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Rebecca Shumway. *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011. 246 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58046-391-1.

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Decentering Precolonial Gold Coast History: Fanteland and the 18th-Century Atlantic World

For slave vessels sailing from Europe down the coast of West Africa, the Gold Coast represented the first of the major regions of slave embarkation. Perhaps one and one-quarter million enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast were forced on slave ships between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, with the vast majority of Atlantic slaving occurring in the comparatively short span between 1700 and 1807 (the period covered by Rebecca Shumway's new book). Approximately one-third of this traffic was funneled through Anomabo, a fort whose history in the context of the slave trade is surely less well known and appreciated than neighboring Elmina or Cape Coast Castle. Given the lack of thorough attention given to Anomabo's history in the era of the slave trade, it is hardly surprising that the political, social, and economic forces that shaped slave trading in this fort's hinterland are not well understood. Shumway's treatment of Fante history during the height of the Gold Coast slave trade is therefore a welcome study. It contributes to a growing body of literature that assesses the local, regional, and global dynamics of Atlantic commerce along the African littoral. Africanists will also appreciate the extent to which Shumway challenges the "hinterland bias" embedded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gold Coast history, moving away from Asante-centric views of the region's precolonial past.

The book is divided into an introduction and four chapters. The introduction frames major research questions and outlines the thrust of Shumway's argument. Although not explicitly organized in this way, the chapters can be grouped into two parts. Chapters 1 and 2 analyze commercial changes and their consequences, the former concerned primarily with the gold trade and the latter with transatlantic slaving. Developing in local context the idea that John Thornton most famously advocated, Shumway argues for African control over Atlantic commerce, discussing the ways that Fante elites demanded rents, gifts, and more broadly used a host of strategies to maintain authority over Anomabo fort. Thus, "in the very territory where the majority of fortified European castles were built, giving the appearance of European control, the Africans residing under those structures were actually exercising greater control over trade than was typical for coastal West Africa in this period" (p. 42). What facilitated such control, according to Shumway, was in part the sustained significance of gold in early Afro-European trade. By the time Fante elites began transitioning to slave dealing in earnest in the 1690s, they had some two centuries of experience developing skills and techniques of Atlantic trade under conditions quite different from the violence associated with slaving–skills that people in Fanteland exploited in later commercial dealings to maintain the upper hand in their dealings with Europeans. This is an interesting argument, though given the more recent trend in the literature that highlights African control over Atlantic commerce across West Africa it is fair to wonder whether the significance of this point is overstated. Chapter 2 focuses directly on the slave trade in the central Gold Coast and its hinterland. While recognizing the general destruction and violence that the slave trade caused across the region, Shumway notes that by the 1730s, captives were drawn from deeper in the hinterland, well beyond Fanteland. As gatekeepers of commerce between Europeans and the inland areas of slave capture, new Fante elites such as Eno Baisie Kurentsi (John Currantee) capitalized on the economic opportunities that the trade provided. The narrative thus privileges African strength and commercial creativity, even at the height of the Gold Coast slave trade.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal broadly with internal changes that occurred in the context of the nineteenth-century slave trade, and it is in here that Shumway's work makes

its most substantial contributions. The Fante, like most communities in the Gold Coast, faced intense pressures from the expanding Asante Kingdom in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet Fanteland repelled Asante Kingdom advances until 1807, successfully defending itself even as its seemingly more powerful neighbors fell to Asante aggression. How did Fanteland maintain its autonomy for so long? Politically speaking (a story told in chapter 3), Fanteland elites formed what Shumway labels the Coastal Coalition, a constellation of new political, religious, and especially military leaders who allied with each other to provide protection in the face of Asante expansion. The interesting aspect of this coalition is that it remained decentralized for the entire period that it operated. The nature of the relationships between particular leaders within the coalition was complex and contested, and Shumway analyzes these relationships in significant detail. In the process of developing mechanisms that promoted political unity, leaders in Fanteland also created a common cultural foundation on which Fante identity itself was built. This process, which Shumway discusses in chapter 4, involved the establishment and spread of Fante language along with adaptations of two Fante institutions: Nananom Mpow (a religious shrine) and the *asafo* militia groups. These three factors combined to promote new layers of social cohesion beyond kin-based and other more locally oriented ties. Fante identity was thus a direct product of Asante military predations and also, in a sense, of the transatlantic slave trade itself.

One of the topics left unaddressed is whether slavery itself evolved in Fanteland during this tumultuous century and if so, how. Readers are left with only brief glimpses into this issue. As elsewhere in Africa, elites accumulated slaves as a form of political capital to enhance their wealth and influence. But beyond framing slavery through this "wealth-in-people" paradigm, we learn little about the economic, political, and social strategies that owners and slaves used as they negotiated relationships with each other. How, for example, did the acceleration of Atlantic commerce affect routines of agricultural production? Did slaves produce provisions for slave vessels? How did Fanteland elites define insiders and outsiders, distinguishing between potential dependents in need of long-term protection and those who would be sold in exchange for valued Atlantic imports? What did slaves held as dependents, who presumably came from deeper within the Gold Coast interior, contribute to emerging Fanteland identity?

Nevertheless, this is a rich study, carefully conceived and argued. Shumway has mined archival material in Ghana and in England, while also making occasional use of oral traditions and linguistic evidence. Several beautiful photos of Anomabo, Nananom Mpow, and asafo shrines, taken by Shumway herself, add to the work. The maps are also valuable, although several historical ones are exceptionally detailed and unfortunately did not reproduce clearly.

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