

Introduction: Forts, Castles, and Society in West Africa

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Like their counterparts in Europe, the forts and castles (fortresses) of West Africa were military installations that were erected to protect the specific economic and political interests of their owners. In the West African case, these were the European imperial governments and the respective trading companies operating under royal charters. Remnants of trade forts and castles on the West African littoral are among the buildings in the region that elicit both historical and architectural interest.¹ Though they evoke memories of dastardly undertakings during centuries of Afro-European commercial interaction, their resilient presence today makes forceful and varied impressions on the emotion scape of all types of visitors. The inclusion of these forts and castles on the UNESCO World Heritage List underscores the recognition of their historical value both as ‘irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration’² and as memorial sites of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Even more paradoxical is their post-colonial status as ‘African Heritage’ that is owned by and managed for Africans by their governments. In effect, the buildings have a presence of their own that is separate from, and yet linked to, their historical provenance, uses, and meanings.

For the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB), the forts and castles are World Heritage sites because their presence in West Africa serves as a reminder of the capacity of humans to combine creativity, aesthetics, instrumentality, and cruelty in one object. Justifying the inclusion of Ghana’s fortifications on the World Heritage List in the 1970s, the GMMB noted:

What makes ... [the] castles, forts and lodges ... important is their historical significance [as] a kind of ‘shopping street’ of West Africa to which traders of Europe came to exchange their goods for those of African traders. Though [they] were built in the first place for the gold trade, later, in the 18th century, they played also an important role in the slave trade, and therefore in the history of the Americas [and Africa too]. These buildings may not strike the observer by their

¹ W. J. Varley, ‘Castles of the Gold Coast’, *West Africa* (21 June 1952): 555–556.

² <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/> (accessed 10 June 2015).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

individual refined beauty [but] it could be said that they constitute a unique ‘collective historical monument’... not only to the evils of the slave trade, but also to nearly four centuries of pre-colonial Afro-European (*sic*) commerce on the basis of equality rather than on that of the colonial basis of inequality.³

The paradoxes represented in the existence of European-built fortifications as mementos in the West African milieu lend themselves to scholarly study from diverse disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Historical studies, like those in this anthology, demonstrate that, though the buildings had specific purposes in West Africa, their presence had profound consequences for West African states and societies due to the economic transactions as well as the social interactions forged in and around them by European and African actors. These studies examine aspects of the enduring impacts that the forts and castles (fortresses) had on the economic, political, and socio-cultural spaces locally and regionally in West Africa and globally, particularly in the Atlantic arena.

This introduction is subdivided into three sections. The first presents some existing studies of European-built fortifications in West Africa. The second provides a broad historical sweep of the forts and castles, emphasising state policies on fortification projects, their actualisation process, and their changing utility at different times. It interrogates the idea of forts and castles as markers of possession and sovereignty. The third section presents the studies in this anthology through the conceptual lens of the ‘middle ground’, a notion borrowed from the work of Larry Yarak (Chapter 4). It distinguishes between the *presence* of the fortifications at specific locations and their *utility*, with a view to suggesting impact differentials based on proximity.

Studies of the forts and castles of West Africa

A. W. Lawrence described his seminal study of the West African forts and castles (published in 1963) as an ‘archaeologist’s sidelight on history’, averring that he would not have included so

³ UNESCO Archives, Identification No. 34, 13 June 1978: Nomination Submitted by Ghana: Forts and Castles – Volta, Greater Accra, and Western Regions. Significantly, though the UNESCO quote dates the slave trade to the 18th century (very much a 1970s position), the forts were used for slave trading at least from the second half of the 17th century.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

much historical detail in his work ‘if historians had written fully on the subject’.⁴ In fact, many of the original scholarly works on the West African fortifications are in the fields of archaeology and architectural history. Archaeologists have combined fieldwork and the documentary evidence from the archives to elucidate the fortresses as past economic and social arenas, and architectural historians have been concerned with describing their structural and functional features.⁵

The fortresses of West Africa have historical trajectories that can be unravelled within the various sub-branches under the discipline of history. Yet, unlike their medieval and early modern European counterparts that have attracted considerable scholarly and popular historical enthusiasm,⁶ they have not as yet received sustained attention from academic historians. Of course, there are some accounts in the form of general inventories of the buildings and garrisons.⁷ Overwhelmingly, the historical works on the trans-Atlantic slave trade have justifiably treated the forts and castles of West Africa as the epitome of cruelty, because of their uses as holding places and final, one-way exit points for enslaved West Africans. In fact, the general literatures on the trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as on diaspora and tourism studies treat them as objects of oppression. In *House of Slaves and ‘Door of No Return’* (2012), Edmund Abaka describes them as ‘ships at permanent anchor on the Euro-African frontier in West Africa’, ‘linchpin(s) in the

⁴ A. W. Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), 17.

⁵ Notable among these works are Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, ‘Some Source Books for West African History’, *Journal of African History* 2 (1961), 227–234; Kwesi J. Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana* (Paris: Atalante, 1999); Christopher DeCorse, ‘Historical Archaeology in West Africa Documents, Oral Histories, and the Material Record’, *World Archaeological Bulletin* 7 (1996): 40–50, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400-1900* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), ‘Early Trade Posts and Forts of West Africa’, in Eric Klingelhofer (ed.), *First Forts: Essays on the Archaeology of Proto-colonial Fortifications* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); H. Nii-Adziri Wellington, *Stones Tell Stories at Osu: Memories of a Host Community of the Danish Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2011); E. Kofi Agorsah, ‘Archaeological Perspectives on Colonial Slavery: Placing Africa in African Diaspora Studies in the Caribbean’, in Paul J. Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 199–221; and David Miles, ‘Roots to Forts: The Heritage and Archaeology of Ghana’, *Current World Archaeology* 20 (2006–2007): 30–33.

⁶ In the United Kingdom, this academic and popular historical interest has been institutionalised through the Castle Studies Group (CSG), which has its own journal (<http://www.castlestudiesgroup.org.uk/>). An important scholarly work is Charles L. H. Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society: Fortresses in England, France, and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ Mathew Nathan, ‘The Gold Coast at the End of the 17th Century under the Danes and the Dutch’, *Journal of the Royal African Society* 4 (1904): 1–32; Albert Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980); Albert Van Dantzig and Barbara Priddy, *A Short History of the Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Liberty Press, 1971); Michel Doortmont and Michel Van den Nieuwenhof, ‘Ancient Forts and Castles in Ghana’, (Internet article: 1999) The history of Fort Patience at Apam and Ussher Fort in Accra; Isaac S. Ephson, *Ancient Forts and Castles of the Gold Coast* (Ghana) (Accra: Ilen Publications, 1970).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

slave trade’, and embodiments ‘of untold torture, suffering and death – a Black Holocaust’.⁸ As Rebecca Shumway argues, these fortifications serve, in the growing tourist industry in West Africa, as ‘vivid reminders of the horrific trade that gave birth to the black population of the Americas’.⁹ No doubt, contemporary visitors will not fail to notice the paradox of ‘civilisation’ embodied in the forts and castles. Particularly, there is the stark contrast between the eerie, suffocating slave dungeons below and the open, airy whitewashed ‘civilised white spaces’ above consisting of residential areas, schools, churches, and facilities with good drinking water – all gently buffeted by the fresh sea breeze.

Thanks to the Internet’s ability to facilitate the dissemination of instantly accessible information for varied purposes has led to an exponential growth in the number of websites that offer a mix of public history accounts and commercially motivated documentaries (videos and photographs). The public history works include general descriptive articles on the history of the buildings (e.g. chronology, ownership, uses);¹⁰ online guides such as Marco Ramerini’s ‘Colonial Voyage’,¹¹ as well as guided video tours and interviews.¹² Overwhelmingly, however, the majority of online materials (travel blogs, video tours, and photographs), though rife with information, are commercially motivated, and so portray the fortresses as being synonymous with the slave trade and as popular tourist destinations.¹³ Discernibly too, though the culture and tourism websites of African governments (the inheritors of the buildings) promote heritage, memory, and ‘home-coming’ interests, they nevertheless betray similar profit motives on their respective tourism websites. For instance, the Ghana Tourism Authority website lists Ghana’s

⁸ Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and ‘Door of No Return’: Gold Coast/Ghana Slave Forts, Castles, and Dungeons and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012), xviv–xxii, 3.

⁹ Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 3. For African complicity in the greatest maritime forced traffic of humans, see 61–62.

¹⁰ See Simon Pratt, ‘Forts of Ghana’ (<http://www.militaryarchitecture.com/index.php/Fortifications/forts-of-ghana.html>).

¹¹ <https://www.colonialvoyage.com/european-forts-in-ghana/#>.

¹² Notably, ‘President Obama in Ghana at the Cape Coast Dungeons pt. 1-2’, CNN AC 360’s video of President Barack Hussein Obama and his family’s guided tour of the Cape Coast Castle in July 2009, featuring the famous interview of the President by CNN’s Anderson Cooper (https://youtu.be/0gmDoon_yC0).

¹³ They are too numerous to list here. See, for example, ‘Complete Pilgrim’ (<http://thecompletepilgrim.com/>; <http://thecompletepilgrim.com/colonial-forts-africa-elmina-castle-fort-jesus-castle-good-hope/>; and Hobo Traveller.com (<http://www.hobotraveler.com/blogger.html>), which is described as ‘a video of the guided tour through the Cape Coast Ghana Slave Fort or Castle in West Africa’.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

fortresses as one of the ‘attractions’ among the eight important ‘places to visit,’ and Senegal’s tourism website promotes Bakel Fort, the Fort in Thiès, and ‘La Maison des Esclaves’ (House of Slaves) alongside the country’s various beaches and other historical sites as attractions worth visiting.¹⁴ However, one public history essay written by a visiting African American to Elmina Castle is worth mentioning for its recognition of the need for balance in the way we ought to approach the study of the West African forts and castles. The author writes: ‘Within the stones of the castle our ancestral spirits are entombed. They silently await excavation. Await our detailed investigation. ... I want to focus on the impact of the slave trade on Africans, both continental and diaspora’.¹⁵

Certainly, the use of the fortifications during the Atlantic slave trade and their place in the making of transnational African diasporas and networks must continue to receive scholarly attention. However, this apparent focus on the forts and castles as the ‘culprits’ in the slave trade seems to take the moral gaze away from the human perpetrators of the trade. It is necessary to keep in mind that they were *just* buildings constructed by their human owners at specific times for specific purposes. In other words, they were just buildings erected or acquired by some European states in the 15th to 18th centuries for the prosecution of the gold and trans-Atlantic slave trades with the active participation of some African states and traders. Thus, we ought not to ignore the impact that the *presence* of forts and castles at specific locations had on the physical and social space in West Africa.

Some scholarly works acknowledge the uses of the forts and castles in the slave trade without explicitly criminalising them. They place emphasis on the human agents of the trade as well as the relationships built within and around them. Thus, though the title of William St. Clair’s 2006 book, *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade*, seems to reinforce the ‘slave trade’ image of the fortifications, its focus is on the lives of the individuals who ‘lived, worked, or were imprisoned there’ between 1664 and 1807.¹⁶ Other works use some forts and castles as starting points to explore the building of Afro-European

¹⁴ See <http://www.ghana.travel/>; and <http://www.visitezlesenegal.com/en/tourism-office>.

¹⁵ Kalamu ya Salaam, ‘The Forts and Castles of Ghana’, *Chicken and Bones: A Journal for Literary and Artistic African-American Themes*, <http://www.nathanielturner.com/kalamuonafrica.htm>.

¹⁶ William St. Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade* (London: Profile Books, 2006), 1, 7–9.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

relationships in general and the framing of identities among some African communities. Though the principal aim of Anne Mette Jørgensen's *Danskernes Huse på Guldkysten, 1659–1850* (2014) is to document all the former Danish structures and their role in the Atlantic slave trade, the individual articles in the book explore Afro-Danish relationships that were established in and around the Danish forts and castles in West Africa from 1659 to 1850.¹⁷ Published in 2004, Robin Law's *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727–1892* highlights, among other topics, how adjacent African communities used the three forts (French, English, and Portuguese) at Ouidah as identity markers.¹⁸ Harvey Feinberg's *Africans and Europeans in West Africa* (1989) provides a close account of the centrality of São Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle) in the establishment of an Elmina-Dutch relationship in the 18th century,¹⁹ while Larry Yarak's book *Asante and the Dutch, 1744–1873* (1990) looks at the changes to regional political dynamics that were engendered by the Dutch presence Elmina Castle.²⁰ Meanwhile, a recent collected volume by Per Hernæs, *Vestafrika: fortene på Guldkysten* (2017), provides a comprehensive historical account of Danish activities on the Gold Coast and in the Atlantic trade.²¹ This was the state of knowledge at the time the idea for the conference and this resultant volume were conceived and implemented.

The present anthology is a unique and long overdue historians' answer to Lawrence's admonition of 1963, as it demonstrates that it is possible and indeed desirable from a scholarly point of view to explore other aspects of the forts and castles of West Africa, namely their erection, their uses at different periods, and their socio-economic impacts within local society. Another effort in this direction is the recent multidisciplinary *Shadows of Empire: New Perspectives on European Fortifications in West Africa* (2017), which studies the forts and castles in their West African context and from the perspectives of architecture, archaeology,

¹⁷ Anne Mette Jørgensen (ed.), *Danskernes Huse på Guldkysten, 1659–1850* (Copenhagen: Vandkunsten og Nasjonalmuseet, 2014), 13–17.

¹⁸ Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slave 'Port', 1727–1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 31–41.

¹⁹ Harvey Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast during the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989).

²⁰ Larry Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch, 1744–1873* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

²¹ Per Hernæs (ed.), *Vestafrika: fortene på Guldkysten* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2017).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

memory, heritage, and history.²² This collection and the present one are two works that must be as seen as complementary to one another.

Forts and castles in the West African setting – Policy, actualisation, and jurisdiction

Considering their forts and castles to be indispensable to their global strategic and commercial infrastructure, various European governments embarked on fortification projects from the 15th century onwards. The erection, from the 1400s to the late 1800s, of scores of these installations on the Atlantic fringe of West Africa, and particularly on the portions of the littoral named ‘the Gold Coast’ and ‘the Slave Coast’, shows how important they were for inter-European competition as well as for establishing relationships with African states.

Policy

Though West Africa (Guinea) emerged as a leading site for direct Afro-European commercial intercourse in the early 15th century, its position as an incipient arena for the eastern Atlantic frontier was consolidated in the second half of the 16th century. Indeed, long before the American and Caribbean fronts of the Atlantic were established from 1492, the West African littoral from Senegambia to Angola was a site of vibrant commercial interchange between Africans and European merchants, the first encounters being between Africans and the Portuguese.²³ As John W. Blake, one of the leading historians of Portuguese enterprise in West Africa noted, “in the period 1480-1578, Guinea enjoyed a vigorous and separate life, and was by no means entirely dependent upon the transatlantic market.”²⁴ From the 1440s to the 1630s, the Portuguese built fortifications at vantage sites on the 3,200 kilometre (2,000 mile) long West African coast to secure their trading monopolies as well as to exclude competition both from rival European nations as well as from English and French interlopers. Their key fortifications

²² John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu and Victoria Ellen Smith (eds.), *Shadows of Empire: New Perspectives on European Fortifications in West Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²³ See John W. Blake, *European Beginnings in West Africa, 1454–1578* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937); and John K. Thornton, ‘The Portuguese in Africa’, in Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 138–160.

²⁴ Blake, *European Beginnings*, 6.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

included Fort Arguin (1445) on Arguin Island (Mauritius), São Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle) (1482) on the Gold Coast, and São Paulo de Luango (1575) on the coast of Angola.²⁵

Thus by the time the Dutch (1630s), the English (1640s),²⁶ the Scandinavian states (1650s), the French (1660s),²⁷ and the Brandenburg-Prussians (1680s) entered the West African trade, fortifications were already established as basic the infrastructure for their ‘settlements of strength’.²⁸ Importantly, the proliferation of fortification projects was not an ad hoc phenomenon. Rather, the construction of these structures was a direct result of European imperial policy that saw fortifications as being indispensable to overseas competition and expansion, that is, for consolidating overseas commercial and strategic interests. This policy was apparent in the respective royal charters issued to the Swedish South Company in 1626 and the Dutch West Indian Company in 1629.²⁹ A standard instruction in all charters issued in the 17th century was that the companies must, among other things (in the Swedish case), build ‘cities, castles, and forts’ and ‘make in our name alliances, treaties, and agreements’³⁰ and (in the Dutch case) ‘make contracts, engagements and alliances’ and ‘build any forts and fortifications for the promoting of trade’.³¹ In addition, there were public debates in some European capitals about whether the erection of fortifications was ‘advantageous or hurtful to the trade in general’ and whether the

²⁵ Viscount De Sa Da Bandeira, *Portuguese Western Africa, No. 2: Facts and Statements Concerning the Right of the Crown of Portugal to the Territories of Molembo, Cabinda, Ambriz, and other Places on the West Coast of Africa* (London: Herbert J. Fitch, 1877); Blake, *European Beginnings*, 16, 98–100; James M. Anderson, *The History of Portugal* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 57.

²⁶ George Frederick Zook, ‘Early Dutch and English Trade to West Africa’, *Journal of Negro History* 4 (1919): 136–142.

²⁷ French sources controversially credit merchants from Rouen and Dieppe for being the first Europeans to open trade with West Africa in 1382 and for building a fortified post on the site where the Portuguese a century later in 1482 were to erect the famous São Jorge da Mina on the Gold Coast. See Blake, *European Beginnings*, 3. A. W. Lawrence (*Trade Castles and Forts*, 126) describes this claim as ‘absurd’ and says that they are backed by ‘a wealth of fictitious detail’.

²⁸ Malachy Postlethwayt, “‘The National and Private Advantages of the African Trade Considered’” to Rt. Hon. Henry Pelham, Esq., First Lord Commissioner and Chancellor of the Exchequer’ (London, 1746), 20.

²⁹ See the ‘Charter of Privileges which Gustavus Adolphus Has Graciously Given by Letters Patent to the Newly Established Swedish South Company, June 14, 1626’. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/charter_014.asp. (‘The Swedish Charter’); and the ‘Charter of Privileges and Exemptions the Dutch West India Company. June 7, 1629’. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/westind.asp (‘The Dutch Charter’).

³⁰ ‘The Swedish Charter’.

³¹ ‘The Dutch Charter’.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

cost in monetary terms of building and maintaining them with public funds was justifiable.³² Generally, however, European officials were positive towards fortification projects in West Africa in the 18th century. The British Parliament, for instance, acknowledged that the ‘forts and castles were necessary for preserving, better carrying on, and improving the trade to Africa; and that it is necessary that they be maintained and enlarged upon the coast’. Between 1730 and 1760s, the British Parliament committed between £10,000 and £13,000 per annum to support their overseas system of fortifications and settlements.³³

Ultimately, the decision to allow the siting of fortifications in particular territories remained the preserve of African rulers. The projects had to be sanctioned by rulers of the respective littoral states, who, by either permission or invitation, allowed their preferred European states to build in their territories. In practice, then, the building of fortifications was the result of negotiations between representatives of chartered companies and African polities based on the calculated interest of both parties as expressed through mutual treaties. The following extract from a treaty signed between the ‘King of Great Acra’ and the ‘King of Denmark and the Danish Africa Company’ in 1661 is illustrative of this fact:

I, King of Great *Acra*, do hereby proclaim with this document ... that from this date on I do make settlement and once more, for the present and in perpetuity, have sold *Ozzou's* [Osu] lands and coasts for a sum of 50 *benda* in kind to ... HRM of Denmark and his Noble Chartered Danish Africa Company ... [to] build ... a fortress and stone house at *Ozzou*.³⁴

³² John Hippisley, *Essays. I. On the Populousness of Africa. II. On the Trade at the Forts on the Gold Coast. III. On the Necessity of Erecting a Fort at Cape Appolonia. Illustrated with a New Map of Africa, from Cape Blanco to the Kingdom of Angola* (London: T. Lownds, 1764), 19–22; Blake, *European Beginnings*, 105.

³³ Hippisley, *Essays*.

³⁴ Ole Justesen (ed.) and James Manley (trans.), *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657–1754*, Vol. 1: 1657–1735 (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2005), 12–13. Osei-Tutu and von Hesse (in Chapter 9 of this volume) discuss the treaty dated 18 August 1661. Other companies operating in various places in West Africa made similar treaties or agreements with local rulers. For the agreement between the Dutch and the King of Aquamboe (Akwamu) in 1704, see Albert van Dantzig (trans.), *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674–1742: A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at The Hague* (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1978), 97–99. The collection contains references in the General State Archive to other treaties with the kings of Whydah (WIC 98: 25/4/1703) and Adra (WIC 98: n.d.). For treaties between the Brandenburg African Company (incorporated in 1682) and Gold Coast rulers, see Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources for West African History, 1680–1700* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

The details of the two royal charters (i.e. the Swedish and the Dutch mentioned above) and the Acra-Denmark treaty show that the location of sovereignty in Afro-European relations in the African setting was not in doubt. Though the fortified European establishments were built on land acquired through direct purchase and in ‘perpetuity’, the European trading companies recognised that the success of their respective trading and fortification projects in West Africa were dependent on the good will of their African hosts. Indeed, no trading or fortification projects in West Africa could succeed during this period without the consent of African rulers who, based on considerations of their states’ economic, political, and strategic military interests, permitted their preferred European companies to build fortified trading establishments in their territories. It was because of this interplay of political realities that trading companies operating under the flag of various European states were able to gain permission to erect fortified trading stations on the entire eastern frontier of the Atlantic, from Ceuta to the Cape of Good Hope. In all cases, African potentates ensured the free flow of trade by keeping the trade roads open and protected.³⁵ Thus, for both the European owners and the West African hosts, forts and castles served mutual economic and strategic interests, and formed a basis for building alliances and diplomatic relationships. However, the building of relationships between Africans and Europeans could become tense in cases where several competing companies were located in close proximity to one another within the same state. In cases where one company acquired the possessions of a competitor through seizure or purchase or mutual exchange, the new owner had to negotiate a new relationship with the host African state.³⁶

The Portuguese, for instance, are reputed to have established 56 trading stations along the entire eastern front of the Atlantic arena from Morocco to Angola between 1415 and 1786.³⁷

³⁵ (Gold Coast) Governor, No XI: *Paper Relating to the Petition of the Delegation from the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti* (Accra: Government Printer, 1934), 26.

³⁶ The changing balance of power among dominant European imperial nations affected the constellation of forces among rival trading companies, leading often to the seizure or exchange of forts, castles, and territories in West Africa. For instance, when war broke out between Denmark and Sweden in 1657, Heinrich Carloff (a former high-ranking officer of the Dutch West India Company (also known as the ‘WIC’) and also a former director and governor of the Swedish Africa Company) was contracted by the Danish King Frederik III to ‘waylay the Swedish Guinea Gold Company in Africa ... and to occupy its forts in Guinea’. See Justesen and Manley, *Danish Sources*, 1–3.

³⁷ See Francisco Bethencourt, ‘Political Configurations and Local Powers’, in Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.), *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197–254, 234; and Colonial Voyage, ‘List of Portuguese Forts and Possessions in West Africa’. <http://www.colonialvoyage.com/west-africa-list-portuguese-colonial-forts-possession/#>.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

Overwhelmingly, these establishments were littoral, though a few were inland, located up navigable rivers [Fig. 1.1].

Insert Fig. 1.1

Figure 1.1 ‘Western Africa.’ The Illustrations by H. Winkles & Engraved by E. Radclyffe. The Map Drawn & Engraved by J. Rapkin’. Authors R. M. Martin, J. Tallis, and F. Tallis, New York, 1851. Reproduced by permission of the David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

Though lists of the European fortifications in West Africa compiled by various researchers are incomplete, they nevertheless provide a good overview of the extent of the scramble for fortifications. Lawrence lists a chain of 43 surviving forts and castles on the littoral from Arguin to Whydah (Ouidah).³⁸ Albert van Dantzig also lists 50 structures from Assini (in Ivory Coast) to Keta (in Ghana).³⁹ Writing in 1690s, Erick Tilleman noted that ‘Most of the more than 60 establishments of various sizes that were built on the Gold Coast in the course of the 300 years were in existence by the beginning of the eighteenth century.’⁴⁰ However, it is noteworthy that there were no significant European fortifications on the 1,120 kilometre (700 mile) stretch of coast from Sherbro (in Sierra Leone) to Assinie (in Ivory Coast) due, apparently, to the sparseness of the local population and the absence of profitable trade.⁴¹

Significantly, the Gold Coast littoral, which was the site of the most intense inter-European commercial rivalry from 1482 to the 1870s, hosted the largest concentration of European overseas fortifications anywhere in the world, with many of them in close proximity to one another.⁴² Lawrence notes: ‘On the 300 mile [500 kilometre] coastline’ of the Gold Coast,

³⁸ Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 14–15.

³⁹ Postlethwayt (‘The National and Private Advantages’, 57–69) gives an overview the ‘number and situation’ of forts and settlements in West Africa in the 1740s. See also Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles*, viii–xii; Isaac S. Ephson, *Ancient Forts and Castles of the Gold Coast (Ghana)* (Accra: Ghana Institute of Art and Culture, 1971), 83–90; and the Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), SC 24.

⁴⁰ Erick Tilleman, *En kort og enfoldig beretning om det landskab Guinea og dets beskaffenhed* (Copenhagen, 1697), *A Short and Simple Account of the Country Guinea and its Nature*, trans. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1994), 2.

⁴¹ Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 41; David Hilling, ‘The Evolution of the Major Ports of West Africa’, *The Geographical Journal* 135 (1969): 365–378, 366.

⁴² The distance between them range from 300 feet (500 meters) to 9 miles (15 kilometres).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

‘roughly a hundred trading-posts (lodges and posts, forts and castles) existed at one time or another, and most of them contemporaneously’.⁴³

The Portuguese erected four between 1482 and 1623, the most prominent being São Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle). The Dutch erected or acquired 12 from 1624 to 1687, and, after expelling the Portuguese from the Gold Coast in 1637, they moved their headquarters from Fort Nassau to São Jorge da Mina. The English had 14 forts from 1631 to 1897, with Cape Coast Castle as their headquarters. In 1897, the British built three inland forts as strategic military bases to expand and consolidate their colonial control. The Kumasi Fort was built for the consolidation of the British position in Asante⁴⁴ and the fort at Wa was to establish control of the surrounding area as well as to check French expansion southwards from their bases in Senegal and the Upper and Middle Niger regions.⁴⁵ The Cantonments Fort (1897) in Accra was a military barracks. The three forts (Kumasi, Wa, Cantonments) were some of the last ‘strong houses’ to be erected by a European power in West Africa. The Swedish presence on the Gold Coast was short-lived, lasting from 1640 to 1657. The two forts that they erected were taken over by the Danes, who supplanted them and later built four more forts between 1658 and 1787 to consolidate their position on the Gold Coast. They managed their West African activities from Christiansborg Castle at Osu (east of Accra). Brandenburg-Prussia founded three strongholds between 1682 and 1694, choosing Gross-Friedrichsborg as its headquarters.⁴⁶ All the state-associated companies kept several smaller forts and lodges as supply posts.

⁴³ Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 42.

⁴⁴ The Kumasi Fort is located in Uaddara Barracks in Kumasi in the Asante capital. According to GMMB sources, the British fort in Kumasi was built on the site of the former fort built in 1820 by the Asantehene Osei Tutu Kwamina, who sought to replicate the coastal European forts in his kingdom. The British forces destroyed this fort during the Anglo-Asante Wars in 1874. See <http://www.ghanamuseums.org/kumasi-fort-military-museum.php> (accessed 29 June 2015).

⁴⁵ The British Fort at Wa was constructed under the terms of a defensive treaty between the British and the *Wa Na* (ruler of Wa State) in January 1897. Ivor Wilks, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7–8; Benjamin W. Kankpeyeng and Christopher R. DeCorse, ‘Ghana’s Vanishing Past: Development, Antiquities, and the Destruction of the Archaeological Record’, *African Archaeological Review* 21 (2004): 89–128; Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 27–28, 102.

⁴⁶ This data concerning the numbers and dates listed concern original ownership and is compiled from a variety of sources: Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations which Have Been Hitherto Published in any Language, Comprehending Everything Remarkable in its Kind in Europe, Asia, Africa and America* (1745–1747) (London: F. Cass, 1976), 573; The British National Archives (London), Work 14/3125, B. H. St. J. O’Neill, ‘Report upon the Historical Growth, Archaeological Importance, the

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32))

Currently, some of these structures have succumbed to the vagaries of the tropical climate and have vanished without a trace, while still others have become ruins. The forts and castles that were constructed with durable imported and local building materials (bricks and hard wood) have largely survived, though many of them are in various stages of decay due to their being neglected by the local authorities. In sum, in Ghana for example, about half of the 60 or so structures are completely untraceable, 6 are visible ruins, and 28 are currently in use.

Actualisation: Phases and motives for erecting of forts and castles

Overwhelmingly, the forts and castles built by various European states in West Africa are tagged as ‘slave forts’, suggesting, and largely rightly so, that the fortifications were built primarily to facilitate the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, from a historical perspective, it is important to appreciate, first, the different motives for the erection of fortifications at different periods and, second, to assess their impacts locally and regionally, and eventually globally. In this respect, some historical facts need to be established. The first is that European trading companies erected forts and castles in West Africa primarily for utilitarian rather than aesthetic reasons. The second, following from the first, is that structurally and spatially they were designed to suit the specific commercial and geo-political purposes of each period. And the third is that, though there was a proliferation of fortifications during the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it is important to keep in mind that some forts and castles preceded the trade and that others were post-abolition and colonial.

Following this historical sequence, we should identify three periods of fortification building in West Africa. We may further distinguish three categories of fortresses according to period and purpose of erection as ‘general/gold trade forts’, ‘slave trade forts’, and ‘conquest forts’. The first period covers the 15th to 16th centuries when the Portuguese erected forts primarily to secure their monopoly over the gold trade against other European interlopers.⁴⁷ Of

General Condition and the Present Use of the Castles and Forts on the Gold Coast with a View to their Better Preservation as Ancient and Historic Monuments’, 22 November 1947; *Atlas of the Gold Coast* (Accra, 1949), 20; PRAAD, Adm. 5/4/310, *Historic Christiansborg: A Brief Account of the History and Construction of the Christiansborg Castle* (Accra: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961); PRAAD, Adm. 11/1614, Ag. S. N. A, H. S. Newlands, ‘Christiansborg Castle’ (Accra, 1928); Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*; PRAAD, SC. 24; Ephson, *Ancient Forts and Castles*, 1970; J. D. Fage et al., ‘A New Checklist of the Forts and Castles of Ghana’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 4 (1959): 57–68; Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles*; ‘List of Castles in Africa’. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_castles_in_Africa.

⁴⁷ See Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, 7–24; and Robin Law’s article in this anthology (Chapter 6).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

course, during this period slave trading also took place. For instance, the commodities of the direct trade between Portugal and West Africa in the 1440s included slaves.⁴⁸ In addition, during an expedition to West Africa in 1554, William Hawkins, the father of the famous 16th-century English slaver John Hawkins purchased slaves and a substantial amount of gold and ivory.⁴⁹ The second period coincided with the peak period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. During this period, trading companies modified existing forts, equipped them with slave-holding dungeons or prisons, and built new ones purposely designed for the promotion of slave trading. On the Gold Coast, for example, 26 such ‘slave forts’ were erected in the 17th century and 10 were erected in the 18th century. Two developments characterised the third period of fortification building from the mid-19 century onwards. The first is that the position of fortifications as tools of commerce declined because of the abolition of the slave trade in the 1800s. The second is that their political significance, as tools for colonial conquest, increased. On the Gold Coast, for instance, the British became the dominant power when they acquired the Danish (1850) and the Dutch (1872) territories, which paved the way for the establishment of the British Gold Coast. Meanwhile, to complete the Gold Coast colonial project they established three inland forts in 1897 – the Cantonments (Accra), the Kumasi Fort, and the Wa Fort (in the Northern Territories).

Throughout these three periods, the forts and castles operated as centres for the day-to-day administration of the establishments, for the holding of palavers or negotiations, for the promotion of commercial exchange, and for the storage of trade goods. Both colonial and independent governments in West Africa put the forts and castles to different uses as centres for state government and as centres for local government administration, as prisons, and as rest houses. What makes them relevant today is their status as heritage sites where memories of the encounters and the trans-Atlantic slave trade are disseminated through museum exhibitions, guided tours, and re-enactments through diaspora and commemorative and ‘home-coming’ events like the Pan-African Festival (PANAFEST).

Tenuous ‘possessions’: African sovereignty and European jurisdiction

⁴⁸ Peter O. Koch, *To the Ends of the Earth: The Age of the European Explorers* (Jefferson, MI: McFarland, 2003), 65–66.

⁴⁹ Zook, ‘Early Dutch and English Trade’, 138; Blake, *European Beginnings*, 79–88.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32))

Generally, the competing European companies envisaged their respective forts and castles as ‘strong houses’ for protecting their settlements and economic interests in West Africa. Strategically, they were defensive bulwarks against both rival European traders as well as African enemies.⁵⁰ Functional considerations determined their design, spatial organisation, and equipment. As military installations, they were equipped with cannons and soldiers to protect the European traders inside the forts, as well as those outside but within the range of the mounted guns, and to provide storage for slaves and other trade goods [Figure 1.2].

INSERT: Fig. 1.2 Guns of Cape Coast Castle. Photo by John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu (2016).

In the context of European great power competition overseas, this military function had strategic as well as veiled territorial (sovereignty and power) implications. From the European perspective, they were strategic installations that were ‘necessary to be kept up as marks of possession’, for claiming ‘exclusive rights’, and for making ‘settlements of consequence’.⁵¹ Thus, European companies that had forts dominated the trade within specific economic spheres and eliminated the competition by confiscating the ships and merchandise of rivals and interlopers.⁵² Traders and ships of other European states were only allowed to trade ‘upon payment of dues or merely for the convenience of the occupant’.⁵³ Yet such attempts to enforce monopolies were largely ineffective, as African traders could divert trade to areas where they could maximise their profits, notwithstanding treaties of exclusivity. In places like Ouidah and Accra, the Dahomian and Gã rulers respectively indicated a preference for a free trade system at their ports by permitting three European companies in each case to establish forts as well as by allowing individual merchants to operate freely in their territories.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ The primary military function is stressed in St. J. O’Neill, ‘Report upon the Historical Growth’, 1947; Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 40; Postlethwayt, ‘The National and Private Advantages’, 22; Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, 115–135; and Klingelhofer, *First Forts*, 1.

⁵¹ Hippisley, *Essays*, 1, 19, 49–52; Postlethwayt, ‘The National and Private Advantages’, 20.

⁵² Postlethwayt, ‘The National and Private Advantages’, 20–21; Klingelhofer, *First Forts*, 1.

⁵³ Lawrence, *Trade Forts and Castles*, 40.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, *Trade Forts and Castles*, 40. See also Law, *Ouidah*, 123; and his article in this anthology (Chapter 6).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

The idea of forts and castles as marks of ‘possession’ was implicit in the royal charters. The charters defined the nature of defences to be made. In addition, they strongly recommended the building of relationships with local polities as well as the establishment of civil administrations to regulate and extend the influence of European governments. The instructions to the Dutch West India Company, for instance, are illustrative of this point. The company was ‘to appoint and discharge Governors, people for war, and officers of justice, and other public officers, for the preservation of the places, keeping good order, police and justice, and in like manner for the promoting of trade; and again, others in their place to put, as they from the situation of their affairs shall see fit’.⁵⁵ However, European governments were not overly presumptuous about the extension of their authority in West Africa. As the instructions to the Swedish South Company show, the company was ‘not [to] commit or begin any hostilities with the people and inhabitants of the aforesaid countries nor ... trade at any place within the said King’s jurisdiction unless his subjects are inclined to allow and grant it’.⁵⁶

Legally, the policy of European ‘possession’ was tenuous, as it was difficult to achieve in practice. As the Portuguese experience in several places in West Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries showed, the ‘blacks here are of a temper not to suffer anything to be imposed on them by Europeans; which if they should but attempt, it would certainly prove their own ruin’.⁵⁷ João de Barros, the Portuguese historian and Factor (Agent) of Elmina, described the astuteness with which King Kwamina Ansa [Caramança] in the early 1480s carried out negotiations with the Portuguese emissary Diego de Azambuja, who sought to build a fort at Elmina. The King, Barros noted, interrupted Azambuja’s long speech, noting that ‘he would be pleased to permit him to build the house as he wished, warning him that peace and truth must be kept’, otherwise his people would abandon them.⁵⁸ Thus, the use of forts and castles to mark possessions must be understood as a mechanism of inter-European commercial competition as manifested in the

⁵⁵ ‘The Dutch Charter’.

⁵⁶ ‘The Swedish Charter’.

⁵⁷ John Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. V: *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea* (London: Awnsham and J. Churchill, 1732), 181. A similar sentiment is expressed in Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (London, 1705), 69.

⁵⁸ João de Barros, *Asia*, 1552. Translated and edited by G. R. Crome, Hakluyt Society, No. 86, 2nd series, 1937; and Ruy de Pina, *Chronicle of John II*. [ca. 1500]. Translated and edited by J. W. Blake, Hakluyt Society, No. 86, 2nd series, 1941: both cited in Freda Wolfson, *Pageant of Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 37–44.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

forging of alliances and signing of treaties of ‘friendship and good understanding’ as bases for promoting mutual strategic interests of Africans and Europeans.⁵⁹ However, the question of who the sovereign powers in West Africa were was not in doubt.⁶⁰

For African rulers, strategic military, economic, and political considerations were important motives for allowing Europeans to establish fortified settlements in their territories. In the volatile period that saw wars of expansion waged by imperial slave-raiding states in West Africa, weaker coastal polities sought for or accepted overtures from particular Europeans for a mutual security alliance. Generally, permission was given only for the building of ‘small trading lodges that had rooms to accommodate a few men, and storage rooms to hold small quantities of goods’.⁶¹ As John Barbot noted about the situation on the Gold Coast, it was only after much ‘caressing’ and ‘insinuation to the king and his counsel that the forts with their cannons would provide better protection for them and their families’ that they allowed some of their houses to be converted to forts and castles.⁶² The security imperative appears to have become even more pressing at the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 17th to 18th centuries, when the majority of the forts and castles were built.

When they felt threatened or intimidated by aggressive European companies and their local allies, some African rulers initiated strategic alliances with other European companies, inviting them to erect forts in their territories. Such a situation occurred on the Gold Coast in the 1750s and 1760s, when the *caboceer* (king) of Cape Appolonia invited the English ‘to build a fort at his landing-place’ as a deterrent against the Dutch and their local allies.⁶³ Under such alliance-by-invitation situations, the vulnerable African polity gained a friendly European power’s protection, while the company of that power gained control of the trade in the polity’s territory.

Some African rulers were, in addition, motivated by ‘the power of money’ or by personal economic gain. For commercially minded rulers and merchants, trade with Europeans provided an immediate opportunity to increase their personal wealth as well as enhance their power and

⁵⁹ Hippisley, *Essays*, 1.

⁶⁰ Robin Law, “‘Here Is No Resisting the Country’: The Realities of Power in Afro-European Relations on the West African ‘Slave Coast’”, *Itinerario* 18 (1994): 50–64.

⁶¹ Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 199.

⁶² Barbot cited in Wolfson, *Pageant of Ghana*, 70–71.

⁶³ Hippisley, *Essays*, 39–42.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

influence within their states and within their regions. Thus, the hosting of trade fortifications provided an opportunity for them to control the flow of commerce in and out of their respective territories as well as for playing the role of intermediary in regional trade. In addition, European companies regularly revitalised relationships by offering ‘gifts’ in cash and kind to their hosts for favours in return. As Barbot observed in the second half of the 17th century, the Dutch and the Danes had to persuade the King of Accra with ‘considerable presents’ to grant their wish of building ‘a storehouse, to settle a factor in, under the obligation of seven Marks of Gold yearly, for each house’.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in some cases African rulers were able to generate additional income by granting land to merchant companies by a ‘note’ system involving annual rent payments.⁶⁵

However, apart from the relatively better-defended castles such as Elmina that served as trading company headquarters,⁶⁶ many of the smaller forts or out-forts, particularly those on the Gold Coast and Slave Coast, were militarily weak and unable to defend the Europeans, let alone the Africans living in the adjacent towns. Many of the small forts could sustain attacks by small bands of rioters, but would not be to hold out against an organised and sustained assault.⁶⁷ As some articles in this collection explain, the presence of two forts and one major castle on the Accra littoral could not always deter the coastward expansion wars of the imperial Akan states on the Gold Coast in the 17th century. The scantily garrisoned fortresses were vulnerable as illustrated by the example of the Dutch expulsion of the Portuguese from much of West Africa in the early 17th century. Indeed, the effectiveness of the military imperative (particularly in inter-European skirmishes) depended upon the combined forces of the fort’s garrison and the

⁶⁴ Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts*, 181.

⁶⁵ For a thorough treatment of the ‘note’ system (*Kostgeld* and the ‘Elmina note’) and its implications for Akyem and Asante claims of sovereignty in some littoral states, see Chapter 3 in Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch*, which is entitled ‘The Asantehene’s *Kostgeld*: Tribute, Rent, and Political Myth, 1744–1872’; and his article in this anthology (Chapter 4). The ‘Elmina question’, which addresses the Asantehene’s irritation with British attempts to divest Asante of its claims of sovereignty on the coast is also touched on briefly in Joseph K. Adjaye, *Diplomacy and Diplomats in the 19th Century Asante* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 184.

⁶⁶ See Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, 115–135.

⁶⁷ Lawrence, *Trade Forts and Castles*, 199.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

proximate naval detail.⁶⁸ During attacks from the landside, the support of allied and friendly African polities was crucial for victory.

Moreover, though architecturally humungous compared to the vernacular architectures among which they were situated, the forts and castles of West Africa did not project any real power locally and regionally until the late 19th century. However, the influence of the European administrations in the forts increased gradually on the affairs of local communities as the former intervened in local disputes and held palavers.⁶⁹ Apparently, the depth of the influence depended on the work force, function, and military capability of the installation. For instance, Feinberg notes that ‘the presence of about 100 Europeans and a powerful military structure inevitably meant that the inhabitants of the fort exercised influence in the Elmina community’⁷⁰. It was not until the resolution of the inter-European imperial struggle from the 1850s onwards that forts like Cape Coast Castle and Christiansborg Castle (from 1877) emerged as infrastructures of power within the British colonial empire. Cape Coast Castle, which was the headquarters of the British slaving endeavour, was the powerhouse of the British colonial administration on the Gold Coast until 1877, when the British transferred the colonial establishment to Accra and Christiansborg Castle. Until the official inauguration of the Flagstaff House on 7 February 2013 as the new location of the Presidency in Ghana, Christiansborg Castle was at various times used as the residence of the head of state or as the seat of the Government of Ghana.⁷¹ Currently, Osu Castle or ‘The Castle’ (as Ghanaians call it), is an annex of the Presidency. Similarly, the Portuguese colony in Angola was until 1975 administered from Fortaleza de São Miguel or Saint Michael Fortress, which was built in 1576.

The ‘middle ground’:⁷² Forts, castles, and society

⁶⁸ Viola F. Barnes, ‘Review of *European Beginnings in West Africa*, John Blake’, *Journal of Modern History* 11 (1939), 66–67.

⁶⁹ See René Baesjou, ‘Dutch “Irregular” Jurisdiction on the Nineteenth Century Gold Coast’, *African Perspectives* 2 (1979): 21–66.

⁷⁰ Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans*, 115–135.

⁷¹ Christiansborg Castle has since 1876 been used variously as the administrative centre and residence of British colonial governors, as a constabulary mess, as a psychiatric asylum (1890 to 1901), and once again as the seat of government from 1902 onwards. See <http://www.ghanamuseums.org/forts/fort-christianburg.php>.

⁷² Credit: Larry Yarak (Chapter 4 in this anthology).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32))

This collection consists of an introductory essay and nine empirically grounded articles that variously use selected forts and castles as starting points to describe and analyse the nature, dynamics, and dialectics of social and spatial change locally and regionally in West Africa from the 15th to mid-20th century. They draw on records of the European trading companies, published travel accounts, colonial government records, and, in a few cases, material collected through fieldwork. Chronologically, the collection spans the period from the 15th to the middle of the 20th century, though individual studies focus on different periods within this time span. Geographically, with the exception of Robin Law's focus on Fort William (Ouidah) on the Slave Coast (so-called during the slave-trade period), the contributors focus on the major forts on the Gold Coast, particularly São Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle), Christiansborg Castle, Fort Crevecoeur, and Fort James (Accra). One explanation for this limited focus is, as mentioned above, that the Gold and Slave coasts hosted and still have remnants of the largest concentration of European overseas fortifications anywhere in the world, with most of them in close proximity to another.⁷³ Another explanation is that the forts on the two coasts are infamous for their uses during the slave trade as last holding places and exit points ('Door of no Return') and, after abolition, as administrative centres and power bastions for both the colonial (Gold Coast) and post-colonial (Ghana) governments. Still another explanation is that we may consider the influence of these fortification systems as representative of larger processes and interactions.

Scholarly works on social change in West Africa generally emphasise the role of humans as the sole agents of change, while they either ignore the presence of forts and castles or at best see their presence as being ancillary.⁷⁴ This neglect derives from the view of the forts and castles as objects that competing European states used to pursue their economic and expansionist goals. Indeed, militarily, they were strategic defensive structures that were used by trading companies for the protection of their employees and various trade goods. Politically, they were the administrative centres from which the trading companies could manage their daily affairs, as well as bases from which European states could establish alliances with African states and peoples. To

⁷³ The distance between them range from 300 feet (500 metres) to 9 miles (15 kilometres).

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Law, *Ouidah*; Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); and DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina, 175–192*, 'The Danes on the Gold Coast: Culture Change and the European Presence', *African Archaeological Review* 11 (1993): 149–173, 'Culture Contact, Continuity, and Change', 163–196. See also Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *Social Change: The Colonial Situation* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

perform these functions, the spaces within their encircling walls were organised into administrative and residential quarters, churches, schools, libraries, palaver (meeting) rooms, infirmaries, stores, and even burial grounds. Beneath these visible ‘civilised’ spaces were darker spaces: dungeons where, during the slave-trade period, slavers kept captured Africans and prepared them for shipment to the New World.⁷⁵

Undoubtedly, ‘human agency’ and ‘social processes’ are important explanatory factors when discussing social change resulting from Afro-European encounters in West Africa during the period from the 15th to the 20th century. However, it is useful, theoretically and methodologically, when explaining relationships and transformations (i.e. processes) to acknowledge *also* the influences that the sheer *presence* or *location* of the buildings at selected sites had on the nature, dynamics, and dialectics of particular socio-spatial outcomes locally and regionally. This approach elucidates the central idea that the forts and castles played a dual role as centres of formal commercial exchange and as dynamic social locations where connections and networks between and among various people (Africans and Europeans) produced new economic classes, political relationships, socio-cultural identities and cosmopolitan outlooks along with associated antagonisms and conflicts. The spatial dimension of these interactions was made manifest through migration, changes in settlement patterns, urbanisation, and the inversion of the economic and political balance between the littoral and the hinterland.

Discussing the relations between Elmina indigenes and Dutch officials at Elmina Castle between the 1830s and the 1870s – a period of general peace – Larry Yarak’s article (Chapter 4) aptly applies Richard White’s notion of the ‘middle ground’, how this flux played out through a process of ‘creative, often expedient misunderstandings’ to produce ‘new meanings and through them new practices’ on the Gold Coast. His admonition is that, instead of seeing ineluctability in all Afro-European engagements in West Africa, historians (particularly of African colonialism) should try to bring out the distinctive character of the engagement at each site and in each period.

How relevant is this conceptual frame for the Elmina situation for the other articles in the present collection? The answer to this question lies in what significance we give to the presence of the fortification *in*, if not *as*, the ‘middle ground’. In Yarak’s case, whereas the town of Elmina

⁷⁵ To appreciate these contrasts, see the photographs from Elmina taken by Dirk Teeuwen in ‘Gold Coast’s Elmina Castle, a Dutch-Ghanaian Monument’, (2009): <http://www.indonesia-dutchcolonialheritage.nl/historicalsites-southafrica/ghanaheritage/Elmina,%20Dutch%20heritage.pdf>.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

provided a general geographical framework, the key interactions and negotiations that gave rise to 'new meanings' that led to 'new practices' were centered on Elmina Castle. In other words, Elmina Castle was the central point in the middle ground, if not the middle ground itself. Similarly, each contribution in this anthology is a distinct case study that elucidates an aspect of the evolving nature of the relations between the European residents and Africans (states and communities) at specific fortified sites, where various people negotiated differing interests under different conditions and with different outcomes. In this sense, fortifications must be seen as central arenas where all sorts of interactions and negotiations proceeded under conditions of 'creative, often expedient misunderstandings'. Implicitly, the contributors to this anthology present cases that illustrate similar flux at various locations, to wit, Whydah (Ouidah), Osu, Accra, Cape Coast, Elmina, and Whitehall.

Conceptualising impacts: Presence, intensity, and extensity

Clearly, the 'middle ground' was a space where interaction between different actors in the Afro-European encounter yielded varied social, cultural, economic, and political results within the West African milieu. It remains, however, to address the position of the forts and castles in the middle ground and their impacts locally, regionally, and globally. It is useful, theoretically and methodologically, when assessing their impact to acknowledge *also* the influences that the sheer *presence* or *location* of the buildings at selected places had on the nature, dynamics, and dialectics of socio-spatial change locally and regionally. This approach makes it possible to recognise both the buildings and the human actors whose purposes they served as factors of change.

In assessing the impacts of the presence of the buildings, it is necessary to look at the positions and the roles they played beyond their traditional utility. First, they emerged as anchors for permanent European trading settlements and thereby formed bases for establishing stable and enduring relationships locally between African host societies and European companies and states. Second, each of them became nodal points within regional and global economic, socio-cultural, and political networks. Important in this respect are how the activities performed in the forts affected the regional balance of power, facilitated linkages between other parts of European overseas empires, and led to the making of the Atlantic world. Third, their position as social milieus was important. For, where they existed, the forts and castles were locations within the

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

‘middle ground’ where individuals, communities, and even states negotiated their particular as well as collective interests. Their position as social milieus can be seen on two levels. On the first level, their walls enclosed spaces in which company ‘civil servants’ (see Winsnes’ article in this anthology, Chapter 3) lived, worked, often died, and, in a few cases, were buried⁷⁶ [Figure 1.3].

INSERT Fig. 1.3 Graves and guns of Cape Coast Castle. © John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu (2016).

Another group of mostly African employees of the forts were the so-called ‘fort slaves’ and fort soldiers. It was apparent that the physically impregnable walls of the buildings were nevertheless socially and culturally porous, allowing uninhibited mingling between European fort residents and Africans of the nearby communities. The interaction more often became intimate, with some European residents taking and having offspring with African concubines and, as the case of Wulff shows, adopting African funerary practices like intramural interment in their homes.⁷⁷ The second level, then, was manifested in the way the European communities within and outside of the walls of the fortifications were entangled within the larger West African environment.

Thus, by emphasising both the *utility* and the *presence* of the forts and castles, we are able to form a broader view of their relative impacts on society and environment. However, keeping in mind the selective location of forts and castles at strategic locations on the coast, the focus on *presence* is not enough to explain the profundity of the transformations that took place in West Africa. Besides, given that no European forts and castles were located in the interior until the close of the 19th century, how do we justify the claim that their coastal presence had some transformational impacts in the interior or forest regions?

⁷⁶ Generally, the companies interred their European employees that died on duty in West Africa in so-called ‘European cemeteries’ located outside the walls, but some top-level administrators were buried on the inside within the compound. See Selena Axelrod Winsnes, *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulff Joseph Wulff, Biography and Letters 1836–1842* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004); St. Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium*; and Alan H. Winquist, *Scandinavians and South Africa: Their Impact on Cultural, Social and Economic Development of Pre-1902 South Africa* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1978).

⁷⁷ The story of Wulff Joseph Wulff illustrates this point. See Winsnes, *A Danish Jew in West Africa*. See also her article in this anthology (Chapter 3).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32))

Two notions, *intensity* and *extensity*,⁷⁸ may be applied when explaining the profundity of the impacts that the forts and castles had on society in West Africa. The proposition is that the spatial and social transformations resulting from Afro-European interactions were mostly around the main forts and castles (that were used actively as headquarters of the respective companies), that they were less profound around the outer (or supply) forts, and that they were least intense where there were no forts. These differences of impact, apparently, could best be unravelled through a comparative approach. This collection, however, consists of case studies that give detailed accounts of the nature of the impacts in specific locations. In this way, they provide a basis for future comparative research.

Intensity of impact refers to the profoundness of socio-spatial change at fortified sites as made manifest through increased immigration, gradual urbanisation, cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridisms, and identity-making. As some of the contributions illustrate, the littoral communities where Europeans were granted permission to build forts and castles in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries were originally sparsely populated maritime fishing villages. During this initial period, economic and political activities were largely concentrated in the hinterland. Over time, however, some littoral places assumed economic and political ascendancy due to the presence of trade forts around and in which bustling commercial and social interactions occurred. For instance, with respect to the Gã state of the Gold Coast, the littoral fishing villages that hosted forts and castles experienced rapid urbanisation and assumed a cosmopolitan character due to the incremental influx of immigrants from the 15th century onwards. The Europeans were mainly agents of the trading companies (see Winsnes' article in this anthology, Chapter 3) as well as privateers seeking personal fortunes. Another group of immigrants from the West African region included traders engaged in the local and regional trade, indentured artisans and labourers recruited to build the fortifications or to serve in other capacities, soldiers recruited to garrison the forts, and slaves. During periods of inter-imperial wars for dominance of the coastal trade, imperial states like Dahomey, Akwamu, and Asante had many internal refugees, many of whom fled to the coast and settled under the gun-mounted ramparts of the forts, which themselves were vulnerable to

⁷⁸ The notions of 'intensity' and 'extensity' are adapted from Catia Antunes' analytical framework of the spatial-temporal dimensions for measuring global change from a historical perspective. See 'Globalization in History and the History of Globalization: The Application of a Globalization Model to Historical Research', in George Modelski, Tessaleno Deveras, and William R. Thompson (eds.), *Globalization as Evolutionary Process: Modelling Global Change* (London: Routledge, 2008), 242–266.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

attack. As some of the articles in this anthology show, the use of forts and castles as identity markers among African communities was characteristic of places such as Ouidah and Accra that had a multiplicity of European forts and presences. The role of forts and castles in identity politics became more prominent during the colonial period, particularly on the Gold Coast.⁷⁹

Extensivity of impact refers to the coverage area of the impact locally along the littoral and regionally beyond the coastal perimeter. This notion is applicable to the question of how the presence of the buildings affected the relative balance of power between coastal societies, on the one hand, and between coastal societies and interior states, on the other. *Extensivity* of impact is clear with respect to the redirection of major trade routes from the Sahara to the Atlantic coast from the inception of Afro-European contact in the 15th century. Another example of the extensivity of impact is the development of parallel competition among African imperial states of the interior (particularly Akwamu, Akyem, and Asante on the Gold Coast, and Dahomey on the Slave Coast) for access to and direct control of the coastal trade in firearms and slaves. As some articles in the present collection show, these parallel imperial struggles affected the military balance of power in the interior, but they were also played out in bouts of expansive, territorial, wars that led to the conquest of the littoral states that had controlled the trade up to the late 17th century. The impact of the fortress-based slave trade on the coast also had ramifications in savannah, mostly acephalous, societies that slavers raided. The changes in these societies were made manifest in the ways in which they adapted socio-political structures, religious practices, as well as defensive systems to defeat or ward off slave raiders. Another dimension of extensivity relates to the entanglement of the strategic and commercial interests of the African polities and that of the European states as expressed in royal charters issued by European monarchs and the treaties signed between African rulers and agents of the chartered companies.

Importantly, as some of the cases in this anthology show, the intensity and extensivity of impacts were not mutually exclusive, but rather formed a continuum. This continuum is apparent in several of the contributions. For instance, Van Kessel's article (Chapter 5) interrogates the political and cultural linkages between Java Hill at Elmina in West Africa and Java in the East Indies, two important sites in the Dutch worldwide empire. Particularly, she challenges narratives

⁷⁹ See Osei-Tutu and Von Hesse in this anthology (Chapter 9). See also Law, *Ouidah*, 37–38.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

that present African veterans (Java Hill fort community)⁸⁰ of the Dutch East Indies Army as cultural brokers,⁸¹ crediting them for the popularisation of Asian batiks (wax-print textiles) in West Africa. As well, the contribution of Osei-Tutu and Von Hesse (Chapter 9) shows this continuum in the context of changes in the regional balance of power as powerful forest states supplanted one another militarily in their efforts to gain control of the coastal fort-based trade. The final contribution (Chapter 10), by Jon Olav Hove, discusses the colonial history of the forts and the castles, arguing that they were important physical and symbolic infrastructure for building and consolidating the British colonial state administration on the Gold Coast in the second half of the 19th century, and that they continued to be salient in the politics of Ghana from 1957 onwards.

One last point needs to be made concerning the present anthology's organisation. The chronological span of the anthology from the mid-15th to the mid-20th century means that no separate chapter in the book is dedicated to analyses of the post-1960s positions and utilities of the inherited forts. How have the governments of African countries used and preserved these inherited historical colonial buildings? What paradoxes do UNESCO's adoptions of the fortresses as heritage sites entail in terms of both their histories and their symbolism? The castles are now an industry replete with carefully crafted narratives to attract and hold foreign tourists. Thus, what should we make of the apparent tension between their 'commercialisation' as foci of the tourist industries of African countries today, on the one hand, and the African Americans' claim to these buildings as pilgrimage sites, on the other? What do ordinary Africans make of

⁸⁰ The expression 'fort communities' describes communities that developed around the immediate environs of fortifications. See Per Hernæs, 'European Fort Communities on the Gold Coast in the Era of the Slave Trade', in John Everaert and Jan Parmentier (eds.), *Shipping, Factories and Colonization* (Brussels: Wetenschappelijk Comité voor Maritieme Geschiedenis, Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1996), 167–180.

⁸¹ The Dutch officials at Elmina, through an agreement with the Asantehene, recruited about 2,100 between 1830 and 1841, and 800 more between 1861 and 1872 from the Dutch sphere of the Gold Coast as well as from the interior. See also Larry Yarak, 'New Sources for the Study of Akan Slavery and Slave Trade: Dutch Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast and Asante, 1831–72', in Robin Law (ed.), *Source Material for Studying the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora* (University of Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, 1997), 35–60; and Yarak's article in this anthology (Chapter 4).

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32)

these sites today? Other works – academic and popular –elaborate on these questions and themes.⁸²

Conclusion

The scientific relevance of the anthology lies in the fact that it offers an alternative way of understanding the utility and impact of the fortresses beyond their general reputation as ‘slave forts’. It brings together multiple studies on and approaches to the history of the forts and castles of West Africa with a focus on those in Ghana and Benin. As noted in the Preface, beyond the recommended geographical focus on the fortresses in West Africa, the Trondheim conference did not impose any specific theoretical or methodological approaches on the contributors. Rather, individual authors were encouraged to bring their own expertise as well as theoretical-methodological angles to the exploration of themes relating to the underlying idea of the book. This methodological freedom explains why the conceptual and theoretical approaches outlined in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 are not explicitly followed up in the other chapters, though they are implicit in them.

Indeed, seeing the fortresses as the main *culprits* in the dastardly slave trade tends to shift the focus – scholarly and popular – away from the *real human culprits*, who, for their national and personal profits, devised and equipped the buildings with various contrivances to facilitate the capture and enslavement of African victims of the trade. In other words, the remnants of the fortresses must continue to remind us of the horrors of the slave trade, but their *presence* within the West African milieu must also stimulate research on the impact they had on society and environment at their respective locations. This approach has led to diversity in the understandings of the fortresses that characterise the chapters of this anthology. I hope that the approach used in this book offers a platform for further debate about the forts in their spatial historical context, their relationships with the slave trade and other activities, the connections between the Europeans and local polities through the presence of the forts, and the forts as heritage objects on different levels.

⁸² On attitudes of ordinary Africans to the fortresses, see Osei-Tutu and Smith, *Shadows of Empire* (particularly Osei-Tutu and Ebenezer Ayesu, ‘President Barack Obama in Ghana and the Cape Coast Castle: Diplomacy, Meanings and Appropriation of the “Gate of No Return”’); and Salaam, ‘The Forts and Castles of Ghana’.

Osei-Tutu, J. K. (Ed.) *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa: Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018 (1-32))

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