

# Frederiksgave Plantation and Common Heritage Site



A historical exhibition and cultural centre covering  
a chapter in the history of Ghana's and  
Denmark's common past and cultural heritage

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NATIONALMUSEET



# Frederiksgave Plantation and Common Heritage Site

The exhibitions at Frederiksgave are  
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# THE EXHIBITIONS AT FREDERIKSGAVE

The main  
building  
(Building 1)

In the main building a number of themes show life on the plantation. Some of the artefacts used by the Danes differ from those used by the workers. This, for example, is the case with European china and cutlery, while the workers used ceramic dishes and bowls. Or the card games of the Danes, while the workers played their own games of *sabu* and *oware*. The two groups, however, also had many things in common. They enjoyed smoking pipes, drinking alcohol and playing games in their sparetime. Local and European medical practices were also similar, both using extracts and powders from herbs in their treatment of diseases.

The items in the main building are copies of objects which, among others, the last Danish governor, Edward Carstensen, had bought on the Gold Coast in the 1840s and brought back to the National Museum of Denmark. With the exception of the very old beads, which are real, Ghanaian artists and craftsmen have specifically made all items for this exhibition.

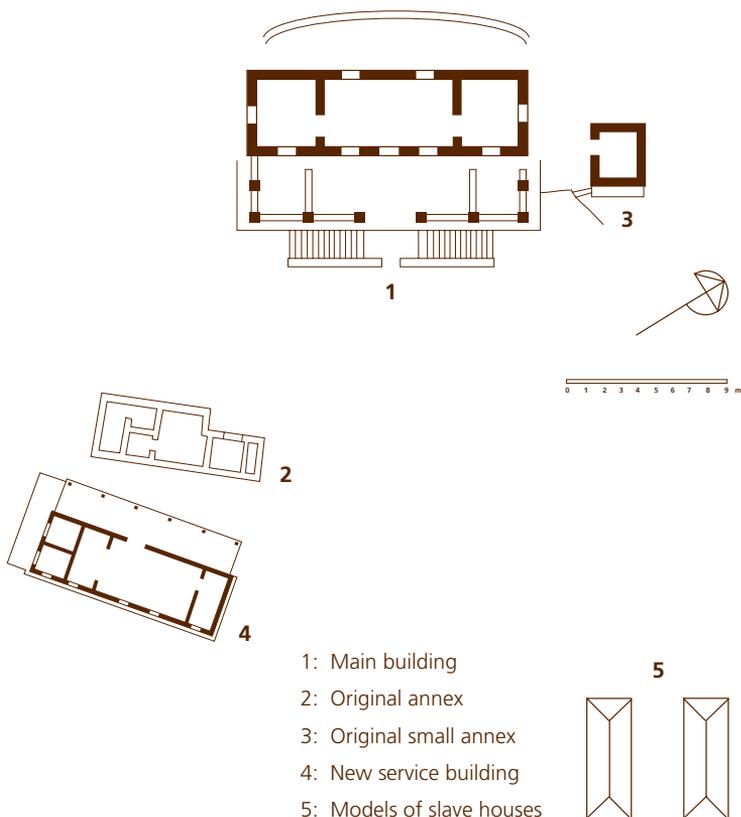
The furniture in the main building consists of examples of furniture that may have been used at Frederiksgave from 1832 to 1850, and which during that period were manufactured in Denmark. The inventory



## The annexe (Building 4)

from Frederiksgave in addition included several beds, tables and chairs, which are not exhibited in the building today due to the limited space.

Some of the finds from the excavation of the buildings of Frederiksgave in 2006, as well as the excavation at Djabing in 1997, are exhibited in the new service building. These are real remains of artefacts from the nineteenth century, such as pipes, bottles, pottery, china, weapons, buttons, buckles, beads, and parts of buildings.



- 1: Main building
- 2: Original annex
- 3: Original small annex
- 4: New service building
- 5: Models of slave houses

# FREDERIKSGAVE

In 1831, the Danish governor, on behalf of the Danish government, purchased the 'deed' for a newly established plantation in the Akwapim range north of Accra, 'Bikuben' (The Beehive). The purchase included the thirty-two enslaved workers that belonged to it. The plantation was renamed 'Frederiksgave' after the Danish king at the time, Frederik VI ('gave' is the Danish word for 'gift', so Frederiksgave literally means Frederik's gift). Following later purchases of land it covered 163 acres. Apart from a main building, still under construction, there was a small village with twelve houses where the slaves lived, later expanded to twenty houses. To improve the access to the coast, an avenue to Osu, flanked by tamarind trees imported from India, was constructed.

The main crop grown at Frederiksgave was coffee, 5,000 plants of which existed in 1834. Later the plantation experimented with other crops. However, in 1836, the governor at the time, Mørch, was forced to report that experiments growing coffee, sugar cane, tobacco, indigo, cotton, wine, and grapes had all produced such poor results that all plans to develop plantation production in the area would have to be abandoned.

At the time, and later, people discussed whether the failure was due to the climate, poor soil conditions, the unclear rights of ownership, inade-





quate political stability, the lack of technical knowledge of the plantation owners, the inadequate labour input of the slaves and their possibility of escaping, cheaper and more efficient plantation production in other parts of the world, or competition from other local economic activities, such as the production of palm oil by local peasants.

Plantation production continued at Frederiksgave, albeit on a limited scale, but after 1836 it increasingly became a health resort for ill Danish public servants from Christiansborg. After selling the Danish properties to the British in 1850, the buildings decayed and the local people settled in the village of Djabing, situated around 500 yards down the road towards Abokobi.

# EXCAVATION, RESTORATION, EXHIBITIONS AND FUNDING

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In 2005, the National Museum of Denmark, in cooperation with Dr. Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, geography Prof. Henrik Breuning Madsen, and Ecological Laboratories (ECOLAB) at the University of Ghana, launched the Common Heritage Project. The intention was to explore the common Ghanaian and Danish cultural heritage and inform the populations of both countries about this chapter of their common history. This would occur through the excavation of and research on Frederiksgave and documenting the history of the plantation.

In 2006, archeologists from the University of Ghana and from the National Museum in Copenhagen, together with a large group of people from the village of Sesemi, excavated the buildings of Frederiksgave. At a level of about three to six feet under the surface of the earth, the foundations of a main building and two annexes emerged, and in and around the buildings they found numerous remnants of pottery, glass, clay pipes, large and small metal parts of utensils and buildings, as well as bones and other animal remains. Supplemented by letters and notes,





written by Danes, today found in the National Archives in Copenhagen, a rather detailed picture of life on the plantation took shape, covering the lives of both the enslaved plantation workers and the Danish civil servants. These records were further supported by the results of excavations of the village of plantation slaves, Djabing, carried out by the archaeologist, Dr. Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, from the University of Ghana, in 1997.

Based on all this, the architects, Nikolaj Hyllestad from the National Museum of Denmark and Frederick Amekudi from Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, were able to guide the restoration of the buildings of Frederiksgave. Materials used are, as far as possible, identical to those used in the original building. Local craftsmen and workers have carried out this work, which was completed in September 2007.

After this, it was possible to design the exhibitions, once again the result of close co-operation between Ghanaians and Danes.

# COMMON HISTORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Frederiksgave Plantation played an important role during the final twenty years of the 200-year period from 1658 to 1850, by which time relationships had developed between states and societies on the Gold Coast and representatives of Danish trading companies and of the Danish government.

The economic relations from 1658 to 1850 between societies on the Gold Coast and the expatriate Danes may be divided into three periods:

- 1658-1690, where the trade in gold was the major activity.
- 1690-1803, where the main activity was the trade and transport of enslaved Africans, who, under appalling and overcrowded conditions, were first kept in the dungeons of the forts and later on the Danish and foreign slave ships, which took them across the Atlantic, a voyage resulting in many slaves falling ill, often fatally.
- 1803-1850, where traders tried to find new goods to export from the Gold Coast following

The trade with  
gold and slaves,  
1658 to 1803



the Danish government's abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

Trade consisted of the exchange of locally produced goods with commodities imported by the Europeans. Traders from the hinterlands would bring their goods to the European trade forts and factories, where the imported goods were stored and sold. The trade often went through local merchants and trade agents, who lived in the towns which gradually emerged around the trading posts.

The kings and political leaders of the coastal states had a keen interest in attracting many – competing – European merchants and therefore signed treaties with a number of European trading companies concerning leases of coastal land, where trade posts and forts were established. It was following the signing of such treaties that the Danes established the trade forts Frederiksborg at Cape Coast (1658-85), Christiansborg in Osu (1660-1850), Fredensborg in Ningo (1736-1820), Kongensteen in Ada (1784-1820), Prindsensteen at Keta (1784-1850), Augustaborg in Teshi (1787-1820), and Isengram in Kpone (1787-1820).

Calculations show that the Danes, from 1660 until the 1760s, purchased and exported a total of approx. three tons of gold, and that approx. 47,000 locally purchased slaves, from 1690 to 1803, were sold from the Danish forts on the Gold Coast and transferred to Danish and foreign slave ships, constituting ap-

Initial stages  
of the  
establishment  
of plantations,  
1788 to 1850

prox. eight per cent of the 600,000 slaves that were exported from the Gold Coast during the eighteenth century.

The first Danish plantations were established in Akwapim as early as in the late 1780s. They were an attempt to grow local crops, using slave labour, instead of shipping out slaves. New attempts were made near Osu towards the end of the 1790s, when the year of the Danish abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1803 was approaching. A considerable number of plantations were established in the southern parts of the Akwapim Mountains in 1807, after Asante had managed to impose control of the whole stretch of coast. Finally, a number of plantations were established in the same area, following the disruption of Asante's control of the coastal region in 1826. One of these was the the Frederiksgave plantation.

Right of ownership or, rather, usufruct rights to these plantations had been obtained through payments to local landowners and obtaining legal permissions from the relevant chiefs and kings. The Danes tried to document their rights by producing so-called 'title deeds', which were privately made documents in Danish, stating the date, size and limits of areas, as well as the procedures concerning the purchase, witnessed by Danish government officials and the relevant chiefs and kings. The deeds, and thus the 'right of ownership' to the plantations were then traded between Danish officials and private merchants.



## Political relations

The establishment of the Danish trade posts, 1658 to 1660

The political relations between the coastal communities and the European trade representatives were characterised by both co-operation and tension. Historians have debated these power relationships concerning the period up until colonial times. One group of historians claims that the local political leaders were independent and perfectly capable of controlling the relationship between their states and the Europeans. Another group, however, maintains that the economic and military presence of the Europeans was so strong that it was a determining factor as regards the structures of coastal societies. The debate, often focusing on the more general levels, needs to specifically acknowledge the difference between the situation in different areas and periods of time.

Links between the coastal regions and the Danes began in 1658 when the Day, or foreign minister, of the kingdom of Fetu entered an agreement with a newly arrived Danish privateer, captained by the former head of the forts of the Swedish Africa Company on the Gold Coast, from 1650 to 1656. The agreement involved assisting him in conquering the main Swedish fort, Carolusborg (today's Cape Coast Castle), on behalf of the Danish king. The support of Fetu was decisive in the successful conquest on the 8 February 1658. Again, in 1659, following the Danish loss of the Cape Coast Castle, the king of Fetu signed a treaty with the newly arrived Danish governor, according to which the king was paid a large sum of gold to allow



## African pressure in the 1670s

the Danes to establish a trade station and a new fort in Fetu. Later, the king of Accra entered a similar treaty with the Danes, permitting them to establish a trade fort at Osu. These treaties or 'notes', accompanied by monthly payments called 'costumes', formed the legal basis for the Danish forts and lodges from 1660 to 1826. The coastal states interpreted this as a kind of lease agreement as well as firm evidence that the Europeans officially acknowledged the sovereignty of the local states when it came to the land on which the Danish trade posts and forts were built.

In the 1670s, the actual influence of the Fetu king on the conditions at the Danish main fort, Frederiksborg, increased. At a time when the Danish company was unable to procure full replacements for deceased civil servants and sufficient merchant vessels, the king of Fetu became a significant factor in the internal conflicts concerning the elections of new governors. In 1679, when only two Danes remained at Frederiksborg, the king offered to let his son become the new governor. The two Danes rejected the offer but by the time the Danish West India and Guinea Company finally succeeded in sending a ship in 1680, the newly arrived governor had to struggle with the Fetu king to regain a certain freedom of action.

## The surrender of Frederiksborg and African occupation of Christiansborg

By this time, Danish commerce had reached the bottom, and the governor had been forced to pawn both Frederiksborg and Christiansborg to the British governor at Cape Coast Castle. As a result, the Danes had to move their headquarters to Christiansborg in 1685, which was possible only after redeeming the British pawn.

The eastern areas were now part of the new and strong inland state, Akwamu, the kings of which put a lot of pressure on the Danes through their conquests along the coast. At one point, in 1693, the situation was so grave that one of the king's subjects, Asamani, occupied Christiansborg, flying their own flag. The following year, after the arrival of new Danish civil servants, they had to pay considerable amounts of money to be able to repossess the fort.

## The relationships to Akwamu, 1700 to 1728

From 1701 until 1730, the Danes at Christiansborg relied heavily on the Akwamu state, which controlled the area from Accra to the Volta River and even further east. The results of this dependency situation, apart from regular supplies of gold and slaves, concerned the political relationships, where the king, in addition to the monthly payments of 'costume', often demanded gifts or 'dash', especially gunpowder and arms. In 1722, these close relationships led the king of Akwamu to appoint a civil servant responsible for relationships with Christiansborg. The person was regarded by the king as the protector of the Danish governor and as the representative of the Danes in the

The political isolation of the Danes, and the new sovereigns, 1728 to 1742

The Danish expansion in the 1780s

capital, responsible for their behaviour and punctual payments. This signified integration into a form of political control that characterised the Akan states and thus a perception of the Danes as subjects to the king.

When a number of towns along the coast, including Osu, started a rebellion against Akwamu in 1728, the Danes became isolated and Christiansborg was besieged by the rebels. The Danish governor requested assistance from the Akwamu state, which reacted by attacking the city of Accra and the European forts there. In 1730, however, Akyem defeated Akwamu and Akyem became the new sovereigns to whom the monthly payments known as 'costume' for Christiansborg became payable and later also payments for the new fort, Fredensborg, in Ningo. Later, in 1742, when Asante defeated Akyem, payment of 'costume' was transferred to Asante.

In the 1780s, the local coastal communities invited the Danes to form an alliance – at a time when the other European nations were unable to support their traditional allies around Volta due to armed conflict in North America. This could potentially expand the Danish sphere of influence by establishing new forts along the Volta River and along the coast east and west of its delta. The allied forces enabled a number of Danish victories and the establishment of the new forts Kongensteen, Prindsenstein, Augustaborg, and Isengram. In the 1790s, however, further expansion



The Danes  
during  
intensified  
Asante rule,  
1800 to 1823

The end of  
Asante  
sovereignty,  
1823 to 1831

towards the east was hindered by a new African-European alliance, which later attacked and killed the Danish commandant at Prindsenstein in Keta. When the Danish governor requested assistance from Asante to provide a force to punish the 'rebels', this was prevented by representatives of the other European countries, which did not want an Asante army in the eastern part of the Gold Coast.

From the end of the eighteenth century, Asante intensified the control of the coastal populations. They demanded more influence and increased payments from the coastal areas, particularly following the defeat of Fante in 1807, and on several occasions sent troops to reduce the opposition of the coastal communities. The presence of these armed forces was a strain on the Danish administration and the inhabitants of towns around the Danish forts, who were all subject to demands for further payments, and they provided a constant threat towards the plantations that the Danes had established in the Akwapim Mountains since 1807. The Danes even had to suffer the indignity of one of their commandants being held hostage by one of the leaders of an Asante army, releasing him only after the payment of a considerable ransom.

Following these developments, the Danish administration did not join the alliance the British had built up against Asante in 1823 until they had been promised British economic support. The size of the offici-

The Danish attempt to establish a colony

## Social relations

The coastal towns

al Danish force, taking part in the final battle of 1826, was smaller than that of the major Osu merchants, probably a main reason why the Danish government, as part of the peace treaty in 1831, was unable to negotiate an exclusive Danish area of influence in the region surrounding Christiansborg.

Although the Danes stopped paying 'costume' for Christiansborg in 1826, they were forced to use the means they had hereby saved to pay a number of local kings in the area to retain their influence in heavy competition with the British merchants of Accra. The Danish attempts to create a basis for new commerce based on the production of export crops on the plantations failed miserably. Failing to beat the British merchant houses at local trade in palm oil, the Danish government, in principle, in 1840, decided to discontinue the so-called 'Danish settlements', which were eventually sold to Great Britain in 1850 and transferred by the last Danish governor, Edward Carstensen.

The social relationships that emerged between coastal communities and the expatriate Danes included elements from the cultural and social conditions of the various African and European groups, which shaped new 'hybrid' forms of social interaction.

The towns that existed near the Danish forts and trade posts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries



varied in size and were generally quite small. During the mid-eighteenth century, Osu probably had a population ranging between 1,200 and 1,500. The size of Danish and other European populations at the Danish trade posts fluctuated considerably due to high mortality rates. Calculations show that the average figures for the eighteenth century were between thirty and forty, but we also know that in certain periods the figures were much lower. Between five and ten persons were involved in commerce and administration, while the rest were petty officers and rank and file soldiers. These were increasingly recruited among Danish-African boys who had attended the Danish school in Osu, the offspring of local marriages entered by local women and expatriate Danes.

In the nineteenth century there were only on average around ten expatriate Danes. Most of them lived at the forts, where they were mainly engaged in administration and commerce, while a few were in charge of the army, now mainly consisting of Euro-Africans and a limited number of enslaved persons, their total figure rarely exceeding fifty. The coastal towns would at this stage have a population between 500 and 2,500, with an increasing number of Danish-African families, including merchants of Danish and Danish-African origin. Some of these had established their own merchant houses with up to approx. 200 enslaved persons attached.

## Slavery as a labour force

Slavery has been a common form of labour control in large parts of the world, including the African continent, and international slave trade networks constantly provided these societies with slaves. Due to the fact that slave populations were often unable to reproduce themselves, new slaves were constantly being provided.

In the literature on the subject, there is an ongoing debate on how to define slavery. There are two opposed perceptions. Firstly, one which regards a slave as a slave irrespective of social and other differences as to culture and other contexts. Secondly, one trend is to focus on differences between forms of slavery. There is, for example, so-called 'chattel slavery', which in its European form is known from Rome and the Americas, involving the perception of a person being completely owned by another person, holding rights to the fruits of that person's production and reproduction, where the slave, by law or custom, was regarded as personal property. There is also 'lineage slavery', in which the slaves are socially marginalised persons who, through incorporation into kinship ties increase the kinship-based human resources through work and reproduction. These were subject to decisions taken by kinship elders, decisions that also applied to all kin.

In much recent literature about slavery in Africa, the long existence of 'lineage slavery' in Africa is emphasised, and that it existed alongside the export of slaves from Africa. The forms of slavery in general

5. Tjathel
6. Biskw-fid
7. Dango.
8. Afangj
9. Kuidjo . .
10. Koffi)

## Forms of slavery on the Gold Coast

have changed both during and following the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave export, changing the main form from lineage slavery to production-based slavery very similar to that of chattel slavery.

The Ghanaian historian, Prof. Akosua Perbi, has demonstrated that the Ghanaian languages have five different words for enslaved persons, servants, pawns, slaves from the North, war captives, and, finally, slaves under capital punishment. New supplies of these came from armed conflicts, the purchase of foreigners on international slave markets, raids and kidnapping, payments of tribute, pawning family members, and criminal offenders.

Enslaved persons performed a number of very different tasks and held very different statuses. They took care of almost all household work, food preparation, laundry, fetching water and firewood, cleaning, childcare, and errands, for which they received remuneration in the form of food, clothes and shelter. They were employed in clearing forests and in agricultural production, which during this time almost totally depended on the work of enslaved persons, both in small-scale family farming, using individual slaves, and larger scale plantation production, owned by kings, chiefs, and a few wealthy individuals, in which the slaves lived separate from their masters. They collected oil palm fruits and cola nuts, raised cattle, and were engaged in hunting and fishing. Enslaved persons constituted the majority of the work force involved





in gold extraction, produced salt along the coast, and were engaged in pottery, basketry, cloth production, woodcarving, metal work, and soap production.

In the long-distance trade some of the enslaved persons were carriers whilst others were leaders of caravans of up to 2,000 people, while yet other slaves served as sellers of gold and purchasers of European goods for their masters.

The administration of the centralised states of the Gold Coast was often in the hands of slaves employed by the households of kings and chiefs (*gyase*), headed by a slave. They often performed a number of purely household duties for the kings, such as throne bearers, musicians and singers, carriers, as well as more administrative tasks such as executioners, heralds, assisting spokesmen during diplomatic missions, collecting and distributing state funds, and being responsible for royal trade expeditions. The members of *gyase* constituted the king's bodyguard that followed him everywhere.

Other slaves formed part of a considerable – if not the major – force of soldiers in the local armies, in which also foreign slaves were used as professional soldiers, and in the towns along the coast, descendants of imported slaves had their own quarters, which were responsible for, and equipped, their own contingents of war (*asafo*).

## The Danish use of enslaved persons

### Fort slaves and serfs at the Danish forts

Apart from the slaves purchased by the Danes, and transported across the Atlantic, the Danes used enslaved persons to work for them on the Gold Coast, more or less in the same way as in the surrounding coastal communities.

Fort slaves and serfs at the Danish forts were male and female slaves, who had been purchased to work at the forts, or were pawns. Male slaves constituted the majority and it was widely accepted that these would not be exported to America.

Some male slaves served, particularly in the early days, as soldiers at the forts, but the majority of fort slaves, who lived in the outworks around the forts, worked as servants, craftsmen, and builders at the forts, while also serving as canoe rowers and seamen on Danish vessels along the coast, as well as supervisors of slaves being transferred from the outer forts and those in the slave dungeons, and, finally, as carriers and envoys for the administration. Their numbers varied from around forty in the first half of the eighteenth century to about one hundred towards the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century. They worked daily from 6 am to 10 am and from 2 pm until 5 pm. Apart from clothing, dispensed twice a year, they were given a monthly allowance topped up by payment for certain services delivered.



African slaves  
serving  
expatriate civil  
servants and  
private  
merchants

Until 1792, where private persons were given permission to trade export slaves, very few Danes at the forts had house slaves, while after that, quite a few, especially private merchants, employed a large number of slaves in their merchant houses, probably between 100 and 200. Here, as well, male slaves dominated and while servants and craftsmen accounted for many of the slaves, the majority was involved in running the merchants' businesses as assistants and canoe rowers. Approx. half the slaves could be equipped with arms by their owners and took part as soldiers in the armed conflicts. They worked from 6 am until 11 am and from 1 pm until 5 pm, and the slaves employed by the private merchants were given a very poor monthly allowance, but did, in addition, receive an annual bonus consisting of clothing and alcohol.

Slaves on  
private and  
public Danish  
plantations

In the nineteenth century, there were around ten Danish owned plantations, the majority of which were situated south of the Akwapim Ridge with a total area of approx. 1,100 acres. The number of enslaved workers varied considerably but the average was about forty male and female slaves per plantation. A number of small slave houses existed on many plantations. The slaves worked four days a week on the plantation, planting or weeding the crops. The rest of the time they worked on allocated plots of land, where they grew their own crops.