

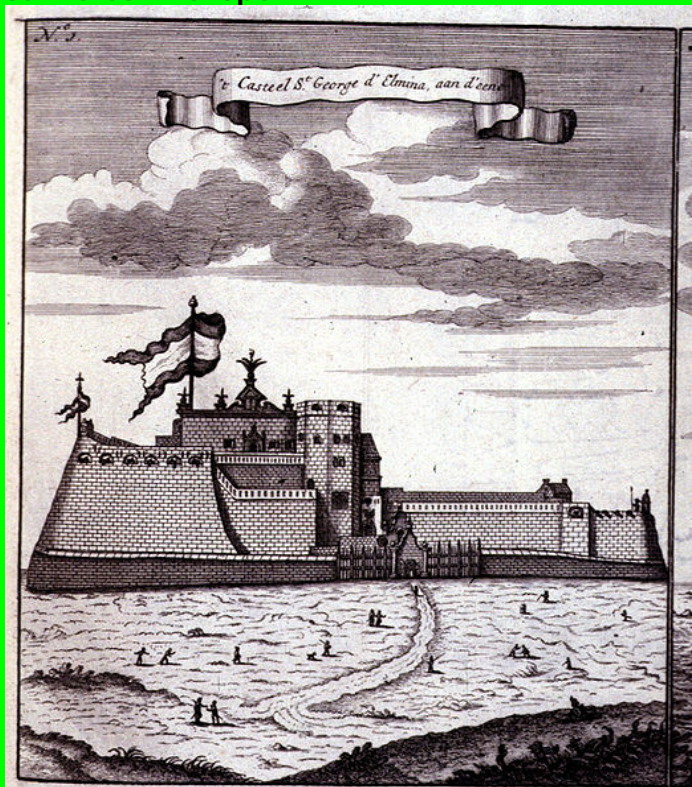
Elmina Castle, Dutch and Ghanese heritage *Monument of Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast*

In 1482 the Portuguese founded Castle Sao Jorge da Mina, which means Saint George of the Mine, on a finger of land between the ocean and Ghana's Benya River. Across Benya River a "native and mixed blood" trade-settlement came into being. The Portuguese were traders, who exchanged European and North African products against local gold and ornaments. Later the transport of gold from South America to Europe weakened the position of Portugal in Sao Jorge da Mina. The Dutch conquered "Elmina Castle" in 1637 after the Portuguese had survived numerous attacks from Spaniards, French and English during the years before.

In 1642 the Dutch West India Company owned all Portuguese possessions in the area. The Dutch success came from a heavy bombardment of Emina from Fort St. Jago - later in Dutch named Fort Coenraadsburg located on a hill opposite Elmina Castle – and several heavy assaults by them. Later Elmina became the headquarters of the Dutch possessions along the West African Coast until 1872. During that year the castle was ceded to the British, because the Dutch possessions in West Africa became loss-making.

Elmina became a police and military training centre for many years. From 1970 Elmina became an official Ghanese monument in the first place and then was included on the Unesco World Heritage List.

Elmina was the first trading post built along the Gulf of Guinea and the oldest European fort in central and southern Africa. The trade-settlement grew rapidly due to gold and slave trade. In fact it became one of the most important stops on the route of the Atlantic slave trade within the trade triangle: Europe – West Africa – West Indies - Europe.



P.1 Elmina Castle from the north 1710, National Museum Accra 2009,
Museum Cape Coast Castle 2009

Collection Dirk Teeuwen Holland
www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl

Elmina Castle *

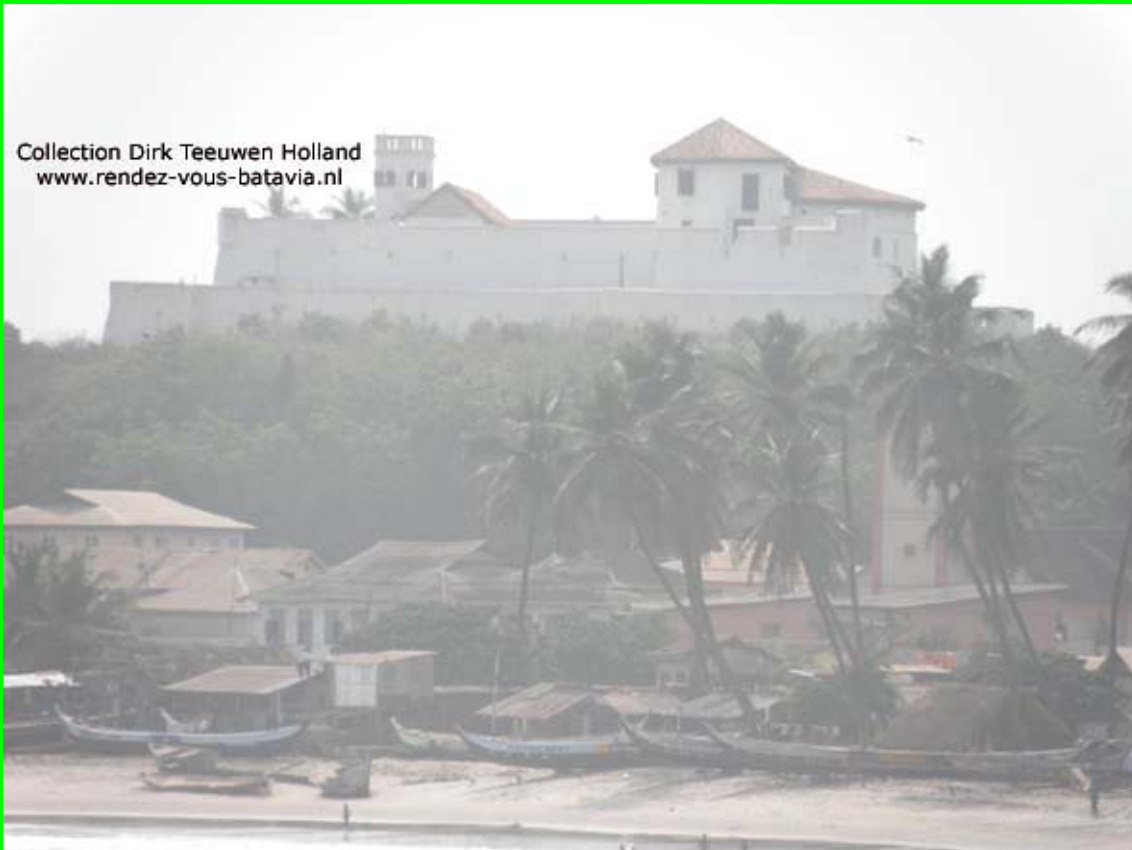
St Jago Castle / Fort Coenraadsburg *



P.2 Elmina and St Jago Castle on a late afternoon, Ghana 2009
P.3 Elmina from the south, Ghana 2009

Collection Dirk Teeuwen Holland
www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl





P.4 St Jago Castle, Ghana 2009

The Gold Coast was an important market for slave traders. The demand came from Europeans on behalf of their American plantations. The supply came from black Africans. African chiefs captured slaves during their local civil wars and by simple attacks on peaceful villages. Those slaves were hostile aristocrats and warriors as well as women and children. Others were captured by black slave hunters in the interior of the Gold Coast. Trans Sahara slave routes had an notorious and awful reputation. Men, women and children were shackled and had to march horrible journeys which could last hundreds of miles. Local guides at Elmina tell a lot of gruesome stories about European slave business, but are silent or lie about the stinking role of their black countrymen in the past. Anyway many of their stories are dreamed up. Captured slaves from the African mainland were stocked in warehouses along the coast. From there they were dragged to slave auctions in African coast villages or in the European castles.

The British outlawed slave trade with the Slave Trade Act 1807. However, despite of strict British control, Spaniards, Portuguese and others continued to carry on the trade. Slavery was officially abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834. However, black West African chiefs continued slavery until 1890-1910. In 1890 The king of Dahomey (Benin) was the owner of 1200 slaves. Finally European and specially British imperialism made, more or less, an end to this crying abuses.

End of this article