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## **GHANA**

# Central Region Project, Coastal Ghana - Perspectives 2000

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Between May and August 1998, a Syracuse University team conducted archaeological research in the Central Region of coastal Ghana (Figure 1). Participants included Edward Carr, Gérard Chouin, Gregory Cook, Benjamin Kankpeyeng, Samuel Spiers, Natalie Swanepoel, and Christopher DeCorse. The research represents a continuation and expansion of work initiated by DeCorse in 1985, which has focused on culture contact, transformation and continuity in African societies during the period of initial European contact, trade and colonization (DeCorse 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001). Funding was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, Syracuse University student and faculty research development funds, and a National Science Foundation international travel grant.

Research by DeCorse in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1990 centered on the African settlement of Elmina (Figure 2), site of the first and largest of the European trade posts established in sub-Saharan Africa (DeCorse 1987, 1992b). During 1993 (along with Theresa Singleton), 1995, and 1997 (with Carr) work continued at Elmina but the focus of the research was broadened. Research was undertaken at other African sites with dates ranging from at least 1,000 years B.P. to present, as well as European outposts associated with other coastal towns. Research goals were to provide a fuller context for interpreting data from Elmina. The 1998 field project continued to widen the scope of work. More detailed surveys and preliminary excavations were undertaken at several sites. In addition, preliminary ethnographic research was initiated on Fante fishing and canoe building traditions, food

ways, and oral traditions of individual sites. Work by Tara Tetrault in 1997 focused specifically on ceramic production, while Nicole Bourgue examined faunal remains.

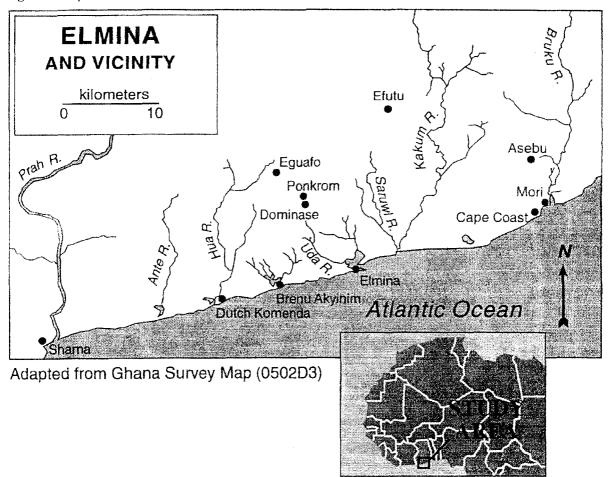
The 1998 Coastal Survey concentrated on the area between Brenu Akyinim, west of Elmina, and Cape Coast, to the east. The purpose of this preliminary survey involved locating and retrieving diagnostic artifacts in order to establish some chronological control for a further understanding of late prehistoric and historic occupation in the vicinity of Elmina. Isolated finds were located along much of the coast, with several discrete sites dating from circa 1000 A.D. to the sixteenth century, as well as more recent occupations.

Preliminary survey of the settlement of Eguafo and immediate surroundings (approximately 2.5 x 2.0 km.) undertaken by Spiers and Chouin was aimed at establishing its size, and collection of diagnostic European trade materials. Eguafo was the center of one of the states that controlled the central portion of the Gold Coast from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries (Chouin 1998, 1999). Theresa Singleton and DeCorse had tested the site in 1993. Thermoluminescence dates obtained from ceramics excavated at that time suggest initial occupation in the late first, or early second millennium A.D. The Eguafo site is very rich in material culture and preservation is remarkable. which in one sense is unfortunate as archaeological deposits are being destroyed at a rapid pace by gold-digging operations. Many artifacts were collected from mining back dirt piles, which, while having no archaeological context, indicate European trade materials from the sixteenth century to the present, though initial occupation is much earlier. A fairly large number of forowa (locally made, sheet brass ritual vessels) and samples of almost complete Rhenish stoneware jugs were collected from what appears to have been an eighteenth and nineteenth century cemetery recently plundered by local gold diggers.

Outlying areas of Eguafo, now mostly farmland, have dense concentrations of locally produced ceramics, and many *in situ* grinding stones were observed, which may indicate a larger settlement than that which exists today. Further, it is interesting to note that material observed in the *Dumpow*, a sacred forested hill associated with Eguafo state's

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Figure 1. Map of research area.

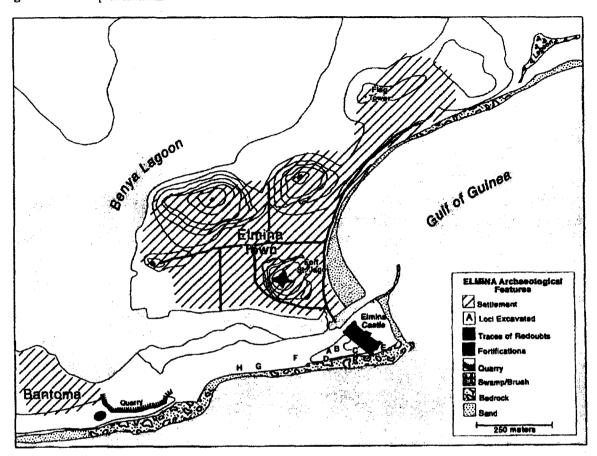


myths of origin, is different from that found in the settlement itself. Oral traditions state that the first settlers of Eguafo came down from the *Dumpow*, one of the few remaining stands of primary-like forest in the area. The artifact assemblage in eroded or tree-fall areas consists of heavily eroded local ceramics, whose paste is different from those in the main settlement. It also includes quartzite pieces, some of which may be artifactual, though this is awaiting further analysis. It is tantalizing to suggest that this may represent an earlier period of occupation than in the town itself, though such questions can only be answered through further archaeological investigation.

Additional research by Carr examined the nearby sites of Dominase and Ponkrum. Carr's research focuses on the articulation (via economic development) of postwar capitalism with the West African peasant economy particular to the inhabi-

tants of the Eguafo State in Ghana's Central Region. The paramountcy, and its peasant-farmer population, has seen a great deal of change in the past 50 years, changes best illustrated through a focus on the Eguafo village of Dominase. Founded in the early nineteenth century along a road linking the coastal international trade entrepôt of Elmina to the Asante hinterland, Dominase grew rapidly. Documentary records from the time suggest that the village was the largest in the Eguafo chieftaincy by 1850. Carr mapped the villages of Dominase and Ponkrum during the 1997 field season and conducted a historical ethnography of the villages to establish temporal patterns of landscape development and disappearance in the period between 1930 and 1997 (Figure 3). This mapping revealed that Dominase maintained its size and relative importance until the 1970s. At that time, the village rapidly underwent abandonment that reduced it to its curNYAME AKUMA No. 53 June 2000

Figure 2. Site map of Elmina.

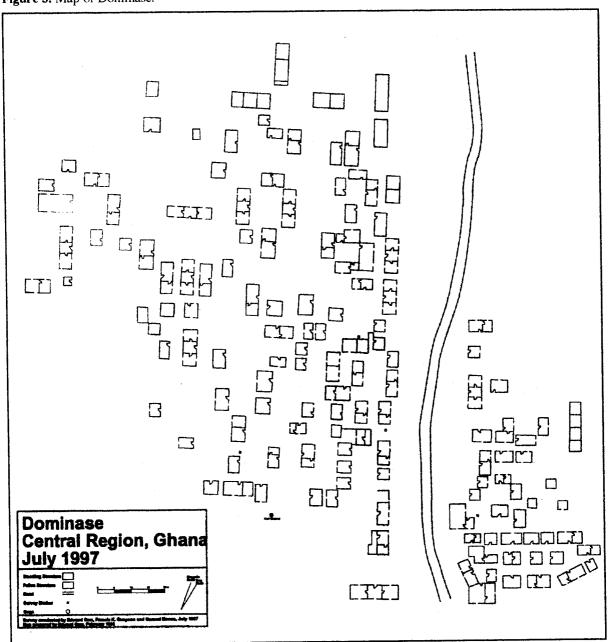


rent state of nine standing structures and a dozen inhabitants. Carr's research approaches the phenomenon of Dominase's abandonment not as an imposed restructuring from above, but as a complex interplay between the local systems of economy. power and meaning and influences operating at both the Ghanaian and global scales. This complexity defies the methodologies previously applied to the study of global-local articulations as manifest in development studies. Previous studies of development impacts at the local level have constructed their studies upon documentary and ethnographic sources of information (Ferguson 1994; Mitchell 1995). At no time do these studies delve into the analysis of the meanings and uses of material culture in the contexts under study. Carr's research uses the material record in conjunction with these other sources of information to generate analyses that otherwise might be unattainable.

Between May and August 1998, Carr returned to Dominase to excavate two structures abandoned in the 1970's. Analysis of these materials is ongoing, but it is hoped that the assemblage will reflect changes in meaning/practice that provide clues to the linkages between the various factors and scales that came together to generate this particular village abandonment. The excavations also served to temporally bind the site by establishing a settlement date around the turn of the nineteenth century. Further ethnographic research conducted between June and August 1999 explored the uses of materials recovered during excavations. relationships between the local social structure and the patterns of resettlement by those who abandoned the village, and current patterns of material use in Dominase and the nearby village of Ponkrum. Currently in Ghana, Carr is expanding his excavations and the scope of previous ethnographic discussions.

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Figure 3. Map of Dominase.



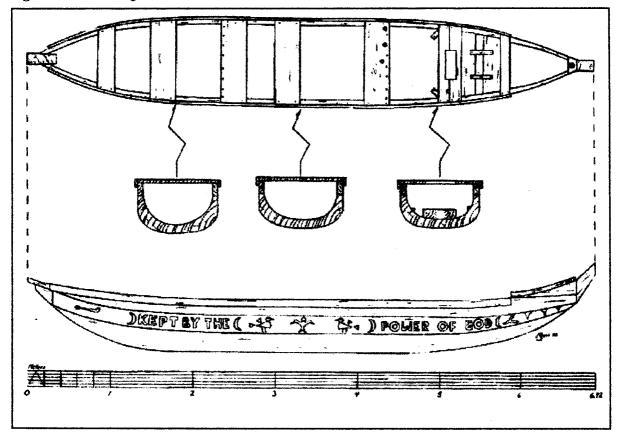
Research by Cook included a logistics survey to prepare for archaeological research on maritime trade. He also initiated contacts within the Elmina fishing industry, conducting ethnographic research on Fante fishing and dugout canoe construction, decoration, and use. This included participation in several open-ocean fishing voyages, interviews with crews and owners of canoes, recording canoe construction methods and creating detailed mea-

sured drawings of numerous Fante and Ewe vessels (Figure 4). The contacts established during the summer, coupled with the first-hand knowledge of offshore navigation and water depths will contribute to the long-term objective of understanding the nautical context of African-European interactions on the Ghanaian coast.

Ongoing research in the Central Region will continue with documentary research and fieldwork

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Figure 4. Fante fishing canoe, Elmina 1998.



during 2000, with the participation of a team of Earthwatch volunteers. Work will be undertaken at several sites, including Brenu Akyinim, Atwima, Eguafo, Dominase, Ponkrom and Yesunkwa. Thermoluminescence dates from Brenu Akvinim. first tested by DeCorse and Singleton in 1993, indicate occupation dates back at least 1000 years. Excavations at these sites will document changes in coastal subsistence and local ceramic industries immediately before and after European contact. The sites are characterized by scatters of locally produced ceramics, occasional pieces of iron, and stone beads. The location of both sites probably speaks to the importance of lagoonal resources and marine shellfish prior to the advent of large-scale marine fishing. Carr will complete his fieldwork at Dominase, Ponkrum and Yesunkwa. Spiers will undertake further survey and excavations at Eguafo in order to delineate the limits of the settlement and their change through time. Excavations will specifically focus on the culture history of the site, looking at changes in settlement pattern, subsistence,

trading networks and craft production associated with socio-political changes in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cook will work towards a more in-depth understanding of the Elmina fishing community through intensive interviews, participant observation, and additional recording of the material culture involved in this industry. His focus will be on investigating symbolic representations in canoe decoration and the collection of oral accounts of fishing techniques and the development of the modern fishing community. Chouin will investigate the possibility of using sacred groves as historical and archaeological markers to locate ancient settlements and two seventeenth and eighteenth century royal cemeteries. Excavations at these sites are part of his doctoral project on precolonial landscape and social organization in the ancient Eguafo kingdom, in a context of geopolitical change. He will also undertake archival research in Britain with regard to a late nineteenth century colonial cemetery situated in Cape Coast, and in France to pursue a census he started in 1994 of French archival

sources for the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century Gold Coast (Chouin 1996).

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