

“Come and Try”

Towards a History of Fante Military Shrines

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“COME AND TRY” IS A FAMILIAR AND CONFIDANT CHALLENGE AMONG THE FANTE ASAFO TO TEST THE PROWESS OF THEIR RIVALS. “TOWARDS A HISTORY” IS PERHAPS AN EQUALLY FAMILIAR, BUT CERTAINLY LESS CONFIDENT FORM OF ENGAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMICS. ONE IS BRAVADO, THE OTHER IS PREVARICATION.’

The photo montage that concludes this article (Figs. 34a–nn, pp. 32–5) provides a visual chronology of *posuban* design. For greater detail, the images can be viewed at www.mitpressjournals.org/loi/afar; this particular article is viewable by all readers, even those who do not receive the electronic edition of *African Arts*.

The images in this article constitute, as far as I am aware, a complete corpus of *posuban*. The editors of *African Arts* encourage scholars who have similarly extensive documentation of African art forms to consider publishing them in the expanded montage format that is now possible in *African Arts*’ electronic edition.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

The arts of the traditional military companies of the Fante, called *asafo*, are best known through the profusion of appliqué flags (*frankaa*) which were discussed most recently on these pages by Kwame Labi (2002), and considered elsewhere through the enormously popular traveling exhibition/publication *Asafo!: African Flags of the Fante* (Adler and Barnard 1992).² The latter project was so popular, in fact, that it has led to *asafo* flags becoming one of the most frequently faked of all Ghanaian art forms, right up there in the pantheon of duplicity with Akua’ba.

As has been detailed in multiple anthropological and historical studies, the *asafo* (*sa*, war, and *fo*, people) were the warrior groups or armies of the traditional Akan states.³ With their military roles almost fully usurped by the administration of the British Gold Coast Colony beginning in 1872, the *asafo* were forced to redirect their energies. This they did with considerable success, and they thrive today as potent social and civic organizations with significant political, ritual, and performance roles in most Fante states. Depending on whom you read, there are from seventeen to twenty-four traditional Fante states (Christensen 1954:14 lists nineteen) with up to fourteen *asafo* companies per state. Within a state, each company is identified by a name and number, usually followed by the town or village in which it is located: e.g. Asafo Kyirem No. 2 Company, Mankesim, a group that we will return to a number of times below.⁴

Considerably less kinetic and much less collectible than flags are the often spectacular cement shrines of the *asafo* called *posuban*, but more commonly referred to by the Fante themselves with the English words “post,” “fort,” or “castle” (Cover, Figs. 1–2). These have frequently caught the attention of visitors to Ghana largely due to their perceived playfulness and to what is assumed to be



1 Nkum, No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Abura Dunkwa, outdoored 9 April 1971. Photographed 1974. Designed by Kobina Ampiah, sculpture by A.K.E. Sam. The retired drums of this company, which are considered sacred, are housed on the bottom level, while the active drums and gongs are stored on the second level. The hand holding a sword at the top of the shrine represents a common Akan proverb, "Without the thumb, the hand is nothing," which in this instance acknowledges the chief of the state.

During the course of research from 1974 to 2006 I have documented with varying degrees of thoroughness more than seventy monumental *posuban* in the Central Region of Ghana.⁶ Many of these shrines are in fact somewhat self-documenting, with their identity proclaimed in inscriptions on their facades. At the bare minimum the writing contains the name and number of the company and the town in which it is located. In addition, it frequently includes the date it was originally "outdoored" (ceremonially revealed to the public for the first time), often a date of renovation and, on many shrines, a declaration of the cost of construction. Company mottoes and the names of important *asafo* leaders past and present may also be inscribed. For example, on the shrine of Kyirem No. 2 Company, Mankessim (Fig. 24), the following inscriptions were recorded in September 2006:

WANA BABA
 COME AND TRY WHO EVER WILL
 NO. 2 ASAFO COY. ROYAL STREET
 MANKESSIM
 KYIREM ASAFO
 ERECTED 3rd NOV. 1891
 RENOVATED 8th SEPT. 1979

their totally incongruous presence in the Ghanaian architectural milieu.⁵ A *posuban* may be materially defined by something as simple as a cane-fenced tree (Fig. 3) and/or a sacred mound or rock designating a god, typically covered with the shell of a giant marine turtle (Fig. 4). It is generally assumed that both the cane fence and the turtle shell provide protection for the gods, but one elder said the presence of the shell indicated "there was big meat inside," i.e., the god was powerful and sustaining. Still, the shrines that attract the most attention are those that are artistically embellished and range from a painted cement-block fence around a tree (Fig. 5) to a freestanding sculpture-laden, multi-storied extravaganza (Fig. 6). For the sake of distinction, I refer to these more elaborate structures as monumental *posuban*.

Despite the information provided, these inscriptions cannot be taken at face value, since in this case the renovation was, in fact, virtually a total reconstruction.

Regardless of scale and configuration, each *posuban* is multi-functional and serves as a locale for at least one of its respective company's gods and as a site for ritual sacrifices and offerings. It is also embraced as a locus of company activities and comes into play during installations of company officers, during funerals of its members, and in the observation of a variety of festivals. Larger shrines might also serve as storage areas for sacred drums, gongs, flags, and other *asafo* regalia, while the



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2 Wombir, No. 4 Asafo Company Posuban, Elmina, outdoored 31 December 1966. Photographed 1974. Sculpture by Kwamina Amoaku. The sculptures of Adam and Eve, centered ground level, assert that No. 4 Company was the original *asafo* of Elmina. These sculptures were badly vandalized c. 2000 in the middle of the night by a rival company.

(opposite, l-r)

3 Akomfu Seykyi, No. 7 Asafo Company Posuban, Anomabu. n.d. Photographed 1974. A cane fence around one of an *asafo* company's sacred trees (*dua ase*) undoubtedly served as the first *posuban*, along with sacred mounds or rocks (see Fig. 4). This structure was supplemented by a monumental *posuban* outdoored in 1977 (see Fig. 34nn).

4 Intin, No. 3 Asafo Company Posuban, Cape Coast. n.d. Photographed 1974. Called both "*esiw*" and "*posuban*," the sacred mound or rock was covered with a marine turtle shell and was usually located in proximity to the *dua ase*. The turtle shell is assumed to serve primarily a protective function, but one elder at this shrine explained, "Sea turtle is god's cover because you have big meat inside a sea turtle."

5 Edumadze, No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Enyan Maim, outdoored 7 November 1971. Photographed 1974. A cement-block fence has replaced the cane versions in many areas and may represent the beginnings of more monumental efforts. The lion and leopard painted on the front of this shrine asserts, "A dead lion is greater than a living leopard." This company, represented by the lion, is saying that even during its weakest moments, it can overpower its rivals, even when they are at their best. The red, gold, and green color scheme replicates the national flag of Ghana.

very largest have sufficient interior space to hold meetings and other gatherings.

There have been at least three proposed etymologies for the word "*posuban*." Referring to the cane-fenced tree also called "*posuban*," E.J.P. Brown writes:

The *pesu-ban* was originally a hencoop or pen made of bamboo or the petiole of the palm, the top of which was covered with the same material. The name was given to the Asafo fence owing to its construction being somewhat similar to the hencoop. *Pesu* is derived from *pie*, a room, and *su*, form; that is, in the form of a room (1929 I:206).

Brigid Sackey maintains, "The word came from the verb *si posu*, to meet or assemble, while *iban* means protective structure" (1998:75, n.18). There is general agreement that *iban* or *aban* is used to identify a substantial (sometimes fortified) building, generally made of stone or brick (see Christaller 1933:6). In popular use it may refer to both the palaces of chiefs and to the forts and castles built by Europeans along the coast. With this in mind, Christensen considers *posuban* to be "a combination of the English 'post' and Fanti 'iban,' or fortification" (1954:112), an interpretation that has been generally accepted.

CONCEPTUAL MODELS

The early development of *asafo posuban* is unclear, but there are several potential conceptual and structural prototypes. The most readily apparent of these views the shrines as Fante replications of the European forts that line the coast of the Central Region of Ghana. Christensen takes this for granted: "[t]hey are obviously stylized copies of the European castles and forts that appeared on the coast. The opinion may be hazarded that the African, noting the impregnable structures of the white man, adopted this as a symbol of military strength" (1954:112). Early records, however, suggest that these "copies" may be more than symbolic. William Bosman was on the coast for fourteen years ending in 1702 and, referencing a drawing of Cape Coast town, he writes:

Under the English Fort you may observe a House, not unlike a small Fort, with a Flag on it and some Cannon; this is inhabited by an English Mulatto, by Name Edward Barter, who hath a greater Power on the Coast, than all the three English Agents together He is become so considerable that he can raise a large number of Armed Men; some whereof are his own Slaves, and the rest of Free-Men, that adhere to him (1705/1967:51).



DeGraft Johnson states that Edward Barter was the organizer of Akrampa No. 6 Company, Cape Coast (1932:309-310). Many oral traditions state that the first *asafo* companies were of “mulatto” composition and Bosman may have been describing one such company. His reference to private or African-owned forts is not unique. In 1798, John Kabe, a local Fante leader, constructed a fortified house in Kommenda and armed it with guns acquired from the British forts at that location (see Henige 1977). There is no question that the monumental *posuban* are readily identified with the European forts and indeed at least two shrines include “castle” as part of the inscriptions on their façades (Figs. 7–8) and three others “post” (see Cover). Indeed, the single most common sculptural motif of the shrines is cement cannons (often along with sculpted cannon balls and kegs of gunpowder) and in half a dozen examples actual European ordnance. And at least three *posuban* resemble the polygonal bastions of forts, complete with crenellation (Fig. 9). Nevertheless, in terms of the architectural details of most *posuban*, the European forts seem to offer only a small part of the story.

Another potential influence is rooted in Fante burial customs and the choice of location for a *posuban*. Arthur Ffoulkes emphasizes that the shrines are typically constructed on the burial sites of important company members:

Under this tower is very often a vault, in which the principal men of the Company have been interred since the origin of the “post”; sometimes it is a spot where some former hero of the Company has died and been buried; or, again, it may have been the ancestral tomb of the Company’s principal men before the post was erected to mark the spot (1907/08:271, see also Christensen 1954:113).

Given the preceding, it is tempting to speculate that monumental *posuban* ultimately evolved from the elaborate grave sculpture of the Fante. In 1602 de Marees, referring to coastal funerals, wrote:

All his possessions, such as his Weapons and clothes, are buried with him, and all his Nobles who used to serve him are modeled from life in earth, painted and put in a row all around the Grave, side by side. Thus their Sepulchres are like a House and furnished as if they were still alive; and this Sepulchre of the King is kept in high esteem and carefully guarded: day and night guards must continuously stand by it with their Weapons and keep watch ... (1602/1987:184–5).

In the same vein Barbot, on the Gold Coast in 1678–9 and 1681–2, described mausoleums for important individuals in the Elmina area:

[T]hey are accustomed to decorate these with a large number of clay busts representing men and women, designed in a fairly jolly manner. These busts are painted in various colours and garnished all over with coral and fetishes. At Mina, on the road leading from the castle to the garden, I saw several such mausoleums, for brafo and officers, including one for a relative of the king of Fetu, which had between 35 and 40 of these busts, displayed on the posts and in a semi-circle in the midst of the fetishes. All around them were several pots of palm wine and meat, together with leaves and branches from fetish trees (Hair et al. 1992:595–6).

De Marees’ use of “sepulcher” and Barbot’s of “mausoleum” suggest a structural elaboration of the grave site with accommodations for funerary sculpture and offer a possible prototype for the monumental *posuban*. As it is we have definite precedents for substantial, even life-sized, sculpture commemorating great men and women, a very common practice on military shrines. The tradition of Fante terracotta grave art dates to before 1602, as de Marees documents, and continues today in the form of cement sculpture made by the same artists who build *posuban*.⁷

George Preston finds another possible inspiration for *asafo* shrines in ships’ “fo’c’s’les,” although he does not elaborate on what details of naval architecture and what type and period of ships are influential (1975:36). Preston’s suggestion is enhanced by the five shrines actually built in the shape of ships (Figs. 10–13, 34ii) and by images of



6 Tuafu, No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Gomoa Legu, outdoored 24 May 1955, but no longer extant. Photographed 1974. Design by A.A. Mills with sculpture by Mills, Kwame Munko, and Kwamina Amoaku. This shrine was unveiled less than two years before Ghana officially regained its independence on 6 March 1957, and the soldiers in red fezzes guarding the shrine represent the colonial Native Authority Police.



7 Dentsifo, Asafo Company Posuban, Gomoa Wassah, outdoored 29 August 1948. Photographed 1974. Design by Kobina Ampiah, sculpture by "Asima (Smith)." The figure dominating the second level wearing an amulet-laden war shirt is Asafohen Yaw Entse, the senior captain of the company when the shrine was built. He was also apparently a major funder of the construction. This is the most text-heavy shrine documented by the author to date, with at least four of the sculptural and painted motifs explained in detail in written Twi.

ships and naval officers found on other posts. Still, the forecastles of the ship-*posubans* do not resemble any other *asafo* shrines. The forecastle of a ship is technically a short, raised deck at the front of a ship where sailors live on large, multi-mast sailing vessels. It has very little in common with *posuban* except decorative railings. The "bridge" of a modern warship probably provides a better analogy with the shrines, since both share a multi-tiered layout punctuated by artillery and railings and a projecting central post or mast.

These observations for prototypes aside, as a ritual center and mustering point, a cane-fenced tree (*dua ase*, Fig. 4) and a "medicine" mound or rock (*esiw*, Fig. 5) are both integral parts of the shrine complex, and undoubtedly preceded more elaborate shrines. The majority of *posuban* today are still not structurally developed beyond these two forms. Throughout much of Fanteland, both are also still referred to as *posuban*. E.J.P. Brown, apparently unaware of monumental forms, described the shrine complex in 1921:

The *Pesu-ban*, corrupted into *Posu-ban*, which is a wooden or bamboo fence surrounding a shade tree, known in the vernacular as *Ngayedua*, filled at the base with stones, etc., marks their meeting place, also *Esiwdu*—that is a mound covered with a tortoise-shell (1929 I:206).

It is probable that the tree and mound date from the beginnings of *asafo* since these two elements are a conventional means of defining sacred space among the Akan, as well as several other West African peoples. Eventually related to the *posuban* and certainly early in the history of the shrine complex is some kind of storehouse for company regalia, especially drums, sacred objects in themselves. Initially this storage area may have been located away from the *dua ase* and *esiw*, but with the advent of the monumental *posuban*, it was either incorporated into the shrine itself or at least moved into the area of the shrine complex.

Significantly, at least twelve posts have variations on a tree form as a projecting central post (Fig. 14). This could suggest that the monumental *posuban* is merely an architectural elaboration of



8 Dentsi, No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Lowtown, Saltpond, outdoored 22 September 1921. Original designer not remembered, but renovated ca. 1960 by Kwamina Amoaku with several sculptural additions including the whale and seal. Photographed 1974. This version of the shrine is no longer extant, but was replaced by a shrine "BUILT SEPT 1687" as indicated by the inscription on the new shrine (Fig. 33). This is certainly an attempt by the company to assert primacy over its rivals.

9 Broflu-Mba, No. 5 Asafo Company Posuban, Cape Coast, outdoored after 1907. Photographed 1974. Designer unknown. At least three *posuban* have an octagonal footprint that echoes the bastions on some of the coastal forts. This company, in particular, identifies with the British and Cape Coast Castle. Its name is typically translated as "white man's children," and the façade proclaims "WE BUILT THE CASTLE." Tacit references to British colonial power remain in the "VR" and "ER" inscriptions ("Victoria Regina" and "Edward Rex"), although not a single *asafo* elder in a group of five remembered what those inscriptions meant in 1974.

the *dua ase*. Indeed, as mentioned above, in a number of modern shrines, cement block walls, occasionally with painted or relief representational embellishments, have replaced the encircling cane fence (Fig. 5) with the ground plan altered from round to square consistent with the plan of monumental shrines, which are almost always square or polygonal. Nevertheless, the cane-fenced tree exists in its own right at all *posuban*, including the twelve with a tree motif for the central post, and the militant nature of most central post imagery (cannons, lions, warplanes, etc.) is far removed from the relatively benign statement of a tree. In addition, the tree is sacred while the motifs on the central post are invariably secular. The cement- or swish-walled tree could be seen as an intermediate structure between the *dua ase* and the monumental *posuban*; however, the roofing of that cement wall would be a direct denial of the tree's life and thus the life of the deity it represents.



It is conceptually more consistent to view the elaboration of the *posuban* as independent of the *dua ase*.

There is a second important interpretation for the central post. In the early literature the *asafo* flag is seen as the most important symbol of the company. Ffoulkes notes in one of the first explicit references to *posuban*:

An essential part of this tower (*posuban*) is a flag-pole. On ceremonial occasions the Company flag is exhibited from this post, and it is the Company's first care to guard its flag from capture or insult (1907/08:271).

After the adoption of firearms by the *asafo*, the flag was probably the next major European contribution to the institution, with the flag-pole joining the fenced tree and medicine mound in the shrine ensemble. It seems plausible that the projecting central post is simply a structural elaboration of the flag-pole and that the shrine itself was in part a fort created to protect the flag in imitation of the European castles on the coast.

EARLY SHRINES

Still, the questions of architectural precedents and the ultimate origin of *asafo* shrines remain. The first conclusively documented monumental *posuban* known to me was outdoored in 1883 at Abandze (Fig. 14).⁸ This was followed by the old No. 2 Com-



pany shrine at Mankesim in 1891 (Fig. 15), the old No. 5 Company “Castle” at Cape Coast before 1901 (ffoulkes 1907/1908:270), and the 1914 structure at Sarafa Kokodo (Fig. 16, minus the biplane and its supports). These were followed by at least nine shrines built in the 1920s. There may have been other posts constructed during this time and perhaps even before, but they have disappeared or were replaced by larger and more elaborate versions, with the preceding examples lost to memory. No existing shrines in my study predate Abandze. To my knowledge, *posuban* are not explicitly mentioned in the literature until ffoulkes’ 1907/08 reference, and this and subsequent published sources provide few clues to the history of the structure. Interviews with the elders of *asafo* companies and with the artists who build the shrines were similarly unproductive about questions of the genres origins and early history.

Despite periods of relative peace, the Asante/Fante wars of the nineteenth century would seem to argue against the development of monumental military shrines by the Fante in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. Not only would the manpower and financial burden be overwhelming (the 1883 Abandze “fort” cost UK£200, as was boldly proclaimed on the front of the shrine), but the structures would also be obvious targets for the nearly always dominant Asante forces. In addition, if *posuban* did originate during this period, *asafo* iconography would likely include at least some lingering militant references against the Asante. This appears not to be the case.

Other events toward the end of the nineteenth century also probably influenced the development of monumental *posuban*. The final “transfer of flag” of the Dutch “possessions” on the Gold Coast to the British in 1872 consolidated colonial administrative control for the first time in the hands of a single foreign country. For those *asafo* groups in areas formerly under Dutch control there was a scramble for recognition by the British on a par with those already in the orbit of the British. In an early African initiative for self-determination, the Fante Confederation of 1868–72,

10 Wombir, No. 4 Asafo Company Posuban, Abrem Berasi, outdoored 21 January 1921. Photographed 1975. Designer unknown. A large variety of sea-faring references are found on *posuban*, including somewhat fully realized ships, naval uniforms, and anchors. Although this *posuban* is less clearly identifiable as a vessel, elders of this company were explicit about it being a “warship” complete with a functioning “smokestack” (a chimney over a fireplace). As with Wombir, No. 4 Company, Elmina (Fig. 2), this company claims to be the original *asafo* in its state and the “mother of all companies” as declared by the woman nursing two children on the side of the ship.

11 No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Ekumfi Akra, outdoored 1929. Photographed 1974. Design by Kofi Knott with assistance from his son A.A.Mills. As if there is any question, the warship identity of this shrine is made even more explicit by the emblazons “Man of War” and “The Famous Destroyer.” Preston’s 1958 date for this shrine (1975:39, 41) most likely refers to a renovation or repainting.



led by key chiefs in the area, also contributed to a jockeying for power along the central coast. In this critical period of transition, the *asafo* were caught between the long-standing prerogatives of chieftaincy and newly minted colonial authority while simultaneously being deprived of their military roles. It seems to me that this was a time when the *asafo* needed to assert themselves and distinctive political architecture was one means to that end.

It is quite likely that the monumental *posuban* did not evolve until after the sacking of Kumase by the British in 1874, and that it was not a widespread or important symbol of *asafo* until the 1920s or later, when the Fante rivalries were more internal than external. It is possible that the Abandze shrine was the first, yet it would seem that the elders would recognize it as such. Still, it must be early in the history of the structure.

Of the four earliest documented *posuban*, three (excluding the original Cape Coast No. 5) are virtually identical in size, form, and detailing. All are square in plan, 8–10' (2.4–3m) on each side. The exterior walls are divided by one or more horizontal moldings and, in the Sarafo Aboano example, crossed by engaged pilasters. The sides of each shrine feature a series of recessed diamond or barrel (gunpowder?) shapes. The walls are crowned with a pronounced cornice topped by two stilted arches on each side. A pier on each corner extends above the arches and terminates in a thin fluted pyramid capped by a black sphere (cannon ball?). A square shaft projects from the center of the *posuban* and terminates in a sculptured finial. For the three shrines under discussion, these finials are: Abandze, a bamboo-like cane called *babadua*; Mankesim, a palm wine pot; and Sarafo Kokodo, a gunpowder barrel.

Equivalent designs exist in seven of the nine shrines built in the 1920s. That there is so little variation among most pre-1930 shrines, and that this form appears fully developed in the oldest known *posuban* at Abandze in 1883, poses a question of developmental precedents. Perhaps significantly, the above descrip-



12 Kyirem No. 6 Asafo Company Posuban, Anomabu, outdoored 1952. Photographed 1974. Design by A.A. Mills. The previous iteration of this *posuban* was also a warship, but it collapsed ("sunk" according to the elders) c. 1950. The earlier shrine, and the first painting of this one, named the vessel "H.M.S. Impregnable," an appellation that presumably disappeared shortly after independence.

13 No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Sarafo Aboano, outdoored 1931. Photographed 1974. Design by Kofi Knott, probably with his son A.A. Mills. Updated repainting of this shrine include the Ghanaian state arms and the national flag. I was unable to record the original date of the Mami Wata painting on the base of the *posuban*, but mermaids occur on a number of shrines and the more explicit representation of the water spirit with a snake reflects widespread West African practices.



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14 No. 3 Asafo Company Posuban, Abandze, outdoored 1883. Photographed by James Boyd Christensen, before 1954. Shrine is no longer extant and its replacement has been under construction since at least 1975. Designer unknown. This is the earliest monumental *posuban* known to me. Its inscriptions seems to balance *asafo* bravado, "WHAT WE HAVE SAID WE HAVE SAID," with a certain tip of the hat to colonial authority, "NOBODY ON EARTH SAVE GOD & GOVERNMENT." The painted figure on the façade represents another common *asafo* challenge to rivals, almost always translated as, "Will you eat before you enema, or will you enema before you eat?"

15 Kyirem, No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Mankesim, outdoored 3 November 1891. Photographed by James Boyd Christensen after 25 November 1962. Shrine is no longer extant, but has been replaced by Fig. 24. This is the second oldest monumental *posuban* known to me and is clearly based on the same model as No. 3 Asafo Company Posuban, Abandze (Fig. 14).

(opposite page)

16 Tuafo, No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Saraafa Kokodo, outdoored 1914, renovated May 1936. Photographed 1974. Original design and renovation by Kofi Nott. The 1936 renovation consisted of the addition of the biplane and its three supports, which updates the weaponry of the *asafo* company. This shrine has a virtual twin in the one from Tantum (Otum), complete with the biplane addition (Fig. 20).

17 Mausoleum at new Dutch cemetery, Elmina, erected 1806. Photographed 1979. Designer unknown. The form of this edifice shares a number of similarities with the earliest monumental *posuban* and may have served as a partial model for the earliest cement shrines.



tion applies in large part to the still-standing and highly visible 1806 neoclassical mausoleum (or cenotaph) in the “new” Dutch cemetery in Elmina (Fig. 18). Given that at least some of the roots of *posuban* design may be found in traditional Fante burial practices, it is possible to speculate that the first shrine builders embraced this European monument in much the same way they borrowed in part from European forts.

I would suggest that the form of the monumental *posuban* was initially created more or less as it existed at Abandze (Fig. 15). While there were certainly sophisticated local construction methods for domestic architecture, the nineteenth century boom in missionary activity, with its attendant rash of church building, provided new technologies and design vocabularies for the Fante to construct *posuban*. Although the nominative identification of the *posuban* is with the European slaving and trading forts, more of their architectural details are modeled after those of churches. Such embellishments as stilted arches, decorative moldings, engaged pilasters, salmonic columns, and various window shapes and balustrades are characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century ecclesiastical architecture in Ghana (Fig. 19). The execution of these embellishments was greatly facilitated by the rapid introduction of Portland cement toward the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ Some of these same details may be found on the forts and castles, yet they were all constructed well before 1850, so the Fante workmen would not have any direct experience in creating such forms in that context. Still, one should not com-

pletely dismiss the influence of fort-building practices, however distant in time. Perhaps surprisingly, many *asrafo* companies claim and take pride in the fact that their ancestors helped build these forts. The current *posuban* of No. 5 Company, Cape Coast, is even emblazoned with “WE BUILT THE CASTLE,” and its decorative scheme primarily features construction implements such as a ladder, pick and shovel, and a barrel for carrying sand (Fig. 9).

Nevertheless, it is significant that two of the first three builders of *asrafo* monuments primarily identified themselves as “church building contractors.” The history of substantial Christian architecture in southern Ghana outside of the forts and castles dates to the founding of the Basel Mission at Christiansborg in 1828 and the Wesleyan Mission in 1835.¹⁰ Beginning in the mid-1800s at Osu, vocational training became an important focus of “Christian education.” Numerous masons and carpenters received direct experience in European construction techniques from building churches and related mission buildings (Hyland 1974:68–9). And again, the introduction of Portland cement provided a new medium for the modeling of substantial sculpture, paving the way for shrines like those of the *asrafo*.

Returning to the three nearly identical early *posuban*, it is not unreasonable to conclude that they were built by the same person or group of persons. The architect of the original Abandze and Mankesim shrines (the two with the earliest dates) is not definitely known, but the Sarafa Kokodo structure was designed and built by the church building contractor Mbir Atta, a.k.a. Kofi Nott (1872–



18 Wesley Methodist Church, Cape Coast, dedicated 10 June 1838, renovated and expanded on several occasions, especially from 1918 to 1922 when the tower was added. Photographed 1974. Kofi Nott, an early *asafo posuban* builder, is credited in part for the expansion that includes the tower, a replica of which may be found on his grave (Fig. 19). Church towers as prominent markers of sacred space are another source of influence for *asafo* shrines, and the pinacles of many of these towers are not unlike the basic design of early monumental *posuban*.



19 Grave monument of Kofi Nott (1872–1938), Enyan Denkyira. Photographed 1975. Designed by his son A.A. Mills and based on the tower of the Wesley Methodist Church, Cape Coast (Fig. 18) on which his father worked. Mills ultimately became one of the most prolific builders of *posuban*, being the principal designer of nine different shrines.

20 No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Tantom, outdoored 12 March 1920, renovated in the 1930's with the addition of the biplane and its supports. Photographed 1974. Designed and constructed by Kofi Nott with his son A.A. Mills working as an apprentice, this shrine, including its addition, is virtually identical to the example at Saraafa Kokodo (Fig. 16). The biplane here was interpreted in an identical way as the virtually ubiquitous *asafo* image of a three-headed winged dragon (see Fig. 21), i.e. "Will you fly or will you vanish?" In other words, no matter what you do, you cannot escape from the grasp of this *asafo* company.



1938) of Enyan Denkyira. Nott was a product of mission training and is best known for his work on the expansion of the large Wesley Methodist church at Cape Coast, a miniature replica of which can be found on his grave (Fig. 19). His dates preclude his having been the principal author of the Abandze and Mankesim *posubans* (he was eleven and nineteen when they were built); nevertheless, there remains the issue of stylistic homogeneity. Kofi Nott's son A.A. Mills, a.k.a. Kojo Abban (b. 1913), also of Enyan Denkyira, remembered working as a boy with his father on the *posuban* at Tantom (Fig. 20, outdoored 1920, cf. Fig. 17), but did not know any of his father's work before then. Mills subsequently worked with his father on two more shrines and after his father's death went on to become the most prolific builder of *posuban* in Fanteland, designing and directing the construction and executing the sculpture on at least nine additional structures, the last outdoored in 1974 (cf. Figs. 6, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, and 34j, m, q, r, ff, gg, mm, all by Mills with his father or alone). He obviously learned masonry and design from his father and ultimately, like his father, also became a significant church builder in Fanteland. Since the design of both Kofi Nott's and then A.A. Mills's shrines follows that of Abandze and Mankesim, it seems probable that Nott either copied these shrines, or more likely, apprenticed with the man who built them. This may even have been Nott's father, duplicating the situation that was to exist between himself and his son.

Fifty of the monumental *posuban* documented in my study were created by only seven artists, six of whom were still living in 1976.¹¹ Of the six, all but A.A. Mills claimed to be self-taught; Mills admits to training under his father. Still, the remaining five—Kwamina Amoaku (b. 1898), Kweku Atta (b. 1902), Kojo Nkrakra (b. 1910), Kwame Munko b. ca. 1940), and Kobina Ampiah—share some-



21 Asafo Company Posuban, Muna, outdoored 1941, renovated ca. 1970. Photographed 1974. Designed and built by A.A. Mills with numerous sculptural additions during the renovation by Kwame Munko (b. c. 1940), including the five figures in front. Munko worked as an apprentice under Mills for a number of years before beginning his own business in the late sixties. Here again the three-headed winged dragon can be seen sculpted on top of the central post and painted on the flag held by the flag dancer on the right of the bottom level.

thing of a common heritage; each worked at one time or another for Nott and/or his son Mills on either church or *asafo* projects. For example, on the shrine of Legu No. 1 Company (Fig. 6) where Mills was the principal architect, the work of Amoaku and a young Munko can be seen, executed at the time of the shrine's construction. Many other instances of collaboration with Mills are found elsewhere. Mills claims the other *posuban* artists are "all my boys," although each went on to become an accomplished artist/builder in his own right with his own distinctive styles and designs. The professional lineage(s) of *asafo posuban* architects and artists is undoubtedly more complicated than descent from Nott and Mills, but church-building traditions remain the most likely inspiration for most of the structural details.

The history of *posuban* after 1920 is generally one of increasing size and complexity. The first three warships were built in 1921 (Abrem Berasi, Fig. 10), 1929 (Ekumfi Akra, Fig. 11) and 1931 (Saraafa Aboano, Fig. 12). The first is by a forgotten builder, but the latter two were by Kofi Nott (with the aid of his son). Two-story *posuban* were introduced at Muna in 1941, with the addition of a second floor to the existing box-like structure (Fig. 21). Although Tantum (1920) was originally built with its present sculpture (Fig. 20, minus the airplane), the additions of figurative forms to *posuban* did not become widespread until the 1950s or later. At this time, many of the earlier shrines were updated with the addition of sculptured figures. The first of the four three-story *posuban* was outdoored at Gomoa Legu in 1955 (Fig. 6, no longer extant). During the 1960s, some *posuban* began to assume house-like proportions enclosing larger and more functional interior spaces, e.g. Asafo No. 2 Company "Assembly Hall" at Apam (Fig. 22). In an extreme example, during 1977 Apam No. 1 Company completed

a three-story *posuban* that has more floor space than any other shrine in the Central Region (Fig. 23). And as a concession to contemporary religious sensibilities, both Apam shrines include life-sized sculptures of Jesus Christ (although quite a few angels may be found elsewhere, dating to the 1950's).

KYIREM, NO. 2 COMPANY MANKESIM

If the architectural conception and execution of *asafo posuban* includes influences from a mix of European fortifications, local funerary art, naval architecture, Christian church-building traditions, and indigenous religious practices, the painted and sculptural adornment of the shrines draws from an even larger array of sources. This diversity is clearly apparent in the sculptural program of the second shrine created by No. 2 Company, Mankesim (Fig. 24, which replaced the 1891 shrine in Fig. 15) and where some of the more common images and themes found in *asafo posuban* sculpture are represented.¹¹ The previous shrine was removed in 1973 and I was able to observe on an annual basis the construction of the new *posuban* from the consecration of its foundation in 1974 to the formal outdooring of the shrine in 1979. The artist/architect of the *posuban* was Kweku Attah (b. 1902) from Cape Coast working with the mason Kwabena Mensa, with additional manual labor supplied by the *asafo* company. This is one of five shrines for which Attah was primarily responsible (Figs. 34v, z, ll). He also executed the sculpture for eight charismatic Twelve Apostles Healing Gardens (see Breidenbach and Ross 1978) and numerous grave sculptures throughout the Central Region.

Examining the sculpture on this shrine from the roof down, the most prominent image on top of the structure is a winged, seven-headed creature with a bow and arrow with a winged, three-



headed “dragon” on top of it. The latter image is ubiquitous in *asafo* arts (cf. Labi 2002:35, Adler and Barnard 1992:75) and almost invariably elicits the expression, “Will you fly or will you vanish?”—the implication being that regardless of what you do, you cannot escape the reach of No. 2 Company, Mankesim. Despite the devil-like bearded and horned heads, the figure underneath is an all-seeing god of the company whose eyesight is so keen that it once detected the footprints of an antelope on a rock. With his bow and arrow he is said to be protecting the shrine, the Ghanaian coat of arms in front of him, and indeed the entire nation.

With Ghanaian independence on March 6, 1957, symbols of national unity began to be added to *posuban* imagery, with the coat of arms found on at least five shrines, the Ghanaian national flag on six shrines, and the black star, “the lode star of African freedom” (independent of the flag) on another five. In addition,

the tricolor scheme of the national flag (red, gold, and green) became popular decorative accents, as seen in both iterations of the Lowtown shrine (Figs. 8 and 33). Interestingly, as of 1981, at least two shrines still had the British royal arms on their façades (Figs. 7, 34b), although in each case, elders of the companies used almost identical English, saying, “We need to modernize.” *Asafo* support for Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People’s Party’s initiatives during the first republic have been discussed in some detail by Kwesi Jonah (1999), but the assumption of national symbols by the *asafo* seems to have proceeded quite independent of who was ruling the country at any given time.

Flanking the state arms are two antlered ungulates quite out of place in Ghanaian zoology. During my 1979 interviews they were identified alternately as “buffaloes” or “bongo antelopes,” but neither looks remotely like the animal supposedly represented, and

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22 Dentsefo, No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Apam, outdoored 20 April 1962, renovated in late 1970s. Photographed by Raphael X. Reichert 1979. Designer unknown, sculpture executed by Kwame Munko. The painted signage on the façade identifies this as “Appam Asafo No. 2 Company Assembly Hall.” It features a life-size sculpture of Jesus holding a cross, on which an arrow points to the Christ figure. A second sculpture of the company’s linguist has him holding a plaque that reads, “I linguist Kweku Amoto promise faithfully that a landplan of Apam No. 2 Asafo Company is with me. I will never part with it.” Territorial disputes are a frequent source of conflict between rival *asafo* companies, and this statement is an affirmation of No. 2 Company’s land rights.

23 Tuofo, No. 1 Asafo Company Posuban, Apam, outdoored 1976. Photographed 1976. Designer unknown, sculpture executed by Kwamina Amoaku. This is the largest *asafo* complex known to me and the one that shares more with contemporaneous domestic and commercial architecture than any other *asafo* shrine. Still, it features on the ground level a very common image of an equestrian figure wearing an amulet-laden warshirt illustrating the highly conventionalized saying, “If the horse is mad [crazy], the rider is not also mad,” indicating that the company (the rider) can control any situation (cf. Fig. 30). Like its rival No. 2 Company (Fig. 22), this structure also features an image of Jesus seen on the top floor in a gesture of welcoming.

(opposite page)

24 Kyirem, No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Mankesim, outdoored 8 September 1979. Photographed 1979. Design and sculpture by Kweku Atta. This shrine replaced the 1891 version in Fig. 15. In some ways it has become the prototypical *posuban*. Just off the main coast road, it is easily accessible, is featured in several postcards, and even has a bifold brochure published by the Ghana Tourist Board explaining its imagery.



antlered animals simply do not exist in Africa. Although the artist Atta repeatedly called the pair “reindeer,” they actually were copied by Atta from a image of a European deer drawn by Pierre Probst and published in Marcelle Vérité’s *Le Monde des Animaux* (Fig. 25a; Vérité 1955, page number missing), which served as a source for most of Atta’s animal images. Nevertheless, the meaning of these “deer” sculptures rests with their identification as bongos, the largest and most elusive of forest antelopes, which, though rarely seen, or perhaps because of that, are considered to have substantial spiritual powers.¹² According to company elders, the bongo is able to foresee the intentions of “evil” men and disarm them before they can do any harm. Interestingly, this is virtually the opposite meaning of the bongo in royal regalia, where it prompts the saying “Had I known, is always last,” or “If I had only known ...,” a lament for the lack of foresight (cf. Ross

1977:23). With their visionary powers the bongos are seen as the “servants” of the already visionary god that they flank.

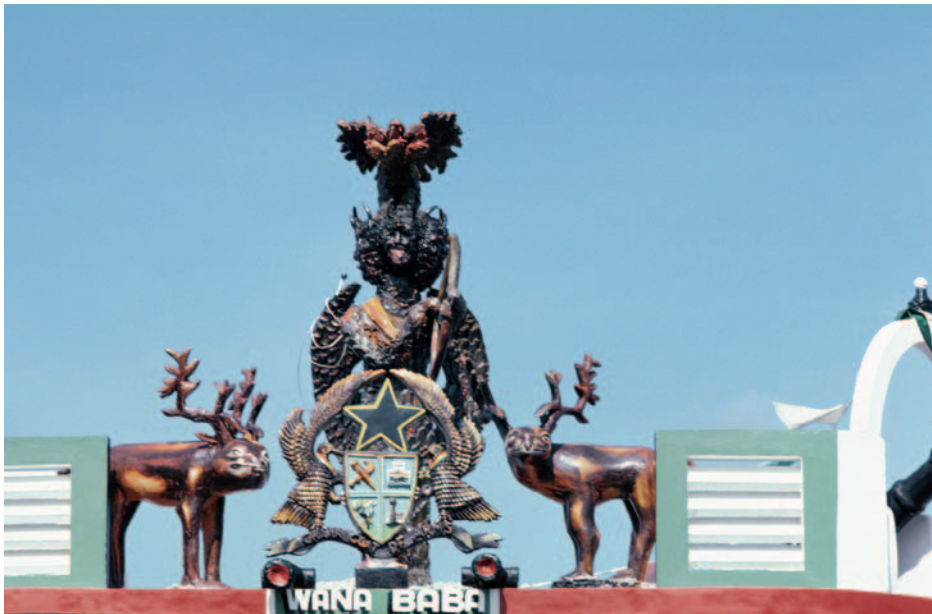
Also on the top level of the shrine are both cement and real cannons. Actual European cannons are scattered in many Fante states and their presence is almost always explained by the activities of the legendary giant Asebu Amamfi. Among his many feats of strength, he was said to have carried cannons under each arm and to have used one cannon for a handkerchief and another as a cane. Other stories tell of him carrying a corn barn around under one arm with a pot constantly cooking on top of his head. Depending on location, he could be either a champion or a menace to the *asafo*. As one *asafo* elder said in English, “He was pocketing everything. You see the man was heavy, he was a supernatural person.” On top of each corner of the roof is a representation of a palm-wine



pot which, like the *asafo* company, is never empty and always ready to serve.

The founding of the town of Mankesim is recalled in the three large male sculptures on the second floor of the shrine (Fig. 27). Most Fante migration accounts look to Techiman, in what is now Brong Ahafo, as their point of departure, with Mankesim their subsequent home near the coast before dispersal to their current locales. The community of Mankesim in general, and Asafo No. 2 Company in particular, take great pride in the town being viewed as the “cradle” of Fante history and culture. The three warriors on the second floor are considered historical figures who, before there were any chiefs, led the Fante from Techiman to Mankesim. From left to right they are identified as ɔsun (elephant), ɔburumankoma (whale), and ɔdapagyan (eagle). During the journey the latter two died, but were carried on to Mankesim where they were buried in the famous sacred grove called Nananom Mpow. ɔsun inherited their swords, hence the three-bladed sword he is seen carrying in the left-hand figure. According to the elders, before his death it was ɔsun who appointed the first chief of Mankesim, indeed the first chief anywhere among the Fante. As with the imagery on the top floor, the theme here is the primacy of No. 2 Company and its deep roots in Fante history. The painted clocks on the wall behind the venerated leaders are both set at 11:55 and reference the preparedness and diligence of the *asafo* company: “The *asafo* captains say that whatever they have to do, they will do it now, because they would not like the morning to overtake them.”

The ground level of the shrine has eight sculptural ensembles. Centered on the front wall (Fig. 28) is a winged, two-headed god, with a third eye on the forehead of each head, holding a sword, with a snake in his lap, and riding a leopard. He is ɔbo Yaakwa, the chief *obosom* of the *asafo* company. As with the “bongos” on the roof, the flanking animals are considered servants, although each also carries its own message. What is identified as a “buffalo” on the god’s left is actually a Tibetan yak, again copied by Atta from Vêrité’s book. The buffalo has a snake coiled between its horns and a bird nesting on the snake, which seems to be about confidence and patience: “It is a patient bird that nests on a snake between the horns of a buffalo.” Here again the *asafo* company is asserting that it can meet any challenge, and indeed accomplish the impossible. On the other side of the deity is an elephant representing the proverb, “When an elephant steps on trap, no more trap,” an explicit statement of the company’s strength and power. This is also a popular motif on royal linguist staff finials, including one still in the treasury of the Asantehene (Ross 1982a:58, 59). The two lions with red light bulbs in their mouths in front of the railing are simply considered to be guardians of the shrine, “watch lions,” although two other lions by Atta on the nearby Abeadzi Dominase Asafo No. 1 Company shrine (fig. 34ll) prompted the saying, “A dead lion is greater than a living leopard” a typical *asafo* statement of one-upsmanship (Ross 1982b:170). Significantly, the savannah-dwelling lion is about as rare in the Fante landscape as are the deer and the yak, and like the latter two animals, Atta copied his lions from Vêrité’s illustrated book (Fig. 25b). I have argued elsewhere that the lion in most Akan art is almost entirely derived from European heraldic traditions, especially those of the British (Ross 1982b). Nevertheless, the lion is the single most prevalent animal



(opposite)

25a–c Images of (top to bottom) a European deer, African lion, and Andean condor illustrated by Pierre Probst in Marcelle Vérité's *Le Monde des Animaux*, used as a source book by Kweku Atta for his sculptural renditions on *posuban*.

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26 Detail of the top floor of Fig. 24. Dominating the roof of this shrine is a seven-headed god of the company, who is considered all-seeing and all-knowing. Each head features a pair of horns, and the figure is winged and has a pointed tail more in keeping with ideas about the Christian devil than with any conception of local deities. There is an ongoing tension between Christian and *asafo* agendas, the latter of which includes the maintenance and recognition of local deities. While no *asafo* elders have said this out loud, it seems to me that the representation of indigenous gods with devil-like features is a form of compromise between the two institutions.

27 Detail of second floor of Fig. 24. This level features the three warriors—*ɔsun*, *ɔburumankoma*, and *ɔdapagyan*—who led the ancestors of the current population of Mankessim in its migration from Tekyiman northwest of Kumase to its present location. Only *ɔsun* survived the journey, but the bodies of the other two were carried along and buried in what is now a famous sacred grove outside of the town. *ɔsun* is credited with appointing the first paramount chief of Mankessim (*omanhene*).



in *posuban* imagery, found on no fewer than thirty-one shrines, almost always in pairs following British practice.

Further out from the shrine on the left is a hunter with a shotgun aiming at a vulture (an “Andean condor” from Vérité’s book; Fig. 25c), while a second hunter prevents him from firing (Fig. 29). Even though they have been hunting unsuccessfully all day long, the second man stops the first because the Fante do not eat vultures, “it is taboo.” The basic idea is that no matter how desperate you are, you do not violate customary laws. Closer to the center is a man wearing an amulet-laden warshirt called a *batakari* and holding scales in his left hand and a cannon ball in his right (Fig. 30). In a strictly *asafo* context, the scales indicate that No. 2 Company is weighing its enemies and in every instance “they come up short,” “they do not balance.” Company elders were quick to add, however, that the weighing of things “is not only for wars. It also weighs [judges] cases. Even the food you eat, you have to weigh it in your mind, even cigarettes or drinks.” So the message here extends well beyond the typical *asafo* brava to issues related to a judicious and well-measured life. Also related to evaluating the behavior of others is the equestrian figure further to the right (Fig. 31). This image is found on at least six shrines (and numerous flags) and invariably prompts the same expression, “If the horse is mad [crazy], it does not follow that the rider is also mad,” warning the viewer not to judge a situation entirely by appearances, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of strong leadership, which, of course, the *asafo* company has in its multiple captains.

The largest figures on the shrine are the four individuals stationed at the corners of the ground level as if supporting the second story on their heads. The four individuals represent a fairly involved story about lazy people trying to make some quick money. It begins with the four playing games like draughts and *oware* and chewing on sugar cane. After a time *ɔbo* Yaakwa visited them and said they were wasting their time. He then offered them a job and told each of them to pick up a head load. Before they knew it, they were carrying the shrine “till the end of the world.” Each started to blame the others



28 Detail of ground floor of Fig. 24. The central two-headed figure with a third eye in each head is *ɔbo* Yankwaa the principal god of Kyirem, No. 2 Asafo Company. He is riding a leopard and carrying a sword and has one snake around his neck and a second around his waist. He is flanked by two servants. On his left is a buffalo with a bird nesting on a snake between its horns and on his right is an elephant illustrating the proverb, "When an elephant steps on trap, no more trap," an obvious statement of the power of the *asafo* company.



29 Detail of ground level of Fig. 24. This group shows one hunter preventing another from firing at a vulture. Vultures are not eaten and it is considered taboo to hunt them, so this sculptural group reminds the *asafo* company that it must adhere to customary law. The two lions in front of this shrine, one of which is seen here between the hunters and the vulture are considered guardians of the shrine or "watch lions."

30 Detail of ground level of Fig. 24. The man holding the scales is an *asafo* captain wearing an amulet-covered warshirt. He is weighing the strength of the company's enemies, and concludes that they are not heavy enough to challenge Kyirem, No. 2 Asafo Company.

31 Detail of ground level of Fig. 24. The equestrian figure in *asafo* imagery invariably prompts the expression, "If the horse is mad [crazy], the rider is not also mad," an affirmation of *asafo* leadership in difficult circumstances.



for his plight, as indicated by their gestures, especially the finger pointing to the eye, which commonly elicits the query, “If you did not hear, did you also not see?” This saying is frequently invoked when someone is not utilizing all their faculties and is almost always directed at rival *asafo* companies. In any case, the four have now accepted the consequences of their lack of foresight and desire for money, although they still argue over who was most responsible for their situation.

Painted on the front wall of the shrine is another foreign design borrowed in this case from the Asante. It is taken from the designs found on their stamped *adinkra* mourning cloth, and the motif is called *Gye Nyame*, usually translated as “Except God” or “Only God.” This originally referred to Nyame, the supreme deity of the Akan world, but is widely used in Christian contexts today, both in Ghana and in the United States and Britain (Willis 1998:114-15).

The final elements of the shrine to be discussed rest on the ground directly in front of the main god (Fig. 32). Included here is Asebu Amanfi’s actual cannon/walking stick. Directly behind the cannon is a third multiheaded god called Akor, who also serves as a receptacle for libations. A fourth god called Sompol is represented by the rudimentary figure to the right of Akor and by the two mounds or *esiw* of the shrine in front of Sompol. In addition to repeating the inscriptions, these are the only elements that remain from the original shrine, along with the nearby enclosure of stones that served as ancient weapons for the Fante.

The dramatic massing of such a variety of images from so many different sources often strikes the casual viewer of this and other of the larger shrines as a somewhat peculiar, if not aberrant statement of African expressive culture. But the vast majority of these motifs are deeply rooted in Fante orature, which includes proverbs, folktales, and historical narratives, along with ancient riddles, jokes, praises, boasts, and insults. And the aggre-

gation of proverbial images is a widespread part of the Fante and larger Akan aesthetic. A chief in full regalia is enveloped with a related accumulation of ornaments, many of which duplicate those found in the realm of the *asafo* (cf. Ross 2002). The different relief carvings on the drums of Akan popular bands may number more than thirty distinct verbal/visual statements, again many shared with *asafo* (cf. Ross 1988). One could also view the accumulation of Akan gold weights (often called “proverb weights”) as part of the same expressive impulse, and of course many of these are repeated by the *asafo* (cf. Menzel 1968). These examples could be multiplied, but in each case we are seeing a telling assemblage of institutionally defining images that collectively embody parts of the Fante world view on the one hand, and fragments of individual identity on the other.

The ongoing renovation, updating, or even complete replacement of *posuban* often complicate our understanding of the history of the form. At the bare minimum, shrines are repainted as needed or for exceptional events. Other renovations may include the addition of new sculptures or painted images. Some of these changes are documented in the shrine inscriptions, as already seen. And some are not. In a rather blatant case of revisionist history at its most problematic, the *posuban* of No. 2 Company, Lowtown (Saltpond), outdoor on 22 September 1921 with subsequent undated additions (Fig. 8), was almost completely replaced by a shrine whose inscription states that it was built in September 1687 (Fig. 33) in an effort to proclaim the preeminence of this company over its rivals.

The identification of the *posuban* with the “fort” or “castle” remains and, as mentioned earlier, many coastal Ghanaians still call these shrines by these English nouns. Since the *asafo* companies have confidently evolved from primarily warrior groups to more civic-minded fraternal organizations, the institution



32 Detail of ground level of Fig. 24. Aside from the inscriptions on the shrine, this area is the only carry over from the original *posuban* (cf. Fig. 15). It features a cluster of four gods: the multiheaded receptacle for libations; the rudimentary torso; and the two mounds or *esiw*. The cannon is considered to be the walking stick of the legendary giant Asebu Amanfi who scattered European ordnance across central Fanteland. The massing of rocks represents the early weapons of the *asafo* company before they acquired firearms.



33 Dentsi, No. 2 Asafo Company Posuban, Lowtown, Saltpond. Designer not identified, built 1992(?). Photographed 1995. This version of No. 2 Company's shrine replaced that seen in Fig. 8. Shrines may be renovated or replaced for a variety of reasons including the desire to upgrade aging structures, modernize imagery, expand the size, replace mutilated or otherwise contested motifs, and to recognize new leaders of the company. All of these may be motivated by competition to outdo rival *asafo* companies.

still maintains considerable influence in most Fante towns, even to the extent of influencing or determining the nomination of chiefs. The renovation of older shrines and the building of new shrines continue and will undoubtedly absorb additional influences from the urban environment. I have not seen a mobile (cell) phone on a shrine yet, but I have little doubt that they will appear in the near future. As a measure of their currency, *asafo posuban* are increasingly being marketed as “tourist destinations,” with signage often pointing out their locations. A postcard and two-fold brochure were produced to advertise the No. 2 Company, Mankesim, shrine (discussed in detail above) by the Ghana Tourist Board. The three most spectacular, but badly damaged, Elmina shrines are included for rehabilitation in the urban renewal efforts of the Elmina Cultural Heritage and Management Programme as evidenced by signs in front of each of those shrines. And tourist guides to West Africa such

as those produced by Lonely Planet and Rough Guide have sidebars in their texts singling out *posuban* as worthy of attention. In particular, the third edition of *Ghana: The Bradt Travel Guide* maps out (both graphically and in text), the location of many shrines in Fanteland and provides a fairly substantial, but flawed, description of their contexts and functions (Briggs 2002:148–9). All of these initiatives promise to increasingly highlight *posuban*, and as one can easily imagine, stimulate further development of the genre.

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Notes

1 This article is a chapter from my phantom dissertation (mostly published) under the supervision of Dr. Herbert M. Cole. As always, I want to thank Skip for leading me to Ghana and for providing numerous opportunities for research and publishing. One could not have a better mentor. I would also like to thank the late Dr. James Boyd Christensen for providing essential contacts in Ghana and for key photographs of shrines in Abandze, Mankesim and Anomabu.

2 The text of this volume is largely a paraphrase of Ross 1979 without the interlinear references, a fact acknowledged by Adler and Barnard (1992:6).

3 A special issue of the *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* (1998), contains a diverse set of ten essays dealing with a variety of *asafo* subjects throughout the Akan area. Christensen 1954 remains one of the best overviews of the Fante and the role of *asafo* in coastal culture. I look forward to the publication of Dr. Kwame Labi's dissertation, "In the Name of Our Company: Art and Conflict among the Fante Asafo of Southern Ghana (Legon: University of Ghana, 2005); although I was not able to read it before writing this article, it is certain to provide considerable insight into the competitive nature of *asafo* rivalries.

4 Spellings of Akan (Twi) words, even place names, vary widely among the Fante themselves. For the sake of consistency within, but not across *asafo* companies, the spellings used in this paper, with a few exceptions, follow those employed in the inscriptions found on the shrines.

5 The best contemporary travel guide to Ghana variously describes these shrines as, "garish," "eyecatching," "startling," "cryptic," "surprising," "exotic," "peculiar," and "improbable" (Briggs 2004:145–9). In the spirit of fairness, I have described these shrines as "ostentatious, almost Disneyesque" (Ross 1980:295).

6 Research in 1974 during my first trip to Ghana concentrated almost exclusively on the *posuban* and consisted of a broad survey of as many extent shrines as could be recorded and photo-documented, with more focused research following in 1975–1981. This year also marked the first of six years of annual visits to Kyirem, No. 2 Company, Mankesim, where I was privileged to witness significant intervals of construction from ritual consecration of the foundations in 1974 to the outdoor-ing of the shrine in 1979. Follow-up visits to thirty-seven of the shrines were made between 1995–2006.

7 It should be pointed out, however, that the tradition of terracotta funerary sculpture was invariably the responsibility of female artists, as was the totality of ceramic arts. The creation of terracotta memorial sculpture seems to have largely ceased around 1970, having been replaced by cement sculpture, which has been almost entirely in the domain of male artists since about 1900.

8 The date for this shrine was erroneously listed as 1888 in Cole and Ross (1977:187, fig. 365) based on interviews with company elders (the date was not visible on the shrine in 1974). The Christensen photograph, however, clearly documents the 1883 date in Roman numerals on the façade of the *posuban*.

9 Various compositions of cement have been utilized in building construction dating back to at least classical times. Portland cement was developed in the early nineteenth century with relatively fixed percentages of lime, silica, alumina, iron oxide, etc., burnt to an ash-like consistency to be subsequently mixed with water and sand, gravel, pebbles, etc. to form concrete. Superior binding properties coupled with a slower drying time gives Port-

land cement sufficient tractability to make it very adaptable for architectural detailing and sculptural modeling. As early as 1877, Henry Reid asserted that Portland cement "penetrates to every accessible quarter of the globe where engineering science demands its aid" (1877:24).

10 While there was a Portuguese "chapel" outside of the walls of Elmina castle in the early sixteenth century (see de Corse 2001:66), the vast majority of church building activity began in the nineteenth century. The Presbyterian church, for example, began artisan training at Christiansborg in 1858 with "workshops concentrated on training joiners, carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons. Africans trained at Christiansborg were much in demand and were found eventually practicing their craft all along the West Coast" (Smith 1966:60).

11 The information that follows is based on an extended taped interview with company elders on 28 September 1979 that included Supis Kojo Kurentsil and Kofi Nunoo, Okyeame Kwesi Aido, Asofohens Kwame Anderson, Kwaku Ocran, Kwame Attah, Kofi Kurankyi, Kojo Aowin, Kwesi Nyarko, Aba Fowa, and Ewara Esi. I would like to thank all of the preceding for many courtesies from 1974–1979. Much of this information is repeated in a two-fold brochure available at the shrine (Baiden n.d.) with some significant variations. I would also like to thank B.A. Firempong and Dr. Yaw Boateng for invaluable help in transcribing the tapes.

12 The British anthropologist Robert S. Rattray wrote that, "the very elusive *otromo* (bongo) ... is, to the Ashanti, the most dangerous animal—not physically but spiritually—in all his forests" (1923:171).

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34 All photographs 1974, except as noted

- a. Ankobea, No. 1, Abrem Agona, 1/21/1921, unk.
- b. Taifo, No. 1, Egyaa, 12/16/1922, unk.
- c. No. 1, Kormantine, 12/24/1924, unk.
- d. Tuafu, No. 1, Anomabu, ca. 1925, unk.
- e. Kyirem, No. 1, Gomoa Tarkwa, 2/22/1926, unk. ren. 1966, 1975, Kojo Nkrakra.
- f. No. 1, Saltpond, 1929, unk. ren. 1972, Kwamina Amoaku, photo 1975.
- g. Kyirem, No. 3, Egyaa, ca. 1935, unk. ren. ca. 1970, Kwamina Amoaku.
- h. Ankobea Asebu, 11/9/1935, unk. photo 1977.
- i. Bantsir, No.1, Esiam, 11/20/1935, unk.
- j. No. 2, Gomoa Legu, 5/1/1936, A.A. Mills, ren. ca. 1970, Kwame Munko.
- k. Dontsin, No. 2, Abura Mpesiduadzi, 2/14/1941, Mr. Mensah.
- l. Dontsin, No. 2, Abura Obohen, ca. 1945, unk., ren. ca. 1970 Kwamina Amoaku.
- m. No. 1, Ekumpuanu, 1948, A.A. Mills, ren. Kwame Munko.
- n. No. 2, Saraafa Beach, 1948, P. Forson.
- o. Dontsin, No. 3, Anomabu, 1948, Kwamina Amoaku, ren. 1966, Kwamina Amoaku.
- p. Enyampfo, No. 7, Elmina, 12/1/1951, unk.
- q. Kyirem, Enyan Denkyira, 12/29/1950, A.A. Mills.
- r. Kyirem, No. 3, Ankaful, 1952, A.A. Mills.
- s. Kyirem, No. 1, Gomoa Debiso, 12/17/1954, Kojo Nkrakra.
- t. name and number not recorded, Gomoa Aada, 10/8/1955, Kojo Nkrakra.
- u. Tuafu, No. 1, Gomoa Abonyi, 3/6/1957, Kojo Nkrakra.
- v. Abrempon, No. 1, Biriwa, 1958, Kwamina Amoaku and Kweku Atta.
- w. Tuafu and Dentsir (merged Cos.), Gomoa Asikuma, 1959, Mr. Asima, photo 1975.
- x. No. 1, Ajumako Esikado, 8/26/1960, Kojo Nkrakra.
- y. Ammferfo OR No. 3, Ajumako Amia, 8/8/1961, Kojo Nkrakra.
- z. Alata, No. 2, Moree, 1961, Kweku Atta(h).
- aa. Anferfo, No. 2, Koforidua, 2/24/1962, Kobina Ampiah, A.K.E. Sam.
- bb. Tuafu, No. 1, Otsew Jukwa, 1963, Kobina Ampiah, Kojo Nkrakra. photo 1995.
- cc. Dentsin, No. 3, A beadze Domenasi, 3/28/64, Kwame Munko.
- dd. Akyemfo, No. 2, Elmina, ca. 1965, unk.
- ee. Appagya, No. 1, Ajumako Owane, 1966, Kwesi Manu.
- ff. No. 2, Ekumfi Ebiram, 10/17/1967, A.A. Mills.
- gg. Kyirem, No. 1, Ekumfi Ebiram, 2/10/1968, Kwame Munko.
- hh. No. 2, Anomabu, ca. 1969, Kwamina Amoaku.
- ii. Abese, No. 5, Elmina, "Gd. Friday 1972," Kwamina Amoaku.
- jj. Omanako Denkyire, Gomoa Kyiren (Chirin), 7/7/1972, Benjamin Artur.
- kk. Nkum, No. 2, Kormantine, 4/22/1973, Kwamina Amoaku.
- ll. Tuafu, No. 1, A beadze Domenasi, 4/13/1974, Kweku Atta(h).
- mm. Kyirem, No. 1, Ekumfi Edumafa, 11/21/1974, A.A. Mills, photo 1975.
- nn. Akomfu Seikiyi, No. 7, Anomabu, 1977, Kwamina Amoaku, photo 1978.





