### Introduction to An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Creator</th>
<th>DeCorse, Christopher R.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource type</td>
<td>Articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage (spatial)</td>
<td>Volta-Tano Watershed, Ghana, Elmina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Smithsonian Institution Libraries, DT512.9.E46 D43 2001X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>By kind permission of Christopher R. DeCorse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format extent (length/size)</td>
<td>45 pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INTRODUCTION

This is an archaeological study, but documentary records, oral sources, and ethnographic data have been used to interpret the material record. Elmina is one of the best-illustrated and -described African settlements in sub-Saharan Africa. It is fortunate that many primary sources on Elmina and the Gold Coast have been republished and annotated in English. Several scholars have synthesized Elmina's history and examined Elmina within the broader context of the Gold Coast. Many archives also possess rich holdings of maps and plans. In particular, I was able to examine manuscripts relevant to Elmina at the British Public Record Office, Kew; the Rijksarchief, Amsterdam; the National Maritime Museum, London; the Furley Collection at the University of Ghana; and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. I also obtained selected material from a number of other archives including: Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden; Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee (now part of the Rijksmuseum), Amsterdam; the Illustrated London News Picture Library; and the Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague. A variety of documentary sources have been quoted at length in the text. These provide substantive information as well as colorful descriptions by European visitors to the coast. Irregularities in spelling and grammar have been retained as they appear in the original works or translations. Unless these confuse the meaning of the passage, they have not been identified in the text.

Despite the wealth of documentary sources, the records are by no means complete. Information on the lower Guinea coast, the area that extends from Liberia to Cameroon, during the Portuguese period is particularly limited. The records that do exist almost exclusively concern trade and navigational peculiarities.

2 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

reconstruction is variable. In some instances, as with the sixteenth-century writings of Duarte Pacheco Pereira and Willem Bosman's later work, A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, the accounts are by Europeans who participated in the events described and played key roles in African-European relations.

Other narratives are by minor functionaries who plagiarized other writers and offer little new information (see, e.g., Feinberg 1979; Jones 1980, 1986). The Asante War and the British military expedition of 1873-74 resulted in the publication of a mass of popular books and accounts in English; for the most part they are of limited direct relevance to Elmina, but some provide useful information (e.g., Allen 1874; Beaton 1873; Boyle 1874; Daily News Special Correspondent 1874; Hay 1874; Stanley 1874).

Above all, many of the documents reflect European economic interests, the vast majority consisting of
observations and reports of trade relations, often made rather dense by bureaucratic excess.

From an archaeological standpoint the documentary records are disappointing. There is a dearth of information on settlement organization and housing within the town. Descriptions are vague at best, and no detailed maps exist. No architectural plans of Elmina Castle itself are known until after the Dutch capture in 1637, or at least no earlier plans survive. The illustrations that do exist suggest a steady increase in the size of the settlement and, to some extent, the incorporation of European elements into house construction. Yet they are also indicative of the limitations of European source material in general: They are lacking in scale and perspective, concentrate on the European presence, and often present widely differing viewpoints.

There are, for the most part, no detailed property records, deeds, or wills prior to the late nineteenth century. Notable exceptions are sources such as the second West India Company's dagregisters (daily journals), lijsten van overlijden (annual lists of the dead), and correspondence. These, as well as occasional references in other sources, briefly describe the homes of specific individuals. In the absence of more detailed maps, however, this information cannot be related to specific archaeological provenances. In any case, the few documents that record estate inventories or properties refer to only a minute portion of the population. The identities of the individuals who lived, worked, and were buried in the houses uncovered during archaeological work are unknown.

**ORAL TRADITIONS AND HISTORIES** To provide more holistic analyses of African societies, many researchers have supplemented documentary records with oral histories and traditions as well as ethnographic data. Other researchers have surveyed and recorded these data with regard to Elmina, but this information, for the most part, was not directly relevant to the current research. Interviews, oral histories and traditions, and ethnographic data were collected during each field season. Much of the data recorded related to specific activities such as salt production, butchering practices, potting traditions, and fishing, and they also included the memories of recent activities that may have impacted the archaeological site.

Oral traditions—narratives of the past passed down over generations—relevant to the early history of Elmina survive. These sources were, however, of minimal use in interpreting the town's past. There is a general consensus within the town that oral traditions no longer exist: "[A]ll the old people who knew about this are now dead" (Feinberg 1969:x-xv; 1989:xiii). In his study of eighteenth-century Elmina-Dutch relations, Harvey Feinberg obtained very little historical information from his informants. In fact, there likely never were formalized mechanisms or positions for preserving oral traditions, such as there are in many African societies, and there may never have been substantial traditions to pass on. Feinberg also noted the chaotic political situation after the town's destruction in 1873 as a possible reason for the paucity of the kind of information these sources can sometimes provide.
The interpretation of oral traditions within Elmina, and within coastal Ghana in general, is further complicated by a process David Henige (1973, 1974) has referred to as "feedback." Many of the people of coastal Ghana are literate, have been so for centuries, and have had access to published materials on Ghanaian history. Elements of these sources, correct or incorrect, have been incorporated into indigenous renditions of Elmina's past. Henige illustrates the problem by citing the influence of early, published European historiography on traditional lists of the paramount stool lineages, including those recounted in a local history published in the 1950s by J. Sylvanus Wartemberg (1951). These traditions include references to Caramansa, the African ruler named in early European sources as the one who met with the Portuguese at the founding of Castelo de São Jorge da Mina. In examining Elmina traditions, Henige found that Caramansa does not appear in recorded lists of Elmina rulers until the late nineteenth century, a period when printed accounts of African-European interactions and references to Caramansa became more widely accessible in Elmina.

Wartemberg, in turn, has become a principal source in contemporary oral traditions (Feinberg 1989:xiii). This point was clearly illustrated during my own research. While interviewing an elder, I was surprised at some of the facts that he was able to recount regarding the history of the town and the settlement's origins. As I rapidly scribbled things down in my notebook, he kindly mentioned that there was no need for me to do so, for he would loan me the book a copy of Wartemberg. Other traditions that were recorded during fieldwork referred to Caramansa and dearly drew information from Wartemberg. Further traditions of doubtful historical merit were also mentioned, including the proposition that a French outpost had been located at Elmina prior to the arrival of the Portuguese.

More helpful than oral traditions were the memories, personal reminiscences, and eyewitness accounts provided by oral histories. This information was principally confined to information relevant to the last 50 years. For example, awareness of grading the parade ground for Queen Elizabeth's visit in the early 1960s and use of the site by the Ghana police helped explain some of the surface features and artifact patterns noted during archaeological survey and excavation. Even this information was often quite limited, however. There was no memory, for example, of a structure located southeast of the castle, which archaeological evidence indicates was associated with the occupation by

4 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

the Ghana police during the 1950s. Nor could any insight be obtained into the restoration work and clearing of portions of the site undertaken during the 1950s under A. W Lawrence's direction. Memories of the discovery of skeletal remains and artifacts were useful in identifying the location of archaeological deposits and the extent of archaeological features, many of which had been obliterated by more recent activity Ethnohistorical information on some cultural practices-pottery manufacture, fishing, and butchering practices-provided useful analogs for the uses of material discovered archaeologically.
Much of sub-Saharan Africa remains poorly known archaeologically compared with some world areas. Site inventories, artifact chronologies, and culture histories are still important concerns, which is true in terms of the present study. Although Ghana has been the focus of more archaeological research than many areas, only limited work has specifically dealt with sites associated with African-European interactions. Research on European sites has generally been limited in scope, concentrating on the identification and description of structures and on architectural history, with little attention given to the associated archaeological materials. This characterization applies to work in Ghana as well as Africa in general. The history and construction of the forts and castles of coastal Ghana have received substantial attention. The most comprehensive study remains Lawrence (1963), but Dahmen and Elteren (1992), Groll (1968), O’Neil (1951), and van Dantzig (1980a) provide useful overviews. The majority of the other works are relatively short and primarily aimed at more general audiences. Detailed plans of the castle were recently prepared by students from Delft University and as part of current renovation work (Hyland 1995; Joustra and Six 1988). The limited amount of archaeological research undertaken in conjunction with this work has dealt with overarching reconstruction concerns and not the recovery of archaeological data that would help in the interpretation of African or European lifeways (Anquandah 1992, 1993, 1997; Joustra and Six 1988).

Elmina’s archaeological potential has been long recognized, but no systematic work had been undertaken on the site when the current work began in 1985. Lawrence (1963:i69) noted the presence of stone foundations but provided no additional information. Other researchers reported isolated archaeological features and surface finds. Bernard Golden evaluated the site as part of the 1969 coastal survey, but his assessment of the site's archaeological potential was negative, concluding that “[t]here has been considerable modification of the terrain here and the deposits in the thin layer of soil covering bedrock are no doubt disturbed” (1969:124).

More intensive excavations were undertaken by David Calvocoressi (1968, 1977) during the 1960s at Veersche Schans (known in the British period as Fort de Veer), a small redoubt built in 1811 on the landward side of the Elmina peninsula, west of the old town. The impetus for the archaeological research was oral traditions that suggested that the location had been the site of a French outpost that predated the arrival of the Portuguese. The traditions are problematic in a number of ways, and Calvocoressi’s work uncovered no evidence of pre-Portuguese European occupation. The excavation, however, did produce material predating construction of Veersche Schans, including burials probably dating to the eighteenth century and earlier midden deposits that were likely pre-sixteenth-century in age. These finds provided material useful for comparison with pre-nineteenth-century artifacts from the Elmina excavations.

Prior to the present work, research on African sites on adjacent parts of the coast had also been limited, and there has still not been a comprehensive survey of the...
Central Region as a whole, though information is now accumulating. Preliminary surveys had been undertaken. Excavations of the historical Fante capitals of Efutu by Agorsah (1975, 1993) and Asebu by Nunoo (1957) illustrate the potential of these sites, but the research undertaken was limited in scope. Farther into the hinterland, important comparative information about change in coastal Ghana during the post-European-contact period comes from the work of Bellis (1972, 1982, 1987) and Kiyaga-Mulindwa (1978, 1982). To the east, Ozanne's (1963) survey of sites in Accra and Shai complements some of the observations made here concerning the transition to more nucleated settlements between the late fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. To the west of Elmina, the sites of Komenda and Sekondi also provide some comparative information.

My initial research on the Elmina settlement was conducted between 1985 and 1987 (DeCorse 1987a, b, 1989a, 1992a, b). This work and the 1990 field season focused entirely on the Elmina site. Archaeological work in 1993, 1997, 1998, and 2000 included additional excavation and survey at Elmina, but work was extended to neighboring areas to help place the Elmina site in broader cultural and historical context (DeCorse 1998a). The specific objective of this research was to locate and retrieve diagnostic artifacts to establish some chronological control for a further understanding of late prehistoric and historic occupations in the areas around Elmina. This collaborative effort has been integrated into the Central Region Project. Archaeological remains at Elmina itself cover an area of almost 81 ha (200 acres), but the earliest and densest areas of past occupation are concentrated on the 8 ha (20 acres) closest to the castle. Portions of the site related to the pre-European-contact village and the Portuguese-period town occupy even more restricted areas. Deposits today lie buried under destruction debris or fill ranging from a few centimeters (less than an inch) to over 2.5 m (8.2 feet). Although portions of the site have been heavily affected by recent development, many areas remain well preserved. Over 40 stonewalled structures were excavated, some with walls still standing to a height of 2 m (6.5 feet). The nineteenth century, the time of the settlement's destruction, is best represented, but the remains span the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. A complete survey of the coast 10 km (6.2 miles) east and west of Elmina has now been completed, and most historically and archaeologically identified African settlements and European trade posts throughout the Central Region have been visited. All standing European structures have been mapped. Material from excavations and from unstratified surface collections has provided a much more detailed understanding of the occupation of the Central Region coast over the past 1,000 years.

A particularly significant aspect of the Elmina excavations was the large proportion of European trade materials recovered. Interpretations of African art and material culture are often limited by their dependency on objects that have been removed from their cultural and historical contexts (see Cole 1979; Posnansky 1970, 1979). The close chronological control provided by European
trade materials is very helpful in dating associated objects of African manufacture, such as metal vessels, gold weights, beads, and ceramics. The preceding sources allow for interpretation of the lifeways of the Elmina people and a means of examining developments within the Elmina settlement over the past 500 years. The history of Elmina, as reconstructed from documentary and traditional sources, is presented in Chapters 1 and 2. The first chapter concentrates on sociopolitical developments and the demography of the settlement; Chapter 2 focuses on records and traditions relating to the town site, spatial organization within the settlement, and town life. These discussions are followed by a survey of the archaeological research undertaken (Chapter 3). The subsequent chapters examine different aspects of the Elmina past, drawing together documentary, ethnographic, and archaeological data. Transformations in subsistence, craft production, and trade are considered first (Chapter 4). Archaeological research provides a closely dated selection of local ceramics, indigenous metalworking, ivory carving, bead production, and other local industries. These data suggest important insights into indigenous technology and necessitate reevaluation of current interpretations. European trade materials dominate the assemblage, and this aspect of the artifact inventory is considered in Chapter 5. Ceramics, glass, tobacco pipes, firearms, and beads outnumber items of local manufacture. The trade in these materials, as well as aspects of European trade poorly perceived archaeologically, is considered. The concluding chapter considers artifacts within the cultural system, the variable meanings assigned to European trade materials, and archaeological perceptions of culture contact.

I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From that mine of gold very great riches and honor have benefited the kings of Portugal, and daily much profit comes to all their kingdom. This is so, not because they are lords of the harvesting of the gold or lords of the land where it is collected, but only on account of the trade, at a fortress which they possess there on the sea, built recently, to which the blacks from all the neighboring districts, willingly and for gain, bring the gold, to sell and exchange for goods taken there from here.

BERN-ALDEZ, C. 1515, QUOTED BY P. E. H. HAIR,
The Founding of the Castelo de Sao Jorge da Mina

History is culturally ordered, differently so in different societies....

MARSHALL SAHLINS,
Islands of History

The African settlement of Elmina in coastal Ghana encapsulates the years of European contact, trade, and colonization better than any other site in Africa. The town was the major trade entrepôt in the portion of West Africa the Europeans called Mina or the Mine and, later, the Gold Coast because of the gold that could be obtained there. The Portuguese stronghold of Castelo de Sao Jorge da Mina, founded in 1482 adjacent to an existing African settlement, was the first fortified
European trade post in sub-Saharan Africa (Figures i.i and 1.2). Elmina Castle, as the fortress eventually came to be known, played a crucial role in Portuguese attempts to monopolize the trade in coastal Ghana, and it became a focal point of European rivalry in the region (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). The Dutch captured the castle in 1637, and Elmina remained the headquarters of Dutch mercantile interests in West Africa until its transfer to the British in 1872. The destruction of the African town by the British in 1873 and the subsequent abandonment of the site illustrate dramatic changes.

**Figure 1.1.** Map of Central Region and some of the principal sites mentioned in the text. (Adapted from Ghana Survey Map 05o2D3)

**8 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA**

Figure 1.2. Map of Elmina today (Illustration courtesy of Christopher R. DeCorse)

Figure 1.4. View of Elmina Castle and the old town site as seen from Fort St. Jago in 1986. Some of the excavations can be seen on the peninsula. (Photograph by Christopher R. DeCorse)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Figure 1.4. View of Elmina Castle and the old town site as seen from Fort St. Jago in 1986. Some of the excavations can be seen on the peninsula. (Photograph by Christopher R. DeCorse)

are varied, complex, and illustrative of the challenges present in evaluating the intersection of Europe with the non-Western world. Despite tensions with the Europeans the African settlement flourished. The population climbed from a few hundred during the fifteenth century to perhaps 18,000-20,000 inhabitants by the mid-nineteenth century. The growth of Elmina and other coastal trading centers...
marked a reorientation away from long-established trans-Saharan routes toward a new frontier of opportunity provided by European coastal trade. Although fifteenth-century Elmina was likely subservient to the neighboring Fante states of Eguafu and Fetu, the population had, by the midsixteenth century, come to regard itself as politically distinct from the surrounding African population. These developments are only partly revealed by documentary sources. European narratives provide limited, Eurocentric understanding of the events that transpired, conveying little about the African population, their beliefs, or indigenous perceptions of the Europeans. This book considers Elmina's past in light of 15 years of archaeological research in coastal Ghana. The data presented represent one of the largest settlement studies of its kind undertaken in West Africa. Excavation cannot provide the detailed chronicle of people and events that documentary records or oral histories at times afford. Archaeology does, however, offer independent information not accessible through other sources. These data both expand our knowledge and furnish a means of evaluating other sources of information for a more holistic understanding of the past.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE PAST Archaeological research at Elmina had two overarching concerns. The foremost of these was the story of the African settlement of Elmina. This narrative is more about the everyday life of the Elmina people than the great historical events of which they were part. Elmina was an African settlement, but the majority of the population left no written records, and the documentary sources that outline the town's history and tell the story of the individuals who lived there were written by Europeans. House foundations, pottery sherds, bottles, bone, and metal fragments furnish a more complete interpretation of the settlement and of the diet, craft specialization, trade contacts, activities, and the beliefs of its inhabitants-the past lifeways of the Elmina people.

The other primary objective of the archaeological study was to place Elmina in broader context and examine developments within the settlement in light of models of European expansion and the processes of sociocultural change in general, particularly how these phenomena can be perceived and investigated archaeologically. The European buildings and the myriad of trade goods offer dear testament to the European presence, but inferring what these material remains convey about change in the belief system, values, ideals-the worldview-of the African population is more challenging. Physical traces do, however, provide insights into both change and continuity in how the Elmina people ordered their lives and conceptualized the world.

Much of the data discussed in this volume deal with the impacts and consequences of the expansion of a European-centered economic system into the non-Western world between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The European trade, territorial claims, and eventual colonization had far-reaching effects on West African exchange systems, economies, and sociopolitical organization. From the onset, Africa was an integral part of European expansion. It was in Africa that European maritime exploration and colonial expansion began.
and where the models of colonization unfolded. The islands off the northwest coast of Africa were settled in the early fifteenth century. Castelo de Sao Jorge da Mina was founded 10 years prior to Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, and Columbus, in fact, sailed with a Portuguese trading mission to West Africa between 1482 and 1484 (Hair 1990:15). There he may have witnessed the final stages of the construction of Sdo Jorge. The technical and practical expertise in navigation and expedition planning and the knowledge of trade that Columbus gained on this voyage were crucial in his succeeding voyages of discovery. Whatever the rationale for the Spanish court's acceptance of his proposed ventures, Columbus brought current, detailed knowledge of Atlantic exploration. Connections among Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas were essential to the developments that influenced much of the character of the world we see today (see Thornton 1995). West African gold provided incentive for European trade during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and it remained an important motive even after the realization of Asian and American riches. Beginning in the sixteenth century the emerging plantation economies of the Americas demanded more labor-demands that were filled through increasing exports of enslaved Africans. This trade dominated European interests in the region between 1650 and 1850, with a peak during the late eighteenth century. The Atlantic slave trade engulfed vast portions of the western and central African coasts and hinterlands and brought 12 million to 15.4 million individuals across the Atlantic. This trade initiated a variety of changes in indigenous societies as Africa was drawn into a worldwide economic system. The immediate re-

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND II

sult was the strengthening of sociopolitical structures that facilitated and controlled exchange. By the mid-nineteenth century new conditions had emerged. The Atlantic slave trade was abolished, and raw materials such as palm oil and rubber increasingly became the staples of the West African trade. European mass-produced commodities arrived in increasing variety and quantity. The nineteenth century also brought intensified Christian missionary activity. All of these developments foreshadowed, led to, and culminated with European partition of Africa into spheres of influence by the beginning of the twentieth century (Boahen 1991; Pakenham 1991).

It was trade that brought the Europeans, and it was within this arena that their activities took place. It is not surprising, therefore, that examinations of European interactions with Africans have often been conceptualized in terms of changing trade relations and economic impacts. Many models have been posited to chart these interactions. Among the best articulated is world-system theory, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1976a, b, 1980, 1986). For social scientists, this theory provides insight into the economic and political connections that have shaped the world during the past 500 years. Its potential for contextualizing the appearance of European trade materials in the archaeological record makes it particularly seductive to archaeologists examining the record of European expansion. Wallerstein identified several historical phases during which Africa was incorporated into the global economy. He considers African economies prior
to the eighteenth century to have largely functioned independently. European trade consisted mainly of nonessential commodities, and demand was primarily dependent on European productive capacities and supply lines. By 1750 the coastal regions of Africa had been brought into the economic periphery. This period was, first and foremost, characterized by the growth of slave labor as an integral part of the European economy. The growth of the trade, Wallerstein argues, in turn precipitated changes in sociopolitical organizations within the slave-exporting regions. During the next 150 years, the rest of West Africa was incorporated into the economic periphery.

The world-system model is particularly relevant here because the majority of this volume deals with the effects that occurred in African societies as a result of European trade and the economic, political, and social changes it engendered. The data from Elmina are illustrative of dramatic transformation, ranging from innovation in subsistence and diet to urbanization and state formation. Despite these changes, an overarching perspective in this book has been the examination of the material record in terms of cultural continuity rather than change in African belief systems. This is not to imply a stasis or lack of change in African societies: Africa and Elmina did not remain "primitive, static, and asleep or in a Hobbesian state of nature" during the period under study (Boahen 1991:23). Rather, examination of continuities is a recognition of the way in which history at once is shaped by and shapes the cultural context in which it unfolds and the diversity of local responses. World-system theory and similar models provide a macroscopic view of the contact setting, offering a holistic means of conceptualizing the economic and historical processes and the political constraints that shaped European expansion. They afford a less satisfactory explanation of developments internal to African societies. Addressing variation in the contact setting, Wallerstein notes: "It is not that there are no particularities of each acting group. Quite the contrary. It is that the alternatives available for each unit are constrained by the framework of the whole, even while each actor opting for a given alternative in fact alters the framework of the whole" (i986:im). Yet it is reasonable to question, as many have, to what extent the same Eurocentric "framework" constrained individual parts of the global economy (e.g., Mintz 1977; Thornton 1995; Wolf 1982). Although European interactions in West Africa can be painted in broad strokes, active agency on the part of African societies in shaping the nature of the contact setting and the diversity of the interactions that occurred needs to be underscored. Even in our recognition of the potential explanatory value of larger systems, understanding of how change occurs is best examined through case studies of individual societies (e.g., Marcus 1995). Elmina is such a study What this research dramatically illustrates is the ways in which local rules uniquely articulate with and mitigate global patterns. Although changes in economic relations may have necessitated particular structural changes and emphasis on the trade in certain commodities, the nature of African-European interactions varied at different times and in different locales, as did the specific European policies initiated, the materials exchanged, and the
volume of trade. Portuguese settlements in North Africa, such as Qasar es-Seghir, can be viewed as ill-fated colonial experiments: cultural transplants and economic failures that remained economically and culturally isolated from the hinterland and the interior trade (Redman 1986). In contrast the lucrative traffic along the West African coast was at first conducted entirely from ships, which remained the predominant pattern in some parts of the coast. It is not coincidental that two of the regions of West Africa that saw the most intensive European activity were areas that afforded comparatively easy access to the gold-producing areas of the interior. Gold was found relatively close to the coast of modern-day Ghana, and the Europeans established fortified outposts to secure trade and allow for the accumulation and storage of goods. In the Senegambia, European trade posts were located along the Gambia and Senegal river valleys. These enclaves were military garrisons, predominantly staffed by men and comparatively small (Posnansky and DeCorse 1986; van Dantzig 1980a; Wood 1967).

Nor did the various African societies that came in contact with Europeans encounter a monolithic "European" or national cultural tradition. In coastal Ghana, the Portuguese, Dutch, French, British, Swedes, Danes, and Brandenburgers vied for trade. Typically, however, the different nations relied on recruits from all over Europe, and staffs of individual garrisons were ethnically heterogeneous. In 1672, for example, the entire complement of Danish Fort Christiansborg consisted of a Danish commander, a Greek assistant, and 40 slaves (Lawrence 1963:201). Shifting European alliances often resulted in rapid changes in relations among different European powers and, hence, in the policies and the specifics of the contact settings that unfolded. Yet conditions in Europe cannot be equated with those in West Africa, where actions were mitori-
forged close alliances with the Europeans, whereas others vigorously opposed or regulated their activities. On the Gold Coast many of the coastal states allied themselves with European powers and proved key in European competition for trade and possession of trade forts. The trans-Saharan trade and trading towns of the forest-savanna ecotone declined while coastal states thrived along the new frontier of opportunity provided by the European trade. States rose and fell, new trade entrepôts flourished, and millions of Africans were enslaved and transported to the Americas. A multitude of non-Western cultures became linked through European trade to an increasingly global economy, but a particular stage of economic development—or "core-periphery" relations—did not correspond to a particular stage of acculturation. Ethnographic studies vividly demonstrate the variable nature of the causal factors involved in change and the specific processes through which change occurs (e.g., Bascom and Herskovits 1963; Curtin 1972; Herskovits 1962; Serageldin and Taboroff 1994; Steward 1972; Tessler, O'Barr, and Spain 1973; Wallerstein 1966). Explication of these distinctive, culturally mitigated conditions is germane to many of the questions and concerns central to anthropology.

In examining the African-European interactions at Elmina, I address the preceding concerns through the archaeological record, European documentary sources, and oral histories and traditions. Each of these sources affords insight into the ways in which the past unfolded. Such interdisciplinary resources are the strength of historical archaeology. Methodologically, however, researchers are confronted with differences in the kinds and scale of information each source provides. In addition to necessitating different research strategies, different source materials structure the kind or type of information that can be investigated. Details on certain topics are more complete or more readily available than others. For example, if archaeological data and the documentary

14 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

Figure 1.5.
A lead bale seal with the coat of arms of the city of Leiden (shown from front and side; seal measures 3.3 by 2.4 by 0.1 cm [1.3 by 0.95 by 0.05 inches]). (Illustration by Christopher R. DeCorse)

record both confirm the growth of European trade at Elmina, they provide quite different perspectives. Archaeologically, imported ceramics are among the most common trade items found. Over 6,000 sherds of imported ceramics were recovered at Elmina, roughly a quarter of the number of local pottery fragments. The imported wares include more than 100 type varieties from Europe, Britain, Asia, and America. Ceramics clearly constitute an important part of the European commodities trade from an archaeological standpoint. Nevertheless, documentary records and trade lists of the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries make only minor reference to ceramics and certainly give no indication of the large amount found relative to the rest of the archaeological assemblage. Far more common in the documentary records are references to cloth. Dozens of terms for Indian and European linens, cotton prints, batiks, and silks pervade trade lists and occur with regularity in European accounts of the West African trade. A
diversity of cloth was also woven locally using native cotton and imported threads. Unfortunately, cloth's composition and its functional versatility make it an unlikely material to be recovered archaeologically. A worn out bedspread might continue in use as a wrap, rag, and eventually a lamp wick. Organic fibers do not survive well in humid climates, and discarded fragments are likely to disappear long before they are uncovered by the archaeologist's trowel. What must have been a vast cloth trade at Elmina is represented archaeologically by a single lead bale seal with the coat of arms of the city with copper alloy objects. Similar disparities of scope, scale, and coign of vantage are seen in the interpretation of the Elmina settlement as a whole. Locating the site archaeologically was not a challenge. Elmina is one of the most written about and illustrated precolonial African settlements in sub-Saharan Africa. It is mentioned in copious documentary records and pictured in numerous European illustrations from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century. European records describe the military action of 1873 in detail and list the British officers and soldiers who participated in the conflict. Oral traditions also recount versions of the town's founding and interactions with the Europeans. Although many inhabitants of modern Elmina were surprised by the archaeological discoveries at the old town site, the location of the settlement was certainly known, and elders could narrate elements of Elmina's past and the destruction of the settlement. Given this wealth of information, some Elmina people felt that digging up the old site was an entertaining though somewhat strange pursuit, and some historians might agree. In fact, what is often striking when considering written and oral accounts of Elmina's past is the paucity of information and the lack of detail available on certain topics. The relative contribution of archaeological data speaks directly to the potential of archaeological research, as well as to the differences between historical and archaeological inquiry, the data sets each employs, and their distinct epistemologies. Archaeological data have alternatively been seen as an independent means of historical discovery and as

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

the pursuit of data anecdotal to historical studies, on one hand providing the framework for historical narrative, on the other detailing the specifics lacking in written records (e.g., Oliver 1966:371; Vansina 1985:185, 187-188). Archaeology can meet these objectives-and more. The material record is, in fact, particularly good at demonstrating the timing and kind of change that occurred in subsistence, technology, and indigenous artistic traditions. It can also assess some of the specific types of goods—ceramics, glass, tobacco pipes, and firearms—that were traded and their temporal ranges. But archaeology can also contribute to broader historical and anthropological debate through examination of changes in settlement patterns, artifact inventory, and archaeological features that can be used to interpret historical processes. With regard to the post-European-contact period in West Africa, perhaps the greatest potential contribution of archaeology lies in the delineation of the impact and consequences of the Atlantic slave trade on African populations, not solely those on the coastal margins occasionally
mentioned in documentary records, but also those in the vast hinterland from which many enslaved Africans originated (DeCorse 1991, 2000b). The real strength lies in the interdisciplinary study of both historical and cultural phenomena. Use of different sources allows for a fuller interpretation of specific sites, features, and artifacts in a manner impossible in prehistoric studies. Documentary data provide not just the particularities of site occupation but also insight into the economic, social, political, and cultural contexts represented in the material record. This includes understanding of specific events, such as the destruction of Elmina by the British in 1873, as well as the patterns observed archaeologically that are representative of the culturally shaped historical processes that produced them. The historical background of African-European interactions on the Gold Coast briefly presented here—its part based on archaeological data—affords only a brief outline of the complex events and interactions that took place between the fifteenth century and the present. It nevertheless provides a context for archaeological examination of the economic, social, and cultural transformations of the past 500 years. Problems faced in interpreting the past have been compounded by the fact that historians and archaeologists alike have, at times, viewed the archaeological record as a direct expression of an ethnographic past. The material record or even individual artifact classes have been seen as essentializing cultural or ethnic identities, as "actors on the historical stage, playing the role for prehistory that known individuals and groups have in documentary history" (Shennan 1989:6; see also DeCorse 1998b, c; Lightfoot 1995). As a result, researchers examining the archaeological record of European expansion have had a tendency to view the advent of trade materials representative of European trade and merchant capitalism as concomitant with equally dramatic changes in nonmaterial aspects of non-Western cultures, marking the erosion of values, the circumvention of traditional beliefs, and the devastation of cultural norms in the face of mass-produced products, technological superiority, and hegemonic policies of Europe. Because of the peculiarities of their data set, archaeologists have tended to underconceptualize the past.

I6 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

There is, in fact, no simple correspondence between material culture and nonmaterial sociocultural constructs. Many cultures maintained non-Western values and beliefs and, in doing so, turned European trade items to new purposes and ends. This is equally true with regard to sociocultural precepts as technological innovation. Trade materials are of interest not solely because of their usefulness in establishing site chronology or because of the insight they provide into technological innovation and trade but also because of what they convey about the impact of European trade on indigenous cultural systems. Technological superiority has been an integral part of cross-cultural change throughout history and a crucial factor in European interactions with indigenes (Headrick 1981). European maritime technology, communications, medical science, and firearms were the tools of empire that secured Europe's dominions in Africa and Asia in the nineteenth century. There is little question that the conflict
that destroyed Elmina in 1873 would have had a different outcome if the Asante had possessed Snider repeating rifles and the British aging flintlocks. Technology was integral to the European expansion. But in viewing this technological maelstrom, we often forget that imported objects were not accepted en masse by non-Western peoples. Nor do they immediately imply an acceptance of nonmaterial European beliefs and practices. Trade materials were adopted, transformed, or rejected within the indigenous cultural traditions in a myriad of different ways. Such entanglements have often been ignored by archaeologists who have assessed cultural or ethnic identities—and change—in terms of artifacts whose cultural meanings are left poorly defined.21 Reaching beyond trade lists and artifact inventories to understand how indigenes used and transformed artifacts is basic to an anthropological perception of cultural contact, continuity, and change.

Ethnoarchaeological research in West Africa serves to underscore both the prospects and problems in the archaeological delineation of ethnographically discernible cultural boundaries and changes in worldview. The archaeological record and cultural reality can be seen as complementary, each at once shaped by and an expression of the other. The archaeological record may provide material expression of ethnographically perceived boundaries. Ceramics, for example, may serve as an important expression of cosmology, religion, and symbolic structures, justifying their use as material indicators of ethnicity (e.g., David et al. 1988:365; Vansina 1995:382-383). Artifact patterning, the use of space, and settlement organization have also been shown to be useful for exploring past cognitive systems (e.g., Agorsah 1983a, b; David 1971). However, recognition of the potential of such inferences must also include awareness that such correspondences are not constant in all cultural settings. Equally varied as patterns of cultural change and the nature of African-European interaction are the ways in which these phenomena are represented archaeologically. Although artifacts are concrete, survive in the ground, and provide testament to past behavior, they were recontextualized and reinterpreted in a diversity of cultural settings in ways that may have been quite different from those that their manufacturer intended.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 17

ELMINA IN PERSPECTIVE

The contact setting at Elmina was very different from those that unfolded in other parts of West Africa, even in adjacent portions of the Gold Coast, and Elmina presents a dramatic contrast to the many regions of Africa that remained isolated from direct European contact throughout the nineteenth century.22 Even in areas relatively close to the coast, a combination of geographical, technological, and cultural factors limited European activities and constrained European expansion.23 African-European interactions prior to the late nineteenth century had a distinctive character as a result of these constraints. Some areas stand out as nexuses of activity: the Sénégal and Gambia river valleys, coastal Ghana, and the small concentrations of European outposts in coastal Benin and Nigeria. But during much of the nineteenth century, the hinterland was known to only a handful of European explorers, many of whom died in their attempts to reach the
interior (see McLynn 1992). Disease was a major impediment to European expansion throughout West Africa until the late nineteenth century. Malaria, sleeping sickness, dysentery, yellow fever, and a host of other plagues unfamiliar to Europeans were endemic to tropical Africa. The death rate among Europeans serving on the West African coast was staggering. The consequence of these impediments was that some three and a half centuries after the founding of Castelo de S~oJorge da Mina the vast majority of the West African hinterland lay largely unknown to Europeans. By the 1850s it was still convenient to show most of the fruits of European exploration in West Africa on a single map. African-European interactions and European involvement in Elmina affairs were far more direct, the most important consequence being the political independence of Elmina from neighboring polities. By the mid-sixteenth century, the settlement was an independent state, which expanded with the assistance of the Portuguese and the Dutch during the following centuries. Written accounts also suggest the formation of new sociopolitical institutions and practices. European officials at Elmina settled disputes, levied fish tolls, and were called upon to recognize newly elected African rulers (e.g., Baesjou i979b; Feinberg 1989:99-104, 115-126). The power the Europeans exercised was not, however, absolute. If European policies became too difficult, the people could simply abandon the town, a situation the Europeans considered alarming because it was injurious to trade. A 1523 letter from King John III to the Portuguese governor of Castelo de Sdo Jorge da Mina expressed concern that the "knights" of Elmina were being treated harshly and that as a result the village was becoming depopulated. The king noted that this was detrimental to the maintenance of good trade relations and that the people should rather be defended, protected, and instructed (e.g., Blake 1942:46-47, 133-134). Similar concerns were cited during the Dutch period (e.g., Feinberg 1969:125; van Dantzig 1978:81). The Portuguese undoubtedly tried to claim rights to adjacent portions of the coast, but this was not recognized by the Dutch or, more important, by the surrounding African polities. We have no detailed descriptions of Elmina at the time of contact, and the precise changes that took place in coastal African culture over the past 500 years will probably never be known. We can, however, point to ethnographic, documentary, and archaeological data that underscore continuity rather than change in African beliefs. This apparent continuity is particularly interesting because it occurs within the midst of a great deal of technological and sociopolitical change. Documentary sources and oral traditions attest to Elmina's central role as a trade entrep6t, and, not surprisingly, a striking aspect of the Elmina excavations was the vast amount of European trade goods recovered. This assemblage can be dramatically contrasted with data from other sites. Indeed, throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa the arrival of the Europeans on the Atlantic coast and hinterland is not a dramatic event archaeologically. Even colonial-era sites a short distance into the interior present only small numbers of European artifacts. Yet the predominance of imported objects in the Elmina artifact inventory cannot be equated with ipso facto evidence of change in
nonmaterial beliefs. Food preparation and eating practices, the use of space, and
ritual practices illustrate continuity in Elmina culture with the surrounding,
largely Akan, cultural tradition. Interpretations of both change and continuity are
facilitated by a wealth of source material.
Prologue On the eve of European contact, settlements were scattered
along all of coastal
Ghana and throughout the adjacent hinterland. Most were likely small fishing
villages or farming communities. This pattern would dramatically change in the
following centuries. Population growth along the coastal margin and concomitant
changes in sociopolitical structures characterize the post-European contact period.
During the fifteenth century, however, the larger population centers were still
located in the West African interior, and coastal settlements were small and
dispersed. Describing coastal Ghana in 1479, Eustache de la Fosse noted Shama
and Elmina as the only significant harbors. Even here it took four or five days for
news of a ship's arrival to spread and for the merchants to gather (Hair
x994b:i29).32 Another fifteenth-century account of the trade comments that "....
when any of the [European] ships reached that land, the people of the land
immediately summoned each other with trumpets because they lived in the
countryside, and would all assemble at the ports to trade their gold" (Hair
1994b:i15).33
Archaeological data from coastal Ghana suggest that this pattern of dispersed
settlement extends back at least 1000 years, probably much earlier.34
Pre-European-contact coastal sites are represented by low-density scatters of
ceramics with occasional stone beads, iron artifacts, and smelting debris. Some of
these sites are quite sizable. At Brenu Akyinim, for example, pottery sherds can
be found for almost a kilometer (about two-thirds of a mile) along the shore.35
This distribution, however, is likely the result of a series of small, shifting
settlements over a long period of time rather than a single large occupation.
Substantial midden deposits, large settlement mounds, or embankments, features
that characterize later sites, are absent. Similar observations have been made for
other parts of coastal Ghana.36 The inhabitants of these settlements spoke Akan
languages. This inference is based on linguistic evidence and, to a lesser extent,
on ethnohistorical data.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 19
Surveying European sources, Paul Hair deduced that vocabularies and word
references to the local language from the late fifteenth century onward are Akan.7
This attribution provides no indications of dialectical differences or more subtle
ethnolinguistic divisions. Akan languages are closely related, forming one of the
major subdivisions within the Volta-Como6 Group (Dolphyne and Kropp Dakubu
1988).8 They are currently spoken in a continuous geographical spread from
southeastern Ivory Coast to the Volta River in eastern Ghana. Today the principal
Akan group of central, coastal Ghana-including Elmina-is Fante, which is
bordered on the west by Ahanta speakers and in the east by the Ga and Guan. To a
large extent the various Akan languages are mutually intelligible. Although Akan
is purely a linguistic classification, a high degree of cultural homogeneity also
characterizes groups within the language family. The people are historically agriculturists, relying on shifting hoe cultivation and fallowing, with fishing providing an important subsistence stratagem among the coastal Fante. Akan sociocultural organization is characterized by highly extended exogamous matriclans, or mmusua (sing., abusua), which have been historically important as a unifying factor of Akan identity and a means of assimilating non-Akan cultural elements into Akan society. The matrilineage is the locus of an individual's identity, determining inheritance of property sociopolitical status, eligibility for state office, and links with the spiritual world. A high degree of ideological and ritual conformity within Akan groups is enforced by the clan elders. Patrilateral ties of varying kinds, including the spiritual links of the ntoro, crosscut and complement the overarching matrilineal framework. These kinship ties are associated with a wide variety of rituals, taboos, and totems. Other Akan commonalities include certain aspects of origin traditions, a 42-day calendrical system, naming procedures, elements of sociopolitical organization, and shared aspects of worldview.

Akan studies have been overshadowed by the Asante, who are the best described ethnographically and thus are frequently used to characterize the Akan as a whole (e.g., Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980; Wilks 1993). The Asante state expanded throughout much of central Ghana in the eighteenth century, incorporating groups that had formerly been autonomous polities. Asante culture traits, particularly language, sociopolitical organization, and state craft, were imprinted on non-Asante groups. Asante cultural influences can also be seen in the archaeological record. This is particularly the case in ceramics, which in parts of southern Ghana become increasingly dominated by black burnished, carinated Asante forms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g., Bellis 1987; Crossland 1973, 1989).

On the other hand, features of other groups, including those of the non-Akan Ewe-, Ga-, Guan-, and Dangme-speaking peoples were welded into a distinct and fairly homogeneous Akan culture. It is reasonable to assume that during the fifteenth century the Akan inhabitants of coastal Ghana shared ideological, ritual, and sociocultural features, the distinctive expression of which may be traced in the documentary, ethnographic, and archaeological records.

The political organization of the fifteenth-century Akan coast is more difficult to assess. Political relations probably consisted of small chiefdoms or in-

Figure 1.6. A map of the Gold Coast by M. d'Anville, 1729. The relative positions of the coastal settlements and polities are shown relatively accurately, but European knowledge of the interior was much
cipient state-level polities centered on major settlements, with the larger political aggregates located in the interior closer to the forest-savanna ecotone. Actual empirical evidence for this is, however, limited. Surveys of place names and African states mentioned in early European accounts suggest a correspondence with the general location, if not the specific organization and extent, of polities identified in later periods (see Figure 1.6). Maps of the coast by Luis Teixeira in 1602 and also in a Dutch manuscript of 1629 show Eguafu (Guaffo, Great Comendo, or Comane) to the west of Elmina and the country of Fetu (Futu, Afutu) to the east (see comments in Blake 1987; Chouin 1998a:i91-i93; Cortesdo and Teixeira de Mota i96o, 3:67-7o; Daaku 1970:182-184; Daaku and van Dantzig i966; de Marees 1987:xxii-xxv; Kea 1982:23-28; and by Mtiler in Jones I983).44 These names, and possibly the lineal descendants of the polities represented, still exist. Fetu, with its capital at Efutu, is known to have controlled much of the territory east of Elmina, with the principal coastal settlement being Cape Coast (Cabo Cors). The Eguafu polity, with its seat at the town of Eguafu, controlled lands to the northwest and west of Elmina. Fetu and Eguafu may both have laid claim to Elmina during the fifteenth century. Archaeological survey and excavation that might help assess the development of sociopolitical complexity have not been undertaken, though information is accumulating.4' The sites of Eguafu and Efutu, as well as other historically known Fante settlements, have extensive archaeological deposits. European trade materials dating to the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries have been recovered from test excavations, surface collections, and poorly documented finds made by gold prospectors. Thermoluminescence dates on ceramics from recent excavations at Eguafu suggest that the settlement had been occupied by early in the second millennium A.D., but the majority of the deposits likely reflect later occupation.

The Europeans on the Portuguese mariners began explorations of the African coast in the early fifteenth century. Isolated travelers' accounts from antiquity provided scant information on the lands south of the Sahara, but the West African coast and a

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 21
hinterland were completely unknown (Boxer I972:9 I0).46 Waters south of Cape Bojador on the Moroccan coast were believed to be a dead zone with no wind and temperatures too hot to endure—the lands peopled with legendary creatures. This situation dramatically changed by the end of the century. Political, social, and economic conditions, combined with more refined sailing technology, allowed Portugal to enter a century of maritime expansion.47 Ships were trading at the mouth of the Pra River by 1471, but isolated visits may have occurred earlier.48 The Portuguese first traded from ships, but the advantages of a strong base were
soon realized. A fortress would serve as a deterrent to other European traders and also would allow for the accumulation and storage of goods prior to a ship's arrival. The latter may have been especially critical given the time it took for merchants to assemble. The result of these concerns was the founding of Castelo de So Jorge da Mina.

Several things made Elmina a logical choice for a fortress. The foremost of these was the presence of a sizable African settlement, which afforded trade opportunities and labor. The physical setting was also advantageous. The African town and the future site of the castle were on a narrow rocky peninsula formed by the Benya Lagoon and the ocean. The peninsula provided an easily defensible position, and the lagoon offered a safe anchorage and a place to careen vessels. Finally, an abundance of quarriable stone to be used in the castle's construction made the site a logical choice. Commander Diogo de Azambuja arrived in Elmina in January 1482. He sailed with an expedition of 10 caravels, 500 soldiers and servants, and 100 masons, carpenters, and craftsmen. The ships carried precut stone for the castle's foundations, arches, and windows. The precut stone from Portugal and quarried Elminian sandstone were used to erect a rectangular enclosure at the eastern end of the Elmina peninsula. Although modified by later Dutch and British additions, the basic plan still conforms to the later Portuguese fortification. Some Portuguese elements are still readily discernible, including the Portuguese church in the central courtyard, remodeled by the Dutch and used as a warehouse and soldiers' mess.

The Portuguese established smaller trade posts on the Gold Coast at Axim, Shama, and Accra. With these and the garrison at Elmina, Portugal attempted to maintain, through force and legal sanctions, a monopoly on European trade on the Gold Coast. Information about the trade was a closely guarded secret, and royal decrees forbade the passing of knowledge to foreigners. Portugal claimed exclusive trading rights in Guinea on the basis of several papal bulls that granted rights to profits obtained from the lands discovered between Cape Bojador (Morocco) and the East Indies (Blake 1977:20-23). This authority provided the Portuguese with political leverage and prevented the overt intervention of other European powers.

Interloping could not, however, always be regulated through political channels. As early as 1480, instructions were given to Portuguese captains sailing to Guinea to seize the ships and cargoes of any other nation and cast their crews into the sea—a policy that continued until the middle of the next century (e.g., Blake 1977:54, 88; Teixeira da Mota and Hair 1988:ii). Heavily armed galleons were dispatched from Lisbon to protect the caravels returning from Elmina.

22 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA and coastal patrols were used to suppress illicit trade. Elmina and its environs were patrolled by armed galleys. Villages whose inhabitants traded with other European nations were burned (e.g., Feinberg 1969:22,30; Vogt 1979:96, IO9, 129; Jones 1983:78; Teixeira da Mota and Hair 1988:i0-i1.).

Rivalries Despite Portuguese efforts, other European nations vied for a share of the
trade. Voyages to Guinea by Flemish, Spanish, and, possibly, Genoese merchants occurred before 1500 (Blake 1977:37-39; Vogt 1979:12-18). Perhaps even more serious than unsanctioned trade were attacks on Portuguese ships. As early as 1492 French privateers seized a Portuguese caravel returning from Elmina (Blake 1977:107). The Letters of John III (Ford 1931) indicates that French pirates captured more than 30o Portuguese ships between 1500 and 1531. At least a portion of these were involved in the Guinea trade. With the Treaties of Alcoves in 1478 and Tordesillas in 1494 and Castile's increased preoccupation with the Americas, the Spanish threat lessened, but incursions by other nations proved more serious. Initially, the chief Portuguese rival was France, but Dutch and English voyages became equally common by the end of the century (Blake 1977:106). By 1530, 5o years of "quiet consolidation" had come to an abrupt end (Blake 1977:96). At the close of the sixteenth century, voyages to Guinea were so common that there was no "winter or summer" of navigation, as many as 25 ships anchoring at a time (Thilmans 1968:i7-i8).55 "Illegitimate" trade by other Europeans soon surpassed the trade of the Portuguese. Elmina remained the Portuguese stronghold, albeit ill supplied and plagued by inefficient bureaucracy.56 The model of governance that the Portuguese employed continued to rely on royal authority from Lisbon, which in practical terms provided limited direction in the empire's far-flung outposts. The Portuguese crown's central concern was the potential revenue from the trade. Attention was focused on luxury items, such as spices, ivory, and gold, the last being the primary trade item at Elmina. Royal monopolies and leases over trade in particular regions and key commodities were granted to merchants in exchange for rent. The merchant community further supported expansive energies by sharing the costs with the government and by the use of private vessels. In fact, the trading rights and support granted by Lisbon were unenforceable and of limited use in West Africa. Portugal also lacked an administrative bureaucracy to support and resupply outposts efficiently and regularly, and garrisons were often left to fend for themselves. By the mid-sixteenth century, profits from Elmina were often insufficient to cover the cost of maintaining the garrison (Teixeira da Mota and Hair 1988:26-33; see also Ballong-Wen-Mewuda 1984, 1993; Fage 1973; Vogt 1979:144, 218-219). The loss in revenue at Elmina and problems with Portugal's trade in Brazil and Asia can be traced to foreign competition and the growing illicit trade carried on by Portuguese officials (Birmingham 1970; Blake 1942:49-51; Boxer 1972:18-i9; Elbl 1997; Rodney 1965; Tomlinson 1970; Vogt 1974). Despite regulation, government posts were regarded as a means of amassing personal fortunes. While the trade of other nations expanded, Portuguese commerce remained hampered by economic problems and a cumbersome bureaucracy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Figure 1.7. Dutch Fort Nassau at Mori.

Founded in 1612, the fort was the first nonPortuguese, fortified
trade post established on the Gold Coast. The ruins include many of the distinctive yellow Dutch bricks used in construction.

(Photograph by Christopher R. DeCorse)

Between 1580 and 1640, Portugal was united with the Spanish monarchy. Although this may have provided a brief reinvestment in Mina trade, São Jorge remained more a liability than an asset (Vogt 1979:114, 127-169; de Marees 1987:212-217,221). Fewer and fewer supply ships came to Elmina during the closing years of the sixteenth century. The Elmina garrison prevented other European ships from anchoring there, but competitors' ships in neighboring areas drew trade away. The Portuguese position became increasingly tenuous, and other European powers competed to fill the vacancy. The Dutch and the French had established trade posts in the Senegambia by the seventeenth century. On the Gold Coast the Dutch established a fort at Mori (Mouri, Moure) just 16 km (10 miles) east of Elmina in 1612 (Figure 1.7) (Vogt 1979:164-165; de Marees 1987:81-84; Feinberg 1989:30). The Dutch had been actively trading at this location since the late fifteenth century. Dutch merchants had, in fact, started to fortify the site several years earlier. The fortress was established with the support of the chief of the Asebu state, who sent two ambassadors to Holland on a Dutch ship with the request that a fort be built in defiance of the Portuguese (van Dantzig 1980b:32). Mori subsequently became the center of Dutch mercantile activity.

These incursions were an immediate threat to the Portuguese. The Dutch unsuccessfully attempted to capture São Jorge da Mina in 1596, 1603, 1606, 1615, and 1625. In all of these cases they were driven off with the help of Africans from Elmina (Chouin 1998a:39-45; de Marees 1987:108, 219; Feinberg 1969:30-31; Ulsheimer in Jones 1983:21-22; Vogt 1979:148, 155-157, 166-167, 179-184). The success of the Dutch attack in August 1637 was largely due to the support of the African states of Eguafo and Asebu and to the incapacitation of the Portuguese garrison (Figures 1.8 and 1.9). A force of 800 Dutch soldiers, with another 1,000-1,400 men from Asebu and Eguafo, reportedly gathered at the coastal town of Komenda and marched toward Elmina (Vogt 1979:166, 187-192).

24 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

Figure 8. A 1637 view of Elmina Castle and town from the southeast. Note the wall or stockade between the southern side of the castle and the shore. (From Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia et Alibi Nuper Gestarum ... Historia by Caspar Balaraeus. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliotheek der Rijksuniver- sitiet, Leiden [20069 A2])
Mercantilism

Portuguese garrison at Elmina at this time consisted of 35 officials and soldiers. The Dutch succeeded in overwhelming the Portuguese and Elmina forces protecting the small redoubt on the top of St. Jago Hill, a small rise north of the Benya Lagoon. Here they positioned artillery pieces to bombard the Portuguese garrison into submission. The castle subsequently replaced Fort Nassau at Mori as the Dutch headquarters in Guinea, and it remained Dutch for the next 235 years. The capture of Elmina was indicative of changes in political, social, and especially economic conditions in Europe. By 1600 European centers of commerce, finance, and industry were in northwest Europe: Holland and Zeeland; England (especially London and East Anglia); and later in northern and western France (Wallerstein i98o:37-71).62 Unquestionably the nexus was the provinces of the emerging state of the Netherlands, which, at the end of the sixteenth century, were just beginning to extract themselves from Spanish rule. Particularly important was the Dutch textile industry, centered at Leiden, which dominated

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 25

European production through much of the seventeenth century. There were also rapid developments in agriculture, mechanical technology, distilling, paper production, brick making, ceramics, tobacco pipe manufacture, and a host of other industries. The Dutch also brought craftsmen from Venice, the center of glass bead production, to Amsterdam. This productive output was combined with efficient commercial organization and the Dutch shipbuilding industry (for general reviews, see Boxer i99o; Wallerstein 198o).

Many of the commodities produced in northwestern Europe were of major importance in the Africa trade. Portugal lacked the productive capabilities and, thus, was placed at a disadvantage. Dutch and other European traders on the Gold Coast brought goods of a quality similar to or better than those offered by the Portuguese and offered them at better prices. The Portuguese attempted to bolster their position through the use of Asian metalware and cloth, but these too could not be supplied on a regular basis (Vogt 1979:146--47, 153). Writing in 1602, Pieter de Marees painted the picture: "[T]hey [the Portuguese] are faring quite badly and are much in decline, so that nowadays the Castle d'Mina gives the King of Spain more loss than profit; and this is because the trade of the Portuguese is totally ruined ... as a result of competition from the Dutch Ships, which offer trade-goods here for about the same price as the Portuguese have to pay in Portugal" (1987:214, see also 55).63 The predominance of Dutch pipes, wine and gin bottles, and yellow brick on archaeological sites, along with
the occasional finds of tobacco boxes and delftware sherds, is testament to the commercial success of the Dutch during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Figure 1.10). Unlike the earlier Portuguese trade that had been an archaic-feitoria system governed by royal regimentos and personal representatives of the crown, the Dutch trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was guided by chartered mercantile companies (see Brukum 1985; Feinberg 1969, 1989). The first of these was the first West India Company, which was organized in 1621. The company failed in 1674 and was replaced by the second West India Company. The organization of the second company was much the same as the first, but it was less ambitious and narrower in scope than its predecessor. By 1725 there were 15 Dutch forts on the Gold Coast (Feinberg 1989:35).

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the age of the Dutch seaborne empire. By 1700 this small European nation had extended trade and established outposts in western and southern Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Dutch commercial interests were not, however, unchallenged. Other European nations launched their own trading ventures in West Africa. By 1800 over 30 forts, castles, lodges, and plantations belonging to various European nations were scattered along the 500-km (300-mile) shore of the Gold Coast (Figure 11) (Lawrence 1963; van Dantzig 1980a).64 Ship trade also remained important. Although French efforts to establish trade posts were short lived, they nevertheless maintained an active trade (e.g., see Chouin 1998:91-127, 149-181; van Dantzig 1980a:41-42; Vogt 1979:96-98).65 The Portuguese, who were unable to maintain an outpost on the Gold Coast after their loss of Sao Antonio de Axem (Axim) in 1642 and Fort St. Francis Xavier (Osu) in 1683, also remained active,

Figure 1.11. European trade posts in West Africa during the eighteenth century. The enlargement of the Gold Coast was probably added before 1773. (British Crown copyright photograph supplied courtesy of the Public Record Office [Document MPK45])

particularly trading in Brazilian tobacco and slaves (e.g., Brukum 1985:41; van Dantzig 1978:152; Vogt 1979:94-204). Dutch free traders, who operated outside the West India Company's jurisdiction, were also active (e.g., see van Dantzig 1978:9, 237).

Of critical significance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the continued growth of the Atlantic slave trade. During the seventeenth century slaves replaced gold as the primary export from the Gold Coast. The timing, reasons, and implications of this shift have been the subject of extensive scholarship.66 At the core of a variety of economic, social, and political transformations were the labor requirements of the emerging plantation system in the Americas. These developments had important consequences in West Africa. Prior to the seventeenth century, European coastal trade was essentially the same as that of the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean systems, which had begun centuries earlier. The items involved consisted of many commodities and luxury items for which there was already demand. African gold was exchanged for metal goods, cowrie shells, clothing, and beads (see Chapter 5). The volume of trade...
was dependent on European production and supply capabilities, as well as on African trade and distribution networks. Initially, African economies remained self-sustaining and largely functioned independently. The slave trade, however, increasingly enmeshed the African economies that supplied the slaves, in many instances through raiding.67

The historical and archaeological data that are available are insufficient to assess fully the consequences of the slave trade on African populations. The majority of the documentary sources and, hence, much of the history on the topic focus on the coastal ports through which enslaved Africans passed, not on their actual ethnic origins. Understanding of the African impacts, as well as the cultural heritage of Africans in the diaspora, is dependent on much fuller knowledge of developments in the vast hinterland of Africa, from which the slaves were drawn (deCorse 1991, 1999, 2000b).68 What is clear is that the impact of trade varied in individual social, cultural, and historical settings. Some societies were directly involved in slave procurement and trading, whereas others were extensively raided for slaves. The negative effect was much greater in the latter situation, the ultimate consequence being interference in the societies' ability to reproduce biologically. Archaeologically, the disruption of social systems may be inferred by alterations in settlement patterns, appearance of fortifications, evidence of depopulation, rapid change in pottery styles, and changes in the artifact inventory.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 27

At Elmina the historical context was quite distinct from other areas of West Africa and even from adjacent portions of the coast and hinterland. The settlement and immediate vicinity were generally not a substantial source of slaves. There are examples of Elmina citizens being panyarred, or sold into slavery because of debt, and others were enslaved as war captives in conflicts with neighboring Fante states, but these were limited occurrences rather than the norm.69 The Portuguese, in fact, imported slaves to Elmina throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The Portuguese, and later the Dutch, prohibited the taking of slaves on the Gold Coast, the presumption being that it was detrimental to the trade in gold (de Marees 1987:48 n. 2; Rodney 1969; Vogt 1979:168).70 This proved to be the case in the eighteenth century when the increased demand for slaves for the Atlantic trade led to kidnapping, slaving, and the disruption of trading caravans (Rodney 1969 :9).71 A royal decree of 1615 permitted the capture and enslavement of Africans on the Gold Coast only beyond a distance of io leagues (approximately 50 km or 30 miles) from Elmina, and the Dutch refer to the limited number of slaves available on the central Gold Coast through the seventeenth century.

The complexities of the Atlantic slave trade and the paucity of detailed records on ethnic origins make it difficult to determine how many captive Africans actually from Elmina were taken to the Americas. Given the population size of the town and its immediate environs relative to the overall volume of the trade, the number had to have been comparatively small. Europeans generally failed to recognize differences in African ethnicities and language dialects. Hence, in many instances the identity of captives became associated with the region or port of export.
through which they passed, resulting in the amalgamation of numerous distinct cultural and ethnic identities into a few, broad categories (Geggus 1989; Kea 1996; Lovejoy 1989). Elmina, variously listed as Mina, Amina, Aminra, and Aminer, became a trope for Akan-speaking people from the Gold Coast. Many other enslaved Africans who passed through ports such as Elmina were from other regions and representative of ethnic groups quite distinct from the indigenous population. These complexities are well illustrated in the difficulties faced in tracing the connections between Elmina and Curaqao in the Netherlands Antilles, which served as a major Dutch distribution point for captive Africans in the Americas (Haviser and DeCorse 1991). Documentary accounts indicate that many of the slaves that reached Curaqao via Elmina were actually brought by ship from other parts of the coast, particularly the Bight of Benin. Many were subsequently dispersed to other parts of the Americas. Such intricacies make it difficult to identify African continuities in American settings.

Limited historical sources suggest that slave traders considered the "Elmina" the term here including individuals from other areas as well as the actual Elmina settlement-as mutinous, savage, and vicious, the worst of slaves, and thus regarded them as a poor resource. Slaves from Elmina were said to have been the instigators of the 1733 slave revolt in the Danish West Indies, which left them in control of the island of St. John for six months. It is possible that a few of the Elmina held responsible were free people, merchants or individuals of some prominence from the Elmina settlement (Pope 1969:134-135). How-

28 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA
Consolidation and Colonialism

ever, the majority of "Elmina" slaves in the St. John revolt were likely Akwamu and Adangme men and women, from the eastern Gold Coast, who were sold to agents of the Danish West India and Guinea Company between 1730 and 1733, following the collapse of the Akwamu state in 1730 (Kea 1996; Wilks 1957). If the town of Elmina and its immediate environs were not a primary source of slaves, they nevertheless provide dramatic illustration of the consequences of an expanding Eurocentric economic system and the emergence of the Atlantic trade. This is reflected in change in African sociopolitical institutions, as well as in the urbanization, growth of material wealth, and the alteration of behavior patterns detailed by the archaeological record. As discussed below, it is during this time period that some of the town's distinctive political structures likely emerged. Competition between European nations was fierce. This rivalry was played out against a backdrop of shifting alliances, wars, and political intrigue. Accounts of trade present an array of conflicting perceptions and images. Ships' captains of different nationalities might enjoy a pleasant dinner together and yet view each other as bitter enemies a few weeks later. Vast fortunes were amassed, but competition brought lower prices and increasingly shrewd buyers. European nations unable to compete simply gave up. By the late eighteenth century the last of the major coastal forts on the Gold Coast had been built. The succeeding century was a period of reevaluation, consolidation, and retrenchment. Three nations controlled the outposts: Britain, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The
Danes dominated the eastern Gold Coast, including all of the forts between Christiansborg Castle, Osu, and Fort Prindsensteen on the Keta Lagoon. British and Dutch holdings were interspersed at irregular intervals to the west. The British headquarters was at Cape Coast Castle, only about 13 km (8 miles) from the Dutch headquarters at Elmina. Of these three nations, only Britain would remain in 1872.

The precipitator of changes on the Gold Coast was the abolition of the slave trade. The moral and economic rational for the trade in slavery was debated throughout Europe in the eighteenth century. After 1772, slaves reaching England were increasingly deemed to have free status, and Denmark outlawed the importation of slaves in 1803. Other European countries and finally the United States (in 1865) and Brazil (in 1888) followed suit. New areas of commerce had to be explored, and it was Britain that was in the best position to do this. By the nineteenth century Britain had developed as the economic nexus of Europe. Birmingham brass, Manchester cotton, and Staffordshire pottery were starting to dominate trade. Britain alone was able to take advantage of the changing economic conditions and seize the potential of new markets. During the nineteenth century the gross tonnage of British shipping involved in West Africa burgeoned, climbing from about 52,000 t (57,000 tons) in 1854 to about 458,000 t (504,000 tons) in 1874 (Reynolds 1974:ii9). Even as a crude measure, such figures illustrate the increasing volume of trade and growing commercial concern. This was an era of detente in intra-European relations on the Gold Coast. In contrast with the military rivalry of the preceding centuries, relations among European nations were harmonious to the extent that conflicts were primarily resolved through political accord. Forts were no longer needed to secure trade from other European nations. They became, instead, administrative centers and bases for the antislavery squadrons that patrolled the coast. The economic rational for outposts was, however, never more carefully scrutinized, and competition never more intense. Ultimately, commercial enterprise would be important in rationalizing the colonial expansion later in the century, but in the preceding decades the economic worth of the West African outposts was far from obvious. Treaties sought to consolidate holdings and secure revenue. There was an increasing perception of territorial rights to the lands beyond the confines of the small coastal enclaves, a foundation or rationale for the territorial claims that would typify the end of the century.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Denmark was the first nation to decide its Gold Coast holdings were not worth maintaining. The Danish crown had purchased the troubled Danish West India and Guinea Company in 1754 (Norregird 1966). Despite a resurgence during the American Revolution, Danish West African enterprises were largely unsuccessful. The nineteenth century began with the destruction of the Danish fleet at Copenhagen by the British, a move perhaps motivated by commercial rather than military interests. Tranquebar on the Indian coast was ceded to Britain in 1845, and the Danish
possessions on the Gold Coast followed five years later in exchange for a payment of £10,000.

Britain and Holland also considered abandoning their outposts. The London Committee of Merchants discussed the declining revenues and the fate of the Gold Coast outposts for several years. These issues were resolved in 1821 when the British government took over management of the forts. In 1828 the British government decided to give up the forts, but the merchants of Cape Coast protested and the plan was dropped. Nevertheless, the economic benefits remained elusive, and losses continued through the following decades. Dutch interests also waxed and waned. During the late eighteenth century, the West India Company outposts were troubled by periodic shortages of trade goods and supplies. Despite reorganization and budgetary cutbacks, there was a steady decrease in revenue. The second West India Company failed in 1790. The Dutch government assumed responsibility for the company’s possessions, and in 1795 these were placed under the Ministry of Colonies. Sale to Britain was considered in the 1850s. When rumors that the Dutch might abandon Elmina reached the coast, the chiefs of the settlement sent a long letter to the Dutch king. The document emphasized Elmina's many years of service to the Dutch and, actually, began the town's history with the Dutch capture of the castle in 1637. This move is not surprising considering Elmina's past. Elmina had frequently fought with the Dutch against the British and their African allies, including the Fante. Now these antagonists were to control the castle.

The sale did not proceed for reasons that probably have less to do with the Elmina petition than with the continued hope of economic return. Both Britain and the Netherlands were by this time claiming jurisdiction over adjacent settlements and territories. The limits of British and Dutch territories were, how-

30 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

Figure 12. Bombardment of Elmina by launches from British warships, June 13, 1873. This view is looking east from the inside of the Benya Lagoon. Elmina Castle and the town appear on the right and Fort St. Jago on the hilltop to the left. (Reproduced courtesy of the Illustrated London News Picture Library [vol. 63, no. 1768, July 19, 1873])

ever, ill defined, and there were constant disagreements about the extent of jurisdiction. In an attempt to resolve these differences and consolidate territory, an exchange was agreed on in 1867 (see Coombs 1963). English forts west of the mouth of the Sweet or Kakum River (between Elmina and Cape Coast) were ceded to the Dutch, and Dutch forts to the east became British. The forts' military role increased, not as protection from European interlopers, but because of the threat of African polities who challenged European territorial claims. A series of defensive works were built by the Dutch around the Elmina settlement during the nineteenth century. These included Fort Beekestein, Veersche Schans, Fort Schomerus, Fort Java, Fort Nagtglas, and the watchtower in Government Gardens (see discussions in Chapters 2 and 3). Although these were termed forts, they were really small defensive redoubts with a few cannons, were staffed by no more than a few men, and were designed to act as deterrents to an approaching army
The British lookout towers of Fort William and Fort Victoria on the hills above Cape Coast also date to this period.

The Dutch decided to give up their Gold Coast possessions in February 1871, with the actual exchange taking place the following year (British Parliamentary Papers 1970a:9-236; Coombs 1963; Crooks 1923:393-429). When the transfer to the British was effected in 1872, much of the Elmina population refused to recognize the British authority. The situation reached a crisis in June 1873, when the Asante moved to the coast, defeating the Fante. Dutch, and hence Elmina's, trade alliances had long been with the Asante. Britain, on the other hand, had actively encouraged Fante independence from Asante.

The British responded to the Elmina insurrection by proclaiming martial law and ordering the surrender of all arms at the castle. The West Indian Regiment was supported by marines and sailors from the H.M.S. Decoy, Barracouta, Druid, Seagull, and Argus. On June 13, 1873, the "disaffected" portion of the town, lying immediately in front of the castle, was surrounded. At about 12:00 noon, after several ultimatums went unanswered, the British "opened fire with artillery all round the disaffected quarter for the purpose of destroying the town" (British Parliamentary Papers 1970a:452). The town was shortly in flames, and the attack was discontinued after about a quarter of an hour. No one was killed in the bombardment of the town, a number of armed Elmina soldiers having escaped westward along the peninsula and many women and children having taken shelter in the castle (British Parliamentary Papers 1970a:445, 447, 474) (Figure 1.12). Over 200 Asante, however, later died in fighting near the town.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 31

TRANSFORMATIONS

The first and most striking change in African societies in the Ghanaian coast and hinterland during the post-European-contact period was increasing urbanization, the concentration of population into larger aggregates. This began as a gradual process during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but culminated during the following centuries. Detailed demographic information is regrettably limited. Census figures are not available for any part of the Gold Coast until the late nineteenth century. More information is available on Elmina than on many other areas, and this can be used to typify developments, as well as illustrate problems in demographic studies of African populations between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The sources involved dearly represent a variety of phenomena and measurements: Many observations may have been little more than wild guesses. Given these limitations it is difficult to assess demographic change. How, for example, should an estimate of 300-400 canoes in 1640 be contrasted with 1,000 militiamen in 1702? Whatever information can be extracted provides no information on age or sex ratios or on the mortality rate. Some indication of the relative increase in coastal populations may be indirectly gleaned through the examination of natural resources available, such as the prevalence of the wild animals along the coastal margin and the relative decline in these populations in the centuries following European contact. But actual estimates of human populations remain elusive.
With these ambiguities in mind, we clearly see from the data that Elmina's population increased substantially between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Although estimates before the mid-seventeenth century suggest a population in the hundreds, the succeeding figures are more suggestive of numbers in the thousands or tens of thousands. Elmina was considered a "large" settlement when the Portuguese arrived. There is little indication of what this meant, but the population probably numbered only a few hundred. During the following four centuries, the town became one of the largest, if not the largest, settlement on the coast. This may already have been true by the late sixteenth century, when Elmina, followed by Shama, was said to be larger than settlements of the coastal hinterland, such as Efutu (Hair 1994b:77 n. 126). Harvey Feinberg (1989:85) estimates Elmina's population at between 12,000 and 16,000 during much of the eighteenth century, and Larry Yarak (1990:48) suggests similar figures for the 1820s. During the late nineteenth century the number of inhabitants may have been somewhat higher. A Dutch report of 1859 estimated a total population between 18,000 and 20,000 (Feinberg 1989:95 n. 42; see also Baesjou 1979a: 214-224; Kea 1982:32-39). These estimates are striking when the sizes of the major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century trade entrepôts of the Americas are considered. In 1692, Port Royal, Jamaica, the largest English harbor in the Americas at the time, had a population of between 6,500 and 10,000 (Pawson and Buisseret 1975). Williamsburg, Virginia, the Anglo-colonial capital, had a population of approximately 2,000 on the eve of the Revolutionary War, and the population of Spanish St. Augustine numbered just over 3,000 (Deagan 1983; Olmert 1990). The crucial difference between these settlements and Elmina is in their population composition: The Elmina population was primarily composed of indigenous African-mostly Akan-people, whereas the populations of the Americas were heterogeneous mixtures of European settlers, enslaved Africans, Amerindians, and people of mixed ancestry.

The small population of coastal African settlements during the early period of European contact reflects the interior orientation of West African trade prior to the late fifteenth century. Earlier trade routes had linked Elmina to a wider network prior to the European arrival, but the larger urban centers were located in the interior along the forest-savanna ecotone and the inland Niger Delta (e.g., Boachie-Ansah 1986; McIntosh 1999; Posnansky 1971; Shinnie and Kense 1989). These were the frontiers of different resource spheres. European coastal trade moved sites like Elmina from the periphery of a trade network to key markets in the distribution of European goods along a new frontier of opportunity. Not only merchants were settled in coastal sites but also boatmen for landing people and cargoes, clerks, soldiers, carpenters, masons, and a myriad of other workers employed by the Europeans. Craftsmen concentrated in the settlements and contributed to a florescence of art. Urban settlements were also foci of power and authority. More important, larger towns afforded protection. Warfare, political instability, and raids characterize the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Gold
During the seventeenth century, coastal Akan society became dominated by the Fante, who expanded westward from the area around Mankesim. There were also lengthy conflicts with Eguao and Efutu. These conflicts contributed to population dislocations and demographic shifts. Multifunctionality and socioeconomic heterogeneity characterized urban settlements (see Kea 1982:13). Population growth within urban centers was partly supported by a variety of American and Asian domesticates. Introduced species commonly cultivated today include: tomato, pineapple, peanut, guava, papaw, avocado, breadfruit, cashew, coffee, cocoa, sugar cane, coconut, cassava (manioc), orange, plantain, sweet potato, mango, corn, and several species of bean (Mauny 1954; Miracle 1965, 1972; Juhe-Beaulaton 1990; Alpern 1992; Chastanet 1998). Some of these plants were known in other parts of Africa prior to the fifteenth century, but European sea trade facilitated their introduction along the West African coast. Introduced animals, including species of sheep, pig, cow, and goose also supplemented earlier food resources. Archaeological and documentary data suggest change in the technology used in the exploitation of marine resources and

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 33

perhaps also in the kind of resources gathered (see Chapter 4). As will be seen, the primary consequences of these innovations were likely in the increased variety and potential caloric value of the resources available, not in the manner in which food was prepared and eaten. There is, however, no question that en masse these introductions affected diet. Foods made from introduced domesticates, such as kenkey from corn, became staples in many areas. Fufu, still predominately prepared with boiled and pounded indigenous species of yam, may also be made with cassava and plantain.

Substantial immigration, as well as natural increase, accounts for Elmina's increasing population during the post-European-contact period. Initially the settlement's growth was likely the result of the amalgamation of smaller Akan villages in the vicinity—a transition from a dispersed settlement pattern to larger centers. This pattern is also reflected in the expansion of other towns in the coastal hinterland, such as Eguao and Efutu. Archaeological data indicate that small coastal settlements that had been occupied during the early historic period were abandoned in favor of these growing urban concentrations. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, increasing numbers of immigrants from farther afield settled in these growing urban centers. Elmina's population became more heterogeneous, incorporating other Akan and non-Akan peoples. It is impossible to determine what percentage of the settlement these groups may have accounted for, yet there are clues. Most notable are the traders from the interior, many of whom were identified as Akani, a vague term often applied to Akan traders from the interior (i.e., both Akan-speaking peoples and traders from what became the Asante state) but possibly also referring to people from farther north (Daaku 1970:146, 202; Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980). The interior Akan figured prominently in Portuguese trade, and merchants and representatives from the Akan hinterland were present at Elmina from the early sixteenth century. References to Asante traders continue throughout the Dutch period, and by the
early nineteenth century there may have been as many as i,000 Asante traders and officials at Elmina.

People from other portions of the coast requested permission to settle at Elmina throughout the Dutch period (de Marr~e 1818:51; Feinberg 1989:81-85). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, people from Fetu, Eguafu, Simbo, Akim, and Denkyira, refugees from conflicts with the Asante and Wasa, settled at Elmina. Other immigrants may have included Ewe and Ga fishermen from eastern Ghana. The modern village of Bantoma, on the inland side of the Elmina peninsula, has a large Ewe population, and it is possible that the Ewe have long formed a part of Elmina society. A small number of Dyula and Mande traders from the northern savanna and the Sahel may also have contributed to the settlement's heterogeneity. Culturally and linguistically they are distinct from the Akan, and they have figured in interpretations of Elmina's early history.8 Notably, Dutch permission was sought for outsiders to settle in Elmina, and an oath of allegiance was sometimes sworn, including a clause promising service to the Europeans. These "strangers" may have made up distinct groups within the town, and it is possible that the third "quarter," which appeared by the seventeenth century, may have been a quarter for strangers.86

34 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

Slaves Captive Africans brought to Elmina by the Portuguese and Dutch also contributed to Elmina's heterogeneity. African slavery, its characteristics, origins, and development are poorly documented.87 There is no historical evidence that slaves existed at Elmina prior to the advent of the European trade. They were, however, being brought to Elmina by the 1470s, prior to the founding of São Jorge da Mina, and there are many references to them on the Gold Coast in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources (Elbl 1997; see also Ballong-WenMewuda 1984, 1993; Bean 1974; Hair 1994b; Rodney 1969; and Vogt 1973a, 1974, 1979). They were used to meet the labor needs of the Portuguese garrison, as well as to help African merchants transport goods to the interior. Between 1500 and 1535 the Portuguese may have imported 10,000-12,000 slaves to Elmina, primarily from the Niger Delta and the Bight of Biafra (Vogt 1973a:464-465; see also Elb 11997).89 It has been estimated that 10 percent of the gold bought by the Portuguese crown at Elmina before 1540 was paid for in slaves (Vogt 1979:76). The importation of slaves to Elmina continued into the Dutch period, when, as will be seen below, slaves made up an important component of the town's population. Some captives brought to Elmina were obtained in Ghana, but most came from other parts of the West African coast and were both linguistically and culturally distinct from the indigenous Akan population.

The earliest reference to slaves being brought to Elmina is by Eustache de la Fosse in L479, who describes the arrival of caravels from the "River of Slaves." These ships carried "a good 200 [slaves] each," most of whom were sold at the "Mine of Gold" (quoted in Hair 1994b:128-13).90 The "River of Slaves" likely refers to the Niger Delta area of modern Nigeria, some 500 miles farther east. The Portuguese also sometimes obtained slaves from lands to the west in modern
Liberia and from Arguim on the Mauritanian coast. Beginning early in the sixteenth century, São Tomé and Príncipe were used as distribution points for slaves obtained on the Slave Coast, and as many as 673 slaves per year were transported to Elmina. Although the slaves may have originated at Ouidah or São Tomé, these areas were collection points, and the captive Africans likely included many different ethnolinguistic groups. Some of these people were taken to the interior, but others stayed at Elmina. As many as 20 or 30 slaves were kept at São Jorge to assist with the maintenance of the garrison (Vogt 1973a:454). Others may have been retained by merchants in the town, but aside from their service as porters, their numbers and occupations within the Elmina settlement are uncertain. The importation of slaves dropped after 1535, perhaps a result of both the disruption of trade routes to the interior and the expansion of the trade in slaves to Portugal and the Americas (Vogt 1973a:466-467).

The number of slaves in Elmina increased during the Dutch period. Letters from the Dutch director general on the Gold Coast frequently referred to the need to bring more slaves from Ouidah on the coast of Benin. Harvey Feinberg (1969:36) estimates that the West India Company maintained approximately 600 slaves on the Gold Coast during the eighteenth century, about half of whom were at Elmina. In 1812, Henry Meredith (1967:86) placed the number of Dutch West India Company slaves in the town at about 900, perhaps 4-8 percent of the total population.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

These figures relate only to company slaves, and, as in the case of the Portuguese period, the number and activities of slaves owned by the townspeople are difficult to infer. Documentary records do provide some indication of their presence. Slaves remained important for the transport of trade goods to the interior, as illustrated by an early seventeenth-century account that describes merchants employing 200 or 300 slaves in a caravan (Hemmersam in Jones 1983:115). In addition, as in Asante, they were likely integral to the production of crops, and they may also have assisted in gold mining and with the harvesting of kola, two principal export commodities of the Gold Coast besides the slaves themselves (Hair 1994a:51 n. 51; Yarak 1990:13). At least some slaves and servants lived in the houses in which they worked (de Marré 1818). Domestic slaves also were used as sacrificial victims at funerals. The role of slaves at Elmina and the institution of slavery in Akan society provide an important contrast to plantation systems in the Americas. Unlike the latter, slaves in coastal Ghana exercised a relative degree of freedom. They were important to the functioning of the European outposts, and they made up an important component of the Elmina settlement. In Akan society, slaves captured in warfare or purchased became part of the matrilineage (abusua) of their owners, and thus became part of a family, linked by marriage ties and kin relations (Christensen 1954:38-41). In many regions, oral traditions refer to slave villages or slave families. During the Dutch period the trainslaven, or "company slaves," also seem to have had some degree of freedom. They lived within the town and formed a distinct segment of the Elmina population (Feinberg 1969:36-37; Meredith 1967:86). Many slaves...
became masons, carpenters, and craftsmen. For example, Meredith (1967:86), writing in 1812, noted some of the slaves of the Dutch West India Company as being "excellent artificers." Significantly, one of the later asafo companies, the Brofonkowa, was made up of West India Company slaves. These were military companies that helped defend the town. At least occasionally they were embroiled in European-African conflicts. During hostilities between the Dutch and Elmina in 1739, the trainslaven caught in the town were either put to death or sold (Feinberg 1970a:36i). Because these people were integrated into local communities, they have poor visibility archaeologically, and documentary sources and oral traditions provide only a very limited indication of their role in the town of Elmina.

Europeans The European population at Elmina is better documented than the African population. Their numbers were always small and by no means stable. Disease and the undesirability of the post caused constant staffing problems. Portuguese records frequently refer to the ill health of the garrison and the need for replacements. When Azambuja established Castelo de Sao Jorge da Mina, only 63 Europeans remained with him. Throughout the Portuguese period the number was never larger than this and was often much smaller (Hair 1994b:36; Vogt 1974). In 1615 the Portuguese garrison was reduced to 25 men, and at the time of the Dutch takeover there were only 35. The actual composition of the Portuguese population is difficult to assess. The most important personages, such as the commander, would have been people of some prominence, yet the

36 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

African-European Descendants varied qualifications of the Mina commanders in terms of their age, experience, and careers are striking. The majority were drawn from the lower nobility (fidalgos and escudeiros) (Ballong-Wen-Mewuda 1984:210-265; Vogt 1979: 42-44). However, others in the early Portuguese company were likely convicts, or degredados, sentenced to exile in Mina (Hair 1994a:91 n. 96).99 The size of the European company increased during the Dutch period, reflecting both the greater importance of Elmina as a trading center and the increasing competition on the coast (Feinberg 1974, 1989:29-42). Figures for the seventeenth century suggest a European garrison at Elmina of over 100.00 During the eighteenth century the Gold Coast staff ranged from as many as 377 in 1728 to a low of 138 in 1757, generally averaging over 175 men. Elmina was the headquarters, so the majority of these people were probably stationed there. Prior to the eighteenth century most of these soldiers, administrators, and sailors were European, but they presented a culturally varied group. Soldiers, the group that made up the largest portion, were drawn from all over Europe. Hence the "Dutch" garrison at Elmina might have included individuals from portions of the Continent that are today part of France, Germany, and Belgium. Many were also lower-class, culled from the orphanages, prisons, and workhouses of Rotterdam, the "dregs of the Dutch nation" enlisted by labor recruiters (Boxer 1990:89-93; Feinberg 1989:86). This was particularly true of the military personnel; West
India Company employment was not seen as desirable by most middle- and upper-class Dutch men, and even senior officials and directors general were of ambiguous background. In the second half of the eighteenth century more Africans and individuals of African-European descent were employed by the West India Company, possibly as means of cutting costs and replacing losses from illness (Feinberg 1969:39-40). By the end of the eighteenth century the entire garrison consisted of Africans or men of African-European ancestry. Under the Dutch government, the number of Dutchmen in Elmina was drastically reduced, and during the nineteenth century they probably never numbered more than about 20 (Yarak 1986a:34). A significant feature of the European population was the small number of European women (Hair 1994b:36). Only three remained with the original Portuguese garrison, and there was never a significant number. A regimento, or set of regulations, set down for the outpost in 1529 listed four women, who were required to cook, nurse, and, for a set fee, provide sexual services to the men (Hair 1994b:36, 91; see also Ballong-Wen-Mewuda 1984:303-304; Birmingham 1970:2). These women may have been degredadas. Consequently, beginning early on in European-African interactions, European men relied on African women for domestic and marital relations. Though it is difficult to determine their numbers, mulattos were already recognized as a distinct segment of the population during the sixteenth century (Feinberg 1989:36, 88-92; Vogt 1979:182). They were distinguished by their dress, which was influenced by European clothing. Writing on the Portuguese treatment of mulatto women in 1602, Pieter de Marees noted: "They maintain these Wives in grand style and keep them in splendid clothes, and they always dress more ostentatiously and stand out more than any other Indigenous women. They can be easily recognized, for they shave the hair on their heads very short, just as do the Men, which is not the habit of the other Women; and they also have far more ornaments on their cloths and all over their bodies, a habit which the other women do not have either" (1987:217). The Portuguese mulatto population was of sufficient importance that special permission was obtained for them to accompany the Portuguese garrison to São Tomé following the 1637 surrender, although at least 200 appear to have remained in Elmina under the Dutch (Feinberg 1969:24-25). There were formal marriages between Dutch men and Elmina women, but these were sufficiently uncommon in the early eighteenth century that the permission of the Dutch director general was sought (Kerdijk 1978:153-155; van Dantzig 1978:176). 103 Dutch officers and merchants, however, frequently maintained common-law wives, and there were children from these unions. In 1700 the director general and members of the council decreed that Dutch men having 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; also see Feinberg 1969:123). It was further agreed that a communal house would be built in Elmina for all such children to be brought at the age of five or six years, where they would be separated from both...
the Africans and the Europeans. Here they were to be educated in the art of letters, the foundation of economics, and some crafts, as well as in the making of plantations.

Using documentary sources, Harvey Feinberg has identified over 250 mulattos living on the entire Gold Coast during the eighteenth century, approximately two-thirds of which he estimates were born in Elmina (Feinberg 1989:89). The Dutch called them tapoeijers, possibly because their skin color was similar to the Tapuya Indians in Brazil (de Marees 1987:26 n. 3; Feinberg 1989:97 n. 71). Many mulattos worked for the European trading companies on the coast. Some became successful independent traders (Feinberg 1989:85-92; Priestley 1969; Yarak 1989). One of the most important Elmina citizens was Jan Niezer (Brukum 1985:165-179; Lever 1970). He visited Europe several times and was probably the first African merchant at Elmina to order his goods directly from American and European companies. Because he was highly regarded by both the African and the European communities, he was consulted on several occasions to settle disputes.

Some descendants of Elmina women and Dutch men 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 (Feinberg 1969:124; Yarak 1986a:34). During the late eighteenth century the vrijburgers were recognized as a distinct group within the town that organized asafo company number seven, 'Ak rampa." They had their own burgemeester, or mayor, who signed agreements with the Europeans. The vrijburgers were exempt from some duties and were also allowed to have a crown on their company flag and to carry swords because of their special status.

38 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA
SOCIOPOLITICAL CHANGE

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the Elmina population and occasional conflict between different segments, the town functioned as a political unit. A variety of informal crosscutting links served to unify the settlement (Yarak 1986a:35). These included intermarriage, the general importance of trade, economic competition with surrounding Fante groups, and Akan culture. These factors provided a cohesiveness in the settlement's internal political organization and relationships with neighboring polities.

The advent of colonial rule at Elmina during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects dramatic change in European objectives and concerns, as well as African-European relations. The colonial administration exercised increasingly overt control over many aspects of African society and imposed, or at least attempted to impose, European government, society, and cultural ideals. But during the preceding centuries African-European interactions were quite different. Europeans played roles that were much more narrowly defined. Although the Portuguese referred to the town's inhabitants as "our subjects," it was, in fact, only the castle that was granted the status of "city" by the Portuguese crown (Blake 1977:99)." The town itself might be better described as a self-governing republic or the Commonwealth of Mina (Blake 1942:45). The Dutch likewise sought to
avoid municipal disputes. Although the Dutch tried cases, these were almost invariably heard jointly with Elmina leaders (Feinberg 1969:208-217). The Dutch factors made every effort to maintain equable relations with the African population to avoid any interruption in the trade. Africans could file charges against Europeans, and unpopular factors were quickly replaced. Oppressive European policies could result in the cession of trade, riots, or abandonment of the settlement (Blake 1942:46, 54-55; Bosman 1967:43; Feinberg 1989:145-150; van Dantzig 1978:9, 8o-81, 212-213, 243-244).

The European presence, nevertheless, wrought important changes, especially in political and social relations within the town and in interpolity interactions. This was influenced by both formal and informal policies. Europeans encouraged Elmina's independence from adjacent polities and fostered connections with other African states. African rulers were given Dutch sanction through payment of an annual gift, or kostgeld. The most influential people in the eighteenth century, at least from the vantage of Europeans, were individuals in the most advantageous positions to benefit from the European trade (Baesjou 1979b:37; Feinberg 1969:241; Priestley 1969). This observation might be colored by dependence on European perceptions that provide limited insight into African views. Elmina and neighboring coastal Akan communities evolved political and social institutions that, at least in some respects, were distinct from those of other Akan groups. There is little doubt, however, that the structure, makeup, and expression of these institutions were African in their underlying epistemology and manifestations. Their antecedents were the kin-based Akan organizations; their models, the institutions and government of the neighboring Akan states.

The organization and development of Elmina and adjacent polities during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are dear. However, their antecedents

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 39

and the transformations that occurred between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries are more difficult to trace (see Hair 1994b:52-56 nn. 31, 35, and 37; see also Ballong-Wen-Mewuda 1984:75-106; Blake 1977:99-100; and Vogt 1979). The political structures that are found in more recent periods did not appear fully formed but rather gradually evolved in the preceding centuries. Although the relationship between Elmina and neighboring polities at the time of European contact cannot be fully evaluated, it is clear that fifteenth-century Elmina was not an independent state: What would become the Edina (Elmina) state emerged over the last five centuries. At the time of initial European contact the Eguafó state, centered at the Eguafó settlement, and Fetu, centered at Efutu, may have both claimed territorial rights to Elmina. Some Elmina oral traditions recount that the founder of Elmina was Kwa Amankwaa, a member of the Eguafó royal family who came to Elmina to hunt (Meyerowitz 1952a, 1974:76-77; Feinberg 1969:8-14; Fynn 1974b:3-4).109 Support for Fetu claims, on the other hand, primarily comes from documentary sources. The principal source is a Dutch map of x629 that states, "[I]n the old days one half [of Elmina] used to be under Great Commendo [Eguafó] and the other Futu, who came there to collect their contribution" (translated in Feinberg 1969:12-13).no This division is repeated in
later sources. A nineteenth-century oral tradition further traces the founding of Elmina to a hunter from Simbo (Simeo, a town now part of Edina but originally belonging to Fetu) and a fisherman from Cape Coast (Feinberg 1969:12). Regardless of the political claims that may have existed, the Elmina settlement became increasingly autonomous after the founding of the Castelo de São Jorge da Mina, and by the second decade of the sixteenth century it had established its independence from both Fetu and Eguafo (Vogt 1979:86-87).

Kingship Elmina's sociopolitical structure presents a number of distinctive aspects, which can be first illustrated by the evolution of kingship. Today, the head of the Edina state is the imanhen, who rules through monarchical succession. He is viewed as the political, military, and religious leader of the Edina state. In contrast with most other Akan groups, inheritance of the position is considered patrilineal. The amanhen must also be a member of Enyampa Asafo and a member of either the Anona or Nsona clans. Other important officials are the state linguist (iman Akyeame), the heads of families (nguabadofo), the heads of the asafo companies (asafohene), and the divisional chiefs.

Although the organization of the modern Edina state may appear clear, the origins and structure of these features are complex. A single king and the central role of the imanhen did not emerge until the eighteenth century." Caramansa, the African ruler who met with Azambuja at the foundation of Castelo de São Jorge da Mina, is unmentioned after his initial appearance, never to be referred to in European records again. Although some writers have described him as the king of Elmina, his actual position is unclear. On the basis of the limited contemporary documentation available, Caramansa can only be described as a ruler, possibly either from or subservient to a neighboring polity, but whatever his position, it likely did not conform to any contemporary European notions of status and power." Although the lack of reference to a single

40 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA

ruler is negative evidence, it seems unlikely that a principal figure with whom the Portuguese interacted would be left unnoted.

There is, in fact, some evidence to the contrary. A 1572 Portuguese report on Elmina discusses how it is unfitting for any of the African rulers to be referred to as kings: "[lit may seem that nothing is lost by permitting this, yet it is very important, since when one of these blacks is called 'King,' or wants to be called 'King,' he then thinks that being King of Cuman or King of Afuto, which are villages of not more than one hundred huts or shacks, is the same as being King of Portugal, which is a kingdom worthy of the name" (Teixeira da Mota and Hair 1988:74; also see Birmingham 1970). In 1639 the Dutch director general noted that the Elmina people customarily "communicate all occurrences to the [Dutch] General, because they have no king; and they stand so firmly upon their rights that they would rather place their lives in peril than be robbed of them by any of the neighboring kings" (quoted in Feinberg 1970b:24). Throughout the seventeenth century Dutch references to political relations within the settlement point to more than one ruler. Beginning in 1629 three different "quarters" were
noted as each having its own caboceer, or captain, the people being organized "as a republic of their own," mostly governed by the Portuguese (Henige 1974:505; Feinberg 1989:99-103). References to kings appear in European records only after 1732. At this date the Dutch appear to have been unfamiliar with the position and viewed it as a new office. Eighteenth-century references usually refer to a first or upper king, a second or under king, and a third king. This may denote the formalization of the office of the "king," or ihen. The specific powers and authority associated with the office likely evolved even more slowly.

Succession of the position also appears to have varied. The position may have rotated among lesser kings, power eventually being centralized in a paramount king, or ihanen, though consideration of king lists indicates that the precise line of descent was variable. Although succession of the position is now regarded as patrilineal—a feature that distinguishes the office from those in most other coastal Akan communities—king lists suggest that the actual line of inheritance has been variable. In fact, the issue of succession remains the source of great debate in modern Elmina. The Elmina royal court was likely initially undistinguished, with the importance of the ihanen and the royal court becoming fully solidified during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even then the head of the state appears as only one of a series of political balances, the most important of which were the asafo.

Asafo

The asafo are associations based on lineal descent, often connected with specific areas within a town. They are characteristic of the coastal Akan, particularly within the Fante states. Membership is by patrilineal descent, which contrasts with the matrilineal orientation of other aspects of Akan office succession and kinship (Arhin 1966; Christensen 1954:108; Chukwukere 1970, 1980; Danquah 1928:i6-2o, 199-121; Datta and Porter 1971:281; de Graft-Johnson 1932; Ffoulkes 1907; Hayford 1903:85-92; Sarbah 1968:26-32). Certain aspects of asafo organization, pageantry, and symbolism suggest European influences: the company

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 41

Figure 1.13. Asafo shrine at Elmina. Although such shrines incorporate European elements, the underlying epistemology is African. (Photograph by Christopher R. DeCorse)

organization, the flags, the representation of European warships, guns, planes, and uniforms in shrines (Figure 1.13). Nevertheless, the groups are clearly indigenous in form and conceptualization. They may represent indigenous institutions, such as the young men's associations in Asante (nmerante) that evolved to include new elements and nontraditional groups like company slaves, vrijburgers, and Europeans. They provided a mechanism through which young men and commoners could express their opinions. Although often characterized as serving primarily military or social functions, the asafo are validated through rituals and fealty oaths. Each asafo has its own shrine in which offerings are made.

At Elmina the origin of asafo likely predates the office of ihanen. Beginning in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, the number of leaders noted in
Dutch records increased, possibly an indication of the development or expansion of the asafo system (Henige 1974:505-506; see also Baesjou 1979a:19; Christensen 1954:107; Feinberg 1989:104-108; Wartemberg 1951:53-55). The asafo organization may have started to emerge in neighboring coastal states at about the same time. Elmina's seven core asafo were recognized by 1724, but three others were added during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two of the additions consisted of refugees from Simbo and Eguafa, displaced by the Fante war of 1810. The final asafo was the Akrampa, consisting of the Dutch West India Company slaves and their descendants. This brought the total number of asafo to ten-more than any other settlement. Their role in Elmina politics contrasted with other coastal Akan polities, for the asafo appear to have had a preeminent position in the political hierarchy. The election of the edenahen (kings) was determined by the asafo (Henige 1973:226; 1974:506-507). The political structure of Elmina is also distinct in its lack of divisional chiefs (prior to 1873), and the nineteenth-century creation of the besonfo, a council of wealthy Elmina people that also originated from the asafo (Feinberg 1969:72-89; 1970b, 1989; Yarak 1986a:33-34). These institutions to some extent counterbalanced one another, but within the Elmina polity all initially were of secondary importance to the patrilineally linked asafo.

The Dutch clearly recognized the primary importance of the asafo. The overall leader of the asafo (ekuwessonhin) and the individual company heads all received a larger allowance than the king (Feinberg 1969:86; 1970b). Such favoritism may have fostered a vested interest in the asafo relations with the Dutch. The formation of companies made up of Dutch West India Company slaves and of mulattos also may have served to legitimize a degree of European influence in local politics through a quasi-indigenous mechanism.

Elmina and Its Neighbors
42 AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ELMINA
The growing infrastructure of the Elmina polity was commensurate with increasing political autonomy from the neighboring states of Fetu and Eguafa and the emergence of Elmina as a competitor for territory. Elmina originally was limited to the settlement area and adjacent farmlands. With the emergence of Elmina as an independent polity, additional land was incorporated with the help of the Portuguese and the Dutch. By 1813 it had extended as far to the east as the Sweet or Kakum River, the location of the modern boundary (Feinberg 1989:77). Presently, the Edina state with Elmina as the capital includes the towns of Ampenyi, Ankwanda, Atabadze, Bantoma, Brenu Akyinim, Dutch Komenda, Essaman, Simew, Yesunkwa, and several smaller settlements. It is bounded by the stools of British Komenda in the west, Oguaa (Cape Coast) in the east, and Eguafa to the northwest. Oral traditions suggest that some of the villages currently incorporated within the Edina state were part of Eguafa until the nineteenth century (Fynn 1974b:21).

Relations between Elmina and the neighboring polities are primarily gleaned through European sources. Portuguese accounts record that in requesting permission to found Castelo de SAo Jorge da Mina the Portuguese promised
always to afford the people of Elmina protection. Barros writes that the African ruler Caramansa was told that he "would become powerful in his land, and lord of his neighbors, for no one would trouble him since that same house, and the power of the [Portuguese] King, would be there to defend him" (1967:119; see also Blake 1942:40-46, 74). Barros does not provide a firsthand account, but the sentiment expressed may well have characterized early Portuguese policy. The political expansion of Elmina strained relations with the neighboring Fante states. Fetu and Eguafo did not recognize Portugal's claim to exclusive trading rights in Guinea, and they were quick to welcome trade from French and Dutch interlopers. These factors led to a series of conflicts spanning the sixteenth through the nineteenth century (e.g., Coombs 1963:52; de Marees 1987:8, 91; Feinberg 1970b:23-24; Vogt 1979:86, 124-125). A European policy that encouraged independence reinforced Elmina's isolation from the adjacent polities, and it can be used to explain, at least partly, the town's distinctive, self-perceived identity. Conflict with the neighboring states also fostered Elmina's long-term ties with the Asante. The Asante state coalesced from a loose confederation of Akan polities during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By 1750 it had reached its greatest extent, having incorporated much of modern Ghana, and become a major power in coastal politics (Fynn 1971; McCaskie 1995; Wilks 1993). Nineteenth-century British policy, particularly under Governor Charles MacCarthy, encouraged Fante independence from Asante (Baesjou 1979a:8-17; Fynn 1971:142-147; Sanders 1979). This interrupted the supply of goods from the coast (including guns, powder, and shot) and threatened the Asante position as middlemen with the interior. Elmina was seen as a natural ally, and long-standing links among Elmina, the Dutch, and Asante were strengthened (Baesjou 1979a:7-28; Brukum 1985:34-39; Coombs 1963:1-13; Yarak 1986a:34).123

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 43
These close relations between Elmina and Asante no doubt helped precipitate the forcible treatment of the town by the British in 1873. The bombardment and leveling of the settlement in June 1873 largely destroyed Elmina's economic importance. Much of the town's population was dispersed, climbing to its pre1873 levels only during the present century (British Parliamentary Papers 1970b:269).124 The town, nevertheless, continued to receive much of the Asante trade until 1900, and buildings dating to this period can be seen in the present town on the north side of the Benya River.