

HISTORIC KORMANTSE, GHANA: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL

Project Abstract

The objective of this proposed archaeological project is to lead Portland State University (PSU) students in four-week hands-on archaeological field school to investigate cultural transformation of the historic Kormantse settlement on the Gold Coast (Ghana) in response to changes occurring from the 16th to the 20th century. Using ethnographic and archaeologically uncovered material culture, students will be led to seek explanation for the processes and cultural manifestations by which enslaved population, including those who passed through historic Kormantse site during the trans-Atlantic slave trade negotiated their survival and identities. In this ongoing project, Kormantse is noted to have embraced the colonial slave trade with access to abundant mass-produced local and foreign trade and culture, while serving as an outlet for the trans-Saharan and Atlantic trades. Assembling the archaeological, ethnographic and historical data to explain the cultural formations of the colonial encounter in Ghana is a main research objective. Affording PSU students a practical opportunity and experience in the rudiments of archaeological and historical field investigation such as field survey, site identification, differentiation and mapping, data recording, inventory, processing and analysis (e.g. local and imported ceramics, beads, smoking, pipes, ornaments, metal objects), working with students of PSU's partner, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, is the second main objective of this project.

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

Objectives:

The proposed project will lead students in this on-going project to search for and identify recognized material traces indicative of internal and external trade contacts and exchanges, migration routes and patterns of market traffic and, ultimately, the different groups represented in the colonial encounter with Kormantse, Ghana. Evidence of changing burial and other social practices will be considered as indices of the community's shifting identity, and will help determine how the communities in and around Kormantse adjusted to changing conditions of the colonial encounter. Artifact differentiation and sources of goods and "people", travel routes, makers and makers' marks and scientific dates will help identify and establish how they related to emerging and continuing social distinctions within communities in and around Kormantse. Archaeological study of the Kormantse site, as a focal point and outlet for the movement of populations from the interior and the coastal areas into New World covered in these studies, will considerably connect and align studies of the colonial period along the coast and the interior. Little is known about Kormantse's material culture, colonial population and how they negotiated their survival in the colonial encounter. As the population catchment and dispersal point for the African Diaspora, Kormantse was probably where the Diaspora cultural formation and bonding began. While searching for the archaeological evidence is central to this project, providing PSU students the opportunity in their overseas experience on the search extends their classroom knowledge into the field in practical and very beneficial ways while also engaged in exchanges with local student of Ghana – killing two birds with one stone.

Evidence of the demographic and biological profiles from the skeletal remains will lead to inferences concerning ecological adaptation, activity patterns, dietary influences, and overall health and will help identify "ethnic" or cultural affiliation(s), consequently making the Kormantse evidence more meaningful in the context of evidence from such sites as Elmina, Begho, Efutu, Salaga and African Diaspora sites at complementary levels. Scientific analysis of the soil, fauna, flora and other material will contribute useful data to the scientific data pool of participating institutions and increase the comparative capacity in skeletal evidence. The project will open up further opportunities for collaboration and expansion of the range of inter-disciplinary contributions. International student collaborative capacity-building, exchange, training, experience and research opportunities the project will strengthen the current developing partnerships and solidify public outreach and open up more tourist activities. Local efforts envisage converting a permanent field laboratory and site Museum for student courses and exchanges for scientific, educational and research experience.