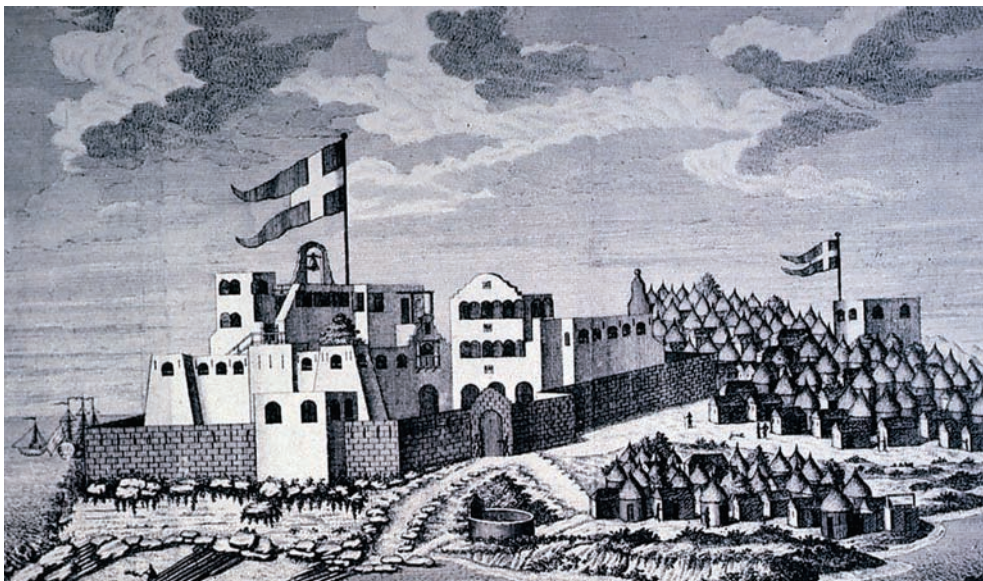


# Stones at Osu are Crying for Attention

## Happenings in the Danish-Osu Cultural Heritage Study Project

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A Contemporary drawing of the Danish colonial fort, Fort Christiansborg, now Osu Castle.

### Preface

In 2004, a book written by a Danish author Thorkild Hansen, titled “Coast of Slaves” and translated into English by Kari Dako, inspired the author to undertake a research project on the traditional Osu community.

The research project which began as a private initiative with encouragement from the UNESCO Accra Cluster of offices, focused on the community history of Osu, looking at the community’s historic places, buildings and genealogical profiles of families with Danish ancestry from the period 1607 to 2007.

Initially, the findings of the research were meant for use to write a historical narrative. However, when the first set of findings became available, it became necessary to present the findings to the public in two exhibitions to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ghana’s independence and the bicentenary celebration of abolishment of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in March, 2007. The excellent resonance the exhibition received encouraged the author to go ahead with the project.

Fortuitously, an award in 2008 from the Ghana Cultural

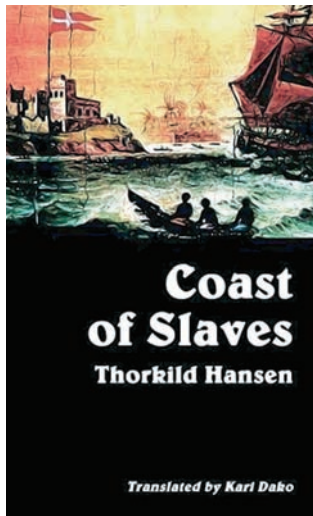
Fund, a Danish NGO, became available to the Project to prepare the manuscript for publication of the book to be titled: “Stones Tell Stories at Osu”.

Since then, a number of related activities have emerged. In particular, because of the increasing interest of the Danish and Norwegian society in the Ghanaian-Scandinavian Cultural Heritage and History, a Danish Non-Governmental Organisation by name “Friends of *Akwamuffe* in Denmark”, has commissioned a Television documentary on the book project for the Danish viewing public.

This article features some aspects of the project that deal with the sites and stories of people and places that appear in the book to be shown in the documentary.

### Introduction

The content of the book is presented in a narrative form, based on the traditional *Ga* style of story-telling with the objective to educate people about how the transatlantic slave trade played out at the local level and the consequences that have lived with the people since then. The people that have to benefit from the book are firstly, the youth of Osu, and secondly all Ghanaians, the Danish society and all others that have had historical connection to Osu, where the Danish Castle, Christiansborg, is located.



The tangible and intangible cultural heritage created by the historical forces within the traditional community becomes the space in which the story of the book is set. This historical space is dubbed "Danish-Osu" that comprises the four traditional quarters, known, since the Danish period, as Osu Kinkawe, Osu Ashinte, Osu Alata and Osu Anahor.

The book, through the technique of story telling, highlights the value and significance of the cultural heritage of the community and at the same time brings out lessons that should be learnt concerning the evils of inhumanity associated with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which should never be repeated in any form whatsoever.

Directed by the research findings, the book brings out narratives that present for reflection, various phases of life at Danish-Osu during and after the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By means of four locations in the shooting of the documentary, some of these phases of community life at Danish-Osu are highlighted in the related narrations that follow.

### Narration at the Richter Fort location

The first location is at the early 19<sup>th</sup> century slave trading residential facility known as Richter Fort. The entrance portal of this private fort has an emblem with the inscription "HR and CR 1809". The entrance portal opens on to the stone pavement of the courtyard that leads to the stone hanging-staircase.

The narration that proceeds at this location refers to the story of Johan Emmanuel Richter, his activities as a Danish merchant and an assistant in the Danish Administration; his involvement in the slave trade; his building of the palatial residence most likely at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; his brief period of Governorship from March to October, 1817 before his death; bequeathing the residence to his off-springs : Heinrich and Christian Richter, Osu

Mulattos; Heinrich a powerful local merchant and slave trader, used the emblem HR CR 1809 to commemorate the acquisition of the property and building of a stone wall and bastion to make it a Fort to compete with Christiansborg.

The Fort became a prestigious citadel which demonstrated a lot of affluence and military power; at one time it held about 400 Asante slaves ready for shipment.

Heinrich Richter developed underground water cisterns inside and outside the Fort to provide for the large number of people who congregated in and outside the Fort; the fore ground of the Fort served as a slave market and a boulevard was developed from the fore ground to lead to the beach to convey enslaved people clandestinely from the slave holdings of the Fort to ships awaiting in the roads in the sea on the east of the Christiansborg.

A local myth asserts that there is an underground access way that links the Fort with the Christiansborg ( this cannot be true due to the topographical and historic circumstances).

### Narration at the Nii-Okantey Shikatse We location

The next location for the narration is the west entrance to the Nii-Okantey *Shikatse We*, another 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish stone trading house. The location for the narration includes the east entrance; the north wall; the south wall; inside the courtyard; the stone pavement; the stone cover over the underground water cistern; the slave-holding chamber; the upper residential floor and

the lower floor for storage; the route from the east gate to the beach and view towards Christiansborg.

The narration of the history of this stone house built by the Danish merchant Jacobsen about the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century includes the fact that the house, auctioned after Jacobsen's death, was bought by H.C. Truelsen who raised a family of five daughters with a mulatto woman. It further tells how the house was auctioned after Truelsen's death and not bequeathed to his mulatto wife; and how the house was bought by Heinrich Richter and sold later to Nii Okantey Shikatse, a local Osu merchant.

One of the five daughters of Truelsen who grew up in this house, became the grandmother of Severine Brock. Severine became the wife of Edward Carstensen, the last Danish Governor of the Guinea Coast.

The house was a typical stone-house, located within the merchants /cabuseers' quarters; was used to serve as a residence as well as a trading facility. The house had a section for the slaves who were held in transit for shipment in the holding long-room with small high level vent holes; upstairs for the resident family; underground water cistern which was fed with harvested rain-water from the roof.

This house was further adapted by Nii Okantey Shikatse, a local wealthy trader in slaves and gold, to serve the traditional arrangement of having female and male sections. This historic house now serves as a family house for the descendants of Nii Okantey Shikatse.



#### **Narration at the Old Danish Slave Route location**

The next location for the narration covers the Danish slave route, now named "Salem Road". It is lined with tamarind trees, coming from the north towards the Castle. Linked to this route is the site of the main local slave market with the name "Awusai Atso", where the two storey family house of Nii Kweiyor We is standing today. From here, one gets a view of *Ashinte Blohum* on the west.

The narration here deals with the story of the tamarind lined route as the last stretch from the faraway interior to the Christiansborg; the planting of the tamarind trees in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the Danes to provide shade for them as they moved between the Christiansborg and the Danish plantations at *Kuku Hill* and *Fredricksgave* at the feet of the Akwapim Hills.

The narration includes the story of how *Ashinte Blohum* came to be known as such due to the Asante traders'

sojourn in this part of Osu while they did business with the Danes in the Castle; how Nii Kweiyor's We came to be located on this historic site of memory: a local slave market. The narration also includes how Heinrich Richter diverted the course of the route to avoid control after the abolishment of the trans-Atlantic trade in 1803 by the Danes.

#### **Narration at the Osu Salem School location**

The next location for the narration is at Osu Salem; the building and its details – the timber framing and the infilling with mud; the stone masonry plinth and foundation in accordance to the Danish traditional stone architecture on the Guinea coast.

Narration brings out the story of the building as the first ever custom-built educational facility in 1865 by the Basel Mission; the School was the follow up from the Castle School for the Danish-Osu Mulattos.

The school was built after the original one at Amangfom,

had been demolished by the British Bombardment in 1854, four years after the Danes had sold all their establishments to the British for 10,000 pounds sterling.

The school building has interesting details and components that link Osu to Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. For example, the pines for the structure were brought from northern Germany and southern Denmark; the plinth and foundation were based on the Danish building tradition of use of stones and the builders were missionaries from Basel in Switzerland, assisted by local craftsmen.

The school is famous for the training programme of forming the mind, the heart and the hands and emphasis on discipline and spirituality; the successful programme is epitomised by the several famous Old Boys who attained great heights in the Ghanaian society eg. the first Ghanaian Speaker of the national assembly was an Osu Old Boy; the first Ghanaian Surgeon and Dean of the Medical School was an Old Boy and several other famous including the Researcher, attained great heights in their life pursuits.

#### **Message of this Article**

The various narrations in the documentary provide interesting information that will certainly increase the great excitement and enthusiasm that the Scandinavians now show for their shared common Ghanaian–Danish cultural heritage and history.

Consequently, this will lead to heightened desire to know more about the other

Danish heritage sites and places of memory in Ghana, such as the Osu Castle, which the Danes built around 1665 and christened “Christiansborg”; the archaeological site of the redoubt, Provesten located on the west of the

ted places must be addressed to conserve what is remaining. To do this is not only to preserve the properties and sites for education of the younger generation about the past; the preserved and the well maintained heritage will

Danish Fort  
Prinsensten,  
Keta, Ghana.



Osu Castle; several Danish stone houses at Osu; the old Danish plantation sites at the feet of the Akwapim hills including, Fredericksgasve, and the ruined Forts at Ningo, (Frederensborg), and Keta, (Prinsensten), etc. Obviously, the impact the documentary will make in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, may lead to considerable flow of tourist traffic from there to Ghana.

In light of this, there is need for all stakeholders, including the local community at Osu, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, the national Commission on Culture, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture to put their axe together to pay heed to the calling of the stones at Osu for attention.

In this regard, the deteriorating conditions of these heritage sites at Osu and rela-

provide the means for the local community and tourism development entrepreneurs to take advantage of the anticipated tourism benefits that will emerge from the increased interest generated by the documentary and the other related activities of the Danish-Osu Research Project.

#### **Conclusion**

So, in conclusion, it must be emphasised that the message of this article on the happenings in the Danish-Osu Research Project, is to serve as a clarion call to all and sundry involved in administration and management of cultural heritage properties and sites in Osu in particular, and in Ghana generally. The message is to get those to sit up and strategise to exploit the opportunities that such heritage tourism may bring up in the coming years. The stones are crying for attention; who responds?

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