Jorge. The site was dedicated to the Portuguese saint, Jago.<sup>55</sup>

African-European contact and interaction resulted in material enrichment at the national, corporate, and individual levels on both sides. In the period 1490-1560, for example, nearly 1000 Kgs. of gold were exported from Mina to enrich the Portuguese crown. It is estimated that by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese Gold Coast trade provided 10% of the world's known gold supplies. Certainly, history was made in an international monetary economy when the English Royal African Company's significant gold exports in 1672 led to the minting of gold currency that bore the designation of Guinea.<sup>56</sup>

Even the beginning of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked a high sense of interest of the European merchants to trade in slaves. The young

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53. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 61.

54. P. Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (London: Routledge and Kagan Paul Ltd., 1965), 43.

55. J. K. Acquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana: For Ghana Museum and Monuments Board Books* (Belgium: Atlante/Paris 42 rue Sedaine, 1999), 62.

56. *Ibid.*, 14.

energetic Africans were being sold as slaves and as an exchange for other goods. This economic venture affected the social order of the Africans. Undoubtedly, with few exceptions such as Hawkins, European buyers purchased African captives on the coasts of Africa and the transaction between themselves and Africans was a form of trade. It is also true that very often a captive was sold and resold as he made his way from the interior to the port of embarkation – and that too was a form of trade. Many things remain uncertain about the slave trade and its consequences for Africa.

Rodney<sup>57</sup> (1972) draws our attention to the claim of the experiences of the rape of Africans, probably the superiors, ranging million in number between 1445 to 1870.<sup>58</sup> This economic venture created a problem for the Africans. Labour was drawn off from agriculture and conditions became unsettled. Dahomey, which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was known for exporting food to parts of what is now Togo, was suffering from famines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The present generation of Africans will readily recall that in the colonial era when abled-bodied men left their homes as migrant labourers that upset the farming routine in the home districts and often caused famine. Slave trading, after all, meant migration of labour in a manner one hundred times more brutal disrupt.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Elmina Castle Becomes a Prison Camp**

We are not ending this paper without talking about the Europeans, especially, the British, for using the Elmina castle as a prison, to camp most prominent African citizens.<sup>60</sup> In this case, we shall talk about two personalities here, both of Asante born. First is Nana Akwasi Agyeman Prempeh. He was born in 1872. On the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1888, he became the king of the Asantes at a tender age of sixteen. In 1896, he was captured by the British and held in the Elmina Castle for four good years.<sup>61</sup> He was then taken to Freetown in Sierra Leone and finally exiled to the Seychelles Island in the Indian Ocean. He was repatriated to Gold Coast in 1924 after some negotiations and became an honorary Chief of Kumasi and passed on in 1931.<sup>62</sup> His arrest could be numerous, but one of his charges on

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57. W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1972).

58. *Ibid.*, 103-104.

59. *Ibid.*, 108.

60. Bryan Hill, "Elmina Castle and Its Dark History of Enslavement, Torture, and Death," *Ancient Origins* (Ancient Origins, March 19, 2020), <https://bit.ly/2AiTXTa>.

61. W. Tordoff, "The Exile and Repatriation of Nana Prempeh I of Ashanti (1896-1924)," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 4, no. 2 (1960).

62. Thaddeus Ulzen, "February 1, 1896: Exiled Prempeh I and His Retinue Arrive at Cape Coast Castle," Edward A. Ulzen Memorial Foundation (Edward A. Ulzen Memorial Foundation, February 1, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2Xdp8ID>.

which the British imprisoned him was that he had refused to honour 1873 war treaty of Fomena, in Ashanti Region, which among others was compelling the Asantes to pay 50,000 oz. of gold to the British as a war indemnity fund. Finally, for the conspiracy to dislodge the British from the Elmina Castle.<sup>63</sup>

The next person to talk about is Yaa Asantewaa. Yaa Asantewaa, on the other hand, led the Asantes in a war against the British for the demand of the golden stool by a British governor Frederick Hodgson in 1900. She was also captured, held in Elmina Castle for a brief moment, and finally to the Seychelles Island.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, she died in exile.<sup>65</sup> At the seaboard side of the castle was the 'Door of No Return', the portal through which slaves boarded the ships that would take them on the treacherous journey across the Atlantic known as the Middle Passage. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 30,000 slaves on their way to North and South America passed through Elmina's Door of No Return each year.

### Conclusion

In summary, we have been able to trace the genesis of the traditional name of Elmina, the founder, and how the early people of Anomansa organized themselves in terms of socio-culture, socio-political, and socio-economic. We have been able to trace the reasons why the Europeans came to Africa and the early exploratory activities of the Portuguese. We have also examined the rivalry that existed among the European traders, how the Elmina Castle was transferred from one European power to the other till the era of the English, and the activities that went on or how these European powers used the castle for, including the *capture* of two eminent Asante royals. We have been able to examine also the relationship that existed between the Europeans and the *Elminians*. And finally, we have been able to examine the benefits derived by both the Europeans and the people of Guinea Coast in general so far as the Elmina Castle is in existence.

At this stage, can one emphatically say that the presence of the European Nations on the Guinea Coast has led to Africa's underdevelopment at the expense of Africans? To voice my opinion on this question is another research for the future and those interested. However, one obvious thing was that, whereas the Europeans were interested and placed a high value on gold, the local people did not but preferred perishable goods. However, I will argue that, in the beginning, we do see any imposition of the Portuguese who first settled at Anomansa on the local people apart from the period where we see rivalries. Whereas the Europeans, especially the Portuguese who came first to settle,

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63. A. Ashun, *Elmina, the Castle and the Slave Trade* (Cape Coast: Nyakod Printing Works, 2004), 31.

64. R. West, *Yaa Asantewaa (Mid-1800s-1921)* (n.p., February 2019).

65. *Ibid*, 32.

needed gold the most, the local populace needed what they wanted and for that matter, they exchanged gold for those items highlighted in this article. It was during the end of the Dutch regime and the era of the British that we see some form of imperialism which is quite not different from Roman imperialism (the tendency to impose one's authority over others).

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