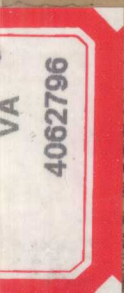
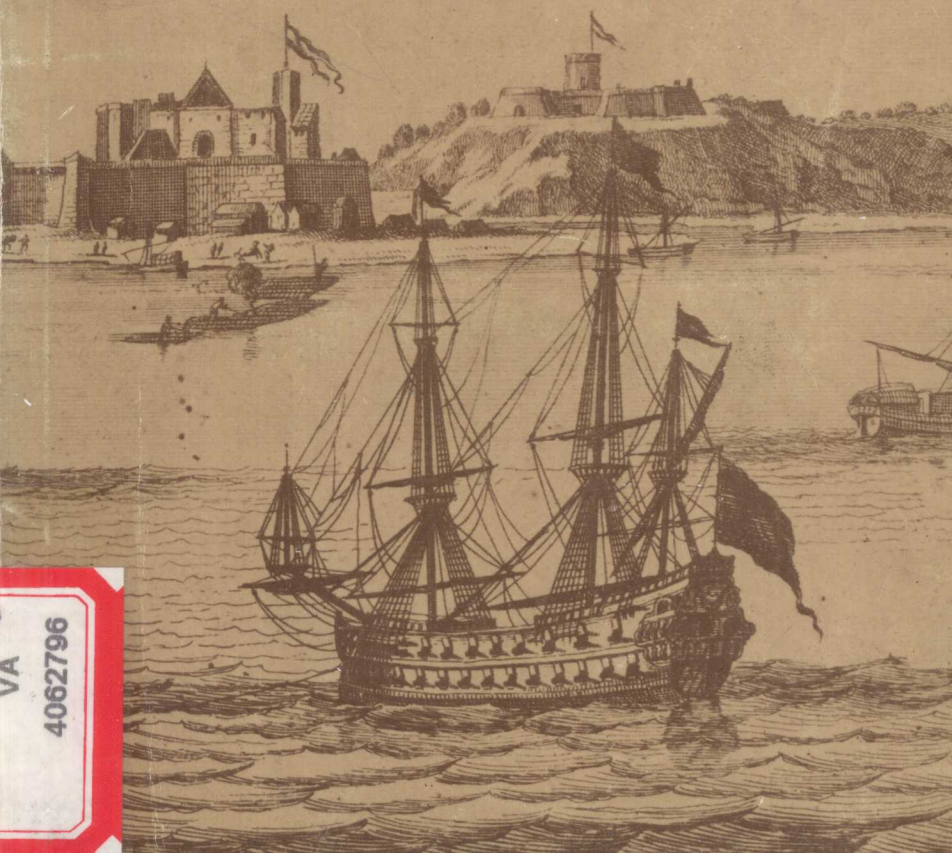


Forts and Castles of Ghana

Albert van Dantzig



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Introduction

The coat of arms of the Republic of Ghana shows among other things a little fort. This is not without significance: the numerous forts and castles along Ghana's shores have played an important role in her history. These structures, built by various European nations to protect their trade on the 'Guinea Coast', are still today one of Ghana's most striking features.

Tradeposts, fortified or not, have been built in various parts of the world, but nowhere in such great numbers along such a relatively short stretch of coast. At various places, such as Accra, Komenda and Sekondi, forts were actually built within gun-range of each other. Within three centuries more than sixty castles, forts and lodges were built along a stretch of coast less than 300 miles (500 km) long. Many of these buildings are still in existence at the present, and if some of them could be regarded as important individual monuments, the whole chain of buildings, whether intact, ruined or merely known as sites, could be seen as a *collective historical monument* unique in the world: the ancient 'shopping street' of West Africa. The 'shops' varied greatly in size and importance. If some could be compared with department stores, others were hardly more than village stores.

The appellation *castle* is applied only to the three biggest of these buildings: Elmina Castle, Cape Coast Castle and Christiansborg Castle, the former headquarters of respectively the Portuguese (later of the Dutch), the British and the Danes. *Fort* is applied to the larger fortified buildings, and *lodge* to small trade-factories, sometimes virtually unfortified. Of the latter only very few traces are left here and

there; sometimes they were simple mud-huts with at best one or two cannon to defend them, sometimes less, like the 'logie' the Dutch had in the late seventeenth century on 'Mount Congh' (Queen Anne's Point): according to a contemporary report the Dutch West India Company had that trade-post guarded by a mere 'man armed with an axe'! To our knowledge the following list of castles, forts and lodges – from west to east – could be regarded as complete:

- 1 Fort St Louis; wooden French fort at Assini (Ivory Coast, near Ghana border), built in 1698, abandoned 1704. No traces at present.
- 2 Fort Apollonia at Beyin. Built by British 1756. 1868–1872 Dutch and known as Fort William III. At present a resthouse.
- 3 Swedish (later Dutch) lodge at Jumore: second half seventeenth century. No traces.
- 4 Portuguese, later Dutch 'Toll House' at mouth of Ankobra river. Probably on site of present ticket office for Ankobra Ferry.
- 5 Dutch lodge 'Elize Carthago' on 'Mount Ankober', the hill overlooking the left bank of the mouth of the Ankobra. Early eighteenth century. It was intended to extend it into a fort, and at one stage fourteen iron guns were brought on top of the hill, but the plan was never executed. Few traces.
- 6 Portuguese fort at confluence of Ankobra and Duma rivers, near present Ankobra bridge, built 1623(?) to guard gold-mine at Akwaso or Dwete-bo, but soon abandoned. A few traces(?).
- 7 Dutch fort or lodge 'Ruychaver' at Old Awudua, on right bank of Ankobra, about 10 miles (16 km) south of present Prestea, built 1654, blown up 1659. A few traces still visible.
- 8 Portuguese fort S. Antonio, built at Axim 1515(?), a little to the east of an earlier fort. Dutch 1642–1872. At present in use as post office, various government offices.
- 9 Fort Gross Friedrichsburg at Princes Town (Pokesu), built 1683 by Brandenburgians. 1717–25 in hands of John Conny. 1725–1872 Dutch, known as Fort Hollandia. At

present in use as residence for nurses of German hospital.
10 Brandenburg lodge Louisa at Takrama, 1685. Taken over by Dutch 1717, but probably soon abandoned. No traces(?).

11 Brandenburg fort Dorothea at Akwida, built 1687. Taken over by Dutch in 1717. Abandoned in later eighteenth century. At present a ruin.

12 English fort at Dixcove, built 1693. 1868–72 Dutch and known as Fort Metalen Kruis. At present a resthouse.

13 Butri: Swedish lodge 1650, soon abandoned. Dutch fort 'Batensteyn' 1656, abandoned in the late nineteenth century. At present under reconstruction.

14 Takoradi: Dutch, Swedish, Brandenburg, English and French lodges late seventeenth century. Dutch fort 'Witsen' built 1656, blown up in 1665, but later rebuilt. No known traces at present.

15 Sekondi: Dutch fort 'Oranje', built 1690 on foundations of lodge (1642). At present in use by Ghana Railway and Ports Authority as a lighthouse.

16 Sekondi: English fort, built 1682; few traces at present.

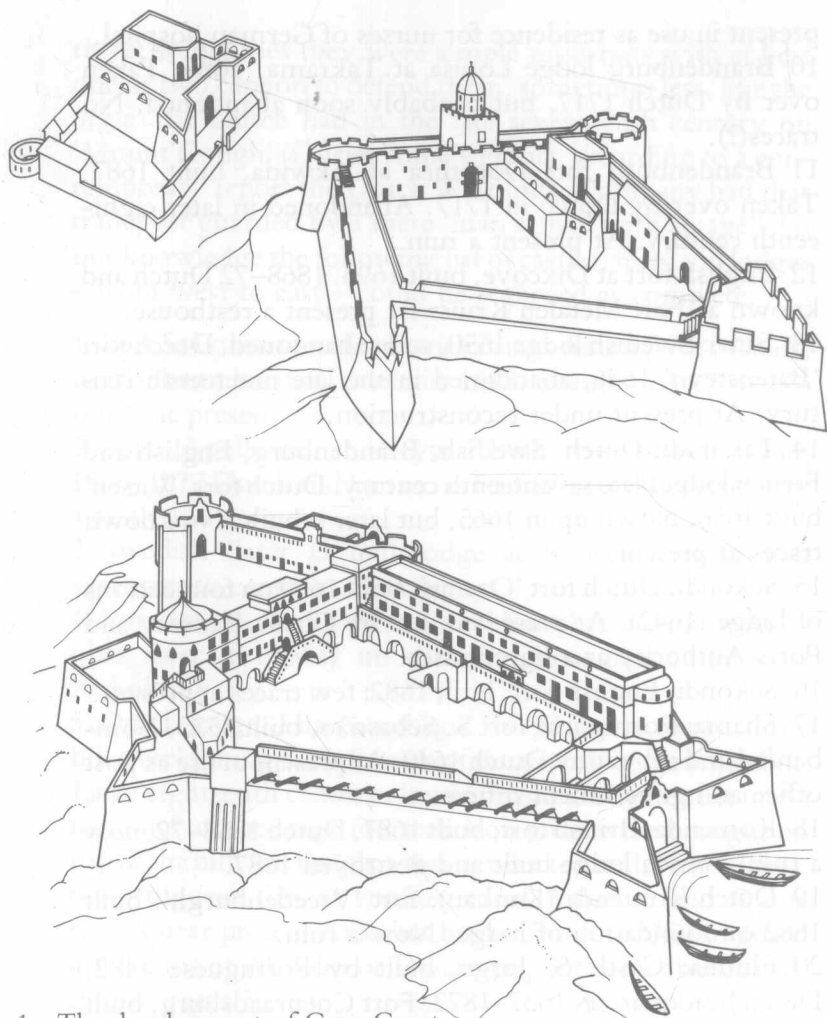
17 Shama: Portuguese fort S. Sebastião, built 1523. BombarDED and rebuilt by Dutch 1640. At present in use as post office and government offices.

18 Komenda: British fort, built 1687, Dutch 1868–72, now a ruin. French lodge built and destroyed 1687.

19 Dutch Komenda (Kankan): fort 'Vreedenburg', built 1682 on foundation of lodge. Now a ruin.

20 Elmina: Castle S. Jorge, built by Portuguese 1482, Dutch headquarters 1637–1872. Fort Coenraadsburg, built 1665 on top of S. Iago Hill, on site of former (1637) fortification. Nineteenth century fortifications: a) 'Veersche Schans' (near Bantama); b) 'Beeckesteyn' (near lagoon); c) 'Schomerus' (formerly 'Coebergh') on site of present St Joseph school; d) 'Java' (formerly 'Cattoenbergh') on 'Java-hill', traces visible; e) 'Nagtglas', near eastern entrance route of Elmina, no traces; and f) watchtower (still standing in Government Garden).

21 Cape Coast: Swedish fort 'Carolusburg' (1653), 1661–64 in hands of 'Dey' of Fetu, 1664–65 Dutch, 1665



1 The development of Cape Coast Castle, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries

British and extended into Cape Coast Castle, British headquarters up to 1876. Now houses West African Historical Museum. Cape Coast 'out-forts': a) Phipps' Tower (1721); b) Fort William; and c) Fort Victoria. The latter two are nineteenth century and well preserved.

22 Cape Coast/Amanful ('Manfro'): Danish fort 'Fredriksborg' 1661, sold to British 1679. Later reconstructed and known as 'Fort Royal'. Few traces at present.

23 Mount Congh or Queen Anne's Point: Dutch, later English lodges, from second half seventeenth century. No traces.

24 Mori: Fort 'Nassau', Dutch headquarters 1612-37; English 1868. Now a ruin.

25 Biriwa or Anashan: English fort (1673). No traces(?).

26 Egya: English and Dutch lodges in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

27 Anomabu: Dutch fort 1630-64. English fort 'Charles' built 1674, abandoned in 1730s, rebuilt 1756, and extended in nineteenth century when it became known as Fort William; at present in use as prison.

28 The French had a fort at Anomabu 1754-58. No traces.

29 Kormantin/Abandze: Former English headquarters (1631-65). After capture by Dutch known as Fort 'Amsterdam'. English 1868. Now a ruin. Conservation in progress.

30 French fort at Amoku, near Saltpond: 1787-1807. Few traces left.

31. English fort at Tantomquery: built 1702 (as a lodge?); extended 1721. Few traces left at present.

32 Legu: English and Danish lodges (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries); no traces known at present.

33 Apam: Dutch fort 'Leydsaemhey' (Patience), built 1698-1704. English 1868. At present a resthouse.

34 Dutch lodge at Winnebah, later English, and 1673 extended into a fort. Bombarded 1812. Few traces still visible in Methodist Church building.

35 Senya Beraku: Dutch fort 'De Goede Hoop' (Good Hope), built 1702, later extended. English 1868. Now under reconstruction.

36 Shidoe: English lodge, early eighteenth century. No traces(?).

37 Nyinyanu: Dutch lodge, eighteenth century. No traces(?).

38 Accra: Portuguese lodge on promontory near modern Brazil Lane. No traces.

39 Accra: Dutch fort 'Crèvecoeur', built 1649 on site of earlier lodge, largely destroyed in 1863 earthquake. Handed over to English in 1868, and since then known as Ussher

Fort. At present a prison.

40 Accra: James Fort, built 1673. At present a prison.

41 Accra/Osu: Christiansborg Castle, built 1661 onwards by Danes. 1681–83 in Portuguese hands and known as Fort S. Francisco Xavier. 1693 in hands of Akwamu. 1850 sold to British. Since 1876 seat of government.

42 Labadi: Dutch and Danish lodges, eighteenth century. No traces.

43 Teshi: Dutch and Danish lodges, eighteenth century, 1783 Danish fort Augustaborg. Few traces at present.

44 Dutch lodge, later fort, at Tema (1701, 1714). No traces left.

45 Dutch lodge at Kpone (1701–?). Few traces.

46 Prampram: English fort Vernon, built 1745(?). Few traces in walls of modern resthouse.

47 Old Ningo: Danish fort 'Fredensborg', built 1734. English 1850. At present a ruin.

48 Tubreku: eighteenth century Danish lodge. No traces.

49 Ada: Fort Kongensten, built 1783. English 1850. Few traces at present.

50 Keta: Dutch fort 'Singelenburgh', built 1734, blown up 1737. Dutch and Danish lodges afterwards. Danish fort 'Prindsensten' built 1784. English 1850. At present a prison.

The essential purpose of all these buildings was to serve as store-houses for goods brought from Europe and bought on the Coast, and as living quarters for a permanent commercial and military staff. If the earliest of these buildings were mainly fortified on the land-side against enemies expected from that side, soon the real danger appeared to come rather from the side of the sea, in the form of European competitors. During the sixteenth century a growing number of French and English ships came to trade in what was supposed to be a Portuguese monopoly area. An even more serious threat to Portuguese supremacy on the Coast came from the Dutch, who had arrived in large numbers on the coast by the end of that century. In 1612 they built a fort of their own at Mori after the local chief of Asebu, who had for some time been trading with them, had sent two ambassadors on one of their ships to the Netherlands with

the request that a fort be built in his state. This was the first of a long line of forts which were in fact only built for the sake of keeping a foothold on the coast and of driving competitors away. Within a few decades several European nations had jumped on the bandwagon and by 1700 the majority of the forts as we now know them had been built.

It should be pointed out that the Europeans did not have any territorial jurisdiction beyond the walls of their forts; the very land on which they were built was only rented. Each European nation tried to reserve exclusive trading rights for itself with the local rulers. It is therefore not surprising that political disintegration set in all along the coast, and consequently the tradeposts had to be armed not only to drive competitors away, but also to protect the traders inside the forts or the people on whose territory they were built against attacks by neighbouring African states.

It was also for geographical reasons that all this European commercial activity concentrated in this relatively small area: first of all there is the obvious fact that Ghana is the only area where there are substantial gold deposits comparatively near to the coast. But Ghana's coast is also suitable for building forts because it is rocky, thus providing building material and strong natural foundations, and access from the interior to the sea is not, as in neighbouring areas, interrupted by lagoons and mangrove swamps. One may contend that forts were also built at Whydah on the 'Slave Coast', on the landward side of a lagoon, but these forts could not stand comparison with those of the Gold Coast: they had mud walls and only a few cannon, which were used mainly for the firing of salutes: the sea-roads were beyond the reach of those guns. The King of Whydah, and later the King of Dahomey, maintained absolute power over their European 'guests'. In 1703 the King of Whydah even imposed a unique treaty on the European traders who had settled in his state: in spite of the war they were fighting in their 'Christian Empire' (the War of the Spanish Succession) they were to live in peace and harmony in his state and not to attack each other's ships on the Whydah roads, thus spoiling his lucrative slave-trade.

A further advantage of Ghana's irregular, rocky coast was the fact that it has a number of natural harbours in the form of coves or bays and capes, while other parts cannot be approached because of dangerous rocky reefs. Consequently ships had to concentrate in definite areas for trade, which could be commanded from the tops of the promontories on which many of these forts were built. Low sandy beaches are much more difficult to check, as trade contacts can be established anywhere along them. Only at the very end of the fort-building period were two forts built in such areas: the English one at Beyin in Nzima, and the Danish one at the opposite end of the coast on the Keta peninsula.

The history of the forts and castles of Ghana could be considered as part of 'colonial history' in the sense of being part of the history of European overseas expansion. But it is not the history of suppression of liberty and exploitation as much of colonial history is. Nearly all the forts were built with the consent, sometimes at the urgent request, of the local chiefs and people. It would be wrong to idealise the relationship between Africans and Europeans in those days, but it cannot be denied that they traded with each other basically on a footing of equality. More often than not they tried to cheat each other, but it was done with equanimity. The forts were built to keep other European traders away, and it was on the side of the sea that they had their strongest defence. It cannot be denied that on a few occasions guns of the forts were trained on the houses of what the Europeans misleadingly called their 'subject natives', but in such brawls these 'subjects' invariably proved to be 'over-mighty': without their co-operation the Europeans in the forts could not survive.

Without the forts and castles the history of Ghana would have been very different. Ghanaians, at least those on the coast, but also many in the interior, had had more than 300 years to get to know Europeans as their equals in their dealings at the forts before the real 'colonial' era of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was bound to have a great influence on the attitudes of the people of Ghana who are justly famed for their open-mindedness towards the

outside world.

The history of the construction of the various castles, forts and lodges along the coast of Ghana thus covers a period of more than 300 years, which can be roughly subdivided as follows:

- 1 the period of Portuguese hegemony, 1470–1600
- 2 that of Dutch and English penetration, 1600–40
- 3 that of keen competition between various companies, 1640–1710
- 4 that of relatively peaceful co-existence between companies, 1710–1800
- 5 that of early colonisation, 1800–1900

During the long first period only one castle, two forts and (possibly) one lodge were built; during the second, two forts and one or two lodges were added; but during the seventy years which followed we see several waves of intensive constructional activity: no less than two castles, twenty-two forts and a large number of lodges were built; during the fourth period only four or five forts and a few lodges were built, while the last period saw the construction of only a few military fortifications and the gradual decay of a number of old trade posts.

In the present century the surviving forts and castles have served, and are still serving, a wide variety of purposes. Christiansborg Castle has remained since 1876 Ghana's seat of government; Elmina Castle, for a long time in use as a police training depot, may one day be converted into a big tourist hostel; Cape Coast Castle has become a West African historical museum. Various forts are in use as – or are being converted into – resthouses; some forts house post offices and other public facilities, others are being used as prisons. It is the policy of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board to make all these monuments fully accessible to the public and to restore them in the most authentic style.

Contents

| | <i>page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| List of Illustrations | vi |
| Introduction | vii |
| Chapter 1: The period of Portuguese monopoly | 1 |
| Chapter 2: The penetration of the Dutch and their expulsion of the Portuguese | 11 |
| Chapter 3: Years of confusion and fierce competition: English, Swedish and Danish penetration | 21 |
| Chapter 4: The growth of the English trade and Brandenburg competition | 33 |
| Chapter 5: Tensions and turmoils around 1700 | 40 |
| Chapter 6: The last forts of the eighteenth century | 53 |
| Chapter 7: From trade to politics: the nineteenth century | 65 |
| Chapter 8: Life in and around the forts | 81 |
| Map of the coast of Ghana, showing the forts and castles | 89 |
| Short Chronology | 90 |
| Short Bibliography | 92 |
| Index | 94 |

List of Illustrations

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| 1 The development of Cape Coast Castle, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries | x |
| 2 The development of Elmina Castle, 15th, 17th and 19th centuries | 4 |
| 3 Fort St Anthony, Axim | 7 |
| 4 Fort St Jago (Coenraadsburg), Elmina | 16 |
| 5 Fort St Sebastian, Shama | 19 |
| 6 Fort Amsterdam, Kormantin | 22 |
| 7 The development of Christiansborg Castle, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries | 30 |
| 8 Fort Gross Friedrichsburg, Princes Town | 38 |
| 9 British fort at Komenda | 42 |
| 10 Fort Orange, Sekondi | 44 |
| 11 Fort Leydsaemsheyt, Apam | 46 |
| 12 The development of Fort de Goede Hoop, Senya Beraku | 50 |
| 13 British fort at Tantumquerry in the late 19th century | 54 |
| 14 Dixcove Fort | 61 |
| 15 Fort Apollonia at Beyin | 62 |
| Map of the coast of Ghana, showing the forts and castles in their present condition | 89 |

1 The period of Portuguese monopoly

The Gold Coast, former name of Ghana, really was quite an appropriate name for this coast in the days when these forts were built; apart from Latin America, monopoly of Spain, West Africa was the only major supplier of gold in those days. Certainly, Europe has had its own gold-mines, but by the time of the Renaissance, when the European economy went through a period of fast expansion and the entire financial system was based on the possession of gold, most of these mines were exhausted or fell into the hands of the Muslim Turkish Empire.

Gold from Africa was already known to Europeans before their voyages of reconnaissance of the fifteenth century; considerable quantities of this gold had crossed the Mediterranean from North Africa, in particular into the Muslim southern half of the Iberian peninsula, the Caliphate of Cordoba. Many traders, especially Italians, travelled to North Africa, and towards the end of the fifteenth century one of them, Benedetto Dei of Genoa, reported on his visit to the fabulously rich city of Timbuktu in Songhai, where he saw that even the collars of the king's dogs were made of gold.

Italy, cradle of the renaissance civilisation and centre of the Mediterranean world, remained politically, however, utterly divided. It fell to the monarchy of one of the first European nation-states, Portugal, on the shores of the Atlantic, to sponsor the little fleets which, making use of the newly developed navigational techniques, were to initiate the 'Age of Discovery'. Prince Henry 'the Navigator', nephew of King John I of Portugal, had three main motives for encouraging the reconnaissance of the unknown world

beyond the Straits of Gibraltar: to establish contact with the legendary 'Prester John', leader of a fabled Christian Empire beyond the 'Mountains of the Moon', and to attack together with him the Muslims in their rear; to transform Lisbon, then still a mere re-distribution market for Asian goods from Venice (which in its turn received these goods via the land-route and many middlemen from India and the Far East) into the terminus of a sea-route round Africa to India; and to gain direct access to the sources of Africa's gold.

Prince Henry would not live to see his first two aims fulfilled. But during his lifetime the first relatively small quantities of 'Guinea gold' were brought to Portugal, together with some slaves, from Senegambia. By the time of his death, in 1460, his explorers had reached the area of Sierra Leone – so named because of the lion-like roars of the frequent thunderstorms there – but from a navigational point of view it looked to them as if they had also reached the limit: there they could at night only dimly see their traditional guiding star, the polar star, just above the horizon.

After the death of their patron, the explorers seemed to be deprived of incentive, but not for long. In 1469 King Alfonso V leased 'the enterprise of Africa' to one Fernão Gomes for five years, on condition that his men explore each year at least 100 leagues of coastline. By the time this contract expired, Gomes' captains had done even better than that and had reached as far as Cape Lopez (Gabon), south of the Equator. In 1471 his men had reached that part of the African coast which seemed to be most promising because of the large quantities of gold which could be obtained there in exchange for relatively little merchandise. The first of such transactions took place at the mouth of the Prah river, the local people possibly selling alluvial gold from the river. As so much gold was offered for sale in this area, the Portuguese thought that the gold-mines must be very near the coast, to which they began to refer as the *Mina de Ouro* or the gold-mine.

News of the discovery of this *Mina de Ouro* soon spread

from Portugal to neighbouring Castile. When in 1475 a war broke out between the two countries on account of a succession dispute, the new Queen of Castile, Isabella, formally authorised her subjects to engage in the Guinea trade, in spite of the monopoly which the Pope had earlier granted for that trade to the Portuguese. There ensued several clashes between Portuguese and Castilian ships – or even fleets – along the Guinea coast, but in the end the Portuguese clearly proved stronger. At home, however, they were defeated. The Treaty of Alcaçovas of 1479 recognised Isabella's succession to the throne of Castile, but excluded the Castilians from the Guinea trade. It was the first European treaty to deal with 'colonial spheres of influence'.

The following years, however, demonstrated that the Castilians could not be trusted to obey the treaty to the letter, and soon their ships reappeared all along the coasts of Africa; the Portuguese saw themselves compelled to take other measures to protect their trade, in particular that of the *Mina de Ouro*. There, trade was concentrating on a place the Portuguese called *Aldea das Duas Partes*, the 'Village of Two Parts', situated at the mouth of a little river, or rather lagoon, the Benya, near one of the best natural harbours of the coast. From the shallow lagoon considerable quantities of salt, an important commodity in the trade with the interior, were in those days – as now – extracted. It was here that the Portuguese in 1482 decided to build a major stronghold to protect their trade.

When the Portuguese first arrived, they found the people wearing heavy gold ornaments: long before that, an extensive barter trade in gold and salt must have been in existence at that place. The traders from the interior showed great interest in the new manufactured goods from Portugal, and a *Mina*, as the newcomers called it, soon developed into an important market.

At first the Portuguese proposal to build a castle at Elmina was not over-enthusiastically received: Caramanã,¹ the local chief, is said to have retorted, in a very diplomatic way, that the Europeans might not be happy in the place because of the hot climate and the