

## Document Citation

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Variety

**Wednesday, February 7, 1979**

**Ashanti**  
**(COLOR)**

**Routine adventure with African slave trade backdrop. Okay prospects.**

London, Feb. 1.

Columbia Pictures release of a Georges-Alain Vuille production. Exec producer, Luciano Sacripanti. Producer, Georges-Alain Vuille. Directed by Richard Fleischer. Features entire cast. Screenplay, Stephen Geller (based on a novel, "Ebano," by Alberto Vasquez-Figueroa); camera (color), Aldo Tonti; production designer, Aurelio Crugnola; art director, Kuli Sander; sound, David Hildyard; associate producer, John C. Vuille. Reviewed at Odeon Leicester Sq. Theatre, London, Jan. 31, '79. (BBFC rating: AA). Running time: 117 MINS.

Dr. David Linderby	Michael Caine
Suleiman	Peter Ustinov
Anansa Linderby	Beverly Johnson
Malik	Kabir Bedi
The Prince	Omar Sharif
Brian Walker	Rex Harrison
Jim Sandell	William Holden
Djamel	Zia Mohyeddin
Ansok	Winston Ntshona
Faid	Tariq Yunus
Dongaro	Tyrone Jackson
Marcel	Jean-Luc Bideau
Capt. Bradford	Johnny Sekka

"Ashanti" is nominally concerned with contemporary slave trading in Africa, with the foreground plot tracking doctor Michael Caine in pursuit of his kidnapped beautiful black wife, Beverly Johnson. The outcome is polished but lacklustre adventure entertainment.

Independently produced by Swiss exhib turned producer Georges-Alain Vuille, and directed with competence if not much verve by Richard Fleischer, pic is obviously exploitable, well-baited with names, and should prove useful for exhibs in the general market. Columbia has it for most foreign territories, and Warners has just made a pickup for U.S.-Canada, with an Eastertime spread in some 450 houses planned.

Caine and Johnson are World Health Organization medics on a visit to an African tribe when the lady becomes a prize catch of Arabian slave trader Peter Ustinov. Caine's retrieval odyssey thereafter is variously aided by Rex Harrison as an ambiguous go-between, William Holden as a mercenary helicopter pilot, and Indian actor Kabir Bedi as a Bedouin with his own score to settle with Ustinov. All acquit with professional grace but unremarkable impact.

Portraying a royal client of Ustinov is Omar Sharif, looking and sounding as if filling time between bridge tournaments. But, in fairness, he, too, has little room for expressive maneuver.

At 117 minutes, "Ashanti" is bloated with expendable narrative in Stephen Geller's script based on a novel by Alberto Vasquez-Figueroa. Action elements are slight or modest, the characterization superficial, and a potentially arresting subplot, the story of slave trading itself, only perfunctorily touched.

No help to the film's grip on interest is Fleischer's minuet pacing. He seems, for one thing, to have come under the spell of those Saharan sand dunes lavishly and lengthily dwelled on as Caine and Bedi pick up Ustinov's trail.

There is a moderately amusing bit in the desert when Caine is introduced to the tricks of camel travel, and some climactic slambang aboard Sharif's yacht, but these are incidental pleasures in an otherwise long, languid, uninspired feature.

All technical credits, including Aldo Tonti's lensing, are fine. No big b.o. bang in sight from this one, just okay business. —Pit.