

Art and Architecture of Anomabo, Ghana: A Case Study in Cultural Flow

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My research has been supplemented by two pre-dissertation trips to southern Ghana. Contacts initially made in the historically-significant town of Anomabo in the summer of 2007 revealed the potential for dissertation study. I returned this summer to conduct interviews with scholars at the University of Ghana in Legon and the University of Cape Coast as well as several of the leaders and townspeople of Anomabo. Although English is spoken widely throughout Ghana, I am pursuing formal Akan Twi training at the University of Florida. I also picked up a few Fante words on location in Anomabo.

Anomabo provides an example of long-term cultural contact, the flow of visual forms and cultural ideas, and the resulting choices that cultures make in appropriating, transforming and recontextualizing visual forms in art and architecture. The coastal city of Anomabo, the primary commercial hub along the Gold Coast during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, exemplifies the impact of globalization. The filter of art and architecture will allow my research to make visible these influences which may otherwise be overlooked. Today, Anomabo's port is closed and much of its historic grandeur

lies in ruins, resulting in an erroneous first impression of a sleepy, rural town unaffected by global concerns.

Numerous pre-colonial African cities, such as the Edo urban center of Benin in Nigeria, experienced similar urbanization, attracting and combining cultures. The absorption of ideas and their translation into visual forms however, is not always documented or evident in the contemporary setting. My research in Anomabo will add to the understanding of both pre-colonial and contemporary urban Africa by providing an example drawing from numerous historical documents and an active



contemporary art scene. My approach will bring to the fore the enduring influence of cultural and artistic behaviors that developed during the pre-colonial period. Anomabo's historic cosmopolitanism continues to influence current art forms evidencing the openness of artists to new influences, motifs, experimentations, and cultural blending.

Visual forms of primary importance are textiles, architecture, posuban or cement shrines, performance, sculpture and painting, and in many instances, these media are combined. Of particular relevance to this study are the many Fante constructs that blend visual forms from seemingly-unrelated sources to create something entirely new. One contemporary example is a group of paintings found on the façade of a building entitled Holy Land. The paintings blend Christian, Fante and Hindi religious ideas and motifs. Study of these appropriations and recontextualizations will aid in understanding how contemporary forms display artistic syncretism and the way current artistic expressions reflect Anomabo's cosmopolitan heritage.

My research will place globalization of an African city and culture in a historical perspective. Anomabo's worldliness does not stem from its position as a satellite to Accra, Cape Coast or any western urban center, nor its positioning at the periphery of global flows, but in reference to its past position at the center of a vast cultural and commercial network.

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