Articles

The Danish Plantations on the Former Gold Coast Colony of Ghana—Why Did They Fail?

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Introduction

In the first half of the 19th century, Denmark made several attempts to establish plantations in the southeastern part of the Gold Coast (Ghana). The plantations were set up mainly in the vicinity of Accra, close to the main Danish settlement of Christiansborg at Osu (Danish Accra). The main goal was to produce export crops to avoid the costly transportation of slaves from Africa to the Danish West Indies, now the U.S. Virgin Islands, where they were used as plantation workers in the production of sugarcane \((\text{Saccharum officinarum} \ L.)\), tobacco \((\text{Nicotiana tabacum} \ L.)\), and other subtropical and tropical crops.

Plantations were mainly located on the footslopes of the Akwapim Hills about 30 km north of Christiansborg Castle (Fig. 1). The close proximity to Accra and accessibility to the area probably determined the location of the plantations. Also, the area was politically stable after the Ashanti were defeated at the battle of Dodowa in 1824. However, knowledge of soils and climate was rather limited, because no systematic measurements were available. Therefore, soil conditions and climate were not considered in locating the plantations. None of the plantation owners were skilled at farming in Africa or had knowledge of the local environment. It was not possible to develop such knowledge, since most European plantation owners died from diseases such as malaria or yellow fever after only a few years in Africa.

In November 2000, a soil investigation was undertaken by a Ghanaian–Danish–American team to elucidate why the former plantation failed. This article discusses the results of this study, examining the influence of soil and climate on the failure of the plantations.

Physical Conditions at the Plantation Sites

The plantations were located at the foot of the Akwapim Hills facing the Accra Plain \((5^\circ45'N, \ 0^\circ15'W)\). Danish plantations varied in size and were small by comparison with modern-day plantation holdings. For instance, the state plantation

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