

Ancient Ghana Reconsidered

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In 2016 I published an article ‘The Emergence of Pristine States’ in *Social Evolution and History* (Vol. 15, Num, 1, pp. 3–58). In that article I paid a lot of attention to Ancient Ghana in West Africa (pp. 25–28). On the sources I then consulted I decided that Koumbi Saleh must have been its capital (p. 25). More recent literature, however, made clear that such was not the case (Fauvelle 2018: 59–61). Fauvelle's main argument is that in el-Bakri's description the capital of Ghana did consist of two separate cities at a distance of about ten kilometres. The one city (or perhaps it is better to say: enclosure?) was the place of the king, his household, his lifeguards, and the priests. The other was the Muslim city (village?), where the merchants stayed (Levtzion 1973: 25–26). Al-Bakri was a citizen of Cordoba in Spain, who with the greatest care gathered the reports of the Arab merchants on West Africa. The glory of Ghana came to an end when the Almoravids, orthodox believers of Islam, destroyed its capital (Fauvelle 2018: 61). The qualification of this double capital as an enclosure and a village might perhaps explain why no traces are left of it after its destruction by the Almoravids. There are no traces – just sand. However, al-Bakri states that in the capital of Ghana several mosques were found and that the royal enclosure was formed by a rather loose grouping of stone and wood houses around the royal enclosure where the palace and its outbuildings, dwellings and courtyards stood (Fauvelle 2018: 60; Levtzion 1973: 25–26). It is strange indeed that no traces are left of the city and its buildings.

Of Koumbi Saleh – once a large city, where more than ten thousand people lived – are found traces in the desert, which testify to its former greatness (Levtzion 1973: 23–24), but it was not the capital of Ghana.

REFERENCES

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