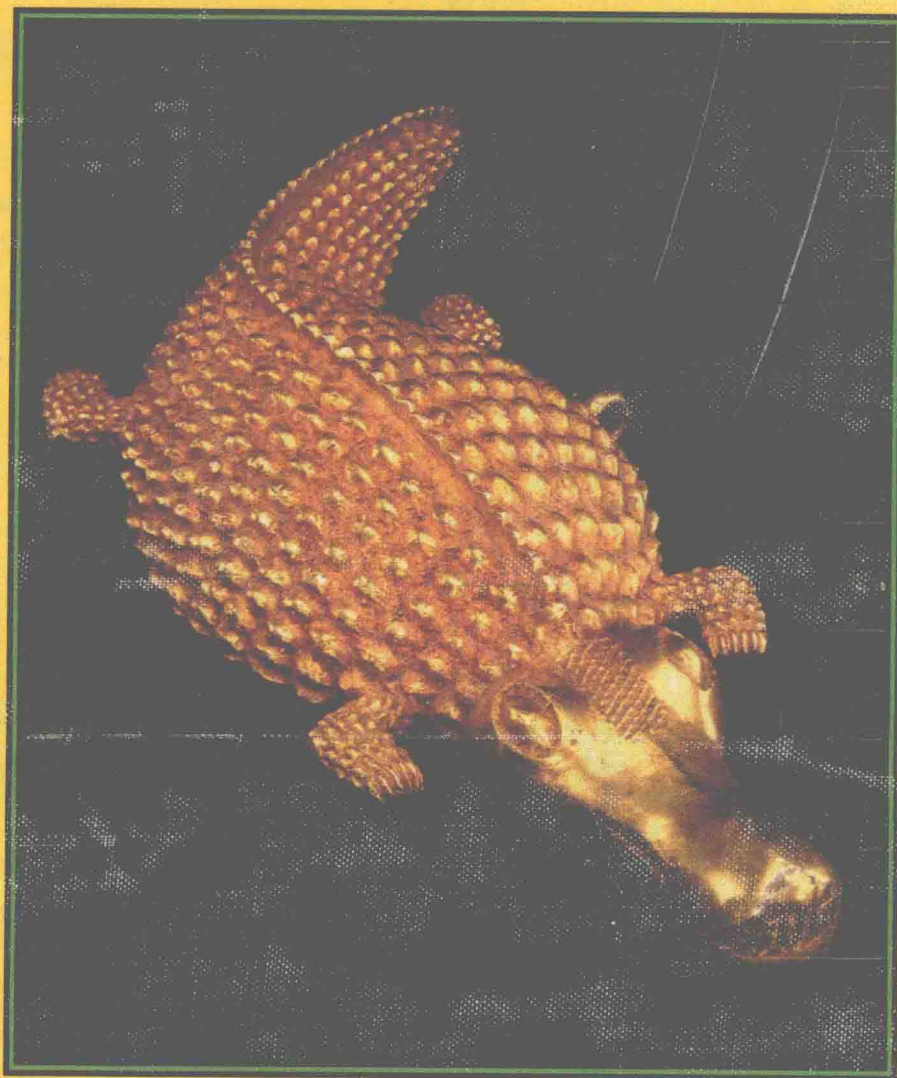


**A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY
OF GHANA FROM THE SEVENTEENTH
TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**
BOOK 1



**A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY
OF GHANA FROM THE SEVENTEENTH
TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

The Gold Coast
in the Age of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

Book 1



With a Foreword by
Ivor Wilks

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Foreword

In January 1471, Portuguese vessels first reached that stretch of the West African coast known to early navigators as *A Mina de Ouro*, later to become the Gold Coast and today the Republic of Ghana. At that time, so Eric R. Wolf reminded us in his *Europe and the People without History* [University of California Press, 1982], "Africa south of the Sahara was not the isolated, backward area of European imagination." The newcomers, he wrote, "would be setting foot in a country already dense with towns and settlements, and caught up in networks of exchange that far transcended the narrow enclaves of the European emporia on the coast." Wolf's comment was strikingly worded. It was substantiated by the writings of two scholars who, in the 1960s and 1970s, had carried out intensive research into the Gold Coast systems of production and distribution ("networks of exchange") in the era of early European commercial expansion.

One of these scholars was Kwame Yeboah Daaku, who left Ghana for England to pursue his studies under the supervision of Roland Oliver in the School of Oriental and African Studies. He followed a fast track (as it were), and completed the University of London Ph.D. in 1964. It was published by Oxford in 1970, under the title *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast 1600-1720. A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade*. Daaku's major sources were the books and papers of the Dutch and English trading companies. Subsequently he turned his attention to recording orally transmitted materials from a number of Ghana's traditional polities, but his work sadly ended with his early death in 1974. The other scholar, Daaku's contemporary, was Ray A. Kea, to whose new book, *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana (17th-19th Centuries)*, I have pleasure in contributing this Foreword.

I first came to know Kea in the early 1960s when he was a schoolteacher in Ghana and at the same time was using principally Danish sources to investigate patterns of trade in southeastern Ghana. In 1967 his M.A. thesis, "Ashanti-Danish Relations 1780-1813," was accepted (with distinction) by the University of Ghana, Legon. Kea decided to continue this line of research, extending the range of his sources and the scope of his inquiry. In 1974 he was awarded the University of London Ph.D. for his *Trade, State Formation, and Warfare on the Gold Coast, 1600-1826*. Kea followed this by presenting a series of papers at various academic conferences. Their titles gave some indication of the developing focus of his inquiry; for example, "Social and Spatial Aspects of Production in Southern Ghana in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (1978); "Land, Overlords, and Cultivators in the Seventeenth Century Gold Coast" (1979); "The 'Laboring Classes' in 17th and 18th century Gold Coast States: a Note on the Political Economy of Pre-capitalist Social Labor" (1980); "Akan Coastal States in the 17th and Early 18th Centuries: The Question of Labor" (1981). These were the basis of his long awaited book published by The Johns Hopkins University Press in 1982 as *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (henceforth, *ST&P*). Kea described it as no more than "a distant relative" of his 1974 doctoral dissertation, having further expanded its empirical base, significantly sharpening the conceptual focus. The problematic remained, however, much the same. This was not entirely to the liking of certain power brokers in the Africanist field who, being of a fiercely anti-Marxist frame of mind, sought (but failed) to deflect Kea from his career as historian and writer.

It should be remembered that these were still the early days of the emergence of African History as a recognised academic discipline. The first appointment in the field at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, that of Roland Oliver, had only been made in 1948. My own active involvement with the West African past dated from 1954 when I began to put together the study of southeastern Ghana that was accepted, in 1959, as a University of Wales M.A. [see *Akwamu 1640-1750. A Study of the Rise and Fall of a West African Empire*, Trondheim Studies in History, Vol. 35, 2001]. At this time many scholars in conventional history departments doubted whether African History could be developed in the foreseeable future as a subject fit to be taught at university level. No one expressed this view more strongly than the Regius Professor of Modern History at

Oxford University, Hugh Trevor-Roper, in the early 1960s. "There is," he remarked of the field, "only the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe." He was prepared to allow that "perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach," but insisted that currently an African historiography "cannot be created out of the darkness discernible in the African past."

Trevor-Roper was obviously unaware of the considerable amount of historical research and writing on Africa that was in progress in the early 1960s. Especially in North American universities the demand for specialists in the field soared as courses in the subject were introduced for the first time, but the opprobrium that greeted Trevor-Roper's pronouncements was not entirely deserved. The fact of the matter was that historians were then in a state of much disarray about what could or could not be regarded as African History, that is, the sort that could be decently taught. The debate was fuelled by researchers who maintained that the African past should best be investigated by those trained in the techniques and methods of the ethnographer. The traditional historian's commitment to working primarily with written sources was challenged. "Orality" became a buzzword. Some among the neophytes took to describing themselves as "ethnohistorians" (a failed neologism, one hopes), and came to attach an almost scriptural status to Jan Vansina's early musings that appeared as *De la tradition orale. Essai de methode historique* [Tervuren, 1961]. I intrude a personal note. The sources I had used for my 1959 M.A. had been almost entirely written ones, and in 1956 I had published a short piece explaining my difficulties in using orally transmitted material for purposes of historical reconstruction ["Tribal History and Myth," in *Universitas* (Legon), II, 84-6, 116-18]. Vansina had succinctly summarized my argument as being, "l'étude des traditions orales relève de l'anthropologie juridique, non de l'histoire," and on that basis decided that I was a British functionalist in the mode of E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes. I was unsure whether that was intended as a glowing tribute or a grave insult in those mixed-up times.

I suspect that Kea himself, granted the state of the field even as late as the 1980s, was unsure whether *ST&P* would be understood as he intended it. He offered the reader a modicum of help. "A study of this kind," he wrote,

with its focus on institutions, structure, and process, required the marshaling of a considerable body of data and the presentation of these data in a detailed

“descriptive,” rather than a synthesized “analytical,” form. As a result, the study has a rather “dense” quality. However, I have attempted to present the data in such a way that, taken in combination, they reveal not only the “composition” of the social formation but also the way in which its diverse components were causally related over time.

Extensive use has been made of European archival and published source materials. Indeed, it can be rightly said that these materials form the basis of this study. In addition to English, these source materials are in several different languages: Danish, Dutch, French, German, and Portuguese.

The archival documents include the records of the Danish, Dutch, English, and Swedish trading companies. They are quite diverse in content, comprising letters (some of which are more than fifty pages long), journals of various kinds, accounts books, debt books, reports [*ST&P*: 7-8].

The book was well received. For example, the then co-editor of the *Journal of African History*, J. D. Fage, wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement*, “.....there are good reasons why those concerned with African history should pay attention to the evidence available from the Gold Coast and, even if it has to be used with some circumspection, the sheer volume and the systematic arrangement of Dr. Kea’s book must make it an invaluable guide.” I number myself among many who consider *ST&P* to be a landmark in the development of the field. Using a wide range of documentation, Kea reconstructed in remarkable detail the commercial, political, social and military configurations, first, of the coastal towns where the shore establishments of the European companies were located, and second, of communities, particularly in the basins of the Ankobra, Tano and Pra-Ofin rivers, where the flows of commodities to and from the coast were organized by the powerful Akani merchants.

In his *A Cultural and Social History of Ghana* (henceforth *C&SH*), Kea has turned his attention to the coastal towns in the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He now refers to them as the “sea-towns,” and much of his material focuses on those polities that had been provinces of Imperial Akwamu until its precipitous collapse in 1730-31. Readers familiar with *ST&P* will find themselves in familiar territory in *C&SH*, but will have much new light cast upon it. I cannot refrain from here quoting Kea’s own challenging statement of intent:

.... An effort is made to mark the long march of history in sea-town society through the practices, ideas, beliefs, and conversations of various named historical actors, who lived in a milieu of events, social action, possibilities, and dialogical textual practices. It brings to light and analyses what these actors - individual and collective protagonists in history - deemed important [*C&SH*: Introduction].

The earliest of the bevy of characters that Kea presents to us is Hans Lykke (otherwise Noete Doku), a wealthy stipendiary of the Danish West Indies and Guinea Company in Osu (Accra) who became involved in rebellion against the Akwamu ruler Akwanno and was killed in 1709. It is, however, beyond my brief in this Foreword further to inform the reader of the pioneering and perhaps sometimes daring uses to which Kea puts his African biographical data.

Kea's recent association with the University of California Multi-Campus Research Unit in World History has much reinforced his long-standing concern with the issue of globalization of the division of labor, having particular reference to the Caribbean. He has also retained a strong interest in the emergence of West African state systems in the period preceding European hegemony, and a lengthy paper to that Research Unit in early 2003: "World-Historical Change and Two Core Areas in Sudanic Africa, 8th-14th Century." I mention this because I still have copies of the earliest papers that Kea presented as an M.A. student in Ghana now almost half a century ago. I thought them much in advance of the general state of knowledge at that time. They uncannily presage his contribution of 2003.

In his Acknowledgements Ray Kea generously describes me as having been his "mentor in many respects." I can only respond by recording how very much I have learned from him over so many years.

Ivor Wilks,
Emeritus Professor of History, Northwestern University, and
Honorary Professor of History, University of Wales at Lampeter.

Acknowledgements

The present work has been an ongoing research project for many years. It is finally completed. In a general sense it is a study of the social and cultural history of Gold Coast coastal towns during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The towns were the locations of the castles, forts, and factories of European trading companies - Danish, Dutch, and English - and were commercially linked to the plantation regimes of the Americas and the entrepôts and accumulating centers of maritime Europe. These linkages strategically situated Gold Coast towns in the circuits of the Atlantic world. In an effort to grasp the historical nature of the Atlantic world connections, the study pursues the following objectives: (1) to identify social imaginaries and fields of intentionality, that is reflexive consciousness and historical subjectivity, and the exercise of power; (2) to understand how the societal order of coastal towns made sense of their own activities and experiences over time; (3) to identify the struggles, conflicts, and antinomies of social existence; and (4) to frame the intersection and articulation of human agency within the historical and material circumstances that shaped it.

Many people, some unknowingly, have helped me in different ways with my project. First of all, I would like to thank my wife, Inge, for her untiring patience and understanding, and my lovely daughters, Charlotte and Pamela, for their continued encouragement and support. I am grateful to former colleagues at Carleton College and St. Olaf College for their collegiality and friendship and to current colleagues at the University of California, Riverside, for engaging me in their own research and providing me with a lot of intellectual stimulation. I am also indebted to those colleagues who made up the "hard core" of the University of California World History Research Unit. At the various conferences and work-

shops, which have been held since the late 1990s, they have introduced new and challenging ways to study history beyond the limits set by established and revered meta-narratives.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the administrations of Carleton, St. Olaf, and UC Riverside for the funding that allowed me to attend professional meetings and to conduct research. The research could not have been successfully carried out without the unstinting assistance of archivists and librarians in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Ghana, and Switzerland. I owe them my gratitude. I am ever grateful to old friends Jeff Rice, Larry Yarak, Tom McCaskie, David Owusu-Ansah, Sandra Greene, and, always, to Ivor Wilks, my mentor in many ways. Thank you for your friendship and support. Finally, this work would not have been possible had I not spent eight eventful and rewarding years in Ghana as a teacher at Mawuli and Tema Secondary Schools and a student at the University of Ghana. I am forever indebted to my Ghanaian friends, especially Miranda and Dennis, for teaching me so much. I can never repay the debt. I would like to thank Ms Linda Bobbit for preparing the figures and tables. Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my daughter Charlotte who with energy and enthusiasm proofread and edited the entire manuscript.

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Introduction

"The historian is neither Caesar nor Claudius, yet he often sees in his dreams a crowd which cries and laments, the crowd of those who did not live enough, who would like to live again.... An urn and tears are not all that these dead ask of us. It is not enough for them that we renew their sighs...." (Jules Michelet)

Who makes history?

The period from 1500 to 1800 - a *longue durée* of surplus accumulation on a global scale - has been described by a Ghanaian archaeologist as the "high-water mark" of urbanization on the Gold Coast.¹ The high-water mark attribution is meant to highlight a specific dynamic - the development and maturation of town life - within historically determined forms of social production. The time of heightened urbanization was concomitantly a time of unprecedented expansion and differentiation of commodity and market trade, a semiotic intensification of cultural and other forms, and social and political struggles in the midst of the contingencies of everyday life. The chapters that follow examine this dynamic by focusing on the cultural and social history of sea-towns or ports of trade (*ɲshonamāji*; s. *ɲshonamaɲ*) between the late seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth century (figure 1). At a general level, the study examines experiences (*Erlebnis*) and representations of experience in sea-town urban space, specifically Akan-, Gã-, and Adãme-speaking components. The world of sea-towns contained an abundance of things, relationships, events, and processes and individuals and collective groups needed knowledge, skills, and self-awareness to live in it. The history of the high-water mark of Gold Coast town formation cannot be achieved or stated in a single meta-narrative unless the vast profusion of narratives or texts that constitute that history are allowed to speak for themselves. The creation of texts and textual practices are to be situated

in socially determined force fields, which are both local and global. Moreover, they are to be understood as determined effects of the changing nature, distribution, and balance of power relations.

For many sea-towns the 1500-1800 period was one of sustained good times, thanks to the export and universalizing of enslaved African labor within a globalizing world-economy. To understand the “blooming, buzzing confusion” of sea-town life categories like *Erfahrungsgeschichte* (“history of experience”), modes of production, and *Lebenswelt* (“lifeworld”) prove useful in charting the historicity of social being and in recognizing a distinction between human rhythms and world(ly) rhythms. The good times, the times of material prosperity, meant new figurations of mercantile accumulation emerged within sea-town space, which was infused with new forms of inequality and differentiation as well as new spheres of knowledge production. Cultural and ideological frameworks, encompassing new ideas, ideals, and beliefs represented new ways of ordering (classifying) and evaluating things, events, relationships, and processes. The sea-town was a *locus* where the varied expressions of high culture came to signify a certain kind of civility - a certain kind of self-consciousness and a habit of reflection. Underpinning these developments were the sea-towns’ alliances, in the form of contracts and treaties, with international merchant capital.

This was an age of globalization when sea-town space became a site of investment for different transnational trading companies of maritime Europe. The *ṅshonamāji* were enclaves of mercantile accumulation. The Atlantic political economy represented a violent transformation of scale. The sale of gold, ivory, and enslaved persons developed as a profitable branch of inter-continental commodity exchange. The trans-oceanic slave trade developed as well into a specific form of social oppression. Linked to global flows of commodities, the sea-towns’ wealth lay simultaneously in circulation and dispossession. An increasing densification of interaction networks was evident not only at the level of sea-town urbanism but also at the level of Atlantic world’s political economy. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, a form of oppression based on a commodity trade in African bodies, was an integral part of this economy. It was systemic to the process of mercantile accumulation in different Atlantic production and consumption centers. At different times in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the sea-towns became sites of contestation among inland political powers, which sought to police in various ways

commodity distribution. Did the process and politics of accumulation draw a line across the actuality of social relations and of cultural and political life of sea-town residents? What were the conditions of the possible within the sea-towns' world and what lines could not be crossed?

Time and oral history narratives have already assigned meanings to events, revealed their consequences, and separated the substantial from the accidental. An overriding aim in this study is to examine what has often been ignored in the experiential world of the *ŋshonamāji* - the contingent hopes, strivings, and desires of individual and collective subjects and the means by which concepts, rules, and contingencies affected and directed people's behavior. More generally, an effort is made to mark the long march of history in sea-town society through the practices, ideas, beliefs, and conversations of various named historical actors, who lived in a milieu of events, social action, possibilities, and dialogical textual practices. It brings to light and analyzes what these actors - individual and collective protagonists in history - deemed important. It examines the dynamic and cultural/intellectual labor of sea-town life and, at the same time, considers the construction of different kinds of social and political subject/subjectivity (as texts) and agency (as *praxis*). More precisely, it considers the relation between the world as experienced in actions and the world as represented in discourses.

There are three thematic sections and five chapters. The first section ("Texts") examines the ideas, ideals, and historical imaginaries (imagination) as these are expressed in three different texts, which were produced in a context of commodity exchange and mercantile accumulation. The texts provide information about intellectual life, belief, identity, and aspirations. The reality of exchange, appropriation, and accumulation did not simply make the unreal and the imagined believable; they created them. Section two ("Service") follows the career of a socially prominent man - through texts and actions - at the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He was in the service of three different Danish trading companies over a fifty-year period in the eighteenth century. He achieved honor and a high rank as a company employee. His experiences belonged to a local entrepreneurial and trading culture, an elite town culture, and an Atlantic world political economy. They show how social class was lived at the upper end of hierarchy and difference. The third section ("Resistance") turns to different forms of struggle and opposition - in words and deeds - among subaltern groups. It delves, too, into the politics of sanc-