

Homegoing (Gyasi)

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Homegoing

Yaa Gyasi, 2016

Knopf Doubleday

320 pp.

ISBN-13: 9781101947135



Summary

Winner, 2016 National Book Critics Circle Award

A novel of breathtaking sweep and emotional power that traces three hundred years in Ghana and along the way also becomes a truly great American novel.

Extraordinary for its exquisite language, its implacable sorrow, its soaring beauty, and for its monumental portrait of the forces that shape families and nations, Homegoing heralds the arrival of a major new voice in contemporary fiction.

Two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, are born into different villages in eighteenth-century Ghana. Effia is married off to an Englishman and lives in comfort in the palatial rooms of Cape Coast Castle.

Unbeknownst to Effia, her sister, Esi, is imprisoned beneath her in the castle's dungeons, sold with thousands of others into the Gold Coast's booming slave trade, and shipped off to America, where her children and grandchildren will be raised in slavery.

One thread of *Homegoing* follows Effia's descendants through centuries of warfare in Ghana, as the Fante and Asante nations wrestle with the slave trade and British colonization. The other thread follows Esi and her children into America.

From the plantations of the South to the Civil War and the Great Migration, from the coal mines of Pratt City, Alabama, to the jazz clubs and dope houses of twentieth-century Harlem, right up through the present day, *Homegoing* makes history visceral, and captures, with singular and stunning immediacy, how the memory of captivity came to be inscribed in the soul of a nation.

Generation after generation, Yaa Gyasi's magisterial first novel sets the fate of the individual against the obliterating movements of time, delivering unforgettable characters whose lives were shaped by historical forces beyond their control.

Homegoing is a tremendous reading experience, not to be missed, by an astonishingly gifted young writer. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—ca. 1989-1990
- Where—Ghana
- Raised—Huntsville, Alabama, USA
- Education—B.A., Stanford University; M.F.A., Iowa Writers' Workshop
- Award—National Book Critics Circle Award
- Currently—lives in Berkeley, California

Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana and raised in Huntsville, Alabama. She holds a BA in English from Stanford University and an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she held a Dean's Graduate Research Fellowship. She lives in Berkeley, California. (*From the publisher.*)

Read Slate's interview with Yaa Gyasi

(http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2016/06/yaa_gyasi_on_her_debut_novel_homegoing_and_getting_blurbed_by_ta_nehisi.html) .

It's far more encompassing than we can do here!

Book Reviews

The novel is work, requiring readers' full attention to follow the connections and lineage between characters while also absorbing details and present-day consequences of historical happenings that are unimaginable. In reward for this effort, Yaa Gasi got in my head, pushing me to further examine my lens and perspective.... Indeed we must. *Homegoing* captured me and I highly recommend it. **Abby Fabiaschi, AUTHOR - LitLovers** READ MORE...

Remarkable...compelling. The novel...provides deep background for today's controversies over racial justice...and is highly readable. In other words, *Homegoing* enters a ready and waiting reading world, and it is built to satisfy.... [T]his powerful novel in particular, can reveal the large and small significances of history, while also delivering the pleasures of story.

Rebecca Steinitz - Boston Globe

Tracing three centuries in Ghana, and the wildly different experiences—prosperity, poverty, comfort, captivity—of two half-sisters and their descendants in Ghana and the U.S., Yaa Gyasi's debut novel promises to be a memorable epic of changing families and changing nations.

Laura Pearson - Chicago Tribune

Heart-wrenching.... Gyasi's unsentimental prose, her vibrant characters and her rich settings keep the pages turning no matter how mournful the plot.... The chapters change narrators effortlessly and smoothly transition between time periods.... Yaa Gyasi's assured *Homegoing* is a panorama of splendid faces.

Soniah Kamal - Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The brilliance of this structure, in which we know more than the characters do about the fate of their parents and children, pays homage to the vast scope of slavery without losing sight of its private devastation.... [Toni Morrison's] influence is palpable in Gyasi's historicity and lyricism.... No novel has better illustrated the way in which racism became institutionalized in this country.

Megan O'Grady - Vogue

Homegoing is an epic novel in every sense of the word—spanning three centuries, *Homegoing* is a sweeping account of two half-sisters in 18th-century Ghana and the lives of their many generations of descendants in America. A stunning, unforgettable account of family, history, and racism, *Homegoing* is an ambitious work that lives up to the hype.

Jarry Lee - BuzzFeed

Stunning... [*Homegoing*] may just be one of the richest, most rewarding reads of 2016. ("19 Summer Books That Everyone Will Be Talking About")

Meredith Turits - Elle

Gyasi gives voice, and an empathetic ear, to the ensuing seven generations of flawed and deeply human descendants, creating a patchwork mastery of historical fiction.

Cotton Codinha - Elle Magazine

[A] commanding debut...will stay with you long after you've finished reading. When people talk about all the things fiction can teach its readers, they're talking about books like this.

Steph Opitz - Marie Claire

(Starred review.) Gyasi's amazing debut offers an unforgettable, page-turning look at the histories of Ghana and America... [where] prosperity rises and falls from parent to child, love comes and goes....Gyasi writes...with remarkable freshness and subtlety. A marvelous novel.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) Gyasi's characters are vividly drawn, sympathetic yet not simplistically heroic... This is an amazing first novel, remarkable in its epic vision. — *Reba Leiding, emeritus, James Madison Univ. Lib., Harrisonburg, VA*
Library Journal

Rarely does a grand, sweeping epic plumb interior lives so thoroughly. Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* is a marvel. —*Dave Wheeler, associate editor*
Shelf Awareness

Gyasi is a deeply empathetic writer, and each of the novel's 14 chapters is a savvy character portrait that reveals the impact of racism from multiple perspectives.... A promising debut that's awake to emotional, political, and cultural tensions across time and continents.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. Evaluate the title of the book. Why do you think that the author chose the word Homegoing? What is a homegoing and where does it appear in the novel? In addition to the term's literal meaning, discuss what symbolic meanings or associations the title might have in terms of a connection with our place of birth, our ancestors, our heritage, and our personal and cultural histories.
2. Explore the theme of belief. What forms of belief are depicted in the book and what purpose do these beliefs seem to serve for the characters? Does the author reveal what has shaped the characters' beliefs? Do these beliefs seem to have a mostly positive or negative impact on the believer and those around them?
3. What perspective does the book offer on the subject of beliefs and otherness? For instance, does the book delineate between superstition and belief? Why does Ma Aku reprimand Jo after he is kicked out of church? What do the Missionary and the fetish man contribute to a dialogue on beliefs and otherness? Does the book ultimately suggest the best way to confront beliefs that are foreign to us?
4. Evaluate the treatment and role of women in the novel. What role does marriage play within the cultures represented in the novel and how are the women treated as a result? Likewise, what significance does fertility and motherhood have for the women and how does it influence their treatment? In the chapter entitled "Effia," what does Adwoa tell Effia that her coupling with James is really about? In its depiction of the collective experiences of the female characters, what does the book seem to reveal about womanhood? How different would you say the treatment and role of women is today? Discuss.
5. Analyze the structure of the book. Why do you think the author assigned a

chapter to each of the major characters? What points of view are represented therein? Does any single point of view seem to stand out among the rest or do you believe that the author presented a balanced point of view? Explain. Although each chapter is distinct, what do the stories have in common when considered collectively? How might your interpretation of the book differ if the author had chosen to tell the story from a single point of view?

6. Consider the setting of the book. What time periods are represented and what places are adopted as settings? Why do you think that the author chose these particular settings? What subjects and themes are illuminated via these particular choices? How does the extensive scope of the book help to unify these themes and create a cohesive treatment of the subjects therein?

7. In the chapter entitled "Quey," Fiifi tells Quey that "[the] village must conduct its business like [the] female bird" (53). What does he mean by this and why do you think that Fiifi chooses this approach?

8. Why was Quey sent to England? After his return home, why does Quey say that it was safer in England? Why might he feel that what he faces at home is more difficult than the challenges he faced in leaving home and living abroad?

9. James's mother, Nana Yaa, says that the Gold Coast is like a pot of groundnut soup (89). What does she mean by this?

10. Why does Akosua Mensah insist to James, "I will be my own nation" (99)? What role do patriotism, heritage, and tradition play in contributing to the injustices, prejudices, and violence depicted in the book? Which other characters seem to share Akosua's point of view?

11. Explore the theme of complicity. What are some examples of complicity found in the novel? Who is complicit in the slave trade? Where do most of the slaves come from and who trades them? Who does Abena's father say is ultimately responsible (142)? Do you agree with him? Explain why or why not.

12. Examine the relationships between parents and children in the book. How would you characterize these relationships? Do the children seem to understand their parents and have good relationships with them and vice versa? Do the characters' views of their parents change or evolve as they grow up? How do the characters' relationships with their parents influence the way that they raise their own children?

13. What significance does naming have in the book? Why do some of the characters have to change or give up their names? Likewise, what do the characters' nicknames reveal both about them and about those who give or repeat these names? What does this dialogue ultimately suggest about the power of language and naming?

14. Explore the motif of storytelling. Who are the storytellers in the book and what kinds of stories do they tell? Who is their audience? What might these examples

suggest about the purpose and significance of a storytelling tradition?

15. According to Akua, where does evil begin? Where else in the book do readers find examples that support her view? What impact does Akua's opinion have on Yaw's lifework? Does he agree with Akua's view or refute it? Do you agree with her? Discuss.

16. What is history according to Yaw? What does he tell his students is "the problem of history" (226)? Who does Yaw say we believe when reading historical texts and what does he say is the question we must ask when studying history? How might these ideas influence your own reading of Gyasi's book and reshape your ideas about the historical subjects and themes treated therein?

17. Sonny says that the problem in America "wasn't segregation but the fact that you could not, in fact, segregate" (244)? What does he mean by this? What does Sonny say that he is forced to feel because of segregation? Which of the other characters experience these same feelings and hardships? Does there seem to be any progress as the story goes on? If so, how is progress achieved? Alternatively, what stymies and slows progress in this area?

18. What is Marcus studying and why isn't his research going well? What feeling does he indicate that he hopes to capture with his project? Why does Marcus go to Ghana and what does he learn from his experiences there? Marcus believes that "most people lived their lives on upper levels, not stopping to peer underneath (298). What does he mean by this? Where do we find examples of this elsewhere in the book? Are there any characters in the novel who defy this characterization?

19. Consider the book's treatment of colonialism and imperialism. In the chapter entitled "Esi" at the start of the book, what does Esi's mother tell her daughter that weakness and strength really are? How does her definition of weakness and strength correspond to the dialogue about colonialism and imperialism that runs throughout the book? Discuss how this dialogue expands into a deeper conversation about freedom and human rights. Have the issues surrounding colonialism, imperialism, freedom, and human rights featured in the book been resolved today or do they linger? If they remain, does the book ultimately offer any suggestions or advice as to how this might be remedied?

(Questions issued by the publisher.)

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Yaa Gyasi

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About this Person

Born: 1989 in Mampong, Ghana

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

Yaa Gyasi is a Ghanaian-American novelist who made her literary debut at age 26 with the publication of her highly anticipated novel, *Homegoing* (2016). The ambitious, sweeping narrative begins on the Gold Coast of Ghana during the 18th century and traces the impact of the transatlantic slave trade across seven generations to present-day America. The novel takes its title from a traditional African-American belief that dates to the era of slavery, whereby the soul of a deceased slave was liberated to return to his or her ancestral home in Africa in a spiritual journey known as a "homegoing." Written while Gyasi was in graduate school at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the manuscript for *Homegoing* reportedly sparked a bidding war among 10 publishers at the 2015 London Book Fair, ultimately garnering the author a seven-figure advance. Reviews of *Homegoing* were overwhelmingly positive, announcing Gyasi as an important new voice in contemporary fiction.

Yaa Gyasi was born in 1989 in Mampong, a small town in the Ashanti region of Ghana. She was two years old when her family moved to the United States so that her father, a scholar of French and Francophone African literature, could finish his doctoral degree at Ohio State University. In the years that followed, as Gyasi's father embarked on his academic career, the family lived for periods in Illinois and Tennessee. Gyasi was 10 years old when the family finally settled in Huntsville, Alabama.

Raised in a Pentecostal Christian household, Gyasi was a very shy child. Her only close companions were her two brothers, with whom she shared the unique and often alienating experience of growing up Ghanaian in the American South. Her skin color set her apart from her mostly white classmates, but neither did she seem to belong among her black peers. As she recalled to Jennifer Maloney of the *Wall Street Journal*, "[O]ne of the things I found most difficult was trying to figure out where I fit in, particularly because while my family is black, obviously we aren't African-American." Further, she explained, "Because I grew up in predominantly white spaces, I think it could be difficult to figure out how to navigate America's racial tension."

An avid reader from an early age, Gyasi came of age with a particular love of Victorian literature, including the works of Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. It was not until she was 17 and a senior in high school that she encountered her first novel by a black woman, reading *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. The experience was revelatory for Gyasi, as she recalled to *Vogue* in 2016: "That was the book that made me want to be a writer, not just because of how amazing the book is but because it was the first time I saw that a black woman was doing this, and at the top of her field. I felt like, oh, OK. This is a possible thing for me, and it can be intelligent and beautiful: all of the things that I love about fiction."

Gyasi studied English literature at Stanford University. In the summer of 2009, she was in Ghana on a research fellowship when she visited Cape Coast Castle, one of about 40 such "castles" (or fortresses) on the coast of what is now Ghana that served as commercial hubs for the transatlantic slave trade. Gyasi had a profound and visceral experience at the castle, as she learned how the British colonial officers lived in luxury in the upper regions of the building, often taking African women as their wives, while thousands of kidnapped men, women, and children were held captive below, packed into sweltering underground dungeons before being shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to slavery in Americas. The young writer knew immediately that the Cape Coast Castle would serve as the point of origin for her novel.

After receiving her bachelor's degree from Stanford in 2011, Gyasi spent brief stint working for a start-up company in San Francisco before she began her graduate studies at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop in 2012. The two-year master of fine arts program provided her the time and space she needed to devote herself to the research and writing of *Homegoing*. Graduating in 2014 with a completed manuscript in hand, she moved to Berkeley, California, with her boyfriend, who is also a writer. The following spring, with representation from Eric Simonoff of the William Morris Agency, she sold the novel to Alfred A. Knopf for a reported \$1,000,000.

Homegoing begins in 18th-century Ghana, where the lives of two half-sisters dramatically diverge: the elder sister, Effia, is taken into marriage by a British officer and lives with him in the comfortable upper quarters of Cape Coast Castle; the younger sister, Esi, is kidnapped and, passing through the castle's horrific dungeon, sold into slavery in America. Gyasi traces the consequences and reverberations of the sisters' separate fates through their descendants over the course of 250 years, with each chapter devoted to a representative of the next generation in the lineage. As the narrative alternates between Ghana and the United States, Gyasi illustrates the ways in which history can act as a powerful determinant in people's lives, leaving them bereft of any real sense of agency or purpose.

Among the most distinguishing features of *Homegoing* is Gyasi's unflinching examination of the ways in which West Africans were complicit in the development and perpetuation of the transatlantic slave trade. The most prophetic summation of slavery's lingering curse comes from one of Effia's descendants, a wise old woman who tells her son, "There are people who have done wrong because they could not see the result of the wrong." Nonetheless, she continues, "Evil begets evil. It grows. It transmutes, so that sometimes you cannot see that the evil in the world began as the evil in your home."

Beyond the media sensation that accompanied the extraordinary price of the book's acquisition, *Homegoing* was widely hailed as a remarkable literary achievement. Ta-Nehisi Coates, winner of the National Book Award for his nonfiction examination of race in America, *Between the World and Me* (2015), drew attention to Gyasi's debut when he tweeted, "Finished Yaa Gyasi's 'Homegoing' yesterday. Thought it was a monster when I started. Felt it was a monster when I was done." In *Vogue*, Megan O'Grady noted the apparent influence of Toni Morrison in Gyasi's work, writing that "she shares Morrison's uncanny ability to crystalize, in a single event, slavery's moral and emotional fallout." At the same time O'Grady identified Gyasi's unique talent in "her ability to connect it so explicitly to the present day: No novel has better illustrated the way in which racism became institutionalized in this country."

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born Yaa Gyasi in 1989 in Mampong, Ghana. **Education:** Stanford University, BA, English literature, 2011; University of Iowa, MFA, creative writing, 2014. **Addresses:** Home--Berkeley, CA. Office--c/o Eric Simonoff, William Morris Agency, 11 Madison Ave., 18th Floor, New York, NY 10010.

CAREER:

Novelist, 2016--.

WORKS:

Selected writings

- *Homegoing*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

FURTHER READINGS:

Sources

Periodicals

- *New Yorker*, May 30, 2016.
- *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 2016.
- *Time*, June 6, 2016.
- *Vogue*, May 25, 2016.
- *Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2016.

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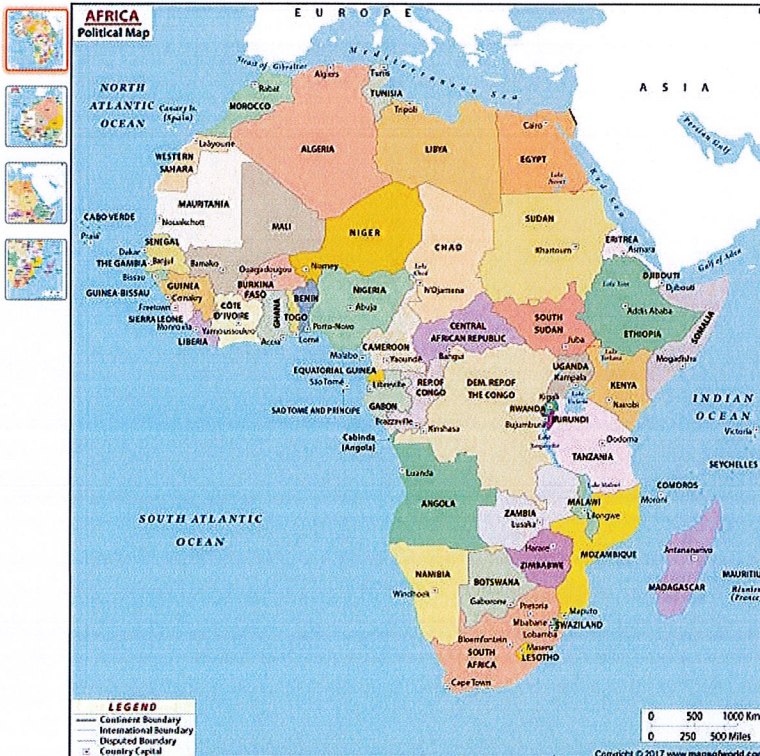


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List of castles in Ghana

During the colonial period in Ghana, at the time known as Gold Coast, European-style coastal forts and castles were built, mostly by Portuguese, Dutch and British. A number of these fortifications and outposts were designated World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Kumasi Fort in the Ashanti Region was originally built by an Asante king in imitation of these colonial forts.^[1]

Contents

Coastal regions

Other regions

References

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19th-century map of Gold Coast and the Asante kingdom

Coastal regions

Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions is the collective designation by UNESCO of European-style fortifications and outposts (mostly Portuguese, Dutch and British) along the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) during the colonial period. The term specifically applies to a number of such fortifications designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979, including:^[2]

- Fort Good Hope (Fort Goedehoop)
- Cape Coast Castle
- Fort Patience (Fort Leysaemhyt)
- Fort Amsterdam
- Fort St. Jago (Fort Conraadsburg)
- Fort Batenstein
- Fort San Sebastian
- Fort Metal Cross

Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions

UNESCO World Heritage Site



Cape Coast Castle

Location Ghana

9. English Fort (Fort Vredenburg)
10. Fort Saint Antony
11. Elmina Castle (St. George's Castle / Fort St. Jorge)

The full WHS list consists of:^[2]

- Three castles:
 - Cape Coast at Cape Coast
 - St. George's d'Elmina at Elmina
 - Christiansborg at Osu, Accra
- Fifteen forts:
 - Good Hope at Senya Beraku
 - Patience at Apam
 - Amsterdam at Abandze
 - St. Jago at Elmina
 - San Sebastian at Shama
 - Metal Cross at Dixcove
 - St. Anthony at Axim
 - Orange at Sekondi
 - Fort Groß Friedrichsburg at Prince's Town
 - William (Lighthouse) at Cape Coast
 - William at Anomabu
 - Victoria at Cape Coast
 - Ussher at Usshertown, Accra
 - James at Jamestown, Accra
 - Apollonia at Beyin
- Four forts partially in ruins:
 - Amsterdam at Abandze (Note, this fort is listed both as *fort* and as *fort partially in ruins* by UNESCO)
 - English Fort at British Komenda
 - Batenstein at Butre;
 - Prinzensten at Keta
- Ruins with visible structures:
 - Nassau at Mouri
 - Fredensborg at Old Ningo
 - Vredenburg at Dutch Komenda
 - Vernon at Prampram
 - Dorothea at Akwidaa
- Two sites with traces of former fortifications:
 - Frederiksborg at Amanful, Cape Coast
 - Fort Augustaborg at Teshie

Includes	1 Fort Good Hope (Fort Goedehoop) • 2 Cape Coast Castle • 3 Fort Patience (Fort Leysaemhyt) • 4 Fort Amsterdam • 5 Fort St. Jago (Fort Conraadsburg) • 6 Fort Batenstein • 7 Fort San Sebastian • 8 Fort Metal Cross • 9 English Fort (Fort Vredenburg) • 10 Fort Saint Antony • 11 Elmina Castle (St. George's Castle / Fort St. Jorge)
Criteria	Cultural: (vi)
Reference	34 (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/34)
Inscription	1979 (3rd session)

Other coastal forts included in Ghana's material cultural heritage list of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board:^[3]

- Fort Fredericksburg at Amanful (distinguished from Fort Frederiksborg/Fort Royal near Cape Coast Castle)
- Fort McCarthy at Cape Coast
- The Little Fort at Anomabu
- Fort Tantomquery at Otuam

Not listed as heritage (mostly largely destroyed or otherwise lost):

- Fort Winneba at Winneba
- Fort Sekondi at Sekondi
- Fort Kongenstein at Ada
- Fort Elize Carthago near Axim
- Fort Ruychaver on the banks of the Ankobra River
- Fort Witsen near Sekondi

By region (from East to West):

- Volta Region:
 - Fort Prinzenstein, Keta (5°55'18"N 0°59'37"E)
- Greater Accra Region:
 - Fort Fredensborg, Old Ningo (5°45'04"N 0°11'01"E)
 - Fort Vernon, Prampram (5°43'31"N 0°07'00"E)
 - Fort Augustaborg, Teshie (5°35'00"N 0°06'00"W)
 - Osu Castle (Christiansborg), Accra (5°32'49"N 0°10'57"W)
 - Ussher Fort, Accra (5°32'19"N 0°12'30"W)
 - Fort James, Accra (5°32'01"N 0°12'40"W)
- Central Region:
 - Fort Good Hope (Fort Goede Hoop), Senya Beraku (5°23'15"N 0°29'23"W)
 - Fort Lijdzaamheid ('Patience'), Apam (5°17'10"N 0°43'41"W)
 - Fort Amsterdam, Abandze (5°11'32"N 1°05'35"W)
 - Fort William, Anomabu (5°10'27"N 1°07'08"W)
 - Fort Nassau, Moree (5°08'00"N 1°12'00"W)
 - Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast (5°06'12"N 1°14'33"W)
 - Fort William (Lighthouse), Cape Coast (5°06'29"N 1°14'39"W)
 - Fort Victoria, Cape Coast (5°06'24"N 1°14'57"W)
 - Elmina Castle, Elmina (5°04'57"N 1°20'53"W)
 - Fort Coenraadsburg, Elmina (5°05'04"N 1°21'03"W)
 - Fort Vredenburg, Komenda (5°03'06"N 1°29'01"W)
 - English Fort, Komenda (5°03'00"N 1°29'22"W)
- Western Region:
 - Fort San Sebastian, Shama (5°00'39"N 1°37'45"W)
 - Fort Orange, Sekondi (4°56'09"N 1°42'26"W)



Regions of Ghana

Cape Coast Castle

Cape Coast Castle (Swedish: *Carolusborg*) is one of about forty "slave castles", or large commercial forts, built on the Gold Coast of West Africa (now Ghana) by European traders. It was originally a Portuguese "feitoria" or trading post, established in 1555. However in 1653 the Swedish Africa Company constructed a timber fort there. It originally was a centre for the trade in timber and gold. It was later used in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.^[1] Other Ghanaian slave castles include Elmina Castle and Fort Christiansborg. They were used to hold slaves before they were loaded onto ships and sold in the Americas, especially the Caribbean. This "gate of no return" was the last stop before crossing the Atlantic Ocean.^[2]



Cape Coast Castle, as rebuilt by the British in the 18th century

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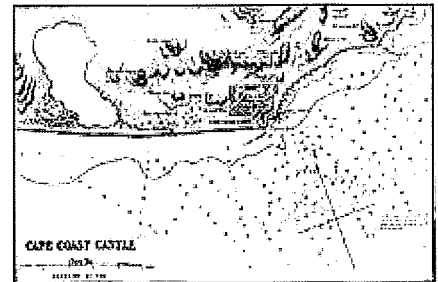
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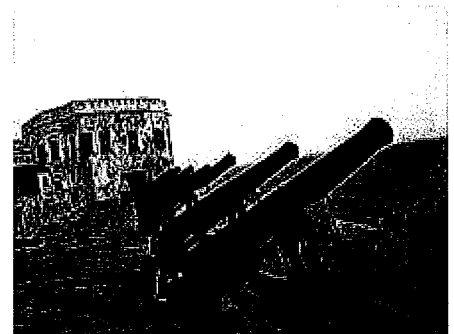
References

Sources

External links



Map of Cape Coast Castle (1869)



Cannon at the Cape Coast Castle

Trade history

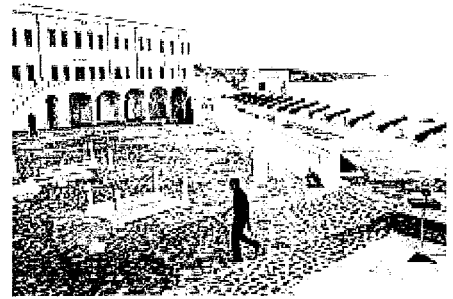
The large quantity of gold dust found in Ghana was what primarily attracted Europe, and many natives of Cape Coast used this to their advantage. In exchange for gold, mahogany, their own people and other local items, the natives received clothing, blankets, spices, sugar, silk and many other items. The castle at Cape Coast was a market where these transactions took place.

At the time enslaved Africans were a valuable commodity in the Americas and elsewhere, and slaves were the main traded in Cape Coast. Due to this, many changes were made to Cape Coast Castle. One of the alterations was the addition of large underground dungeons that could hold as many as a

thousand slaves awaiting export. Many European nations flocked to Cape Coast in order to get a foothold in the slave trade. Business was very competitive and this led to conflict. This is the reason why the castle at Cape Coast changed hands many times during the course of its commercial history.

Living conditions

In Cape Coast Castle, the underground dungeon was a space of terror, death, and blackness. This stood as a direct juxtaposition to the European living quarters and commanding heights of whiteness above, who lived relatively luxuriously. The basement of this imposing fortress was often the last memory slaves had of their homeland before being shipped off across the Atlantic, as this signified the beginning of their journey.^[3]



President Barack Obama visiting the slave castle



Cape Coast castle

Building history

The first fort established on the present site of Cape Coast Castle was built by Hendrik Caerloff for the Swedish Africa Company. Caerloff was a former employee of the Dutch West India Company who had risen to the rank of fiscal before employing himself with the latter company established by Louis de Geer. As a former high-ranking officer of the Dutch, Caerloff had the friendly relations with the local chiefs necessary to establish a trading post. In 1650, Caerloff succeeded in getting the permission of the King of Fetu to establish a fort at Cabo Corso (meaning "short cape" in Portuguese, later corrupted to English *Cape Coast*).^[4] The first timber lodge was erected at the site in 1653 and named *Carolusborg* after King Charles X of Sweden.

Caerloff returned to Europe in 1655, leaving a Swede by the name of Johann Philipp von Krusenstjerna in charge of Carolusborg. Louis de Geer had however died in the meantime, and Caerloff got himself involved in a serious dispute with his heirs. In Amsterdam, he convinced merchants to give a financial injection to the Danish West India Company, for which he set sail to the Gold Coast in 1657, with the goal in mind to capture for Denmark the Swedish lodges and forts he had established himself.^[5] With the help of the Dutch, Caerloff succeeded in driving the Swedes out, leaving the Gold Coast on the captured ship *Stockholm Slott*, and with Von Krusenstjerna on board as a prisoner.^[5]

Caerloff had left Samuel Smit, also a former employee of the Dutch West India Company, in charge of Carolusborg.^[6] The Dutch were able to convince Smit in 1659 of the rumour that Denmark had been conquered by Sweden, upon which Smit rejoined the Dutch West India Company, handing over all Danish possessions to the Dutch. The King of Fetu was displeased with this, however, and prevented the Dutch from taking possession of the fort. A year later, the King decided to sell it to the Swedes. After the King died in 1663, the Dutch were finally able to occupy the fort.^[6]

The Danes had in the meantime established another fort, Fort Frederiksborg (1661), just a few hundred metres east from Carolusborg. Although situated perfectly to launch an attack on Carolusborg, the English capture of Carolusborg (1664) during the prelude to the Second Anglo-Dutch War, prevented the Danes from challenging them; the English had reinforced the fort, which they

named Cape Coast Castle, to such an extent that even Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter deemed it impossible to conquer.^[7] As the Dutch had captured the former English headquarters at Kormantin and had rebuilt it as Fort Amsterdam, Cape Coast became the new capital of the English possessions on the Gold Coast.^[8]

In 1689 the pirate Duncan Mackintosh was hanged at the Castle with a few of his crew, though he would not be the last pirate hanged at the fort.^[9] In 1722, the fort was the site where 54 men of the crew of the pirate Bartholomew Roberts were condemned to death, of whom 52 were hanged and two reprieved.

In 1757, during the Seven Years' War, a French naval squadron badly damaged and nearly captured Cape Coast Castle.^[10] This event was likely one of the most important reasons to entirely reconstruct the Castle, which was quite notorious for its collapsing walls and leaking roofs.^[11] In 1762, an extensive spur ending in a tower was built on the western side and in 1773, a high building along the north curtain was erected, during which the last remnants of the 17th-century fort were demolished. Greenhill Point, a bastion to the east of the castle, was replaced by two new bastions, with a sea gate in the middle. To the south, two new bastions, named Grossle's Bastions, replaced an old round tower as the main defensive work. The tower, which now had no military use, was extended in 1790s with two stories, now becoming the governors' apartments. The space below Grossle's Bastions was used as the new slave dungeons.^[12]

Notable governors

In 1824 the British governor, Sir Charles MacCarthy, was defeated by the Asante army, committed suicide, and his skull was taken back to the Asante capital Kumasi where it was reportedly used as a drinking cup.^[13] George Maclean was governor of Cape Coast Castle from 1830 until 1844. In October 1836 he met the poet Letitia Landon at a dinner party while on a visit to the UK. They married and traveled back to Cape Coast Castle where, within two months, Landon died of heart failure. Both George and Letitia are buried in the castle courtyard. Maclean was charged with putting an end to slave trading and did so along 300 km (200 mi) of the West African coast. He also made peace with the Ashanti (Treaty of 1831), instituted a judicial system still in use in many African democracies, and encouraged successful and fair trading.^[14] From 1846-1850, Governor William Winniett was also active in ending the slave trade. He died in the Fortress.

Restoration

The castle, or castle and dungeon, to give it its official name, was first restored in the 1920s by the British Public Works Department.

In 1957, when Ghana became independent, the castle came under the care of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB). In the early 1990s the building was restored by the Ghanaian Government, with funds from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with technical assistance from the Smithsonian Institution and other NGOs.

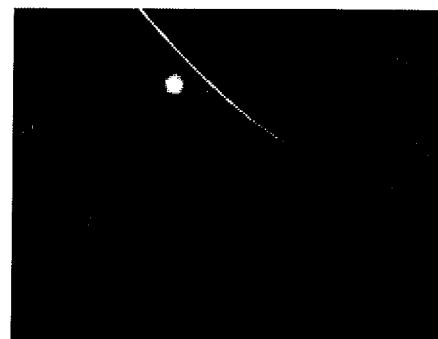
The Cape Coast Castle, and other forts and castles in Ghana, are included on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List.

Cultural references

Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi makes frequent references to the Castle. The contrast in living conditions between the Europeans living above and the slaves living below are highlighted in the individual stories of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, during their time at the castle. While Effia lives in luxury, Esi suffers in the squalid living conditions in the dungeons below unbeknownst to her half-sister.

3D documentation with terrestrial laser scanning

In 2015, the Zamani Project documented Cape Coast Castle with terrestrial 3D laser scanning.^{[15][16]} The non-profit research group specialises in 3D digital documentation of tangible cultural heritage. The data generated by the Zamani Project creates a permanent record that can be used for research, education, restoration, and conservation.^{[17][18][19]} A 3D model and a panorama tour, of Cape Coast Castle are available on www.zamaniproject.org (<https://zamaniproject.org/site-ghana-cape-coast-cape-coast-castle.html>). An animation of the 3D model is available here (<https://zamaniproject.org/site-ghana-cape-coast-cape-coast-castle.html#video3-28>).



Inside the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle, where hundreds of slaves were held in cramped conditions before being transferred to boats bound for the western hemisphere

See also

- Town of Cape Coast, Ghana
- Cape Coast Castle Museum, Cape Coast, Ghana
- List of castles in Ghana

References

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4. Van Dantzig 1999, pp. 23–24.
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10. Van Dantzig 1999, pp. 61–62.