

# **A Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigations at the Danish Plantation Settlements along the South Akuapem Ridge, Ghana**

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## **Introduction**

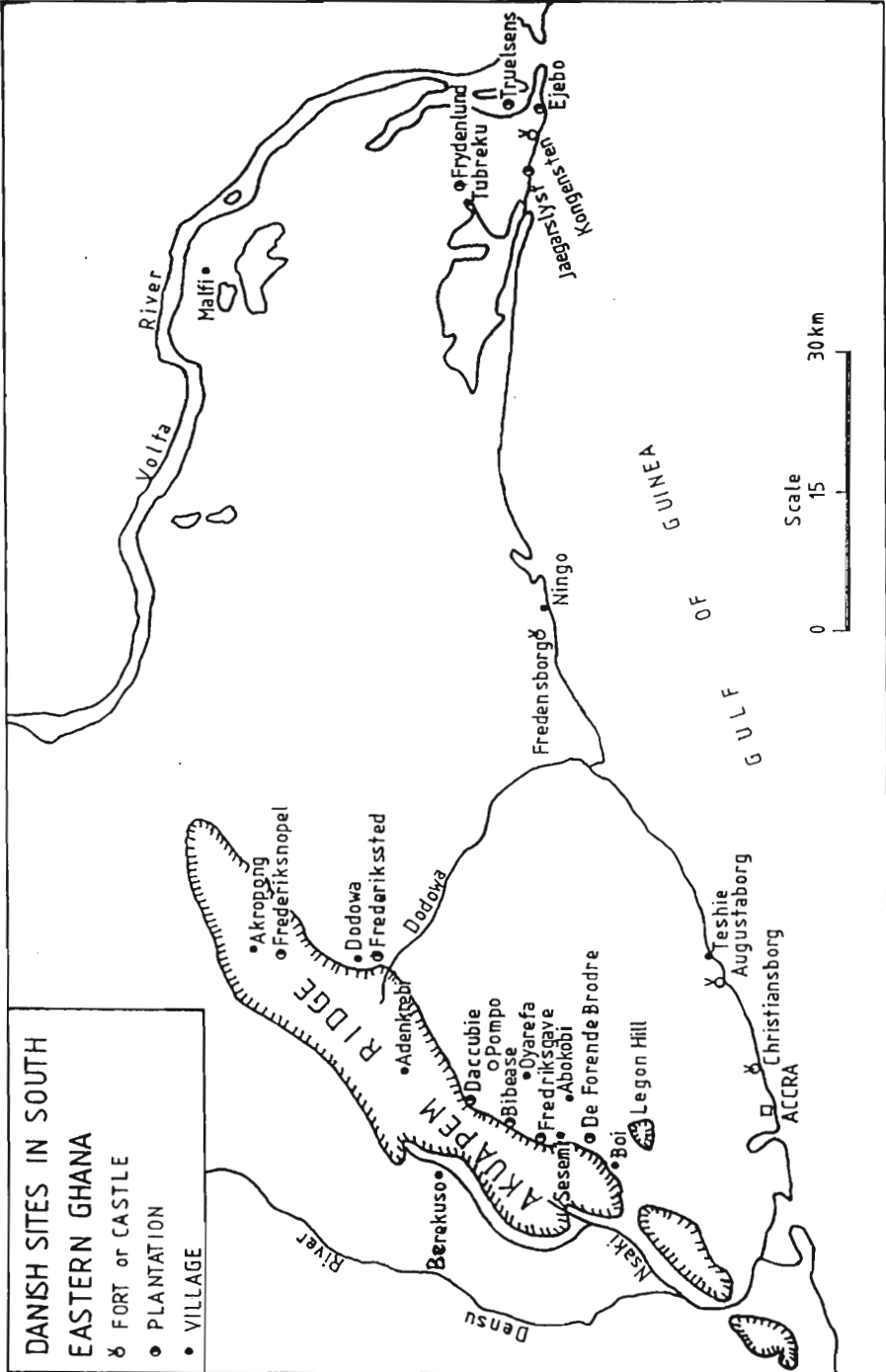
In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Danes established plantations in southeastern Ghana (Fig.1) in response to their country's abolition of the slave trade (Jeppesen 1966; Dickson 1971, 128; Kwamena-Poh 1972, 47). The areas that attracted the Danish plantation settlements were the southern foothills of the Akuapem Ridge and the estuary of the Volta River (Adams 1957; van Dantzig 1980: 80). Labour on the plantations was provided by African fort slaves from Christiansborg Castle and other slaves privately owned by Danish merchants (Norregard 1966).

Since 1992, the plantation settlements (situated along the eastern portions of the Akuapem Ridge and the adjacent low-lying and gently undulating Accra Plains) have been the subject of archaeological and historical research. Archaeological surveys and excavations jointly directed by the authors have been carried out as part of the *Slavery and the Danish Plantations Archaeological Project*, funded by the Senior Members Research Grant of the University of Ghana, Legon.

## **The Archaeological Study of European Settlements**

The archaeological study of European settlements in West Africa has a relatively long tradition. Before examining the details of the present study, it is useful to review past attempts made by Africanist archaeologists at understanding the European presence in West Africa. Lawrence (1963) was the first to carry out an extensive survey and documentation of European settlements in Ghana, focusing on their architecture, history and subsequent restoration. Following this study, Wood (1969) also provided information on the history, architectural construction and occupation of European settlements on the Senegal and Gambia Rivers. In addition, he assessed the archaeological potential of these settlements.

In Ghana, there are two types of extant European settlement, namely trading posts and Danish plantations. The trading posts took the form of forts, castles and lodges. It is estimated that sixty trading posts (representing two-thirds of European settlements in West Africa) are located in Ghana (Van Dantzig 1980). Excavations have been conducted at some of these trading posts, although the objectives of these excavations may have varied. The initial work either facilitated maintenance and restoration (*e.g.* Van Dantzig 1972) or focused on chronology and the description of recovered artefacts (*e.g.* Calvocoressi 1977). Recent excavations conducted by



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Figure 1 Map of southeastern Ghana, showing Danish sites

Anquandah (1992) at Fort St. Jago, Elmina elucidated the architectural, military and cultural history of the building.

Two projects undertaken at Cape Coast Castle and the ruined Elmina old town are exceptions. When Simmonds (1973) excavated the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle, his project was aimed at examining the general conditions of slaves and their material possessions at the points of departure for the diaspora. DeCorse (1992a; 1992b) excavated the Elmina old town which developed adjacent to Elmina Castle, in order to examine the ramifications of European contact on indigenous Elmina society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Previous researches conducted at some of the plantation settlements in the areas have concentrated on accounts of their structural history (Lawrence 1963) and on the compilation of inventories and descriptions of the on-site conditions (Adams 1957; Golden 1969; van Dantzig 1980). In addition, a survey was carried out in the 1960s by a Danish geographer, Henrik Jeppesen (1966) to relocate the plantation sites. A small-scale excavation conducted at the Daccubie plantation also examined the nature of African-European interaction on the Gold Coast (Ghana) (DeCorse 1993). The fieldwork initiated under our on-going project marks the first extensive and systematic archaeological research undertaken to investigate the Danish plantation systems in the area.

### **Research Objectives**

The research has concentrated on two main issues: (i) the examination of the nature of human/cultural interactions on the plantation settlements and, (ii) the investigation of the effects of the Danish (European) presence on the natural and socio-cultural environments of the Akuapem Ridge and the entire eastern Accra Plains.

### **Surface Survey**

Our field crew consisted of three technical staff, B. Murey, J.T. Armah-Tagoe and R.K. Nobo, all from the Department of Archaeology, Legon; six archaeology undergraduate students; ten local workmen and one guide. In April 1992, the field crew conducted an extensive archaeological surface survey of a 25km<sup>2</sup> area from the village of Boi to the Naski and Daccubie Valleys, and to Berekuso, Adenkrebi and further on to the north of the Akuapem Ridge (Fig.1). The area was surveyed extensively utilising footpaths, water-courses and third class motor roads.

In the course of the survey, five of the plantation sites relocated and mapped by Henrik Jeppesen were visited. These were: Frederiksgave, Forenede Broedre, Bibease, Pompo and Daccubie (Fig.1). Two other sites, namely Lindman (Lind's village, or the suburb where slaves who served as house servants on the Frederiksgave plantation lived) and a stone building further to the north of Frederiksgave and close to the footpath leading from Sesemi to Berekuso, were discovered. Lindman was probably abandoned in, or shortly after, the 1862 earthquake which devastated the Accra area and caused the village to be moved down the slope to its present location at Sesemi

Of the plantation sites looked at during the survey, Frederiksgave near the village of Sesemi was selected for test excavation due to its accessibility. This preliminary report presents the results of the archaeological research conducted there between mid-April and early May, 1992.

### **Site location of the Frederiksgave Plantation**

The site of the Frederiksgave plantation is easily reached from the campus of the University of Ghana, Legon by proceeding north along the Accra-Aburi Road. Turning off the road at the Pantang Mental Hospital Junction leads to the village of Abokobi. Frederiksgave was located along an ancient land route that linked the Accra coast to the hinterland through Berekuso, Aburi (Abode) and Akyem Abuakwa.

The plantation stone building is located half-way up the ridge, from which the whole aspect of the plantation can be overlooked. This building, now in ruins, has been colonized by trees whose large roots have caused considerable damage to the surviving masonry. Jeppesen relocated Frederiksgave during his survey and provided a brief description of the ruins and observed that the building had been flat-roofed (1966:85).

Clues to other sections of the Frederiksgave settlement were provided by surviving oral traditions which identified another African slave village that supplied the manpower needs of the plantations as Djabin, Dsabeng or Juabeng, and the nearby fields where the plantation crops were cultivated.

An impressive avenue of tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*) was planted using slave labour to link the plantation to the Accra coast over Legon Hill (Jeppesen 1966: 84). During the survey, our team did not locate this avenue. Our enquiries did, however, reveal that remnants of this avenue had been removed in the 1970s when the present road from Abokobi to the base of the ridge at Sesemi was constructed. One big tamarind tree, probably part of this avenue, now stands in the compound of Nii Abbey at Sesemi.

### **Historical Background**

The history of the Frederiksgave plantation commences in the first half of the nineteenth century. Its first owner was Governor Henrik Gerhard Lind who, in 1828, began a survey of the Volta River and established a private plantation at Akuapem. In 1829, Governor Lind's interest shifted to the southern foothills of the Akuapem Ridge. He recruited former native servants of Fort Christiansborg who had been discharged during the reduction of staff in 1817, and settled them on his new plantation (Norregard 1966). Later, Governor Ludvig Vincent Hein bought the plantation from Lind for 2,400 rix dollars and it became Danish government property.

Governor Hein was given a grant by the Royal Danish Government to erect a building on his newly purchased plantation to be utilised as a rest resort for Europeans (Danes) on the Gold Coast (Ghana). This building was completed in

1832. Following the granting of royal consent, the plantation was named Frederiksgave (meaning Frederik's gift, or endowment) after Frederik VI, the reigning monarch. It was sometimes referred to as the 'Royal Plantation' (Norregard 1966:204; Jeppesen 1966:84).

Although the planters at the Frederiksgave plantation also cultivated cotton, tobacco, sugar-cane, oranges and indigo, coffee was the major production crop. At the time that Governor Hein bought the plantation, Lind had already planted 2,000 coffee trees, and from 1830, the plantation produced good yields of cotton and coffee. As the plantation was reported to have gained a good reputation for its beauty and wealth (Adams 1957:42), it is no wonder that it was kept in good repair and formed part of the Danish property sold to the British in 1850.

### **Excavation**

Test excavation was primarily limited to the plantation building area (Fig. 2). On the basis of known structural features and on-site surface configuration, 2m<sup>2</sup> grid units were laid in the chosen area. Four 2m x 2m units were used in testing the stratigraphy and the foundations of the plantation building. The test units reached an average depth of 3m. A small stone structure located between the plantation house and the slave village was totally excavated.

Figure 2 shows the plan of the plantation building area. The main building (A) was erected on a cut stone footing or foundation about 3m above the ground level. It measured 16m x 9m. The excavation revealed a double staircase leading to a terrace (1). A small room was located under the staircase. The terrace opened on to a living room (2), and there were five other rooms (3 - 7). The walls of the building were made of hewn stones set in mortar made from sea-shells, presumably from the Accra coast. The external and internal faces of the walls bore traces of whitewashed plaster.

Next to the main building were the foundations of a small building (B), comprising one room measuring 4m x 2.65m. Its location suggests that it was probably a guardroom. Further down the slope were the foundations of a four-roomed stone building (C), which measured 10m x 4m. The plantation structure was enclosed by an embankment (D) along the western edge, possibly to protect the site from run-off water from above.

Just up the hill and immediately behind the main plantation building is a quarry (E). It is marked by a large heap of stones and a relatively broad crater created by cutting stone blocks, apparently for the construction of the plantation structures.

### **Artefact Analysis**

The artefact assemblage presented here comes from the test units and from a limited surface collection made in the slave village during the survey. It can be divided into two broad categories: (1) imported European items; and (2) locally produced materials. The imported European materials represent trade items brought to the Gold Coast (Ghana) during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They include

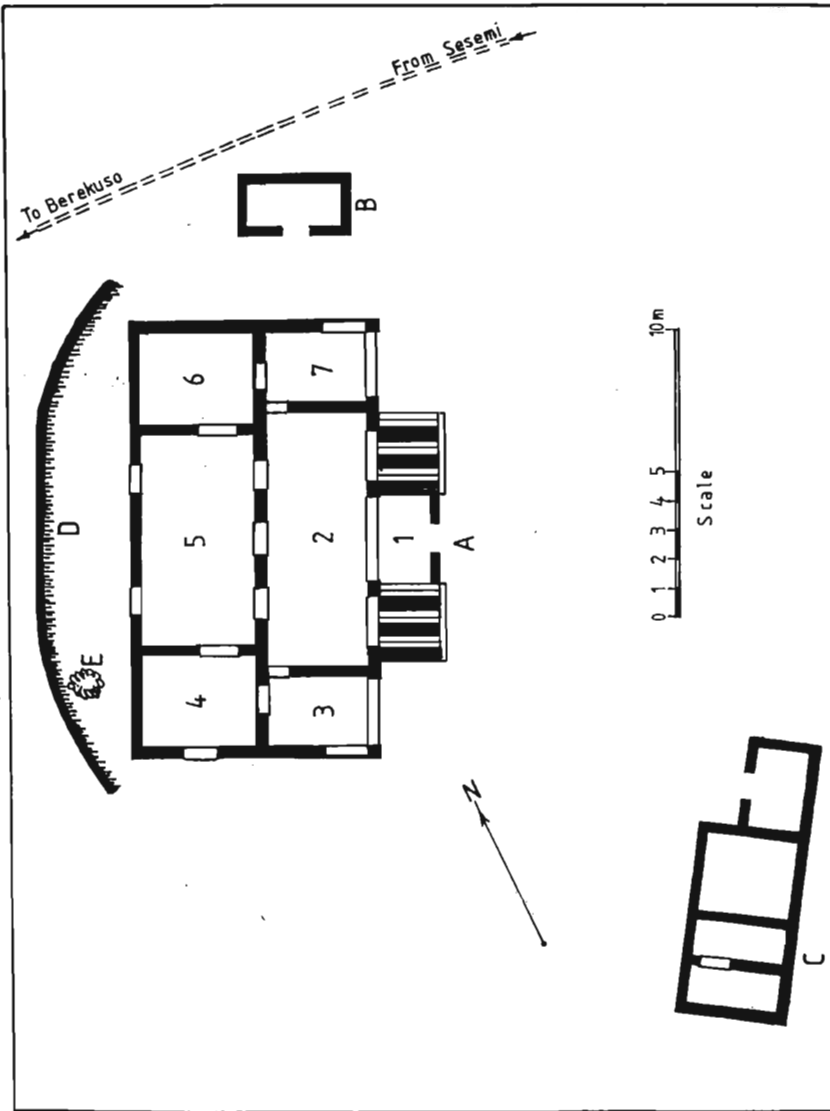


Figure 2 Plan of the Frederiksgave plantation building, Sesemi.

ceramics, glass bottles, nails, kaolin smoking pipes, flints (strike-a-lights or gun flints), a small bell and cowrie shells.

Imported European ceramics identified include: (1) an annular or banded decorated mug comparable to British types excavated from eighteenth and nineteenth century contexts at Elmina (DeCorse 1989; Calvocoressi 1977); (2) white ware with light green shell-edged decoration, c.1820-1850; (3) transfer-printed ware in blue underglaze with willow designs of the late nineteenth century; (4) a white ware mug, mocha decorated c.1800-1850; (5) earthenware with hand-painted floral pattern, c.1800-1850; and (6) sub-glazed ware with no decoration, 1820-1900.

Glass bottle fragments recovered represented case bottles for containing alcoholic beverages. They may be placed into two main categories: schnapps and brandy (Fig.3). There was no evidence of culinary, toiletry, medicinal and drinking glasses. This is perhaps surprising given that Danish records mention that the plantation building was also used as a convalescence home (Adams 1957:42). Perhaps further excavations will give an insight into the use of such materials.

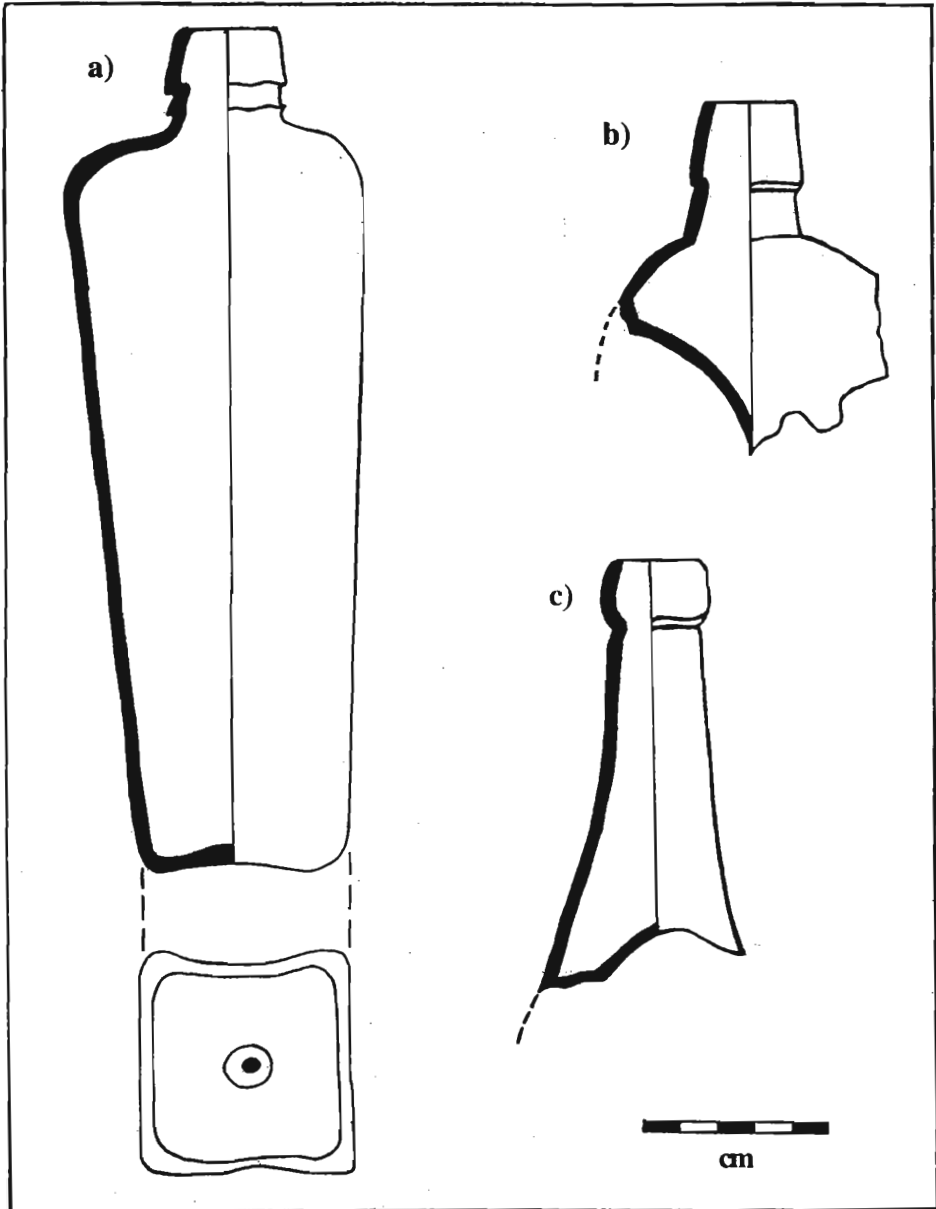


Figure 3 Alcoholic beverage bottles from the Frederiksgave plantation site, Sesemi

A small number of nails ( $n=8$ ) distributed in and around the main plantation building probably represent construction debris (Fig.4a). They appear to be hand-made and can be dated to between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries (Nelson 1962).

Fragments of kaolin smoking pipes ( $n=6$ ) were recovered from the small building (B on Fig.2) believed to have been a guardroom. They consist of two bowl pieces (Fig.4b) and four stem fragments. The bowls carry delicate denticulation around the rim. Also the heels or the backs of the bowls carry maker's marks. These marks comprise the diminutive letters W and L, surmounted by a royal crown motif. On the basis of these inscriptions, the pipes are thought to be of seventeenth to nineteenth century Dutch origin (Noel-Hume 1978: 296-313; Walker 1975: 165-193; Calvocoressi 1975: 195-200; 1977: 136-39). Pieces of flint ( $n=2$ ) were recovered from the slave village during the surface survey (Fig.4c). They are the blade type, probably of English origin, introduced after 1775 (de Lotbiniere 1984). One small bell measuring 3cm at the base and 3cm high was also recovered from the slave village (the ball part had been detached).

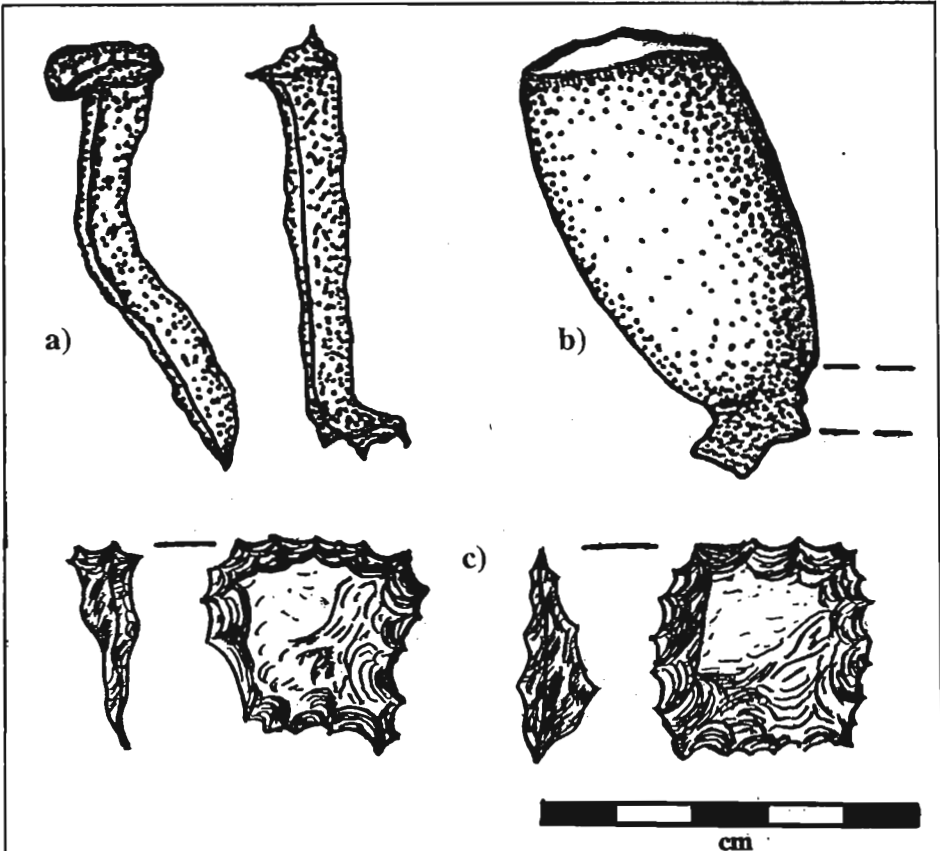


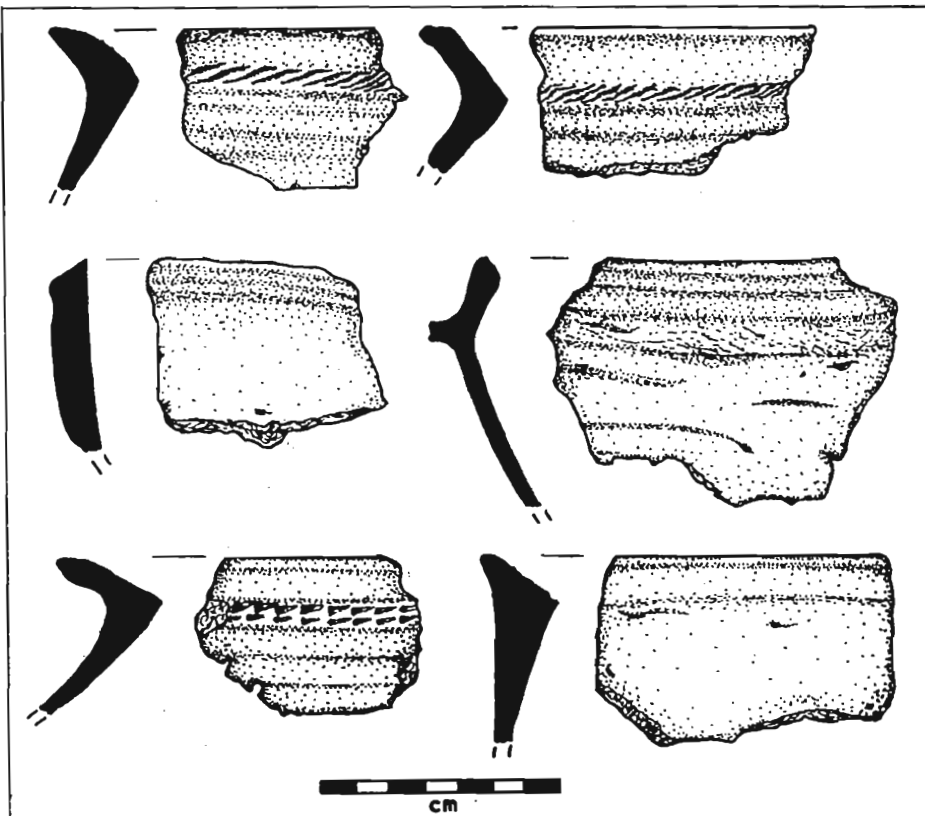
Figure 4 Miscellaneous artifacts from the Frederiksgave plantation site, Sesemi



Cowrie shells ( $n=10$ ) were also collected from the slave village, representing both *Cypraea moneta* and *Cypraea annulus*, two species originating from the Indian Ocean (Edmunds 1978:36). *Cypraea moneta* was the first to arrive in West Africa via the trans-Saharan route from the eleventh century A.D. onwards, whilst the Portuguese introduced *Cypraea annulus* to the West African coast from the seventeenth century. These shells were initially used as currency in West Africa and later for ornamentation (Shaw 1977: 86; York 1972).

Artefacts of local origin include ceramics and grinding stone balls, as well as the faunal remains of mollusca and land snails.

Locally-manufactured ceramics were found scattered over the entire slave village. As only forty sherds carrying diagnostic attributes were collected during the survey, the full range of ceramic forms to be expected from the plantation settlement may not be represented. However, the rims suggest that this limited collection can, nonetheless, be categorized as storage jars, cooking pots and bowls. Pots and jars have angular necks that often carry incisions as well as bodies that are globular in shape. Bowls range from shallow to relatively deep forms with their rims accommodating ledges that run around the entire diameter (Fig.5).



**Figure 5** Locally-produced ceramics from the Frederiksgave plantation site, Sesemi

Sherds were well-fired with light brown or reddish to shiny black surfaces. Some were highly burnished and smudged. Preliminary analysis indicates that the ceramics are similar to those found at the Daccubie plantation (DeCorse 1993). The source area for the supply of ceramics to the Danish plantations along the southern Akuapem Ridge would have been the Dangme Shai Hills, about 30km east of the plantations.

Grinding stone balls were also recovered from the slave village. They were probably used as milling equipment. The stone raw material was obtained from the ridge.

Shells representing species of two larger land snails, *Achatina achatina* and *Archachatina* were collected. They are two common land snails found in thickets and in the gallery forests along stream banks in the Accra Plains. These were exploited for food by the slaves. Marine and estuarine mollusca were also recovered. Those from the plantation building area were highly fragmented and showed traces of plastering material. The shells from the slave village were whole and included such species as *Arca senilis*, *Arca afra* and *Tympanotus fuscata*, suggesting that they were another food resource for the slaves.

### Conclusion

Research for this study is still in progress. The archaeological data recovered so far is very limited and obviously more work needs to be undertaken. Further excavation of the slave settlements on the Frederiksgave plantation may yield comparative data that will help to elucidate the Danish presence and its consequences for indigenous African societies.

The worldwide European expansion which began in the late fifteenth century brought vast changes and transformations in African societies (Arhin 1966; 1979; Boahen 1981; Hopkins 1977). Perry (1985) explains that these dramatic changes occurred because European contact exposed people to one another's ideas, beliefs and customs. In West Africa, this led to the disruption of local trade patterns, emergence of new social classes, changes in the means of accumulating wealth and an increasing dependence on European manufactured goods (DeCorse 1989:213). Despite these changes, there was some degree of continuity in many aspects of African societies. Features such as the African world view, food consumption patterns, systems of inheritance and material culture remained relatively stable (Blake 1967:53).

The above illustrates the complexity of processes of change and continuity in African societies on a wider scale. The Danish plantation settlements constitute individual contact settings that form only a small component of this complex dynamic. What was the nature of African-European interaction on the plantations? The plantation settlements were small in size and were manned by small numbers of expatriates. The African slaves who provided labour on the plantations outnumbered the Danes (Europeans). Did the Danes acculturate the African slaves to European lifestyles? Documentary sources certainly indicate that the Danes were themselves absorbed into some aspects of African lifestyles. One example can be

seen in patterns of food consumption. Commenting on Danish habits on the Gold Coast, Norregard (1966: 160) notes:

“The food was not bad, unless war or bad harvests caused a shortage of supplies. Some provisions were sent out from Europe. Game, fish and several kinds of delicious fruits were obtainable in the country. Poultry and pigs could be bought from the natives. In ordinary circumstances, therefore, the means of sustenance were quite sufficient. If one was planning to stay a long time, it was wise to get used to the natives diet. In a way the natives made quite good cooks.”

The archaeological data seem to confirm the documentary sources. The presence of local material culture such as cooking pots, eating bowls, grinding stones and faunal remains of land snails and molluscs is an indication of a strong African consumption pattern on the plantation settlement. Far from home, the Danes had no choice but to accommodate themselves to African food in order to survive.

The development of the Danish plantation settlements on the Gold Coast (Ghana) was the result of the European contact and the slave trade. Crops cultivated on the plantations were for export and local consumption. Among the crops cultivated were cotton, coffee, maize, cherries, sugar-cane, oranges, tamarind, tobacco, indigo, yam, cassava, plantain, banana, lemons and a good number of vegetables (Jeppesen 1966:79-84; Adams 1957:37-9). Though most of these crops had been introduced to West Africa by Europeans from other parts of the world from the fifteenth century onwards, the Danes are credited specifically with the introduction of the tamarind plant to the eastern Accra Plains (Jeppesen *ibid*: 78). The tamarind tree added to the agricultural landscape of that region. Today, the distribution of tamarind trees can be correlated with the location of former Danish settlements in southeastern Ghana. In the eastern Accra Plains, the edible fruits of this plant are exploited by the local people as a nutritional and medicinal resource. On the whole, the Danish plantation system served as a forerunner of commercial agriculture in southeastern Ghana.

This paper is an exploratory attempt at examining the nature of African-European interaction on Danish plantations on the Gold Coast. The limited data from the Frederiksgave plantation site has been used, to some extent, to examine the ramifications of the European presence on the plantation society in the eastern Accra Plains. Further excavations of the slave settlements on the plantation are planned to obtain comparative data that will, hopefully, assist in allowing a full analytical treatment of the research objectives that we have set.

### **Acknowledgements**

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