




BRIEF REPORT

Urban History in Kumase, Ghana: A Note on Archives

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Abstract

This note seeks to bring awareness to the wide variety of archival documents available for research in urban history in Kumase, Ghana's second city and capital of the historic Asante Kingdom. We draw mainly on our experiences researching the history of Jackson Park, one of colonial Kumase's earliest public parks.

Résumé

Cette note vise à faire connaître la grande variété de documents d'archives disponibles pour la recherche en histoire urbaine à Kumase, la deuxième ville du Ghana et capitale du royaume historique des Asante. Nous nous appuyons principalement sur notre expérience de recherche sur l'histoire du parc Jackson, l'un des premiers parcs publics de la ville coloniale de Kumase.

Keywords: Urban History; Urban Parks; Asante Archives; Tin-Trunk Archives; Ghana

Mots-clés: Histoire urbaine à Kumase; Ghana : Une note sur les archives

In March 2021 we began researching the history of urban parks in Kumase capital of the historic Asante Kingdom in present-day Ghana.¹ This research constituted

¹ Ghana's official government orthography continues to follow anglicized names of towns and institutions as inherited from the colonial era. However, historians have preferred to use correct Asante orthographic conventions where possible. Kumasi thus appears as Kumase and Ashanti is Asante in this paper. We maintain anglicized versions of names of institutions and titles of archival volumes to avoid confusion.

part of the British Academy-funded project Old Parks New Futures.² We aimed to explore the social political and economic uses of Kumase's urban parks. Our case study was the Sir Francis Jackson Park, a recreational ground established by British colonial authorities between 1935 and 1938.³ Our work sought to expand the historiography on urban Asante through three pillars: Getting Votes (Jackson Park's political uses) Getting Noticed (Jackson Park's economic uses) and Getting By (Jackson Park's social uses).⁴ The purpose of this paper is to share with historians of urban Africa some of the methodological insights and possibilities we uncovered researching the history of Jackson Park through two main archival sources: the Kumase branch of Ghana's Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) and the Manhyia Archives.

PRAAD-Kumase, and indeed other regional branches of Ghana's national archival repositories, have been the subject of previous commentaries on historical research in Ghana. These include David Henige's outline of the contents of the Ghana National Archives in Accra, Adam Jones's follow up on Henige's report, James Silver's observations on the Sekondi archives, Gareth Austin's discussion of the contents of PRAAD-Kumase in 1986, and Pino Akotia's note on judicial and legal records in PRAAD's holdings.⁵ More recently, Samuel Ntewusu has added to

² For more information on this project, see the project website: <https://www.oldparksnewfutures.org>.

³ See Manuel J. Manu-Osafo and George M. Bob-Milliar, "Manifestations of Colonial Modernity in Asante: Kumase Public Parks and Town Hall as Symbols of 'Civic Pride', 1901–1960," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 56, no. 3 (2023): 297–327.

⁴ For the purposes of our research on Kumase's parks, we defined "urban" as a large town or city with characteristics such as a significant population, state bureaucratic offices and institutions such as courts and police stations, and important social amenities like hospitals, large markets, and post offices. We also considered physical and infrastructural distinctions that exist between urban, peri-urban, and rural Asante in terms of building design, construction material, and neighborhood layout. This allowed us to narrow our scope to Kumase-proper (Adum, Asem, Asafo, Asante New Town, Bantama, and related neighborhoods). We excluded Kumase's fast-growing peri-urban areas such as Sokoban, Peki, Nsenie, Ahwiaa, Kenyasi, Esreso, and Fumesua. Historically, these areas were considered countryside, although they have in the last decade been rapidly absorbed into the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area. We plan to revisit the history of peri-urban Kumase and other Asante urban centers including Dwaben, Mampon, Bekwai, Obuase, and Konongo. In this paper, however, we go beyond Kumase to survey records at PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives useful for research on Asante's urban history. For the history of urban Kumase, see Wilhelmina Donkoh, "Kumase: Ambience of Urbanity, Tradition and Modernity," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 8 (2004): 167–183; Tony Yeboah, "Phoenix Rise: A History of the Architectural Reconstruction of the Burnt City of Kumase, 1874–1960," *Journal of West African History* 5, no. 1 (2019): 53–82. For distinctions between the urban, peri-urban, and rural in Asante historiography, see the different case studies in Sara Berry, *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power, and the Past in Asante, 1896–1996* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000). See also Tom McCaskie McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850–1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1–23; Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1957* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 12–14.

⁵ David Henige, "The National Archives of Ghana: A Synopsis of Holdings," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1973): 475–486; Adam Jones, "Ghana National Archives: A Supplementary Note," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 385–388; James Silver, "The Sekondi Archives," *History in Africa* 5 (1978): 365–370; Gareth Austin, "The Kumase Branch of the National Archives of Ghana: A Situation Report and Introduction for Prospective Users," *History in Africa* 13 (1986): 383–89; and Pino

these important contributions with his note on conducting social history research in Ghana's national and regional archives.⁶ It is our hope that, like these aforementioned works, this paper will whet the appetite of urban historians to use the rich archival records at PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives. While this essay is intended to guide urban historians, others could also benefit from these records including anthropologists, geographers, cultural heritage, social, economic, and architectural historians.

PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives: An Introduction

What can be said about the physical condition of PRAAD-Kumase? PRAAD-Kumase used to be housed in the old archives building at the Kumase Cultural Centre. Previous commentaries highlighted the difficulties that undermined research work, such as poor lighting in the reading room, a poverty of resources which lowered the morale of the workers, unavailability of photocopy services, and the fast-decaying archival records.⁷ This is currently not the case as the archive has seen major improvements worth mentioning.

In 2016/17 PRAAD-Kumase moved into a newly constructed storeyed building adjacent to the old archives building. PRAAD shares this building with the administrative offices of the construction firm Contracta, as part of the Kejetia Market Redevelopment Project. The Brazilian contractor is expected to hand over the entire building after the second phase of the market project (this looks unlikely as the company has found other work outside the market project). Currently, the ground floor houses PRAAD while the upper floors serve the purposes of the firm. The repository is still in the old building, but the reading room, administrative offices, and washroom facilities are in this new building. Currently the reading room is air conditioned, has fluorescent lighting, and is fitted with high windows, which allow in a lot of natural light. The glass doors and windows are also soundproofed. This shields users of the reading room from the generally raucous environment of the Cultural Centre, Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, and the Kejetia market and lorry station nearby.

PRAAD-Kumase opens at 9:00 A.M. and closes at 4:00 P.M. on weekdays. No document requests can be made after 3:00 P.M. (although, in our experience, requests may be permitted under special circumstances, such as when a researcher has a tight travel schedule). The search room has comfortable chairs and desks, is rarely crowded, and sees on average about six users per day.⁸ Photocopying is available for 50 pesewas per page (US\$0.04). Photographs are

Akotia, "Judicial and Legal Records in the National Archives of Ghana/Accra: An Introduction for Users," *History in Africa* 20 (1993): 361–367.

⁶ Samuel Ntewusu, "Serendipity: Conducting Research on Social History in Ghana's Archives," *History in Africa* 41 (2014): 417–423; see also Samuel Ntewusu, "The Banana and Peanut Archive of Ghana," *History in Africa* 44 (2017): 285–294.

⁷ See Austin, "The Kumase Branch."

⁸ Sara Berry mentions in *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries*, 30n49, that during her research in 1993–94, she "never encountered another academic researcher in the Search Room. All the other patrons were searching for evidence to use in cases then under litigation." This is still the case.

allowed. Previously the charge for taking photographs was 10 cedis per day (US \$0.86). However, this rate was under review at the time of writing (possibly to 50 pesewas per picture). At PRAAD-Accra, one can request for documents to be scanned into searchable PDF files at the cost of 50 pesewas per page. Searchable PDF files are more convenient for scholars, especially when dealing with a large volume of records. PRAAD-Kumase plans to offer this service soon. A searcher's ticket is also required, which is valid for a year. Students and faculty are advised to visit with their ID cards as proof of credentials. At the time of writing, tickets were sold to Ghanaian students for 10 cedis, whereas Ghanaian faculty, international students, and international faculty paid slightly more. The prices for the searcher's ticket are also under review.

The increase in user fees by PRAAD is understandable, given the need to internally generate funds to meet certain day-to-day administrative requirements. Ghana's archives continue to be underresourced and underfunded in proportion to their needs and importance. The negative effect of these seemingly arbitrary fee increases, unfortunately, is that Ghana's university students are no longer able to freely conduct research (many cannot afford the new rates introduced by PRAAD). Conversations are currently ongoing between PRAAD and the History Departments of the University of Ghana and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology for special dispensations to be extended to students.

The Manhyia Archives were established in May 1963 by the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies (IAS) as part of the Institute's Ashanti Research Project. The core documents of this archive come from the holdings of the erstwhile Manhyia Records Office, donated to IAS by Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (1931–70). The Asantehene also bequeathed to the archive the building formerly occupied by his lands department. The archive has occupied this building since 1964. It can be accessed via the main entrance to the Manhyia Palace, right next to the Asantehene's Land Secretariat. The archive is staffed and managed by the IAS. Like PRAAD-Kumase, the Manhyia Archives opens at 9:00 A.M. and closes at 4:00 P.M. on weekdays. Requests from the repository cannot be made after 3:00 P.M. The archive has two reading rooms with a seating capacity of about twenty, although only one is regularly used. It also sees on average about six users per day. Photocopy services are available for 50 pesewas per page. Photography is allowed free of charge. Manhyia too plans to introduce scanning services soon.

A Three-Dimensional Approach to Kumase's Urban Historical Archives

How did the project approach the records of PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives? For our project's investigation, we used a three-dimensional approach in understanding the unfolding of urban Kumase's history. First, we focused on the changes and transformations that have occurred in Kumase's physical spaces. For instance, ARG 1/15/68, titled Recreation Ground, Kumasi, informed us that our research subject, Jackson Park, used to be a Muslim cemetery which was converted into a football field in the mid-1930s. Later changes to the built

environment of the park saw it converted from a football field to state parade grounds, a trade fair site, and, finally, a car park. Tracking transformations in the physical appearance of this location informed us of how the Ghanaian state and other powerful actors such as chiefs impinged on the evolution of physical spaces over time, shaping contestations, negotiations, and eventual resolutions.

Second, we searched for records that could enlighten us on the history of social, political, and economic processes within the borders of Jackson Park. One way of doing this was by looking at the fluid relationships that existed between the entities and individuals who organized social and political events such as football games, state durbars, science exhibitions, beauty pageants, and dinner dances, not just at the park, but also its neighboring edifice, the Prempeh Assembly Hall (built between 1938 and 1939).⁹ This approach was instrumental in understanding the different ways diverse elite groups, their supporters, and ordinary residents related to public spaces in historical Asante society.

Finally, we looked at the histories of users of Jackson Park's physical space. These included: Kumase's Muslim residents who lived in the nearby Yalewa Zongo and used the park for Ramadan prayers; British officials and Asante chiefs who used the park for state durbars and parades; coconut and yam sellers who hawk their foodstuff on the park's outer perimeter; African nationalist politicians who organized party rallies at the park; individuals who rented the park for funerals and weddings; and state institutions like the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, which controls access to the park.¹⁰ Focusing on the actors who use this space helped us to make sense of present-day state-society contestations over the nature, direction, and pace of development in Kumase.¹¹

Indeed, Jackson Park is but a small patch of land in Kumase. Yet, as we came to understand during our research, contestations that unfolded around the park, and the meanings people generated from their historical associations with the park, were representative of larger debates over the status of Kumase as the capital of a primordial state. Kumase is a city shaped by a mishmash of colonial interventions, inhabited by a proud and boisterous indigenous population, and host to an active immigrant population eager to assert themselves as citizens of a postcolonial state under whose power Kumase reluctantly falls.

From the two archival holdings on Jackson Park, we were able to develop an intricate understanding of the sentiments people associate with public spaces around Kumase. We realized that the meanings captured on the archival pages are not dead and forgotten. On the contrary, they are alive and continue to animate everyday actions and negotiations on Kumase's streets despite the passing years. We therefore recognized from our archival research that both the archival past and the ethnographic present reflect the entwined histories of space, human processes within space, and actors living and toiling within these spaces.

⁹ See, for instance, PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG1/15/70, Town Hall—Kumasi, Prempeh Hall; PRAAD-Kumasi, ARG1/1/200, Official Functions and Ceremonies.

¹⁰ The Zongo was the Muslim/northern immigrant quarter of colonial Kumase.

¹¹ See, for example, PRAAD-Kumasi ARG1/1/11, Durbar.

The Thematic Arrangement of Kumase's Archival Records

Based on this three-dimensional approach, what are some of the records at PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives that are useful for urban historical research? The records can be divided into four broad thematic periods: the early colonial period (1896–1920), the middle colonial period (1921–35), the late colonial period (1936–57), and the post-independence era (1957–70).

The early colonial period covers the imposition of colonial rule on Asante by the British in 1896, the subsequent exiling of the Asante monarchy to the Seychelles Islands, and the establishment of a nascent colonial bureaucracy. It was during this period that British officials began to impose fundamental ideas of European development and modernization on the forest environment of Asante, especially Kumase. Admittedly, most records from this period cover political issues as the British tried to make sense of their latest colonial acquisition while instituting pacification policies after the 1900 Yaa Asantewaa War. However, they also catalogue interesting information on the gradual spread of colonial goals such as administrative offices, general infrastructure, and military outstations across Asante.

The middle colonial period saw the reinforcement of the colonial bureaucracy to reflect changing British attitudes towards the Asante from one of suspicion to cautious trust. By this period, colonial authorities had developed a better appreciation of Asante politics and culture and, as such, could engage the Asante with more confidence.¹² The late colonial period witnessed the most changes in urban Asante as the colonial state carried out developmental projects on a large scale through the combined agencies of an established mature bureaucracy and a restored Asante monarchy. The documents on this period offer more wide-ranging perspectives on colonial development and urbanization in Asante compared to the two preceding periods.

The post-independence period comprises records on urban development after the transfer of power from British to Ghanaian hands. The volumes from this period, although large in number, can still not be compared to the scope of documents available on the late colonial period. This is due to a combination of factors such as the thirty-year rule and the general decline of the Ghanaian state bureaucracy after independence, which resulted in a famine of record supply to the archives.¹³ We terminate our archival research in 1970 because of the paucity of records from the 1970s onwards. Even though the thirty-year rule means documents from the 1970s

¹² This change in British attitudes could be partly attributed to R. S. Rattray's appointment as colonial anthropologist in July 1921. Rattray's research under the umbrella of the Anthropological Department of Asante certainly influenced official thinking in the 1920s and 30s when colonial policies on urban development started to congeal. The relevant folder on Rattray is ARG 1/21/1/54. The folder on the anthropological department (ARG 1/8/1/7) is sadly empty with the contents either misplaced, lost, or destroyed.

¹³ In 1996, PRAAD-Kumase was completely recatalogued by the then archivist, Thomas Aning and his staff. As Gareth Austin notes in his 2005 book, *Labour, Land and Capital*, this process helped to systematically organize the records. However, in the process many documents were "weeded out," leading to a reduction in PRAAD-Kumase's holdings, see Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital*, 460n59.

and 1980s should be released, in practice only a few documents are available due to administrative bottlenecks and bureaucratic delays.¹⁴

PRAAD-Kumase's records in particular display an impressive geographical range. They cover not just Kumase the Asante capital, but other urban areas in Asante such as Obuase, Bekwai, Konongo, Dwaben, and Mampon. Until the creation of the Brong Ahafo region, Asante covered a large area which, historically, included parts of the upper Trans-Volta Togoland and the Gold Coast's Eastern and Western Provinces. As a result, many records are available on areas outside Asante-proper. These include Sunyani, New Dwaben, Kwahu, Ketekrakyie, Banda, Sefwi, Wenchi, Gyaman, Wam, Dormaa, and even Tamale and parts of the Gold Coast's Northern Territories.¹⁵

Useful Records for Urban Historical Research at PRAAD-Kumase

The ARG (Ashanti Records Group) 1/33 series contain records on natural disasters and general accidents from 1906 to 1951. Scholars interested in urban administration would find the ARG 1/26/1–3 series particularly useful. They hold documents on rules, regulations, and ordinances. For records on urban planning, street naming, demolitions and compensations, and the establishment of markets, see the files under ARG 1/7/1/30, ARG 1/7/1/38, ARG 1/7/1/39, ARG 1/7/1/40, and ARG 1/7/1/46. The ARG 1/17 series also hold detailed records on urban development across Asante. They especially focus on the layout plans of Asante's smaller towns and villages.

Information on public health topics such as disease prevention and control, community sanitation, mental asylums, and hospitals generally can be found under the ARG 1/14 series. The records of the Kumasi Public Health Board can be found under the ARG 1/14/5–7 series.¹⁶ Records on the introduction of electrification and lighting in early colonial Asante can be found under the ARG 1/15 series. The development of road transportation falls under ARG 1/15/1. ARG 1/15/2 covers the expansion of railways in Asante.

Records on Kumase's water supply can be found under the ARG 1/15/5 series.¹⁷ For public recreational and durbar grounds, including Kumase's town hall, rifle range, golf course, and nongovernmental associations and clubs, see the ARG 1/10 series. This series has volumes on associations such as the Red Cross

¹⁴ This is an issue Ntewusu discusses in more detail in "Serendipity" and "The Banana."

¹⁵ The 1996 recataloguing noted above also included labeling files that had previously not been catalogued. This process has largely been completed. In the process colonial court records from the Northern Region were found in Kumase's holdings. Unfortunately, there is no timeline yet for returning them to PRAAD-Tamale, where they should be. Neither can researchers access these records as they are not catalogued.

¹⁶ The Kumasi Public Health Board was the administrative body charged by the colonial government with overseeing development in Kumase. It comprised colonial officials, chiefs, and representatives of business interests. The board, through several administrative changes, eventually became today's Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly.

¹⁷ For the historical context of the development of water supply in Kumase, see Tom McCaskie McCaskie, "Water Wars' in Kumasi, Ghana," in *African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Spaces*, ed. Frances Locatelli and Paul Nugent (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 135–155.

(health), Goldsmiths Association (business), and Boys Scouts (general interest). In addition to these records, ARG 1/34 also contains files on sporting activities such as tennis and golf. Cemeteries (exhumations and burials) are covered by ARG 1/2/24/22 and ARG 1/2/25/1. The ARG 1/35 series offers another set of comprehensive records on cemeteries and related matters across Asante.¹⁸

On the Asante Confederacy Council (restored by the colonial government in 1935), see the ARG 1/2/26 series. The series contains the minutes, rulings, and bylaws of the restored Asante Confederacy on urban planning and development. These records are essential to Asante's urban historiography because the council worked closely with the colonial government to oversee urban development.¹⁹ Due to indirect rule after 1935, many of the laws and ordinances that governed urban areas were distilled through the agency of chiefs. These records are thus important in understanding how colonial law operated in a traditional society still undergoing change. Corresponding folders from the Manhyia Archives on the Confederacy Council are noted below.

For information on government departments and institutions, see the ARG 1/8/1 series. It contains information on departments such as Geological Survey, Lands, Veterinary, Town and Country Planning, Public Works, and Labour. Likewise, the ARG 1/18 series covers government committees such as the Sanitary Committee of the early colonial period. ARG 1/19 contains further records in the form of minutes of meetings of various committees, but from the middle to late colonial period. ARG 1/20 contains reports by government commissions, committees, and observers. ARG 1/20/1 comprises further government reports. ARG 1/20/2 holds reports from the district level. Intelligence reports can be found under the ARG 1/20/8 series. For police, prison, and security matters in general, see the ARG 1/9/1 series.

Records of the District Commissioner for Kumase's office are contained in the ARG 6 class. They deal with issues emanating from and principally concerning the Kumase urban area. These records start in 1919 and terminate in 1966. On the demolition of houses, see ARG 6/1/2 and ARG 6/1/24. For records on road development, see ARG 6/1/6–7 and ARG 6/1/19. On general development in the Kumase area, see ARG 6/15. These include records on roads, railways, and industrial development. ARG 6/1/8 details the provision of finance for chiefs to engage in town and village improvements.

On Kumase's Royal Mausoleums, see ARG 6/1/11.²⁰ For general maps and cartography, see the files under ARG 6/1/45. On rent control and other related

¹⁸ A recent work which utilizes such records, but for Accra, is Sarah Balakrishnan's "Building the Ancestral Public: Cemeteries and the Necropolitics of Property in Colonial Ghana," *Journal of Social History* 56, no. 1 (2022): 89–113.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Berry, *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries*, 1–34, 63–102; McCaskie, *Asante Identities*, 212–231.

²⁰ The Bantama Mausoleum was the final resting place for Asante's rulers before British troops destroyed it in 1896. It was reconstructed and recommissioned by Asantehene Prempeh I in 1931. Its central geographical location, relevance to the rituals of the Asante state, and peculiar material history places it at the center of Asante cultural heritage. On the historical importance of the Mausoleum, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Christianity, Modernity and the Weight of Tradition in the Life of 'Asantehene' Agyeman Prempeh I, c. 1888–1931," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69, no. 2 (1999): 302–303.

matters, see ARG 6/1/57. Files on health, sanitation, hospitals, and other related issues can be found in the ARG 6/1/69 volumes. Records on Kumase's slaughterhouses can be found under ARG 6/1/124. ARG 6/14 offer further records on disease control, sanitation, and medical services in general. Records on government departments and institutions fall under the ARG 6/8 series. These span the period between 1924 and 1966. They cover waterworks, museums, lands department, and posts and telegraphs.

Kumase's associations and clubs fall under the ARG 6/10 series. These include folders on letter writers, the rifle club, and senior civil servants. Records on the expansion of local government administration can be found in the ARG 6/11 series. District and municipal council minutes can be found here. ARG 6/18–19 has further records on committees and commissions, especially from the district and local government levels. On schools and education matters in general, see ARG 6/13. On population census and related matters, see ARG 6/16. Further records on town and country planning and layouts can be found under ARG 6/17. On matters relating to elections, see ARG 6/24.

The records under the ARG 2 class (records of the Ashanti Regional Administration Office) deal with issues concerning Asante as a whole, not just Kumase. The files begin in the late colonial period (especially the late 1940s); however, the bulk emanate from the postindependence era up to 1979. The ARG 2/1 series contains records on topics of general interest such as public ceremonies in Asante, funerals, housing loans schemes, the Kumase trade fair, independence anniversary celebrations, hotels, and the development of Lake Bosumtwi as a tourist attraction.

ARG 2/3/1 covers land boundary disputes. ARG 2/3/3 holds records on stool lands in Asante. Records on forest reserves in Asante can be found under the ARG 2/4 series. On courts and judicial matters, see the ARG 2/6/1–6 series. The ARG 2/8 series has files on state agencies such as the meteorological department, post office, social welfare, the zoological garden, and the workers brigade. On military lands, soldiers' quarters and accommodation in Kumase, and other military-related issues in Asante, see the ARG 2/9/1 series. Records on the police can be found in ARG 2/9/2.

For records on clubs and associations in Asante, see the ARG 2/10 series. These include files on the Ashanti Youth Association, Taxi Drivers Association, Butchers Association, Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association, Charcoal Sellers Association, Playing Cards Association, and the Young Women's Christian Association.²¹ The ARG 2/10/1–4 series hold further records on clubs and unions. These include societies and clubs such as the Asante Kotoko Society, the Child Care Society, Ashanti Herbalists Union, and the Ghana Motor Union. ARG 2/10/3/22 is a volume on iced-kenkey and koko sellers, vendors of breakfast and lunch foods in many of Ghana's postcolonial urban centers.

For bylaws, see the ARG 2/11/3 series. These cover issues such as local authorities, markets, and lorry parks. On matters relating to the development

²¹ Abena Osseo-Asare provides important insights into the organization of the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healing Association in "Writing Medical Authority: The Rise of Literate Healers in Ghana, 1930–70," *Journal of African History* 57, no. 1 (2016): 69–91.

of education, see the ARG 2/13 series. ARG 2/13/1–2 cover the establishment of elementary and secondary schools in Asante, ten-year development plans, the Bureau of Ghana Languages, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. ARG 2/14 covers health and sanitation matters. These include smallpox, family planning, infectious disease control, and the Ghana leprosarium. ARG 2/14/1 holds volumes on health institutions such as the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital and the Mental Hospital. ARG 2/14/2 series contains medical reports on Kumase from 1954 to 1964.

Records on industrial and developmental projects can be found under the ARG 2/15/1 series. The series comprises records on the expansion of Asante's electricity grid, radio communications, and the construction of a swimming pool for Kumase. ARG 2/15/2 holds records on government buildings, bungalows, and estates such as the Asawase and TUC estate projects. Records on water supply projects in Kumase and other Asante towns can be found under ARG 2/15/3.

For government development plans and committees for Asante, see the ARG 2/15/7–9 series. The ARG 2/18 series hold further documents on government committees and commissions. On population and census matters, see ARG 2/16. ARG 2/17 holds volumes on town and village layouts. The ARG 2/19–21 series contain records on intelligence, committee minutes of meeting, departmental and district monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, as well as personnel matters. On matters of religion, see the ARG 2/30 series. For security schemes and structures, see the ARG 2/39 series.

Useful Records for Urban Historical Research at the Manhyia Archives

Most of Manhyia's holdings come from the records of the Kumasi Traditional Council (MAG 1 series) and the Asanteman Council (MAG 21 series).²² All Asante rulers have had close working relationships with the national government. As a result, one can also find in the holdings government publications, bulletins, and gazettes. MAG 22/5 is a list of records on executive instruments. MAG 22/7 contains gazettes from 1928 to 1958. You can also find the private letters of the last three Asantehene before the incumbent: Prempeh I (1888–1931), Prempeh II (1931–70), and Opoku Ware II (1970–99) in the MAG 2 series. These letters provide inner perspectives from the Asante ruling lineage on political and social matters.

One of the richly documented themes at Manhyia is land ownership and administration in both the Kumase urban area and Asante-at-large. One must exercise extreme analytical caution when perusing the documents on land ownership. Why? Due to the ebb and flow of power between Kumase office-holders and leaders outside of Kumase in Asante's long history, Kumase office-holders lay claim to many tracts of land beyond the traditional boundaries of the Kumase state. However, colonial rule reversed and erased many of the precolonial agreements and contracts that validated these claims and regulated land

²² The former is an assembly of Kumase chiefs while the latter includes chiefs from the other Asante states.

ownership in general.²³ Many of the archived testimonies on land ownership come from the colonial period, although the records also contain documented cases up to the 1980s. They thus contain blends of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial understandings of Asante land law. We therefore advise cautious reading and interpretation of these records. The MAG 1 series contains the records of the Kumasi Traditional Council, which shed light on these issues. On land matters specifically, see the MAG 1/6 series. This covers concessions, boundary disputes, allocation of residential plots, and leases.

Issues relating to colonial Kumase's various associations and societies can be found under MAG 1/11. These records sometimes overlap with corresponding titles from PRAAD-Kumase highlighted above. Their importance, however, lies in how they illuminate both the dichotomies and similarities in reactions by colonial officials and Asante chiefs to social and political problems. MAG 1/18 contains various speeches from 1928 to 1941. MAG 19–20 hold press releases and newspapers from the colonial period up to 1976.

The records of the Asantehene's courts can be found in the form of dockets and record books under MAG 9–10. They contain thousands of court cases. These cases offer a breathtaking range of case studies on matters such as land disputes, adultery, inheritance, defamation, and trespassing. The Kumase traditional area also had divisional (clan) courts presided over by divisional chiefs. Every Asante served the Asantehene through their respective clan. The clan courts therefore provided a platform for adjudicating cases at the local level. Eight divisional courts are represented in the archival holdings stretching from 1924 to 1960. These are Krontire (MAG 13/1/1), Akwamu (MAG 14/1/1, MAG 14/2/1), Adonten (MAG 15/1/1), Kyidom (MAG 16/1/1, MAG 16/2/1), Gyaase (MAG 17/1/1, MAG 17/2/1), Benkum (MAG 18/1/1), Oyoko (MAG 19/1/1, MAG 19/2/1), and Ankobia (MAG 20/1/1).

Despite the best efforts of the archivists at both PRAAD-Kumase and Manhyia, we encountered problems during our research such as misplaced documents, unavailable files, fragile records, and mislabelled catalogue numbers.²⁴ Nevertheless, the wealth of data available promises to bear fruit for researchers interested in urban history and related fields.

Tin-Trunk Archives in Kumase

We cannot finish our discussion without reference to a third archival source we benefited from: the 'tin-trunk' archives of elderly Asante who lived through

²³ On these matters in Asante history, see Tom McCaskie McCaskie, "Ahyiamu – 'A Place of Meeting': An Essay on Process and Event in the History of the Asante State," *Journal of African History* 25, no. 2 (1984): 169–188.

²⁴ A particularly sad instance is the ARG 1/2/30/2 series titled Matters Relating to Marriages and Adultery. All 16 volumes under this series were lost to termite infestation and had to be destroyed. The case titles recorded in the search book range from as early as 1907 to as late as 1949. Researchers interested in marriage, adultery, prostitution, and sexual relations would have benefited from the diversity of case studies this series contained. While it is still possible to explore these topics, one would have to plough through individual court cases heard before the Asantehene's courts (Manhyia Archives) and the civil courts (PRAAD-Kumase).

colonial rule, and whom we were privileged to interview.²⁵ For instance, Apanyahemaa Nana Durowaa is the centenarian wife of Asantehene Prempeh II. Because of her position at the center of the Asantehene's court, she was able to accumulate a great volume of photographs, posters, and magazines, which she generously allowed us to peruse while offering insightful commentary on some of the events and people captured. These included the opening ceremony of the United Africa Company's Kumase headquarters (Unicorn House), the famous wooden bridge over Kumase's Railway Station, and various processions of chiefs and festivals in Kumase. Photographs from her tin-trunk archives provided us with invaluable immersive views of important locations around colonial Asante. This is important because Jackson Park does not exist in a vacuum. On the contrary, its history has always been closely tied to other monuments, locations, and events around Kumase and Asante.

The challenge with tin-trunk archives during our research was that many of our interlocutors were reluctant to open to academic research and document their private archives. This is not a new development in Asante history. Kwame Arhin and Tom McCaskie repeatedly failed to convince Baffour Osei Akoto, the Asantehene's famous linguist, to donate some of his private papers to the Manhyia Archives. Asante elders are fully cognizant of the political ramifications and pitfalls of historical construction and interpretation. As Arhin put it, elders "had to think of their posthumous reputations and did not want 'spies' fossicking about in their papers."²⁶ Akoto himself confirmed this: "I don't want people building themselves up by tearing me down. If I make my papers public I will certainly lose something."²⁷ This partially accounts for why we made no headway in our bid for access to the archives of the *Ashanti Pioneer*, colonial Asante's foremost newspaper, founded by John and Nancy Tsiboe.²⁸ Other reasons include disputes in the Tsiboe family concerning who has oversight of the archives and the improper preservation of the newspaper's back copies. Nevertheless, the tin-trunk archives we had access to gave us invaluable sparks of imagination with which to rethink colonial Asante and expand the horizons of our research possibilities.

Conclusion

To sum up, the wide variety of documents available at PRAAD-Kumase and the Manhyia Archives offer budding historians and indeed university students in various disciplines topics to investigate by gleaning through the archival

²⁵ On tin-trunk archives, see Karin Barber, ed., *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Rose Miyonga, "'We Kept Them to Remember': Tin Trunk Archives and the Emotional History of the Mau Mau War," *History Workshop Journal*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbad010>.

²⁶ Tom McCaskie McCaskie, "Asante History: A Personal Impression of Forty Years," *Ghana Studies* 10 (2007): 157.

²⁷ McCaskie, "Asante History."

²⁸ On the *Ashanti Pioneer*, see Jarvis Hargrove, "Ashanti Pioneer: Coverage of Growing Political Developments in the Gold Coast, 1946–1949," *Journal of West African History* 5, no. 2 (2019): 29–56.

materials. Sometimes, students have difficulty identifying topics for their research projects. Meanwhile, the archives offer limitless possibilities which can be adapted not just for historical research but for addressing contemporary issues. Even administrators and scholars from various fields of endeavor can find material from the past with which to understand the roots of Ghana's developmental journey and find foresight to continue the course. The stagnation of Ghana's development is frequently attributed to the fact that people do not know the past. The archives offer great insights on long-term trends and better ways to think about development in Ghana.

Unfortunately, the relative absence of "conventional" archives in Africa due to the challenges of the postcolonial state can sometimes hamper historical research.²⁹ Our experience was not different as we struggled on many occasions to piece together postindependence archival sources on our research subject, the Sir Francis Jackson Park. The three-dimensional approach combining the separate but interlinked histories of space, human processes within space, and users of space aided us to pry into some of postcolonial Asante's veiled histories. As indicated above, our efforts were also greatly augmented by tin-trunk archives. In that regard, historians studying urban spaces which lack "conventional archives" would have to design innovative methodologies that meet the unique demands of their research subjects.

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²⁹ This issue has been endlessly discussed in African history, see for instance: Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, "The Archival Afterlives of Prison Officers in Idi Amin's Uganda," *History in Africa* 25 (2018): 245–274; Samuel Daly, "Archival Research in Africa," *African Affairs* 116, no. 463 (2017): 311–320; and Edgar Taylor et al., "Archives of Idi Amin," *History in Africa* 48 (2021): 413–427.

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