

Constructive Cultures and Social Justice: Histories and Futures of Earthen Architecture- Kumasi, Ghana



A photograph of a traditional building with a thatched roof and a decorative facade. The facade features a large circular motif and two figures. The word "Acknowledgments" is overlaid on the image in a bold, black font, with a horizontal line underneath it.

Acknowledgments

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**Asante Traditional
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Adu Poku
Kwaku Agyepong
Twusmasi Ampofo
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Nana Karikari
Opanin Kwabena Owusu
Opanin Kwame Assuming
Asare Bediako Dickson



Ejisu-Besease | Tano Yaw

Nana Sabi Antwi III
Kwadwo Oheme
Daakyi Asiedu
Nana Daakyi Asamoah
Nana Asi Sarpong
Nana Kwabena Boakye
Kwame Peprah



Adako Jachie | Kwasi Sima

Nana Osei Bosompem III
Opanim Agyemang Duah
Nana Nyarko
Hon. Baffour
Nana Akosuah
Esther Kyei
Asiamah Kyei

Community Interviewees

Nana Ama Bonsu	Diana Antwiwaa
Phillipa Dansowaah	Esther Kye
Adwoa Fremah	Joyce Bookye
Solomon	Ama Atta
Boateng Thomas	Confort Nkansah
Nana Baama	Esther Owuswaa
Nana Techimaa	Fouzia Ayew
Kwakyee Dominic	Kwasi Lotto
Anokye waa	Eric William
Nana Akosua	Emmanuel
Kwaku Boateng	Prem Peh Kwame
Akosua Mary	Maame Agyerwaa
Lily Asare	Foon Elijah
Patricia Donkoh	Bayern Dsoramesh Dylan
Prince Asante	



Patakro | Adansi Bonsam

Nana Okyere Tibo Darko
Nana Kuti Asaadu
Nana Owusu
Osei Agyemang Sylvester
Paul Yaw Duku
Osei Agyemang Decosta
Oppong Thomas
Maxwell Owusu Frimpong
Fordjour Danelson
Opoku Stephen
Kofi Poku
Emmanuel Amponsah
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Kwabena Peprah
Kwadwo Anokye
Owusu Akyaw
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Sébastien Moriset

Community Consortium

Gina Haney

A photograph of a traditional earthen building with a thatched roof. The building features decorative carvings on its facade, including a central figure and two smaller figures. The text "Earthen Architecture and Social Justice: Context Analysis" is overlaid on the image, with a horizontal orange line below it.

Earthen Architecture and Social Justice: Context Analysis

Earthen Architecture Origin Stories



Ziggurat of Ur in Iraq

Image by Rasool Ali

Creating Social Identities and Collective Know-How



Women Replastering Adobe Walls In New Mexico
Image by Russell Lee 1940, The Library of Congress

Colonizing Narratives



Huaca Huantille, Peru

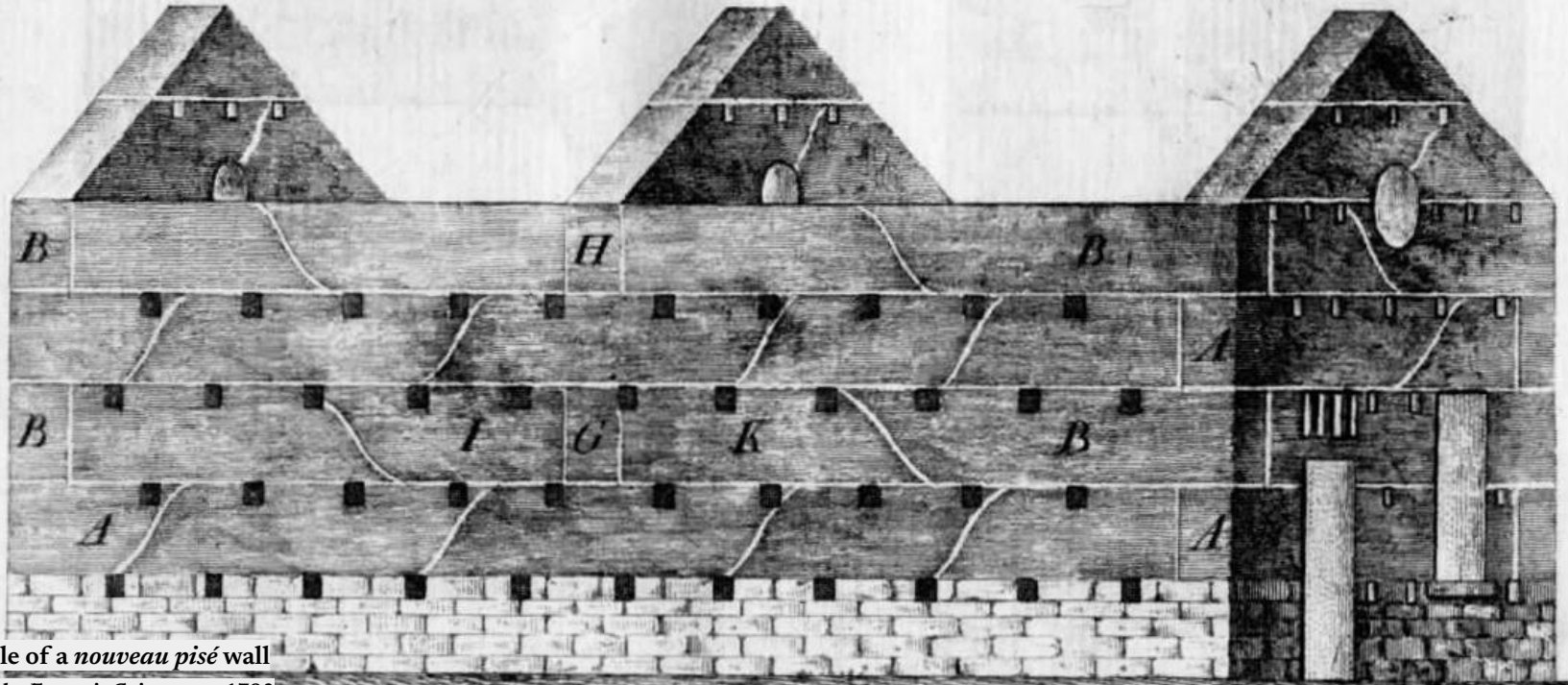
Image by Jose Morales



Rammed Earth in Joya del Ceron, El Salvador

Image by Youngrobv

The Industrial Revolution and the “Modernization” of Earth



Example of a *nouveau pisé* wall
Drawing by François Cointeraux, 1793

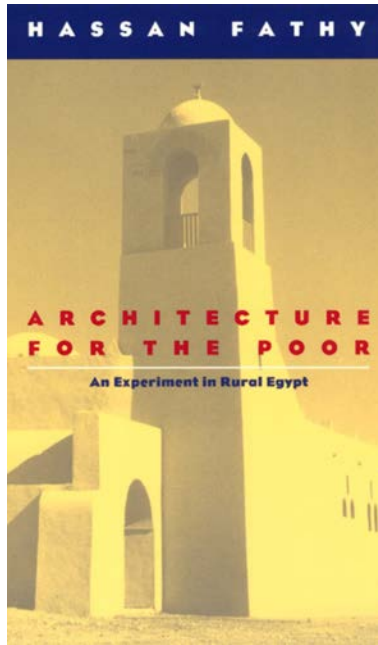
Social Discredit of Earth through Western Perspectives



Rammed earth construction near Birmingham, AL

Image by Thomas Hibben, 1937

Raw Earth and Poverty



Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor*
Published in 1969



House built of clay in Prädikow, Germany
Built ca. 1950

Raw Earth and Terminology

Strength and erosion resistance of mudbrick as an alternative local material for Australia's Northern Territory remote housing

Beyond the mud hut: the return of raw-earth architecture

The extraordinary benefits of a house made of mud

THE FUTURE OF MUD

A Senegalese architecture firm is championing a lower-tech material than concrete to help cities prepare for climate change.

The sustainable cities made from mud

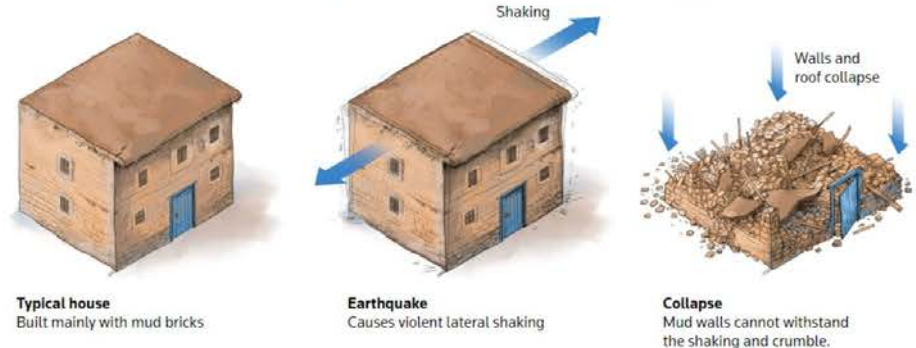
Disaster-Related Misconceptions

After Morocco Quake, Earthen Buildings Come Under Scrutiny

Recent disasters have raised questions about the seismic vulnerability of mud-brick and rammed earth construction. Can this traditional building style be made safer?

Morocco mud brick housing makes hunt for earthquake survivors harder

90% of the buildings in the city were destroyed. However, many people believe this was largely due to the poor build quality of the homes and structures as opposed to just strong ground shaking. At the time of the earthquake, most of the buildings were of adobe construction and not capable of sustaining earthquake



Disaster-Related Misconceptions



Damages on Tinmen Mosque after the Morocco 2023 earthquake

Image by Lucyin, 2023

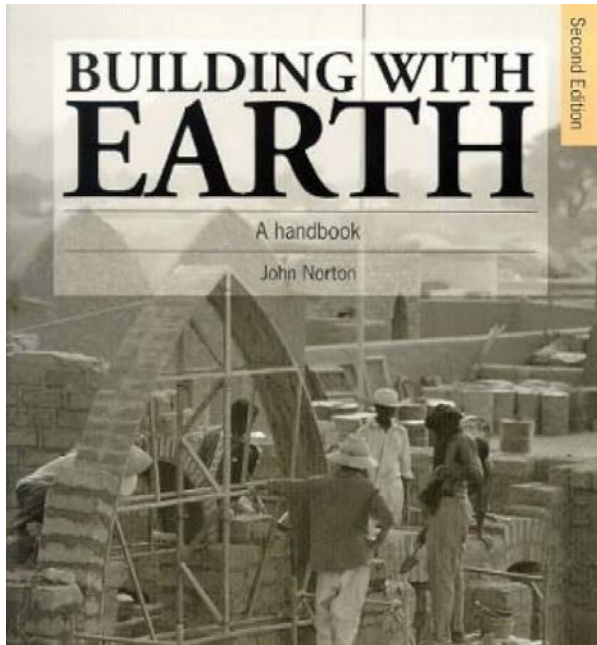
Earth as a Sustainable Building Material

A photograph of an adobe house in Santa Fe, NM. The house features thick, textured walls made of earth. A window with a white frame is visible in the foreground. The background shows a dirt area, another building, and a cloudy sky. The overall scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

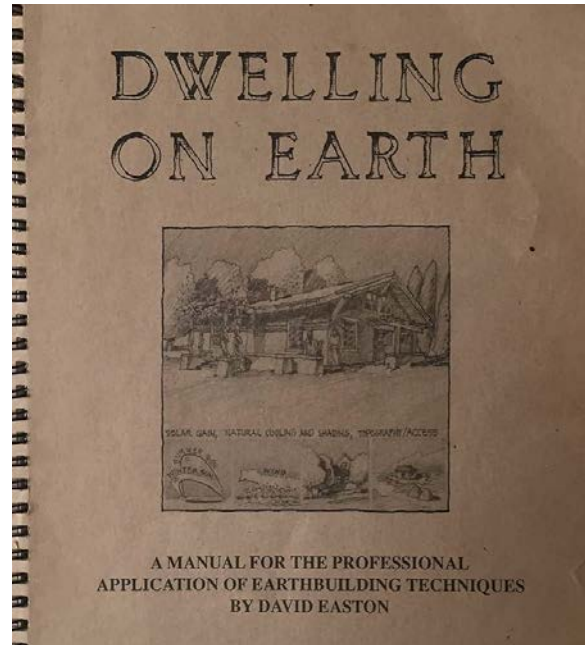
An adobe house in Santa Fe, NM

Image from U.S. NARA, 1974

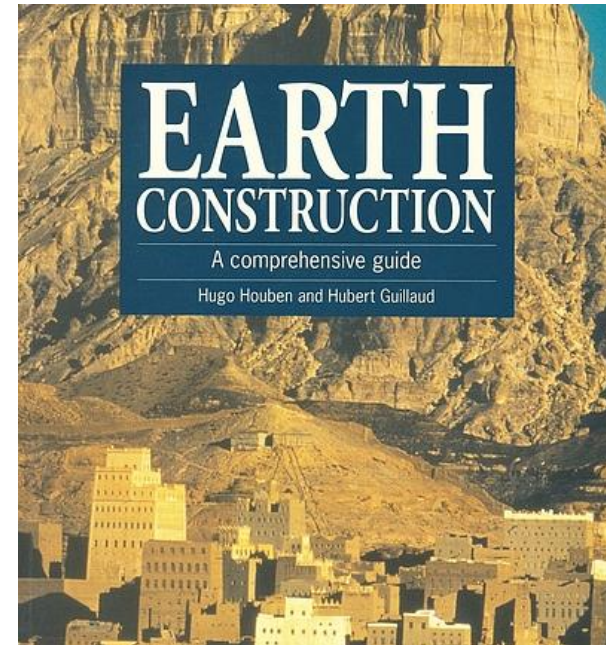
Building a Body of Literature



Building with Earth: A Handbook
Published 1986



Dwelling on Earth: A Manual
Published 1991



Earth Construction: A Comprehensive Guide
Published 1989

Techno-Scientific Structuring of Knowledge

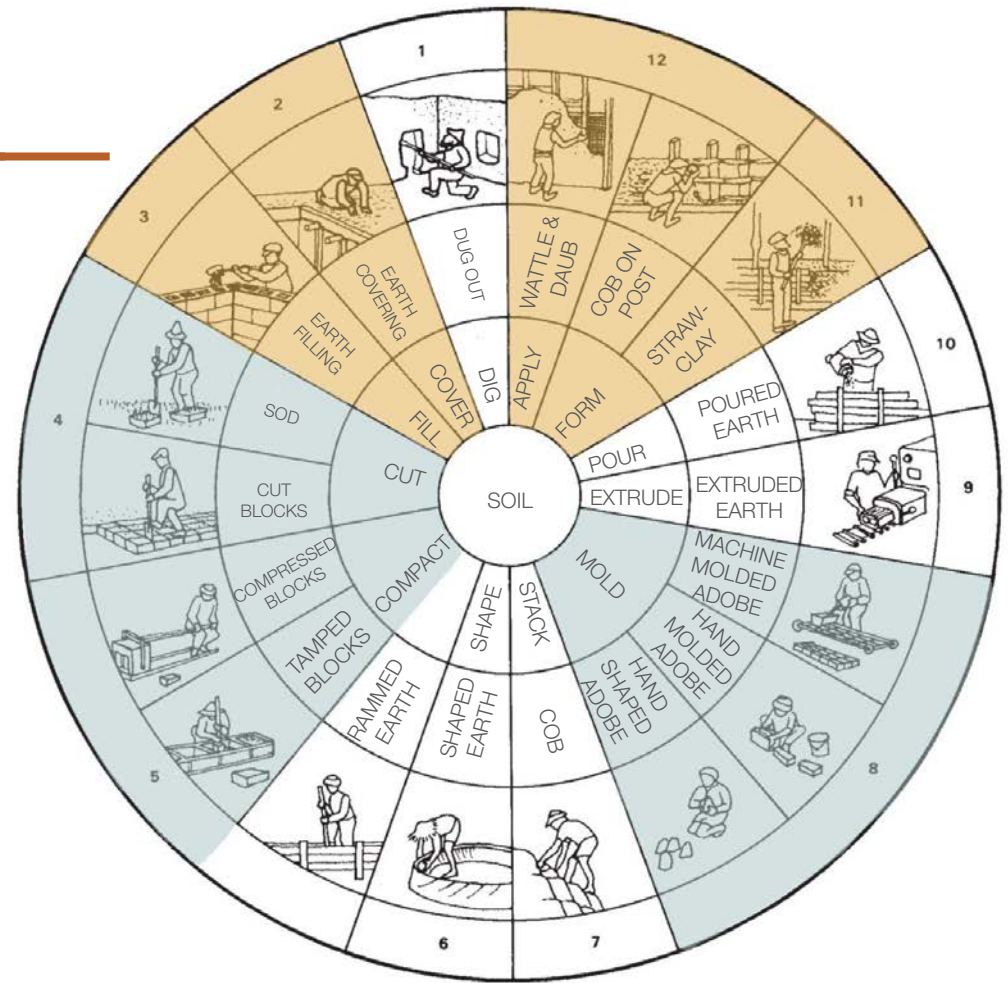


Chart of Simplified Earthen Construction Typologies

Image by CRAterre, modified by Eleanor Phetteplace

Advancing Study & Professional Practice



PAT Course

Image sourced from Getty Conservation Institute



UNESCO Chair Institutions

UNESCO Chair

Promoting Material Training and Accessibility



Construction of a rammed earth wall in Perú

Image by JYB Devot, 2013

Transferring Traditional Knowledge



Repairs at Patakro

Image by Francis Kwarayire

A photograph of a traditional Asante building. The building features a thick, thatched roof made of dried grass or straw. The walls are made of light-colored mud or plaster, with a prominent decorative frieze in the center. This frieze is carved into the wall and depicts a figure, possibly a deity or a historical figure, surrounded by intricate patterns. Below the frieze, there are several large, rectangular blocks of reddish-brown material, likely wood or stone, which are also intricately carved with swirling patterns. To the right of the building, there is a dark doorway leading into the interior. The ground in front of the building is dry and dusty. The sky above is blue with some white clouds.

Asante Traditional Buildings: Case Study

Tradition and Use



Objects Preserved in Fetish Room at Besease

Image by Cassidy Kraft

Physical Description & Construction Methods



Exposed Wall at Adako-Jachie

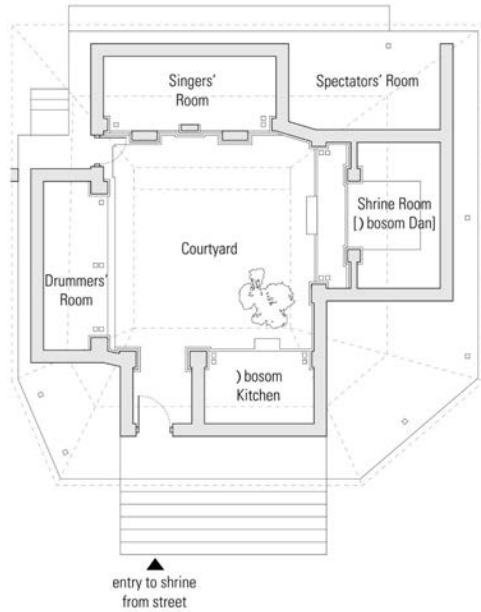
Image by Daniela Martinez



Workers at Adako-Jachie

Image by Studio Group

Layout and Significance



Floor plan at Bodwease

Survey and Condition Assessment by WMF and GMMB.
January 2014



Drummer's room at Patakro

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

Spirituality Represented in Decorative Forms

Examples of Adinkra:

Images by Roberto E. Villasante



Patakro



Patakro



Besease



Adako-Jachie

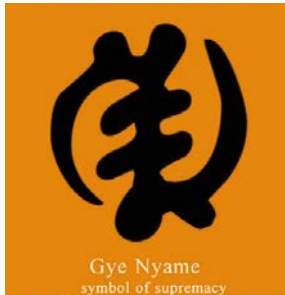


Edwenase

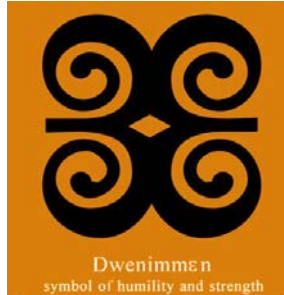
Examples of Symbols and Their Meanings:



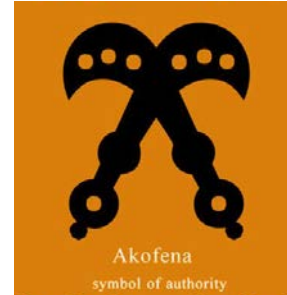
Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu
symbol of unity in diversity



Gye Nyame
symbol of supremacy



Dwenimmen
symbol of humility and strength



Akofena
symbol of authority



ɔsrane ne nsoromma
symbol of faithfulness

Influencing Factors

Colonization of Resources &
Markets

Colonization of People &
Social Change

Asante Culture & Spirituality,
and Religion

Heritage Policy

Spatial Transformation

Colonization of Resources and Markets



Forester and Workers Felling Tree

Image sourced from UK National Archives, Kew, England



Buying European Goods at Market

Image sourced from UK National Archives, Kew, England

British Campaigns in Ashanti



Battles & Destruction in Search of Golden Stool

Battles of the Nineteenth Century, 1901



General Wilcocks and Staff at Fort in Kumasi

Image by David Martineau Haylings, 1900

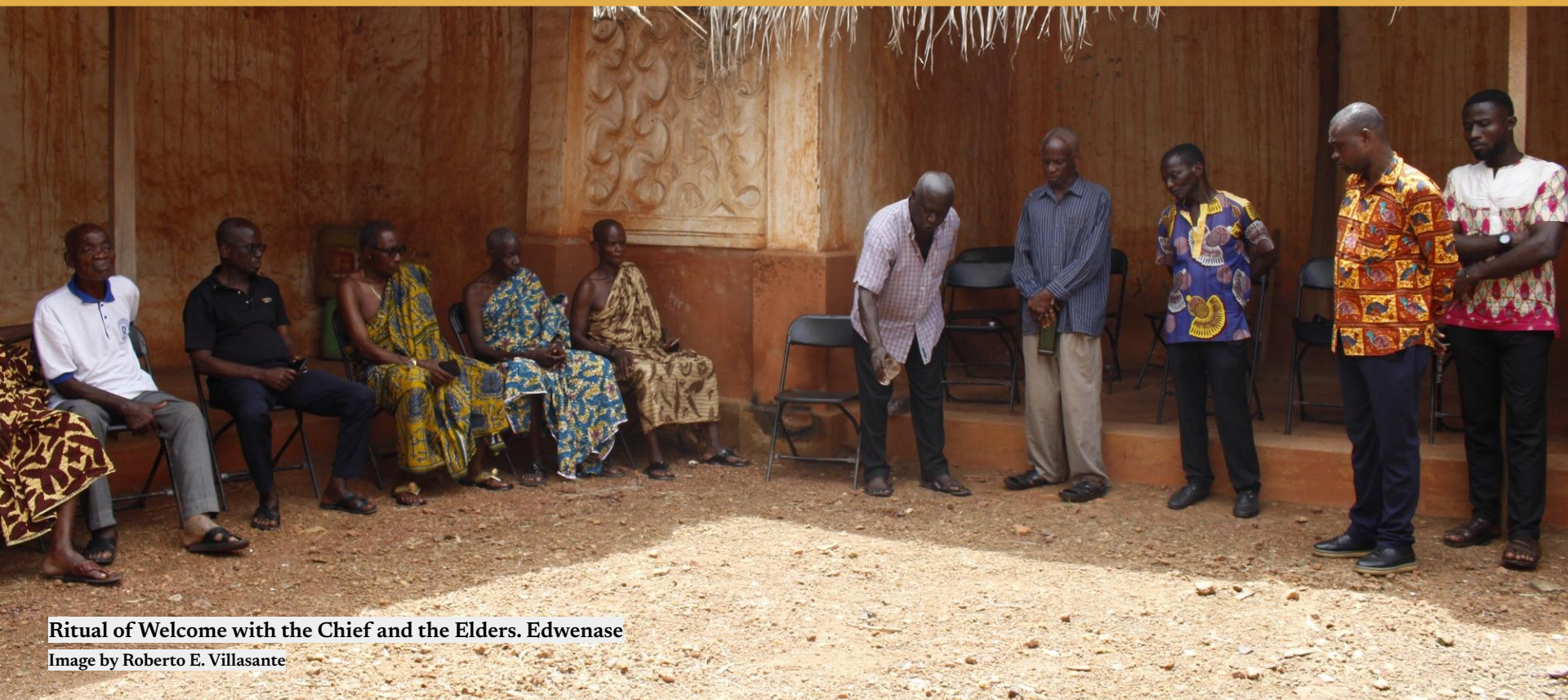
Religious Imposition



Colonial Soldiers and Missionaries in Ashanti

Image sourced from Basel Mission Archives, 20th Century

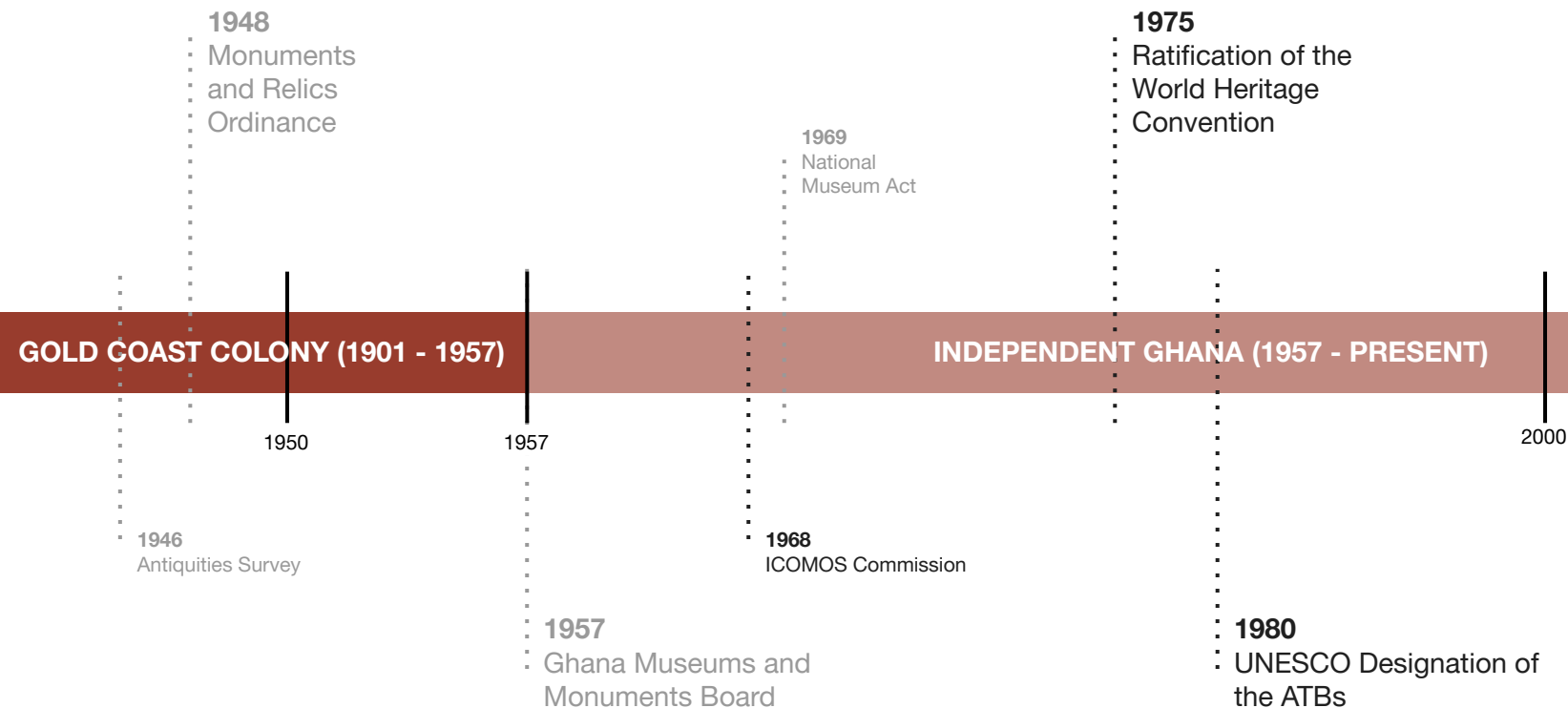
Asante Culture and Spirituality, and Religion



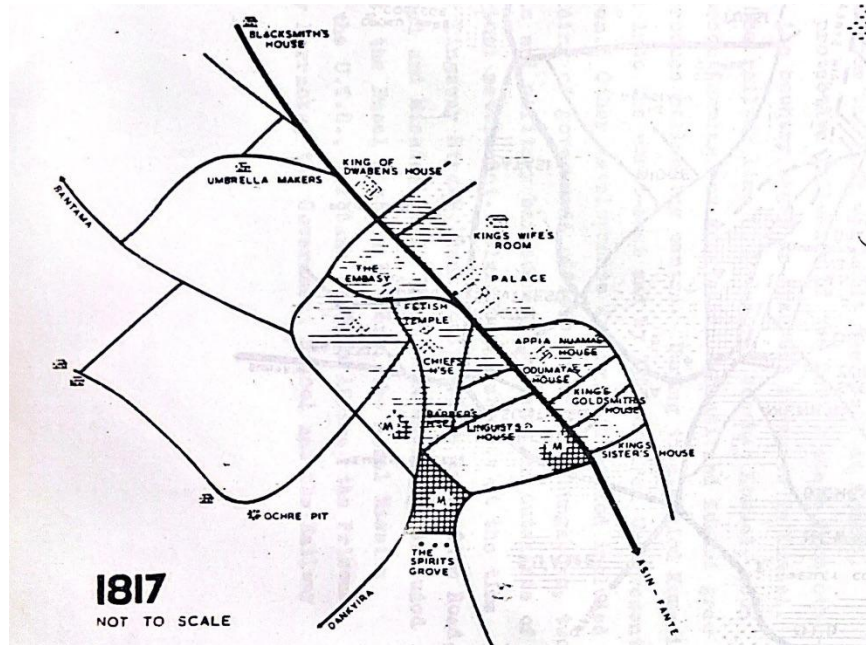
Ritual of Welcome with the Chief and the Elders. Edwenase

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

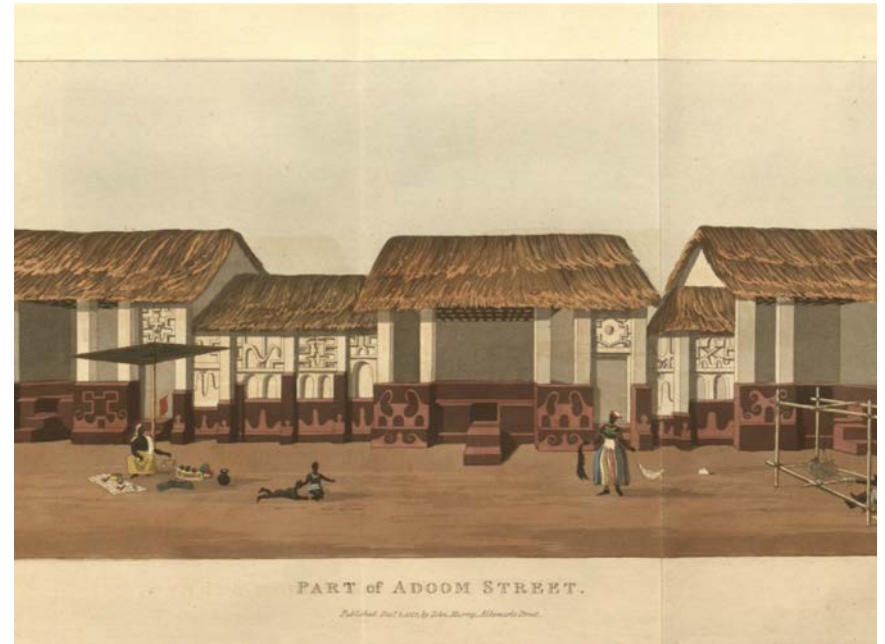
Ghanaian Heritage Policy in the International Context



Changes in the Built Environment



Kumasi city map as described by Bowdich
Image by Frederick A. Abloh



Traditional Kumasi Cityscape before the 20th century
"Part of Adoom Street" Bowdich 1819

The Burning of Kumasi



“Burning of Coomassie”

AN ORIGINAL PUBLICATION OF
“British Battles on Land and Sea” by James Grant.

Key Findings



1

Earth as Sustainable
Construction

4

Limited Heritage
Investment &
Financing

7

Government
Investment in
Continued Use of
Earth

2

Divide and Interplay
Between New &
Traditional

5

Complex Social
Perceptions

8

Authority &
Communication over
ATBs

3

Limited Heritage
Policy & Education

6

Tensions with
Christianity

9

Traditional
Knowledge & Skilled
Labor

1

Earth as Sustainable Construction

Thermal Properties and Energy Consumption

Locally Sourced Materials

Recyclability

Land Consumption and Resource Availability

Thermal Properties: Impact of Roofing Compatibility



Traditional and contemporary roofing materials on traditional earthen structures.

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

Locally Sourced Materials



Transportation of building materials into Kumasi.

Image by Daniela Martínez

Recyclability



Wall construction of Atakpame, Earth Block with Cement, and Cement Block

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

Recyclability

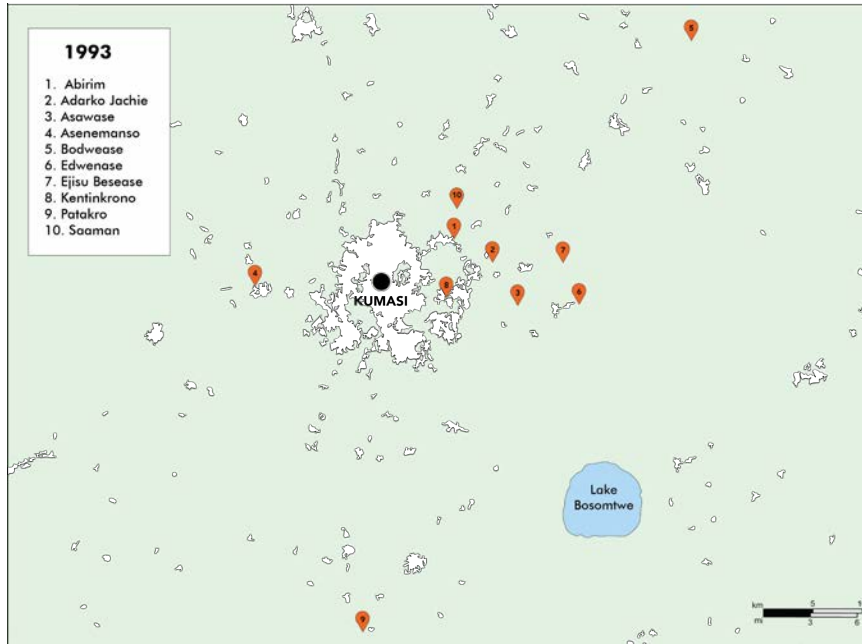


Use of Cement Mortar
Image by Roberto E. Villasante



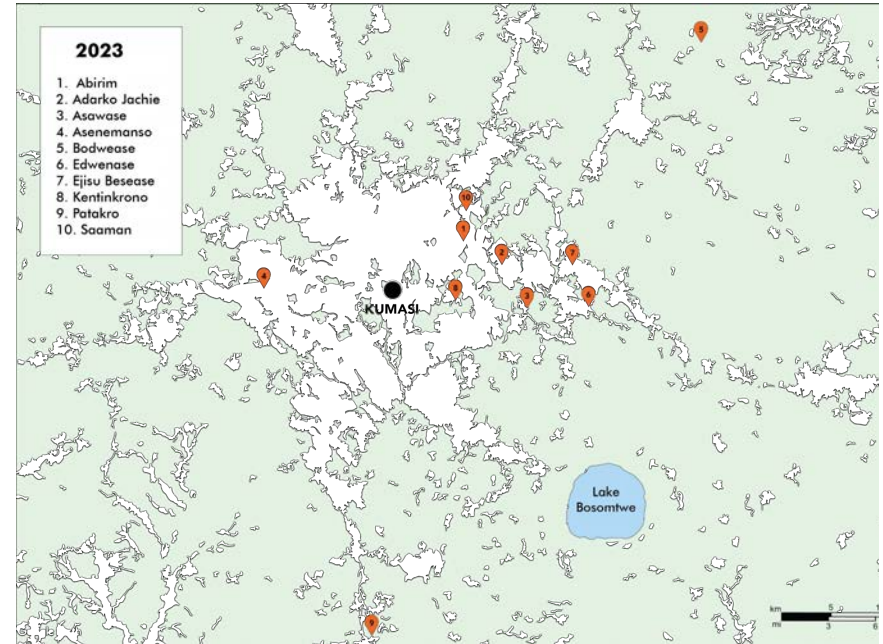
Use of Cement Mortar
Image by Eleanor Phetteplace

Urban Expansion



Kumasi urban footprint by 1993

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 1993



Kumasi urban footprint by 2023

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 2013

Land Consumption



Village around Asenemanso in 2013

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 2013



Densification Around Asenemanso in 2023

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 2023

Land Consumption



Village around Bodwease in 2013

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 2013



Village around Bodwease in 2023

Image by Daniela Martinez based on aerial photography from 2023

2

**Divide and Interplay
Between New &
Traditional Earthen
Architecture**

Divided Institutional Focus

Need for Combined Institutional Efforts

Rural Use of Traditional Materials

Kumasi Earthen Construction Types

**Institutions Support New Earthen
Architecture**

Divided Institutional Focus



Traditional Construction Methods

Image by Studio Group



Community-made Earth Blocks

Image by Daniela Martínez



Lab-made Blocks, AAMUSTED

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

Need for Combined Institutional Efforts



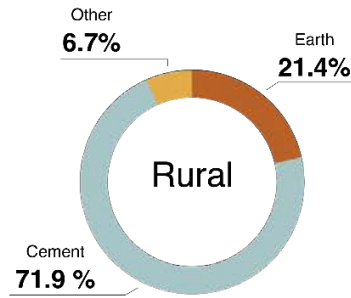
Community-made Earth Blocks

Image by Daniela Martínez

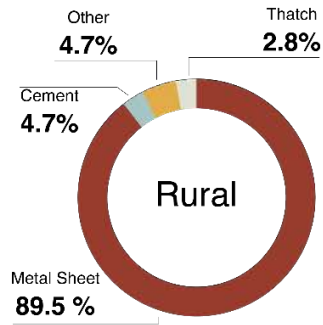
Facebook: @MUNDO

Rural Use of Traditional Materials

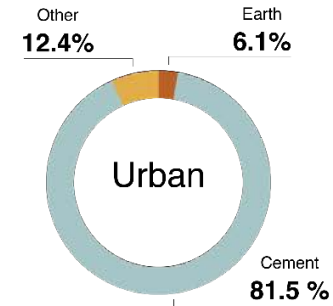
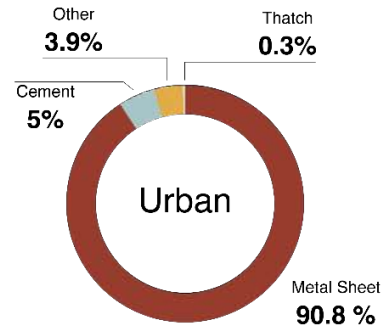
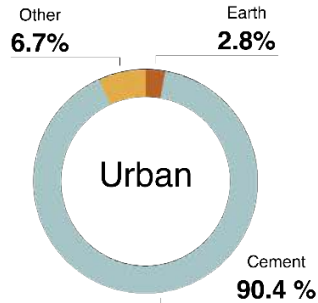
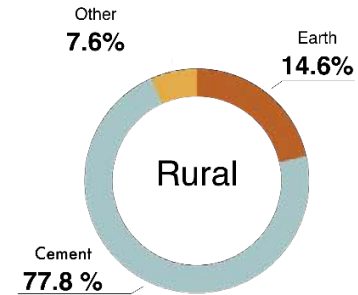
Outer Walls



Roofing



Flooring



Mixed Use of Contemporary and Earthen Materials



Tadan

Image by Daniela Martínez



Atakpamé

Image by Roberto E. Villasante



Earth Block

Image by Studio Group

Institutions Support New Earthen Architecture



Construction Lab at AAMUSTED

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

3

Limited Heritage Policy & Education

**Limited Heritage Policy and Government
Investment**

Lack of Investment in Heritage Education

Lack of Investment in Heritage Education

CHALLENGE

THE CONCEPT OF ARCHITECTURE, EVEN IN ITS MOST TRADITIONAL SENSE, IS FOREIGN TO AFRICA. THE CONSCIOUS DESIGNING OF MONUMENTS OR CLASSICAL UTOPIAS IS FURTHERMORE IRRELEVANT TO THE SITUATION OF THE EMERGING CONTINENT. AFRICA IS WHOOLY & PIERCELY COMMITTED TO A TOTAL SELF-TRANSFORMATION THE LIKE OF WHICH MANKIND HAS NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE. IT ENTERS ON THIS WITH A CULTURAL HERITAGE LARGELY OF INTANGIBLES: A FINELY DEVELOPED INTUITION, AN UNCLUTTERED INTELLECT, AN ABILITY TO HANDLE COMPLEX & SUBTLE SOCIAL ORGANISATION, AN INSTINCTIVE RESPONSE TO THE TOTAL ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT, A PLIANT PLASTIC LANGUAGE BUT ONE WHERE THE SYMBOLIC IS VITAL & WHERE ITS CONCRETE EXPRESSION ACCEPTS TRANSIENCE AS INHERENT.

IN THE PARTICULAR CASE OF GHANA THE NATION FACES A DOUBLING OF POPULATION IN TWENTY YEARS, WITH A PRESSING NEED TO DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMIC BASE & TO CREATE MODERN INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES. SHE HAS ALREADY ACHIEVED A SIGNIFICANT RISE IN THE STANDARD OF LIVING & HAS COMPLETED THE VERY MAJOR PROJECT OF THE VOLTA DAM. THIS LATTER HAS NECESSITATED A COMPREHENSIVE RESETTLEMENT OF 80,000 PEOPLE CARVED OUT WITH GREAT RESOLVE FOR THE WIVES OF THOSE AFFECTED. APART FROM THIS PROJECT THERE ARE TWO OVERALL LONG TERM FACTORS. FIRSTLY THE NECESSITY FOR PROVIDING AN AGRICULTURAL BASE FOR THE NATION, WHICH IS THE ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITE FOR THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION; & SECONDLY THE NEED TO MEET THE INCREASING PUBLIC DEMAND FOR RESIDING TO HIGHER STANDARDS & FOR A GREATERLY INCREASED POPULATION. TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING PROVIDES NONE OF THE TOOLS NEEDED FOR THE FORMAL RESETTLEMENT PROBLEM. THE COUNTRY POSSESSES NEITHER THE TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMAN A BUILDING INDUSTRY TO DEAL WITH A MASSIVE REHOUSING & SOCIAL BUILDING PROBLEM. THE EXAMPLE OF EUROPE SHOWS THAT IN ANY CASE SUCH A CRAFT INDUSTRY COULD NOT SOLVE THIS PROBLEM.

A FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE IN THIS SITUATION, IF IT IS TO TRULY CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUTURE OF THE CONTINENT, MUST DRAMATICALLY REDEFINE THE TASK OF AN 'ARCHITECT'. AT KNUST S.I.T. WE ARE EVOLVING AN APPROACH TO **COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN**. OUR STUDENTS WILL FACE VERY GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES IMMEDIATELY & WILL HAVE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS THE NATURE OF WHICH WE CAN ONLY BEGIN TO GUESS & TO WHICH WE CAN GIVE NO READY-MADE SOLUTION.

THE CURRICULUM IS DEVELOPING FROM 4 FACETS: PROBLEM SOLVING AS A TOTAL DISCIPLINE, SOCIAL SCIENCES, PHYSICAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND STRUCTURAL FABRIC. BY THIS WE HOPE TO CREATE A BODY OF SKILL CAPABLE OF DEFINING THE PROBLEM INHERENT IN ANY SITUATION AND EVOLVING & IMPLEMENTING A TOTAL SOLUTION. IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT THIS IS A FIELD WHERE THE EMERGING COUNTRIES CAN LEAPFROG BEYOND THE DEVELOPED NATIONS & MAKE A TRUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUTURE OF MANKIND.

JOHN R. LLOYD, DEAN OF THE FACULTY

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
GHANA KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY
 OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY KUMASI

YEAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
TECHNICAL	1	TECHNOLOGY		CITY PLANNING			
	5	DESIGN		MANAGEMENT			
URBAN	2	DESIGN		INDUSTRIAL DESIGN			
	3	TECHNOLOGY		ARCHITECTURE			
RURAL	4	CITY PLANNING		URBAN PLANNING			
	5	INDUSTRIAL DESIGN		REGIONAL PLANNING			
INDUSTRIAL	1	TECHNOLOGY		CITY PLANNING			
	2	DESIGN		MANAGEMENT			
CITY	3	DESIGN		INDUSTRIAL DESIGN			
	4	TECHNOLOGY		ARCHITECTURE			
ARCHITECTURE	5	CITY PLANNING		URBAN PLANNING			
	6	INDUSTRIAL DESIGN		REGIONAL PLANNING			

TRADITION TEACHES...

STUDENT SURVEY WORK WAS USED BY THE FACULTY IN THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME PROMPTED ABOUT BY THE GIGANTIC VOLTA RIVER HYDRO-ELECTRIC PROJECT, WHICH IS TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY, AGRICULTURE, TRANSPORT & SOCIAL LIFE OF GHANA.

KNUST Pamphlet for the 1965 International Union of Architects Conference on Architectural Education in Paris

J. Max Bond Jr. Papers, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library

4

Limited Heritage Investment & Financing

Lack of Infrastructure for Tourism

No Payback from Initial Investment

Insufficient Government Funding and
Reliance on Foreign Resources

Lack of Infrastructure for Tourism



UNESCO Signage at Ejisu-Besease

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

Insufficient Funding from Government and Asante Traditional Authority, and Over-reliance on Foreign Assistance



Damaged *tadan* wall in Adako Jachie

Image by Andrés Santana-Miranda

5

Complex Social Perceptions

Durability

Poverty and Social Status

Healthiness and Dirtiness

Tensions and Contentions

Complex Social Perceptions



Discussions with regional chiefs and elders

Image By Daniela Martinez

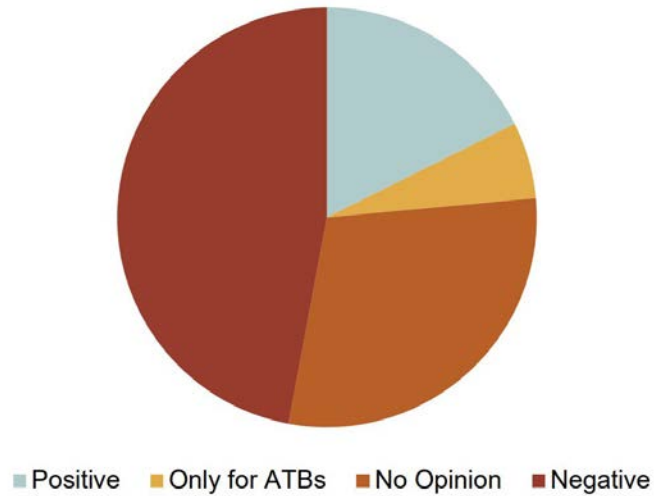


Discussions with shrine's caretakers

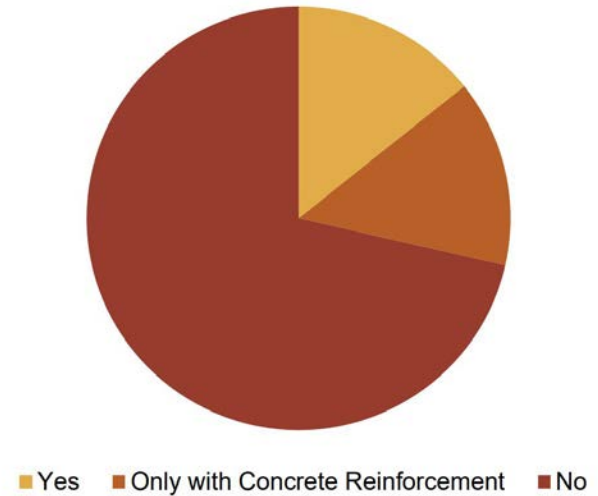
Image by Daniela Martinez

Interviews with Adako Jachie Community Members

Perception of Earthen Architecture



Willingness to Live in Earthen Building



6

Tensions with Christianity

Longstanding History of Conversion and Demonization

Contemporary Perceptions Informed by Religious Tensions

Growing Influence



Photo Collage of Christian Images

Collage by Esther Wagner

7

**Government
Investment in the
Continued Use of Earth**

Lack of Buildings Using Earthen
Architecture

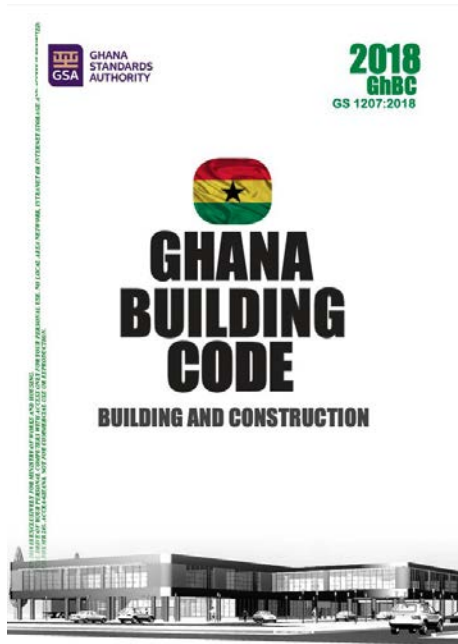
Complications of Building Codes

Lack of Buildings Using Earthen Architecture



View of the City
Image sourced from Wirestock

Complications of Building Codes



2018 Ghana Building Code
Ghana Standards Authority

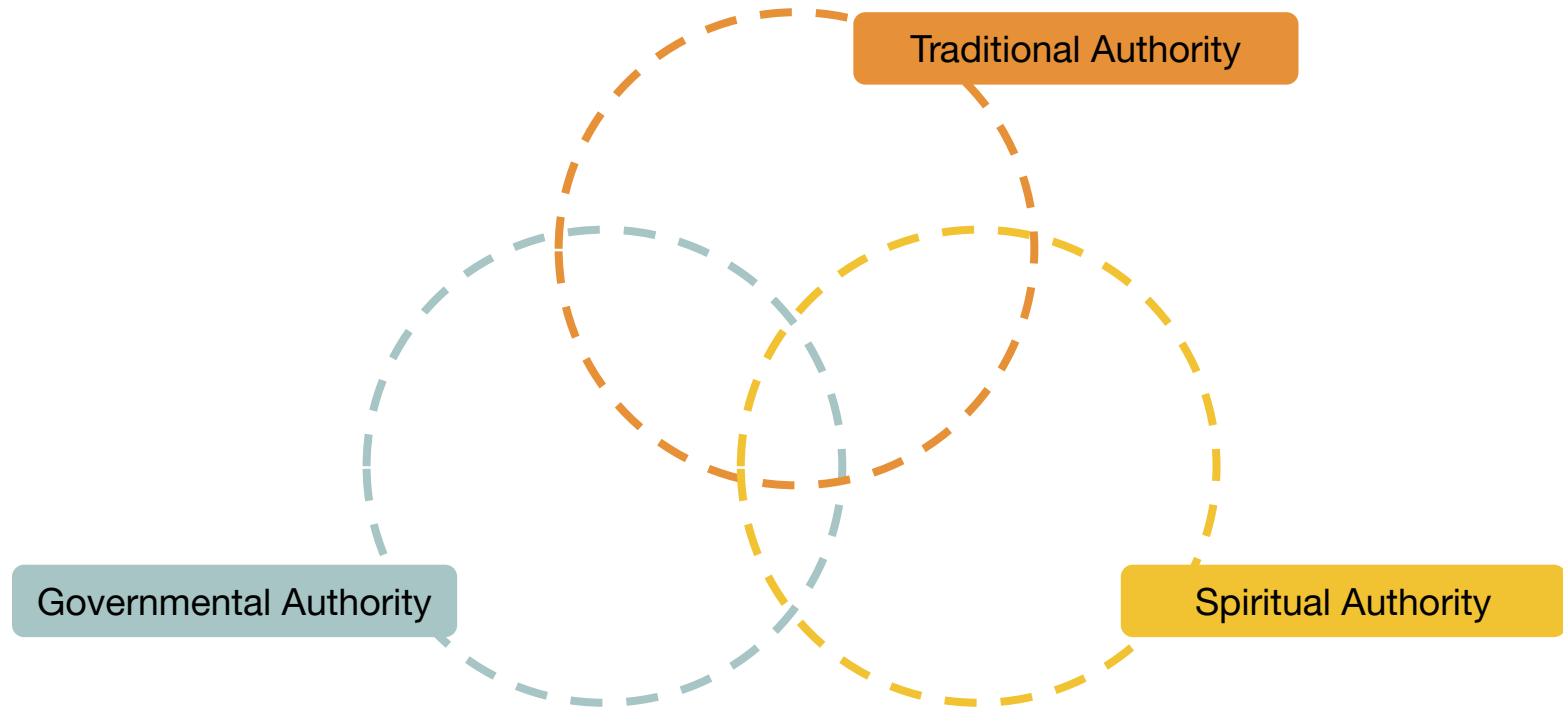


Earth block house and *tadan* building on the road to Patakro
Image by Daniela Martínez

8

Authority and Communication Over Asante Traditional Buildings

Intersection Between the Different Authorities



9

Traditional Knowledge and Skilled Labor

Loss of Traditional Knowledge and Skilled Labor



Man Who Built His Own Tadan Home

Image by Daniela Martinez



Self-Built Tadan on Roadside

Image by Daniela Martinez

1

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Labor

A photograph of a traditional building with a thatched roof and decorative wall panels. The building has a thatched roof made of dried grass or straw. The walls are made of a light-colored material, possibly mud or plaster, and feature intricate carvings and patterns. The carvings include a large central figure, possibly a deity or a person, and several smaller figures and symbols. The building has a dark doorway on the right side. The ground in front is dirt. The sky is blue with some clouds.

Proposals

Material Resource Protection

Ghana Museums and Monuments Board Earthen Building

Ashanti Region Earthen Architecture
Symposium and Coalition

Community Engaged Tourism Development

Heritage Research and Documentation Accessibility



Material Resource Protection

Traditional Thatched Roof

Image by Daniela Martinez

Contemporary Material Need



Natural Materials Needed for Maintenance

Images by Studio Team

Government-Protected Forests in Ghana

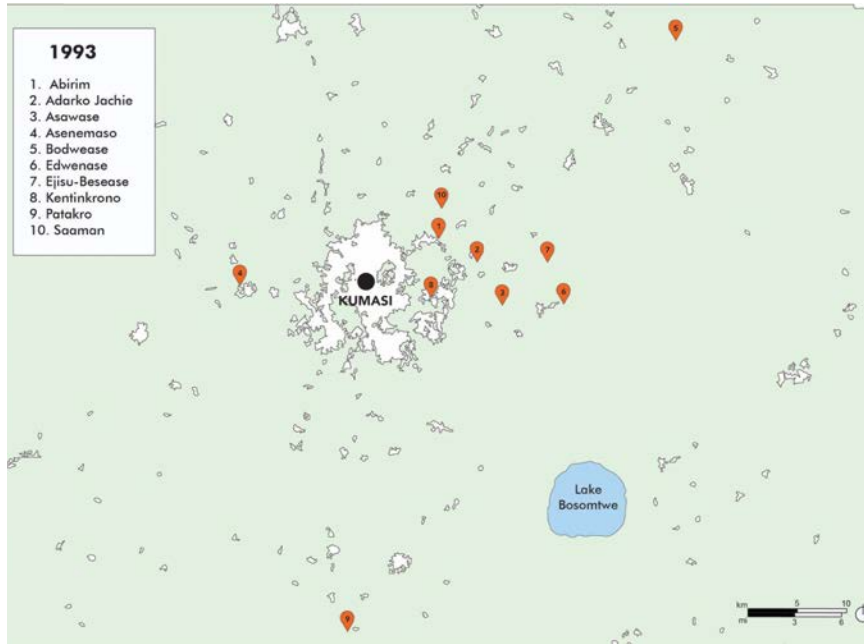


Protected Forests in Southern Ghana, Including Ashanti Region
Protected Planet

National designations	304
Forest Reserve	286 >
National Park	7 >
Resource Reserve	6 >
Strict Nature Reserve	1 >

Protected Forest Statistics for Ghana
Protected Planet

Regional Deforestation



Kumasi Deforestation in 1993

Graphic by Daniela Martinez



Kumasi Deforestation in 2023

Graphic by Daniela Martinez

Maintaining Traditional Materials & Practices



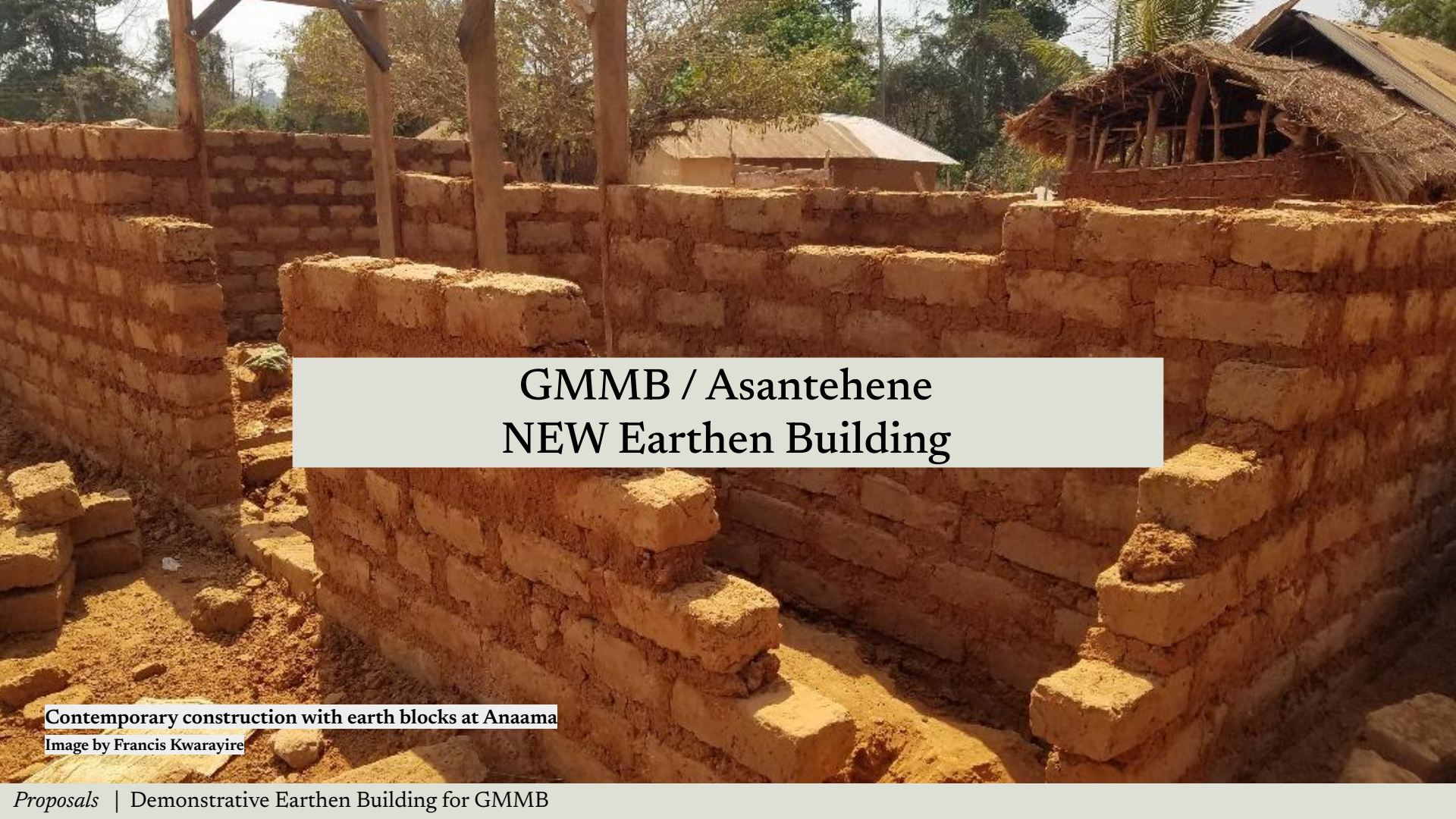
Replacement Metal Roofing at Asawase

Image by Roberto E. Villasante



Traditional Thatched Roofing at Edwenase

Image by Roberto E. Villasante

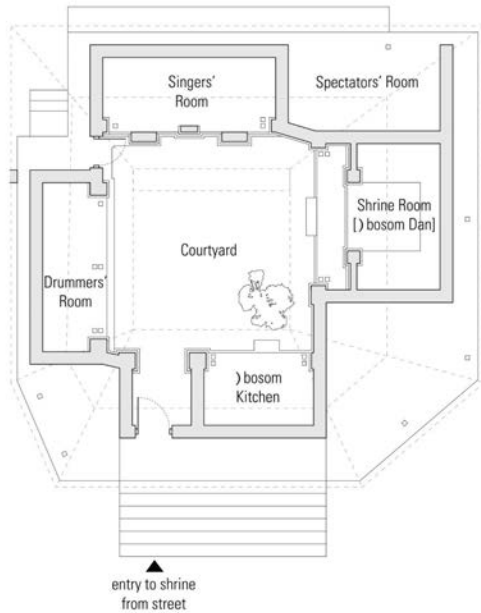


GMMB / Asantehene NEW Earthen Building

Contemporary construction with earth blocks at Anaama

Image by Francis Kwarayire

From Spatial Injustice to Material Opportunity



Floor plan of Bodwease

Survey and Condition Assessment by WMF and GMMB



Prempeh II Jubilee Museum at the Cultural Centre

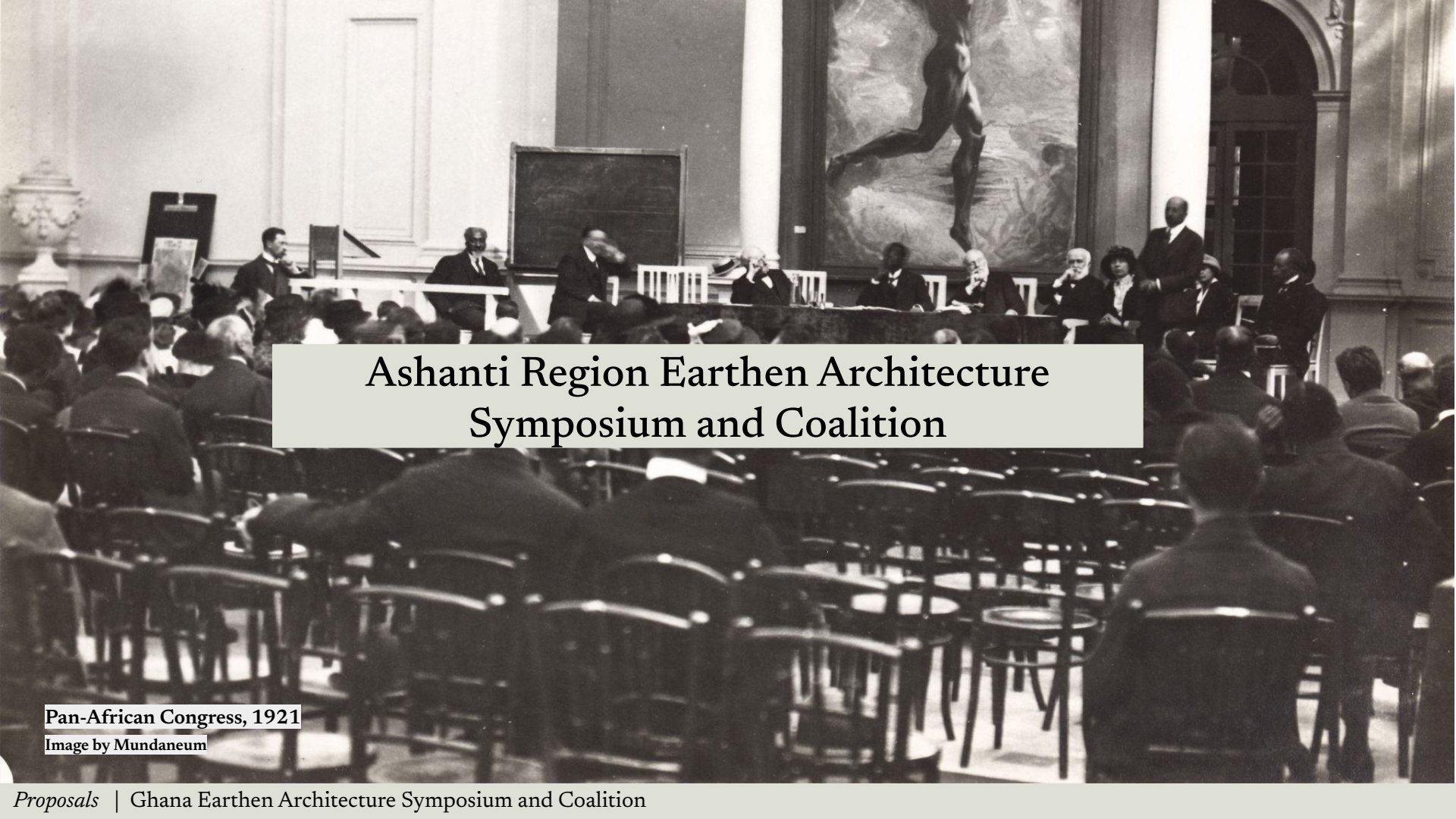
Image sourced from TripAdvisor

Showcasing Earthen Architecture



Exterior of the GMMB Regional Office

Image by Erica Avrami

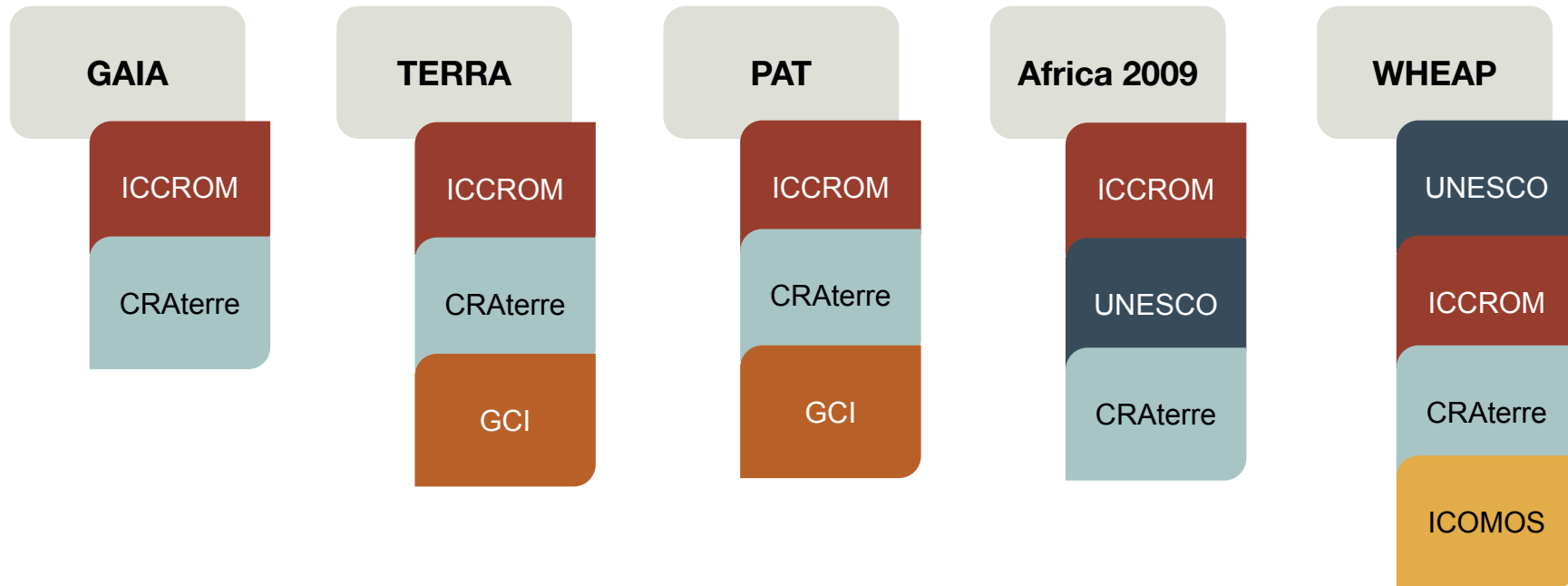


Ashanti Region Earthen Architecture
Symposium and Coalition

Pan-African Congress, 1921

Image by Mundaneum

Historic Patterns of Institutional Partnership



Example of Participating Institutions

GMMB

KNUST

AMMUSTED

BRRI

**Asante
Traditional
Authority**

Pan-African Congress, 1921

Image by Mundaneum



Community Engaged Tourism Development

Studio Group Learning about Shrine at Besease

Image by Studio Group

Previous Measures



Signage with Site Name at Besease
Image by Studio Group



Signage with Site Name at Asawasi
Image by Studio Group



Signage with Site Description at Edwenesase
Image by Studio Group

Proposed Process

Understanding the Landscape

Build Local Capacity

Integration and Partnerships

Funding

Review past interventions

Engage meaningfully with community

Local chieftains and GMMB work collaboratively

Look at possible funding sources

Review other case studies

Focus on knowledge sharing and awareness

Involve local universities

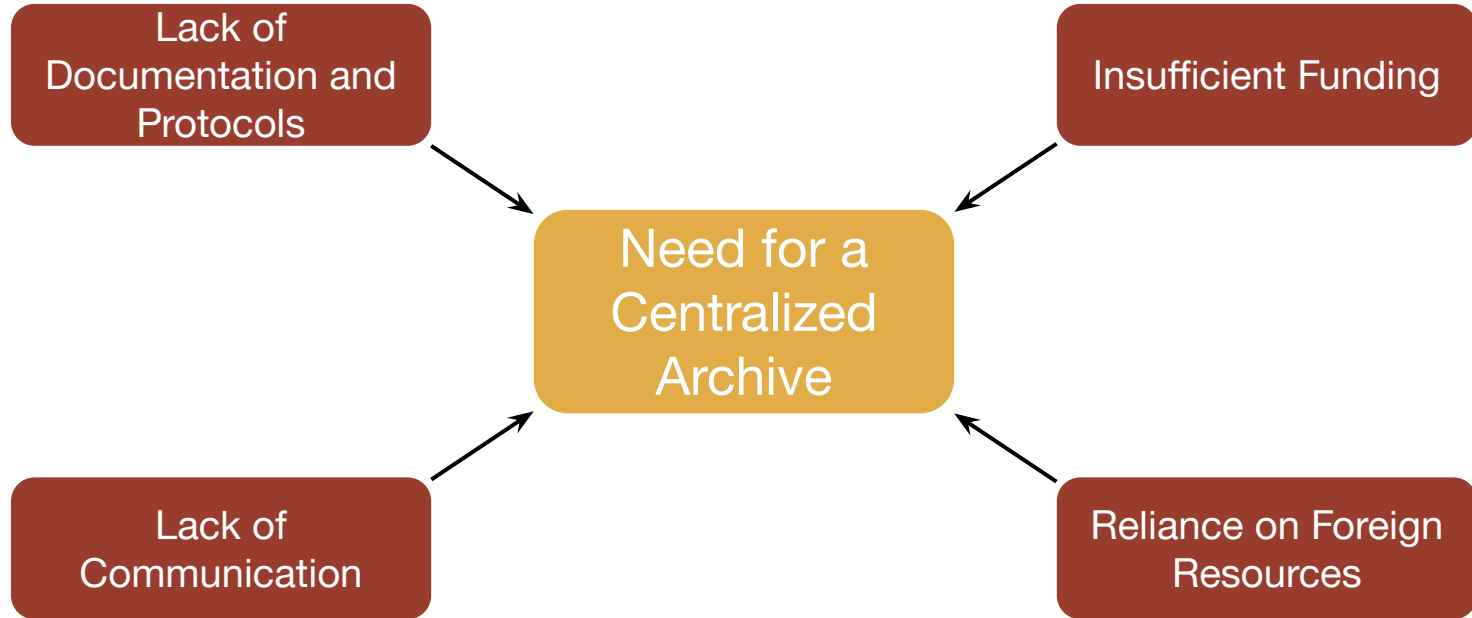
Develop a future collaborative plan based on equity and justice



Heritage Research and Documentation Accessibility

Manhyia Palace Museum
Image by Roberto E. Villasante

The Present Barriers



Social Justice



Ritual of Welcome at Edwenase

Image by Roberto E. Villasante



Nana Sabi Antwi III, Besease Chief

Image by Roberto E. Villasante



Worker at Adako-Jachie

Image by Roberto E. Villasante



Thank you!