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Eclectic Architecture in a “Model Colony”

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During the late nineteenth century, African countries were victimized by European colonial aggression. Western powers including Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, and Germany established colonies throughout the African continent in hope to Christianize the “savage” African cultures and take advantage of their numerous natural resources. Germany owned minimal parts of the continent with colonies only in present-day Cameroon, Tanzania, Namibia, and Togo. Togoland, the name for colonized Togo, was considered Germany’s greatest colonial venture. The colony was seen by many as a “model colony” for it quickly became self-sufficient and integrated (Amenumey 1969). To introduce their culture, German administrators established major centers along the southern coast of Togo and allowed missions to form schools and churches to educate the indigenous people. These institutions were not only a method of conversion, but also integration. The artistic design and meaning of the buildings the missionaries and administrators constructed represented the interweaving of the German culture and the indigenous cultures. This combination of architectural forms can clearly be seen in Lomé, the present-day capital of Togo, where colonial churches and structures still stand. The layout and façade of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé represents German colonists’ attempt to connect the German influence and Catholicism with traditional African domestic styles to promote conversion and compliance from the people of the Togo colony.

Unlike its neighboring countries, Germany was not originally interested in creating a colonial empire in the 1800s. When African colonization began, Germany had just become unified as the German Empire with a new chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck was more interested in bettering the empire’s relationship with other Western powers and even stated in 1881 that ““as long as I am Imperial Chancellor we shall not pursue a colonial policy,”” (Selig

1998). This all changed in 1884 when Bismarck realized that his efforts to win France over as an ally were failing and he established German protectorates at a series of locations in Africa. German traders and landowners had previously settled in these areas making it easy for the empire to obtain the land, yet the total land they acquired was minute compared to the other colonial powers in Africa due to their late arrival to the continent.

Nevertheless, on July 5, 1884, a German consul located in Tunis proclaimed a protectorate over the coast of Togo and officially took control of southern cities like Lomé (Selig 1998). The initial interactions between the Germans and the local African cultures of Togo was disconcerting. Many Germans were not interested in resettling in Africa, so the population was mostly merchants, traders, military members, and administrators. These demographics were not caring or considerate so much so that after visiting German Africa, a German doctor stated that there was ““a relatively large number of men of passionate temperament...in the colonies,”” and he justified this statement by saying ““there are, out under the palms, opportunities greater than in Europe to avoid the moral imperatives,”” (Selig 1998). Without the watchful eye of the German public and government, officials could manipulate their power and create harsh rules.

This period of rule in Togo is known as Bismarck’s System and ended in 1890 when Bismarck left the position of chancellor of the German Empire. During this time, military expeditions were sent north into the rural areas of Togo to communicate with local chiefs. This communication normally turned hostile and many town centers and villages were destroyed by German militants. However, local chiefs usually survived the attacks and were not stripped of their governmental power and standing because there were not enough German officials to oversee the less populated and developed regions (Amenumey 1969). This meant that the

majority of German colonial efforts occurred along the south coast of Togo, even though the administration was interested in securing their borders and expanding their power.

With the end of Bismarck's rule, came a change in Germany's colonial approach. Wilhelm II replaced Bismarck and noticed the disorganization of the empire's African colonies. To improve this, Wilhelm II introduced an official colonial government in 1898 (Amenumey 1969). The government of Togo consisted of only twelve administrators and the entire region of Lomé was run by one German official. The administration center was also moved to Lomé because it was "thought to be a healthier town" for the Germans to occupy (Amenumey 1969, 626). Once the government was established, an Imperial Penal Code was enforced. This code gave district officers absolute jurisdiction and allowed corporal punishment, yet the means in which these punishments were performed was fairly courteous in regard to normal colonial rule. For example, only flogging was allowed as physical punishment and "as the country came more and more under the government, the fiercer punishments like death, chaining for life, etc. became rare," (Amenumey 1969, 628). Graf Zech, a colonial administrator in the 1890s, even instructed his officials to "remember that in many instances, though the people might be guilty of what constituted a crime in German law, a real criminal intention might yet be lacking," (Amenumey 1969, 628). German officials were therefore aware of the cultural differences between themselves and the indigenous people of Togo and were capable of seeing different perspectives than their own.

This rather civilized approach to colonization is why Togo is called the "model colony" or the "munster-kolonie" in German. The success of Togo "demonstrated that Germany was capable of wise and liberal colonial rule," that resulted in progress and financial success (Amenumey 1969, 623). When German administrators arrived in southern Togo, the agricultural

production was already quite advanced, yet German officials wanted to increase the colony's outputs and built roads and rail lines for faster transportation of goods within the region (Amenumey 1969). They also introduced medical services and education systems which were commonly run by missionaries that the officials invited. These advancements along with the balanced budget the German regime produced and the avoidance of major wars with the local communities inspired the title of a "model colony" for Togo (Laumann 2003).

The success of the colony was in part due to the presence of both evangelical and catholic missionaries that the administrators welcomed into Togo. Missionaries worked alongside German administrators and merchants by training the Togo people "not only to be good Christians, but also to be literate so that they could be employed as clerks of merchants and interpreters to the administrators," (Apo and Lundt 2013, 127). Religion was therefore a German social structure for change and personal development for the indigenous people because it "offered an alternative world-view that fomented a breakdown of established social and economic structures and networks to the advantage of German colonial interests," (Apo and Lundt 2013, 135). The fast spread of Christianity in Togo therefore correlated with the German colonial government's ability to turn it into a "model colony".

Christianity was also fairly similar to the belief systems of the indigenous people, so their conversion was not always tedious or difficult. Both Christianity and local cultures believe in the importance of their daily behaviors and honor their connection to their deceased ancestors. These various religions believe in a type of god, spirit, or collection of the two that is responsible for the creation of the world which they must honor frequently. This higher god is then served by deities or spirits that live in natural elements of the world and play a large role in the everyday lives of their followers (Apo and Lundt 2013). The similarity between these belief systems

allowed the Germans to connect with the local people of Togo through a more spiritual and personal approach. The Germans then transferred this religious connection into architecture because they realized that the local communities believed that “traditional West African architecture – designed, lived, and perceived by mortals – exists only through a set of relations with the gods and with nature,” (Bourdier and Minh-ha 2011, 15). Architecture was a direct connection to religion so the Germans used this art form to connect with the people. Christian architecture was therefore a way to combine German culture and practice with those of the local communities which is directly represented in the architectural techniques the missionaries used throughout Togo. In Lomé, the center of the German imperial rule in Togo, this blending of cultures through art is clearly seen at the Sacred Heart Cathedral.

The Sacred Heart Cathedral, also referred to as the Lomé Cathedral, is a fusion of Togo’s vernacular indigenous architecture and German catholic style built between 1901 and 1902. The presence of a catholic cathedral in a German territory at the beginning of the twentieth century is peculiar. The German Empire was not a part of the Holy Roman Empire and consisted of mainly protestants and evangelicals due to its participation in the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The Reformation was a turning point not only in German culture and religion, but in German art and architecture. Catholic churches were no longer built and people practicing Catholicism became the minority. Thus, the presence of Catholicism in German Africa demonstrates that the colonial government was not worried about the denomination of Christianity that the Africans were converting to, as long as all types of Christianity remained catalysts for creating a population easy for them to rule, understand, and control. The fact that the Sacred Heart Cathedral was established at the center of Lomé, the central area of German administration in Togo, is proof that what motivated German officials to allow catholic

missionaries into Togo was the direct impact the conversion of indigenous people would have on their success as colonizers.

Because the Germans prioritized the social changes the cathedral would impose over its spiritual importance, the Sacred Heart Cathedral is a simple design and is uncharacteristic of twentieth century catholic architecture. The cathedral is Gothic, an architectural period that ended almost simultaneously with the start of the Reformation. This means that German architects in Togo drew inspiration for the Sacred Heart Cathedral from the last major catholic structures that were built in Germany, which were the Gothic cathedrals from the twelfth to sixteenth century, before the country converted. The floor plan consists of a central nave ending with a semi-circular choir. The choir consists of five main panels distinguished by five pointed arched, stained-glass windows which encircle the altar. A triumphal pointed arch separates the apse from the nave and contains a concave niche for sculpture. The nave is flanked by two aisles with seven bays each encompassed by a ribbed groin-vault. The exterior walls of the aisles have a large window in each bay and mark the termination of the ribs with a statuette of a capital. The aisles culminate with a pointed archway full of floral tracery common in Gothic decoration. The nave is also marked by a set of seven ribbed vaults. The ribs are mandatory in Gothic architecture to support the vaulting made from pointed arches. The ribs spring from stout classical columns that seem to have a simplified Corinthian capital. A clerestory surrounds the nave to supply natural light, and the interior is overall very subdued and conservative.

The exterior of the Sacred Heart Cathedral follows the conservative nature of the interior with hardly any elaborate sculptural elements. The entire exterior is a base of white paint with red ornamentation. The front façade consists of two, four story towers flanking a two-and-a-half story center. Each story is marked by a red horizontal beam that encircles the building. The

center block of the façade features a three-layered pointed archway leading to the front portal. The archway is surrounded by a triangular element atop a square base that protrudes from the wall and breaks the horizontal that separates the first and second stories. The tip of the triangle touches a Catharine window, commonly referred to as a rose window, which is a circular window covered in geometric tracery. Above the window is a series of three very pronounced trefoil arches and the central arch encloses a large clock.

The adjacent towers are identical and slightly extend past the center section. The first stories of the towers have the illusion of a sculptural niche that is instead filled with a painting of a sculpture. The second stories have another pointed arch that caves into the wall and surrounds a window. The third stories are divided into a small horizontal layer of four pointed arches, the center two encompassing windows, and a larger layer of two separated pointed windows surrounded by two overlapping sculptural pointed arches. The fourth stories consist of a tracery pinnacle that culminates with a cross.

The sides of the cathedral are only divided into two stories. The bottom level features the large pointed windows of the aisles and the top story is two infused pointed windows that make up the clerestory. The edges of the interior bays are marked by engaged flying buttresses on the exterior. Flying buttresses were originally used in Gothic architecture to support the heavy walls of the cathedrals and the weight of the large panels of glass used for the windows. However, advancements in the field quickly made buttresses unnecessary as the walls could support themselves, but many architects continued to use engaged buttresses as a symbol of the Gothic style and to represent past structures. This means that by the time the Sacred Heart Cathedral was constructed, there was no need for it to have buttresses, but because the Germans' last knowledge of national catholic architecture came from the early period of Gothic, the inclusion

of buttresses seemed necessary to capture the religion. Also, atop of the sixth bay, there is a representation of a transept, or a perpendicular hall that intersects the nave. There is not a transept in the interior of the cathedral so this element is purely representational and meant to recall earlier, more elaborate European cathedrals.

An example of an earlier German gothic structure is the Cologne Cathedral in Cologne, Germany. Elements of this cathedral can be clearly seen in the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Togo demonstrating the connection between the German and local cultures in colonial architecture. The Cologne Cathedral, originating from 1247, is one of Germany's greatest Gothic cathedrals. The cathedral follows a High Gothic plan and design, pulling elements from its predecessors in France. The Cologne Cathedral was meant to "surpass all other Temples of God on earth," and did so through its enormous size and grandeur (Benedix 1855a). Like the Sacred Heart Cathedral of Lomé, the Cologne Cathedral follows a basilica plan, yet the proportions are much larger. The cathedral consists of a central nave flanked by four aisles. The transept is also three aisles wide and the choir contains seven radiating chapels that have five protruding sides each. The chapels are separated from the altar by an ambulatory allowing Christians who made a pilgrimage to Cologne to visit the chapels without interrupting the main service. The choir has an immense amount of beautifully constructed stained-glass that requires "massive double-arched flying buttresses [to] bear the stress of the choir-vaults" and prevent the glass from breaking due to strain (Baum and Schmidt-Glassner 1956, 30). The nave is divided into six bays, each covered by ribbed groin vaults. The ribs converge above groups of compound piers, each of which are covered by sculptures of saints and other images from the Bible (Nussbaum 2000).

The west façade was completed after the nave and choir and "would turn out to be the biggest building project in the Middle Ages," (Nussbaum 2000, 89). The façade features two

massive, tracery towers that are marked with pier buttresses at each corner. There are secondary buttresses, as well, that divide the towers into two major sections. These sections gradually transform from a square base into an octangular form that acts as the platform for the massive pinnacles. The repetition of motifs and sculptural elements is prevalent on the façade forcing the viewers' eyes to keep moving upwards and follow the verticality of the design. The façade is interrupted by a grand portal, one of three on the cathedral's exterior, that is also a layering of arches, similar to the entry at the Sacred Heart Cathedral of Lomé. The entryway contains numerous wall reliefs, unlike in Lomé, that brings a sense of three-dimensionality to the appearance of the door and is made up of a repetition of lancet arches and tracery gables (Nussbaum 2000). The entire exterior is marked by multi-layered flying buttresses that are not engaged, like those in Lomé, because at the time they still were needed as means for support. The buttresses, however, still retain the cathedral's style of ornamentation by being "richly pinnacled and canopied" with the negative space between them marked by arches with quatrefoil tracery (Baum and Schmidt-Glassner 1956, 30). As with any Gothic cathedral, all the arches were pointed and articulated with tall pillars. Overall, the Cologne Cathedral "is not only one of the largest but also one of the most uniform and perfect of the High Gothic churches," in Europe and is the most unique and well recognized cathedral in Germany (Baum and Schmidt-Glassner 1956, 30).

The Sacred Heart Cathedral of Lomé is therefore a highly simplified version of the Cologne Cathedral. The transept at Cologne is omitted, the buttressing is reduced and becomes purely ornamental, the size of the pointed arches and windows lessen, and the sculptural decoration is almost completely forgotten. However, German Gothic cathedrals were meant to "break new ground...for not only did its height put it somewhere between heaven and earth, it

also tested the limits of what was possible in architectural organization, technology and art,” which both the Cologne Cathedral and the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé clearly do in their respective locations and time periods (Nussbaum 2000, 55-56).

But why did the integration of German Gothic forms into Togo succeed? How come after the Lomé cathedral was constructed, the city became a highly Roman Catholic area? (Debrunner 1965). The answers to these questions can all be found in the architecture and design of the Sacred Heart Cathedral. As stated before, Christianity and indigenous belief systems shared many ideas and concepts which helped German missionaries and administrators to convert and communicate with the local people of Togo. The Germans clearly understood this connection and demonstrated it through architecture to further promote conversion. To show the local people that Christianity was a welcoming and almost familiar spiritual system, the Germans used local architecture from Togo as inspiration for the Sacred Heart Cathedral and paired it with European forms to show that Christianity was still a novel concept to the region.

The local forms that the Germans were inspired by when creating the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé, came from domestic and vernacular architecture. These types of architecture had the most significance and connection to the spiritual community of local cultures making them the ideal structures to copy when trying to bind the German spirituality with that of the indigenous peoples. The understanding of vernacular architecture is vital for outsiders in regions such as Togo for “the produce of the land, the organization of the community, and the architecture that supports them, are part of the daily life of the city” and the common man (Adjaye 2011, 7). Furthermore, for many West African cultures, “there is no clear distinction between the religious and the secular,” but in European cultures the divide is clear so the Germans decided to combine a secular type of African architecture with a religious form of

European architecture to please both cultures and ensure their success as colonizers (Huntar 1992, 64). As a result, it can be said that the elements of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé that do not draw direct inspiration from German Gothic cathedrals, like the Cologne Cathedral, are West African.

One feature of the Sacred Heart Cathedral that is clearly regional, is the coloring. Gothic cathedrals are normally like the Cologne Cathedral, built of stone or brick and not painted over, however the cathedral in Lomé is painted red and white. This is partly due to the lack of stone the architects had available to them, but also acts as a reference to vernacular West African architecture. Red and white are common colors found in African decoration and design. The use of red paint to decorate the exterior of a home “connect[s] the red of the soil to the color of the sun...of blood, and thus of the ‘newborn’,” (Bourdier and Minh-ha 2011, 62). This means that the house is a product of the earth, connected to the life source of nature, the sun, and represents fertility and family which are all valuable concepts found in African societies. Another West African detail of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé is the lack of sculpture. African houses normally do not have sculpture on their exteriors unlike the highly ornamented façade of the Cologne Cathedral. The external decoration that is allowed is painting. This is translated into the façade of the Sacred Heart Cathedral by the inclusion of sculptural niches that contain paintings of prophets and saints instead of a three-dimensional depiction of them. The importance of the entryway is also a vital aspect of West African vernacular architecture. When entering a house, it is as if the person is entering a new world, for “gaining access to the interior universe of dwellings means undergoing a transformation both physical and spiritual,” (Bourdier and Minh-ha 2011, 29). The interior of domestic architecture is a completely separate space than the exterior land or compound on which it is situated. This means that a door is a spiritual

passageway between the man-made world and the natural world. This importance of the doorway is normally exhibited by the presence, or lack thereof, of paint or is marked by a religious or ornamental element. At the Sacred Heart Cathedral, the doorway's importance is brought to the viewer's attention by the layering of the arches and the disruption of the symmetry of the façade due to its triangular frame. The portal is shown as an almost separate entity from the rest of the façade, demonstrating its spiritual importance through artistic choice. These architectural aspects of the cathedral in Lomé may seem superficial, yet they possess a much deeper meaning for the indigenous people of Togo turning the structure into a multicultural experience.

Overall, the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Lomé, Togo embodies the combination of multiple cultures, each from a very unique landscape and history, into a cohesive whole that motivates change. The ability for this structure to succeed in marrying European styles to African styles demonstrates the German Empire's power to understand those that they were colonizing and to use art as a means of coercion. The Germans strategically allowed catholic missionaries who were not fully supported in their homeland, to penetrate their colonies and shape the local communities into "ideal" subjects. Many other European countries, especially after the fall of the German Empire with the end of World War I, argued that Germany was never fit to possess colonies and stated that the success of Togo was due to absurd taxation of the people and forced labor (Laumann 2003). However, compared to the atrocities that occurred in other colonies throughout Africa that Europeans performed in favor of themselves, the success of Togo must still be acknowledged as a colonial triumph that occurred with minimal acts of brutality. The ultimate reason Togo became a "model colony" was not because of the German official's administrative methods, but of the interweaving of cultures through religion, art, and architecture. The Germans understood the power of spirituality, community, and culture in Togo

and used that to their advantage. Cities like Lomé are proof of this theory, where eclectic colonial architecture continues to connect numerous people and histories together as one.

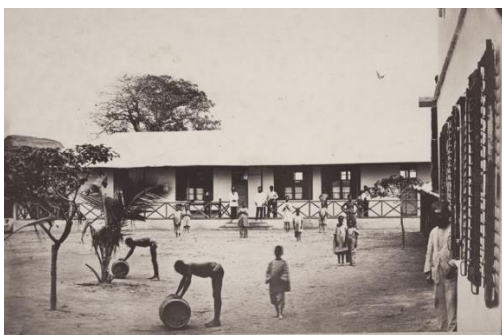
Images



German Colonial Troops in Togo: Bismarck System Era
(Basel Mission Archives)



German Railway in Lomé and a German Agricultural School in Northern Togo
(Basel Mission Archives)

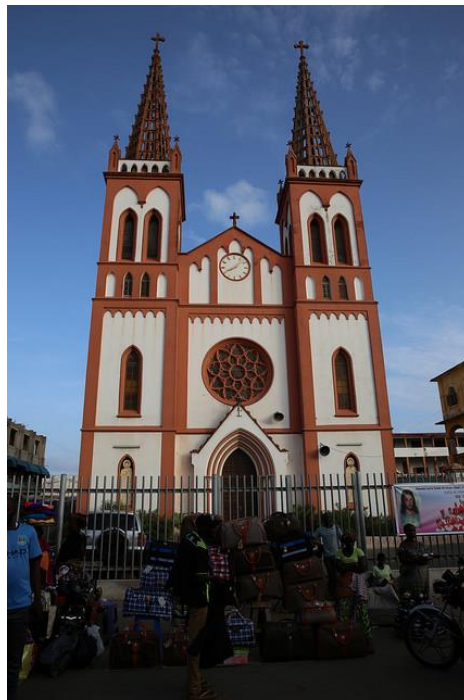


German Missionaries
(Basel Mission Archives)

Images



Southern Coast of German Togo with the Sacred Heart Cathedral on the Right
(Basel Mission Archives)

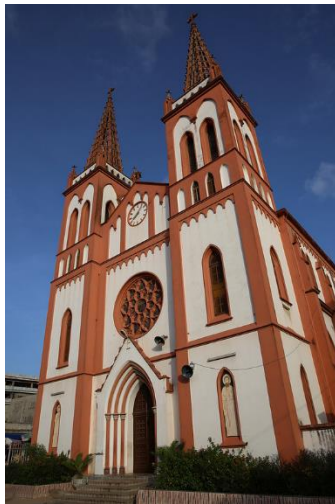


Colonial Photo of the Sacred Heart Cathedral and 2016 Façade
(Basel Mission Archives and Mathew Rivlin, May 28, 2016)

Images



Sacred Heart Cathedral: Side View
(TripAdvisor)

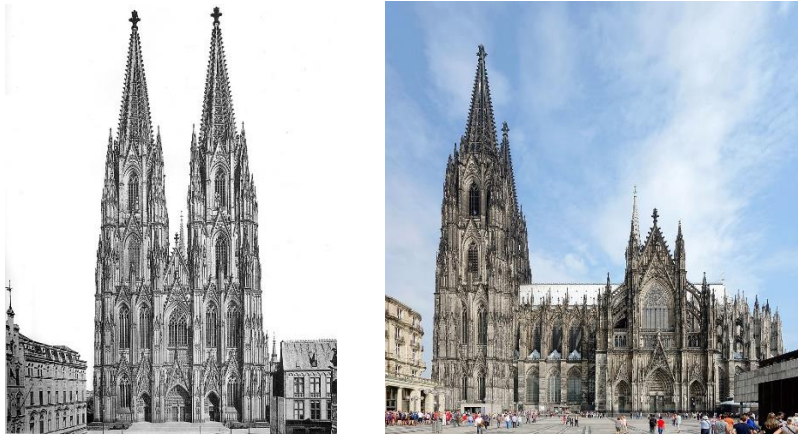


Sacred Heart Cathedral: Towers
(Matthew Rivlin, May 28, 2016)



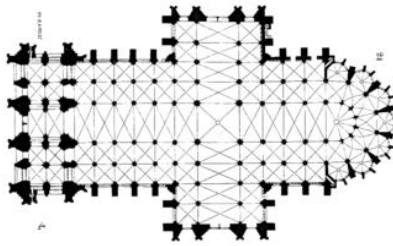
Sacred Heart Cathedral: Interior
(Mathew Rivlin, May 28, 2016)

Images



Cologne Cathedral: Façade and Side View

(Wikipedia)



Cologne Cathedral Plan

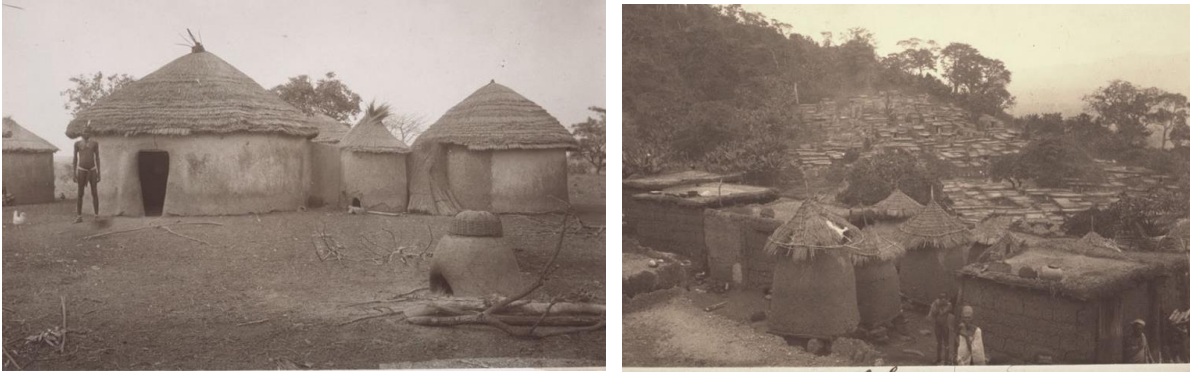
(Wikipedia)



Cologne Cathedral: Interior and Flying Buttresses

(Wikipedia)

Images



Konkomba Village and Flat Roof Village in Southern Togo
(Basel Mission Archives)



Community in North Togo with Highly Ornamented Doorways
(Basel Mission Archives)



Colonial Lomé
(Basel Mission Archives)

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<http://www.bmarchives.org/>

Mathew Rivlin Photography 2016:

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