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Gold Trade and Gold Mining in the 15th to 18th Century at the Gold Coast (Ghana) and the Activities of the Brandenburg-Prussians

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1. Introduction

Since 1980 the Institute of Mining and Geosciences of the Technical University of Berlin carried out an educational project at the University of Science and Technology (UST) in Kumasi and the UST School of Mines in Tarkwa, Ghana, Westafrica. Eichmeyer (1) reported about this project already, in which this author did participate.

This project of scientific cooperation in the areas of mining and minerals sciences is not the first contact between Germany and Ghana (earlier called Gold Coast or Guinea). At the end of the 17th Century the Brandenburg-Prussians had undertaken mining activities on the Gold Coast already apart from gold-trade. The historical background of these early mining activities will be presented in the light of the then prevailing political and economical conditions. In this context the early mining attempts of other European powers as well as the indigenous mining activities in those days are described. The development of the modern industrial gold mining sector in Ghana was presented by Gosten and Peters (2) elsewhere.

2. Historical Development and Trade at the Gold Coast up to the End of the 17th Century

The first gold from Guinea or later the Gold Coast, the name given to Ghana throughout centuries, was carried by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians to Europe in the 6th and 5th century B.C. via sea. The trade connections on land from West Africa via Timbuctou to the Mediterranean were established by the Saracenes in the early 9th century A.D. This led to a continuous trade of gold from West Africa in exchange of brass, iron and iron products (weapons), silver, salt, cloth and horses (3).

West Africa in general and the Gold Coast in particular was known in Europe to be a gold producer and the Venetian Cada Mosto, who participated in trading-ventures by ship to West Africa in 1455/56 reported that in the 14th and 15th century the gold coinage of Portugal, Spain and Italy was nearly entirely minted from West African gold (4, cited by 3).

Caused by the excessive financial demands of the European royal courts during those times and accelerated by the political and military conflict with the Moores/Saracenes on the Iberian Peninsula all efforts were undertaken to control the trade with the West African gold countries or even to secure possession of these gold sources. French sailors from Dieppe are said to have reached the Gold Coast as early as in 1364 and had built a stronghold at Elmina in 1413 (3). But only the arrival of the Portuguese on the Gold Coast in 1471 is historically documented. They started trade in gold dust at the mouth of the river Pra at Shama (5) after having passed by ship CABO TRIS PUNTAS (Cape Three Points) and CABO CORSO (Cape Coast). This gold trade was monopolized after a short time by the Portuguese Court and led in 1482 to the construction of the castle SAO JORGE DA MINA (later Elmina) with the aim to secure the gold trade mainly against other European competitors (6).

Until the end of the 16th Century Portugal remained the only power operating permanent trading posts on the Gold Coast. For the early part of the 16th century the gold dust bought annually is estimated at 24,000 ounces, about 10% of the then world production of gold (7).

The French became competitors first when undertaking trading ventures to the Gold Coast from 1530 onwards. In 1542 a French ship visited CAPE THREE POINTS and returned to France with 1000 ounces of gold (7). The first Englishman on the Gold Coast was Captain Thomas Wyngham (Windham) who shipped 150 pounds of gold to England in 1553. Later travels by John Lok and William Towerson followed which were observed by the English Court with growing interest. But the English activities remained not coordinated until 1618. In 1592 the first traders from Netherlands (Bernard Erecksz) reached the Gold Coast which were by far better organized and prepared for all kind of trade. They established themselves with trading posts at MORI, BUTRE, KORMANTINE, and COMMENDA.

In 1580 Portugal was conquered by Spain and the reformed Northern Provinces (Netherlands) separated by secession from the catholic Spain in 1581. Consequently the Dutch undertook everything possible to drive the Portuguese away from the Gold Coast, this to reduce the income of their enemy, Spain. The Dutch West Indies Trading Company was founded in 1629 and the Portuguese were forced out of their possessions on the Gold Coast between 1637 and 1642. Between 1600 and 1630 all gold used by the mints of the Netherlands came from Guinea/Gold Coast.

Around this time the "Thirty Year War" devastated Europe (1618-1648). After the conclusion of the peace treaty in 1648 sea forces were set free in Sweden and Danmark, with which trade on the Gold Coast was started. The presence of the different European nations on the Gold Coast at the time of the erection of the Castles of the Brandenburg-Prussians can be studied in Fig. 1 and Table 1.

Table 1: Foundation of Castles at the Coast of Guinee between Axim and Mori (Cape Coast) and ownerships around 1700 AD.

TOWN	TRADE FORT or CASTLE	OWNER of CASTLE	at 1700		
Name	Foundation	Nation	Nation	since (year)	
AXIM	San Antonio	1515 Portugal	Netherlands	1642	
POKOSO	Gross Friedrichsb.	1683 B/Prussia	B/Prussia	1683	
TAKRAMA	Fort Sophie L.	1685 B/Prussia	B/Prussia	1685	
ACCADA	Fort Dorothea	1684 B/Prussia	B/Prussia	1690	
DIXCOVE	Fort Metal Cross	1691 England	England	1691	
BUTRI	Fort Batenstein	1598 Netherlands	Netherlands	1598	
SECONDI	Fort Orange	1670 Netherlands	Ahanta	1694	
SHAMA	San Sebastian	1500? Portugal	Netherlands	1640	
COMENDA	Fort Vredenburg	1688 Netherlands	Netherlands	1688	
ELMINA	San George	1482 Portugal	Netherlands	1637	
CAPE COAST	Cape Coast C.	1652 Sweden	England	1664	
MORI	Fort Nassau	1598 Netherlands	Netherlands	1598	

Fig. 1: Overview map of the Gold Coast at 1700 A.D.

In the 15th to 17th Century the activities of these European forces were restricted to the coastal areas alone. It has to be assumed that they were strongly depending on the local African powers due to their trading activities. Independent control and influence they were able only to enforce within the firing radius of the cannons of their forts and castles.

Due to the political conflicts in the hinterland of the Gold Coast some African coastal states were ready to grant to the European forces rights for the erection of forts on their land mainly with the aim to derive protection and re-enforcement for themselves. In addition, benefits were expected from the mutual trade. Because the Europeans did not understand at all the internal African politics and the existing balances of power they were often caught in on-going conflicts among local war-factions especially when they established additional castles

and trading forts in areas belonging to local enemies of their first hosts. From time to time conflicting African powers entered into treaties with inimical European powers to exploit the help of their cannons for their own war ends.

Since the 12th Century the AKAAN peoples migrated from the Northwest of the area of today's Mali to the Gold Coast. These migrants split up into several tribes and assimilated or drove away the inhabitants they met with in the land. They founded and developed the states of AKWAMU, AKIM, FANTE, DENKYERA and ASANTE. These state forming processes were accompanied by various conflicts and wars and the resulting prisoners of war became a main source of supply for the emerging slave trade at the coast and led in turn to the acquisition of iron weapons, especially rifles and black powder from the Europeans.

Gold mining in the hinterland and the gold trade to the coast was often interrupted by those wars and the European trading forts did not receive any gold for months. They then changed their commerce to slave-trading because slaves were available in larger quantities during war-times.

3. Records on Gold Mining and Gold Trade

Likely the Portuguese were the first Europeans who carried out gold mining on the Gold Coast besides the common gold trade. Shortly after 1470 F. Gomez opened a mine at ABROBI near Commenda, which was in operation until 1621 when it collapsed because of uncoordinated stoping, missing support and weak pillars (5).

Protected by the castle SAN ANTONIO (at Axim) in 1630 the Portuguese started another mine at Aboasi, which was destroyed on 18th December 1636 by an earth-quake. Aboasi was said to be situated 8 km up-river on the DUMA (Dumba) river, a tributary of the ANKOBRA. The actual location of the mine could not be traced up to date. But it can be assumed that this mine was situated at or nearby the later ETINASI/AKOKO mine (south of Simpa). For the KANYANKAW mine further east also the local traditions remember Portuguese mining activities.

Up to the end of the 17th century the activities of the other European forces were restricted to trade (barter) of gold for goods only. The main source of the gold was the hinterland, although some gold was washed on the shores, as described by the traveller SAMUEL BRUN in his book "Guineische und Angolanische Schiffahrten" after he had spent some time on the fort NASSAU in 1624:

"Because it is told that this country Guinea is very rich in gold I shall shortly describe how the gold is searched for.

They keep many slaves who search for gold in the sands near our fort. When it does rain they find more of it than at other times. They sweep their dwellings and streets very often and produce hereby gold. At a certain time I met about 500 slaves at the sea who worked the beach sands for gold. And if the soil or the sand is of yellow-brown colour, gold will be present therein with certainty. But there is not as much gold production as to cover the cost of a trading ship. But the Abrambuer and Akanists travel about 300 miles into the interior and carry about 100 pounds of gold on their return."

A more detailed description from the area around Cape Coast is provided by the Reverend W.J. MUELLER in 1673, who served as parish priest from 1661 to 1669 on Fort Fredericksborg (later Fort Royal):

"The European goods are paid with gold nuggets and are then carried into the interior of the country FETU to Accania first, about five days travel distance to Cape Coast. Around there are gold veins but it is told that they carry not very much gold. From there the goods are transferred through Allance nach Accabel, a twelve days travel behind Accania. And it is the latter country which possesses the richest gold mountains from which the largest quantities and best qualities of gold are produced and used for the purchase of the European goods.

A Christian had never reached this gold land and therefore nobody can really know what the actual matter is with these gold deposits and the exploitation methods for gold. Especially when some people might assume these barbaric tribes are by far too in-experienced to search and dig for the gold. But enough information is available from the Accanists who communicate every day with the Whites in the country FETU: That the Accseer explore the gold veins in the

rocks deep in the earth with a lot of effort and danger. They use a number of tools, large iron hoes, baskets and ropes not only to dig inclines and tunnels in the ground but to extract the gold found there. They do recall that a larger number of slaves quite often is lost through the collapse of the gold diggings. Most of the gold which is brought by the traders from Accania was chisselled out in larger lumps together with the host-rock and carried up from the underground mines. These larger lumps will then be crushed and comminuted to enable the separation of the rock and other impurities. Among the Accanists one might find from time to time some smaller gold nuggets with adhering rocks and sand which remained in their original state as they were chisselled out. This is the kind of gold the Accanists use to purchase European trading goods, gold from the Accanists mountains."

Olfert DAPPER (ca. 1636 - 1689) wrote in 1668 in his book "Umstaendliche und Eigentliche Beschreibung von Africa" in the chapter "Guinee" (10):

"Quite a number of these kingdoms are rich in gold, which is named by them Chika. Even at the beaches gold occurs and is washed by the floods on-shore and is then collected by the women at low-tide who gather from time to time pieces of the size of two or three Guilders value. But the gold which is offered to the Dutch had been obtained mostly from rivers or was dug in gold shafts and carried by the Blackmen to the coast from the areas of Fantin, Akanien, Adom, Akara and others. They do not find it in their countries but barter it for European goods from other Blackmen who live further inland.

The location of gold shafts no Blackman knows who is living at the coast. Also the Whites have never been there. They are perfectly kept hidden and protected by the owners, namely the kings. Because every king possesses his own gold mines from which his subjects dig the gold which he trades to other Blackmen who live nearer to the coast. Therefore the gold passes from hand to hand until it is sold to the Dutch. At times the gold is searched for in rivers which flow down from the mountains and carry the gold along, especially in the gold-rich Atzin river below river bars and water falls.

The largest quantities of gold is mined in the underground diggings in the mountains."

From the cited records it is obvious that the main source of the gold was the African gold mining operations. How was this vein mining carried out ?

More recent research and archeological investigations (11,12) have proved that the mining techniques described by later eye-witnesses like Skertchley (13) and MacDonald (14) were likewise used in the 16th/17th century. To mine the gold-bearing reefs shafts of 60 to 90 cm diameter were sunk down to the reef or in steep dipping reefs driven direct in the mineralization. The narrow diameter of the shaft did provide working space for one man only and mining was carried out with hand tools. The ore was lifted with baskets or clay- or pumpkin pots. To ascend or descend holes were dug in the walls of the shaft, support was uncommon, for lighting purposes palmoil-lamps were used. Horizontal tunnels were rarely driven because missing knowledge of suitable support methods had caused high losses of miners. The construction of such tunnels was therefore assumed to be forbidden. Consequently, about up to 100 of such vertical shafts were to be found on an area of about 2500 sq.m. When the reef was reached with the shaft in most cases a bottle-shaped chamber was mined out at the bottom. This often led to the collapse of these shafts even during time of operation, later such an area was covered by holes and traps. In the late 19th century many visitors of such mining fields reported on their dangerous nature. The maximum depth of these shafts was reached at 15 to 25 m because neither dewatering nor ventilation techniques were known.

In the course of a day about 30 litres ore were hoisted which was crushed either direct at the shaft or in the village. The crushing was carried out with hammers, milling was done on a flat stone with grinding stones, separation was effected by washing the dust in calabashes and at the end by picking the gold with feathers. The gold dust was collected in the housing of a large, edible snail and delivered. The Chief or King had the right to a certain part of the gold dust by way of royalty, in most cases all nuggets found had to be surrendered as sole property of the King.

Fig. 2: Sketch of African Shafts, after Wray in (15)

At the end of the 17th century Bosman (16) noted that most of the gold offered at the coast originated from DINKIRA (Denkyera), ACANNY, ASHANTI, AKIM, AOWIN, WASSAW and EGWIRA.

4. Brandenburg-Prussia on the Gold Coast

The Emperor Elect Frederic Wilhelm (*1620) had had to be conversant with the West African trade and the benefits therefrom because he spent some longer time in the Netherlands for educational purposes. During this time his interest in sea-trade was formed. When he succeeded the throne in 1640 he met Brandenburg-Prussia in a state of decline caused by the 30 years war. After the conclusion of the peace in 1648 he developed a very expansive foreign policy, which was hampered by missing funds and power. This might have convinced him about the necessity of an accelerated development of a fleet and the over-seas trade. His country needed urgently the returns of such trade for consolidation of the budget, especially the import of gold.

By his special order of 13. July 1680 two ships, the "Wappen of Brandenburg" (commanded by Bartelsen) and the "Morian" (commanded by Blonck) were equipped and sent to West Africa for trading purposes (17). The undertaking was not very successful because the Dutch took the "Wappen of Brandenburg" away and forced the "Morian" to leave the waters off the Gold Coast, this in order to defend their trade monopoly. But on 16th May 1681 the conclusion of an agreement had taken place with three indigenous African trading princes of the Ahanta at Cape Three Points. This agreement allowed the erection of a castle and concluded the exclusive trade between these princes and the ships from Brandenburg. Besides this agreement the Morian had carried 100 dutch pounds of gold back home. From this first gold parcel the Emperor Elect ordered the minting of two medals, which documented the joy about the first receipt of West African gold, see Fig. 3 and 4, after (18).

Fig. 3: The smaller medal of Brandenburg, after Oelrichs in (18)

Fig. 4: The larger medal of Brandenburg, sketch after (18)

On the 17th March, 1682 the Brandenburg-African Trading Company was registered and officially recognized through the issuance of a protection charter of 18th Nov. 1682. This "Oktroi fuer die Brandenburgisch-Afrikanische Kompanie" expressively allowed the "negotiation for and trade with pepper, elephant tusks, gold, slaves and what else there is offered and to carry out commerce and free trade." (17)

By an "Order to Major Otto Friederich von der Groeben, who is herewith sent to the coast of Guinee" (16. May 1682) two ships were again sent to the Gold Coast, the "Churprinz" and the already known "Morian", with the aim to erect on the basis of the concluded agreement a castle at Cape Three Points. V.d. Groeben landed at POKOSO (Poquese, Poquefoe, today Princess Town) and started the building of the castle "Gross Friedrichsburg" on the small promontory MAMFORT (Manfro, Mumfort).

These developments were adjudged favorably by the trading princes of the AHANTA, who at that time were engaged in a war with their eastern neighbours, the ADOM, who in turn were allies of the Dutch. The Ahantas were caught in something like a vice due to the fact that the Dutch had established themselves also in the West at Fort St. Anthony near Axim. As reported by Groeben in his travel description (20) the construction of the new castle led to the immediate protest of the Dutch representative of Elmina and, after a short time, to the attack of the Dutch together with the Adom. This aggression was defeated. Groeben returned with the Morian to Brandenburg and the gold receipts of this travel were used to mint the first "Guineas", each to the value of three prussian taler. They showed on one side the picture of the Emperor Elect, on the other a sailing ship of the time.

In the following years several ships with trade goods and large amounts of building materials were sent to Gross-Friedrichsburg. The castle was expanded (20 cannons) and after the conclusion of a further protection agreement another fort was constructed near Accada, which was later named "Dorotheen-Schanze" (6 cannons) after the wife of the Emperor Elect. For additional protection of this fort and the castle itself another stronghold (2 cannons) named "Sophie-Louise" near Tacrama was built. Through the years 1685/86 a

brisk trade was developed but later the conflicts with the Dutch-West-Indian Company escalated who had since 1685 intercepted and taken away several ships of Brandenburg and conquered in autumn 1687 the fort Dorotheen Schanze at Accada.

After the death of the Emperor Elect in the year 1688, Friedrich III (later, from 1701 onwards named Friedrich I., King of Prussia) took over the reign and through negotiations with the Dutch managed to have the Dorotheen Schanze returned in 1690.

5. German Mining Activities and Gold Trade

The business of the Brandenburg-African Trading Company started to blossom again in the following years. A delegation was sent to Denkyera in 1691. As already mentioned above, Denkyera controlled the rich, gold producing states of Wassaw, Aowin and Egwira. Wassaw hosts today's areas around Tarkwa and Abooso. The visit of the delegation might have had at heart the promotion of the internal gold trade to the coast.

1694 trade became again more and more difficult, likely due to the outbreak of war between the Dutch and the people of Commenda. Such wars always interrupted the gold supply from the hinterland. Bosman reported on his visit to the castle Gross-Friedrichsburg (16):

"When I visited the Brandenburger in 1694 they complained that sometimes they would not receive more than 2 marks of gold (= 16 ounces) in one month."

Of special interest is the reason for the war between the Dutch and the people of Commenda: 1688 they built the fort VREDENBURG at Commenda, likely without the consent of the king of Commenda (5). From this base they searched for the old mines of the Portuguese at Arobi Hill. For this exploration they employed probably German miners, may be from Saxonia (22) because there was no mining activity going on in the Netherlands at those times and they were used to engage German miners for other overseas mining projects, for example in Sumatra 1680 and in Capeland (South-Africa) in 1685 (23). These mining attempts at Arobi Hill led to open conflict, because this hill was held sacred by

the people of Commenda since the time of the collapse of the Portuguese mine in 1621. The mine had been obviously closed with a fetish to pacify the gods of the earth and underground. The new mining activities were stopped by force, the miners were abducted as prisoners. The Dutch had to withdraw and were engaged over several years with this war.

Because of the permanently fluctuating gold supply and to increase the profitability of the Brandenburg-African Trading Company it was anticipated to take gold mining in their own hands. The mines-administrator Dannies and the mine-captain Heitz were sent to Gross-Friedrichsburg to carry out exploration. Dannies produced the view of the castle, see Fig. 5.

Fig. 5: View of the Castle Gross Friedrichsburg, drawn by Dannies (21)

The exploration must have been pursued by Dannies nearby the castle, probably at the foot of the promontory Mamfort, on which the castle is situated. Dannies reported himself in a letter of 22. Sept. 1697 about the activities:

"We have carried out some trenches during that time and started at a determined place an adit, although this is still in clayey soil. That was the situation three weeks ago when through influx of bad air in the shaft and tunnel all miners became sick and three good men died within five days. The other three are still heavily sick, Heitz in addition but because of a different illness. In case more will die I should worry about our presence here although I still had some hope not only to find gravel and waste but something valuable. There might be some occurrence in the Spar, who intersects the soil and persists.

If I had had only healthy workers and among them 50 slaves. The latter were missing from the beginning and I could not get them at all due to necessary works on the castle. Half of them are crooked and lame anyhow that we had to help us with a very few. It is not good here for miners to work especially because of the missing food (which others can obtain far easier and for less money) which might cause them to die anyway in the long run, wether they fall sick or not. One should have the opportunity to send out 2, 3 or 4 slaves to

obtain and carry the food for them at all times. In general things here are bad but even worse for those who do have their working place outside the castle far in the bush. I still have hope that things will improve, if only the workers would regain their health."

This by all means not positive conditions describing letter passed in the hands of a mining inspector from Cleve, W.H. Staeden von Cronenfels (22), who attached the following to the original writing on the 14. April 1698 (17):

"Attached I return the letter of the mining-administrator Siegmund Dannies and its translated copy. Like in all other mines where adits are not yet connected with the shaft the ventilation air might be poisonous, which is valid for Africa too. Therefore miners will fall sick or can even die. But all mining experts should agree with me that the information given

- provides good prospects to meet rich samples and good ores in the future, especially because*
- a clayey soil and*
- a white Spar in the clayey soil has been met with and*
- can be consistently followed during the driving of the adit as well as during sinking of the shaft. Therefore it can be concluded that*
- they are working on a good ore-vein, especially because*
- they reported that in the Spar native gold is found*

so that I, following my knowledge and expertise, can not advise my Excellency in a different way than to propose to the Emperor Elect, our gracious Lord , to continue this rich mine in the name of God with more efforts and to wait for its obvious blessing."

For second opinion the famous "goldmaker" (Alchemist) of Peacock Island (near Berlin), the inventor/producer of "ruby-glass" Johann Kunckel was asked for his opinion. Kunckel had worked in Berlin from 1677-85 and moved then to the Court of Karl VI. of Sweden. On the basis of the letter of Dannies sent to him he arrived at the very realistic opinion that it is to be expected to meet good ores according to the results already communicated but that it is a complete different question whether it is advisable to invest more capital in this project or not. He foresaw large difficulties arising out of the long distance to the project,

the difficulties with food, the adverse climate for German miners and the resulting illnesses and death cases to be expected. He advised to stay away from further work, especially because it was completely unknown, how and with how much effort black workers could be trained in and used for performing adequate mining work. For the opening phase of the mine without returns one had to expect for several years additional high investments, due to the political situation attacks of other European powers or their local allies had to be reckoned with in addition, this resulting in an additional cost factor for the necessary defence expenses (22). Consequently Friederich I. turned down the request for further capital for this mining project.

A last report about the mining activities was written in December 1698 (22):

"Most of the time the miners worked at different places, but so far without success. Five of them are dead, only the officials Dannies, Heytz and the Administrator are still alive. At present they work at a new place in the valley, whether something can be found there time must tell."

6. Fall of the Trading Posts of the Brandenburg-Prussians

In the following times the trading business was permanently declining, caused mainly by two reasons:

First, in the year 1699 war to determine supremacy broke out between the ascending Ashantis and the Denkyeras, which closed all mining activities in Wassaw, Aowin, Sefwi and Egwira. Only small quantities of gold might have reached Gross-Friedrichsburg, in 1699 already the minting of Gold-Guineas had ceased (21).

Secondly, the supply of the trading posts with merchandise, food supplies and personnell became more and more difficult due to the French-Spanish war from 1701 to 1714. Many ships, including all of the Brandenburg-African Trading Company were taken away by the French. The garrison on Castle Gross-Friedrichsburg had to operate for years on their own resources and had been able only through the help of the local Ahanta to keep the place under control because they had to employ local personnell for sentry squads and other

services. After long time in 1709 the ship "Prinz Eugen" reached Gross-Friedrichsburg for replacement of the remaining staff.

During these trying times John CONNY (Couny, Kony), a merchant prince from Pokoso, became a decisive power in the area. He set up an army of several thousand men and had the area of the state Ahanta under his control. Naturally he came into conflict with the Dutch and the English and attacked their castles on several occasions, especially Fort Metal Cross at Dixcove nearby. With the garrison of Gross-Friedrichsburg Conny concluded a mutual defense agreement and did everything in his powers to enforce the position of the Brandenburg-Prussians.

In 1713 Friedrich I. died. His successor, Friedrich Wilhelm I. (the "Soldierking") put the army as the main objective of the state Prussia and redefined the focus of his policies to increased settlements and economic development within the State Brandenburg Prussia, moving away from the idea to get colonies overseas.

He sold the castle and trading forts for 6000 Ducats to the Dutch-West-Indies Company with an agreement dated 22. Nov. 1717. At this time no Brandenburger were living at Gross-Friedrichsburg, but John Conny had taken over the castle with the promise to keep and conserve it for the Brandenburgers. Therefore the castle became later known as "Conny`s Castle.

When the Dutch came to take over the castle, Conny rebuked them and defended it until 1724. In that year he had to withdraw in face of a united force of the Dutch and the English. From 1725 onwards Gross-Friedrichsburg (renamed Fort Hollandia) remained under control of the Dutch but without much economic success until the Dutch surrendered the castle to the English in 1872 (when they finally withdrew from the Gold Coast).

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