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Original article

Mining in Ghana and its connections with mining in the Brazilian diaspora

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1. Introduction

This paper argues that slaves brought from Obuasi (Adanse) in the Asante Region of present day Ghana through Sao Jorge da Mina (Elmina Castle), constructed by the Portuguese in the 15th century introduced gold mining practices in the Mina Gerais area of Brazil. For centuries, West Africa has been one of the world's most important gold mining regions in the world. Today, it's most significant gold producing country is Ghana, which accounts for 70% of regional output (Utter, 1992; Hilson, 2002).

Ibn al-Faqih, an Iranian scholar who compiled materials for an encyclopedia of the Muslim world, wrote that "In the country of (ancient) Ghana, gold grows in the sand as carrots do, and is plucked at sunrise". This assertion is true when one considers the experience of Gold Coast Colony's (now Ghana). Although it is not known when gold mining activities began in the Gold Coast, it is certain that local inhabitants had a sound knowledge of gold processing prior to the arrival of the Portuguese. As Davidson (1963:13) explained:

Until the discovery of America, the gold of Europe was mined and smelted by Africans in Africa. Metal working was known for many centuries before Europe's first appearance on the continent of Africa.

Even before the introduction of European technology to Ghana, the indigenous people were engaged in alluvial gold mining activities (Junner, 1973; Hilson, 2002; Ofofu-Mensah, 2013).

During this period, nearly all of the gold in Ghana appeared to have been recovered from streams and rivers in the rainforest and in the coastal sand, where it had been washed down from the interior by rivers and rains (Kimble, 1963; Gocking, 2005; Ofofu-Mensah, 2013). Bosman (1967) attests to this fact when he wrote that the gold was obtained in or between certain hills and in river gravels where the streams enter the sea. This was also corroborated by Barbot, 1732 who reported that the streambeds at the base of hills or beneath waterfalls were especially rich sources of alluvial gold.

In West Africa, gold was not mined on the coast but further inland. One of the main inland sources of gold was Bambuk on the Upper Senegal and Bure on the forest fringes of Mali. The other main gold-producing areas were Obuasi (in Adanse) and neighboring Akan states (Ofofu-Mensah, 2013; Ofofu-Mensah, 2010).

Oral tradition and early Dutch and English sources repeatedly mention that the Akan people of Ghana worked and mined gold, and that their goldfields supplied Trans-Saharan traders and the European market prior to and during the colonial administration of the Gold Coast Colony. Akan gold miners used simple but effective technology and kept Europe supplied with enormous quantities of gold, especially between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries (Daaka, 1969; Arhin, 1978a, 1978b; Garrard, 1980

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Fig. 1. Map of Africa and South America showing both Ghana and Brazil, and the gold-producing localities under investigation.

2. The gold resources of Obuasi (Adanse)

On 3 February 1634, Jan Stricker of the Dutch West India Company described a place in the interior of the Gold Coast, where gold was mined. Scholars such as Junner (1973), Daaku (1969) and Benneh (1978) have identified this area as modern day Obuasi. Bowdich (1819) described the hills between Akyem and Assin as very rich in gold, and Bosman (1967) and Barbot, 1732 reported that gold from Obuasi (in Adanse), which they referred to as “Accany”, was exceptionally pure and fine. According to Daaku (1969), the quality of the gold led to the label “Accany Sika” being used to refer to gold from Obuasi.¹ Muller was probably referring to Obuasi gold when remarking that “it was in the rich mountains in the interior that the best gold sold on the coast could be found” (Perbi, 1997).

3. The Gold Coast Colony's (Ghana's) relations with the early Europeans

The potential to trade for gold lured many European countries to the Gold Coast Colony. This led to the erection, along the colony's coastlines, of numerous forts and castles, some of which are still in use. As Hilson (2002) explains, European interest in West African gold began to grow in the 15th century, mainly because of the acute shortages in gold supplies in continental Europe at the time. The first Europeans to arrive in West Africa were the Portuguese. They landed on the coast of modern Ghana in January 1471. For 11 years, they engaged in trade with the people of Edina. Because of the abundant gold they found here and in surrounding areas, the Portuguese gave the location the name Elmina (gold mine). Convinced that the prospects for trade were very good, they obtained land from the king of Elmina, built a magnificent castle in 1482 near the mouth of the River Benya and named it Sao Jorge (Jaogo) or St George (Buah, 1980).

¹ The word “Sika” is the Akan word for “money” and as “Accanny” was a corruption of the word “Akan” by the European traders.

One of the earliest written sources which makes reference to Portuguese activity on the Gold Coast was a Committee of Enquiry Report called the *Inquirico*, written in 1499 at the Elmina Castle on the instruction of Captain-General Fernao Lopez Correa. The document contains pieces of information on the slave trade on the Gold Coast in particular and West Africa in general (Anquandah, 2004). Another document, the *Regimento da Mina*, a 90-page royal manual provided instructions for the Captain-General of the Elmina Castle on commercial procedures. According to this document, slaves from Ghana were exported to Portugal or to Portuguese-run plantations in Brazil (Anquandah, 2004). By 1700, Portuguese ships were frequenting the Gold Coast, and loaded with slaves and transported to Brazil (Van Dantzig, 1980).

For a number of reasons, the Portuguese were unable to maintain their trading monopoly in West Africa. These included financial mismanagement, unsuccessful explorations, colonial revolts and inadequate numbers of labourers to cultivate colonial riches. These inevitably led to a gradual decline of Portuguese control of the seas in the 16th century. Recognizing these weaknesses, the Dutch and the English mobilized financial resources and began invading weakened Portuguese forts in West Africa (Hilson, 2002: 18). In the case of Ghana, the biggest challenge came from the Dutch, who began travelling regularly to West Africa in 1593. Within half a century, they had managed to force the Portuguese to surrender and withdraw from the Gold Coast. In 1637, they captured the Elmina Castle from the Portuguese. With the capture of the fort at Axim and Beyin in 1642, the Dutch had acquired all Portuguese possessions in the Gold Coast. After the Dutch established the Dutch West India Company (DWIC) in 1621, Dutch merchants intensified their trading activities along the West African coast, including supplying slaves to the Portuguese in America. From 1678, the Dutch began to face stiff opposition from the British. After this, British trading activities on the Gold Coast began to increase rapidly, while those of the Dutch started to decline (Buah, 1980).

Towards the middle of the 17th century, other Europeans started to arrive in the Gold Coast, lured by its wealth and trade prospects, including the Danish (1642), the Swedish (1647) and the Brandenburgers (1682). The latter did not stay very long and

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