
History in the Dungeon: Atlantic Slavery and the Spirit of Capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana

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The most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred.

—Joseph Roach

THERE IS A SPIRIT IN THE DUNGEON of Cape Coast Castle who greets visitors to what is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site commemorating four centuries of Atlantic slavery and the European presence in West Africa. Enshrined in the dank depths of the infamous fortress, between the vaulted chambers for storing slaves and the “Door of No Return” through which they exited as chattel, Nana Tabir presides over a realm of darkness where his decorated altar and attending “fetish” priest receive offerings from the living to honor the dead.¹ Visitors are surprised when they encounter Nana Tabir, perhaps because he does not appear in any museum plans or programs; hence his presence is unexpected. Reactions are mixed: Ghanaian schoolchildren and Pentecostals often hold back, expressing concern over possible pagan contamination.² International tourists are both attracted and repelled, some drawn toward intimations of the sacred and others reluctant to fork out more cash. If honoring the dead is redemptive and healing for many who come through, the ritual assemblage is discomfiting. It “flashes forth unexpectedly,” to signpost Michael Taussig’s invocation of Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image, for what is an altar if not a montage?³ In this case rocks, shells, money, booze, and blood—the *prima materia* of Atlantic slavery—are juxtaposed on its whitewashed tiers, providing less a story of this unspeakable past than a gateway for its intrusion.

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¹ The term “Nana” is a gender-neutral honorific that applies equally to humans and spirits in Akan languages such as Fante and Twi, expressing respect due to holders of high office, including kings, chiefs, senior kinsmen, elders, ancestors, priests, priestesses, and higher-ranking deities.

² Bayo Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana* (Chicago, 2008), 185–186.

³ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago, 1987), 368–370, quote from 368.

Nana Tabir has not gone unnoticed in the growing scholarship on Ghana's slave forts and castles, but his appearances are ephemeral. In Coleman Jordan's "rhizomorphic" analysis of the architecture of race in Cape Coast Castle, the underground dungeon is a space of terror, death, and above all blackness, in vertical contrast to the European living quarters and commanding heights of whiteness above. Here, on the sediment of "decayed bones, flesh and excrement" that congealed over centuries of human warehousing, Jordan identifies "a shrine to Nana Tabir, the local rock god . . . guarded by a local fetish priest clad in white garments," but says nothing more about it.⁴ Similarly, in her reading of Cape Coast Castle as a *lieu de mémoire* for redemptive tourist narratives, Ann Reed alludes to Tabir as a nameless dungeon fetish "maintained by a traditional African priest, who accepts monetary offerings towards prayers of atonement or appeasing the local deity," adding that "redemption and healing may now take place through embracing traditional African culture."⁵ Comparable descriptions by Cheryl Finley and Bayo Holsey emphasize Tabir's role in shaping tourist experiences, both indicating a certain degree of community involvement in bringing the shrine to its present location in the 1970s.⁶ The question of when and from where the shrine originated—in a word, its "history"—is not central to their more contemporary concerns with heritage tourism and public constructions of the past, but each acknowledges prior associations with local materials ("the rock out of which the dungeons were carved") and sacred sites within the city.⁷

When we take Tabir's history seriously, less as a record of objective documentation than as a window into Afro-European encounters associated with the rise of the Atlantic economy and the development of Cape Coast government and society, we can see that he epitomizes a range of African coastal "fetishes," extending from Senegambia to Luanda, that register European contact and trading relations in their ritual iconographies and forms of spirit possession. Rosalind Shaw, Robert Baum, Judy Rosenthal, and John McCall offer similar perspectives on embodied memories and secret histories of Atlantic slavery hidden in shrines, following earlier evidence of "fetishized" manifestations of European merchants and slavers on the coast.⁸ What distinguishes Tabir within this growing literature on the historicity of such ritual ar-

⁴ Coleman A. Jordan, "Rhizomorphics of Race and Space: Ghana's Slave Castles and the Roots of African Diaspora Identity," *Journal of Architectural Education* 60, no. 4 (2007): 48–59, here 56.

⁵ Ann Reed, "Sankofa Site: Cape Coast Castle and Its Museum as Markers of Memory," *Museum Anthropology* 27, no. 1–2 (2004): 13–23, here 15.

⁶ Cheryl Finley, "Authenticating Dungeons, Whitewashing Castles: The Former Sites of the Slave Trade on the Ghanaian Coast," in D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren, eds., *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place* (London, 2004), 109–128, here 120–121; Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance*, 160, 286.

⁷ Finley, "Authenticating Dungeons, Whitewashing Castles," 120.

⁸ See Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago, 2002); Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (Oxford, 1999); Judy Rosenthal, *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo* (Charlottesville, Va., 1998); John C. McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2000); and most recently, Meena Venkatachalam, *Slavery, Memory, and Religion in Southeastern Ghana, c. 1850–Present* (New York, 2015). See also the earlier forays of A. A. Whitehouse, "An African Fetish," *Journal of the African Society* 4, no. 16 (1905): 410–416; P. Amaury Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs* (London, 1932); Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, "A Footnote to the History of Negro Slaving," *Opportunity* 11, no. 6 (1933): 178–181, reprinted in Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom*, 2 vols. (1938; repr., Evanston, Ill., 1967), 1: 63–69.

chives, however, is the depth of European documentation going back to 1601. If Tabir looks like an invented tradition “customized” for tourists, he has in fact been around for centuries, changing forms and places, sacralizing spaces, and shaping pathways of ritual reciprocity to empower chiefs and devotees. His history is less a story to be told than a past that he both mystifies and manifests, evoking migration and settlement, Cape Coast Castle, the Royal African Company, gold and slaves, coastal asafo military companies, market-driven warfare, and the making of a creole culture through the mimetic appropriation of European insignia. It is one thing to identify those forms of mystification that distort the past to retrofit the present, and another to use those mystifying logics as interpretive keys for unlocking the past. The latter approach is far more difficult and rewarding, and represents the challenge posed by the deity in the dungeon.⁹

THERE ARE THREE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES to historical interpretation that, taken together, can help to illuminate critical dimensions of Cape Coast’s Afro-European encounter, including its forms of violence, ritual mediation, symbolic appropriation, and economic exchange, as well as the levels of articulation through which it developed. Focusing on the “fetishized” zones of this encounter enables historians to reconsider shrines and ritual assemblages as primary sources—even ritual archives—that, together with written records and oral traditions, support three related theses in Cape Coast history.¹⁰

The first approach, developed by Marshall Sahlins in his dynamic synthesis of

⁹ Research for this article is based on two short periods of fieldwork in Cape Coast: the first in September 2004, when I videotaped segments of the annual Fetu Afahye festival and collected preliminary oral histories from the priest and priestesses of Tabir; the second in June 2011, when I returned for a more intensive series of interviews with Nana Sampson, Kobina Minnah, the Queen Mother of Fetu, Cape Coast Castle tour guides, and members of Asafo Company No. 2. I have combined these field data with archival material on the Royal African Company in the British National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA]; published editions of primary sources; and the published narratives of travelers, missionaries, company residents, and slave traders, some of which reappear in the English pamphlet literature debating the Royal African Company’s monopoly status.

¹⁰ The methodological status of the “ritual archive” complicates the signature opposition between written and oral sources in African historiography because, like writing, ritual is highly formalized, and thus somewhat insulated from revision, but like oral testimonies and traditions, it remains context-sensitive and thus subject to manipulation and post hoc elaboration. The challenge is not simply in distinguishing between accurate versus distorted renditions of the past, but in reading historical processes from the very patterns of variation and distortion. The problem is further complicated when, as in Tabir’s case, rituals generate their own written and oral traditions. The Africanist literature on these methodological challenges is vast. Key positions and paradigm shifts are represented by Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. H. M. Wright (London, 1965); David P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford, 1974); and Joseph C. Miller, ed., *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, Conn., 1980). For variant oral traditions generated by the development of oppositional ritual fields, see Andrew Apter, “The Historiography of Yoruba Myth and Ritual,” *History in Africa* 14 (January 1987): 1–25. More recent approaches to oral historical methods in Africa include Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001); and Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Rochester, N.Y., 2003). For sacred groves as “archives” embedded in the landscape, see Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington, Ind., 2002); and Gérard Chouin, “Archaeological Perspectives on Sacred Groves in Ghana,” in Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, eds., *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change* (Oxford, 2008), 178–194. See also n. 99 below.

French structuralism and the Annales School, examines the production of historical events and trajectories through the cultural logics that render them intelligible to motivated actors and constituencies on the ground.¹¹ Highlighting exogenous cultural “encounters” because they bring the dialectics of historical practice to the fore—his most famous case explains Captain Cook’s deification and demise as the Hawaiian god Lono in 1779—Sahlins’s generative perspective applies to internal histories as well, since all “change” is ordered by the reciprocal shaping of events by structures and structures by events. Central to this method is his dialectical focus on the “structure of the conjuncture,” by which he means “the practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested action of the historic agents, including the microsociology of their interaction.”¹² The movement between social and symbolic structures is of course crucial to the workings of historical *praxis*, since the shaping of events and their historical consequences depend as much upon cultural schemes of signification as they do upon levels of articulation between competing groups, politics, or developing markets. What gives an event historical significance is precisely its “reciprocal movement between higher and lower orders, a translation of each into the register of the other.”¹³ If Captain Cook’s arrival (and return) by sea made ritual sense within Hawaiian cultural schemes, creating a crisis for local kingship and sovereignty, it also opened the floodgates to those “cosmologies of capitalism” that followed in his wake.¹⁴

When we transpose Sahlins from the Pacific Islands to the Atlantic “Guinea Coast,” a number of striking parallels come to light. Like Cook, Europeans arrived by ship, posing a problem of cultural classification for those Africans who had to determine just what and whom they were dealing with. Barring the problematic question of whether Europeans were taken for spirits or gods, they were clearly associated with altars, shrines, and high-ranking deities in coastal pantheons.¹⁵ They also registered a lasting impact on local codes of social distinction, as key markers of European value and sovereignty were incorporated into the architectural styles and sta-

¹¹ For a representative trajectory, see the following works by Marshall Sahlins: *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981); *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985); “Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of ‘the World System,’” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 1–51; *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago, 1995); and *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago, 2004). For an enthusiastic refinement of Sahlins’s theory of history by a historian, see William H. Sewall Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), chap. 7.

¹² Sahlins, *Islands of History*, xiv.

¹³ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York, 2000), 304.

¹⁴ For an alternative development of a historical anthropology that focuses on “symbolic practice,” “signifying economies,” and “great conjunctures,” see John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colo., 1992); and Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2: *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago, 1997), a conceptual as well as scholarly *oeuvre* that more fruitfully applies to colonization, Christianization, and the making of nineteenth-century Cape Coast Christian elites. See, e.g., Roger Gocking, “Creole Society and the Revival of Traditional Culture in Cape Coast during the Colonial Period,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17, no. 4 (1984): 601–622.

¹⁵ For the spirited slugfest between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere over Captain Cook’s problematic “apotheosis,” see Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton, N.J., 1992); Sahlins, *How “Natives” Think*; Robert Borofsky, “Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins,” *Current Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (1997): 255–282; and Clifford Geertz, “Culture War,” *New York Review of Books* 42, no. 19 (November 30, 1995): 4–6.

tus symbols of the new mercantile elites. In this respect, Tabir became a point of ritual articulation—not only between land and sea, coast and hinterland, Africans and Europeans, and developing coastal polities, but also between the converging orders of structural differentiation resulting from Cape Coast's incorporation into the growing Atlantic economy. Hence thesis one: Tabir was no mere mirror of this change; he occupied a key position in a growing ritual network, which established Afro-European trading alliances through “fetish contracts” that controlled the sphere of circulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Shifting from Marshall Sahlins to Michael Taussig—from a historical poetics grounded in structure to a poetics of history that disrupts like a poltergeist—we can catch fleeting glimpses of Tabir's past as it pushes into the present. Much like a possession priest channeling Walter Benjamin, Taussig takes us on a tour of European colonialism and its legacies in Latin America, charting a historical symptomology of fetishism, affliction, terror, healing, magic, memory, and mimesis.¹⁶ Taussig's *oeuvre* defies synoptic summary, given his guiding principle that unsettling juxtapositions rather than narrative conventions more effectively capture “the design of history” and the power of the past. In a signal essay, “History as Sorcery,” Taussig shows how Huitoto spirits invoked in Sibundoy Indian shamanic healing transform victims of the Putumayo rubber atrocities (both as slave laborers and as company guards) into mystical agents of protective divination, building on a prior mythic topography of highlands and lowlands in southwest Colombia.¹⁷ Central to such forms of ritual activation is a poetics of mimetic appropriation, a doubling and copying of icons and images associated with European authority (the state, the church, the company) and “savage” power (the *indio*, the “Wildman”), not to resist or eliminate it but rather “to acquire it.”¹⁸ In later work, Taussig assembles a telling inventory of images that illustrate such histories of ritual and mythic domestication—of European figurines, spirit boats of gringos, spirit fortresses bearing European flags, and the sympathetic magic of “first contact” itself.¹⁹ Taussig's mimetic clutter runs riot in Cape Coast's annual Fetu Afahye festival, where Nana Tabir turns out to be a white European, the specter of Cape Coast Castle, and the spirit of merchant capitalism, linking the ship-like shrines (*posuban*) of military asafo companies (with their cannon, heraldry, and flags) to the palace of the Omanhen, or paramount chief, through volatile pathways of ritual reciprocity.²⁰ Hence thesis two: Cape Coast's history of cultural creolization

¹⁶ Key texts by Michael Taussig in this vein include *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man; The Nervous System* (New York, 1992); *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993); *The Magic of the State* (New York, 1997); and *Walter Benjamin's Grave* (Chicago, 2006).

¹⁷ Michael Taussig, “History as Sorcery,” in Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, 366–392, here 369. Originally published in *Representations* 7 (Summer 1984): 87–109.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 391. See also Fritz Kramer, *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa*, trans. Malcolm Green (London, 1993), for mimetic appropriations of foreign powers in West African ritual aesthetics, including those of “northerners” among the Asante.

¹⁹ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

²⁰ For asafo aesthetics, see Doran H. Ross, *Fighting with Art: Applied Flags of the Fante Asafo* (Los Angeles, 1979); Ross, “Cement Lions and Cloth Elephants: Popular Arts of the Fante Asafo,” in Fred E. H. Schroeder, ed., *5000 Years of Popular Culture: Popular Culture before Printing* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1980), 287–317; Ross, “‘Come and Try’: Towards a History of Fante Military Shrines,” *African Arts* 40, no. 3 (2007): 12–35. For historical studies of asafo companies, see Ansu K. Datta and R. Porter, “The Asafo System in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (1971): 279–297; James Boyd Christensen, *Double Descent among the Fanti* (New Haven, Conn., 1954); I. Chukwukere, “Perspectives on the Asafo Institution in Southern Ghana,” *Journal of African Studies* 7, no. 1 (1980): 38–47; J. C. de

rested on African strategies of ritual acquisition that converted the symbolic forms of Atlantic slavery into “fetishes” of power and value.

This key idea of history as sorcery, or as the ritual coalescence of turbulent pasts, is further developed by Rosalind Shaw, whose *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* examines religious ritual and embodied knowledge as alternative forms of historical consciousness—not recognized as history by Sierra Leoneans but fetishized in idioms of mystical agency. Her focus on spirit raiders, divination techniques, social landscapes, and witchcraft idioms discloses “an alternative history of the slave trade—a history of moral imagination, told primarily in the language of practical memory through places and practices, images and visions, rituals and rumors.”²¹ Crucial to Shaw’s interpretive method is the identification of “palimpsest memories” that represent a layering of historical templates in which prior conflicts and encounters shape the apprehension and recollection of subsequent events.²² As Charles Piot has shown for the Kabre in Togo, and Jean Allman and John Parker for the Talensi in Ghana, popular accounts of colonial conquest are framed by older memories of eighteenth-century slave-raiding, generating a chain of embedded encounters in which historic actors adapt prior scripts.²³ The concept of “palimpsest memories” is important because it allows us to get beyond idioms of collective recollection to the actual pasts that they codify and invoke, illustrating how repressed historical memories return, even if dimly apprehended or “fetishized” as sorcery. Hence thesis three: Although Cape Coast residents routinely suppress their slave-trading past, it returns through Tabir’s ritualized forms of spirit possession and collective purification in Fetu Afahye.²⁴

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE Fetu Afahye festival will help position Tabir in relation to Cape Coast’s major deities and shrines, and highlight the pathways of ritual reciprocity that are cleared by his priests and priestesses as they process throughout the city, preparing the ground for collective sacrifice and purification.²⁵ If the following

Graft Johnson, “The Fanti Asafo,” *Africa* 5, no. 3 (1932): 307–322; Ansu Datta, “The Fante Asafo: A Re-examination,” *Africa* 42, no. 4 (1972): 305–315; Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, N.Y., 2011), 144–152; Per Hernaes, “Asafo History: An Introduction,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, new series, 2 (1998): 1–5; R. Addo-Fening, “The Akyem Abuakwa Asafo, 1700–1918,” *ibid.*, 7–19; Kofi Baku, “The Asafo in Two Ewe States,” *ibid.*, 21–28.

²¹ Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago, 1999); Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God* (Bloomington, Ind., 2005), 14–15.

²⁴ Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance*, especially 4–6. For an Anlo example, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, “History, Memory, Slave-Trade and Slavery in Anlo (Ghana),” *Slavery and Abolition* 22, no. 3 (2001): 1–24. For northern Ghana, see Joachim Jack Agamba, “Beyond Elmina: The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 1–2 (2005/2006): 39–72.

²⁵ The richest ethnographic account of Tabir, and his role in the collective sacrifice of a bull during the Fetu Afahye festival, is David William Thorsen-Cavers, “Entanglements: Tradition, Modernity and Globalization in Cape Coast” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2006), 313–325. Thorsen-Cavers’s study, based on fieldwork conducted in 1997 and 2003, reveals fascinating continuities and variations in ritual practice and historical memory in relation to my own material, illustrating the micro- as well as macro-temporalities of coastal festivals in West Africa. He also identifies Tabir and the bull’s sacrifice as “invok[ing] the historical complicity of Cape Coast’s ancestors in the slave trade” (317). See also Samuel Blankson, *Fetu Afahye* (Cape Coast, 1973), 19–21.

portrayal, based on my first visit to Cape Coast in early September 2004, reflects some of the historical contingencies of the moment, it also establishes a ritual schema or template that has shaped historical developments since the seventeenth century.²⁶

Tabir's role in Fetu Afahye began in the morning with a "closed" ritual in Cape Coast Castle's dungeon shrine, tended by his high priest (*akomfo*) and his male assistant, together with some assembled priestesses (*amisafo*) of his "sibling" deity Amissah. The officiates were dressed in black cloth with water vines (*nyenyena*) draped over their shoulders.²⁷ They propitiated Tabir with red wine poured into gourds and onto two large rocks supported by the altar: the one above representing Tabir himself, and the second, slightly smaller rock below it identified as Oبراfo, Tabir's messenger, who specializes in sending sacrifices and reversing curses. (See Figure 1.) Adorned with coins, bills, and wine bottles, together with bowls, shells, skins, and a pair of gongs, the altar faced commemorative wreaths and plaques from international visitors hanging nearby on a wall. As the wine continued to flow, and shots of gin were passed among the officiates and invitees, the priestesses sang and danced for their deity. This restricted ceremony was ritual preparation for the next phase of Fetu Afahye—Tabir's noontime procession with a white sacrificial bull through Cape Coast's streets and thoroughfares.

Tethered to the castle railing near its seaward cannon, the bull was released by a group of young men identified as "from the North," who subdued it with ropes and pulled it to the ground so that the Tabir priest could tie a sash filled with coins around its neck.²⁸ After the bull was raised back to its feet, Tabir's priest, accompanied by an entourage of assistants and Amissah priestesses, proceeded from the castle through Cape Coast's streets and intersections, stopping people and traffic to make way for the bull as it was carefully directed with two ropes by the northerners. The chief priest led the way, throwing handfuls of one of Tabir's special foods—mashed red and white yam mixed with palm oil (*mpotroba*)—to the left and right from a calabash, to placate all attending gods and spirits and thereby enable the bull's smooth passage. The group was announced by two staccato strikes of the gong, in rapid succession, as if manifest-

²⁶ I am grateful to Professor Irene Odotei, from the Department of History and the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, for inviting me to join her research group on chieftaincy in Ghana. I greatly benefited from the connections and intimate access that she had developed over the years with local chiefs, priests, and asafo companies in Cape Coast, which included Tabir's morning ceremony on September 3, 2004. See Irene K. Odotei and Albert K. Awedoba, eds., *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development* (Accra, 2006).

²⁷ The association of this black cloth with remembering and venerating ancestors, usually in funerals, is noted by Thorsen-Cavers, "Entanglements," 318.

²⁸ Thorsen-Cavers identifies the young men as "a small team of Muslim butchers"; "Entanglements," 319. As in most West African towns of the Atlantic littoral, the meat trade is controlled by Muslims from the north, often of Hausa ethnicity, working in southern markets. Here we can see how the explicit identification of the northern cattle trade ("Muslim butchers"), in the context of the bull's sacrifice in Fetu Afahye, sublimates Cape Coast's historic trade in northern human chattel, given that the northern Muslims who formerly captured and sold "Gur-speaking peoples of the middle Volta savannas" today bring cattle to the coast. I thank the second anonymous *AHR* reader (quoted in the previous sentence) for encouraging me to clarify the important distinction between northern Muslim traders and the Volta peoples whom they enslaved. For a rich and illuminating historical exposition of Volta shapeshifting idioms of witchcraft and how these figured in the "Gold Coast imagination" during the first half of the twentieth century, see John Parker, "Northern Gothic: Witches, Ghosts and Werewolves in the Savanna Hinterland of the Gold Coast, 1900s–1950s," *Africa* 76, no. 3 (2006): 352–380. Parker locates northern shapeshifting hyenas and werewolves within two temporal frames: the later "transition from northern slave labour to migrant wage-labour," and the longer historical trajectories of Atlantic slavery (358; see also 354–355).



FIGURE 1. Tabir's shrine in the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle. Photo by Andrew Apter, June 2011.

ing one of their songs, "We own the city . . . if we don't move, nobody moves." In this fashion, the group took control of Cape Coast's public space, guiding the bull to the Omanhen's palace (*ahenfie*), and then back toward the castle to the nearby Paprata shrine, built around a large silk cotton tree in the open market.²⁹ Here the bull was attached to the tree, while the assembled crowd, growing in size and anticipation, awaited the arrival (via Chapel Square) of the Omanhen, who by his own hand would cut the bull's throat as a sacrifice on behalf of the entire kingdom.³⁰ The explicit thrust

²⁹ According to the prominent Cape Coast historian James Erskine Graham, "Nana Paprata is also one of the oldest gods in Cape Coast. Nana Paprata resides in a tree and it can now be found behind the Anafo market. It is believed that the early [Fetu] settlers organized all their meetings under this tree which was then the biggest tree in Cape Coast. With time, this tree became a god. This was because all forms of state sacrifices were performed under this tree. Even up till now, all the state sacrifices are performed under Nana Paprata." Graham, *Cape Coast in History* (Cape Coast, 1994), 114. See also Wilhelm Johann Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country, 1662–9," in Adam Jones, ed. and trans., *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669* (Wiesbaden, 1983; original German ed. 1673), 134–259, for an unnamed reference (from the 1660s) to what was likely the Paprata shrine in Cabo Corso's market: "In the middle of the market, just as at Fetu, there stands a green tree with outstretched branches, which is held to be sacred" (140). As Jones points out in n. 10 of his translation, the tree appears in plate 4 of Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602), trans. and ed. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford, 1987), 62; and de Marees mentions elsewhere in the text that "[t]he highest tree of the town is the king's fetisso." The plate with the tree is reproduced below as Figure 2.

³⁰ See also Irene Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana: Continuity, Transformation and Politicisation of Tradition," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, new series, 6 (2002): 17–34, here 19.

was expiatory, offering the bull for collective purification and atonement by washing away a year's worth of accumulated witchcraft—factional clashes between chiefs and clans—through the expenditure of blood.

Nana Tabir's role in preparing the bull for sacrifice and leading it in a procession to the Paprata shrine is one reason given to explain his preeminence as the top-ranked god among Cape Coast's seventy-seven deities, known as *obosom* in Akan religious culture.³¹ As the defining moment in the Fetu Afahye festival, the bull's sacrifice is nonetheless embedded within a seven-week sequence of ritual transitions and activities, beginning with the New Yam Festival, when the Omanhen is confined, followed by a ban on drumming and fishing, the release of the Omanhen, his lifting of the fishing ban in the Fosu Lagoon, the mobilization of asafo companies to clean the town, general shrine renovation, and the lighting of asafo bonfires, before closing with the Bakatue Regatta. After the bull's sacrifice and the Omanhen's return to his palace, nocturnal bonfires were lit for newly installed asafo officers (*asafohenfo*), who leapt across the flames without getting burned, and sought further cleansing in the sea. On the following celebratory Durbar Day, with chiefs in their palanquins heralded by drummers, the political order of the Oguua "nation" turned out in full glory, bearing the umbrellas, icons, and insignia of chieftaincy, followed by the competitive flag-dancing of the asafo companies that has made this festival such a cultural attraction.³²

Fetu Afahye incorporated immigrant groups around an Oguua core that had originally migrated from the inland kingdom of Fetu (also called Efutu) to take advantage of nascent European trade on the coast.³³ Its longer trajectory consolidated different groups and festivals within an attenuated annual "Customs" celebration, broken by long periods of prohibition imposed by British occupiers and colonizers, and revived by Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) after independence. In 2004, the broader politics of the festival was evidenced during the concluding durbar by the surprise visit of President John Kufuor, who was then campaigning for his second term against his Fante rival, John Atta Mills—in effect, seeking support in ethnic "enemy" territory, since he himself was Asante. But if such a contemporary political strategy marked an important moment in Ghana's successful return to democracy, it was also a variation of a much older history of intersecting markets and

³¹ The number seventy-seven should not be taken literally, but rather as what Christopher R. DeCorse calls "a trope for 'many'" in his discussion of the seventy-seven deities of neighboring Elmina. See DeCorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1482–1800* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 180, 245 n. 23. Nonetheless, local businessman and historian W. S. Kwesi Johnston published a "definitive" list of Cape Coast's seventy-seven gods, generating mimeographed and photocopied variations that circulate among chiefs. Johnston, "A List of the Seventy-Seven Tutelary Gods of Cape Coast," *Ghana Notes and Queries* 12 (1972): 32. It is interesting to note that whereas Johnston's list is alphabetical, the mimeographs rank Tabir at the top, followed by Paprata and Fosu. For a distinction between Cape Coast's seventy-seven "state gods" and more numerous "household gods," see Graham, *Cape Coast in History*, 111–117. For the identification of the Paprata deity as Tabir's wife, see Thorsen-Cavers, "Entanglements," 314.

³² See Thorsen-Cavers, "Entanglements," chap. 6, for a rich account of all of these phases in Fetu Afahye. See also Blankson, *Fetu Afahye*, whose photograph of the bull in 1972, facing p. 14, reveals the sash of coins tied around its neck (although it is not mentioned in the text). See also the plates facing pp. 12, 13, 16, 17, and 18 for photographs of the *akomfo* and *amisafu* priests and priestesses exiting the dungeon and arriving at the Paprata shrine.

³³ For a rich synthetic account of Fetu's history, see Yann Deffontaine, *Guerre et société au royaume de Fetu (Efutu): Des débuts du commerce atlantique à la constitution de la Fédération Fanti; Ghana, Côte de l'or, 1471–1720* (Paris, 1993).

political orders that has characterized Cape Coast since the arrival of Europeans.³⁴ And it is one that we can reexamine through Tabir's ritual lens.

To begin, there is no question that Nana Tabir is intimately linked to early contact with Europeans on the coast. The altar in his dungeon shrine is adorned with gifts, foods, and currencies associated with the commercial custom of Atlantic slavery in West Africa, as well as a pair of gongs used on various ritual outings. From the contemporary viewpoints of his chief priest and devotees, Tabir is a "white" god who prefers the food and drink of Europeans: he does not receive fish, but requires sheep, goat, fowl, eggs, and yam as sacrificial offerings, and prefers bottled and "paper" wine—that is, red wine sold in cartons in the local shops and supermarket—to the local gin or imported schnapps favored by other gods. Moreover, as Nana Sampson, Tabir's chief priest, explained, "According to my father, when the spirit of Tabir descends, he doesn't speak Fante. He speaks English, and moves his hands in an English way . . . as a result they always have to find someone to interpret."³⁵ Tabir's whiteness is further embodied in the children he engenders. Barren women, or those seeking successful delivery through his ritual auspices, are said to give birth to white or mulatto children. In one explanation of Tabir's paramount ranking among Cape Coast's seventy-seven gods, I was told that "the meaning of his name is 'overseer,' someone behind all the other people . . . which makes him a white person."³⁶ Was Tabir a ritual representation of the white governor of Cape Coast Castle or the mulatto overseers of slaves there when the fortress became the West African headquarters of the Royal African Company?

And what about the slaves who were held in the dungeons and sent overseas? Did Tabir manifest the spirits of the slaves, or in some sense placate their spirit-souls? Was his "fetish cult" comparable to the Dahomean ritual complex of appeasement for royal ancestors who had been sold into slavery, as documented by Melville and Frances Herskovits in 1933?³⁷ Most responses were resolutely dismissive: "The slaves were just passing through . . . a slave is a slave, so nobody cares for them."³⁸ A standard narrative emerged from various interviews that Tabir was a white god associated with a rock overlooking the sea, where he was first encountered by inland Fetu immigrants who settled on the coast, and was subsequently incorporated into Cape Coast Castle after Europeans arrived and established their presence. He ritually serves the people of the community, having had little to do with the slaves as such.³⁹ According to the migration story,

the inland King of Fetu had a taste for crabs, and sent some people to the coast to collect them and bring them back. The expedition came to a rock by the sea, where they encoun-

³⁴ The visits to Cape Coast Castle of the lieutenant governor of Maryland, Michael Steele, in June 2004 and President Barack Obama in July 2009 fall within this cycle of historic intersections. In June 2011, Steele's wreath was still visible in the dungeon.

³⁵ Interview with Nana Sampson, Cape Coast, June 21, 2011. Compare this with Thorsen-Cavers's observation that Tabir's whiteness and European identity may well be evoked "by the mimetic performances of *akomfo* . . . possessed by Nana Tabir—saluting, marching and acting as though they were carrying a gun, like a soldier, and shooting it"; "Entanglements," 317.

³⁶ Interview with a Tabir devotee in Nana Sampson's entourage, September 4, 2004.

³⁷ See Herskovits and Herskovits, "A Footnote to the History of Negro Slaving."

³⁸ Interview with a Tabir devotee in Nana Sampson's entourage, September 4, 2004.

³⁹ Tabir's role as a tourist attraction for foreign visitors to Cape Coast Castle in no way detracts from his status as a venerated god within Cape Coast, and among his active devotees. In fact, the relation between tourist and local ritual spheres represents the latest iteration of "historic intersections" mentioned in note 34.

tered a very thick fog. After the fog subsided, they saw there was a god here, on this rock. It was something they discovered; Tabir god or deity presented himself first to them in the form of a fog. So that drew the attention of the settlers. When they came closer, the fog disappeared. So they saw that there was a god here. That is how they discovered Tabir. It was here before they even got to this place.⁴⁰

The tradition is part of a longer story about Tabir and Amissah being brothers, and how a coastal market in crabs and fishing was established in Kotokuraba, giving rise to the Oguaa market settlement before the arrival of the Europeans and the building of the castle. At this time, Tabir was responsible for the well-being of fishermen and traders.⁴¹ The tradition also explains how the mystery of Tabir's whiteness ("nobody knows how Tabir became white") predated the European encounter: "He was already white before the Europeans arrived."⁴² Framed within a mythic opposition between hinterland and coast, land and sea, Tabir emerges as a god of mediation, not only occupying the most liminal of zones—a rocky precipice where land and ocean collide—but also including a "hybrid" sibling relationship with the god Amissah, represented by water vines, who was brought by the early Fetu migrants (of the Bentsir and Nkum clans) but is also associated with the sea, as a whale. When I asked how Amissah and Tabir could be brothers if the latter migrated to find the former already on the coast, the priest explained that it was because for a time they shared a shrine, which effectively *made* them brothers. Which shrine, and when? Here is where we encounter Tabir's contradictory relationship to Atlantic slavery.

Local histories maintain that Tabir's rocky shrine was incorporated into the castle dungeons when they were originally built. In one dominant narrative, Tabir opposed the slave trade and made trouble for the Europeans who settled in the castle. As Nana Sampson explained, the god made life so difficult for the Europeans that they appealed to Opanyin Koho Amoah, the leader of the Oguaa community (and a native doctor), to take the deity out of the castle and house him in a different shrine:

Tabir didn't like the number of innocent people who were being carried away. Therefore he started harassing the Europeans in a spiritual way, haunting them. It was the whites who first went to Opanyin Koho Amoah to report the behavior of Tabir in the castle, and that they wanted to move him out of the castle and give it to him [Amoah] to keep, and he agreed. They brought Tabir to Akosua Amissah to attend to him. After they finished with the trade, they put the shrine back in the castle. A purification sacrifice of a bull was performed to cleanse the place before they resettled.⁴³

Evidence of Tabir's opposition to slavery was further adduced in a line from a song accompanying a dance during the dungeon ceremony: "Tabir, nifa Kokole, Tabir Kokole," which the priest explained in the following terms: "'Nifa' means 'to the right' . . . When Tabir saw the slaves being taken, it is like they are taking the right

⁴⁰ Interview with Nana Sampson's son, Cape Coast, June 16, 2011. Deffontaine attributes the founding of Oguaa to a Fetu faction that seceded under the direction of Edwe and Etumpan and settled on the coast toward the end of the fifteenth century. *Guerre et société au royaume de Fetu*, 18–19.

⁴¹ When fishermen made no catch, Tabir was consulted with offerings of corn dough and palm oil (*mpotroba*) sprinkled on his rock—the same food tossed from the calabash during the annual Fetu Afahye festival.

⁴² Interview with Nana Sampson's son.

⁴³ Interview with Nana Sampson, Cape Coast, June 18, 2011. Akosua was the name of Amissah's priestess at the time.

hand to the left, so he is saying, when they [the slaves] go, they [the Europeans] should bring them back to the right again.”⁴⁴ Like many ritual language forms, this fragment links the worshipper’s body to the context of utterance, reinscribing sacred space through the directional choreography (right to left, left to right) of indexical reference.⁴⁵ This meaning was of course implicit and opaque until it was explicitly voiced by the priest himself, suggesting that Tabir’s opposition to slavery is embedded in ritual practice. It is also embedded in ritual space, since the shrine outside the castle that Tabir came to share with Amissah represents his “time away” during the period of slavery.

Not all voicings, however, remain so oppositional. Even Nana Sampson shifted registers in the same interview, proclaiming of Tabir, “He later revealed himself as white when he came to do the slave business; he didn’t go back. He brought the slave trade!” It would be a mistake, however, to treat this statement by Tabir’s top-ranking priest as a contradiction within his narrative, because mythic discourses are inherently polyvocal, sustaining multiple meanings that emerge and recede according to ritual context and political motivation.⁴⁶ The contradiction is not within Nana Sampson’s narrative, but within Tabir, the deity of Cape Coast Castle, as a channel of Afro-European mediation that manifests aspects of both complicity and resistance.⁴⁷

This closer identification of Tabir with slavery, and the very Europeans who came from overseas, emerges in an oral history from Kobina Minnah, the *supi* (superior officer) of Asafo Company No. 6, and one of five ranking members of the Fetu Afahye planning committee.⁴⁸ Narrated in English rather than Fante, this version represents a more elite perspective allied with the asafo military company most directly associated with the former slaves and mulatto officers who had built and managed Cape Coast Castle:

Nana Tabir was in the form of a rock. Tradition has it that when Ejo Oguaa [the inland Fetu chief] came to settle in Cape Coast, he found the sacred rock near the seaside. And he invoked into it by offering sacrifices and paying homage to the sacred rock. At the time the castle was built, Tabir was brought into the castle. It is believed that when the slave dungeons were hollowed out of the rock from 1672 to 1675, a cow was slaughtered by the Royal African Company. Nana Tabir can be found to this day in the dungeon in the castle.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid. “Kokole” is an onomatopoeia imitating the sound of the drum that accompanies the song and dance.

⁴⁵ For analyses of such scheme transpositions, see William F. Hanks, “The Indexical Ground of Deictic Reference,” in Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, eds., *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge, 1992), 43–76; Andrew Apter, “Griaule’s Legacy: Rethinking ‘la parole claire’ in Dogon Studies,” *Cahiers d’Études africaines* 177, XLV, no. 1 (2005): 95–129.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of multiple voicings in Yoruba mythic narratives, and the political histories that they represent, see Apter, “The Historiography of Yoruba Myth and Ritual.”

⁴⁷ For a similar tension between Tabir’s opposition to Atlantic slavery, illustrated by his time away from the castle, and his association with slavery as a white European, see Thorsen-Cavers, “Entanglements,” 315–317.

⁴⁸ Although there is a general consensus that the asafo company office of the “*supi*” derives from the English title “superior officer,” Arthur Ffoulkes provides a vernacular interpretation: “The word *supi* means a pot brimful of water, and as water is essential to life, so is the *Supi* essential to the life of each Company.” See Ffoulkes, “The Company System in Cape Coast Castle,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 7, no. 27 (1908): 261–277, here 265. The tension between European and local meanings in asafo companies is central to their development as “creole” institutions.

⁴⁹ Interview with Kobina Minnah, Cape Coast, June 20, 2011. The status of this text as an oral history raises interesting questions of literary feedback. The specific dates of dungeon construction provided

As far as Supi Minnah was concerned, Tabir had never left the castle; he had been in the dungeon since the beginning of the slave trade.⁵⁰ Moreover, his account identifies the sacrificial bull of Fetu Afahye with an original *European* sacrifice to Tabir associated with his incorporation into the castle.

Tabir is a state god; even the priest who is taking care of it now [in the castle dungeon] must do one annual festival. The bull should be sent to Tabir's shrine overnight, which is why they say Nana Tabir is a foreign god, a white man. The bull is there for cleansing before it is taken through the streets of Cape Coast for the state sacrifice on Friday. So the bull is sent to the shrine on Thursday. Before the bull is taken away, an annual offering is made: one white sheep, two bottles of red wine, margarine, palm oil, and eggs.⁵¹

Adding margarine to Tabir's list of European foods, the supi emphasized that the sacrificial bull itself was most closely identified with European consumption, since the Royal African Company officers of the past would slaughter a bull at an annual Christmas banquet. It was after the whites left Cape Coast, he explained, that the Africans maintained the sacrifice.

From the oral histories of Nana Sampson and Supi Minnah, we are faced with the question not of which is more accurate, but of what, taken together, they both represent. Although they differ on Tabir's association with the slave trade—mostly opposed in the former and supportive in the latter—both concur that Tabir in his sacred rock preceded the arrival of Europeans, and was later incorporated into the dungeons when Cape Coast Castle was built. The shrine itself seems to reference this history through the two large stones on its tiered altar representing Tabir in the cas-

by Supi Minnah (1672–1675) appear to come from Graham, *Cape Coast in History*, 46; however, Graham thanks Supi Kobina Minnah (among others) for his “invaluable oral information” in the acknowledgments (second page, unpaginated), complicating the trajectories of oral-textual influence. See also David P. Henige, “The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands,” *Journal of African History* 14, no. 2 (1973): 223–235.

⁵⁰ Jean Barbot's first published journal (1688) provides one of the earliest accounts of the slave dungeon in Cape Coast Castle, and an estimate of its holding capacity: “The most noteworthy item is the slave-house, which lies below ground. It consists of large vaulted cellars, divided into several apartments which can easily hold a thousand slaves. This slave-house is cut into the rock, beneath the parade-ground.” *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678–1712*, ed. P. E. H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, 2 vols. (London, 1992), 2: 392. The editors add that “[i]n 1679 Barbot saw 400–500 slaves paraded on the parade-ground and ‘four large slave-holds’ in the fort,” based on the draft of his 1679 visit (2: 404 n. 11). References to the slave dungeons in castle surveys include one commissioned by Thomas Pye in 1749, which notes “steps that go down to the Slaves Rooms which are cut in a rock and Arch'd over very strong and will hold 1500 slaves” (TNA, CO700/GoldCoast1B), and Justly Watson's 1756 survey, which notes “Air Holes over the Vaults where the slaves are Kept” (TNA, MPG1/233).

⁵¹ Interview with Kobina Minnah, Cape Coast, June 20, 2011. The procession of the bull, led by Tabir's devotees, may well recapitulate an older ritual template of “ennobling” or installing a “big man” or asaf company captain, described by de Marees in 1602. In this ceremony of accession, the aspiring big man (or woman) provides a cow as a gift to assembled notables in the market, which, like Tabir's bull, is paraded throughout the town and then returned to the market, where it is slaughtered three days later. De Marees mentions that the giver (man or woman) cannot consume any of the meat, on pain of death, since doing so would amount to partaking of one's own gift, in effect subverting the “outward” flow of value. In return for the considerable expenditure involved, the “giver” receives not only “noble” recognition, but the right to own and sell slaves and other formerly restricted commodities. Whether the bull/cow distinction represents a significant gender opposition is not clear from the limited evidence, but in both cases the bovine procession and ritual sacrifice not only regulates access to slavery and commercial exchange, but also shapes the very pathways of circulation. See de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 167–170.

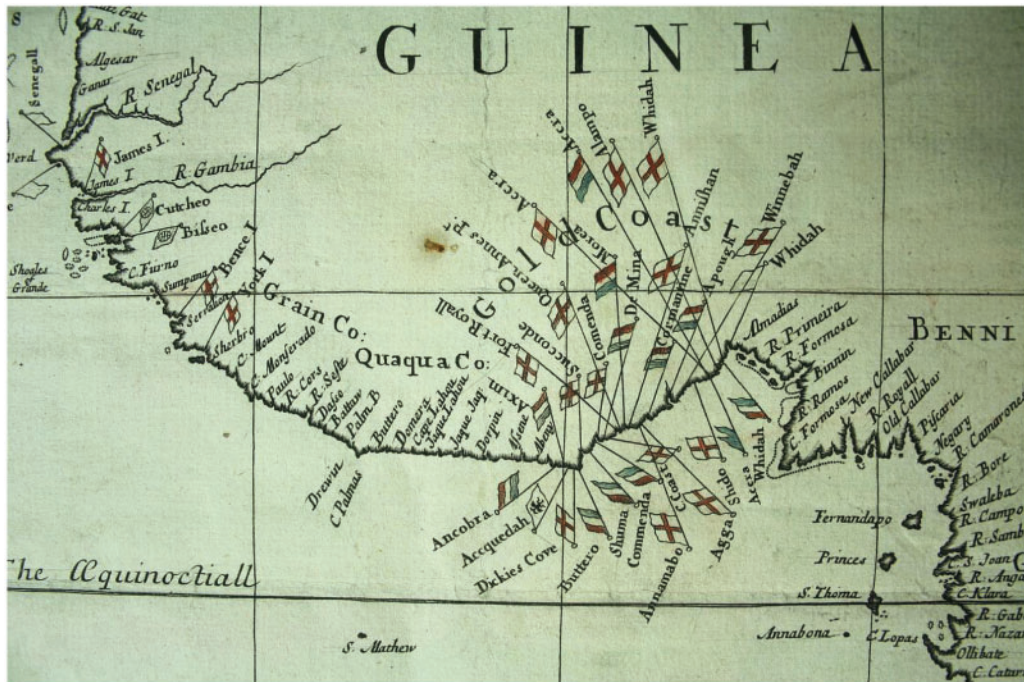
tle and Tabir-Echew—Tabir “behind” or “in the back,” indicating the original rock behind the castle wall, facing the open sea, where officiates still go to cast or reverse a curse. Both versions also directly link Tabir with the growth of a market in crabs and fish that was already in place when the Europeans arrived.⁵² Because Tabir was good for business, he became something of a “commodity fetish,” with powers and attributes that came to manifest the material relations of Atlantic slavery. Recall the two versions of the bull’s original sacrifice: in one, it was carried out by the Royal African Company to bring Tabir within the castle and the service of the English Crown; in the other, it was done by Tabir’s devotees to purify the dungeons and return him to the castle after the slave trade was abolished. Simultaneously supporting and opposing this trade, Tabir became central to its ritual mediation, channeling the conjuncture of African and European interests as Cape Coast developed into a major port city.

TO DEEPEN OUR INTERPRETATION of Tabir’s history within the coastal developments of the Atlantic economy, we turn to the writings of European residents and travelers, whose sustained fascination with local “fetishes” generated a documentary record over several centuries.⁵³ In 1602, the Dutch merchant and explorer Pieter de Marees published his *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, documenting the “customs” and commerce of Cabo Corso (Cape Coast) while challenging Portugal’s monopoly on gold, slaves, and ivory.⁵⁴ Based on his visit in 1601, de Marees portrays a nascent cosmopolitanism that would characterize the region for centuries to come. During the Portuguese monopoly in the sixteenth century, trading forts were established at Elmina (São Jorge de Mina) and Axim, marked by place names and trading terms still in evidence today, but by the century’s turn, the European players included motley crews of French, Dutch, and English agents and privateers—soon to be followed by Swedes and Danes—whose trading forts and castles would transform the seventeenth-century coastline. (See Map 1.) De Marees’s text depicts the commercial coastal culture already developing in this early period of European trade, when gold preceded slaves as the primary export commodity. His observations of local dress, commerce, and “*fetisso*” (“fetish worship”) describe hybrid forms of social distinction, transactional forms of surplus extraction, and ritual forms of economic “stimulus” that came to be identified with Cape Coast’s “superior” market and the associated (if yet unnamed) promontory of Tabir Rock—a half-century before the original “castle” was first built by the Swedes in 1653.

⁵² Tabir’s ritual jurisdiction over the sea contrasts with Fosu’s over the lagoon, reinforcing a distinction between sea-caught fish for commercial sale to inland buyers and lagoon fish for local consumption. I thank Lauren Adrover for bringing this insight to my attention (personal communication, June 17, 2011).

⁵³ In a series of three important essays in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, William Pietz linked the obsessive preoccupation with West African fetishism in European travel narratives and Enlightenment discourse to the historical relations framing Afro-European encounters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which it constituted a mediating category projected onto African idolatry. See Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *RES* 9 (Spring 1985): 5–17; “The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish,” *RES* 13 (Spring 1987): 23–45; and “The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman’s Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism,” *RES* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105–124.

⁵⁴ De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*.



MAP 1. European trading forts and castles on the Gold Coast, 1660s. From "A Draught of the Coast of Africa from the Streights Mouth to Cape Bona Esprance" (1663–1681). British National Archives, MPG1/221.

De Marees's account of coastal "costume" illustrates emerging social categories and status differentials linked to the rise of Afro-European trade. His woodcut of "the Market of Cabo Corosso" remains an extraordinary visual document, offering the earliest glimpse of coastal commerce by the end of the sixteenth century, including salient details that resonate through time despite stylistic distortions typical of the period. (See Figure 2.) One is struck immediately by the degree of market specialization and differentiation—the range of local and imported commodities; the categories of goods, buyers, and sellers; the presence of political officials and toll collectors; the spatiotemporal articulation of commodity flows; and the ritual mediation of market activity by the central "fetish" tree and shrine. Thus we see dedicated stalls and areas for locally produced bananas, rice, millet, wood, fresh water, palm wine, sugarcane, fruits, chickens, and meat; and others dedicated to imported goods purchased from the Dutch, featuring "Holland Linen" but also "Knives, polished Beads, Mirrors, Pins, bangles," and a wide assortment of pans, neptunes, and basins; as well as a specific spot where the castle wives from neighboring Elmina sell their "*Kanquies*" (fermented maize dough). We learn of trade conducted by local women selling food staples and fish from the sea, caught by their husbands and sent "100 or 200 miles into the Interior, where it is considered of great value"; of men from the interior buying goods from Dutch ships; of pilots and rowers purchasing palm wine with the "*dasche*" (cash gifts) they receive from factors and interpreters; of Dutchmen who come onshore for provisions—all presided over by the local "Captain" (caboceer, or headman) with his armed guards, exacting tolls on long-distance trade, and the market fetish, who receives up to one-tenth of a market woman's foodstuffs in offer-



FIGURE 2. Cape Coast Market, ca. 1601. From Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602), trans. and ed. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford, 1987), 62.

ings.⁵⁵ De Marees explains that markets for local and long-distance goods occur on different days, at fixed intervals of the market cycle, with a day off on Tuesday, when trading and fishing are prohibited and the gods are fed.

Like many major markets in West Africa, the Cape Coast Market formed a regional crossroads, where local towns including Elmina on an east-west axis were linked with European merchants and hinterland traders on a north-south axis, and where local chiefs extracted revenues from tolls to support their households and retainers. De Marees's engraving identifies the roads leading west to the Castle de Mina, north to "Foeta [Fetu] and other Inland Towns," and south to the seashore, where European ships lay anchored with their goods.⁵⁶ At the market's very center, where both axes converge, a fetish shrine and sacred tree appear to mediate and stimulate the flow of money and commodities. In instrumental terms, the local gods benefited business. De Marees portrays fetish priests praying to the god of the sacred tree "that he may send them many Traders and also that it may rain so that they may find much Gold," and officiating at the market shrine, consisting of "a square stand, about 4 foot square, with four Pillars rising 2 Cubits above the ground . . . All around it they hang straw wisps or *Fetissos*," feeding it "*Millie* [millet] with palm oil."⁵⁷ Seeking similar ritual assistance, we learn that "[i]f the King does not receive enough Tolls for his upkeep, on account of an insufficient number of Traders, he goes to a

⁵⁵ De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 62, 63, 64. See also 47 n. 1 in the text, where the translators/editors provide a concise etymological explanation of the pidgin term "dash" (alt. "dache," "dasche," and "dashee") as a gift or tip "offered *before* entering into an agreement or transaction."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66, 67.

tree which he regards as his *Fetisso* and brings it food and drink.”⁵⁸ On the beach-head, more elaborate offerings were made to the sea god to improve the fishermen’s catch:

If there is little fish in the sea and the Fisherman [*sic*] do not catch much, they think their *Fetisso* is angry and does not want to give them Fish. Then they all utter loud cries, fetch their *Fetissero* and give him some Gold, in order that he may adjure their *Fetisso* to let them catch fish. This Sorcerer goes away and gets all his wives (three or four, as many as he may have) to put on their best clothes or ornaments; and they go around the town, howling and wailing . . . When they come together on the beach, they pluck off vines from the trees and hang them around their necks. They regard these Trees as their *Fetisso Dasianam*, which, they believe, gives them Fish. [The] Sorcerer or man who will exorcise the *Fetisso* comes with a Drum and plays or beats it in front of the Trees . . . After this . . . [h]e throws *Millie* into the Sea as food for it, . . . thinking that their God is then satisfied and will let them catch plenty of Fish.⁵⁹

This passage clearly evokes the ritual assemblage associated with Tabir, the fish-seeking god of the sea, accompanied by the priestesses of his sibling deity Amissah, who processed through the town draped with *nyenyena* water vines. That de Marees mistook the *amisafo* priestesses for wives, and wrongly assumed that the vines came from trees, in no way obviates the reciprocal exchanges between priests, traders, and chiefs that such offerings sustained, linking the multiple constituencies of Gold Coast society through intersecting pathways of investment and accumulation. And if he focused more attention on Cape Coast’s “beautiful square Market, superior to those of other coastal towns,” he was also struck by the town’s dramatic location “on a hillock, in front of which is a huge Rock, on which the sea breaks so loudly that one can hear it from far away.”⁶⁰

Tabir’s rock, although unnamed, is thus obliquely identified in de Marees’s text, establishing a charged site in European Cape Coast travel narratives that would gain greater visibility over the next four centuries. By 1673, when the German pastor Wilhelm Johann Müller published his *Description of the Fetu Country (Die Africanische auf der Guineischen Gold-Cust gelegene Landschaft Fetu)*, the “European ‘scramble’” for Cape Coast was in full swing, with English, Swedish, Danish, and Dutch companies building forts and waging skirmishes to secure trading interests after the Portuguese were driven out three decades earlier.⁶¹ Müller worked as a chaplain for the servants of the Glückstadt (Danish) African Company, which built the small fort of Fredriksborg, where he resided for seven years, witnessing the growth of the Cape Coast economy and society and its presiding landmark castle. Cape Coast Castle’s early history illustrates the turbulent field of hostile takeovers as European and African stakeholders jockeyed for control: originally established by the Swedish African Company as Fort Carolusberg in 1653, the castle was captured and delivered to the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 68–69. See n. 6 in the text, where the translators/editors explain that “*Dasianam* probably represents *daase na nam*, ‘thanking for fish’—i.e. the name of a ceremony rather than that of a ‘fetisso.’”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁶¹ Adam Jones, “Introduction” to Müller, “Wilhelm Johann Müller’s Description of the Fetu Country,” 135. For a philological analysis of de Marees’s textual influence on Müller, see Jones, “Double Dutch? A Survey of Seventeenth-Century German Sources for West African History,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 141–153.

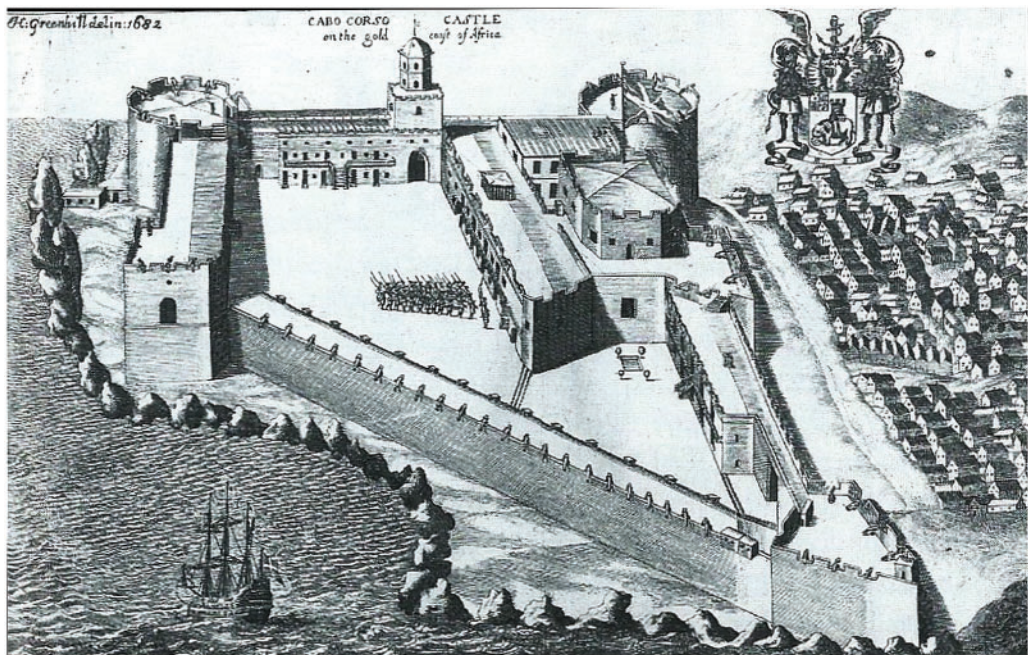


FIGURE 3. Cape Coast Castle, 1682 (after Henry Greenhill). From A. W. Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London, 1963), plate 37.

Danes in 1658, ceded to the Dutch in 1659, seized by the *dey* (state treasurer) of Fetu from 1661 until 1663, and then returned to the Dutch, who lasted one year before a joint Danish-English assault allowed the English to take the castle in 1665, which they rebuilt ten years later as the Royal African Company's headquarters.⁶² (See Figure 3.)

Müller was present during much of this turmoil, and provides one of the earliest accounts as the castle changed hands and its new Dutch owners encountered ritual resistance:

This castle at Cabo Corso is four-sided and fairly strongly built, with thick walls made of stones, some hewn and others not. On the beach it has two strong batteries with heavy guns. This side is also powerfully protected by a large rock lying on the beach, which the Fetu people hold sacred.⁶³

If the seaward cannon warded off hostile fire from European ships, they were also

⁶² For more detailed discussions of these devious machinations, see Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country," 142–149, supplemented by the invaluable archival references provided by Adam Jones in notes 21–57; William St. Clair, *The Door of No Return: The History of Cape Coast Castle and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 2007), 30–34; Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra, 1980), iii–iv; and George Frederick Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa* (1919; repr., New York, 1969), 34–68. While Müller says that the *dey* held the castle until 1664, van Dantzig gives the date as 1663; *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, 29. In his notes on Cape Coast's Ground Plan, surveyed and drafted in March–April 1756, engineer Justly Watson recorded that "the Figures 1654 are upon the keystone of the Arch to the Warehouse," documenting not only when the arch was originally set, but how prior building materials and structures were incorporated into later renovations, forming what we might call material palimpsests in relation to palimpsest memories. TNA, MPG1/233.

⁶³ Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country," 148.

guarded by the “huge Rock” referenced half a century earlier by de Marees, here identified as “sacred” and “powerfully” protective. Indeed, the rock was a force to be reckoned with, reshaping the very architecture of foreign occupation as the castle changed hands and expanded. Müller recounts how the Dutch conceded to local imperatives of sacred space:

The Swedes had wanted to enlarge this fort horizontally and vertically, and had already laid out a wall which was just as large as the fort. But when the Dutch obtained this wall in 1663, they tore it down again. Instead, they placed a strong low battery at the edge of the sea, next to the aforementioned rock, and erected palisades on one side. But as these palisades stood very close to the rock, they had to take them away again, because the Fetu people alleged that their idol, to whom this rock was dedicated, was displeased.⁶⁴

Taken together, these passages illustrate not only the “fetishized” terrain of Cape Coast Castle, but also significant African agency in negotiating the terms of European settlement and trade. The “Fetu people” could pressure the Dutch to dismantle their palisades and respect local gods because Europeans competing for coastal dominance and trade needed the recognition and cooperation of local chiefs and merchant princes.⁶⁵ That the spirit of Tabir came to mediate this transactional space is documented further on in Müller’s text, where he discusses types of *fitiso* in the spirit landscape, including stones, snakes, lizards, trees, bundles of “rubbish,” and precious beads:

The aforementioned rock near the castle at Cabo Corso [Cape Coast] is likewise held to be very sacred. No-one will venture to set foot on it, if he intends to remain unpunished and unbeaten. This rock is named after a false heathen god, Tábri.⁶⁶

Thus named, Tabir can now be identified as an emerging “spirit” of the Afro-European encounter, rising to historic visibility and prominence with the founding and development of Cape Coast Castle. From this “point” forward in both space and time, Tabir’s ritual dominion as a god of the sea—protecting fishermen and generating wealth by providing bountiful catches for inland markets—became increasingly entangled with European trade and firepower. Ambivalently positioned both within and without the castle on its rock, Tabir connected the Atlantic economy to Cape

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ A similar conflict instigated by the building of Elmina Castle as far back as 1482 is recorded by João de Barros, in which “the blacks, not being able to tolerate such an injury as was being done to that sacred spot which they worshipped as God, rose up in a fury.” This passage, cited by DeCorse in *Archaeology of Elmina*, 181, was translated in P. E. H. Hair, *The Founding of Castelo de São Jorge da Mina: An Analysis of the Sources* (Madison, Wis., 1994), 32, together with a similar account provided by Rui de Pina. Indeed, fetish shrines on the promontories of slave forts and castles may have been the rule rather than the exception. Justly Watson’s survey of “Annamaboe” Fort in 1756 identifies a “New Fitish Rock” abutting the southern wall along the sea, as well as sundry “superstitious, sacred rocks” on the southeast promontory. “Plan and Sections of Annamaboe Fort, Africa,” TNA, MPG1/231. Similarly, when the English built Fort James in Accra in 1673, they encountered the Onyeni (alt. “Oyeni”) fetish on its land, and agreed to house it in the fort dungeon and grant access to local worshippers for their annual ceremonies. Like Tabir, the preferred sacrifice was a bullock, and ritual offerings on its shrine included “blue baft and red turkey twill,” which alluded to “the long friendly and honourable association of Oyeni with the flag of England.” See C. W. Welman, “James Fort, Accra, and the Oyeni Fetish,” *Gold Coast Review* 3 (1927): 73–88, here 81–82. See also 83 and 85 for references to the priest’s “nyanyana” vines. I thank one of the anonymous journal reviewers for this reference.

⁶⁶ Müller, “Wilhelm Johann Müller’s Description of the Fetu Country,” 160–161.

Coast's developing economic and political landscape, bringing Euro-African relations into ritual alignment when Cape Coast eclipsed the inland capital of the Fetu kingdom, part of a late-seventeenth-century trend associated with the region's "expanding seaside towns."⁶⁷

According to Jones, "Müller may have seen Fetu at the height of its power, when it was still able to exploit European rivalries to its own advantage," before it was effectively absorbed by the rise of Cape Coast in the 1690s.⁶⁸ Müller's rich description of "festival days" in Fetu itself is therefore highly significant because it outlines an elaborate ritual system—clearly the forerunner of Cape Coast's annual Fetu Afahye festival—that formalized Afro-European relations through those reciprocal pathways of ceremonial exchange that Tabir came to manage and consolidate:

At Fetu the . . . great festival (as they call it) is held annually at the beginning of September . . . The heathen festival takes place as follows. They invite not only many Blacks from neighbouring places and countries, but also the Danes, Dutch and other Whites trading in the Fetu country. Many people might easily think the Christians could not attend this heathen festival without offending against their consciences. They excuse themselves by saying that this is difficult to avoid, because the Christian servants in these heathen countries are pledged to seek what is best for their principals, and, in view of this, must take good care not to antagonize the natives. The commandant of the Whites never attends this festival in person, but the chief factor and other servants of the company are ordered to do so.⁶⁹

European participation in the "Customs" ceremonies of many coastal polities engaged in Atlantic trade is well documented in other travel narratives, but what stands out in this seventeenth-century account is the recognition of native bargaining power through the idiom of ritual itself. Europeans were compelled to attend the "heathen" holiday against their better Christian judgment because it was basically good for business, and if the company "commandants" remained exempt, it was only because they were represented by their chief factors and company servants. Of additional interest is the mode of conveyance that literally carried Europeans to Fetu:

These people are carried to Fetu in hammocks by slaves on Sunday after lunch, accompanied by many armed black soldiers, servants, attendants, as well as male and female slaves, who must carry the guns and equipment. Each nation also carries the flag of its king and overlord with it, as well as taking a drummer.⁷⁰

Few images resonate more clearly with Gold Coast chieftaincy than the ruler carried in a hammock or palanquin, beneath an embellished state umbrella, flanked by an entourage of drummers, warriors, and asafo company members dancing with distinctive flags to representative rhythms. (See Figures 4 and 5.) Whether European participation first established this practice or fed into local chiefly precedents is difficult to

⁶⁷ Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 41.

⁶⁸ Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country," 137. Thus Müller could write that, before the 1670s, "[t]he king always stays at Fetu and never comes to the coast. The reason he gives is that his *summàn* or *fitiso* would not allow it, and it would cost him his life" (183).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 167. See also n. 128 on that page, by the editor and translator, Adam Jones, who relates the Quassi festival to today's Fetu Afahye: "A festival known as 'Fetu' is still held at Oguuaa (Cape Coast) in September."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.



FIGURE 4. Europeans departing Cape Coast Castle. "Mode of Travelling in Africa," from William Hutton, *A Voyage to Africa: Including a Narrative of an Embassy to One of the Interior Kingdoms, in the Year 1820* (London, 1821), facing 176.

say, although the genre that evolved over the centuries is surely a "creole" mix.⁷¹ What is clear is that by the 1660s, Europeans traveled from Cape Coast to Fetu for what was ostensibly a harvest festival along the very toll roads and commercial pathways that generated surplus for the kingdom through extraction and exchange. In a sense, the Europeans were themselves commodified, "taken possession of" as esteemed objects of transport while representing their nationally chartered companies. That their first point of arrival was the Fetu market itself, where they were greeted by market women shouting "Aquaba, aquaba!" ("Welcome, welcome!"), highlights the conversion of economic into political capital, as the whites then "proceed[ed] to the houses of the king and his closest counsellor," where they professed friendship and loyalty to their African hosts in return for their hospitality. Over the course of the next five days, the dominant organizations and constituencies of the kingdom performed their specific dances and ceremonies, with much "shooting, drumming, . . . whooping and shouting" and "inhuman drinking," beginning with "[t]he king and his closest counsellor . . . on Monday, the *day* [dey] on Tuesday, the *brafu* or military commander on Wednesday, and the Fetu caboceers and the Accanists living at Cabo Corso on Thursday."⁷²

⁷¹ Müller later mentions that when the *dey* of Fetu traveled to Cape Coast to visit the whites, "[h]e has himself carried by two slaves in a West Indian hammock," and that "[i]n front of the hammock go minstrels, horn-blowers and tusk-blowers, drummers and beaters of bells, stool-bearers and shield-bearers, archers and soldiers with sabres and hand-spears." *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 168–169. The Accanists (Akani) were hinterland gold merchants living in Cape Coast, with access to the interior mines. See Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982), chap. 7; Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 37–40.

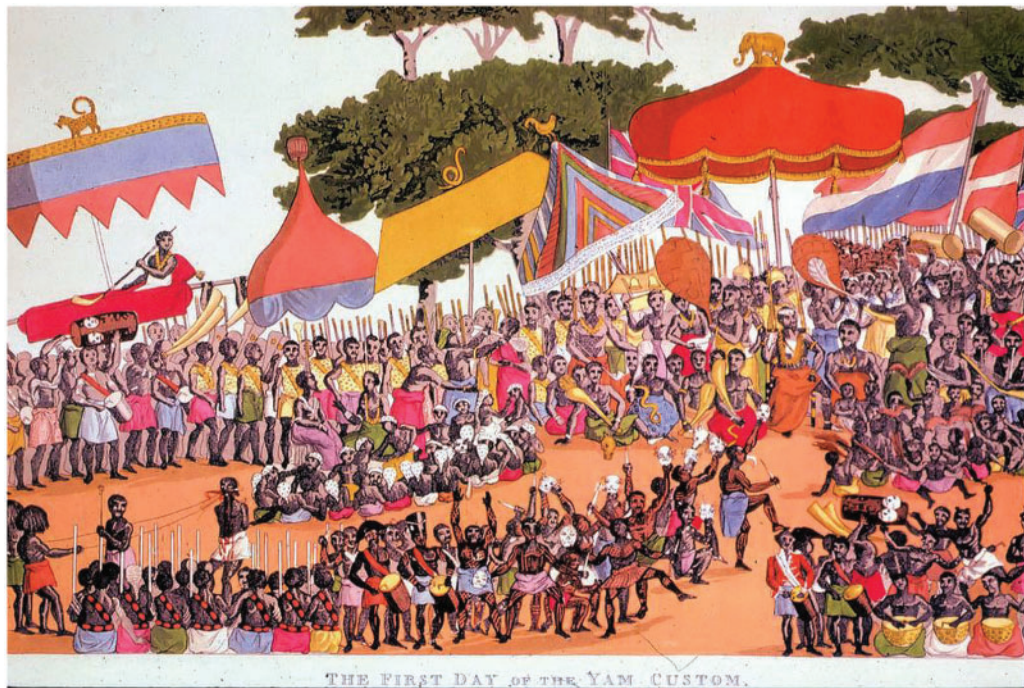


FIGURE 5. Ashanti Yam Ceremony. From T. Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee: With a Statistical Account of That Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa* (London, 1819), facing 275.

In this manner, Fetu's "Quassi" festival took some measure of control over European company merchants, lodging them in the houses of the *dey*, the so-called "stadtholder and treasurer" who served as the number two (or in some accounts, number three) official in the kingdom. Representing and protecting the European traders on the coast in exchange for gifts and monthly "custom" payments, he also maximized his power by playing the European companies against each other.⁷³ It is thus not surprising that as Cape Coast grew with the Atlantic economy, the *dey*'s role waxed while the king's authority waned. During the festival witnessed by Müller, the *dey* received the whites with kingly fanfare: seated on a stool with a piece of elephant skin under his feet, "dressed and adorned in the most splendid manner," he was accompanied by "many wives, servants, attendants and soldiers," as well as his *piaffu*, a personal attendant who also served as an interpreter.⁷⁴ And unlike the king, who was ritually prohibited from leaving the capital, the *dey* established a residence in the Oguaa "village" of Cape Coast, where he could deal directly with the Europeans. As early as 1659, one Danish official in Cape Coast complained that the *dey* known as Johann Classen (aka Acrosan) "rules the whole country and kingdom" and "appoints

⁷³ In addition to the "3, 4 or more ounces of gold" that the Europeans paid him as protection duty, they also added substantial gifts to gain special favors. Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country," 185–186. For an analysis of the deference relations between Europeans and Africans established by gift-giving during these festivals, see Deffontaine, *Guerre et société au royaume de Fetu*, 136–139.

⁷⁴ Müller, "Wilhelm Johann Müller's Description of the Fetu Country," 183.

and deposes the king as he chooses.”⁷⁵ His successor was known to travel in a “West Indian hammock” with a magnificent king-like entourage that included “twelve gentlemen-at-arms with . . . flint-lock guns,” followed by “other important Negroes and a large mob of soldiers, as well as many women and children.”⁷⁶

When Fetu’s diminishing kingship shifted to Cape Coast during the 1690s, the move was directly associated with the rise of the Fetu Afahye festival, which ritually reconstituted the kingdom’s core. Cape Coast historians relate how this royal relocation to Oguaa merged its Ahobaa, Eguadoto, Bakatue, and Asago festivals into the overarching annual celebration of Fetu Afahye itself, which became so extensive and elaborate that it was dubbed “Black Christmas” by the English residents of Cape Coast Castle.⁷⁷ Local chiefs maintain that the “central feature” of this ritual consolidation involved sacrifices and libations at the four principal shrines: Nana Tabir’s on the Castle Rock, Nana Fosu’s at the Fosu Lagoon, Nana Paprata’s at the Central Market, and the Stool House in the Omanhen’s palace, thereby positioning Tabir at the apex of an overarching festival that calibrated political sovereignty with local and overseas trade. Whether such a sacrificial template was actually established at the time or has been retrojected into a myth of origins is impossible to determine from the available evidence, but in either case, Fetu Afahye was intimately associated with these profound politico-economic transformations. What we can determine from the written record is Tabir’s enduring connection with Cape Coast Castle and the rise of the British Atlantic economy.

In 1709, the Tory mercantilist Charles Davenant published a political tract defending the Royal African Company’s chartered monopoly against parliamentary “experiments” with limited free trade, excoriating the deleterious consequences of private “interlopers” in West Africa and the Americas.⁷⁸ Appointed as inspector general of the imports and exports at the time, he accessed the company’s records in London to support his case, documenting the need for strong trading forts and castles in protecting British interests at home and abroad. It was in the context of his appeal to Parliament that he described the company’s Gold Coast headquarters:

Cape-Coast-Castle is a very large Fort, with four Flankers, and a large Platform that hath nine Pieces of Ordnance mounted thereon; the Battlements have 10 Guns, and the Flankers 25 from a Minion to nine Pounders; and on a Rock called *Tabora*, within 20 Paces of the Castle, there are 4 twelve Pounders more mounted; making in the whole 48 Guns, all

⁷⁵ Ibid., 185 n. 196. It is also highly significant that in 1659, the Fetu kingdom signed a treaty with the Danish Africa Company, granting it land and trading rights in Cape Coast in exchange for fifty *benda* of gold, and that the agreement was sealed by “the fetish called Coassy”—the same deity of the “Quassi” festival. The agreement stipulated that the Fetu kingdom’s copy remain with the *dey* Acrosan rather than the titular king, illustrating the political transformations generated by Atlantic commerce and structured by ritual. See “20th December 1659: Treaty between the Kingdom of Fetu, the King of Denmark and the Danish Africa Company,” in Ole Justesen, ed., *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657–1754*, trans. James Manley, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 2005), 1: 8–11 and 11 n. 33.

⁷⁶ Müller, “Wilhelm Johann Müller’s Description of the Fetu Country,” 187. See Jones’s extensive footnote (144 n. 32) detailing the *dey*’s role in the transfer of Cape Coast Castle from the Danes to the Dutch in 1659, and the extent of his control over their gold, trade, and castle slaves. See also Defontaine, *Guerre et société au royaume de Fetu*, 66–68, linking the *dey*’s enhanced political power to his specialized relations with European merchants.

⁷⁷ “Oguaa Fetu Afahye 2004,” program pamphlet, 9.

⁷⁸ Charles Davenant, *Reflections upon the Constitution and Management of the Trade to Africa*, pts. I–III (London, 1709).

in good order. It is situated by the Sea-side; having the chief Fort belonging to the *Dutch* within nine Miles to the Westward, and another *English* Fort within a Mile to the Eastward of it: It is commonly guarded with about 100 *white Men*, and 150 *Gromettoes*; and has two large Tanks. In short, this is incomparably the best of all the Fortifications, of whatever Nation, on the Coast of *Africa*.⁷⁹

Several significant details stand out in this brief but telling entry, registering the conjunctural relations developing on the coast. First there is the intimate connection between finance and firepower in the “protection” of the joint stock company’s investments and assets, doubly directed against European competition and the ever-present volatility of the “natives” onshore. Over time, such threats became increasingly entwined, for if Europeans played African merchant princes against each other to secure markets in gold and slaves, African traders were quick to exploit European rivalries to maximize their “dashee” and bargaining power, giving rise to fractious alliances that periodically collapsed into insurrections and attacks, and escalated into the Komenda Wars of 1694–1700.⁸⁰ These competitive dynamics were further fueled by European battles over trade in the Americas, highlighted by the Second Anglo-Dutch War of 1665–1667, with aftershocks from the ongoing skirmishes between Elmina and Cape Coast Castle lasting well into the eighteenth century. Private interlopers entered the fray, adding a further dimension of instability on the Gold Coast, since they circumvented company rules—undercutting monopoly prices, kidnapping (“panyarring”) African traders, and thereby undermining the credit and trust that the Royal African Company had established with local merchants.

Secondly, we see the growing number of castle “gromettoes” who would continue to shape Cape Coast creole society. Various described as “castle slaves” or “factory slaves,” as distinct from the “chained batches of sale slaves” whom they oversaw in the castle dungeons, the gromettoes occupied an interstitial space between bondage and freedom, entering the ranks of junior officers.⁸¹ As William St. Clair, Rebecca Shumway, Simon Newman, and Randy Sparks have meticulously demonstrated, these mediators, who were internally differentiated by color as mulattoes, came to occupy higher positions, a process linked to European unions—frequently polygy-

⁷⁹ Ibid., pt. II, 32. This passage appears nearly verbatim in Barbot’s 1732 edition of *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea*, a much-expanded version of his 1688 manuscript “Description des Côtes d’Afrique,” which remained unpublished until the English edition prepared by Hair, Jones, and Law for *Barbot on Guinea*. For a critical discussion of the methodological challenges presented by the “composite” character of Barbot’s writings, see Robin Law, “Jean Barbot as a Source for the Slave Coast of West Africa,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 155–173; as well as Hair, Jones, and Law, *Barbot on Guinea*, 1: xix–lvi. I have yet to determine the original source of Davenant’s descriptive passage. Davenant apologizes in his preface for neglecting to identify the sources of his “extracts,” given the pressure to publish in time for an impending House of Commons debate.

⁸⁰ Documentation of these fractious relations abounds in R. Law, ed., *The English in West Africa: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681–99*, 3 vols. (London, 1997, 2001, 2006). For the Komenda Wars, see Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720* (Oxford, 1970), 83–89; and Robin Law, “The Komenda Wars, 1694–1700: A Revised Narrative,” *History in Africa* 34 (2007): 133–168.

⁸¹ For the distinction between “sale” slaves” and “factory” slaves or *gromettoes*,” see A. P. Kup, *A History of Sierra Leone, 1400–1787* (Cambridge, 1961), 88. For the etymology of “grometto” and its semantic accretions from the feudal “groom” to the maritime “cabin boy,” see Jean-Claude Nardin, “Recherches sur les ‘gourmets’ d’Afrique occidentale,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 53, no. 192–193 (1966): 215–244.

nous—with so-called local “wenches.”⁸² Additional castle slaves were offered by chiefs to English officers as gifts and pawns to cement local alliances. It is important to emphasize that the rise of this caste of castle slaves was no mere outgrowth of Afro-European commercial relations, but was central to their promotion and protection, providing cheap labor, essential services, and access to prominent families and chiefs—indeed, *generating* the illustrious creole families of the nineteenth-century cosmopolitan elite.⁸³

Finally, Davenant’s identification of the “rock called Tabora” locates Tabir at the epicenter of these Afro-Atlantic transformations where merchant capital, market forces, and hinterland captives converged. The god’s early association with Europeans and their firepower may well represent that thunderous cacophony which today’s devotees say signals his anger, echoing over the ages the crashing waves and deafening cannon facing the sea.⁸⁴ Tabir’s fluid identification with Europeans, slipping between white and mulatto features, further registers his central significance as a ritual figure of mediation and exchange, channeling both sides of Afro-European “intercourse” and the new social categories to which it gave rise. But if “Tabora” remains the fetishized locus of Cape Coast entanglements in Davenant’s text, how were they shaped by actual ritual practices?

The earliest written account of Tabir in action comes from the travel narrative of John Atkins, whose *Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West-Indies* recapitulates the course of the triangle trade. Published in 1735, the text recounts the adventures of a British expeditionary force that set sail in 1721 in pursuit of pirates and their contraband. Serving as a naval surgeon on the *Swallow* and the *Weymouth*, Atkins spent six weeks in Cape Coast Castle, where he doubled as “registry” in the trial of 270 captured pirates, 52 of whom were hanged onsite.⁸⁵ His descriptions of Cape Coast within and beyond the castle walls portray a dynamically creolized Afro-European community as the Atlantic slave trade (and the “Golden Age” of piracy) kicked into high gear: intermarriage extending from the castle governor and his mulatto wife

⁸² St. Clair, *The Door of No Return*, 147–180; Rebecca Shumway, “Castle Slaves of the Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast (Ghana),” *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 35, no. 1 (2014): 84–98; Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia, 2013), chap. 6; Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), 22–24, 80–85.

⁸³ To suggest, however, that such African and mulatto wives of the seventeenth century, referred to as “wenches” in contemporaneous records, were simply instruments of strategic alliances fails to acknowledge the considerable wealth, power, and agency they could acquire as business partners, commercial agents, and even slave traders themselves. For illuminating research on the *signares* of Senegambia along these lines, see George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio, 2003), xxi, 206–221; and Brooks, “A Nhara of the Guinea-Bissau Region: Mãe Aurélia Correia,” in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1983), 295–319. See also Carol P. MacCormack, “Slaves, Slave Owners, and Slave Dealers: Sherbo Coast and Hinterland,” *ibid.*, 271–294; Bruce L. Mouser, “Women Slavers of Guinea-Conakry,” *ibid.*, 320–339; and Edna G. Bay, “Servitude and Worldly Success in the Palace of Dahomey,” *ibid.*, 340–367. For the creoles of Cape Coast, see Gocking, “Creole Society and the Revival of Traditional Culture during the Colonial Period.”

⁸⁴ The castle cannon were used mainly as “gun signals” presaging the departures of ships, or in signaling to passing ships of other nations. See St. Clair, *The Door of No Return*, especially 21. Castle and fort governors could take great offense when passing ships failed to acknowledge their cannon by replying with the proper number of rounds.

⁸⁵ See Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London, 2007), caption to second plate, opposite 214.

throughout the officer corps, which included growing numbers of “white Negroes” paid just enough “to buy *Canky*, *Palm-Oil*, and a little fish to keep them from starving,” and a lively local market outside the castle gates, where Atlantic and local economies converged.⁸⁶ This latter development is circuitously associated with Tabir’s annual sacrifice in Atkins’s text:

There is also at *Cabo Corso*, a publick Fetish, the Guardian of them all; and that is the rock Tabra, a bluff peninsular Prominence that juts out from the Bottom of the Clift the Castle stands on, making a sort of Cover for Landing, but so unsafe, as frequently to expose the Boats and People to Danger, the Sea breaking over with great force . . .

To this Rock, the *Fetish-Man* sacrifices annually a Goat and some Rum, eating and drinking a little himself, and throwing the rest into the Sea with odd Gestures and Invocations, he tells the Company, and they believe that he receives a verbal answer from *Tabra*, what Seasons and Times will be propitious; and for this Knowledge every Fisherman finds it worth his while to *Dashee* him with some Acknowledgment.⁸⁷

In addition to Tabir’s liminal location at the “unsafe” union of land and sea (naturalizing, as it were, the dangerous undercurrents of the Afro-European encounter) and his preeminent position in Cape Coast as “Guardian of them all,” we catch a passing reference to a ritual community assembled on the rock for Tabir’s annual sacrifice, where local fishermen offered goat meat and rum for favorable predictions. As with Davenant, the details are sparse but revealing. We know that goat and rum were no ordinary food and drink, but represented the sumptuous fare of the governor’s “Publick Table,” where the company’s chaplain and surgeon regularly dined—one summary of expenses for a single month in 1750 included fifteen goats and fifty-two gallons of rum.⁸⁸ Whether Tabir was already a European god or was simply developing European tastes is impossible to say. Perhaps he was both, a kind of ritual creole manifesting multiple forms of Afro-European intercourse. For the African fishermen assembled on the sacrificial rock, he offered successful catches that, if destined for the hinterland, first provisioned Cape Coast Castle, underwriting at least some of the costs of reproducing its labor force. That these two spheres of circulation came to be linked and controlled by the castle in 1703 is evident from a “fish-toll” agreement between the governor, Sir Dalby Thomas, and Cape Coast’s chief caboceers, “that the fishermen shall every day bring fish to the Castle that the Castle may be first provided and they will carry the remainder to the town, they further agreed to appoint six canoes on purpose to fish for the Governor and in case they did not bring that quantity of fish or of such sort as he shall have occasion to provide out of the other canoos what shall [be] wanting.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West-Indies; in His Majesty’s Ships, the Swallow and Weymouth* (London, 1735), 90. For an extended discussion of the Company’s “white Negroes,” see Newman, *A New World of Labor*, chap. 5.

⁸⁷ Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West-Indies*, 102.

⁸⁸ St. Clair, *The Door of No Return*, 125–126. In 1777, the monthly breakdown of meats consumed at the Publick Table had columns specifying Sheep, Pigs, Turkies, Hogs, Ducks, Guinea Hens, Lambs, Kids, Goats, Geese, and Cows, with “No exact Acct of Fowls” because they were bartered for butter. “Account of Live Stock Killed for the Use of the Public Table at Cape Coast Castle from the 11th of April to the 31st of December 1777,” TNA, T70/1247. The same accounts list copious amounts of bottled wine (claret, Madeira, white port, red port, Lisbon, old hock, mountain, and porter) and spirits by the gallon (rum, brandy, and arrack).

⁸⁹ *Memorandum Book Kept at Cape Coast Castle, from January the 13th 1703 to January the 2d 1704*, TNA, T70/1463, entry for January 29, 1703. In 1780, Governor Roberts complained to the company that

Cape Coast Castle was in manifold senses an Afro-Atlantic crossroads of exchange, death, and transfiguration. As Europeans succumbed to tropical diseases and “Vacuum of the Guts,” Africans died from forced incarceration, whether languishing in the dungeons or sentenced to death in the “condemned cell,” where they withered away without water and food.⁹⁰ Describing the castle’s central quadrangle, Atkins noted the “large Vaults, with an iron Grate at the Surface to let in Light and Air on those poor Wretches, the Slaves, who are chained and confined there till a Demand comes,” which vaults we recall were carved from Tabir’s rock.⁹¹ Female captives were routinely summoned to the apartments of senior officers above, where they were raped, then returned to the squalid dungeons below. Errant Europeans were also jailed and flogged for debauchery, thievery, and insubordination, and were hanged on the gallows for such “notorious Crimes” as piracy, desertion, and murder.⁹² But the company’s *raison d’être* was Atlantic commerce, exporting slaves while importing goods from England, as well as large quantities of salt from Accra, “the Sale [of which] appears like a Fair in the castle.”⁹³ If money and commodities reciprocally morphed through transactional pathways of commercial exchange, commodities qua commodities were also transformed into company property—via the wax stamps on the cooper’s barrels, the registered marks of company gold on the English guinea, and, most notoriously, the branding iron impressed upon the flesh of human cargo. As Atkins duly mentioned of the dungeon slaves, “They are all marked with a burning Iron upon the right Breast, *D. Y. Duke of York*.”⁹⁴ Branded with the mark of the nobleman who had first led the company when it was founded, and who became King James II of England and Ireland in 1685, the “slaves for sale” in Cape Coast Castle were burned and blistered into commodity forms through the same symbolic process that transformed bullion into currency.⁹⁵

LET US NOW RETURN TO our central concern with Tabir’s history as a generative locus of ritual renewal, manifesting the past to bear upon the present. At the very least, Tabir’s distinguished career has been established as a hallowed (if hollowed!) “rock of ages,” alluded to by de Marees in 1602, fully attested by Müller in 1673, and reap-

his predecessor (Mills) had relinquished the “fish toll,” creating difficulties in provisioning the “Publick Table.” Roberts to Committee, Cape Coast Castle, July 16, 1780, TNA, T70/32.

⁹⁰ Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West-Indies*, 93; Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance*, 189–190.

⁹¹ Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil and the West-Indies*, 98.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹⁵ For official instructions on the branding of castle slaves, see “Copy of Instructions of the Royal African Company of England to Their Cheif [*sic*] Agents in Africa,” July 1, 1720–September 29, 1737, TNA, T70/66, article 53: “You are to Inventory all our Negroes . . . and mark them with the Company’s mark D.Y. [Y superimposed over the D in original], and give them Names of Distinction, registering in a book their Sex, Age, Employment, Marriages, Births, Burials, and the times of buying them; and always mention them in the lists of Living and Dead sent for England, and so often as you send any of them for the West Indies (which must not be but for great misdemeanours) mention them particularly in the Bills of Lading.” For gold “guineas” stamped with the Royal African Company’s emblem—the elephant and the castle—beginning in the reign of Charles II, see K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (1957; repr., New York, 1975), especially 181.

pearing in successive textual guises over the centuries that followed. Indeed, Tabir's textual biography hardly ends with Atkins in 1735, but resurfaces in the 1758 missionary writings of Thomas Thompson, who identified "[t]he great Idol of the *Cape Coast Blacks*" as "a Rock behind the Castle," receiving "*Cankee*, . . . [mixed] with Palm Oil" in weekly offerings, with sheep and goats sacrificed on special occasions.⁹⁶ Thompson also identified a second rock, "*Taberah n'eiyeer*," as "Taberah's" wife, a reference further developed by Ellis a century and a half later, when she is called "Tahbi-yiri . . . like a mermaid, white in colour, but with a woolly head," registering the arrival of the siren-like goddess Mami Wata and her notoriously dangerous Atlantic wealth.⁹⁷ We also learn from Arthur Ffoulkes that "*Nanatabir* . . . was a big hole, full of snakes and sea-weed, in the rock on which the castle is built," and that "[t]his hole was only filled in about 1874," by which time Tabir was assimilated into Asafo Company No. 5, whose current members boast descent from the mulatto slaves who built the castle.⁹⁸ Clearly Tabir's ritual paramountcy is no mere invention of heritage tourism, but has perdured much longer than we might expect, given the susceptibility of ritual and myth to changing political pressures and landscapes.

More significantly, Tabir's lasting association with Cape Coast Castle in the Fetu Afahye festival highlights the centrality of ritual in shaping the history of Afro-European relations as the Atlantic economy developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁹⁶ Thomas Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages* (London, 1758), 38–39. See also William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea: Describing the Customs, Manners, Soil, Climate, Habits, Buildings, Education, Manual Arts, Agriculture, Trade, Employments, Languages, Ranks of Distinction, Habitations, Diversions, Marriages, and Whatever Else Is Memorable among the Inhabitants* (London, 1744), 122–123, for a description of Cape Coast Castle, which included "on the Southside a large well built Chapple, the back Part of which joins to the Castle Wall, having the great Body of the Rock call'd *Tabora* on the outside of it, which not only serves to break off the Violence of the Sea, but is also a very good Defence from the Annoyance of any ship." Smith served as surveyor for the Royal African Company, and visited the castle from February 18 until March 23, 1727. The structural juxtaposition of the Christian chapel with Tabir's rock raises interesting questions about emerging Christian-"pagan" relations and oppositions for further research. Although Smith plagiarized liberally from William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts* (London, 1705; original Dutch ed. 1704), this passage appears to be Smith's alone. See H. M. Feinberg, "An Eighteenth-Century Case of Plagiarism: William Smith's *A New Voyage to Guinea*," *History in Africa* 6 (1979): 45–50.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 39; A. B. Ellis, *The Tshi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Languages, Etc.* (London, 1887), 44. It is interesting to note that in Ellis's account, "Tahbi" himself is described as "of immense size and black . . . of human shape, with the exception of his left hand, which is like the fin of a shark," in contrast to his white wife, who we also learn holds a calabash in her left hand, likely associated with her dangerous wealth. Ellis himself considers that "[t]he notion of this goddess may perhaps have been derived from Europeans" (ibid.). On the ambivalent powers of Mami Wata, and her diagnostic features as a white mermaid with "woolly hair," see Henry John Drewal, ed., *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington, Ind., 2008). See also Kramer, *The Red Fez*, chap. 6; and Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake* (Trenton, N.J., 2008).

⁹⁸ Ffoulkes, "The Company System in Cape Coast Castle," 275. Earlier in the article, Ffoulkes attributes the mulatto descendants of the castle-builders to Asafo Company No. 6, mentioning that it "has a regular drum and fife band, to show their European origin" (272). See Graham, *Cape Coast in History*, 57–58, who maintains that Company No. 5, called "Brofomba" or "white men's servants," split off from Nkum Company No. 4, and that Akrampa Company No. 6 was formed by Thomas Edward Barter, a powerful mulatto who dominated Cape Coast trade and politics at the turn of the seventeenth century. See Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 51, for depictions of Barter's power and influence, which included a fort-like residence featuring a Union Jack and two small cannons. See also E. C. Eliot and J. Lucas Atterbury, *A Guide to Cape Coast Company Emblems and Notes as to Customs, Etc.* (Accra, 1909), 6–13.

centuries—not in addition to politics and trade, but as the consecrating framework through which they took shape, and as such, it can serve as a significant historical resource. But what kind of history does Tabir illuminate, and what sort of access does he offer to the past?

The three methodological orientations we have used to frame the Afro-European encounter in Cape Coast highlight salient dimensions of a “ritual archive,” one that is housed in shrines, maintained by specialists, and accessed through a range of techniques and performances that activate the past to remake the present.⁹⁹ Following Sahlins, we have identified Tabir as a critical point of ritual articulation that brought Cape Coast society and the Atlantic economy into historical relations of reciprocal development. If Tabir was already enshrined on his rock when the Portuguese and Dutch traders of Elmina expanded Oguaa’s local market with the dividends of Atlantic trade, pushing its toll roads deeper into the hinterland while generating the creole categories of coastal elites, the English takeover of Cape Coast Castle as the African headquarters of the Royal African Company—fully effected by 1675—flagged a new era in Anglo-African relations, not merely changing the cast of European characters, but scaling up to a new configuration as the fiscal and political stakes were raised: new patterns of governance signaled by the Fetu king’s relocation to the coast in the 1690s; new levels of conflict and competition between European rivals and local constituencies, taking on global dimensions after the Second Anglo-Dutch War; new pressures of supply and demand fueled by the developing plantation system in the Americas, driving a wedge between the monarchy and Parliament over monopoly versus open trade; and, finally, new models of social and political distinction as Cape Coast Castle and community coevolved.¹⁰⁰ Such general developments are of course well documented, and characterize an entire genre of historical research assessing the impact of Atlantic slavery on West and Central Africa.¹⁰¹ But the Afro-European encounters within this body of scholarship are generally unidirectional, with Atlantic inroads transforming African societies.

The conjunctural history developed by Sahlins emphasizes the cultural orders and ritual modalities that shape such interactions in the first place, highlighting the reciprocal conversions of meaning and value through which they occur. If Tabir served as a god of Atlantic mediation, connecting European trade, firepower, and

⁹⁹ For a methodological formulation of ritual activation and its genealogies of historical transmission through substitution and “surrogation,” see Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby, “Introduction,” in Apter and Derby, eds., *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), xiii–xxxiii. See also Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, 1996), chap. 1, for the “surrogate” role of Atlantic outsiders in inaugurating “original” ritual and racial “bloodlines.”

¹⁰⁰ Davies, *The Royal African Company*, chap. 3; William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672–1752* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2013).

¹⁰¹ Representative studies include Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and Their Hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1960* (Cambridge, 1999); Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, Wis., 1975); Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast*; Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford, 1956); Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast*; Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991); Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727–1892* (Athens, Ohio, 2004); Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (Oxford, 1970); and Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*.

symbolic capital to an emerging merchant polity on the coast, he did so at the apex of a ritual system that developed into Fetu Afahye, an amalgamation of communal festivals linking the ocean, the lagoon, the market, and the palace to northern hinterland sources of slaves—a festival that was anchored in Cape Coast Castle and *brought* the Omanhen to reside in Oguaa. Nor was such mediation strictly one-sided. Afro-European relations may have been historically asymmetrical, but as we have seen, local leaders, caboceers, traders, and “fetish priests” exercised considerable agency in storming the castle, negotiating prices, demanding gifts, exploiting rivalries, and incorporating European factors into their ritual fields of command. Recall how Crown agents were quite literally conveyed to the inland kingdom of Fetu during the “Quassi” festival—the important forerunner of Fetu Afahye—before the Omanhen relocated to the coast. Europeans invested in the ritual economies of gift-giving, sacrifice, and reciprocal recognition because they were good for business, establishing measures of trust and security in a volatile context of tenuous alliances.¹⁰² They also structured the pathways of commodity circulation and exchange, with Tabir presiding at the very intersection of the Afro-Atlantic worlds. In this respect, Tabir channeled a two-way flow of European goods and African slaves. His shrine commanded the company’s respect because it monitored the gateway to local merchants and hinterland markets through complex networks of “fetish contracts.”

But if Cape Coast ritual played a significant role in shaping Afro-Atlantic commerce, it also appropriated European objects and signs, generating a symbolic economy of fetish images and values associated with British sovereignty and commodity forms. Cape Coast asafo companies are particularly famous for their Union Jacks, heraldic devices, and replicas of muskets and cannon, which warrant a separate and extensive analysis. For now, we can invoke Taussig to highlight the logic of mimetic appropriation as a technique of empowerment, by copying or incorporating the “original” to access its force and efficacy. Thus de Marees describes market women sporting imported Silesian cloth—indexing the value of a commodity that doubled as a money form—as well as *fetissos* of keys and Venetian trade beads evoking locked chests of gold and overseas wealth.¹⁰³ And Müller portrays protocols of local royalism that mirrored the preroga-

¹⁰² The swearing of fetish oaths to establish treaties and facilitate Afro-European trade was directly linked to control over pathways of gifts and commodities, empowering Europeans to regulate African access to ships, and empowering local African chiefs to regulate access to trade routes and toll roads. See the multiple index entries for “fetishes” in Law, *The English in West Africa*, and for “fetish oath” in Justesen, *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana*, for the pervasive ritual protocols of commercial exchange. See also Shumway, “The Fante Shrine of Nananom Mpow and the Atlantic Slave Trade in Southern Ghana,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44, no. 1 (2011): 27–44; Robin Law, “The Government of Fante in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 54, no. 1 (2013): 31–51; Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters*, especially 26, 61–62. See also “Cape Coast Castle Private Books, 1703–4, 19 August, 1703,” TNA, T70/1463, on how Sir Dalby Thomas used a fetish to secure the loyalty of Cape Coast residents to favor the Royal African Company against the Dutch, and to regulate local relations with neighboring communities. Whether or not the fetish was Tabir remains unspecified in his report. For an earlier account (February 1694) of a fetish oath within Cape Coast Castle to secure the loyalty of a Fetu king who ousted his brother for allying with the Dutch, see Thomas Phillips, *A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694, from England, to Cape Monseradoe in Africa, and Thence along the Coast of Guiney to Whidaw, the Island of St. Thomas, and So Forward to Barbadoes*, in Awnsham Churchill and John Churchill, eds., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 6 (London, 1732), 173–239, here 208, 224–225.

¹⁰³ De Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, 39. Gold locked in chests was the standard way of storing trading company profits on the Gold Coast.

tives of European agents, suggesting how their entourages to the inland capital were subsequently reproduced by Fetu's kings and chiefs. Tabir's imputed whiteness is also mimetic, channeling the power of Europeans through their embodied dispositions, consumptibles, and colorations. Here we might emphasize the mid-seventeenth-century legalistic meaning of empowerment, "to invest with authority, authorize," which has commanded so much of Pierre Bourdieu's interest in symbolic power and the "misrecognition of the violence that is exercised through it," epitomized by seals and stamps of the state's imprimatur.¹⁰⁴ Doing so highlights those magical signs that delegate power, consecrate authority, transform written drafts into legal documents, and turn material objects into commodities and currencies: the flag that institutes the castle as a sovereign outpost; the Royal African Company's logo of the elephant and the crown, establishing the castle as the regional headquarters of a joint stock company; the Duke of York's initials, converting human captives into company property and slaves for sale; or a coin's stamp, turning gold into guineas and sovereigns while guaranteeing their value as money. Tabir's shrine in the castle dungeon channeled not only the *prima materia* of Atlantic slavery, but those *symbolic forms* of investiture, delegation, and commodification—the "political idolatry"—that shaped merchant capitalism.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, the Royal African Company's insignia and heraldry, inscribed on black bodies, gold coins, and the most coveted gifts to Cape Coast chiefs, and further reproduced on asafo company flags and shrines, extended the occult powers of the king's "touch" into trans-actional spheres of corporate branding and "acquisition."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 209. See also his notion of "state magic" in Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Laetitia C. Clough (Stanford, Calif., 1996), 374–377.

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 205. The implication here is that signs of European sovereignty served as central currencies of political capital in establishing and maintaining what Rosalind Shaw calls the "predatory commercial flows" of Atlantic slavery; *Memories of the Slave Trade*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Of course, we cannot assume that such insignia had the same meanings for Europeans and Africans in Cape Coast and beyond, although they clearly conferred authority upon their recipients. For pre-modern European models of sacred kingship and its mystical powers, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Theology* (1957; repr., Princeton, N.J., 1997); Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1973); and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif., 1998), 57–62. For Danish gifts to the *dey* of Fetu in 1680 "bearing HM's crown and arms," see "Presents to the Kings and Their Ministers on the Gold Coast in Guinea," in Justesen, *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana*, 1: 36. A century later, the British governor of Cape Coast Castle would write of emblazoned swords and canes, "Such presents flatter their vanity, and are more valued by the Negroes than twice the Value in Goods." Thomas Melvil, "Letter to the Committee of the Company of Merchants Trading in Africa," July 11, 1751, TNA, T70/29, 3. See Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 82–83, for gifts of "a gold-headed cane with the arms of the company engraved" directed to both the Asante and Fante kings. See Ffoulkes, "The Company System in Cape Coast Castle," 277, for the identification of the Union Jack painted above the door of Asafo Company No. 5, together with an illustrative photograph taken in 1907. For a discussion of the contested prerogatives of owning the Royal African Company emblem of the elephant and the castle among Asafo Companies No. 4, 5, and 6, see Eliot and Atterbury, *A Guide to Cape Coast Company Emblems and Notes as to Customs, Etc.*, 6–12. For the proliferation of the Union Jack (and after independence, the Ghanaian flag) on the cantons of asafo flags, see Ross, *Fighting with Art*; Peter Adler and Nicholas Barnard, *Asafo! African Flags of the Fanti* (London, 1992); Federico Carmignani, *Asafo* (Udine, 2010); and Kwame Amoah Labi, "Fante Asafo Flags of Abandze and Kormantse: A Discourse between Rivals," *African Arts* 35, no. 4 (2002): 28–37. For a recent study of chieftaincy and corporate branding on Fetu Afahye festival t-shirts after the 1990s neo-liberal turn, and what I would argue is the latest iteration of a much earlier history of corporate branding in Cape Coast, see Lauren Adrover, "Branding Festival Bodies: Corporate Logo and Chiefly Image T-Shirts in Ghana," in Karen Tranberg Hansen and D. Soyini Madison, eds., *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance* (London, 2013), 45–59.

The violence of Tabir's mimetic history—of European expansion, Atlantic slavery, British sovereignty, and merchant capitalism—has gone underground, repressed by the social amnesia of Cape Coast's collective memory and "sequestered" within the castle dungeon.¹⁰⁷ And like other traumatic pasts, it surfaces in sublimated guises—through spirit possession, in ritual oblations, and during the inclusive harvest festival of Fetu Afahye, uniting Cape Coast's sub-chiefs and asafo companies in collective sacrifice and purification at the core of its extensive celebrations. Following Shaw's lead on the palimpsest memories of slave-raiding and slave-trading buried within ritual landscapes and practices in Sierra Leone, we can identify the *historicity* of Fetu Afahye in the perpetual return of a repressed past.¹⁰⁸ Motivating the commemoration of inland migrations and hierarchies of chiefs; the opening of the Fosu Lagoon, connecting the sea to markets, shrines, and the palace by ritual pathways; the sweeping of streets; the burning of bonfires; and the culminating Durbar ceremony is the misrecognized history of Cape Coast's development from the revenues of Atlantic slavery, a ritual laundering of its accumulated "dirt" both annually and over the centuries. When Tabir's bull proceeds from the castle through the town, tended by priests and pulled by northerners to its final destination at the Paprata market shrine, it has a sash of coins tied around its neck provided by the very Omanhen who will later cut its throat and spill its blood, thereby atoning for the historic profits gained from the buying and selling of northern captives.¹⁰⁹ Cape Coast's violent slave-trading history may be repressed in collective memory, but it returns every year as the settling of a debt that is endlessly deferred and can never be repaid.

¹⁰⁷ See Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance*, 184–186, for the concept of "sequestered" history.

¹⁰⁸ Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ In a small but telling detail, the coins are distributed to the participating northerners after the bull is fully decapitated, thereby finalizing the circuit of ritual reparation.

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