Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade

Paul Erdmann Isert's
Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia
(1788)

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

SELENA AXELROD WINSNES

Isert's book, in the form of 12 letters evidently written for publication, has excited interest ever since it first appeared in 1788. Modern scholars have long had a great interest in, and need for, careful translations of early Danish sources on Africa; but though Isert's text was long ago translated into other languages, this is the first translation from the original German into English.

Modern scholars have become interested in Isert because he himself approached his subjects in a scholarly and scientific way. Already a respected botanist and medical doctor, Isert became interested in ethnography on his arrival in Accra. His letters contain an unrivalled wealth of information, including details of customs, clothing, martial arts, music and recreation. His descriptions are the more valuable because, in marked contrast to his predecessors, he reveals an overwhelmingly positive, sympathetic and respectful attitude towards the Africans and their way of life.

Isert has a special place in West African history because of his attempt to establish a plantation on the Gold Coast to counteract the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The last part of Isert's book concentrates on the slave trade in the West Indies, and includes a first-hand description of a slave revolt on a ship.

Throughout his text Isert draws a clear and lively picture of life on the Gold and Slave Coasts of Africa and the Danish and French islands in the West Indies at the end of the 18th century.

Selena Axelrod Winsnes is a specialist in Scandinavian sources for West African history.

Cover illustration is taken from the title page of the original 1788 edition.

LETTERS ON WEST AFRICA AND THE SLAVE TRADE

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Journey to Guinea and
the Caribbean Islands in Columbia
(1788)

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Paul E. Isert was a true child of the Enlightenment, accordingly his interests ranged over all the sciences of his day. It follows, then, that anyone who would annotate his work must call upon a whole crowd of specialists, for a word here, a phrase there, information and comment. It has been my great good fortune to have met and worked with many people who showed keen interest in the work and who gave me invaluable aid. Their contributions have been acknowledged in the pertinent notes. Should any of these have been 'lost' in the course of countless revisions of the work, I apologize, and reaffirm my indebtedness.

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Most of the sources I needed were not ready at hand in my town, or even in Norway. Therefore I wish to express my gratitude to the librarians in Strømmen, Oslo and Copenhagen, who were able, through inter-library loans, to provide me with the books and articles necessary to the research. In particular I wish to thank Nancy Frank and Frøydis Haugane at the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo, Astrid Ørmen at the county library in Strømmen, Sverre Løkken at the Biological Institute's library in Oslo, Kaåre Lauring, curator at the Maritime Museum in Helsingør, Poul Aag. Christi at the University Library in Copenhagen, and the staffs of the

National Archives and the Royal Library in Copenhagen who assisted me during my hectic annual fortnights in Denmark, and who sent me a great deal of material after each visit. Helen Engelstad, now deceased, made those visits possible by inviting me to stay with her in Helsingør, and by acting as critic as my work progressed.

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Where, in spite of all this help, there are errors or inaccuracies, the fault is entirely my own.

Rælingen
Norway

Editor's Introduction

The background of Danish activity in Guinea and the West Indies

When Isert first arrived at the Gold Coast in 1783 the Baltic Guinea Company, chartered in 1781, was taking full advantage of an opening in the slave trade, both in Guinea and the West Indies. The American War of Independence had drained off some of the resources of Britain and France from its commencement in 1776, and in 1780 the Dutch, too, became involved in a war with England. These events tended to reduce the economic activities of the other nations involved in the trade in Guinea, and the Danes were able to expand into the ground vacated. There were echoes in Africa of the conflicts elsewhere when British ships attacked the Dutch forts in Guinea and destroyed Fort Crèvecoeur at Accra, thus ending the Dutch presence there and eastward along the coast. Now that there was nothing to stop him, the new Danish Governor, Jens A. Kiøge, set about expanding the Danish area of control eastward. The small English fort at Prampram was evidently no obstacle. Kiøge made treaties of alliance with former Dutch allies along the coast — Teshi, Dutch Accra, Tema, Kpone — and inland with the Krobo. Kongensten Fort was built at Ada in 1783 to support the Ada against the Awuna. The *Sagbadre War* in 1784, with victory for the Danes and their allies, resulted in more treaties, all the way eastward to Little Popo. The Danish Fort 'Prinsensten' at Keta was also built during this period.

Called the '*florissante*' period of Danish history in Guinea, its days were numbered. The American War of Independence ended with the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, and when the war between Britain and the Netherlands was concluded in 1784, the Danes returned to them their former areas and rights on the Gold Coast. This was an immediate threat to Kiøge's plan for expansion, a plan which was looking even farther eastward, to Whydah. The English, uneasy about this, had supplied the Awuna with war material, and some groups in Little Popo were asking the English for aid against the Dutch advance. A number of new allies of the Danes now wanted to change their allegiance, and Kiøge had to work

very hard to keep control. In 1786 there was a conflict in Keta but the anti-Danish groups were driven out. In 1787 Kiøge, still bent on consolidating Danish trade on the coast, built the last of the Gold Coast forts, 'Augustaborg', at Teshi, and started the construction of 'Isegram' at Kpone. However, the trade was ineluctably on the wane. The Baltic Guinea Company was taken over by a consortium, The Guinean Entrepreneurs, that same year, and sold again two years later, to four of the staff at Christiansborg, who were permitted to trade privately upon payment of a fee of 50,000 riksdalers annually. It was against this background that Isert was to launch his project.

Danish history in the West Indies starts after 1660 when, upon the conclusion of the long period of wars in Europe, Frederick III established himself in Denmark-Norway as absolute monarch, and interest could again be directed overseas. Private excursions had been made to the Caribbean earlier, but with little impact. The post–1660 voyages produced cargoes enticing enough to whet the appetites of Danish and Norwegian merchants. The Danish West India Company was granted a royal charter in 1671. The Danes had already found an 'uninhabited' island, St. Thomas, which boasted an excellent harbour, and they were now 'graciously permitted' by the king to retain this island and to build forts, lodges, offices, etc. on St. Thomas and on other equally 'uninhabited' islands, 'uninhabited' obviously meaning not previously claimed by any other European power. Secton 16 of the company charter permitted it to take up the work of the already existing Glückstadt African Company if the latter showed signs of being unable to live up to the premises on which it had been established, that is, to supply slaves to the West Indian islands. Clearly, the need for assuring a constant supply of slaves was anticipated as early as 1671, and the merger of the two companies did in fact occur in 1697, producing the Danish West India and Guinea Company.

The acquisition of islands continued. 'Crab' [Vieques] Island had been a bone of contention for many years, with several nations vying for possession. Foremost among the contenders were the Brandenburgers. Denmark managed to take formal possession in 1694, beating the Brandenburgers by two days. St. John was occupied in 1712, and St. Croix was purchased from France in 1733. In 1754 the Company sold its shares to the king, thus making the Danish islands royal colonies.

During the nineteenth century there was a steady economic decline in the West Indies due both to competition from the newly developed and cheaper process of extracting sugar from beetroot, and to the abolition, first of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and then of slavery. In 1867 Denmark began what was to be a long and tortuous process of trying to sell the islands to the United States. After much negotiation, aborted attempts,

lapsed treaties and the vagaries of world politics during the next fifty years, the islands were finally sold to the United States in 1917 for $25,000,000, to become the Virgin Islands of America.

What remains of the Danish-Norwegian presence in Ghana today? A few ruins of plantation buildings can be found. We are told that tamarind trees were usually planted in avenues by the Danes, and that these provide clues as to where the early plantations were located.[1] Family homes of Danes who settled in Accra in the nineteenth century, such as Richter's house and Wulff's house, remain.[2] More than 70 Danish family names are extant in Ghana today.[3] I myself used to drive down Dr. Isert Road in Accra almost daily.[4] But the most visible, permanent and handsome reminders of the tie between the two countries are two imposing buildings, dissimilar in architecture but sharing name and function. They are the two seats of government, Christiansborg Castle in Copenhagen and Christiansborg Castle in Accra.

Biography of Isert

Paul Erdman Isert was born on 20 October, 1755, in Angermünde, Brandenburg, the son of a master weaver. Having been appointed chief surgeon to the Danish establishments on the Guinea Coast he sailed from Copenhagen in July, 1783, and arrived at Christiansborg, the Danish headquarters in Africa, in November, 1783. He was immediately called upon to participate in the *Sagbadre War*, in the Anlo country on the east bank of the Volta River, where the Danes were allied with the Adas in their long-standing conflict with the Anlo Ewes. The war started on 25 February, 1784, and ended in victory for the Danes and the Adas four months later. Isert's descriptions of the war in his second, third, fourth and fifth letters are detailed, informative, and lively. He remained on the Coast for three years, during which period he was sent eastward to Whydah, as a trader, and, at a later date, he journeyed inland as far as Akuapem, north of Accra, on a private excursion. Isert started the latter journey

[1] Henningsen 1970: 117–8.

[2] Johan Emanuel Richter was a trader on the Gold Coast 1793–1805, and governor December 1815-October 1817. Wulff Joseph Wulff was Assistant at Christiansborg 1836–42. He died in Osu. See *Da Guinea var Dansk: Wulff Joseph Wulff's Breve og Dagbogoptegnelser fra Gudkysten 1836–1842*, Copenhagen 1917.

[3] Henningsen 1970: 116.

[4] This was a small side-road in the 'Ridge' area, near the Danish and German embassies. The name, in use in the 1970s, may have disappeared now. I have been unable to find out when, or by whom, the road was so named.

from Accra on 7 June, 1786. He planned to spend some time in Akuapem on the way to his ultimate goal, Asante, having been invited by the sister of the Asantehene to visit that nation. To his great disappointment the trip was aborted after a ten-day stay in Akuapem by a call back to service at Christiansborg. Angry and embittered, Isert decided to leave Africa at the first possible opportunity. On 7 October, 1786, he sailed on the *Christiansborg*, bound for Copenhagen by way of the West Indies with a cargo of slaves. Just two days out to sea the slaves revolted, directing their attack against Isert himself in the mistaken belief that he was the owner of the ship. He was very seriously injured but had recovered by the time the ship reached its destination in the West Indies two months later. The entire episode is described in the eleventh letter.

Isert spent the next eight months in the West Indies where he saw a slave auction and witnessed the maltreatment of the slaves. Fully aware, albeit not admitting it openly, that he too had had a hand in providing slaves for the plantations, he was badly shaken by the revelation. Apparently he had believed that the slaves were put to work as ordinary field hands and were treated accordingly. Isert resolved to do something to end the practice of sending slaves across the Atlantic to be subjected to such abuse. He lost no time in preparing a scheme for the establishment of a plantation on the Gold Coast, where he would raise the same crops as those cultivated in the West Indies and the black workers could remain in their own land, thus making the trans-Atlantic slave trade redundant.

He arrived in Denmark in late summer 1787 and he set about realizing the plans for the plantation. The finance minister, Count von Schimmelmann, agreed to support the attempt by giving Isert a modest sum of money and the right to buy goods and supplies on credit at Fort Christiansborg in Accra. Isert was commissioned captain in the infantry in order to give him more authority in the eyes of both the Europeans and the Africans. On 3 April, 1788, Isert married Dorothea Elisabeth Plum, aged 22, the daughter of a prominent Copenhagen family. She was venturesome enough to embark with him, three months later, on the pioneering project in Africa which was to cost both of them their lives.[1]

The Iserts, accompanied by a number of other Europeans who were to take part in the project, left Copenhagen on 14 July, 1788, on the *Fredensborg* bound for Accra, where they arrived on 14 November. Isert journeyed to Mlefi on the Volta River where he had planned to establish the settlement. The location had been decided on earlier in the confident expectation of good soils for planting, and in the hope that the river could be used for transportation to the coast. However, Isert soon discovered

[1] For papers relating to Frederiksnopel, see Editor's Appendix 3, pp. 227–45.

that the area had a particularly unhealthy climate, so he altered the plan and made for the hills of Akuapem, which he knew well, and whose paramount chief, Obuobi Atiemo, was a good friend of his.

The group of settlers was very industrious. A good beginning was made on a road to the coast some 35 kilometres to the south, and by December the first crops had been planted and a house had been erected as headquarters. On 21 December, 1788, the new settlers held an official ceremony of dedication at which the paramount chief himself raised the Danish flag and swore fidelity to the Danish king, represented by Isert. The settlement, now being called a 'colony', was named Frederiksnopel [Frederik's City] in honour of the crown prince of Denmark-Norway.[2] On 16 January, 1789, Isert wrote a letter to Schimmelmann reporting on his progress and requesting more aid. Five days later, on 21 January, 1789, he died. His wife gave birth to a daughter, christened Pouline, in 17 February. The mother died on 25 February and the child on 18 March. Attempts by Isert's replacement, J. N. Flindt, to continue the colony failed, basically because of the distance to the coast and to lack of support from Christiansborg. All signs of the settlement apart from a few piles of stones have now disappeared.

Reactions to Isert's death were strikingly various. The event seems to have been no cause for mourning at Christiansborg but it evoked expressions of great sorrow on the part of Schimmelmann and his wife. Schimmelmann was particularly distressed at the blow to the incipient colony. Isert's wife's brother, Frederik Plum, eulogised Isert in a poem which was published in a prominent journal. J. A. Kiøge, who had been governor of the Danish establishments during Isert's term of duty in Africa, and clearly had been his friend, wrote a moving obituary in which he remarked that Isert had been ridiculed and mocked during his lifetime and that very few indeed mourned his passing.[3] H. C. Monrad, who was Isert's immediate successor as a reporter of life at Christiansborg and on the Guinea Coast, made a point of contesting Isert's reporting and of belittling him whenever possible. A leading contemporary botanist honoured him in the year of his death by naming a genus of plants after him.[4] At least one modern writer was convinced that Isert had in fact been murdered.[5]

What manner of man could have been the object of such divergent opinions? The known facts of his life are few and are restricted to the

[2] For the plans for a colony, see Editor's Appendix 3, pp. 227–35.
[3] For the obituary, see Editor's Appendix 4, pp. 246–7.
[4] Johann Christian Daniel von Schreber, German botanist and zoologist, gave the name *Isertia* to a genus of plants of the family *Rubiaceae*, a red-dye producing madder.
[5] Cf. Thorkild Hansen, *Slavenes Øyer*, 1970.

date and place of his birth, to his place of study, and to the last four years of his life. I have been unable to discover when he made his first appearance in Copenhagen. His name does not appear in the catalogues of students or medical practitioners in the Danish archives. A search by librarians at universities in Germany where he might have studied yielded negative results. However, I finally traced a letter that Isert had written from Guinea in 1785 to Sir Joseph Banks, a letter which provided some important information and revealed something of the man.[6] In his charming and blundering English, Isert told of his studies in botany under the tutelage of the highly respected Dr. Marcus Elieser Bloch in Berlin, and he declared his burning desire to undertake scientific expeditions in Africa and the West Indies, should he receive financial support from Sir Joseph Banks. Isert also wrote that he had widened his studies from pure botany to include medicine, in order to increase his chances for work in Africa. Thus, his stated motivation was scientific and had nothing to do with the furthering of Danish economic or political interests in Africa. It does not support the claim of a modern biographer that although German by birth, Isert was Danish in his way of thinking and working.[7] Since Denmark had sent foreigners out to other parts of the world as investigators earlier in the century, and since relations between Denmark and Germany were close, it is understandable that Isert turned to Denmark, which actually had establishments on the Gold Coast. And in Copenhagen he received his posting to Africa, from the Danish company. The fact that there was a real paucity of botanical material and plant specimens from Africa in Denmark at that time could scarcely have escaped his notice. But having arrived in Africa he expanded his scope of study considerably, branching into ethnography. In the preface to his book he took on the new role of 'historical author', with a 'holy obligation' to record the manners and customs of the Africans for posterity. Of course, he knew quite well that this type of information had been recorded earlier by others, so he may simply have been establishing himself as one who was in a position to improve upon or even correct older sources. He often cited previous reporters, taking issue with them at times. I have addressed these in the notes to the translation.

From the outset Isert had an unreservedly positive attitude toward Africa and the Blacks, and an equally negative attitude toward the Europeans on the Guinea Coast. An admirer of Rousseau's philosophy he was eager to point out the corrupting influence of European civilisation on the Blacks. It was Isert's contention that the desire for European goods had

[6] Cf. Editor's Appendix 2, pp. 219–26.

[7] Kay Larsen in *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, 1937.

led to robbery, the pawning of debtors and to murder, a crime that he claimed was unknown to the Blacks before the advent of the Europeans and their luxury items. The one area in which the Blacks fell short of his unstinting praise was in their unquestioning obedience to fetish priests, all swindlers in Isert's eyes.

He saw the Europeans as a thoroughly bad lot — lascivious, gluttonous inebriates. Life at the forts in the company of his adopted countrymen held no pleasure for him. In Isert's view they jeopardized, even ruined, their health by consorting excessively with 'Venus, Ceres and Bacchus'. He found them men of little merit and commented that one had to have recourse to one's own resources in order to tolerate staying there. — Isert, of course, had his botanical interest to occupy him and he collected plant specimens at every opportunity. — He made no allowances for the background of many of the staff, for a difficult and boring life at the fort, and for the constant fear of illness and death, but he did recognize the factor of homesickness and grudgingly admitted that this could be ameliorated by taking a '(*quasi*) wife'. The single, towering exception to this widespread degeneration, in Isert's eyes, was Governor Kiøge.

Isert's disdain, indeed contempt, for the others at the Danish establishments could not have been a secret to them. Since he wrote openly about it, it is safe to assume that he made no effort to hide his distaste. It is equally safe to conclude that this was a major cause of others 'mocking' him, 'ridiculing' him, not 'understanding' him. Yet this was the man who returned to the Coast to start a new settlement.

In his new and authoritative role Isert was to be responsible directly to Copenhagen and not to Fort Christiansborg in Accra, yet he was to be granted credit for goods and wares from Christiansborg — at a time when that establishment was in serious financial straits. As if that were not provocation enough, he was also empowered to establish a military alliance with Akuapem, particularly to protect the settlement and Akuapem from other Black nations and from other Europeans, for the settlement was to be exclusive. Furthermore, he would purchase slaves, in competition with Christiansborg, since slaves were to be used in the colony. Isert explained that this was the method used in Africa for cultivation of the land, but that slavery at Frederiksnopel would permit of no maltreatment, since slaves were to be only serfs and slave-trading within the colony was prohibited. Miscegenation was also prohibited and the European men who were married were required to bring their wives and families with them.

The combination of Isert's aloofness towards the Danes in Accra and the apparently favoured position of Frederiksnopel, against the background of the deteriorating Danish trade on the Coast, was certainly more than

enough to assure him an unsympathetic reception at Christiansborg. Isert died, ostensibly of fever, his family followed him in death, and the dream of a utopian colony dwindled away. He was, however, remembered, and even honoured by some.

Isert can be seen as the watershed in the annals of the Danish-Norwegian settlements in West Africa. Although sent out as a government official he was also a representative of the new body of enlightened reporters who made their appearance in the 1780s.[8] Motivated by intellectual curiosity and influenced by eighteenth century rationalism, he was the first reporter to leave Denmark with the specific, albeit private, purpose of gathering and recording information from West Africa. However, it was Isert's misfortune to have made his entrance at the wrong time in history. He was too late for the expeditions sponsored by Linnaeus from the 1740s on, and for the first expedition sent by Denmark to her tropical colonies in 1763. And he was just a few years too early for the first expedition sent specifically to gather botanical specimens in West Africa. It fell to Peter Thonning to execute that project in 1789–1803. But Isert has been acknowledged as the pioneer in the establishment of the African botanical collection in Denmark.[9] His plant collection has been preserved in the Botanical Museum in Copenhagen, where it is kept together with that of Peter Thonning.[10]

The book

Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen Inseln in Columbia was written in the form of letters. Apart from the tenth and eleventh letters which are addressed to Isert's father there are no salutations. It is impossible to know whether it was actually a series of letters or if Isert had merely employed a literary device popular at the time. I am inclined to think that they were letters, either sent to various friends or to just one whose name, or names, and all personal references were deleted in the editing. It is clear that the readers to whom the book was addressed were expected to be of a similar turn of mind as was Isert himself. Sharing of the same 'code' is implicit in many of Isert's comments and asides to the reader, particularly on the behaviour of the Europeans in Africa. An example of this is his disinclination to describe the antics aboard ship after the ritual

[8] Philip D. Curtin. *The Image of Africa*, Madison 1973: 14.

[9] Carl Christensen, *Dens Danske Botaniks Historie*, Copenhagen 1924–6: 117.

[10] Isert also left two descriptions and drawings of birds which are in the University Library in Copenhagen. See pp. 254–5.

performed in crossing the 'Line', explaining that such a description would disgust the reader. Perhaps the 'letters', were sent to Dorothea Plum, whom he may have come to know before he left Denmark for Africa. This guess is based upon the very short period of time that passed from his return to Denmark to the date of their marriage. He returned in late summer 1787, and from then until they married on 3 April, 1788, a period of about eight months, he had his book published, launched his plan for a new settlement in Africa, made the arrangements for its initiation, and advertised for, and hired, staff and artisans for the realisation of the plan. If Isert and Dorothea Plum were not acquainted before then it must have been a hectic courtship indeed. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any reference to the pair in letters in the Plum family collection in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The only direct reference to the journey to Africa is a touching memory book given to Dorothea Plum by her family and friends before her departure. It includes a very moving farewell to them both written by her father.

Isert's book is notable for its attempt at objectivity and a scientific approach. He frequently made comparisons between African and European customs — to the advantage and/or disadvantage of both sides equally. For example, when he found a certain musical instrumental performance unpleasant he equated his reaction to what might be that of an African hearing European violin or cembalo music for the first time. This is in contrast to earlier Danish writers who, if they mentioned it at all, concluded that the African had no music, only loud noises. Isert commented upon the same ethnographic details as did his predecessors but his handling of the material was refreshing in its absence of eurocentrism and lack of condemnation. Pointed teeth were simply pointed teeth and not a proof of cannibalism. The apparent ease with which the African women gave birth to their babies excited no comment on their having escaped God's judgement. The dietary habits of the Blacks were admirable and sensible in Isert's eyes and the Europeans were exceedingly foolish not to emulate the Blacks in that respect.

Although his disapproval of the fetish priests was unconditional, his descriptions of other aspects of religion were objective. He even attempted explanations for practices which other Europeans had dismissed as based on ignorance or barbarism. The worship of the python is a case in point. Isert launched the hypothesis that a python may have once saved a person's life by killing an attacking animal, and that, as a consequence, and in gratitude, the snake was made into a godhead. His objectivity, however, did not generate sufficient respect to prevent his willingness, had he found the opportunity, to capture and preserve that same snake. Scientific curiosity held pride of place.

Isert made a strenuous attempt to find a scientific explanation for the black skin of the African, an intellectual exercise which was widespread in the eighteenth century. Having launched the theory that the skin of the Blacks had been stained by blood after excessive perspiration, he invited other theories to disprove his, but was adamant in rejecting the idea of a hybrid resulting from a mating between a European and an ape. His counter-argument was based upon the intelligence of the Black which he claimed was, if not superior to, at least equal to, that of the European, a postulate which was not shared by his Danish predecessors.

Isert had read widely in several European languages and was careful to acknowledge a number of his sources precisely in his notes. Some were not acknowledged but I have indicated in my notes those that I have been able to identify. His language preferences appear to have been German, French and English, with Latin as his professional language. I have found no reference to sources written in Danish — his citations from the earlier Danish source, Rømer, were from the German translation of 1769. There is no sign of his having mastered Dutch. His admiration for the English and the French and their languages was undisguised. Given this polylinguistic background his poor performance in writing is inexplicable. Faults in the written French and English may be excused. In Latin it is worrying. But in his mother tongue, German, it is shocking. In a great number of cases my translation has perforce been influenced by informed guesses based on research, my increasing familiarity with Isert's way of thinking, and my own experience gleaned from a five-year residence in Ghana and from studies at Legon. German experts to whom I have turned for aid and advice were appalled at Isert's errors of syntax and grammar. In a German review of the book in 1789 the reviewer closes with, 'Everywhere one finds printing errors and errors in language, which, because of the wealth of useful information, one can readily ignore. Perhaps the author is not German.' (*Physikalisch-Oekonomische Bibliothek*, 1789: 46–70).

It is my sincere hope that the reader will use the translation as a guide to facilitate finding material of particular interest in the original text, hence that the original will eventually be made available in a facsimile edition. Ultimately it is Isert's own words that should be read.

Previous translations

1. The first Danish translation appeared in 1789 in the collection *Gyldendals Samling af de bedste og nyeste Reisebeskrivelser i Udtog* Vol. III, pp. 247–512. The translator, who remains anonymous, did a careful piece of work in presenting the entire text. The only changes were omission of the drawings and the meteorological appendix, inserting botanical nomenclature into the text rather than as footnotes, and placing the table of contents at the end.

2. *Reise nach Guinea und den Caribäischen Inseln*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1790, is a second German edition containing the following changes: the foreword was rewritten and abbreviated; the introduction to the meteorological appendix from the original was placed immediately after the foreword and the meteorological observations were omitted; the 'letters' were changed to chapters, omitting headings and closing phrases. The text itself was unaltered apart from the translation into German of the English phrase in the twelfth letter. From page 319 to the end the publisher included a treatise on the slave trade, its history, its extent, descriptions of ships, loads, treatment of slaves, customs of Blacks. None of this material is Isert's work. I have been unable to identify the editor or the author of the treatise.

3. *Reize na Guinea en de Carabische Eilanden*, Dordrecht 1790, is a Dutch translation listed in H. Ehrencron-Müller 1927. I have not been successful in finding a copy of this for examination.

4. *Voyages en Guinée*, Paris 1793, is a French translation of the complete text. The translator has stayed close to the text in general but has taken a few liberties, such as presenting the final paragraph of the foreword in a French far more fluent than the original German but changing the meaning in the process. He explained in a footnote following the foreword that he would not use the name 'Columbia' for America as Isert did, since common usage contra-indicated the practice. The French text has several omissions, such as the word 'monthly' in describing payments to be made to the 'mulatto treasury' (p. 241), and the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph in the seventh letter. There is an occasional inexplicable mistranslation such as *un insecte* for Isert's *thier* in describing a python (p. 172). The English conversation in the twelfth letter was translated into French and the French conversation was corrected. The appendix of meteorological observations was included but the introduction to the observations containing an explanation of the methods and instruments used was omitted. The French edition was reviewed in *L'Esprit des Journaux, Francois et Étrangers*, vol. 9, Paris, September 1793, with comments both on the original and on the translation.

5. *Bref om Guinea-Kusten och Caraibiske Öarne*, Stockholm 1795, is a translation into Swedish by J. H. Olin of excerpts from Isert's book. The excerpts are true to the original but there is no indication of what, or how much, was left out.

6. *Reize van Koppenhagen naar Guinea*, Amsterdam 1797, is a Dutch translation of the entire text which is very close to the original. The

appendix and index are included but the original plates were replaced by drawings by J. C. Bendorp. The plate showing women's clothing was replaced, Isert's plate showing the installation of the field marshal [Third Letter] was omitted, and an entirely new drawing depicting the entrance of the king of Afla [Seventh Letter] was added.

7. *Lægen Paul Iserts Breve fra Dansk Guinea 1783–87*, Copenhagen 1917, edited and translated by Ingeborg Raunkí7r, is a popular edition in modern Danish which has omitted considerable sections of the original text, without indication.

All of the above translations, apart from the third one on the list, are available at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

8. *Voyages en Guinée et dans les Iles Caraïbes en Amérique*, Paris, 1989, is a new critical edition of the earlier French translation. It contains an introduction and notes by Nicoué Gayibor.

This translation

I have refrained from capitalising nouns but have retained Isert's orthography of proper names. The modern names of persons or places are indicated at first appearance in [-] immediately following the original, if they are easily recognisable. If they are totally different they have been placed in the notes.

The division into paragraphs is the same as the original. All (-) are Isert's. My editorial comments are in [-]. The original pagination is indicated throughout the text by ||-||.

Isert's footnotes were far more extensive and scientific than were those of his predecessors. Since he used an alphabetical system it was possible for me to use a numerical one and distinguish my notes from his. In the eighteenth century Germanic alphabet *i* and *j* were identical. When Isert had gone through the alphabet and needed to start anew he used *a* again. I have altered this to *aa*, etc. Editorial comments to Isert's notes are in [-].

The Scandinavian alphabet has been used in the bibliography, that is, *Æ, Ø [Ö]*, and *Å [AA]* are at the end, in that order. Measurements are equated to modern terms at first appearance in the text, but there is a complete list in the appendix.

The ubiquitous term *Negerei* has no single English equivalent so I have used the phrase 'Black settlement'. Michel Dortmoont translated sections of the Starrenberg manuscript for me. Unless otherwise indicated all translations of Letter headings, quotations and other non-German phrases are my own.

The greatest challenge, and the most problematic aspect of the work, has been that of style. The inescapable fact is that Isert wrote badly, expressed himself clumsily and committed many grammatical errors. My original intention was to translate as faithfully to the source as possible, fairly literally, yet remaining grammatically correct. However, as the work progressed along this line it became increasingly obvious that the language was so cumbrous and distracting that it interfered seriously with perception of the content. In an earlier version I had already broken up many of the latinate sentences. Now I have aimed for even more fluency while preserving the flavour of the text. Where Isert repeats a noun several times in the same sentence or paragraph I have done the same. His ironic circumlocutions have been retained. His obscure sentences have been translated as clearly as possible with editorial comment in the notes where necessary. The result has been a compromise whose success or failure I leave it to the reader to judge.

Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia (1788)

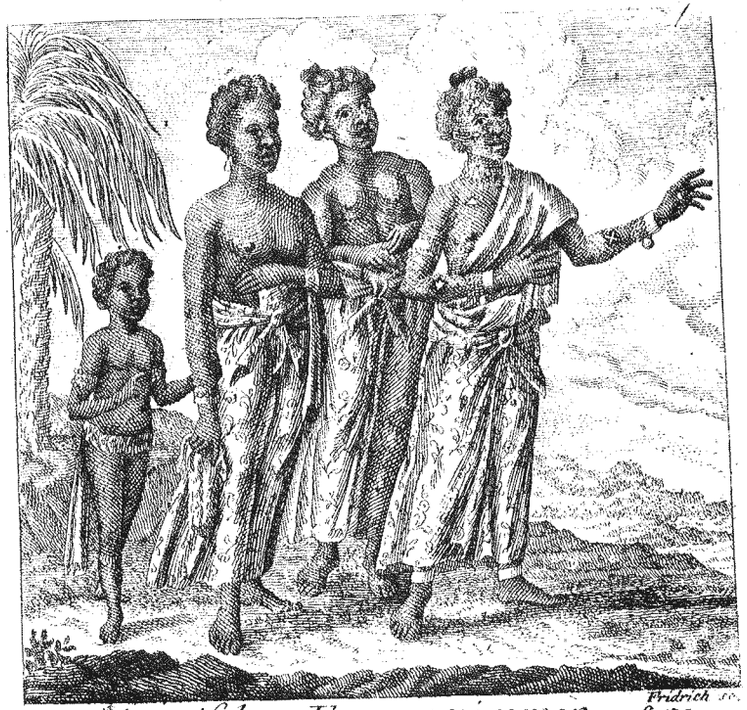
Paul Erdmann Isert's,
ehemahl. königl. dänisch. Oberarzte an den Besitzungen
in Afrika,

Reise nach Guinea

und den

Caribäischen Inseln in Columbien,

in Briefen an seine Freunde beschrieben.



Akraisches Frauenzimmer. S. 188.

Kopenhagen, 1788.
Gedruckt bey J. F. Morthorst, wohnhaft in der Pilestraße
No. 11. Litr. B.

Illustration 1. Facsimile of original title page.

Preface

||p. i|| The unanimous urging on the part of my friends to make these letters available for general use is the reason that the author has ventured to place them before the eyes of the public, after having read them through several times and corrected them here and there.

One must not expect an extensive topographical, cosmological, geographical and historical discourse about the countries reported upon here. Such reports can be found in an encyclopædia or some other appropriate, thick volume, which treats them adequately in compilation upon compilation.

The chief motive for my going to Guinea — and thereafter to West India — was solely an interest in natural science. Upon my arrival there I found a thousand new things which I could not leave unreported even if they do not belong precisely to the field of natural science. The fruit of that decision is these letters. Possibly one or another of my readers may laugh and say, 'What is the man's purpose in presenting us a book full of the foolishness and customs of a wild, barbaric nation?' I answer them with Rainal that it ought to be a holy obligation for every historical author to preserve the manners and customs of savage nations.[1] One century [on], possibly more, and those nations may no longer exist, or may be extremely changed. The Peruvians, the Mexicans and other nations in that hemisphere — what were they? And what are they now? It is even more necessary to preserve the customs of savage nations who lack the art of writing, since they themselves cannot preserve them, as do civilised people, for the [future] time when they wish to be informed of their history. I shall consider myself fortunate if I have succeeded in revealing some characteristics of that remarkable African nation, the Black!

From the standpoint of natural science studies of creatures other than people, one will find this [account] somewhat superficial, of only general

[1] 'Rainal' is the French philosopher and historian Guillaume T. F. Raynal, 1713–96. His great work was *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, six volumes, Amsterdam 1770. With humanitarian sympathy he reviewed the maltreatment of the coloured peoples, and came to exercise great influence on those contemporaries who were agitating for reform.

interest. What would interest the specialist must be described in its own mode and language, and would be out of place in this book. To please those who have a taste for, and knowledge of, botany I announce the first fascicle of a book entitled *Prodromus floræ australis*, in which 200 new species will be described, and which may be ready by Michaelmas.[2]

Where you read 'Columbia' in the letters please understand it to mean 'America'. I am unable to write the word 'America' without its making the blood boil in all my veins. I have always been of the opinion that the braggart Vespuccio, after the unforgettable Columbus had fallen into undeserved misery, built himself a pillar on the other's trophies.[3] The idea of renaming 'America' 'Columbia' is not new. It has been the practice for a long time in some places in North America. Industrious followers of this idea, and, for himself, the good will of his readers, are now the pre-eminent wish of the Author.

Copenhagen 1787

[2] Evidently this book never appeared. However, there is a small pamphlet, *Index Plantarum*, hand-written by Isert, at the Botanical Museum of the University of Copenhagen. It comprises 30 pages of enumeration of plant names according to Linnæus's classification, as well as one page of new generic names. Isert's plant collections are also at the same museum. The American plants are mixed with other collections but the African plants are kept as a separate collection. See Hepper 1976 *passim*. Isert also wrote about birds on the Guinea Coast, 'Kurze Beschreibung und Abbildung einiger Vögel aus Guinea', in *Schriften der Gesellschaft naturforschender Freunde zu Berlin*, 1788, Vol. IX: 16–20, 332–5. Two drawings and their descriptions can be found in the University Library, Copenhagen. I have been unable to find more.

[3] Amerigo Vespucci, 1451–1512, was an Italian explorer and geographer who went to Spain where he became acquainted with Columbus. Vespucci participated in a Spanish expedition to Guyana and in a Portuguese expedition to Brazil. He was cleverer than Columbus in promoting and making capital of his discoveries, with the result that a German educator, Martin Waldseemuller, suggested in 1507 that the fourth continent be named after Vespucci. Thus it became 'America'.

Table of Contents

[The pagination is that of 1788]

First Letter

Christiansburg
10 November, 1783

'*Ea quae scimus sunt pars minima eorum quae ignoramus.*' Linnæus[1]

You know, dear friend, that on 2 July this year I boarded a Company ship called 'Prinz Friederichs Hofnung' as a passenger, to make the journey from Copenhagen to the Danish possessions here.[2] With this our goal we weighed anchor the following morning. Near midday we saw the well-known island Wheen [Ven], residence of the famous astronomer Tycho Brahe, and soon after that, Helsingør [Elsinore].[3] This sea journey in The Sound || p. 2 || is the most attractive in the world, especially in the summer when one can clearly observe on both sides the blessed tracts of Zeeland [Zealand] and Schone [Skania].

Since the wind was unfavourable and the weather was foggy we did not dare to venture into the open sea but remained at anchor. I took advantage of the opportunity to go ashore at Helsingør to see the superb Fort Kronenburg [Kronborg Castle], by means of which our nation can force other nations to pay duties when they pass from the North Sea towards the Baltic Sea, or in the reverse direction.[4] You ought not to expect

[1] 'Those things which we know are the least part of those which we do not know.'

[2] 'Prince Frederick's Hope'.

[3] Tycho Brahe (1545–1601), the Danish astronomer, was given the island of Ven in The Sound in 1576 as a fiefdom by King Frederick II. On the island he built two observatories, 'Uranienborg' above ground and 'Stjerneborg' underground, both equipped with excellent instruments of his own design and construction.

[4] The name 'Kronenborg', which Isert used, is one of the variant forms of the name employed over the centuries. The original building was a fort called *Krogen* [The Hook], built on a hook-like promontory where Zealand's north coast forms nearly a right-angle to the south coast. The name was, perhaps, a play on words since the fort was built to collect toll from passing ships. Because The Sound was the shortest route from the Kattegat in the North Sea to the Baltic and in addition was very rich in fish, control over those waters was a bone of contention from the fourteenth century up to the nineteenth century. The conflicts were finally resolved by treaty in 1857 when Denmark was paid a single and final compensation of 67 million kroner, and all nations have enjoyed the right of free passage from that time. Kronborg Castle itself has undergone many changes in the course of time. Built as a

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a detailed description from me since there are available more detailed descriptions than any I can give.[5] The number of ships usually lying in port here is astounding. I have counted 150.

After a period of six days we set off, sailing slowly, and soon found ourselves in the Kattegat. Since we were becalmed we fished and caught many varieties of fish, such as gurnard[a], mackerel[b] and *Willinge*.

|| p. 3 || I amused myself by watching a species of medusa [jellyfish] that has a purple disc and is very common in that area![6]

Since the wind was not at all favourable for us, we stayed in the North Sea for nearly four weeks, and even when the wind occasionally came from a favourable direction it was always so weak that we could make only very slight progress. In these interludes we caught various kinds of fish, among them a species of shark.[c] The sharks were accompanied by two to four small fishes, a variety of small salmon, which the crew call 'pilot fish' or 'guides', and which are never killed by the shark. It appears that because of the poor eyesight which the sharks seem to have, and the fact of their being a fish of prey, Nature has found it necessary to help them. On the shark itself there are usually found some 'shark-suckers'[d] that fasten themselves to it. I can see no reason for this practice other than that the 'shark-suckers' live either on the quantities of slime secreted, or, in common with various other fish, on a kind of insect.[e]

|| p. 4 || At last, on the 29th, we saw the so long-awaited coastal towns of Dover and Calais. In the evening the wind changed and we did not dare to enter the Channel, since the mouth of the Channel at the above-mentioned cities is very narrow. So we found it necessary to turn back again until 1 August, when the wind had become more favourable. On the 4th we were in the so-called English Channel, level with the Isle of Wight. We now saw a flotilla of six Dutch warships which were setting out for the Mediterranean. On the 12th we ran into a small storm but by

[a] *Cottus Scorpius Linn.* [sea scorpion]
[b] *Scomber Thynnus Linn*
[c] *Squali* [dogfish]
[d] *Echeneis an Remora ? Linn*
[e] *Monoculus* [See [5] below]

fortress in 1574 on the ruins of 'Krogen', it has evolved into an impressive castle which is now an important museum. The national Maritime Museum is also located within the walls of Kronborg.

[5] The sources to which Isert referred may have included the following works: Boesen, *Den ved Øresund Beliggende Anseelige Stad Helsingørs Beskrivelse*, Aalborg 1757; John Atkinson *The Tariff* or *Book of Rates and Duties . . .* Glasgow, 1770; T. A. De Marieu, *Tableau des droits et usage . . . du Sund*, Copenhagen 1776. (I am indebted to Henning Henningsen for this information.)

[6] *Willinge* may be whiting. The 'species of medusa' refers to a jellyfish.

using full sail we avoided the French coast. On the 14th we had our last sight of European land, the island Ushant, at a distance of about three miles, after which we found ourselves in the Spanish sea.

On the 24th we saw a Danish brig, laden with dried currants and sailing to Ostend from Zakynthos [Zante]. When they saw our flag they immediately put out a boat and the officer-in-charge soon came aboard. They lacked nearly all the necessities || p. 5 || which Nature requires, since they had been at sea for eleven weeks, and the voyage usually takes only one month. However, this lack was soon remedied from our surplus stores. The day was fair and there was hardly any wind, so we made an excursion in a small boat to the brig. It is extraordinary that even in mid-ocean it can be so calm that the surface is as flat as a board.

On the 25th we saw four porpoises[f] around our ship. Their majestic movements in the water resembled those of wooden horses that were being animated, and the water which they sprayed like fountains several ells high out of their nostrils, made a pleasant spectacle. They were about the length of two persons and some of them had finger-thick welts which in all probability they had received from their enemies. The entire ship was surrounded by an army of bonito[g] following in the ship's wake, and their silvery, shining bellies in the water || p. 6 || gave off a phosphorescent glow.

In the evening I saw a bird which must have belonged to the species of *Schnepfe*.[7] It was quite black and had a white stripe across its back. After it had landed on the ship several times it took off for the east in the direction, in our opinion, of where Madeira must lie.

Since the nights were now darker, the light of the sea water could be seen very clearly. When the wind is blowing somewhat and the ship has some speed a pleasant spectacle is provided, for it seems as if the ship is flying through a fiery stream. The physicists are divided in their opinion of the cause of this light in the sea water. Some think that it comes from very small atom-like insects; others that it comes from rotten particles of sea animals. The latter opinion seems the more credible, unless one can argue against it that these same rotting particles are found in the northern seas as well, although no remarkable light is seen there.[8]

[f] *Delphinus Phocaena Linn.* [porpoise]
[g] *Scomber pelamis Linn.*

[7] '*Schnepfe*' may mean a snipe.

[8] Isert is mistaken, since phosphorescence is in fact seen in the northern seas. It is caused mainly by the presence of plankton and other minute cellular creatures. Isert sailed the northern seas for the first time in July, when the nights are always very light, hence the phosphorescence may not have been visible.

|| p. 7 || The following day we caught a so-called ink-fish[h], which appears to be a new species. It has, to be sure, the characteristics of the other known species, namely that it has a bladder full of a black fluid, probably its gall, lying over its stomach, and this fluid served as the original ink for the ancients.

On 1 September we saw land in front of us, towering about the clouds. The sailors assumed it to be the Peak of Tenerife, that giant among the mountains of the earth.[i] However, when we came close, it was the island of La Palma, another of the Canary Islands. A bird of the species *Wiederhopfen*[k] flew out to us from land. Even the most thick-headed disparager of Nature would have been struck with wonder at this marvellous || p. 8 || mixture of colours: black, white, sapphire blue and carmine red alternated diagonally along the entire length of the bird.[l]

During the night of the 4th we crossed the Tropic of Cancer, and since it was pleasant weather the sailors began celebrating the occasion with a game known as *Hönsen (Hühnern, or Hänseln)*.[9] It is said that the Dutch nation was the originator of this tasteless entertainment. But since it might be fitting for you to know about the foolishness of the Europeans in the remote parts of the world, I shall narrate it as well as I can remember it.

|| p. 9 || The evening before the initiation ceremony, as soon as it is dark (which is always the case in the evening in the tropics) a sailor, who must be equipped with a strong bass voice, is completely wrapped in a sheepskin

[h] *Sepia — tentaculis x carnosis lanceolatis intus serratis: binis intermediis longioribus. Os maxillis instructum castaneis osseis in centro tentaculorum, affixum. Corpus oblongum teres: lobi anales rhomboidei. Oculi ad latera capitis inserti nigri. Color supra nigro cinereoque irroratum subtus argenteum* ['Cuttlefish' — ten fleshy tentacles serrated with spikes: two among them being longer. The mouth, in the middle of these tentacles, is provided with jawbones fastened by chestnut-like formations of bone. The body is smooth and oblong; the anal/posterior lobes are rhomboid. Black eyes are located on the sides of the head. The upper part of the body is speckled black and ash-grey, and the underside is silver.' There are errors in Isert's description: The 'spikes' are suckers; the 'jawbones' are a beak, since the cuttlefish has no jaws; 'chestnut-like formations of bone' is obscure, but the reference to 'chestnut' perhaps is an attempt to define the beak. I am indebted to Thor Bakke for these comments.]

[i] According to more recent observations the Cordilleras in Peru have a higher altitude than this one has. [Pico de Teyde, or Tenerife, is 3,716 m. high; Huascaran in the Cordilleras de los Andes in Peru is 6,760 m. high.]

[k] *Upupa*. [The description fits the Senegal wood-hoopoe, *Phoeniculus purpureus* (Serle and Morel 1977: 134–5).]

[l] I am not going to describe this delightful creature, which is unknown to the ornithologist. One of our ship's crew, an orthodox man, considered it sinful to catch this bird, believing it better to let it die of hunger or drown in the sea rather than keep it captive. Therefore, acting on this conviction he secretly gave it its freedom.

[9] The term *hønse*, used for this initiation at sea, may mean money given on entrance to a guild, payment for refreshments, or the verb, to tease (Henningsen 1961: 237–9).

and sent all the way to the top of the main mast. When he arrives there he starts to roar fiercely, like a kind of bear. Everyone is frightened, especially the young sons of Neptune who have not crossed the Tropic of Cancer before. The older ones say to the younger ones, 'That is the Man from the Line. It is on your account that he is angry. You must offer him something, otherwise you will die!' The Man from the Line roars again. They cringe. One among them, more courageous than his brothers, implores, 'Is there no hope for deliverance?' The 'Old Man' answers, 'By morning you will be mine!' He roars once more and disappears.

Early the next morning, before the sun has appeared, four of the older sailors have stripped themselves naked and blackened their entire bodies. The 'Old Man' is still in his vestments and with him in the crow's nest he has the blackened sailors, who represent his 'angels'. || p. 10 || During the night they have hauled a quantity of sea water up to the crow's nest, from which the black ones, now and then, pour bucketfuls down on to the deck and the frightened young sailors. The 'Old Man' roars again. He is asked to come down. He descends and some of his black angels come with him. He asks for the captain, who makes himself known, and the 'Old Man' then orders the captain to line the crew up in front of him immediately. This is done. The 'Old Man' already knows who has not yet crossed the Tropic and threatens to take them [underwater] to the Line. The other sailors plead for them and promise a ransom. They write down all the names of the novices, who, in turn, have to promise to hand over certain sums [of money]. They reach agreement. And the Old Man, to whom they repeatedly offer brandy, urges the sailors to perform dances and games, of which they invent so many during the day that it would evoke disgust in you if I described them all. The main thing is that the initiate is completely blackened by the 'angels' and a bucketful of water is poured over his head, || p. 11 || at which the Old Man repeatedly excuses himself, saying that at this latitude great *travats*[m] occur. No one is spared at this point, no matter who he is. Therefore, not rarely, the entertainment ends in a row.[10]

[m] The words *travat* or *tornado* signify the type of rainfall, accompanied by thunder and lightning, which one experiences in the tropics. On the Guinea Coast it never rains in any other manner. The sky can be completely cloudless apart from one small black cloud in the east. Then, when it is going to rain, a mighty storm blows up and the sky becomes black. One hears thunder crashing and there are flashes of lightning, and finally the rain falls in what we call a cloudburst. This usually does not last for more than one to two hours. Then the sky is as clear as it was before. [Isert is describing what is known today as a 'line squall', but the term 'tornado' is a misnomer (Boateng 1970: 32).].

[10] Isert's description is of an initiation classical in all its components. For detailed accounts of this custom, its variations and *loci*, see Rømer 1760: 257–61; Lydenburg 1957; Henningsen: Tønsberg 1961 and Copenhagen 1961.

On the morning of the 7th, when we found ourselves at Cape Verde, we experienced the first *travat*. This area is famous for nearly always having stormy weather, but what interested me most was a so-called 'water-spout', or 'whirlwind'[n], which hung with its point all the way down to the sea, turning like a spinning top from east to west. It is an awesomely beautiful show ||p. 12|| of Nature. Our sailors, knowing its effect, were not a little worried. It is not unusual for it to pull the vessel off course, or even to sink it.[o] In the afternoon I saw a small land bird that landed on our ship. Its colour was steel-blue, and it belonged to the sparrow species.[p] A number of seals [q] were also seen, and towards evening two European swallows appeared and stayed overnight in our mast.

On 8 October we caught three great sharks, or man-eaters[r], one weighing ||p. 13|| 250 pounds. When I examined their jaws I found them full of insects which are called 'one-eyed'[s] by insect specialists. Usually the sailors have an aversion to eating this fish. They say that it eats people, and if a person eats it and has a ||p. 14|| disease hidden in his body, it will break out immediately. However, I found it tasty enough, particularly the flesh from the region of the belly. The rest of the flesh of the adult fish is somewhat tough, and when it has been cooked it has a bright orange colour.

[n] *Tuba aquatica, Typhon Physicor* [The terms *tuba* and *typhoon* are not synonymous. See Glossary of Meteorology 1959. The modifiers *aquatica* and *physicor* are not in use today but are apparently Isert's own terminology (Gustav Bjørbæk, personal communication).]

[o] One and a half years later I saw one of these whirlwinds blow away several of the Blacks' houses and the flagpole of the English fort near Christiansburg.

[p] *Fringillae*

[q] *Phoca an Vitulina Linn.* [Harbour seal]

[r] *Squalus Carcharias Linn.* — I anatomised the head. The *cerebrum* was divided transversely into two *lobos*. The *nervus nasali* originates from the point of the first one. Then the *lobus* becomes, as it were, *petiolatus*, and from the *petiolo* comes the *nervus ophthalmicus*. The *cerebrum* becomes thicker, and I counted two *ventriculi* at the front and two at the back which were separated from each other only by a thin membrane. On both sides *ventriculorum anteriorum* one finds a *lobus*, which is nearly *pellucidus* and whose use I could not divine. Approximately in the dividing wall *ventriculorum* originates the third pair of nerves, which are only very small, and close by, the fourth pair, which goes to the mouth and could be called *paria gustatoria*. Closer to the back, in the *medulla oblongata*, arises the fifth pair. These are as strong as the previous ones but are immediately divided into several branches, and appear to be chiefly designated for the back. The *medulla* terminates in the *medulla spinalis*. In the region *ventriculorum* there are found various prominences and depressions, which it would be too time-consuming to describe here. [The above description is correct in its entirety, but the Latin terminology is different today (Thor Bakke, personal communication).]

[s] *Monoculus*, a new peculiar species, which will be described on another occasion. (Isert may be referring to one of various types of *euphausiid*, whose eyes are very close together (*idem*).]

Flying fish[t] increased enormously in numbers in this locality. They could be seen rising in schools of thousands. As their number increased, so did the numbers of their enemies. Two varieties of gull, one totally white and the other grey[u], sea ravens, frigate birds and herons made their lives miserable in the air, and in the water dorado[x], *Halbe Kurte*[y], bonito and many other fish did the same. Some of the bonito were caught with bait, others with a spear, some of them weighing 15 pounds and more. I examined the jaws and found them filled with numerous 'one-eyed' creatures.[z] The most amusing ||p. 15|| sight was that these creatures all lined up and marched about the jaws like a corps of soldiers.

On the 13th we saw Cape Three Points, or the promontory of three headlands on the coast of Guinea, and immediately after that, the first Dutch fort. We kept close to the coast and had the pleasure of seeing both the main forts, St. George della Mina [Elmina Castle] of the Dutch and Cape Coars [Cape Coast Castle] of the English, as well as several other insignificant ones.[11] In the evening a beautiful woodpecker[aa] landed on our ship and was caught by hand.

On 16 October we found ourselves in the roadstead at Christiansburg [Christiansborg], our final destination, having spent almost sixteen weeks on the way, during which time no one had set foot on land. Immediately a great canoe or boat made from a single tree trunk and manned by 15 Blacks, all paddling and singing, came out to us from land. Ships that ply their trade on the Guinea Coast find it necessary to drop anchor from one to one and a half miles off shore, because the water along this coast is very shallow, ||p. 16|| so that a sudden storm could quite easily draw the ship into the breakers[bb] where it would be irretrievably

[t] *Exocoetus volitans Linn*

[u] *Lari*

[v] and [w] missing.

[x] *Coryphaena Hippurus Linn.*

[y] The same species, but larger.

[z] *Monoculi* — a different species from the one I found in the shark. [See [s] above.]

[aa] *Merops viridis Linn.* [In the text Isert calls the bird a woodpecker, but his ornithological classification is *Merops*, and these are bee-eaters. See Serle and Morel 1977: 130–32.

[bb] Breakers, *Barre*, the breaking of the waves.

[11] Although Dixcove, an English fort, was the first on the coast after Cape Three Points it may have escaped Isert's notice in favour of Fort Batenstein at Butri because the former lay in a rocky cove whereas the latter, a Dutch fort, was on a high hill (Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 19–20). In addition Isert may have seen the following forts: Ft. Nassau at Mori, Ft. William at Anomabu, Ft. Amsterdam at Kormantin, a British fort at Tantumquery, Ft. Lydsaamhed at Apam, an English fort at Winnebah, and finally Ft. de Goede Hoop at Senya Bereku. For the history and descriptions of these forts, following the order listed above, see Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 12, 41, 17, 37–8, 33, 26, 48, 35.

lost.[12] We treated our Blacks[cc] to brandy, that so very welcome drink, and the ship's captain and passengers immediately went with them to land.

In vain have the Europeans tried to breast the breakers and to land in their own small pointed boats. These have almost always capsized. The trip from the ship to the breakers was made in less than three-quarters of an hour.

The Blacks now started to prepare themselves to breast the breakers. The captain of the canoe made a short address to the sea, after which he sprinkled a few drops of brandy as an offering. At the same time he struck both sides of the canoe several times with his clenched fist. He warned us Europeans to hold fast. The entire performance was carried out with such gravity that we felt almost as if we || p. 17 || were preparing for death. An additional cause for alarm is that, having started to go through the breakers, they must often paddle back again because they had not timed it to the right moment. They are said to do this often deliberately in order to torment the Whites in the breakers for a longer time, so that in acknowledgement of their great struggle they would be given a larger bottle of brandy. In a few minutes, however, we were safely across and our boat was on the sand. Then some strong Blacks came from the beach and hauled us on their shoulders to the dry beach.[13]

It was almost evening when we came ashore. God! how wonderfully different I found this world from that which I left 16 weeks ago. A new sky, a new earth, new people, animals and plants! Everything around me here is beautiful, remarkably beautiful! But maybe only because it is new? Yet all of human nature is, so to speak, afflicted with curiosity. Why should I, then, feel ashamed of this drive inherent in humans? The Blacks of both sexes welcomed me wherever || p. 18 || I went with a gratifying '*Adio a hura*!' ('Good day, Sir').[dd]

Christiansburg is the headquarters of the Danish nation in Africa. The fort was the first Danish possession. The Danes bought it in 1660 from the Portuguese. Christiansburg lies at 5° 44′ north latitude, in the middle of the province of Akra [Accra]. The Portuguese had used it only as a

[cc] Mistakenly called 'Moors' in Germany. [For a discussion of the terms 'Moors' and 'Moor-land' see Müller 1673: 29.]

[dd] This phrase is evidently a corrupt form of the Portuguese *a Dio*. [In all probability the phrase Isert heard was *Ajo*, 'it is fine, cool', used in greeting, and *Owúra*, 'Sir'. A transliteration of the first word would result in a familiar European term. The title *Owúra* is a Twi word and one of many loanwords in Gã (Mary Esther Dakubu, personal communication). See also Müller in Jones 1983: 168; Rask 1828: 48.

[12] On transportation from the roadsteads, see Barbot 1732: 266–7; Monrad 1822: 350; Boateng 1970; 4; Dickson 1971: 115–6.

[13] Cf. Barbot 1732: 266–7; Rømer 1760: 256; Meredith 1812: 57–9.

secondary fort where they had some white servants to maintain the Akra trade. It was at that time a small but very durably built fort.[14] Now it is a very remarkable conglomeration because, because of the growing number of personnel, it became necessary to enlarge it here and there, until today one can no longer tell what the place was actually like in former times. A reasonably accurate picture of it can be found in Rømer[ee], where it is drawn from two different aspects. After Romer's time a great solid masonry bastion was added on the southwest side, in the year || p. 19 || 1778, on the orders of the worthy, now deceased, Governor Major Hemsen.[15] This has two twenty-four pound cannons, two eighteen-pounders and several twelve- and six-pounders, very impressively placed. By the use of these cannons we are able, if necessary, to salute the Dutch and English forts which lie nearby.[16] Outside of the fort, towards the northeast, there has been built a long building of stone that was originally meant to be a church, but has now been changed into an armoury.[17] At its highest point the Castle has four storeys which might be very disadvantageous in the event of a siege by Europeans.

As impressive as the appearance of the Fort is at a distance, both from land and sea, just so impressively lacking in comfort is the interior construction. Not only are the rooms extremely cramped, even those for the officers, but they are so low that a grown man can barely stand upright in some of them. Moreover, the walls in the old part of the Fort are up to four feet thick and the windows so small that it is barely possible for a man to put his head out. ||p. 20.|| One is therefore deprived of the cross-draught so necessary in this hot climate, and since each man has no more than one room at his disposal, and must keep all his belongings and

[ee] L. F. Rømer's *Nachrichten von der Küste Guinea*. From the Danish 1769. [Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer was in the Danish service on the Gold Coast 1739–49. He published two books about the Guinea Coast: *Tilforladelig Efterretning om Kysten Guinea*, Copenhagen 1760, and *Tilforladelig Efterretning om Negotien paa Kysten Guinea*, Copenhagen 1756. Isert's date reference was to the German edition which was clearly the one he had read. The drawings of Christiansborg Castle (Rømer 1760: 290–1) are on pp. 251 and 252.]

[14] For the early history of Christiansborg Fort, see Tilleman 1697: 91–6; Meyer ?1698: manuscript; Bjørn 1788: 193; Lawrence 1963: 199–217 and Plates 41b–50a; Nørregaard 1966: 42–6; Daaku 1970: 112–4; Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 22–4.

[15] Johan Conrad von Hemsen was the Danish governor from June 1777 until he died in office in December 1780. His governorship immediately preceded that of Jens Kiøge (Second Letter [1]). Isert was evidently in error in citing 1778 for the building of the bastion. The actual completion of that structure was probably not before 1780, that being the date inscribed under Christian VII's cipher on the bastion itself (Lawrence 1963: 210–1). See also Rømer 1760: 190–1; Bjørn 1788: 194.

[16] The Dutch fort was Crèvecoeur, now called Ussher Fort, and the English one, Fort James. Both are in use today as prisons.

[17] For descriptions of the church, see Monrad 1822: 376; Lawrence 1963: 211.

equipment there, as well as sleep there, it is easy to understand that this place alone is enough to breed contagious illness. We would have been happy to have been allowed to build a kind of barracks with spacious rooms outside the Fort, where we could spend the nights. It would cost very little because building materials are available in this country.[18]

More in the future, and until then I am . . .

[18] On the small crowded rooms at Christiansborg, see Rømer 1760: 291; Bjørn 1788: 194.

Second Letter

In camp at Ada on the Rio Volta
29 December, 1783

||p. 21|| I had barely sent off my last letter to you when I received orders from the present Governor-in-Chief of this country, Mr. Kiøge, who was staying at Ada on the Rio Volta, to join him and his army of Blacks.[1] They had been gathered in camp there for a few weeks in order to make another Black nation see reason — a nation called Augna, who live on the other side of the Volta.[2]

But first a few words about my first land journey in Africa.[3] Travelling in this country is quite different from our way of travelling in Europe.

[1] Jens Adolph Kiøge's first position on the Coast was that of *Underassistant* in 1766. He was named factor at the Ada trading lodge in 1770, just after a war in which the Anlo, with help from the Way and Keta, attacked theAda and won a decisive battle over them. Kiøge persuaded the two sides to 'eat fetish', thus making peace. He established a trading station at Little Popo [now Anecho] in 1772, making this the easternmost of the Danish settlements. Upon the death of Governor Hemsen (see First Letter [16]) in 1780 Kiøge was made Acting Governor of Christiansborg and confirmed as Governor in 1781. He consolidated and strengthened Denmark's position on the Coast and laid the cornerstone of the new Fort Kongensten at Ada in 1783, a fort build as protection against the Anlo, who were still harrassing the Ada and threatening the Danes. With a strong military alliance of nations west of the Volta and the new fort as support Kiøge embarked upon a military resolution of conflicts with the Anlo and their allies. The resulting war came to be known as the *Sagbadre War, Sagbadre* being the local nickname of a Danish trader whom the Anlo had robbed in 1783. Isert describes this war in detail in the Third and Fourth Letters. Kiøge, released from his appointment because of ill health, returned to Denmark in 1789. In spite of the many honours which had been bestowed upon him in recognition of his work on behalf of the Danish establishment, he was accused of economic irregularities during his career in Africa and was denied repayment of the private funds that he had used for the establishment in Africa. He brought the case to court but died before the matter could be decided. See Nørregaard 1966: 152–3.

[2] Augna is a variant of Awuna which signifies the Anlo of the Ewe nation.

[3] Bowdich compared distances recorded by other European writers to those of Isert (Bowdich 1821a: 57–69).

One has neither horses[a] nor wagons, but a kind of hammock ||p. 22|| which is a sheet fastened to a pole and carried on the heads of bearers. Eight Blacks who alternate two by two are required for a journey of ten miles.[4] They are very skilled in this craft, and make the journey from Christiansburg to Friedensburg [Fredensborg] in twelve hours, a distance reckoned to be ten miles. When the journey is not a matter of haste it is preferable to travel during the night. This is to avoid the great heat which is so much more intense at the shore, because the Blacks always walk as close as possible to the sea in order to profit from the constant moistening of the sand by the breakers, but the reflection from the water of the sun's rays increases the heat.[5]

Three-quarters of a mile from Christiansburg lies the first Black settlement , Labodei [Labadi]. At the beginning of this century there was a small fort at Labodei whose ruins can still be seen. 'At that time', say the Labodians, 'we were in our fullest flower.' They were always allied with the Ursu [Osu] Blacks, whose settlement lies under Christiansburg. The Ursu still live at Christiansburg because their town was burned down in a war with the Dutch Akras ||p. 23|| six years ago.[b] The Labadians are primarily renowned because of their oracles and fetishes which are held in high esteem, particularly among the Akras, and the priest of the fetish hut is regarded as being similar to a bishop among the other Akra priests.[6]

About two miles from Labodei lies the Black settlement of Tessing [Teshie], where the hammock bearers usually rest for a little while, and there they make a pretext of drinking water. It appears, however, that if the travelling White Man is not provided with that royal fluid, brandy, himself, he is forced to buy a bottle at his own expense from the local factor and treat his Blacks to it. A further two miles from Tessing one arrives at Temma [Tema], after first passing an insignificant Black settlement known as Ningoa [Nungo], which lies further inland on the left side. There is a small Dutch fort at Nungoa which, however, was abandoned by that nation in the war of 1781.[7] At present one of our corporals is stationed ||p. 24|| in the kabossie's house there because the Blacks asked for our protection and they have flown our flag since 1781.[8]

Two miles farther on from Temma there is another Black settlement, or town, known as Ponny [Kpone]. It is the same size as the previous one and, like it, has a deserted Dutch fort and also, at present, a Danish trading office under an assistant.[9] The trading business is actually not very brisk because Ponny is so close to the forts Christiansburg and Friedensburg. I stayed a day and a night at Ponny, since I had been told that I would find marvellous mussels here, and indeed I was not disappointed. Not only did I find mussels, but also several plants, insects, etc. hitherto unknown to me. On the shore at Ponny irregular rock formations go quite far out into the sea. Among these rocks, which form small lagoons, there can be found the greatest variety of sea creatures, shell fish such as molluscs.

Another two miles farther on from Ponny lie the two Black settlements Great Prampram and Little Prampram. The latter has a fortified trading lodge ||p. 25|| or small fortress belonging to the English.[10] About halfway there, one passes a salt-water lagoon. This has constant connection to the sea, and in flood tide is often so deep that it reaches all the way to the Blacks' shoulders. Then it can be up to 300 *Klafter* wide. It is called the Ponny Lagoon.[11] It is rich in fish, particularly a kind called *hardis*

[a] Apart from one single horse at each establishment, which in rare cases might have been brought to the coast from as far as 200 miles inland. [On the rarity and condition of horses on the coast, see Barbot 1732: 216; Rask 1754: 103; Goody 1971: 37, 47.]

[b] This village was rebuilt in the years 1785 and 1786, and a Danish trading post with an assistant was established there at the same time. [The war to which Isert referred was probably the *Kotoku* and *Twerebo* war of 1777. See Reindorf 1895: 101–3; Reindorf 1980: 2].

[4] Under the system Isert used, 1 mile = 7.5 km.

[5] Monrad took issue with Isert on the description of the hammock being carried on the heads of the bearers (Monrad 1822: 364). However, there is ample evidence that Isert was correct. See also, Meredith 1812: 59–60; Burton 1864: 90–1; Freeman, R. A. 1898: 7; Gayibor 1978: 133. There are divergent reports on the willingness or unwillingness on the part of the hammock-bearers to travel at night. See Rask 1754: 124; Rømer 1760: 75; Gayibor 1978: 133.

[6] Isert may have been paraphrasing an earlier description of the status of the Labadi 'Oracle' (Rømer 1760: 49). See also Bjørn 1788: 200. The phrase 'Dutch Akras' indicates the practice of identification of Black inhabitants with the European nation with which they were most closely allied. The relationship was one of interdependence based upon proximity to a European fort; payment of tribute by the Europeans to the African chief or king for permission to settle and stay; mutual military support when necessary; and trade agreements. This type of alliance, often manifested by the flying of the European nation's flag, was a highly pragmatic arrangement and frequently subject to change by either side.

[7] On Tema, see Bjørn 1788: 206–7; Lawrence 1963: 85; Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 38. Isert's date 1781 should read 1782 since he was probably referring to the attack made by the English, under Captain Shirley, on the Dutch holdings at Accra and its environs. In this action the Danes were supposedly neutral but they had a vital interest in the removal of the Dutch influence and trade from the Accra area and the coast eastward. The 'neutrality', then, amounted to giving the Dutch refugees asylum in Christiansborg on the one hand, and balancing this by giving 'supplies' to the English — supplies which were in fact the ammunition instrumental to the English victory.

[8] *Kabossie* is from the Portuguese *caboceiro*, 'head man'.

[9] On Kpone, see Bjørn 1788: 207–8; Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 38.

[10] The English fort at Prampram was Fort Vernon.

[11] A *Klafter* is a span of outstretched arms equal to about 190 cm. in Isert's time. The 'Ponny' Lagoon is now known as the Laloi Lagoon (Christopher De Corse, personal communication).

here, which is extremely tasty, and is similar to the European salmon in some respects.[12]

In the region of this lagoon I saw for the first time the African Crown bird, or Fetish-bird,[c] a renowned bird whose majestic appearance pleased me not a little. This bird is held in high esteem, and no one would venture to shoot it. When the Blacks see it gliding through the air they shout to it, just as in our country children commonly shout to the stork. They call it the 'Hornblower' (Trumpeter) of the fetish, because when in flight it usually produces a call as unpleasant as that produced when one blows on a horn.

||p. 26|| At last, a good two miles beyond Prampram, lies our second fort, Friedensburg, at the Black settlement Ningo. This was the end of the first stage of my journey. The fort was built by the Danes during the years 1735 to 1741.[d] It is a regular, long rectangle with four bastions and a spacious courtyard. Surrounding it is an outwork, or wall, within which it can comfortably accommodate the number of Blacks in the Black settlement in case of an attack. In recent years, under the leadership of the Chief Merchant and Commander, Mr. Kipnasse himself, considerable attempts have been made to improve the wall, and in addition the Fort has been provided with a solidly-built store-house and living quarters for craftsmen and soldiers.[13] However, the Fort itself has a fault on the northeast bastion — the wall there is cracked from top to bottom, ||p. 27|| making the bastion unusable. Attempts are made to repair the walls as well as possible, yet a single shot from the four cannons that the bastion carries is sufficient to put it back into its former state. To repair the wall [properly] it would be necessary to rebuild the bastion, or indeed the entire Fort.[14]

[c] *Ardea Pavonis Linn.* [The Crowned Crane, *Balearica pavonina*. See Serle and Morel 1977: 63, pl.11. See also, Bosman 1705: 263–4, drawing no. 11; Rømer 1760: 345; Boyle 1874: 355; Stanley 1874: 186.]

[d] Rainal is in error when he says that we had bought it from the King of Aquambo sometime after the first half of the last century. This could apply only to Christiansburg, from which the Aquambos had chased the Portuguese away. See *Histoire philosophique & politique*, 1773, Vol. IV p. 172. [In the 1770 Amsterdam edition this material is found in Vol. IV, p. 283.]

[12] This is probably the fish which Tilleman and Müller call *harder*, and which Jones identifies as grey mullet. (Tilleman 1697: 146; Müller in Jones 1985: 297).

[13] Johan Fridrich Kipnasse had his first tour of duty on the coast between 1766 and 1772 as a *Reserve*, and his second tour as *Oberassistent* in 1773. He was Governor from the time of Kiøge's departure in March 1788, until he was replaced by A. R. Bjørn in October 1789. See Nørregaard 1966: 153; Reindorf 1980: 137–8. See also 'Materials relating to Frederiksnopel' in Editor's Appendix 3.

[14] See the drawing on p. 250. For other descriptions of Fredensborg Fort, see Rømer 1760: 310–12; Bjørn 1788: 208–9; Lawrence 1963: 73, 76, 77, 86, 90, 93; Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 38.

This Black settlement, which is not among the smallest, is made up largely of round houses like those at Christiansburg.[15] The language of the Ningos is different from that of the Akras. They call themselves Adampes [Adangbe], and their language Adampe, which is something between Assianthee [Asante], Krepee and Akra.[16] This nation is populous, and lives not under a king but in small republics. The Adas are also of the Adampe nation.

After I had rested at Ningo for a day, I continued my journey to Ada with a new team of bearers.

On this journey of about twelve miles, there is not a single Black settlement or European station. Therefore it is necessary to provide one's self with all the necessities for the journey, since ||p. 28|| sixteen hours of hunger and thirst cannot be endured. At a little distance from the sea, about half-way from Ningo to Ada, there once used to be the Black settlement, Lai,[e] but the inhabitants were driven out and have fled, some to Ada and some to Ningo. At Lai, too, the English used to have an open trading lodge that has long since disappeared.

About one mile this side of Rio Volta there was once a small Black settlement bearing the name Fouthe [Futé]. The spot is still recognisable by a single house and some monkey-coconut trees. The house was built by the Danes and served for several years as a lodge during the time of unrest because they feared that the Augnas would plunder the lodge on the island of Ada in the Volta.

It was midnight when I arrived at Fouthe. My Blacks were tired and decided to hang up my hammock, with me in it, between two trees. They themselves ||p. 29|| then lay down to sleep in the cool sand, and left to me the decision of whether to sleep or stay awake. I am certain that I did not close my eyes. A stranger in the land, ignorant of the language of the nation, fearful of rapacious animals, I very soon crept out of my sack and, with sword in hand, I patrolled among my Blacks, who were unworried and fast asleep under the open sky. It was my luck that the Goddess of Night shone splendidly in full majesty in the cloudless sky. Every single palm branch, whispering as it was moved by the wind, seemed to me, at

[e] Not Loi, as in Rømer, *et al.* [The term 'Loy' appears in Rømer 1760: 277, but the earlier sources which Isert used called it 'Lay' (Barbot 1732: 186; Bosman 1705: 327). For discussion of the name, its present form, and etymology, see Ozanne 1965: 6–7; Spragge 1969: 89–95.]

[15] Cf. Bjørn 1788: 209–10. On round and square houses on the coast, see Dickson 1971: 51–2.

[16] The term *Krepi*, or *Krepee* is properly only applicable to the Ewe dialect group Weme, but was used by the eighteenth and nineteenth century writers to mean both the northwestern section of the Ewe, and the Ewe in general (Grove and Johansen 1968: 1400 n. 4).

first impression, a manifestation of tigers and panthers.[17] But I was spared hostile attacks. Only a melodically-singing species of frog[f] came out of the nearby swamp to jump around my feet, and in my zeal I pierced some of them with Don Quixotic vigour.

Morning finally broke, and then my Blacks no longer walked along the beach but inland instead, where it is almost completely marshy, so much so that the Blacks walking alongside often had to pull the bearers' legs out of the mud ||p. 30|| before they could proceed. This resulted in a rather wonderfully perfumed air, particularly pleasing to one like me, who had eaten nothing at all for fourteen hours. At about 9 o'clock in the morning I finally arrived at the camp at Ada.

Our soldiers received me with cheers. Some of them even took over from the bearers and brought me at a gallop to the tent of the Governor. The troops could not have been more that 1,200 in number because our 'Lagoon Blacks' had not arrived as yet.

Their camp? Imagine an irregular agglomerate of nest-like huts spread out over the area and you will have an approximate idea of the camp of our troops at Rio Volta. Each Black settlement or town has its huts assembled in a group, and from the number of such groups it can easily be reckoned how many towns are represented in the camp. One must not expect to find regular streets here, any more than in the Blacks' own normal towns, and he who happens to have wandered deep inside a group of huts runs the risk of not being able to find his way out again. Every African nation has its own ||p. 31|| method of building these shelters or huts. The Akras, for example, build their huts like normal buildings, yet so low that you cannot stand upright inside them. This is not regarded as a fault by the Blacks because the huts are not used for anything other than sleeping in and for storing their war equipment. The walls consist of palm leaves[g] and the roof of a very tall grass.[h] They keep them very clean inside. A certain number of these huts are surrounded by a fence made of the same material of which the houses have been built. This area is called a quarter, and a man whom we call 'Lieutenant' has command over it.

[f] *Rana Gibbosa Linn.*

[g] Either of *Elias guineansis L.* or *Borgassus flabelliformis L.* [Oil palm or African fan palm].

[h] *Andropogi sp.nova.* ['A new species of Andropogon'. Andropogon is a genus of the grass family.]

[17] Tigers, strictly speaking, are not found in Africa, but Isert's use of the term was in accordance with contemporary usage. Up to the nineteenth century, Portuguese, Dutch and English sources on Guinea all used the term to refer to all large cats except lions, and especially for leopards.

The huts of the mountain Blacks, or the Aquapims [Akuapems] and Krobbo [Krobo] Blacks, about whom I shall write to you at greater length at another opportunity, are much humbler and poorer, like the nations themselves.

On the other hand those of the Lagoon Blacks are much better. Incidentally, I must explain that by the term 'Lagoon Blacks' we mean the various inhabitants ||p. 32|| of the large and small towns lying either on the countless islands in Rio Volta or on its banks. The walls of their huts in the camp are made of thick straw mats fastened together into a round form, and in like manner the thatch of the roofs is so solidly woven that even in the strongest storm the huts remain dry. As a rule the Lagoon Blacks speak the language of the Krepees, that is, that of the nation living on the other side of Rio Volta.[18]

The Ningo Blacks and the Adas, who actually make up one nation, build in a style very similar to that of the Lagoon Blacks, but their buildings are not nearly as beautiful.

On 15 October of this year, the very day on which I arrived at the roadstead at Christiansburg, the cornerstone of this fort had been laid, and the fort was named Königstein (Kongensteen).[19] Before I came to Ada, I had surmised, judging from its name, that this fort must have been erected on a high rock. Therefore I was not a little astounded when I saw that the newly erected fort was standing on quite flat and clayey ground, where for a full ten miles around surely no stone ||p. 33|| larger than a bean could be found, even if one were willing to pay a million for it. When I expressed my surprise at this to the Governer, he disclosed to me that, 'For precisely that reason, the name is even more fitting because all the stones which were used for the building came either from Christiansburg or all the way from Europe, at the King's expense.'

Königstein is a regular rectangle measuring 136 *alen* long and 130 *alen* wide, with four bastions which are intended to carry six cannons each.[20] Only the two bastions toward the river will be built in the first stage. At present the outside wall is three feet high. The fort lies about one mile inland from the sea and a good musket shot from the bank of Rio Volta, across from the island of Ada, where we formerly had our trading lodge. Between the new fort and the river are the shelters or cabins of the White and Mulatto soldiers, and towards the river a breastwork has been thrown up, equipped with cannons to receive the enemy who are encamped on

[18] By the term 'Krepee language' the early sources evidently meant the Ewe language or some form of it.

[19] The Danish name *Kongensteen*, now Kongensten, means 'Kingstone'.

[20] 1 *alen* = approximately 62 cm.

the other bank of the river, in case they try to disturb our work. A tall flagstaff from which the royal flag waves has been erected in the middle of the row of cannons. ||p. 34||[21]

After I had been at Ada about a fortnight we received a shipload of stones from Christiansburg. These were landed on the shore, from which they had to be dragged a quarter of a mile overland right to the end of an arm of the river, and from that point they could be brought to the fort by lagoon canoes. The land transport was the most troublesome. The Governor requested of the Grandes (prominent men) among the Blacks that they provide people for this transport. Not only did they comply, but the whole camp broke up for the undertaking, and because the Blacks would then be so very near the enemy camp, they armed themselves as completely as if they were going into battle.

In their way of arming themselves they are as different from the Europeans as they are in all other respects. While the Europeans maintain uniformity in their outward appearance down to the most insignificant detail, each individual here attempts to find a way of looking as unlike the others as possible. Their actual weapons, of course, are always the same. At present the most important pieces of equipment ||p. 35|| required by each Black soldier are a flintlock musket,[i] a cartridge pouch of tiger or some other hide, tied over the stomach and carrying 12–16 cartridge cases filled with powder, plucked raffia for wadding, and lead balls, or in lieu of these, bits of iron or smooth, heavy stones. Around his hips he wears a leather or cotton sash to which are fastened knives of various sizes in sheaths. The Black often hangs another cloth over his shoulder, to which even more knives or a sword are fastened. In addition he has a small pouch filled with *mammue*, which is made of Turkish maize, roasted and ground into flour, and a small calabash or gourd shell as a vessel for drinking. Also around his hips he hangs a rope of raffia with which to tie any prisoners he might take.[22]

Even their clothing is in exceedingly varying styles. Instead of the usual large *pantjes* called *mammale* which is normally ||p. 36|| worn hanging

[i] The Blacks living as far as 300 miles from the coast no longer use bow and arrow but all are equipped with firearms. [This is a grossly exaggerated judgement since no European was acquainted with conditions that far inland (Paul Hair, personal communication). Unless '300' is a misprint for '30' this statement is comparable to other inflated distances found in Isert's text. See Tenth Letter.

[21] For Fort Kongensten, see Bjørn 1788: 212–13; Monrad 1822: 318, 357, 359, 361; Lawrence 1963: 361, 367 n.1; Grove and Johansen 1968: 1392. All that remains of Fort Kongensten today are a few cannon (Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 39–40).

[22] For soldiers' drinking vessels, see Monrad 1822: 114; Bowdich 1819: 301. For their rope and belts, see Müller in Jones 1985: 197; Rask 1754: 91–2; Rømer 1760: 210–11.

from the hips to the calves, on these occasions they wear only a small cloth called *tæklæ* in Akra, which is actually intended only to cover the private parts.[23] On their heads they wear truly remarkable things. The most common kind of head ornament is a cow-hide that has been stretched while fresh over a wooden block and allowed to dry. The rim is cut out somewhat decoratively, and the helmet is thus finished. Others wear an elephant ear, so shaped that it accomplishes the same purpose. Still others have fashioned the vertebræ of a large fish into the form of a cap, and fastened to it a long tail of black and white striped falcon feathers. This kind is used primarily by the most distinguished among the Lagoon Blacks. The Mountain Blacks use the skin either of a species of large black monkey or of a tiger, which is so arranged that their own eyes can see out of the hole where the animal's eyes once were. Behind this they hang a long tail of the skin of the same animal, so that they appear more fearful. Still others have exceedingly large straw hats, or caps ||p. 37|| of woven rushes, etc., etc.[24] All over their bodies they hang large numbers of fetishes, each one of which has its own magic power. Among the Akras it is common to tie a number of pliable grass straws under their left knee, the ends of which they allow to hang down a short distance, and in these ends they form knots with glass beads woven into them, each supposedly having a particular beneficence. A number of such amulets are also hung on their arms and around their necks. The more influential the man, the greater is the number of amulets and the higher the price he pays when he buys them from the fetish priests. Among the Blacks known to me the Krepees excel in the number of fetishes they use.[25]

In addition to all this, the army leader has a staff painted in alternating red and white stripes, with straw of a particular variety wound around the middle, and the hero must not put it down during action.

A lieutenant carries a sword and only rarely a gun. The swords must be made in this country and must be of a special type, because those that

[23] For a detailed drawing and description of military attire, (in Danish, French and German) see Schmidt 1760. *Pantjes* is a Dutch term for a waist, or loin, cloth. There were contemporary variants of the term: *paan*, Bosman 1704: 121,; *pankis*, Rask 1754: passim. The term *panties* found in Isert and Monrad is the same as *pantjes* because 'i' and 'j' were interchangeable. The Gã term *Mammale — mama ni le* signifies *mama*, 'cloth' and *ni le*, 'large'. The *tæklæ*, now *tɛklɛ* is still used, especially for covering a corpse (Leone de Graft, personal communication).

[24] On headgear, see Müller in Jones 1985: 196–7; Barbot 1678–9: 345–6; Bosman 1705: 185; Rask 1754: 92; Nørregaard 1952: 527.

[25] On amulets, see Hemmersam in Jones 1985: 116; Barbot 1978: 335; Rask 1754: 165–6. For other types of personal decoration designed for protection, see Rømer 1760: 211; Monrad 1822: 118–9; Bowdich 1819: 271; Reindorf 1895: 122–3; Spieth 1906: 66, 68; Kyerematen 1964: 69; Cole and Ross 1977: 16–9.

come from Europe are not ||p. 38|| considered worth using for any other purpose than to chop wood. The sword usually has a sickle-shaped blade. Two blades are often fastened together in one handle. In addition, these swords are provided with a variety of iron spikes which stick out up to a half an inch, whose purpose I do not understand unless it be that the sword can be held more securely in the hand while attacking an enemy should he attempt to pull it away.[26]

As regards their martial music, it is always mainly the beating of drums, of which they have several varieties. The drums are made of hollowed-out tree trunks and are covered with sheep skin, but only on one end, the other end remaining open. The small ordinary drums are carried by means of a band around the neck, but the regimental drum (if I dare call it that) has to be borne horizontally on the head of a Black, and the player walks behind him to strike it. These drums can be up to four feet high and two and one-half feet in diameter. The drumsticks are hook-shaped.[27]

The second musical instrument used in war is the horn. These horns are made of the tusks of young elephants. A hole ||p. 39|| is chiselled in one side of the tip, to blow into, in the manner of the blowing-holes of a flute. The virtuosi of these instruments can call each person by name. When a division appears to be losing courage in a battle, on the orders of the commanding general the hornblower repeatedly blows the name of the wavering lieutenant in command, to inspire him with courage.[28]

Finally, a large umbrella and a flag are requisites of the military procession.[29]

Thus equipped, the entire army marched out until they came to the place to which the stones were to be brought, and then proceeded in good order to the beach. Every man carried his stone on his head, along with his weapons. Even the gentlemen lieutenants did not want to be left out and carried their stones as well. Each man sang a heroic military melody

[26] Isert's reference may be the earliest reference to the double sword in southern Ghana (Ross and Garrard 1983: 60). On swords in general, see Müller in Jones 1985: 194; Barbot 1679–80: 344; Kyerematen 1964: 33–7; Cole and Ross 1977: 145–9.

[27] On drums, see Rask 1754: 217–9; Bosman 1705: 139–40; Monrad 1822: 244; Nketia 1963: 11–2, 14–5, 196–7, 110–11; Kyerematen 1964: 60–66. On horns, see Bosman 1705: 138; Bowdich 1819: 299–300; Reindorf 1895: 119–20, 122; Kyerematen 1964: 56–61; Cole and Ross 1977: 168.

[28] Although Isert realised that names were signalled on the horns he makes no mention of the use of language in drumming. Probably no European at this date understood the tonal structure of many African languages and how this made drum-meanings possible (Paul Hair, personal communication).

[29] For umbrellas, see Kyerematen 1964: 89–91; Cole and Ross 1977: 64–8. Unfortunately, Isert gives no information on the appearance of the flags, but for historical references and use today, see Cole and Ross 1977: 191 ff. and Ross 1979, monograph.

in his own language, the theme of which was, in the main, 'We will dash your heads to bits, you Augnas!' When the work was finished, and it did not take more than four hours, ||p. 40|| they were treated to brandy, and then they retired to the camp. On this occasion several buffalo[k] and an unusually large monkey were shot.

Since I have not yet explained the reasons for these campaigns and their aim I shall do so straight away.

From time immemorial the Adas, or the Blacks who live on this, the west side of Rio Volta, and also on the islands in the river, have been enemies of the Blacks living on the east side of the river. The frequent disputes were mostly because of disagreements about the fishing boundaries. Since both nations live on the Volta, it is natural that both should have rights to fishing, yet they could never agree how far out in the river the one or the other nation should engage in fishing. They also fall out with each other when a person from one of the nations is owed money by a person from the other and is not paid back. And they also quarrel out of pure envy — when one nation was prospering ||p. 41|| more than the other, this gave cause for war. These wars started with small skirmishes, until the parties became so exasperated with each other that war became general. The Adas in particular aroused their neighbours' jealousy partly because they were hosts to the Europeans (namely, our lodge) and partly becuase of their flourishing saltworks, which brought them the major part of their wealth since they could sell the salt so profitably to the Mountain Blacks or to the Assianthees. But how frequently it is the case all over the world as it is here, that when a nation has arrived at the highest pinnacle it can possibly reach it falls prey to debauchery and indolence, and its ruin is imminent. Both ancient and recent history furnish renowned examples.

In the year 1750, as reported by Rømer, the Augnas had driven the Adas into an extremely tight corner.[30] Of course the latter tried from time to time to rise up again and avenge themselves on their enemy, until finally peace was made. This, however, lasted only until 1767, when the Augnas again hazarded an attack on the Adas. They were not particularly

[k] A *Bos bubalis Linn.*? [The *Bos bubalis* is the water buffalo, an Asian animal which was not part of the African fauna in Isert's day. The African buffalo is *Sincerus caffer*, a term in use since 1847. Isert should have used *Bos caffer*, a classification made by Sparrman in 1779 (Jørgen A. Pedersen, personal communication).]

[30] The reference is to the *Nonobewa War* of 1750. This war was the first in a long series of wars in which other polities, particularly Popo, were deeply involved. The Danes at Ada took an active part by providing funds for arms for the Ada, and payment for assistance by groups from Krobo and Larteh. See Rømer 1760: 282; Reindorf 1895: 131; Grove and Johansen 1968: 1386, 1390 ff.; Green 1981: 134 ff.

successful, so they repeated the attempt a few years later. In the year 1776 ||p. 42|| the Augnas allied themselves with all of their neighbours to wipe out the Adas completely, and this attempt came close to the success they wished. They attacked at night from their canoes, killed a number of the Adas, took some prisoner, burnt their town, and won a complete victory over them. Those of the Adas who remained fled to Friedensburg.[31]

The Augnas now had only to settle accounts with the Whites who still had their lodge on the island of Ada. At all times the Augnas had a certain respect for the lodge, especially since they knew that a kind of fortification armed with small cannons had been built there. Nevertheless, it was rumoured from time to time that they were considering plundering the lodge. They even tried to win over our factors by sending ambassadors with generous gifts, which the factors looked upon as only a form of tribute. Despite all this, we held the lodge until 1782, when our own Blacks absolutely demanded that we land our wares on the west bank of the river, since there was no longer any safety for us at Ada. If we sent any wares with our company ||p. 43|| slaves, either over land or by the lagoon, to Quitta [Keta], where we had a lodge some 12 miles further away on the east side of the river, they were usually plundered. Our wares, our boats, and even our Blacks were taken.

Such wide-spread excesses could not but embitter us towards a nation with whom we only wished to live in peace. We sent representatives to their King and Council, and threatened that if such inimical acts were not stopped, we would find it necessary to ally ourselves with as many Blacks as possible, and take military action against them. We actually brought some armed Blacks to the place mentioned earlier where I camped overnight under the open sky. When the Augnas saw that the situation was becoming serious, they entered into negotiations. We demanded guarantees to secure the peace, so they sent two children of the most prominent men as hostages.

Thus things remained for a while, until the young men among the Augnas could not endure the peace any longer. They swore that it was a disgrace to let themselves be subjugated, so to speak, by the White Man. ||p. 44|| So they made a camp near the river and attempted to waylay our Blacks, as well as the free Blacks, and capture them. Since the majority of votes tipped the scales the King and Council felt forced to listen to their demands, even though they realised all too clearly that they would get the worst of a war.[32]

[31] Cf. Johannesen 1966: 15, 38.

[32] Isert's account simplifies the story considerably. It is worth noting that he had just arrived on the scene and was undoubtedly given a very brief and very partisan explanation of the cause of hostilities. This was far from being solely a direct contest between the Anlo and Ada, with the Danes drawn into the fray. The entire area had long been the scene of conflict between many polities with shifting constellations of allies. Both the Asante and Akwamu from the interior were involved, as were the Popo from the east. Interested parties included the European nations, particularly the Danes and the Dutch, who were often in heated competition for control of trade on the lower Volta. See Claridge 1915: 120–4; Nørregaard 1952: 550–7; Kea 1969: 39–42; Ward 1969: 223; Green 1981: 131–67. For a discussion of Governor Kiøge's larger plan for the expansion and strengthening of the Danish hegemony from Accra to Anecho, and of the strategic significance of the Sagbadre War in the implementation of this plan, see Johannesen 1966: 55–63; Nørregaård 1966: 145–6, 148–53.

This, roughly, was the situation when I arrived in camp. The Adas, having up to now huddled together in Ningo, were heartily pleased that we had decided to build a fort in their former settlement. They knew that they now had a safe refuge in case the settlement was again attacked by their enemies. This willingness to have a fort constructed on their land would certainly not have been shown 50 years ago when they were still living in their 'Golden Age', and their kabossie was vain enough to give himself the proud little 'Master of Heaven and Earth' (*Numbo kus puntse*).[33]

Live well. More in the next letter, from your . . .

[33] The phrase *Numbo kus puntse* is Adangbe, and should probably read *Nyumu*, 'man' or 'master'; *kɛ*, 'and'; *putsɛ*, 'owner of the sun' (*tsɛ*, 'owner'); that is, 'Master and owner of the sun'. (I am indebted to Amonor Dseagu for this information).

Third Letter

Quitta on the Guinea Coast
8 April, 1784

'Geschätztes Nichts der eitlen Ehre
Dir baut das Alterthum Altäre,
Du bist noch heut der Gott der Welt;
Du hast aus unterird'schen Grüften,
Die tolle Zier an unsern hüften:
Das Schwerdt zuerst am Tag gebracht.' Haller[1]

In my last letter you received a description of the supply of military equipment of the Black, of the actual declaration of war, of the reasons for the war, and other matters. Now I shall give you a more precise report on the actual outbreak of the war.

Since we have been stationed here, our enemies have been giving us trouble repeatedly, especially at night. However, since they have always found us on guard, they could accomplish nothing.

|| p. 46 || On a recent occasion, after midnight, there arose a disturbance in the camp, 'The enemy is coming!' A number of shots had been heard from the countryside near Agraffi, a Black settlement on the lagoon, and it was assumed that it was the enemy who was fighting there with our fishermen and our advance guard, and who was preparing shortly to take us by surprise. The alarm drum was immediately sounded and everyone was very soon in arms and at his post. I took up my post at the Fort's northern bastion, which was complete enough for the cannon to be mounted on it. Since musket shots could still be heard in the area mentioned

[1] 'Treasured Nothing of hollow Honour,/Antiquity has raised Altars to you/Who are even today the God of the World./It was you who first brought to Light from Caves underground/-This absurd Ornament of our Hips/The Sword.' Albrecht von Haller (1708–77) was a Swiss scientist and author. His main field was medicine, and his studies in physiology were of fundamental importance for advancing knowledge, particularly as regards foetal development. As a young man Haller wrote poetry and in his later years he wrote three political novels. Haller was precisely the kind of person a young man of Isert's turn of mind would admire greatly.

above, some armed Blacks were sent off in canoes to reconnoitre. Shortly after that we received news that the enemy had attacked five of our canoes laden with clam shells for the lime kiln. The crew had escaped by swimming ashore, apart from one man who had fallen into the hands of the enemy who had hurried back to their camp with him.

On 14 February there took place the very important appointment of a military Commander-in-Chief who was to be recognised as the Field Marshal of the united nations. || p. 47 || All of the kabossies, elders, etc., were present for this solemn ceremony, placing themselves in a circle. If the scene which now occurred could be enacted in the same unaffected way in Europe, I am convinced that much could be learned from it. Enclosed is a poor attempt at representation by my inadequate brush.

In the background, toward the northeast, one sees an open area with 12 cannons on a rise, and behind that the Rio Volta with its banks clad in bushes and palm trees. In the middle, between the two rows of cannons, a 40-foot high flagpole has been erected, and from this waves the Danish royal flag. On each side of the cannons, towards the west, the area is enclosed by grass huts, which are built in a style similar to that of our peasant houses. Beyond these, opposite the cannons, the half-built Fort Kønigstein can be seen, on whose northern bastion one catches a glimpse of cannons.

Close to the entrance to the area, on the right, there is a tall pea-tree.[a] On its boughs hang an hourglass and a massive bell by which the hours are struck. A guard is standing next to the tree. Beyond || p. 48 || the pea-tree there is a square table on which lies a yellow silk cloth, and on this cloth a valuable sword with the inscription, *Gloria ex amore patriae*.[2] Next to the sword are seven wine glasses and a bottle of wine.

In a semi-circle around the table, starting on the right, are seated Otho, the hero and paramount chief of the Akras, and Naku, the kabossie from Ursu.[3] Next are the Governor Mr. Major Kiøge, and three other promi-

[a] A new species of *Robinia* [Cf. Willis 1973: 1001.]

[2] 'Glory derives from love of country'.

[3] In 1777 Chief Oto Brafo of Accra led an alliance supporting the Dutch who, after driving the Danes into their Fort, captured the settlement of Accra. In 1782 he defended the Dutch Fort Crèvecoeur against an English attack but was defeated, and subsequently settled with his people outside the Osu area. Later in the same year the Danes, planning a campaign against the Anlo, sought to enlist the people of Dutch Accra as allies. Although their king was against the alliance, Chief Oto, seeing an opportunity to conquer their ancient enemies, the Anlo, advised the chiefs to agree to fight alongside the Danes. Since Oto was very highly respected the chiefs followed his lead (Reindorf 1895: 129). See also, Nørregaard 1952: 540. King Naku Odang of Christiansborg was among those kings and chiefs who were in alliance with the Danish government and were paid monthly tributes. The others were Ako Dsharan, King of Labadi, and the chiefs of Kpone and Ningo. See Reindorf 1895: 131; Bjørn 1788: 196–7.

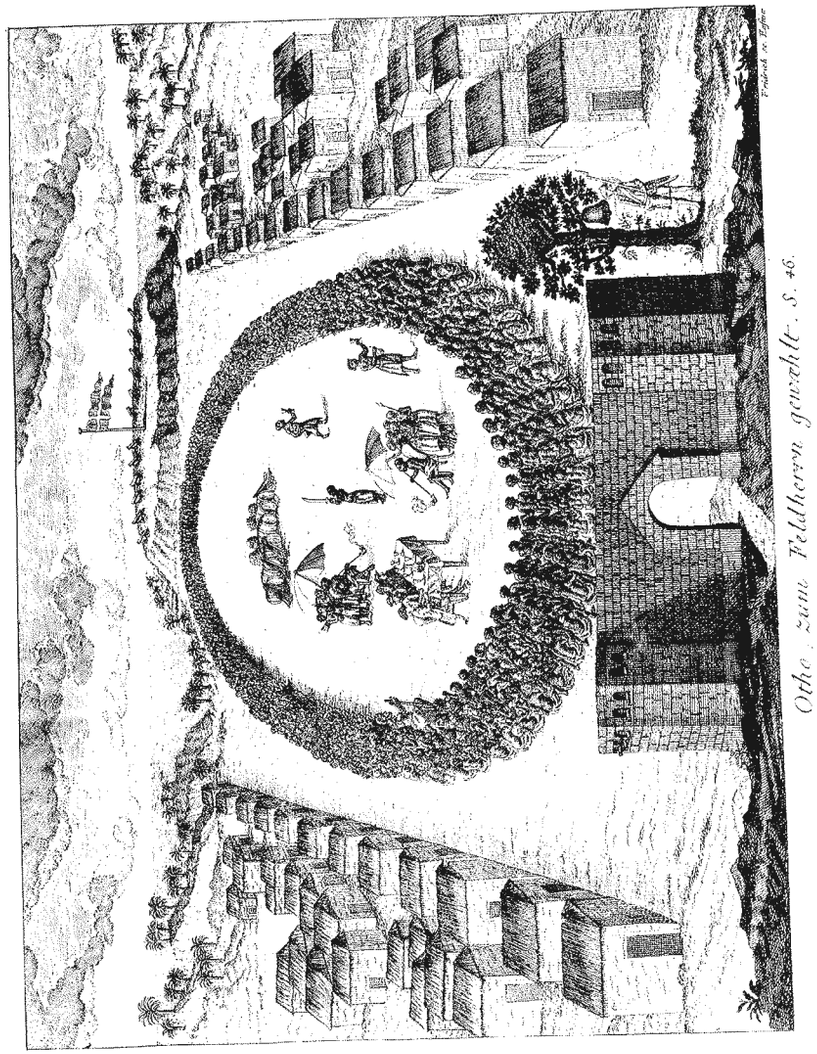


Illustration 2. Representation by P. E. Isert of the appointment of a military Commander-in-Chief as Field Marshal, 14 February 1784.

nent Whites. Finally, at a little distance, is Attiambo, Duke of Aquapim.[4] Behind the Duke and the kabossies stand several armed Blacks, and others are holding a large umbrella over them. All of these people are surrounded by an army (of some 500 Blacks) seated in a circle, those in the two front rows on low stools, the others on the bare ground. All are armed, with their guns planted on the ground in front of them. The elders and nobles, or prominent men, are sitting in front. The fetish-priest is sitting in the middle of the first row. He can be recognised because around his neck he is wearing a thick straw collar which hangs all the way down to his stomach, [on his head] a cap of woven straw, and he is holding a thick staff in his hand. In the opening of the semi-circle there are six casks of brandy, on top of which lie rolls || p. 49 || of tobacco, and standing next to these there are pipes. Inside the circle two of our black attendants move around with a great bottle of brandy in one hand and a glass in the other, from which they serve the Grandees around the circle. I wish I could describe the longing looks of those who have not yet drunk, and the smiling, happy expressions of those who have already savoured the divine drink. And furthermore, how certain of them keep some of the brandy they have imbibed in their mouths, then turn around and give a retainer of theirs sitting the fifth or sixth row away a signal which makes him open his mouth wide, whereupon his benefactor shoots forth a stream of the retained mouthful into the mouth of his servant with such skill that between mouth and mouth not a drop is lost.[5] To take advantage of the opportunity other common Blacks crowd around the leaders whom Ganymede has recognised, demanding with threatening voices that they also be served.[6]

When they had all received their brandy, a rite which must precede any celebration, because the Blacks declare that they can then think better, the interpreter came forward into the circle and made a speech || p. 50 || explaining the ceremony that was being held that day. It was necessary for him to present the explanation three times, each time in a different language, because our army included speakers of that many main languages. He did this with a proficiency that would have put many a Euro-

[4] The 'three other prominent Whites' certainly included Isert himself and Andreas Riegelsen Bjørn. The third White man is not identified but may have been J. F. Kipnasse, Commandant of Ft. Fredensborg and successor to the governorship for a few months. For Bjørn, see [14] below. 'Attiambo' [Obuobi Atiemo] came to play a leading role in Isert's 1788 attempt to establish a plantation in Akuapem. See Editor's Appendices.

[5] In the past this was the manner in which liquor was given to inferiors and children (Reindorf 1895: 133). In recent times mouth-to-mouth transfer of liquor from father-in-law to son-in-law occurs on *Homowo* day (Field 1940: 26 n.).

[6] In Greek mythology Ganymede was cup-bearer to the gods.

pean speaker to shame.[7] It made me think of the public assemblies of the Greeks and the Romans in former times. The speech itself praised the virtues of Otho, saying that he was the worthiest to bear the sword, that is, the highest command of the combined armies, and that the Whites hoped that the hearers would be obedient to his command. This being greeted with friendly shouts, the sword was presented to the hero. He drew it and held it high with both hands, then raised his eyes to heaven and said, 'You are White, whose servant I am. May God kill me with this sword if I forswear my oath!' The Whites, together with the Duke and the Kabossie Naku, drank the health of Otho, upon which he was honoured with a salvo of seven cannon shots.[8]

On 23 February our black hero wanted the united army to swear an oath of allegiance. Therefore everyone appeared in military array. The hero himself had been || p. 51 || dusted from head to foot with red earth, presumably to give an impression of bloodthirstiness towards the enemy.[9] Every lieutenant, or commander over between 25 and 100 men, had a great umbrella which had been put together of as many kinds of coloured cloth as it had been possible to collect. A slave always held the umbrella over the head of a commander.

After having assembled they all danced around the new fort to continuous drumming and hornblowing, and incessant firing of guns. Each swore an oath to Otho and to the other prominent Blacks gathered there. When this ceremony had been concluded with the firing of guns they finally came in procession to the open area described earlier, where the Whites sat under the pea-tree. They swore an oath to each White specifically, roughly in these words 'I am a man prepared to fight and sacrifice my life for you.' They made that declaration with such peculiar capers, and with so much enthusiasm, waving their war-knives about before our faces as if they were fencing, that my nose frequently twitched in fear. || p. 52 || Their gestures thus emphasised their extreme hatred of the enemy and their steadfastness. But it is hardly possible to put all this into words.

Otho was the last man to take the oath. The noble behaviour of the old man gave him a splendid bearing indeed. He swore with deliberation rather than with passion, 'I have only one umbrella, one drum, and one camp stool. Where these are, there am I. And where I am, there is the entire army.'

[7] For the role of the spokesman, known in Twi as *okyeame*, see Rattray 1927: 276–7; Kyerematen [1964: 92; Cole and Ross 1977: 158–60.

[8] On the swearing of oaths, see Barbot 1732: 276; Rattray 1916: 129–31; Debrunner 1959: 170; Mbiti 1969: 212; Ward 1969: 125–6; Opoku 1978: 58, 158.

[9] On the use of red earth, see Rask 1754: 223–4; Field 1937: 52; Antubam 1963: 82; Fortes 1969: 187 n. 84; McLeod 1979: 173.

On 21 March we made a festive march into the Fort, and from then on guards were posted. The Governor went first, accompanied by two other royal officials, then the drums and the flag. Finally, the twenty soldiers stationed there, with their sergeant, made up the full complement. The beat of the drums accompanied the entry march and the raising of the flag on the newly-finished bastion. Then arms were presented and the drums beat as they marched on.

The 25th of the same month saw our entire army mobilised to engage in the long-desired battle with the Augnas and their allies. Everything was made ready for battle, and then nothing more remained to be done but || p. 53 || to load the waiting canoes with equipment, board them, and paddle to the mouth of the Volta. But, oh! the confusion of the Blacks! We had allotted a certain number of canoes to each division. This appeared to be necessary because on earlier occasions they had sprung aboard some of the canoes in numbers that the canoe could not carry, while in other instances they had left with three or four in a canoe that could have carried fifteen. Things did not go much better on that day, so we had to delay them by holding back the paddles for the time required for each canoe to be properly filled. That so few Whites could administer this exercise was indeed no mean accomplishment. We finally sent most of the Blacks off in the canoes, but because there was a shortage of men who knew how to paddle, a large number had to go by land. This was a great help, since we would otherwise have had to repeat the transport by canoe, which was a journey of one and a half miles.

The largest of our canoes was equipped with cannons in the bow, two of them one-pound amusettes, and leading the canoes was a cannon-raft on which were mounted a six-pounder || p. 54 || and a three-pounder.[10] On our trip we did not see a single one of our enemy, who previous to this had regularly appeared in order to capture or steal our canoes.

Not until evening did we arrive at the river-mouth where we made camp directly across from our enemy, who very defiantly walked around on the other side, at a point where the river was about one quarter of a mile wide.

The place where we had made camp was a peninsula formed on one side by the sea and on the other by Rio Volta. The camp did not consist of canvas tents, but of thickets of coco-plum[b], the only kind of bush which, in company with Brazilian convolvulus[c] and lobelia,[d] grows in this

[b] *Chrysobalanus ica[c]o Linn.* [Cf. (Willis 1973: 250).]

[c] *Convolvulus brasiliensis L.* [Cf. *ibid.* 288.]

[d] *Scävola Lobelia L.* [Cf. Irvine 1961: 727; Willis 1973: 1035.].

[10] An amusette was a light field gun.

thoroughly barren sand. Our entire camp was in a mood of exultation, and a continuous drumming, hornblowing, etc., rent the air all the way to the enemy camp across from us. In the evening and in the morning warning shots were fired from the six-pounders || p. 55 || across the river and into the enemy camp, for whom this shooting must have been the more alarming since they were not themselves supplied with such weapons.

The following day was a day of rest, but early on the 21st everyone was required to be armed and ready for the crossing.[11]

Our Blacks had made themselves look fearsome by painting themselves with white earth, as they usually do on birthdays and other festival days, but today they surpassed themselves in ugliness. In war attire no man must look like any other man. The more disharmony, and the more fearsome they were able to make themselves, the better.[12]

The Governor, the Merchant Mr. Bjørn, and some other white men boarded the canoes which had the cannons.[13] They were followed by a great number of Lagoon and other Blacks who knew how to paddle, and they all proceeded directly across the river to the camp of the enemy. As soon as we felt that we were within reach of the enemy by gunfire, we started to fire on their huts, both from the canoes and from the cannon-raft. At this point we became aware of a stratagem of the Augnas which one would hardly have expected from a people so little practised in such tactics. They had actually ensconced || p. 56 || themselves behind a natural rampart provided with trenches, as cleverly made as if planned by a European engineer. By all appearances our six-pounders and three-pounders had some effect when they came close enough to shore, because at various times the Augnas were seen running in groups to the places where the shots had landed. Apparently they did this solely to bring their wounded to safety.

We began firing at 9 o'clock in the morning and did not stop before 12

[11] '21st' must be a misprint for '27th'. The 21st is mentioned earlier as the date of the march into Fort Kongensteen. On the 25th the army arrived at the mouth of the Volta and made camp. The following day was a day of rest, and the river was crossed the day after that, hence the 27th. The 'day of rest' was 26 March which was a Friday, and the army may have been observing a local religious injunction relating to Fridays (Meredith 1812: 33; Brydon 1976: 94). Alternatively, the army was recovering from its expenditure of energy during the preceding days.

[12] On the use of white earth, see De Marees 1602/1987: 86b; Barbot 1746: 295; Bosman 1704: 153, 185; Reindorf 1895: 126; Rattray 1923: 143–4, 155, 158, 201, 211; Field 1961: 172 n. 1; Antubam 1963: 78; McLeod 1979: 173. Two early sources interpret white clay as a symbol of fertility (Rask 1754: 236 and Monrad 1822: 78 n.).

[13] Andreas Riegelsen Bjørn (1754–1821) worked on the Gold Coast for about eight years and was Governor from November 1789 tro January 1793, when he was removed from office. He wrote: *Beretning 1788 om De Danske Forter og Negerier* in *F. Thaarup's Archiv*, 1797–8 and *Tanker om Slavehandel* 1806.

o'clock. During this period all the canoes, 115 in number, stayed in a line close to land. After they had been there for a good half-hour, sometimes firing without effect on those Augnas who advanced in groups from their hiding places in the bush, our men retreated to the camp. They did this without worrying about the Whites, who, with their cannons and raft, would have been in danger if numbers of the Augnas had pursued them in their own canoes, which || p. 57 || they had lying in the Quitta Lagoon.[e] When we found ourselves abandoned, we made the obvious decision to turn back, since it would clearly have been inadvisable to land with as small a party as we had with us.

Among the main reasons the Blacks gave for not wanting to land was, first, that at the mouth of the river one encountered not living people, but the dead, that is ghosts, and they told wonderful stories about these ghosts and how they were supposed to walk on the lagoon. The second reason was that the Augnas had buried themselves. How could we, then, go ashore and fight them? No remonstration helped here. They would not listen to the argument that under the protection of cannons they could land safely without being shot at. They would not and could not do it, and did not know why.[14]

The next day our Lagoon Blacks produced a plan whereby they would be able to penetrate the land of the Augnas in another place quite without danger. This was accepted || p. 58 || by the whole Council of War, and that very evening, when it was dark, we were all able to begin the crossing. This lasted all night since we had to paddle more than a mile, and not even half the army could be taken over at one time. The Governor, I myself, and a sergeant were the only Europeans who accompanied the Blacks — a mighty contrast to the approximately 2000 armed Blacks.

Not until 6 o'clock in the morning did we reach the land of the Krepees, those people who have been notorious for so many years. When all our men had been taken across they were divided into four columns. The Augnas made up the left wing, the Lagoon and Ada Blacks the right, the Akras and the rest formed the centre, and in front of the centre we Whites were to be found most of the time.[15]

The march proceeded without interruption from eight o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, when we made camp in a

[e] This is the name given to an arm of Rio Volta which stretches from its mouth to Quitta, and the direct military route from Ada to Quitta is by water. [Cf. Boateng 1970: 159, 160.]

[14] This may have been based on the local religious belief that the dead have to cross the river before entering the next life. See Bosman 1704: 156; Monrad 1822: 16; Field 1961: 200.

[15] 'Augnas' is clearly an error. It should read 'Akwapims'.

plain surrounded by a pleasant forest of palms. In the middle of the plain a supply of relatively good fresh water was to be found. In the direction of the sea could be seen a small village named || p. 59 || Tetetu, whose inhabitants had deserted it. The whole area had a romantically attractive appearance. Cabins or shelters were not set up here and everyone lay out in the open. The night was dark, darker than the Blacks themselves, so that we could only see each other during the frequent sheet-lightning. At last, towards morning, the army of black clouds increased, Aeolus and Jupiter united, and in less than half an hour we had the most thorough storm of lightning, thunder, rain and wind.[16]

As you can imagine, this was now a truly pleasant situation! Here we were, probably very close to the enemy, and in such disorder that we would not have been able to fire our muskets. Our powder supply was exposed to the rain and lightning. In the terrible darkness of the night we did not know where we should flee if attacked. All this, as well as other factors, made for a truly pleasant prospect!

However, we quite soon recovered from this predicament. Our people were dispatched, in the best possible order, to the palm forest nearby. The powder kegs and other war supplies || p. 60 || were also carried there, and covered with palm leaves. Most gracious Aurora drove away the black rain clouds, and after one hour we had dry weather again.[17] Never have I awaited the morning more longingly, and it was made the more enjoyable by the fact that nothing had been seriously damaged.

At six o'clock on the 30th we again broke camp and the march continued. As bad as it had been on the preceding day, the many swamps we had to pass made that day much worse, not only because of the greater number, but also because of their greater depth. At about ten o'clock we were close to the first enemy town, called Atocco, which is not more than three miles in a direct line from the Volta, and not much more than a quarter of a mile's distance from the sea.

Immediately afterwards, on both sides of the army, I saw for the first time several herds of wild buffaloes, each herd consisting of about ten or twelve individuals. These animals are ash-grey in colour, like the Polish oxen, but they greatly exceed them in size. Their horns curve backwards in a half-moon shape, and the points come together inwards. One of this variety had been shot near Ada, and it weighed more than 800 pounds. || p. 61 || Zoologists are of the general opinion that in the hot climate mammals decrease in size but these buffaloes seem to prove the opposite.

[16] Aeolus was the Greek god of the winds. The presence of Jupiter, the chief of the Roman gods, was marked by rain, thunder and lightning.

[17] Aurora was the Roman goddess of the dawn.

I could not understand why such wild and dangerous animals were not nervous at the sight of so many armed people. After standing stock-still and looking at the vanguard of our army they took a few steps forward, and finally withdrew into a break in the swamp. The reason they first came forward and then retreated soon became clear.

We ourselves now reached this swamp which was about a quarter of a mile in diameter. Marching was exceedingly difficult, not only because we had to stop every few minutes so that those ahead had time to clear a path, but also because of the intense heat. Since these marsh grasses[f] were as high as a man, the vertical rays of the sun could be felt directly at full strength, and there was not the slightest movement of air which could provide relief. Finally, at about twenty paces in front of me, I saw a semi-circle of very tall || p. 62 || bulrushes[g], from which I concluded that there must be a wide ditch of water there. This would mean the end of these wicked marsh grasses.

While I was having these thoughts, and had aleady counted this new recruit to my company of plants, since I had not seen it earlier in Africa and wanted to go closer to it, there was a sudden sound like rolling thunder, and we heard musket fire coming towards us from the other side of the ditch! 'Now the game begins!' said our Major.[18]

By means of scouts in the trees, the Augnas had in fact seen us coming for a long time and had positioned themselves here to cut off our passage through the lagoon. Since their strength lay in a surprise attack, they were in good order and their first barrage was actually like the battalion fire of European troops.

Now both sides refrained completely from all the fool's play in which the Akras and the other Blacks usually indulge when enemy parties see each other, that is, when one man from each side plays the buffoon by dancing and jumping in front of the 'enemy' as if in a fury, firing his gun, throwing it tumbling into the air, || p. 63 || catching it, throwing himself down on the ground as if hit, standing up, and starting all over again where he left off, while laughing at the enemy for not shooting better.[19]

Our forward guards had also become aware of the enemy in ambush in

[f] *Cyperus articulatus Linn.* [This is a species of Galingale. See Dalziel 1955: 516; Willis 1973: 330–1.]

[g] A new *Typha* called *Australis*. [Bulrush. For a general description, see Willis 1973: 1190. See also Dalziel 1955: 484.].

[18] Kiøge was given the rank of Major in 1783, and then promoted to Lt. Colonel in 1785 in recognition both of his zeal in expanding the Danish sphere of influence on the Coast and his victory over the Anlo.

[19] Cf. Müller in Jones 1983: 197; Barbot 1732: 276; Bosman 1704: 182; Monrad 1822: 119 note, 246 note.

the bulrushes and were just as ready to respond. The attack drum was struck, this being a very small object shaped like an hour-glass, and we had the satisfaction of seeing that everyone who could make his way forward did his duty. No one faltered, and the Aquapims and Dutch Akras behind did not even get a chance to shoot. But even after half an hour of this firing, the enemy would not yield.

Our Adas and Lagoon Blacks now performed a masterpiece of bravery. With guns held in their mouths and with their other implements on their heads, they waded through the ditch at one place where the Augnas were not expecting them. They were in water to their armpits, and from there they attacked the enemy courageously. The Adas, in particular, ||p. 64|| attacked furiously, and the enemy was also attacked from two sides by our soliders, of whom the most eager were within touching distance of them. Had our left flank cut through the lagoon at the same time and attacked the enemy with the same vigour, it would have been a simple matter to surround them and capture them all. But the impenetrable forest of rushes hindered this. Nevertheless, the enemy could not hold out against such lively firing for long, and they took flight after three quarters of an hour. Our men shouted a continuous *Victoria*! (in their own manner, of course), and as soon as the whole army found itself on the other shore, it pursued the enemy at all possible speed. But they had a good head start, and were not fatigued, as were our men who had already marched six miles before the battle that day. The women and children of the Augnas had seen the action from some hills in the distance, and when they saw that their men showed us their backs they took to their heels as well.

The army was divided into two columns, of which the one on the right set fire to the first enemy settlement, ||p. 65|| Atocco, and dragged away with them as many oxen and sheep and as much other booty as they could seize in their haste. Another village, Fouthe, [Wuti], lying not far away, met the same fate.

Towards evening, at five o'clock, we reached the main capital of the Augnas, which bore the name of the nation, namely Augna.[20] After having set fire to three other small settlements, Attitonu [Atito], Uwako [?] and Alapple [Alakple] lying further inland, the army formed a semi-circle and marched on the town, firing their muskets, and, like arsonists, they set this attractive town of the Blacks ablaze. We tried, with a great deal of explanation, to make them understand that this was not the European method of warfare, but they insisted that one cannot say that the enemy

[20] The capital of Anlo is Anloga.

has been conquered if one has not burned down his towns. Furthermore, they said, the Augnas had done the same to the Adas earlier.

We camped here on the side of the burning town where the smoke was not troublesome, and feasted wonderfully on the great spoils of cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, and all the Black ||p. 66|| delicacies which the enemy, in his haste, had not been able to take with him. It was not necessary to light lamps here since the burning city of Augna, lying so near, spared us the effort.

That battle left us with some 40 wounded, of whom a number died later. A choleric Ada shot himself in battle because he believed that it would go badly for us. The enemy, on the other hand, must have suffered many more casualties since we found 13 of them on the battle ground, all of whom, according to Black custom, had to lose their heads.

It is a rather peculiar custom of these nations that, in cold blood, they cut off the heads of those of the enemy who are dead, as well as of those who are wounded and cannot walk. They carry these heads away with them, then they remove all the flesh very carefully from them and hang the lower jaw-bone on a small drum or blowing horn. But the upper part is hung on the great drum. They haul these unique ornaments around to all future ceremonies in war and peace, in the belief that they thus wreak no small revenge on the dead individual who is unbearably tormented every time the horn is ||p. 67|| blown or the drum is beaten. Indeed the greater the number of such symbols of victory a leader can show, the greater is his worth, just as among us the greater the number of captured standards, cannons, etc., the greater is the honour of the warrior.[21]

That entire evening was spent in feasting and singing, of which the former was most welcome because for four days the Blacks had not eaten any hot food. At eight o'clock they asked if they could shoot victory salvoes, which then proceeded so tumultuously that one would have thought a new battle had begun. We camped again in the open. At about midnight there was another rain storm which I did not notice in the least, so much had the march and the work the day before exhausted me, even though in the morning I found myself thoroughly soaked.

We camped there the following day and night, in order, as they said, to give respite to our badly wounded, who had to be carried in hammocks. I, on the other hand, kept myself busy, during the part of the day when I was free, in searching through depressingly scorched huts and ||p. 68|| the remains of the former Augna town. On this excursion I very soon had the pleasure of discovering, at the entrance to the town, a natural arbour

[21] Cf. Brun in Jones 1983: 93; Hemmersam *ibid*: 117; Müller *ibid*: 197–9; Rask 1754: 194; Rømer 1760: 132–35; Monrad 1822: 116–8.

which had been almost completely spared from the fire. By questioning I learned that it comprised the fetish grove of the Augnas, and on closer inspection I found that the grove was constructed in a very regular fashion purely of dragon-tree branches.[h] My happiness at this discovery was surely not less than must have been that of the late Linnæan scholar, Løfling, when he discovered this same tree in southern Columbia![22] It is known that from the trunk of this tree flows a resin which is wonderfully useful in medicine and in painting, and it gives spirits of wine a blood-red colour, from which the figurative name of this drug, namely dragon-blood, has its origin.[23]

On the other side of the settlement, towards the sea, the inhabitants had many garden plots, or what the Black calls *rossar* places, where they had planted mainly plantains, bananas, yams and sugar cane.[24] I had not seen sugar cane in Africa until then. ||p. 69|| The mature canes were more than the height of a man and just as thick as those in the West Indies. The Black makes no other use of the sugar-cane than to chew it when he is thirsty. Our Blacks swarmed through the gardens with their swords, and when they had taken the fruit from the banana trees, they cut those beautiful trees down, as we cut down thistles. When I saw this I remembered how highly this tree is valued in our country, and when it flowers in our botanical gardens how the event is blazoned forth in public news accounts.[25]

That evening the cymbals were struck in the camp to announce that on the following day everyone was to follow the Whites to Quitta and that, when there, they should refrain from all hostile actions.

Accordingly, on 1 April, at six o'clock [a.m.], the entire army broke camp. At eight o'clock we arrived at the town of our bitterest enemy. It is called Way [Woe] and is only slightly smaller than Augna. The day before, our Mountain Blacks, who are the most practised in burning and plundering, had not been able to desist from setting fire to and plundering this town, as well as a settlement called Thebee [Tegbi] lying a good mile

[h] *Dracaena draco Linn.* [Cf. Willis 1973: 388.]

[22] Per Løfling (1729–56), a Swedish botanist and student of Linnæus, studied the flora of Spain and undertook an expedition to South America, a continent that Isert, true to his commitment, called 'Southern Columbia'.

[23] Cf. Irvine 1961: lxxiv-v for trees used around sacred groves. For sacred groves, see Müller in Jones 1983: 164, 165; Rask 1754: 212–3; Rømer 1760: 58–9; Monrad 1822: 29, 30; Spieth 1906: 64.

[24] *rossar*, from the Portuguese *roçar*, to plant.

[25] Isert did not realise at that point that the stem of the banana plant (not a tree) is routinely cut down after it has produced fruit, and a new plant grows from the root. This fact became apparent to him later (Tenth Letter 288).

further east, in spite of the riches they had taken in Augna. It was a horrible sight to see ||p. 70|| numbers of creatures, such as sheep, oxen, goats, and pigs that those wanton people had shot and left lying. And the carcasses, after the passage of 24 hours, were terribly bloated from the heat of the sun. What was still left alive was then killed, either by shooting it or, as I once saw, by binding it up and throwing it, still alive, into the fire to roast. The skill with which they did this was extraordinary. They took a straw roof from a hut, put the living, bound pig on top of it, then another roof on top of that, ignited the lower layer, and when all the straw had burned up the roast was done.

The Way Blacks are the worst rogues among the entire admirable Augna nation. Their body-build probably contributes to their godless actions. Even among the Krepees, who are the strongest of all the other Black nations, you cannot easily find another Black settlement where there are so many large, strong people. I have seen one man who when standing was six and one-half Rhinelandish feet tall, and that is certainly a tall man. And there are said to be many among them who are even taller.[26]

||p. 71|| The Augnas are very well-to-do people, and for this they can mainly thank the Quitta lagoon, which, on one side, flows right past their doors. It is full of fish and small crabs which they dry and sell to people further inland. One man can earn up to nine *thalers* in a single day, a considerable sum in this country, because a man can live for a whole month on two *thalers*. Yet they are not as rich as they might be. When a Black has fished for a few days he spends the rest of the month at home, eating, drinking and smoking tobacco, and courting his women.[27] Usually there is no lack of European wares there, for just as they have the lagoon on one side, they have the ocean on the other, and in exchange for slaves and provisions they can obtain anything from the ships that they are unwilling to buy at our lodge.

After resting there for one hour we made our way to the last enemy settlement, Thebee. As I have already stated, that had also been set on fire and the situation was much the same as in Way, apart from the fact that Thebee is only about half the ||p. 72|| size of Way. However, after we had also rested there the march continued towards Quitta, only two miles distant, where we have a lodge.

We arrived there at exactly twelve o'clock. We found our lodge and the Black settlement empty, apart from an old company slave, who was now both 'emperor and sexton'. The Whites in charge, together with other

[26] One Rhinelandish foot = 31.5 cm.

[27] For a comment on Isert's impression, see Grove and Johansen 1968: 1386.

people belonging to the company, had fled to a settlement in the bush whose inhabitants were on our side and who called themselves Aflahus [Aflaos]. Since the Quittas were allies of our enemies, the Augnas — even if they always alleged that they were neutral — they had found it advisable to leave their settlement at the rumour of our victorious arms, and to hide themselves in the bush.[28] Envoys were sent to assure them that we would show no hostility towards them, and that they could return to their settlement undisturbed, which they have not done up to now.

On the 4th of the month a corps of 1,100 Krepees joined us. These men were from various || p. 73 || towns such as Aflahu, Bay, Popo, *et al* which I shall describe more extensively at another opportunity.[29] Our army is considerably increased by this addition, in that we now have more than 3000 guns. Everyone is now living on the abundance of the booty taken from the Augnas and their allies. It is said that we will soon venture out again and move into a camp where even more troops are expected, and about this you will hear more news by the next ship.

Until then, live well . . .

[28] The alliance between Keta and the Anlo was evidently somewhat unstable, because, perhaps, of the importance of the Ketas' own salt trade and its general role in the coastal trade (Grove and Johansen 1968: 1390). For a discussion of the break in relations between Keta and the Anlo and some of its military consequences, see Green 1981: 167–9.

[29] 'Bay' is the traditional name for Lomé.

Fourth Letter

||p. 74 || In camp at Pottebra[1]
18 May 1784

'At fratres animosa, accensaque luctu
Pars gladios stringunt manibus;
Pars missile ferrum,
Corripiunt caecique ruunt.' Virgil, *Æneid.* Libr, XII[2]

If my last letter moved you to compassion, I am afraid that this one will do so even more, since that letter can be considered an introduction to the present one. Thus the course of the war . . .

On 10 April the newly combined army marched out again and made camp at a very important town named Pottebra, at a distance of three miles east of Quitta. During the march we encountered three separate towns, Little Ajuga, Great Ajuga and New Ajuga, which were at a distance of one half mile from one another. The inhabitants of these three towns were neutral and therefore had not fled from our army || p. 75 || because we had promised them that we would abstain from any acts of hostility against them. On the contrary, they sold foodstuffs to our soldiers, and gave them free drinking water, which was rather dear there. However the Pottebras, who are generally considered to be dissolute rabble, had quit their town and had fled inland together with the Augnas. The town of Pottebra was formerly situated on the narrow strip of ground between the sea and the salt lagoon which starts in the west at the Rio Volta and terminates here. The Governor and his adjutant established their quarters in the houses of the kabossies, the most prominent Blacks did the same

[1] Despite Isert's detailed geographic description I have not been able to locate Pottebra. According to a contemporary source the people were Ketas by birth, and the settlement could boast 60 able-bodied men (Bjørn 1788: 210). There is no sign of it on Thonning's map of 1838. Conceivably the settlement has disappeared into the lagoon.

[2] There is a word missing in the first line, which should read: '*At fratres, animosa phalanx, accensaque luctu . . .*'. 'But of his brethren — a gallant band, and fired by grief, Part draw their swords, Part seize the missile steel, And rush blindly on.' Aeneid Bk. XII 1.277–9 (Fairclough 1946: 319).

in the other houses, while the rest were forced to build a camp, which the Blacks can do as quickly with poles and palm fronds as our soldiers can put up their tents.

The Augnas and Pottebras live mainly by extracting salt from sea water, and by fishing. Enormous quantities of salt were found in store. Next to every house there are one or two great haystack-shaped huts made of thick, very tightly woven grass mats, with very strong roofs ||p. 76|| of the same material. These huts are filled with the clean salt that they produce, salt which is not inferior in quality to the best we obtain from Spain. Each one of the sheds is capable of holding more than 50 tonnes. The method of preparing the salt is as simple as it is easy. when the sea is very high it floods over the beach and leaves a pool of water on the smooth, loamy, sandy ground. The excessively hot rays of the sun in this land cause the moisture to evaporate very quickly and the salt solidifies along with the mud. The Blacks gather this crust into a pile, throw it into a hole which they have dug in clean, dry sand, and pour sea water over it. They allow the salt to dissolve and then solidify in the sunshine again. By this process the impurities settle at the bottom of the hole. The crystal-white salt on top is then removed and stored for use.[3]

Each division of soldiers in possession of a house has confiscated its salt stores too, and when the women from the nearby towns come into the camp to sell provisions, they take salt back with them. Now, for the price of two *stüber*, or a *groschen*, ||p. 77|| they can take back with them as much as they can carry — an amount which would have cost them more than one *thaler* in times of peace.[4]

Not a day goes by but a War Council (*Palaber*) is held. It is not a little tedious to sit in the sun like a statue for four to five hours. Most frequently the reason for these meetings is that a newly-arrived group has to be sworn in — a process which we watch, listen to and must keep a written record of, because we Europeans cannot confidently entrust such things to memory, as can the secretaries of the Blacks who have to keep every public trial in their heads, even 40 years after the event. We know that even though they have not learned to write and cannot read a single letter, they are accurate in recalling their traditions as well as their history.[5]

[3] On salt making and the salt trade along this coast, see Müller in Jones 1983: 244; Bosman 1705: 308–9; Barbot 1746: 205; Rask 1754: 125–6, 127, 184; Rømer 1760: 297; Monrad 1822: 251; Macdonald 1898: 56–7; Grove and Johansen 1968: 1395; Daaku 1970: 5–6, 25–6, 121; Dickson 1971: 85–7, 99–100.

[4] A *groschen* was a heavy silver coin valued at about 24 to the *reichsthaler* in the eighteenth century.

[5] *Palaber/palaver* derives from the Portuguese *palavra*, word, speech. For a detailed description of palaver proceedings, see Monrad 1822: 75–84.

The primary reason for our stay here in apparent inactivity is that new allies arrive every day. Indeed we have need of them since we know that our enemies, hidden in the bush, are receiving similar assistance. In my case, it is not precisely enjoyable for a lover ||p. 78|| of living nature to remain for a long time in this infertile sand, where with every step, you sink into sand over your shoetops.

During this protracted period our Blacks have been occupying themselves by digging for treasure in all the houses. It is a habit of the Pottebras to bury their money in their houses in times of war, just as our own people used to do in former times. Large pots are filled with *boss*, or 'snake skulls', sealed shut and buried. However, since they are usually not buried to any great depth, our soldiers uncover many of the pots by simply prodding the loose sand with their swords. When they feel something hard, they can be sure of booty.[6]

We carried on in this way until 11 May when we decided not to give hearing to promises of allegiance from any more prospective allies. We Whites left the town for the open country with our own people first.[7] Our Blacks were somewhat dissatisfied with this sudden decision but when they saw that it would not be altered they marched all night to join us. Towards morning we were all in the open plains around Pottebra. As a show of gratitude for good quarters the last Blacks to leave the town had set fire to the town in four places, ||p. 79|| even though this had been expressly forbidden before departure.

When the soldiers had been mustered for inspection it was found that, although they had been supplied with sufficient powder and shot earlier, their cartridge pouches were now empty. The poor devils had been forced by hunger to sell their cartridges to the sutlers for provisions, after the trade in salt had come to an end. Indeed some had had to sacrifice their most treasured valuables to that insistent adversary, hunger, because the poor salary of about one *stüber* a day that we paid them would not suffice.

The number of guns had now increased to 4,000, so nearly the entire day was spent in distributing ammunition, since I had to inspect every single cartridge pouch because they all demanded ammunition, whether

[6] The early Danish sources all used the term *boss*, or a variant, for the cowry shell. *Boss* is derived from the Portuguese *búzio*, a univalve sea shell, conical or oval in shape, with a large opening. The appellation 'snake skulls' [*snogepander*] for cowries appears in several Danish sources. See Tilleman 1697: 150; Monrad 1822: 256. One source remarks that the farmers in Denmark used them as decoration on the straps of their money bags, and thought that they were the skulls of snakes (Rask 1754: 85). For cowries buried in houses see Müller in Jones 1983: 198; Rask 1754: 149–50. For cowries as currency, see Johnson 1970: (1) 17–49, (2) 331–53.

[7] 'Our own people' presumably means the Danish officers and soldiers.

they needed it or not. Because the Blacks do not use uniforms each one was issued with a narrow strip of linen to be tied to his musket. This cloth served amongst them as identification of a friendly party. In the afternoon we marched about four miles farther inland to look for the enemy, proceeding along paths which we had to cut since the route had evidently not been used before. We did not call a halt until long after it had ||p. 80|| become dark and we were in a pleasant palm grove.

Because we now had a formidable army (by African standards) which had been assembled from so many different nations, it required not a little alertness on our part to discover their true sentiments. Among others there was a distinguished Black by the name of Lathe, who had risen from a lowly birth all the way to the position of kabossie at Popo. He had served as a servant for the English in his youth, and having a keen mind he learned very quickly how to set about becoming rich and powerful.[8]

On every birthday — which is celebrated weekly among the Blacks — Lathe's trumpeters, whom he has had instructed in the European manner, trumpet forth his titles, or as the Blacks express it, his 'Great Names'. This special ceremony takes place in the following way. Two horn blowers position themselves in the street or in front of the tent of their master. One of them has a gong-gong, or brass basin, in one hand, and a small stick in the other. He beats rhythmically on the gong-gong with the stick, then pauses ||p. 81|| while the others shout very loudly, 'Lathe, Great Hero!' The gong-gong repeats its music and the crier continues, 'Master of such and such settlements; Conquerer of this or that great man..', and all the while the gong-gong provides the intermezzos. I have counted more than thirty of these praise names, but could not understand them all.[9]

A majority of the Krepees are now in Lathe's power because he supports them with money. By this means he has acquired as great a reputation as the King of Popo, and possibly even greater. We know, too, that Lathe himself is greatly in debt to our enemy, and that they have entered into a secret alliance with him against us. Nonetheless he is here in our army with all his serfs, and he promises, contrary to his own interest, to fight on our side. We dare not reject him because he would then openly become

[8] 'Lathe' was Late Awoku, son of a hunter, Late Bewu, who came from Accra to Glidzi, where he apparently married the king's daughter and settled there. Late Awoku's son, Akuete Zankli, later known as George Acquatey Lawson, is recognised as the founder of the Lawson dynasty whose members held important positions in commerce and politics on the West African Coast from 1821 until well into the twentieth century. See Newbury 1961: 38; Gayibor 1978: 142; Skinner 1983: 103–5.

[9] On titles of praise and Great Names called to musical accompaniment, see Müller in Jones 1983: 183; Rask 1754: 11, 235–6; Rømer 1760: 193; Bowdich 1819: 282; Dupuis 1824: 78; Freeman 1844; 148 note.

our enemy. Yet if he acts with us we are bound to fear that during battle he might turn his muskets on us. One hears of this having been done by similar allies in this land.[10]

When we all had made camp in the open forest — affording me, that night, an unforgettably beautiful sight of the forest ||p. 82|| being lit by perhaps more than 1,000 different fires from the camp town for a stretch of about a half mile — the Governor and I patrolled the entire camp. To our great satisfaction we found that our Blacks were in just the kind of mood we desired, that is, prepared to attack the enemy at any moment. Those who were sleeping slept completely armed, gun in hand, and the others kept watch, which was necessary there because we had to assume that we were close to the enemy.

In the morning, while we were gathered in a Council of War to discuss where the army should march that day, a shout was suddenly heard from the advance guard. Everyone was immediately in arms and ready to show the enemy a bold front. It was assumed that the enemy wanted to attack in the forest where they knew the hiding places better than we did. We were soon apprised of our error when the news was brought to us that it was only a patrol of about twenty of the enemy, apparently sent out to reconnoitre.

||p. 83|| From then on our army marched in three columns in order to hunt out the enemy through the trackless forest. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon we found the enemy camp near the Black settlement of Fita [Weta][a], which belonged to allies of the Augnas. We made camp, but decided not to undertake any fighting that day. However, our Lagoon Blacks could not refrain from provoking the enemy in his camp with constant shooting, which was only rarely answered. It was an exceedingly restless night. Every half hour the horn-blowers of the Governor had to make themselves heard; they were answered by those of Kabossie Lathe, and these, in turn, by numerous other horn-blowers and drummers. Toward one o'clock there arose a war cry. Everyone was on guard, as before, but it was no other enemy than a snake that had wounded in Black.

||p. 84|| Next morning, 14 May, was the fateful day on which the fortune of our arms was to be decided. We started to arm ourselves at an early hour, the Blacks not forgetting to smear themselves with white

[a] One must not confuse this Fita with Fida, or Whyda[h] of the English, which lies ten miles to the east, beyond Popo. Fita lies some six miles inland, opposite Pottebra.

[10] Considering Late's family connections to the Akra and his long-standing hostility to the Anlo, the Danes and their allies probably had nothing to fear from his presence in their midst. See Reindorf 1895: 135; Johannesen 1966: 55, 56.

colour in order to appear as ugly as possible. Since we were in an open field each village unit marched separately in platoons, their flags in front of them, and each kabossie was in the middle of his platoon with a prodigious umbrella over his head, twirled as it was carried from behind him by one of his slaves. The lieutenants, on the other hand, used only small European sunshades. Not until 11 o'clock did we reach the camp of our enemy, who had found it advisable to withdraw from it. Our soldiers promptly set it on fire as they advanced. The camp consisted of individual huts built with their backs along the edge of the forest. In front of them there was open ground about 300 *klaftern* wide and three-quarters of a mile long. The area was surrounded by thick palm forest with an undergrowth of bush. The plan was certainly not without merit for they had thought that when we were all in the open field they could storm us from all sides from the forest (in which || p. 85 || they had concealed themselves at all points) and thus deprive us of both the possibilities of fighting back and of flight.

But they had deceived themselves. Before pushing our way directly into this trap we despatched small pickets along both sides of the forest to make a reconnaissance and discover on which side the enemy was strongest. Scarcely had the pickets reached the middle of the open ground when the enemy started to show himself along the entire edge of the forest, which now seemed to be animated.

Then our whole army advanced, first seizing the right side of the forest, or that side where the enemy camp was situated. Beyond this there was a fresh spring from which they must have got their drinking water because great crowds of soldiers assembled around it, appearing to want to retain possession of it. When we noticed this one platoon after another rushed at them. The tumult of shouting, hornblowing and drumming was general. When a group is ready to fire its first shot its leader sings out, the drums and horns accompany him, and finally the entire troop shrieks in a truly dreadful tone, and runs full speed as if they were going to run || p. 86 || the enemy down. However, they stop at a distance of about 50 paces, spread out in a single line, fall to one knee or bend down, and shoot a volley. They then jump a few steps out of the ranks, load their guns again, shoot, and continue as before.[11]

The battle started at midday, around 11:30. After about one hour of fighting the spring was successfully taken by our men and the enemy withdrew into the forest, pursued by our soldiers. When the enemy's allies on the other side of the open ground saw this they made an attempt to

[11] For descriptions of combat techniques, see Barbot 1732: 296; Bosman 1705: 182; Rask 1754: 89–90; Bowdich 1819: 298ff.; Monrad 1822: 119–20; Kea 1971: 209–10.

break out from their side of the forest in order to come to the aid of those who were withdrawing on the opposite side, as well as to cut off our passage on the side where we were not well secured.

At that point we Whites found ourselves in the centre of the clearing with a corps of reserves numbering about 500 Blacks. These Blacks advanced immediately to drive back into the bush the enemy who had broken through there. I recall quite vividly the gratified expressions on the face of these Blacks when they were ordered to attack. They were already greatly || p. 87 || dissatisfied at having had to remain idle so long. The reason for this inactivity was that we sought to spare them because they consisted, in part, of royal, or company slaves who were regarded as our bodyguard and were to be used only in an emergency.

Such a heavy exchange of fire soon produced wounded and dead. The first wounded were brought to me and I was asked to help. I thought, '*Aesculapius Marte potior*', threw my weapons down on the grass, sat down on one of the Blacks' stools, and helped where I could.[12] But however many I bandaged the numbers of the wounded did not decrease. So, too, did the mountain of enemy heads piled in a heap in front of us grow higher. It is an absurd, barbaric custom of the Black that, as soon as he can seize an enemy soldier who has been shot, he cuts the head off straight away. He then cuts a hole in one of the ears, threads a strip of raffia through it, and hangs it around his neck. On one occasion Lathe came bearing two such symbols of victory at once, in order to remove from us all doubt of his loyalty. They even do the same with their own comrades when they cannot take the entire bodies away with them. In the latter case, however, they put the heads into a sack || p. 88 || immediately and do not allow them to be seen until they are later buried with due honours in their home villages.

There was an Akim (a Black from the kingdom of Akim) who had been sent as a hostage from his country to ensure that his king would not attack our land while we were absent and in enemy territory. He was usually called 'chicken thief' because when we were in camp he always supplied us with those creatures which he must have stolen from the enemy. Now he had received a shot in the buttock. Since this is not the place where the heart or courage are supposed to be located, I jokingly remarked that this shot gave him very little honour because he had received it by showing the enemy his back. Half annoyed, he answered, 'Take this out (pointing at the bullet) and if I don't bring you an enemy head, you must cut this off' (pointing to his neck). As soon as he had been bandaged he ran

[12] 'Aesculapius [the Greco-Roman god of healing] is more powerful than Mars [the Roman god of war].'

off, and in less than half an hour he threw the head of an Augna at my feet.

||p. 89|| The Black reveals not the least sign of pain in the hands of the doctor dressing the wounds received from the enemy, unless the wound is so grave that he has gone out of his mind.

I cannot, on this occasion, refrain from telling you about a particular wound which I considered to be fatal at first view, and yet is almost completely healed, by [the time of] this writing. A robust man had been shot between the third and fourth ribs, at about the middle of his left side. The shot had made its way through at a slant and come out through the back, under the right shoulder blade. When on examination I found only very little blood in the opening, I widened it, but there was no clotted blood (*thrombus*) to be seen. Therefore I feared that there was bleeding into the chest cavity and was anxious about the patient. To my surprise, however, he recovered very soon. Another soldier was not as lucky. He had been shot in the same place, but as I examined the wound a stream of blood spurted into my face like a fountain, indicating ||p. 90|| damage to the aorta, and all hope was destroyed.

A great number of our men were injured when their guns exploded, with the result that either the entire left hand, or part of it, was lost. For this misfortune we are indebted to a new kind of musket which has been sent to us in recent years.[13]

That day was the hottest I had experience thus far. Not only was I so overburdened with work that I could scarcely think, but the scorching rays of the sun fell almost perpendicularly from a cloudless sky on to the open ground, and the lack of any kind of refreshment exhausted my strength. I sometimes threw myself on my stomach into the moist grass, searching in vain for coolness! The entire atomosphere around me seemed to be aflame.[b] It was not long before I fell in a faint from my stool in the midst of my bandaging work. In falling ||p. 91 ||I am supposed to have said, 'No! Now I can't take any more . . .' By the humane assistance of the Governor and my trusty black servant[c] and others, I was restored

[b] This heat was in fact increased by the perspiration of the many wounded who were gathered closely around me. My thermometer, which I always carry, read 91 degrees Fahrenheit. See the Meteorological Appendix.

[c] He is called O Fem [*sic*] and is absolutely the most honest fellow I have found among the people of his colour.

[13] It is difficult to follow Isert's explanation. Were the accidents due to faulty muskets or to the soldiers' inexperience with a new and unfamiliar mechanism? For musket accidents, see Rømer 1760: 164–5, 212; Bowdich 1819: 376–7; Dupuis 1824: 181. Wounds may have been caused by loose loading or by too heavy loading (Monrad 1822: 120, 131).

to consciousness by the usual remedies, and I picked up where I had left off.

Up to then the outcome of the battle was still uncertain. Our Mountain Blacks, whom we had repeatedly reproached for not having done their duty in the action of 30 March, fought like lions this time, and due to their great eagerness they were soon in danger of being cut off from the rest of us. The enemy was already shooting vigorously through the great umbrella of the Duke, striking so close to him that even his personal servant (*okra*) who was standing beside him, received a shot in the elbow.[14] The Mountain Blacks had only just enough time to call for help. We immediately sent our Adas to reinforce them, and the enemy was soon driven back into the bush. But on this occasion we lost a splendid and distinguished Black (*Grande*), whose exceptional turn of mind I shall never forget.

||p. 92|| Evening came before the action was completely over. It was impossible to force the enemy out of his fortifications and out of his thousand hiding places. The roads that appeared to lead to the enemy had been undermined with holes that had been dug and covered with branches and grass, so that when our men attempted pursuit they fell into the pits. The enemy lay hidden in the bushes and shot at those who were trapped. The approaching night finally brought an end to the bloodshed.

The enemy, wanting to show that they had not all crept away, fired one more salvo an hour after dark. At that moment I myself was in the forefront, having done a little botanizing in the swamp.[d] But this mischief was soon answered when our Field Marshal called out. Everyone immediately crowded towards the place where the firing had been seen, and sent off a random salvo, whereupon the enemy withdrew.

||p. 93|| We held a Council of War again, at which it was unanimously decided to camp for the night on the battlefield, and in case the enemy had not withdrawn the following morning, to attack him there once more.

[d] On this occasion I found a variety of swamp snail which I have sent to my friends in Copenhagen. This rare snail, which coils to the left, is classified as *Helix Vario*, or *La Prune de reine Claude*. [There is clearly an error here. The final words *oder La prune de reine Claude erkant*, that is, 'known as the plum *Reine Claude*', are on a separate line at the end of the note, and it is probable that the printer erroneously inserted a line from another place in the text. Curiously, there is no place in the book where that particular identification would apply, so it may have been a remnant from Isert's editing.]

[14] Since the Akuapem are an Akan people they adhere to the religious practices common to the Akan. The *kra* is the soul in Akan philosophy, and is the bearer of the person's destiny, as well as being his protector and advisor (Kofi Asare Opoku, personal communication). See also Rask 1754: 177–8; Bowdich 1819: 39, 288, 291; Rattray 1927: 153–4; Kyerematen 1964: 110; Opoku 1978: 26, 30, 94–6.

A detachment made ready to fetch additional ammunition from Quitta at all speed.

Meanwhile we camped, or rather sat, there without sleeping. Throughout the night each nation sang its war songs, each in its own language, scorning the enemy for having taken flight. It was the most marvellous dissonance in the world. The Governor then chose the troops of Lathe to act as our guards because they had so often furnished effective proof of their loyalty that day. They were ordered to form a ring around us. The Governor sat on a stool, but I threw myself down on the grass with my arm outstretched. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I was suddenly frightened by something cold and alive moving over my hand. I made an outcry, and at the same moment the Governor also cried out because he had detected a snake between his feet. The monster was immediately attacked with swords and killed. ||p. 94|| It might have taken the life of someone who, on that very day, had escaped death by musket shot.

The bite of these snakes is extremely dangerous, and those who have been bitten by them normally die within a period of 12–36 hours. I have seen some of these sad cases, but unfortunately have never been able to do anything to help them. Like many other nations the Blacks are blinded by religious bias, and since their priests are also their doctors, it would be a mortal sin for the Black to undertake anything which was contrary to the priest's orders.[15] Their treatment consists mainly in this, that the patient is seated naked on a stool, and water, into which they have first put many consecrated herbs, is poured over him continuously. Anyone with even the slightest knowledge of medical science would realize that the entire success of a cure, once the poison has been absorbed, depends entirely upon salutary perspiration. In contrast, any method that would close the sweat pores must be more disadvantageous than advantageous in effecting a cure.

||p. 95|| Before daybreak we learned that our enemy had fled far back into the bush. Our army had run out of provisions and had only a little ammunition left, so we did not dare to seek out the enemy once more. Instead we withdrew to our earlier camp at Pottebra in order to put ourselves into a more suitable state.

After this seven-hour action we had 22 dead and 65 wounded, some of whom died later. The enemy, on the other hand, and by their own admission, had 54 dead and 160 wounded. In an African war this is

[15] Isert errs in equating the doctor with the priest. They were distinct and separate positions (McCaskie 1972: 37). See also Monrad 1824: 273 n. xx.

considered an extraordinary defeat, since nothing but muskets could be used here.[16]

More another time. In war and peace, I am your etc., etc.

[16] There are slight variations in the reports of deaths and casualties: 24 dead and 54 wounded on the Danish side, 54 killed and 160 wounded on the other side (Reindorf 1895: 135–6); 12 dead and 60 wounded against 60 dead and 150 wounded (Nørregaard 1966: 148). The final phrase [*da hier nichts anders als Muskete gebraucht werden konte*] is unclear. Isert may have intended to say that no larger weapons, such as cannons, had been used.

Fifth Letter

Fort Prinzenstein at Quitta in Guinea
25 June, 1784

'Dated from yet another new fort?' you may say. 'How is that possible? A fortress, after all, is not a mushroom, which appears one day and disappears the next!' Be that as it may, we have at pesent four of the most fortified towns in Africa, and we have begun to be considered by the Blacks to be the most esteemed nation, because as far back as the annals of the Blacks concerning the Europeans go, there is no memory of our having fought alongside them in war before, or of our having been present at their battles. But I shall carry on where I left off, and present this laudable history of a Guinean war as completely as possible.

During the first days in our old camp we were not in the best condition. Our earlier residence, the kabossie's house, ||p. 97|| together with the rest of the entire town, had been reduced to an ash heap. Therefore we were all forced to live in huts which we had to build ourselves. Our troops were greatly reduced in number, the majority having gone to Quitta to obtain supplies. Had the enemy troops been in a position to undertake the most trifling enterprise, they could very easily have taken us by surprise. It was often rumoured in camp that they would try just that, therefore we Whites had to sleep fully clothed and armed for 14 days. Then the number of our troops gradually increased.

While walking on the beach one morning during this period I saw several of our Blacks sitting close to the breakers, facing the sea, and working very industriously on something. This aroused my curiosity so I walked closer and saw that they were skeletonising human heads and hands. Therefore they sat close to the sea so that when they had peeled the flesh from the bones, the seawater, flowing over them, washed the flesh away. To my question as to whether ||p. 98|| they recognised individual heads of the enemy so well that during these preparations they did not get them mixed up, they answered, laughing, 'It does not matter.' And they even showed me one head after another, saying, 'This one is

Lieutenant Dacon, this one is so-and-so, and that one so-and-so.' When the heads have been well polished, they are hung on the great drums. But the jawbones and the hands are hung on the smaller drums, or on the horns.[1]

Prince Ofoly Bossum, who had not been with our army earlier, arrived at this time with a part of his forces. He is the son of the late King Assiambo of Popo.[2] On the 24th of last month he had sworn an oath of allegiance. Apparently he had come mainly to serve as a mediator between us and the Augnas, therefore he immediately made proposals for peace negotiations. He sent one of his lieutenants to Kriko [Klikor], the closest town of the allies of the Augnas, to say that they were to send representatives to ask for peace. The representatives arrived on the 27th of that month. On the following day an official council was held, and the Augnas' representatives were made to understand that to avoid causing more bloodshed we desired to make peace with their people, ||p. 99|| provided that they complied with the following terms:

First: They would permit the building of a fort at Quitta;
Second: They would allow free passage through their country over land and by water;
Third: They would permit the establishment of a lodge in the capital of their country;
Fourth: The Augnas themselves would no longer send canoes out to sea to meet ships, but would trade only with our nation;
Fifth: After rebuilding their towns they should again ally themselves with the Quitta Blacks and live in eternal friendship;[a]
Sixth: In order to secure these terms, ten sons of their most prominent men would be handed over to us as hostages, who, in the event of a breach of agreement, would be sent out of the country as slaves.[3]

While all this was in progress the King of Popo, called Obly, was in Aflahu [Aflao], a considerable Black settlement some three miles from here.[4] He

[a] In the latest action the Quittas were either neutral or else they fought against the Augnas, in spite of the fact that they had been allies before.

[1] For the ritual display of skulls, see Brun in Jones 1983: 92–3; Müller in Jones 1983: 199; Rømer 1760: 132. See also Isert Third Letter n. 21.

[2] 'Ofoly Bossum' was Ofori Thosu, son of King Ashangmo ['Assiambo'] of Accra (Reindorf 1895: 136): see Third Letter [21]. He held the post of governor of the town of Glidji in Popo during the last quarter of the eighteenth century (N. Gayibor, personal communication).

[3] For this treaty and its implementation, see Green 1981: 166–8.

[4] On Obly, see Bjørn 1788: 226. 'Obly/Oblie' was no doubt a corruption of 'Ofori', the name of the King of Glidji from 1778 to 1786 (N. Gayibor, personal communication).

could not look on passively while the matter was settled || p. 100 || without him, so he sent messengers to us frequently, with promises that he would come at such-and-such a time and would bring a very numerous army with him. Arrangements for his reception were made and a special tent was set up in a large courtyard, but he did not come at the appointed time. Since the period of waiting stretched out and we still wanted to know whether we should make peace or not, the governor himself travelled to see the king of Aflahu, and I followed two days later. Other matters were discussed at that meeting, too, since a trading lodge was to be set up there, whose chief would be the sergeant, mentioned earlier, who had fought with us during the war.

Aflahu[c] lies six miles beyond Quitta, to the east, thus forty miles from Christiansburg. It has an extremely pleasant location in the forest, and is about one quarter of a mile from the sea. Being large, it is divided into different *quartières* or quarters, || p. 101 || each with its own kabossie.

We paid our respects to His Majesty, in order to hear his final decision as to whether or not his troops would support our army — to which question he gave a categorical answer, 'You shall not make peace with the Augnas, but stay in camp at Pottebra for four more weeks. If I have not given you any troops by then, you will still have enough time to make peace.' It was a hopelessly ambiguous pronouncement which had most likely been hatched in the brains of his ministers, not in his own.

This man is certainly much over 80[d] and absolutely childish. He has a long, thin frame, and one could blow right through him. He loves English cheese above all else. Once, when he received an invitation from the governor, he asked that at least some cheese be sent him first, although he had only three miles to travel.

After this audience we considered it more prudent to make a peace favourable to us || p. 102||, preferably as soon as possible, because were a new war to start, a victory for us would be doubtful. We began our return journey during the night and arrived at camp on the morning of the 4th.[5]

We then renewed the peace negotiations because by that time matters had taken a much happier turn for us, since the enemy knew that the king

[c] This is probably the Koto mentioned by earlier travellers. I do not know what kind of province Koto was, that lay five miles west of Little Popo. The name is not known here. See the *Modern part of an universal history*, Vol. XVI p. 386. [Isert is referring to *The modern part of an Universal History, from the earliest accounts to the present time*, 44 volumes, Richardson, London 1759–66. It has not been possible to locate Isert's page reference. See also Labat 1730: Vol. II, 3–10; Bosman 1705: 329–33.

[d] He died in 1789.

[5] The date is 4 June.

of Popo was making arrangements to muster his army. On the fourth day of that month four of the most prominent Augnas came to 'sign' the articles of peace ('signing' verbally, of course), and this was concluded with the greatest pomp on the 18th. All of our prominent men were in their best dress. No drums, no horns were forgotten that day. They were even more decorative than before, having been adorned with the heads, jawbones and hands of the conquered enemy.

We were arranged in a circle so large that it could have contained the largest market in Europe. Each general or kabossie was surrounded by his own people, and a great umbrella was held over his head. The musicians were placed at a slight distance from the others and they gave a concert now and then. We Whites did not cut a poor figure, either, with our mulatto soldiers and buglers.

|| p. 103 || When everyone was seated in the correct order, an etiquette to which the Blacks adhere amazingly, the Augnas' envoys were called in. Crawling on all fours they appeared in the circle and greeted each kabossie in turn around it, moving from the highest in rank to the lowest. Finally one of them began to speak. He said, 'We cannot possibly resist the weapons of the Whites, therefore we take our hats off[e] and beg for our lives. This persistent and long-lasting war has exhausted our strength and our goods; we are suffering hardship, since our children are either dead or wounded. We agree to all the conditions you have presented to us, and as confirmation of this, we have here nine children of the King and the greatest men in our country. We give them to you as a permanent pledge of assurance to what we now promise, confidant that you will not let them suffer hardship.'[6]

|| p. 104 || Thereupon the envoy took by the hand one after the other of the youths who lay on the ground like slaves, and he gave them into the hands of Field Marshal Otho. Otho, in turn, gave them into the governor's hands, at the same time announcing the names of the fathers and their children. When this ceremony was over the envoys again greeted everyone around the circle and then sat down, while our prominent men, according to seniority from the lowest in rank to the highest, returned the greeting.

It is a strange custom of this nation that in paying respect in public the young must always precede their elders. Should an elder kabossie see a

[e] Translated literally. It means, as a rule, to ask forgiveness. [The modern Ewe for this phrase is *með kuku*, 'I take off hat' (Felix Ameka, personal communication). The same metaphor appears in the Akan phrase. *Mepa wo kyɛw* and in the Gã *o fai nɛ*.]

[6] I have no explanation for the discrepancy in the number of hostages. In the text the numerals 10 (p. 99) and 9 (p. 103) are very clear.

younger man walking behind him, he would take it as badly as would a *Conferenzrath* if a *Kammerrath* ventured to walk in front of him.[7]

The affair ended with a joyous 'hurrah!', and on the next day the envoys ate fetish with the Augnas, that is, they swore loyalty to each other.[8] We Whites, however, travelled back to Quitta that very evening, a distance of a good three miles. I made this journey on foot because at that point I was suffering from diarrhoea which was usually exacerbated in the litter.

||p. 105|| On the very next day preparations were made for the construction of a fortress which would enclose our old lodge, and the Governor entrusted me with the measurements and marking out. It was to be constructed following the plan of Fort Kønigstein, apart from its being about six feet larger.[9] On the 22nd of this month the cornerstone was laid — a solemn event here. Adade, the brother of the king of Popo laid the cornerstone in the name of the king, and Prince Ofoly strewed the chalk.[10] The latter made a very long speech on this occasion, of which the main theme was that any one who ventured to remove this stone from its place would have to destroy him and his power first. Each man had put on a mason's apron made of a piece of silk taffeta.

The Quittas, who would have preferred anything to permitting the Whites to build a fort there, looked on askance, clearly despondent, [yet] not daring to allow their displeasure to be noticed since we still had with us a mighty army with sword in hand. Admittedly, they had lost the freedom to trade at sea with foreign nations, preferably ||p. 106|| with the French and the Portuguese, as they had done in former days. Still, we had been generous enough to permit them to sell provisons, but neither slaves nor ivory. On the other hand, and as a result, they had gained a safe place of refuge to which they could flee in case of an enemy attack. This treaty had to be made public in the same manner as all native treaties were publicized.[11]

Quitta is a fairly significant Black settlement, lying between the sea and

[7] I have been unable to find a satisfactory translation of these titles but it is clear that the former term denotes a considerably high rank than the latter.

[8] For the swearing of oaths, see Third Letter note [9].

[9] For the lodge at Keta, see Rømer 1760: 287. For comment on the prospects of the fort, see Bjørn 1788: 218–9; Grove and Johansen 1968: 1400–01. For the later history of the fort, see Lawrence 1963: 361–8.

[10] On the ceremonial use of white chalk see, Bowdich 1821a: 46; Rattray 1923: 158–60, 188, 195, 211; McLeod 1981: 176. See also Third Letter [13].

[11] On public announcements, see Müller in Jones 1983: 192; Bosman 1704: 193–4; Rask 1754: 250–1; Barbot 1732: 290; Bowdich 1819: 276, 298; Monrad 1822: 75; Rattray 1927: 278–9; Kyerematen 1964: 57; Daaku 1970: 58.

an arm of Rio Volta, on a narrow, low peninsula.[12] The terrain here is quite varied but is largely very swampy, thus accounting for the presence of an incredible number of mosquitoes that had been hatched in the stagnant swamp. One can be protected from them indoors during the day, but by going out into the grass around the houses one can be quite certain to return with lumps on the face, hands, and feet unless booted. I know that they have tortured me to a frenzy at various times during my walks. If one is to be spared during the night all openings must be closed before it is dark. ||p. 107|| It is impossible to sleep without a tightly fitting hanging around the bed. To protect themselves from these tormentors, the Blacks go to the beach in the evenings and lie down there on the sand, where there are no mosquitoes.

The Black settlement and the fort lie some 300 paces inland because from the shore to that point there is white quicksand which could not support the erection of even the smallest structure.

In respect of the supply of fresh water and provisions, including game, oxen and sheep that are found in this area in profusion, Quitta has the most favourable location of nearly all our possessions. The lagoon is full of delicious fish and crabs,[f] and the oysters[g] are so numerous that the Black considers it too much trouble to carry them home, even if it means walking only a couple of hundred paces. They open the shells on the spot and throw the oysters into a pot where they are cooked in their own juice for a little while. ||p. 108|| The Blacks then hawk them for sale in the town, where, for a *stüber* or six *pfennig*, one can get so many that they can hardly be eaten all at one time. Unfortunately, this abundance has cost many newly-arrived Europeans their lives, and I have seen the sad results, especially among the crew of a French ship which had been lying in the roadstead for several months. Eaten in moderation oysters are very healthy nourishment, but that nation loves them to the point of gluttony.

The water here is better than at any other place on the coast of Guinea, and it is available with less trouble. A hole eight to ten feet deep is dug in the loose sand about 100 to 150 paces from the sea. An abundance of the most crystal-clear, fresh water in the world immediately filters into

[f] A species closely related to *Astacus Squilla Fabricii*.

[g] *Ostrea* — presumably a new species, the individuals being very narrow and long, sometimes up to more than a foot in length. [Cf. Müller in Jones 1983: 238–9; Rask 1754: 21.]

[12] The 'arm of the Rio Volta' is the Keta Lagoon. P. Thonning's map of 1838 shows a direct waterway between the Volta and the lagoon. See also Monrad 1822: 137; Boateng 1970: 159.

the hole, and from this hole barrels can be filled. The Blacks then swim through the breakers, each one pushing a full barrel with his head, to the point where a ship's boat lies ready to receive them. These water-holes cannot be used for more than two or three days because after that time the water || p. 109 || begins to turn brackish, or a little salty.[13]

It is a strange phenomenon that this white flowing sand, in which I could discover no absorbing earth, contains something else that is able to absorb the salt from sea-water so saline that it has more than 24 parts of salt in solution,[h] and can thus transform it into water as fresh as rain-water. The presence of underground sources of fresh-water here is absolutely unthinkable. Would it not be worth the trouble to set up some experiments to copy nature by taking a pointed sack (a Hippocrates sleeve), filling it with sand of this kind that will then take the shape of a funnel, and pouring sea-water on it?[14] I need not describe the usefulness such a device would have for ships on long cruises. It should be obvious when I point out that, when a slaveship with a cargo of 500 slaves leaves the coast, it has to carry up to 600 barrels of water, each of which holds up to 260 *kannen*.[15] || p. 110 || To be sure, in recent times there have been devised very useful distilling machines to change sea-water into fresh water, but on the one hand these are costly, and on the other, they are unusable in bad weather.

A prominent Black named Quau [Kwaw] formerly stayed at the lodge as the so-called 'broker' and was salaried by us as such. The opinion of the Europeans concerning his conduct is divided. One group considers him to be a wicked swindler, while the others, on the contrary, argue that as a native Augna and from a political viewpoint he could not have acted differently. It is, however, persistently disturbing that up to now he has not made an appearance while all the other Quitta Blacks have already returned. The Quitta Blacks themselves, in their rage over this man Quau, blame all their misfortunes on him, and have completely torn down all the houses in his quarter.[16] This town, like so many other large places, is divided into different *quartières*.

Close to the newly constructed fort stand several very large Indian fig

[h] See the Appendix of Meterological Observations.

[13] Presumably, rain water, left undisturbed, filters down through the sand and forms a layer on top of the salt water underground. Cf. Rømer 1760: 293; Monrad 1822: note to 137: Bowdich 1821 b: 66

[14] A 'Hippocras bag or sleeve' [*L. manica Hippocratis*] was the contemporary term for a conical bag of cotton, linen or flannel used as a filter.

[15] One *kanne* = 1.9 litres

[16] For Quau's position and power, see Bjørn 1788: 219–20; Monrad 1822: 69 and note.

trees[i] and several monkey trees[k], under which || p. 111 || the Blacks gather during the day and hold council. Both of these trees are sacred to the Blacks; the Indian fig because it has the peculiarity that from its highest branches thread-like roots hang clear down to the ground, and the monkey tree because of its extraordinary size and its large attractive, pendant flowers.[17] These trees have hanging in them a variety of great bat, in such numbers that one can hit up to eight of them with a single shot. The sun has hardly withdrawn its brilliance before these animals begin to come alive, while during the day they hang by their feet from the branches as if dead. They shriek in a musical, but for one who is not accustomed to it, very unattractive tone that can be roughly expressed as 'Heihe-hi-i-i-i'.

In the direction of the sea there used to be many silk-cotton trees[l], but since they obstructed our view they were chopped down. || p. 112 || I sincerely hope that we shall set out on our return march to Akra tomorrow. We are leaving Prince Ofoly and Chief Lathe of Popo and their troops in charge until the fort has been put into such a state of readiness that neither the Quittas nor the Augnas could entertain the notion of disrupting us in building. It is a sad fact that the stones for this fort, too, must be brought from Akra, because the only type of stone here is an incrusted one which lacks the necessary strength for such a building. However, mussels for the lime are not lacking.

At my next opportunity, more. Meanwhile, I am, etc.

[i] *Ficus indica Linn.* [Banyan Tree. See Dalziel 1955: 276–7, 282; Irvine: 1961: 442; Willis 1973: 458.]

[k] *Adansonia Digitata Linn.* [The Monkey Bread tree, or Baobob. Cf. Dalziel 1955: 112–5; Irvine 1961: 185 ff. and plate 16a; Willis 1973: 20.]

[l] *Bombax pentandrum Linn.* [Ceiba Pentandra Gaertn., Silk-cotton tree. Cf. Dalziel 1955: 118–22; Irvine 1961: 190 and plate 16b.]

[17] On sacred trees, see Müller in Jones 1983: 139, 140, 160; Rattray 1923: 122, 130; Rattray 1927: 2–4; Irvine 1961: lxxiv-v.

Sixth Letter

Fort Kønigstein at Ada on Rio
Volta in Guinea,
24 September, 1784

Well now! The war is over, and we are enjoying peace. Ah! Would that two-headed Sir Janus be forever locked in his temple of war! Whatever may be said to the contrary, war brings into the world ten evil deeds for each good one.[1]

On 26 June this year we joyfully made our return march with the allied Akra, Aquapim and Lagoon Blacks, and found ourselves at the mouth of Rio Volta the next morning. Since our arrival was known in advance boats were already at hand to carry us from there to the Fort. The crossing, although of not more than one mile, was very difficult because that was the period when the river was at its highest ||p. 114||; and also when it ran most swiftly to the sea. We spent more than five hours on the water before we reached the Fort, even though our paddlers used all their might to take us across as quickly as possible. The army was put across the river without delay, and from there the soldiers set off for Ada on foot. The Governor stayed at the Fort for a few days and then continued his journey to Christiansburg, after having transferred to me the command (*ad interim*) which entailed responsibility for the continued building of the Fort as well as for the trade. Since by now I have been at the Rio Volta for a period of six months I shall give you as clear a report of it as I can.

The River Volta has received its name from the Portuguese because of its leaping-like entry into the sea.[2] It is one of the great African rivers in this region, despite ranking in size after the Rivers Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leona and especially the Niger. Its width at the mouth is not more than a good quarter of a mile. On the other hand, its course has still not

[1] The reference here is to the gates of the temple of *Janus* in the Roman Forum. They were double gates which were symbolically closed in times of peace but left open in war.

[2] Isert seems to have accepted his predecessors' conviction that the river was so named by the Portuguese because of the prodigious rapidity of its course. Cf. Bosman 1705: 328; Labat 1730: Vol. II, 2. Actually *volta* means 'return' in Portuguese.

be fully explored by the Europeans. Meanwhile, I conjecture that it is not more than ||p. 115|| 50 German miles in length.[3] According to the Blacks the town of Malfi [Mlefi] that lies on an island in the river about 12 miles from the seashore is halfway to Aquambo city where the river has its beginning, or where, at least, it is formed from such small, shallow streams that canoes cannot be paddled up them. No one has yet tried to enter the river with European boats, but it is possible that large ships could enter, since no breakers can be seen on the east side of the delta, a fact that can be considered evidence of its depth.[4]

About one and one-half miles inland from its mouth the river forms a great lake which is more than 15 miles long and 12 miles wide. An arm of the river stretches from there to Pottebra, and in the rainy season may well stretch further. This lake contains an extensive archipelago of large and small islands, certainly numbering more than one hundred.

One of the largest of these islands, measuring about a quarter of a mile across, is Ada, opposite Fort Kønigstein, ||p. 116|| on which we have had a lodge since our earliest settlement in Guinea.

For six months, that is from May to December, the river water is drinkable, but during the other months, when the river is at the same level as the sea, it cannot be used. However, at that time there is the advantage that it is even richer in fish. In this salty water the fisherman catch a particular species of fish called *hardis*, which, when smoked, is like our European salmon.[5]

The river is very romantically pleasant. Its banks are clad with evergreen bushes and trees, among them being mangroves[a], a linden-like hibiscus[b], a thorny tree-like bush[c], and especially remarkable, a large species of tree incorrectly called a cedar here.[d] The roots of the last-named variety have the special property that wherever they grow they send up many shoots from the earth. These shoots never have leaves and resemble pipe stems. This tree is so thoroughly salty that in the morning ||p. 117|| there are great drops of dissolved salt on the leaves, where they are crystallised by

[a] *Rhizophora mangle Linn.* [Cf. Dalziel 1955: 85–7; Irvine 1961; 138; Willis 1973: 991.]

[b] *Hibiscus tiliaceus Linn.* [Cf. Dalziel 1955: 130–1; Irvine 1961: 197; Chittendon 1977: 996.]

[c] *Pterocarpus lunatus Linn.* [This tree may be Barwood, a name which applies to all species of Pterocarpus (A. A. Enti, personal communication).]

[d] *Aviceniae*, new species. [*Avicenniae*, White mangrove, Black mangrove. Cf. Dalziel 1955: 453–4; Irvine 1961: 750: Willis 1973: 113.]

[3] The term 'German mile' probably refers to the official land mile of 7.5 km.

[4] On the source and navigability of the Volta, see Bowdich 1819: 173 ff.; Lind in Thaarup 1834: 1–16; Starrenburg Ms. 1849: Section 3, notes h, i, k; Berg 1900: 193; Dickson 1969: 109; Boateng 1970: 40–1.

[5] For *hardis* see Second Letter (12).

the sun later in the day. We use the timber, which is fairly straight and up to 50 feet long, for building.

Travel on the river would be far more pleasant indeed if one did not have to watch out for those veritable monsters, the sea-elephant[e] and the crocodile. These are encountered in not inconsiderable numbers here. The former overturn the canoes for entertainment, and the latter, often before one is aware of it, grab a hand of one of the paddling Blacks, indeed often dragging the whole man underwater. These animals are not more than ten feet in length, from which fact I am inclined to conclude that the crocodiles of the Nile exceed them in size.

The trees are full of singing birds. It is a great error to believe that birds do not sing in the torrid zone. We have a nightingale here which is not inferior to the Polish variety in its song, and is totally lacking in their virtuoso caprice of only singing for a couple of months of the year. Our Guinean nightingale ||p. 118|| charms the ear of the listener equally in December as in May.[6] The European rush warbler,[f] or at least a species which is exactly like it in appearance and song, is also found here.

About three-quarters of a mile from the seashore lies a small island which we have named 'Bird Island'. The island is populated at all times with many herons,[g] of various and unknown species. The green social parrots[h] arrive there in flocks, like our starlings [in Europe], covering the bushes and filling the air with their chick-like chirping, until the various kinds of monkeys, at the approach of human beings, put them out of tune with their terrible screams as they leave the tops of the trees.

In the months of July and August the Rio Volta overflows its banks, flooding considerable areas of the mainland. These parts are particularly suitable for the cultivation of rice, which is grown further inland where the water is always fresh.[7]

[e] *Hippopothamus amphibius Linn.* [Hippopotamus].

[f] *Motacilla Curuca Linn. [Motacillidae* are wagtails and pipits; Warblers are identified by a number of other names, none of them *Motacilla*. Cf. Serle and Morel 1977: 159–63.]

[g] *Ardeae* [ibid.: 19–23.]

[h] *Psittacus pullarius Linn.* [Probably *Agapornis pulleria*. See ibid.: 103. By mid-nineteenth century the trees on Bird Island had been felled and there were hardly any birds left (Starrenburg Ms. 1849: Section 3, n. (o)).

[6] Contemporary sources disagreed regarding bird song considered pleasing to a European ear. Some insisted that none existed (Rask 1754: 115; Monrad 1822: 160 and n. (xx). Others agreed that nightingales were found on the Guinea Coast but that the song of the European species was more pleasant. Cf. Bowdich 1819: 328; Starrenburg Ms. 1849: Section 3, n. (n); Serle and Morel 1977: 199.

[7] Reporting on an expedition up the Volta in 1827–8, Lt. A. G. Lind listed the crops seen growing in settlements along the way but did not mention rice, apart from indicating areas suitable for its cultivation (Lind in Thaarup 1834: 12).

||p. 119|| Where the water is salty one finds incredible quantities of shipworms.[i] With astounding speed these creatures can gnaw away wood which is lying in the river. I have seen a tree trunk two feet in diameter that had been lying in the river for five months, burrowed through to such a degree with their *Daedalean* tracks that the wood could be rubbed to dust between one's fingers.[8]

In the branches of the mangrove trees that hang down into the water there are oysters of a delightful flavour. These differ from those found on the banks of the salty lagoon in that they are smaller than the latter and round in shape. They have the best flavour when the river is salty, but in the months when the river is fresh they are thin and poor.

The best-known of the Black settlements that lie on and around Rio Volta, and of their inhabitants — known in their own language as Lagoon Dwellers (*Faen Bile*) — are Agraffi [Agave], Malfi, Meffi [Mefe], Tøfferi [Tefle] and Batoo [Battor]. They are all our allies and fly our flag.[9]

||p. 120|| The first-mentioned lies closest to Ada and provides us in abundance with all kinds of agricultural products. We have to obtain these products from the Agraffi because the Adas consider it ignominious to cultivate the fields, and much prefer to leave such arduous, degrading labour to their neighbours, while they devote themselves solely to the fish industry and to salt-making, both of whose products they sell to the people situated further inland.

Malfi, the largest of all the settlements, was able to send us nearly 300 soldiers without depriving itself of manpower. It is also famous because of its fetish temple since any slave who can succeed in reaching there gains his freedom. I have had some experience of this myself on one occasion and to my vexation. One of our slaves had fled there and no Black dared to fetch him out of the temple. Finally I sent a Mulatto soldier who, because he had been baptised dared not believe, at least publicly, in the trickery of the Black. He seized the slave, but admitted that from fear of the fetish he had been trembling throughout his entire body.[10]

The trade of the inhabitants with the Europeans here is limited solely to slaves and ivory, but the latter is in fact ||p. 121|| very rarely available. Gold, on the other hand, is almost never brought here for sale. The vast

[i] *Teredines*. [Any of various elongated marine clams that resemble worms, burrow into submerged wood, and damage wharf piles and wooden ships.]

[8] Isert was invoking the image of Daedalus as the legendary builder of the Cretan labyrinth.

[9] *Faen Bile* could be the Gã *faa ming bii le*, 'the people in the lagoon' (Mary E. Dakubu, personal communication).

[10] On slaves 'dashing' (i.e. awarding) or devoting themselves to the fetish, or 'sitting on the fetish', see Thonning 1801: 41–2; Bowdich 1819: 265 and n.; Monrad 1822: 42–3.

majority of slaves come from the region of Krepee, most of them from a particular province named Acothim [Agotime] that lies three days' journey beyond Malfi. It is not rare for an Acothim trader to bring 30 or 40 slaves for sale at one time, once he knows that there is an adequate supply of good wares for him at the Fort. The traders travel to the Fort in a number of canoes, going by way of Malfi whose inhabitants escort them to the Fort in return for payment. However, it can come to pass that the Malfis fall into disagreement with the Acothims, who then take the route to Quitta.

The wares that we give them in exchange are little different from those that we are accustomed to trade at Christiansburg, and in general at all our establishments, with the slight difference that the traders here demand more cloth than do those to the west.

The price for a young, grown man is at present 160 *thalers*, and for a young woman who has no blemishes 128 *thalers*, at so-called 'slave-price', which is about 25 per cent lower than the Danish currency. ||p. 122|| In addition, some six *reichsthalers* known as a 'present' must be paid as a fee for each slave.[11] The wares which would be paid for a male slave, for example, are the following:

5 muskets at 6 *rthlr*		=30 *rthlr.*
80 pounds of gunpowder		=40 *rthlr.*
2 rods of iron at 3 *rthlr.*		= 6 *rthlr.*
1 anker of brandy		=16 *rthlr.*
4 dozen small knives		= 4 *rthlr.*
2 tin basins		= 2 *rthlr.*
1 piece of flowered cotton of 24 ells		=10 *rthlr.*
1 piece of *chellos*	East	=10 *rthlr.*
1 piece of *bajuttenpauts*	Indian	=10 *rthlr.*
½ piece of striped taffeta	wares	=10 *rthlr.*

[11] 'Slave price' is given here in *riksdaler* value, but the statement is misleading because a dual system existed — the price paid to the Black traders for the purchase of the slaves brought to the forts or lodges ('land price'), and the price paid to the factors by captains of the ships ('ship's price'). The latter price could exceed the former by a third, or even two-thirds. The same dual system applied to the values placed on wares, but in reverse. In the mid-eighteenth century the 'land price' of wares was 25 per cent higher than the ship's price (Rømer 1760: 318–9). Furthermore, the 'slave price' was in response to supply and demand, for example the price of a male slave increased from 96 *riksdaler* for a male slave in Rømer's day to 160 *riksdaler* in Isert's. For information on slave prices, see also Bosman 1705: 362, 392; Barbot 1732: 242 ff.; Rask 1754: 76; Rømer 1760: 253, 318, 323 ff.; Bowdich 1819: 331–2 and n. (a); Monrad 1822; 284–5; Daaku 1970: 7, 30, 38–9, 151; Gayibor 1978: 242 ff. What Isert calls 'presents' was, and still is, more commonly known in anglophone West Africa as a 'dash'. See Jones 1983: 35, n. 76.

1 piece of East Indian kerchiefs in 10 units		=12 *rthlr.*
1 brass basin		= 4 *rthlr.*
3 rods of copper at 1 *rthlr.*		= 3 *rthlr.*
2 rods of lead at 1 *rthlr.*		= 2 *rthlr.*
to the guard		= 1 *rthlr.*
		160 *rthlr.*

Or, for a woman:

5 muskets at 6 *rthlr.*		=30 *rthlr.*
60 pounds of gunpowder		=30 *rthlr.*
1 crate containing 9 bottles brandy		=12 *rthlr.*
4 dozen small knives		= 4 *rthlr.*||p. 123||
Various kinds of glass beads		=12 *rthlr.*
2 brass kettles		= 8 *rthlr.*
1 piece *Neganepauts*	East	=10 *rthlr.*
1 piece *Nicones*	Indian wares	=10 *rthlr.*
1 piece half *Say*		=10 *rthlr.*
Boss [cowries]		= 1 *rthlr.*
For the guard		= 1 *rthlr.*
		128 *rthlr.*[12]

Of course, the Black traders do not always take exactly the wares described above; however, there must always be included muskets, gunpowder and knives in payment for each slave, or the trader will not sell them to you. Indeed at Christiansburg and at Friedensburg, where one deals mainly with Assianthees [Asantes], one is often forced to pay for the slaves with guns and powder exclusively because there is no demand for any of the other goods, apart from a piece of fine fabric or silk cloth. The reason for this is that they themselves are nearly always at war with an even mightier nation, the Dunkos, who live north of them. For some

[12] *Chellos* [chelos] was a chequered East Indian cotton; *Bajuttenpauts* [bajote] was a coarse, white cotton cloth; *Neganepauts* [neganepos] was a cotton cloth in primary colours, originally from the East Indies but later produced in Rouen; *Nicones* [necanias] was a blue and white striped East Indian cotton. (I am indebted to Ingeborg Gravjord for this information.) *Say* was a cloth of fine texture resembling serge; formerly partly of silk, subsequently entirely of wool. See also Rømer 1760: 323–5; Justesen 1981: 345.

time now these Dunkos have been using guns, ||p. 124|| for which the Assianthees, who sell them the guns, demand a very high price.[13]

When a black who has been brought for sale has no blemishes at all the above price will be paid without any further discussion. But if he has a defect of any kind there will be a corresponding reduction in price to allow for it; for instance, for one tooth missing, 2 *thalers* will be deducted. Sores on the legs, so common here, and greater defects such as the lack of one eye or of fingers, and so forth, results in a greater discount. The height that a young man must have attained before he is paid for as an adult is four feet, four inches, Rheinland measure, but the minimum height for a female is only four feet. When they have grown to these heights they are considered to be men and women, even if they are not more than 12 years of age. The reason for this is that in Columbia they much prefer to buy young slaves in order to have that much longer use of them. What the boys as well as girls lack in these measurements reduces the price by eight *thalers* per inch.[14]

The Blacks are difficult to trade with and it requires great effort to reach agreement with them. When they come into a warehouse everything attracts them and they would like to have ||p. 125|| it all. Since this is impossible, they can sit for hours and pick and choose time and again, and finally still not know what they want.[15]

Since not a single Black has learned to write and calculate, one might assume that it would be easy for the sales clerk to take advantage of him in the price or in the quantity of wares. But it would be a mistake to believe that. The Black does not reckon, as we do, in *reichsthaler*, but in what is called *cabes (ihi* to the Black), that is, two *reichsthaler*. Four *cabes* equal one *gua*; two *gua* equal one *guenno*; and further, two *guenno* equal one *benda*. Therefore, when a Black wants to say 58 *thaler* he would say, *'Benda kä guenno kä gua, kä ihi'*. Or else but more rarely, he would express 29 *cabes* as *ihi numa ingho, kä neien*. In addition their units have subdivisions, such as *möo* which is one *reichsthaler*. Thus it is customary to express two *reichsthalers* as *möo ingho*. One *dame [damma]* equals one *stüber* or six *pfennig pah*; and one *tabo* is one shilling or one *dreier*. The

[13] *Dunkoes* seems to have been a term used generically for people from the northern areas of the Guinea Coast. According to Rattray, *Odonko* applied strictly to any man or woman, other than an Asante, who had been purchased with the express purpose of making him or her a slave (Rattray 1929: 35). See also, Bowdich 1819: 182–3; Rattray 1927: 65. Isert's remark about the Asante selling arms to people with whom they were at war does not seem reasonable as a general statement. He may have been thinking of individual traders.

[14] On reduction in the price for slaves, see Rømer 1760: 318.

[15] Cf. Müller in Jones 1983: 248; Barbot 1732: 273; Daaku 1970: 40, 44.

tabo is worth 20 pieces of *boss*, or 'snake skulls',[k] a species of mollusc from the ||p. 126|| Maldive Islands. When the Black is to be paid a large sum it is reckoned in different ways; for example, for a slave costing five *benda*, or ten ounces, he counts as many *boss* or maize kernels as there are in five *benda*, that is, 80 *cabes*. He knows the price of the wares exactly, hence near each piece which he has received he lays as many *boss* as the individual piece costs, then the European's reckoning must agree with his. Should it happen that a piece of goods costs an odd number of *reichsthaler*, for example seven *thalers*, the Black would put down three large snake skulls and one very small one on it.[16]

Elephant tusks are paid for according to their weight, size and beauty. The Company has established the following fixed rate for a *reichsthaler* of gold, or two *thalers* worth of *boss*:[17]

1) For small tusks, which are called 'crevellan' [scrivellos], having a weight of one to fourteen pounds, one must pay one *reichsthaler* of gold per six pounds of tusk.

[k] *Cypraea Moneta Linn.* [Cowries. See Johnson 1970: 18–9; Jones 1983: 41 n. 110. For 'snake skulls' see Fourth Letter.[6]]

[16] The gold dust and cowrie systems were separate along the entire Guinea Coast apart from at Christiansborg where the two systems met (Johnson 1970: 332). This situation also applied to the use of both Akan and Gã terms for counting and for units of value. The numerals used in the text are Gã: *ingho [enyo*, two], *neien [nɛɛhu*, nine], *numa ingho [nyonm' eny*, twenty], *kä neien [kɛ nɛɛhu*, and nine]. *Cabes* [Portuguese *cabeça*, head] was a unit of value representing either 4000 units [grand *cabes*] or 2000 units [small *cabes*]. At the end of the eighteenth century the Danes were using the small *cabes* whose value in *riksdaler* had evidently remained stable at two *riksdaler* throughout the century (Rask 1754: 257). *Gua, guenno* and *benda* were Akan names for units of gold dust. *Benda*, the largest unit, represented two ounces of gold dust, or 32 *riksdaler. Ihi* was the Gã term for *cabes*, thus representing two *riksdaler, guenno* was sixteen *riksdaler* and *gua* was worth eight. *Kä* [*kɛ*] meant 'and', or 'plus'. Thus Isert's example *'Benda kä guenno kä gua kä ihi'* signifies 32 + 16 + 8 + 2 = 58 *riskdaler*. In his second example for expressing the same amount he placed the noun before the numerals, *'ihi numa ingho, kä neien'* [*cabes* twenty and nine]. The smaller amounts were *Möo ingho* [Ga, two *möo*]; *dame* [Akan *damma*], a tiny unit of gold-dust weighed with the red and black abrus seed; *pah* [Ga *kpaa*], a small unit of value also meaning string or rope, thus suggesting a string of cowries; and *tabo*, perhaps *taku*, an Akan weight of slightly higher value than the *damma*. (I am indebted to Mary E. Dakubu and Timothy Garrard for their help in interpreting the above terms.) The *taku* was worth 80 cowries in the early eighteenth century (Rask 1754: 85). A *dreier* is a German coin of small value. Maize kernels were used only as counters, not as currency on a par with cowries, as the sentence seems to imply (Marion Johnson, personal communication). The large sum of five *benda*/80 small *cabes* [160 *riksdaler*] would require a payment of 160,000 cowries, or 400 lbs. Isert's description of placing single cowries on wares — three large and one small for seven thalers — must have referred to the use of cowries as counters.

[17] In the eighteenth century one *reichsthaler* [*riksdaler*] represented .06 ounces of gold. Cf. Nørregaard 1966: 161.

2) For a medium tusk weighing from 15 to 30 pounds, one must pay one *reichsthaler* of gold per three pounds of tusk; ||p. 127||
3) And, for the larger ones, which weigh more than 30 pounds, one must pay one *reichsthaler* of gold per two pounds of tusk.

By following this rule which has been laid down for us we can bargain only very little. The Black, even though he has no scales, knows very well how much an Englishman or Dutchman would give him for each tusk, so he does not bring it to us. What we do buy is, to a degree, illegal, yet a practice which cannot very well be forbidden, and because we are forced to pay more than the Company permits we must then pay the excess from our own pockets. But since we do not have an excess of gold, the chief clerk must have something with which he can buy from foreign nations the necessary provisions and luxury items which come only in sparse quantities from Denmark.[18]

Gold, formerly a significant article of trade at our establishments, is now in decline because the Akims [Akyems] have been so extensively over-run, and probably most of the gold miners have been killed.[19] A Black who trades in gold knows its worth to a hair, || p. 128 || and always carries his scales and gold weights with him.[20]

The Guinea gold is of a pale colour, like the Hungarian, and is always found in small grains of little weight. Sometimes nuggets are found that weigh one ounce or more but this kind is seldom seen by the European, because the Black drills a hole through such a nugget and wears it as an ornament around his neck or wrist, calling it 'fetish gold'.[21]

Gold is bought by the ounce, which is 40 grains heavier than one ounce medical weight. Such an ounce of gold costs 16 *thalers* in Danish currency here, but in Copenhagen, if it is pure, it costs 20 *thalers* in Danish currency.

The love of profit has corrupted the Blacks into making false gold, or falsifying the real gold. They file brass and rub it for a long time on their millstones with a portion of gold, until the brass has been gilded by the softer gold and the filings have lost their sharp corners. Then they mix it with gold and try to deceive the Europeans. Among themselves this would not readily occur ||p. 129|| because anyone who is discovered in such

[18] On the trade in tusks, see Zur Eich in Jones 1983: 261; Monrad 1822: 288 and note; Daaku 1970: 27–8.

[19] For the mining of gold in Akim, see Bosman 1705: 69, 78; Rask 1754: 82; Rømer 1760: 160–1; Dickson 1971: 88–9; Garrard 1980: 57–9.

[20] On gold as trade currency and the use of gold weights, see Brun in Jones 1983: 83; Müller, ibid, 244–5, 249; Bosman 1705, 82, 85–6; Macdonald 1898: 108–12; Rattray 1923: 300–13; Kyerematen 1964: 43–55; Menzel 1968: 19ff; Cole and Ross 1977: 70 ff, 92–4; Garrard 1980: 171–212.

[21] For descriptions of nuggets, or 'fetish gold', see Bosman 1705: 81–2; Rask 1754: 82; Rømer 1760: 180; Menzel 1968: 14; Garrard 1980: 9–10, 37, 54, 58, 135–8, 142.

'making' of gold would lose his reputation absolutely. Only rarely do they bring this false gold to us in the Fort, because they know that we test it with nitric acid if we have the least suspicion; and should such an artist be exposed, his hind quarters would fare very badly.

Another little trick is this; the gold is either not fully cleaned, or else it has been deliberately mixed with grains of sand. Our Black broker exposes this by simply blowing on the gold — a test to which the sellers must submit.[22]

Eight days ago the building of the Fort reached the stage at which it will remain for the present because we have greater need of the masons at Prinzenstein. It now has two bastions finished, specifically the eastern and northern ones at the front of the Fort. Each of these carries six cannons consisting of three-pounders and six-pounders. The two other bastions are provided with a single wall until a better time, and the finished side, at the front, is supplied with twelve one-pound cannons.

A few days ago an alarm was raised in the Black settlement to the effect that the Augnas were coming, ||p. 130|| armed, to attack the Adas again. Straightway all the women and children rushed into the Fort, but the men stayed outside to receive the Augnas. At that moment I was engaged in loading the cannon with shot-sacks and aiming them. For the first time the Adas could see the benefit of the Fort to themselves, because they could now, quite calmly, let the enemy come as close as they themselves wished. However the enemy did not come because it was a false alarm started by some women who had seen hunters in the forest and believed them to be Augnas.

The Governor, knowing of my desire for travel, yesterday proposed to me that I should sail as doctor and trader on a brigantine to the great African river Gab Boon, which lies about 200 miles southeast of here, below the equator. Understandably, I accepted the offer. From there you shall hear more in the future from your, *etc.*

[22] On the falsification and adulteration of gold, see Brun in Jones 1983: 90; Hemmersam, ibid: 121; Müller ibid: 250; Bosman 1705: 82–5; Barbot 1732: 230–1; Rask 1754: 79–80; Menzel 1968: 73 ff; Garrard 1980: 58, 66, 86–9, and 176, names of pure and counterfeit gold.

Seventh Letter

Williams Fort at Fida
on the Guinea Coast
28 March, 1785

'Den Første, siger man, gjør Vold mot Folkets Ret,
Som nogensinde Straf vil eftergive,
Det veed jeg ikke just; men dette tør jeg skrive:
Den Tigers Hierte har, som ei undskylder det.'[1]

In my last letter, dated from Fort Kønigstein the 24 September last year, I wrote that I would send a report from the River Gab Boon. But this hope has now been dashed and you shall hear the reason.

With that intention I actually sailed from Christiansburg on the brigantine Ada, on 11 October last year. For this voyage, we loaded some wares which were designated for the establishment on the Lower Coast, or as we call it here, the Lower Stations, primarily for Fort Prinzenstein and the factory at Popo, where we were to unload them. After three || p. 132 || days we arrived at the roadstead of Prinzenstein, at Quitta, where I went ashore.

As I passed through the breakers, which are usually high here, despite the fact that only one, or at most two, breakers are seen at any one time, I had the unpleasant experience of being submerged with the canoe. I was tossed around in the breakers until a Black came swimming from the shore, pulled me onto his back, and thus drew me ashore. The worst of the incident was that my thermometer, which I always carry with me, was broken and my books and papers were in part damaged by sea water and in part totally lost.

We stayed here for four days before the goods could be brought ashore,

[1] 'That Prince, they say, violates the people's right,/Who would ever commute a sentence./Of that I am not so sure, but this I dare write:/He has a tiger's heart who does not condone it.'
From the narrative poem '*Fyrsten og Forbryderen*' by Johan Herman Wessel, 1742–85, a Danish-Norwegian poet and member of a famous literary circle in Copenhagen. Apparently Isert had some acquaintance with Danish literature.

during which time I occupied myself with natural history, and had the opportunity of discovering a number of wonderful things, which are too extensive to be described here. I was particularly delighted to find Gloriosa,[a] the very beautiful flower that rightfully bears that name, growing here on the swampy shore as far along as Little Ajuga [Agoué], and also the Whip Bush,[b] which is to be found on the edge || p. 133 || of the woods. What made such a very strong impression on my spirit was knowing that the former is normally considered purely a native of the Malabar Coast, and the latter is also known as a native of East India, particularly of Coromandel, Ceylon and Java, although those coasts are considerably more than 1000 miles away.

We weighed anchor the next day and 24 hours later we arrived at the roadstead of Popo. Popo, which geographers call Little Popo to distinguish it from Great Popo, but is nowadays generally called in these parts Afla, lies some eight miles east of Aflahu. It is the easternmost of those trading posts where the Danes have established themselves. At present it is a considerable Black settlement formed of five separate towns, each of which has its own kabossie. One of these towns is composed wholly of Krepees, the original inhabitants of the land. However, the other towns have been peopled by Akras who, in the last century, when their king had been defeated by the Aquambos, sought refuge here; and who, since they understood the use of weapons better than the simple Krepees, made themselves || p. 134 || masters over the latter, a position they still hold today. Through the middle of the united towns, and stretching far inland, runs an arm of a fresh-water lagoon which presents the most charming views through the alternating bush and palm groves.[2]

On this lagoon, some two miles farther inland, lies the large Black settlement of Gregi [Glidji], of which Prince Ofoly Bossum, whom I mentioned earlier, is the chief. There he has his residence, to which he has now, to a certain degree, given the form of a fort. This Black settlement is the real breadbasket of Popo. Twice a week they have a market on the lagoon at which time the Popos come in crowds by way of the lagoon to fetch their victuals, which they would not be able to raise at Popo where the ground is so sandy. The abundance of foodstuffs is so great in Gregi that the people not only supply the Popos, but they also handle substantial

[a] *Gloriosa Superba L.* [Glory, Climbing Lily. See Dalziel 1955: 478; Willis 1973: 494.]
[b] *Flagellaria indica L.* [*Flagellaria guin.* High-climbing lianes. See Dalziel 1955: 467; Willis 1973: 462.]

[2] The modern name for Little Popo is Anecho. For descriptions, see Bosman 1705: 331–3; Labat 1730: II 3–4; Dalzel 1793: 3–4; Bjørn 1788: 225; Akinjogbin 1967: 33, 105. Anecho was part of the kingdom of Glidji (Gayibor 1976: 75–102; Skinner 1983: 103–4).

bulk cargoes, particularly of salt, which are transported by canoe on arn arm of the lagoon which stretches to Fida [Whydah] for sale there.[c3]

||p. 135|| Next after the king the most prominent Black here is Lathe, whose riches elevate him over all the other distinguished Blacks. Notwithstanding his riches, and contrary to what is customary for rich Blacks, he is an energetic merchant and carries on his own considerable business. He understands three European languages, namely English, Portuguese and Danish, and, in order to be able to carry on his extensive business with more accuracy, he has at present one son in England and another in Portugal, where they are learning to write and calculate, skills he himself has not yet attained. He always has a warehouse full of supplies, and when an English ship is lying in the roadstead they lodge with him. When visiting him one is served in fully European style, and he always has European bread in his home, which is a rare experience among the Europeans in this land.[4]

In practising their religion the Blacks here are much more zealous than those in Akra. They often sweat under the burden of their amulets, or so-called fetishes.[5] Even their sheep and dogs have to wear such things, to protect them from all manner of illnesses. All around in their houses stand many idols, ||p. 136|| often made of clay or wood, which have been given the form of human beings, and are painted in various colours. In all the courtyards, to the right of the door, there stands a large pot filled with water, on a conical pedestal of clay two or three feet in height, and the pedestal is covered with small potsherds standing on end, placed very close together. In the water in this pot floats a sacred plant which spreads quickly and fills the entire pot, without needing any soil at all, a characteristic which probably led the fetish priests to include it among the sacred objects. It resembles the auricle[d] in shape and has a mild, heart-stimulating aroma.

[c] This is exactly the opposite of what the author of *The Modern part of an universal history* says. Perhaps there were not as many inhabitants then as there are now? [For this reference, see Fifth Letter [c]]

[d] *Pistia stratiotes Linné*. It is strange that this plant is found in all of the warm countries outside Europe. Once when I had one under observation in a glass whose surface was two inches in diameter, the plant continued its rapid reproduction, which consisted mainly of shoots (*stolones*). I was not a little amazed when I found that, from such a small surface, one and one-half ounces of water had evaporated in 24 hours. I repeated the experiment by putting water into another glass of the same size, without putting the plant into it, and I found that it had lost only two *quentchen* in the same period of time. Therefore I concluded that the missing 10 *quentchen* had been used up by the growth of the plant, and, to confirm this, I weighed the plant every 24 hours. But I did not find the missing water in it, because the plant had hardly increased by the weight of one *quentchen* during the first day. Then I put the plant under the microscope and, to my satisfaction, found some hair-like channels,open at the top, in which I clearly saw water circulating. I realised then that the plant — consisting as it did of a number of broad, horizontal leaves to whose surface there was a constant circulation of water — provided a relatively greater surface area in the glass containing the plant than there was in the glass without the plant, so the former could evaporate more water. [The plant is Water lettuce. Cf. Dalziel 1955: 482–3; Willis 1973: 907. Isert's use of two terms of measures can be confusing. The *fluid ounce* = 28.4 cc Imperial measure, and the *fluid dram*, or the obsolete *quent*, = ⅛ ounce, or 3.55 cc. Thus his 'one and one-half ounces' = 42.6 cc, or 12 *fluid drams/quentchen*].

[3] Concerning trade in Glidji in 1788 it was said that 'their exceedingly great trade makes them Capitalists, and they live in a Superfluity of Superfluity' (Bjørn 1788: 227). See also Newbury 1961: 28–9, 38, 113; Gayibor 1978: 141; Skinner 1983: 103, 104–5.

[4] For Lathe, see Fourth Letter [7].

[5] It is not clear whether the 'burden of amulets' refers to their cost or their weight.

||p. 137|| The building of the houses here [in Little Popo] surpasses anything of this art that I have seen until now among the Blacks. Kabossie Akoi, an upright gentleman, has recently built himself a proper palace, three storeys high. Elsewhere there are other houses which are equipped comfortably enough, according to the style of the Black.

Trade flourishes here in all its aspects. The first morning I was here, even before the sun had risen, my curiosity was aroused by a constant shouting in the street: 'Come ||p. 138|| buy *flatta [aflata]*, the water is hot!' I sprang to the window to look out and see what that meant, and learned from my servant that it was a girl hawking 'tea' for sale, something I had not heard previously. This 'tea' is made thus. The girl carries a pot of gruel made from Turkish maize under one arm, and another pot of hot water on her head. Someone now comes along who orders 'tea' from the girl, for a shilling or threepence. She gives him a large spoonful of the gruel in a calabash shell (which is used here instead of a cup) and then pours a *pegel*, or half-pint, of hot water over it. The buyer stirs it with nature's teaspoon, the finger, and drinks it. Thus he has partaken of his breakfast. Some also mix it with honey, which is extraordinarily good here and has an aromatic quality. Here the gruel is called *flatta*, or *a Cassa [sic]*. It is preferred as food for the sick, and is very nourishing.[6]

The local Blacks also know how to weave cotton [cloth], which the Akras ||p. 139|| either do not know, or are too proud to do. Our factor took me to a Black who practises this profession, which I had not seen practised in this land. When we arrived there we found absolutely no sign of any establishment. I wanted to turn back but the factor asked me to wait a moment because the loom could be set up very quickly. He called the weaver and in less than a quarter of an hour a loom was standing there, threaded with yarn, and the weaver was weaving. As much as this work merits the genuine admiration of the connoisseur, yet it is done very

[6] For *akasa*, see Monrad 1822: 240; Dede 1969: 83.

simply. Four posts of a good thumb's thickness are stuck into the earth, demarcating the area of the four posts of the loom. Against the two hindmost stand two two-foot long poles fixed at a slant so that they cross the latter, and in this cross another pole is laid horizontally, making the seat for the master. They have no warp-beam, but the warp is wound on a claw, which a helper far behind holds in his hand. Their reed is similar to ours, only it has no eye, but is made up of two half-loops which are fastened together, || p. 140 || between which the thread lies. At the same time they tread with their feet on pedals made of a pair of thin sticks. The reed is just like ours but has two threads through each division; it hangs loosely without being fastened in the yarn. Their woven cloth is unusually narrow, seldom being over a quarter of an ell wide. The yarn is cotton, which they spin on a spindle.[7]

Above all they know how to dye a fast, beautiful blue, which, if it does not actually surpass our indigo, is at least equal to it. They make it from the leaf of a kind of tree, and the root of another plant,[e] over which they pour ash water made from palm nuts, thus causing it to ferment, although it is cold. This takes a few days. When the dye is ready they immerse the yarn in it, cold, several times, then dry and wash the yarn, and the procedure is finished.[8] They also prepare all the other known colours, but these are less fast and less beautiful. And since they are lovers of the true red colour, || p. 141 || they are forced to unravel European red cloth in order to weave the thread into their cloth. One such cloth (waist kirtle) of the finest sort, with red stripes, which is much esteemed everywhere, can cost upwards of 50 *thalers*.[9]

Popo was at one time a real nest of robbers, where many rogues lived who stole from each other at night. Even now it is not quite safe to go about at night, and if anyone is forced to do so he always carries with

[e] Both species unknown in Europe. The first is a *Bignonia* and the other a *Tabernæmontana*. [For *Bignonia*, see Willis 1966: 134–5; Chittenden 1977: 279. For *Tabernæmontana*, see Willis 1966: 78, 1097; Chittenden 1977: 2073–4. For types of dyes, see Bosman 1705: 459; Rask 1754: 62; Rømer 1760: 201; Bowdich 1819; 310–11; Irvine 1961: 391; Picton and Mack 1979: 38–9.]

[7] Isert's description of weaving is a good one apart from his confusion of terminology. First he uses the term *Kämme*, 'reed', where *Helfe*, 'heddle' would make more sense, since it is the heddles that have the loops. Two sentences later he uses another term for 'reed', this time correctly, in describing another part of the process. (I am indebted to Marion Johnson and Ingri Juul for this information.) For other accounts of weaving, see Bowdich 1819: 309 ff.; Rask 1754: 9; Monrad 1822: 253; Rattray 1927: 221–263; Cole and Ross 1977: 38–44; Picton and Mack 1979: 99 f.

[8] For cold-dyeing methods, see Picton and Mack 1979: 39.

[9] On the unraveling of cloth, see Rømer 1760: 200; Bowdich 1819; 310 and n.331; Rattray 1927: 220–1, 235; Picton and Mack 1979: 30, 119; McLeod 1981: 155.

him his battle axe, made entirely of very hard wood and in the shape of our hatchets. When two people meet at night, each one greets the other, whereupon the greeting is returned in the vernacular, so that from the tone each one knows if the other is a native or a foreigner. In the latter case, without further ado, the foreigner is given a clout on the head with the axe, whether he is guilty of anything or not, and he is taken, if possible, into official custody for further investigation. To be sure, rogues often employ the same device to bring the poor devil into that custody from which he can never escape, namely aboard a ship that carries him to Columbia.

|| p. 142 || His Majesty, the King of Afla, arrived here yesterday. Partly out of curiosity, partly for diplomacy, we Europeans, who were four in number, had ourselves announced as wishing to pay court to him, whereupon we were granted an audience without delay.

Afla is called Great Popo by geographers, but that name is not known here. Those who have described the Guinea coast, such as Desmarchais, Bosmann [*sic*] and Barbot, differ greatly in their opinions regarding the size and prosperity of this Black settlement. The first and the last extol the town as a very considerable, well-populated and cultivated place. The second, on the other hand, calls it one of the most wretched in Africa.[10] I myself have not seen the town. However, considering the multitude of vessels and people that are found in the entourage of the King, I must conclude that the town is not the most insignificant one in the nation.

It lies nearly five miles east of Popo, on a morass-like ground, removed a little way from the sea, on a lagoon which stretches eastward to Fida and westward to this place. But this lagoon is so shallow that one cannot travel on it || p. 143 || with any type of boat other than a canoe.

The king calls himself 'Master of the Lagoon', so when he comes here he does not go into the town but always sleeps on his boat in the lagoon, not venturing more than ten paces from it. His canoe has a covering made of cloth, but it is not as comfortable by far as the cabin of the smallest European ship. He had ordered to be set up on the beach, as far as he dared come on land, a fenced-in area within which we sat on low stools, in the manner of the Black, and there we had to wait until His Majesty had dressed in his canoe.

After having made us wait for him for more than half an hour, the mighty person himself appeared with a very numerous following of musicians and women. The latter kept the flies away with fans made of palm leaves, as well as thus wafting fresh air around him. A very large

[10] Cf. Bosman 1705: 336; Labat 1730: II 6–8. I have been unable to find the description in Barbot 1732.

umbrella was held twirling over his head. His outfit consisted of a very costly Black *pantjes* reaching from his hips all the way to the ground. Over this he wore a loose silken dressing gown, and on his head, a coachman's cap, on || p. 144 || top of which was a European hat worked all over with large silver flowers. He wore the shoes of the Black, which are thick soles without upper leather and no further fastening than a strap which is fastened in the front of the sole and crosses over the big toe, thus holding it on the foot. In his hand he also carried a Spanish manila cane with a silver knob.[11]

The high person himself is of a stocky, very bulky, obese build, and is equipped with an unusually broad nose and protruding lips. He greeted us in the Black fashion, which means that he made a slight bow, keeping his hat on. He laughed constantly, and he appeared, moreover, to have only moderate intelligence. During the entire festivities the musicians had to keep on playing, as well as singing, while continually capering or even bowing so deeply that they almost touched the ground with their noses. During this time, a period of two hours, they swung a large sunshade over him as well as over us, and the man who held it thus danced with it at the same time, and sweated revoltingly. When the piece of music that they were playing no longer pleased the king, he himself, if he could not make them understand it otherwise, sang the next song he wanted them to play || p. 145||. As far as I could tell all of the songs seemed to be the same. So poor is the taste of a European! The instruments comprised two large and six small horns made of the tusks of young elephants and covered with red cloth. They blow into the upper opening, which is on the side of the point of the tusk, as it is on our flutes, and modulate the tone by opening and closing the lower opening with their hand. In addition to the horns, many drums of all sizes, a triangle and iron bells, like our cow bells, make up the orchestra of this prince. The music which these instruments produce, always of a heroic or military tone, seldom or never pleases a European ear, just as, similarly, the Black would never be moved by the sweet tones of a violin, much less a cembalo.

Finally we were offered refreshment, that is, a glass of brandy was presented to us. The king did not drink, since he must never partake of anything in public. His religion forbids it, because || p. 146||, like the King of Augna, he is at the same time the highest priest of his land. In this respect he could be regarded as parallel to the priestly Elector and Archbishop. The secular kings are not bound by this precept.

After we had drunk, the king returned at once to his floating chambers

[11] For comments on the use of European dress in combination with traditional African dress, see Müller in Jones 1983: 205; Rømer 1760: 13; Monrad 1822: 233; Dupuis 1824: 69; Spieth 1906: 37, 53.

(a withdrawal perhaps occasioned by the nectar fumes of our *finchel-jochen*) and asked to be excused for a moment, saying that he would be with us again very soon.[12]

In passing I must remark that it is incomprehensible to the Black that we make so very little of what is, to them, the extremely pleasing drink of brandy, since, after all, we Europeans produce it ourselves and bring it such a long way to their land.

After a good quarter of an hour the king finally appeared again. I had to laugh at how the old fop now strutted out in a totally different outfit: a scarlet *pantjes*, another silken dressing gown and a different, braided hat on his head.

The Popos show great respect for him, even though he is not their master. || p. 147 || When they approach him they throw themselves full-length on the ground, clap their hands several times, and snap all their fingers, in which they are extraordinarily proficient.[13] He comes to Popo at different times of the year to collect gifts from us, as well as from the Blacks. The Popos fear him greatly, and even Europeans can be so foolish as to believe that the entire Afla, the residence of the king, is full of witches, and that the king is their Grand Master. Should the gifts that he receives not satisfy him, he immediately threatens to make salty the lagoon from which the Popos must get their drinking water. He is said to have done this a few times, but I believe that it happens in a natural way by his secretly making a connection with the sea at the point where the lagoon winds very close to the sea. This can be done very easily, and then it can just be built up again.

When we wanted to continue our journey after a few days and the king discovered this, he immediately sent a message informing us that he had to have still more kegs of gunpowder and some casks of brandy || p. 148 || before we could go on board. When this was bluntly refused him, he defiantly informed us that none of us would be able to board, because he would set a fetish on the beach. Had he done this, that is, had he actually stuck a pole painted white and bound with several strips of cloth into the sand near the sea, and sworn by it that we would not get through the breakers safely, not one of the Popo Blacks would have brought us on board our ship, even if we had promised him all the riches in the world, until such time as the king himself had removed the fetish.

[12] *Fincheljochen*, eighteenth century German slang designating an exceedingly poor brandy. The term is derived from *fenchel*, fennel and the Low German *juchen*, a stinking liquid.

[13] This distinctive snapping of fingers in greeting was, and still is, customary in many places along the Guinea Coast. Cf. De Marees 1602/1987: 17b, 89a; Müller in Jones 1983: 155 and n.; Barbot 1732: 257a.

However, His Majesty was not so harsh, but in the morning sent a message to us asking forgiveness. He had been a little unwell (inebriated) yesterday, and hoped we would not travel away from Popo without giving him some kind of gift. The way was open, wherever and whenever we wanted to go. Thus he and we realised our goals — he received more of the desired refreshment, and we travelled on our way.

After having been here for eight days, we weighed anchor and set || p. 149 || our course for Fida, which is ten miles from Popo, where we arrived the next day, 2 November of last year. We anchored at Fida, since we had decided to do our trading here and not at the River Gab Boon, as had been our earlier plan.[f] The black Viceroy of Fida had sent boats to us from Popo, to || p. 150 || inform us that we could shortly trade the contents of our canoes with him for Blacks.[14] Even before this we had not held the best opinion of trade at the River Gab Boon, since we knew the inhabitants only from their bad side. Therefore we decided to make an attempt here [at Whydah], since Danes had never traded here from time immemorial, as far as anyone could remember.[15] The wares were brought on shore at the English fort. I established myself as factor there, and the brigantine sailed to our main fort to supply me with a greater number of the wares more suitable to this place.

The trade is vastly different from that carried on at our establishment. There are three fortresses here; a French one, an English one and a Portuguese one. All three have been constructed entirely according to the

[f] It was not a little disappointing for me not to become acquainted with that great river on this occasion. From a later trip to that river the skipper of this brigantine brought a piece of wood as a curiosity. It was red sandalwood (*Pterocarpus santalinus Linn.*). He informed us that several English ships carried it to Europe as an article of trade. Trading with the inhabitants for ivory and wax is extremely profitable in that region, but the slaves there are much inferior to the slaves of the Gold Coast, and would be sold for only half the price in West India. They are exceedingly small, poor and weak individuals, and I was at times appalled by their ugly physiognomy. One boy, about 15 years old, more red then black in colour, had inch-long hair of the same colour covering his entire body. He had an exceedingly protruding mouth, and the rest of his physiognomy was more like that of an orangutan than a human being. His intelligence, in keeping with the size of his body, was extremely limited. [For comments on trade and the people in the Gabon area, see De Marees 1602/1987: 113b, 120a–121a; Brun in Jones 1983: 70; Bosman 1705: 404 ff. For *Pterocarpus* see Dalziel 1955: 256–7. The same source lists *P. santalinoides* but specificies that this was not used for dyeing (*ibid*: 258).]

[14] The Viceroy of Fida was the *Yavougah/Yevugan*, the official who tended to the needs of Whites (Bosman 1705: 361a–2). See also Burton 1893: I 63–4; Herskovits 1938: II 26–7; Akinjogbin 1967: 120–1.

[15] Isert's statement was not entirely correct. This was the first time a Danish factory was established at Whydah, but trading there from visiting Danish ships had been going on since the seventeenth century. See Tilleman 1697: 127–31; Bosman 1705: 334; Nørregaard 1966: 65, 67, 68, 95.

same plan. They consist of houses built together in a spacious square, the houses thatched with straw, and the one in front having two storeys while the other buildings have only one. The flanks are provided with bastions, which, however, are not raised more than three feet above the ground. Each bastion has twelve iron cannons. Circling || p. 151 || the entire area of the fort is a 20-foot deep and wide moat in which, however, there is seldom water.[16] A bridge at the front can easily be removed in case of attack. The French fort is in the best condition, and the Portuguese in the poorest. The former has round bastions, and on the east bastion there is a very high tower built of European bricks, which also serves as the pedestal for the flagpole. The bastions of the other forts are all square. All have their powder magazine in the middle of the yard, in the form of a dovecote, which is also thatched with straw. In their courtyard the English have a metal nine-pounder which is aimed at the entrance.[17]

The original intention was that no other European nation than these three should trade here. But since the income of the king would increase if more nations participated, I was also given permission to trade. Each ship which comes here to trade establishes a factory and carries on its own trading, for which privilege they must pay — if it is a three-masted ship, the value of twelve slaves, and if it is only a two-master, the value of seven slaves. This requirement || p. 152 || has often induced the French to remove their spanker, or mizzenmast on the three-masted ships before coming to the roadstead, in order to save the price of five slaves. The governors, on the other hand, all have free trade when they have the goods in the Fort. For this permission the king takes annual tribute.[18]

Like the Black settlements, the fortresses lie up to a mile inland. Before arriving there one must cross the Popo Lagoon and a number of swamps, which, however, are not so deep that a Black cannot wade through them. This makes the transport of the goods both difficult and expensive. On the beach itself each ship keeps a tent in which to collect the landed goods, and the viceroy provides a trusty Black to prevent anything being stolen. The guard is paid weekly for this. These tents also serve to give

[16] It is not clear from the text whether the moat was twenty feet wide as well as deep.

[17] For eighteenth century fortresses at Whydah, see Bosman 1705: 355 and n.; Snelgrave 1734: 115; Newbury 1961: 27–8; Fage 1969: 76–7.

[18] Isert's contention that trade was restricted to the English, French and Portuguese cannot have been correct. The Dutch and Brandenburgers had also traded at Whydah in the early eighteenth century. Such attempts at restriction as there were were on the European side, companies like the Dutch West India Company and the English Royal African Company having supposedly a monopoly of their own national trade, but in practice these monopolies were frequently flouted by 'interlopers' and had been, for the most part, formally abandoned long before the 1780s. Apparently it was up to the traders whether they availed themselves of the facilities offered by the forts. (I am indebted to Robin Law for this information.)

the fort signals — if a ship arrives, if the breakers are easy or difficult, etc. The viceroy provides yet another Black for each ship. This one is called the 'conductor', and he goes to the factory every morning to inquire whether wares have been landed that day. || p. 153 || If they have, he goes to the beach and receives the wares, seeing to it that everything is brought to the factory without any piece being lost of stolen, for if it is he has to pay for it.[19] At the factory there are also two brokers and two factors, all chosen by the viceroy. The broker criss-crosses the town every morning, going from one negotiator to another and asking if slaves have arrived. When they have, notice is given to the factor, who then accompanies him. With his measuring stick in hand the factor goes into the houses of the black merchants to inspect the slaves, and if they please him, he buys them and gives a specification of the wares to which they have agreed. The purchased slave is then branded with the factor's mark. The slave, if not a royal slave, is then delivered to the fort or the factory in the evening. But if it is a royal slave, he must stay with the black negotiators until he can be brought directly to the ship.[20]

The Fidas have the singular habit of dressing the slaves up as attractively || p. 154 || as if they were going to a dance, before they are shown to the Whites. The women are dressed in five waist cloths as in the local fashion, one over the other.[21] All the slaves of the male sex have their hands bound behind their backs, even if the slave is only a child of five years of age. This is done by order of the king because a slave once bit a European terribly when he tried to inspect him. The negotiators must have a proper licence from the king, and it is not permitted for a travelling merchant to sell his slaves to the Europeans himself.

The slave traders here are great capitalist; they may often have a credit from the Europeans to the extent of a thousand or more *thalers*. They do not readily show their notes of credit before they know that the wares have reached the fort, a process not always possible because of the violent breakers. The chief wares are: brandy, cowries, tobacco, brass basins, glass beads, iron, and cloth for *pantjes*. Often the negotiator wants only one kind of commodity. Guns and gunpowder, although the chief articles of trade at Akra, are sold here only in small quantities or not at all. The

[19] European wares were protected by law. The King of Dahomey, Kpengla, decreed, first in 1777, and again 1781 when he made the law even more stringent, that theft of the White man's property was a capital offence (Akinjogbin 1967: 158). See also Newbury 1961: 27.

[20] Presumably the 'specification of the wares' was a list redeemable at the factory upon delivery of the slaves. It is unclear if the 'royal slaves' were slaves of royal blood, slaves of royal persons, or slaves sold directly by the ruler. For slaves of royal blood, see Akinjogbin 1967: 116.

[21] Cf. Bosman 1705: 350–1.

main reason || p. 155 || is that the ordinary Black is not permitted to buy these articles from the Europeans but must receive them from the viceroy in small quantities. If a Black is found possessing more than a hatful of powder he is considered to be a rebel and is promptly sold on behalf of the king.[22]

The present 'Fida' must have been the earlier 'Jachen' [Jakin] since Fida is really the name of the entire province. Fida once had its own very powerful king, but he and his land fell into debauchery and indolence and were conquered in 1729 by Truro Audati, King of Dahomet [Dahomey], who ruled further inland. He made this land into a province, and since that time the King of Dahomet has maintained a governor, or viceroy, and various kabossies in Fida.[23]

The present Fida was once under the rule of the King of Fida, and was less important than it is now, because another Black settlement named Sawi [Savé], which lay some two miles further inland, used to be the capital and residence of the king, but it is now quite in ruins.[24] In order to see this once so famous town || p. 156 || I made a journey there some time ago, but found no more buildings than I had seen in other ordinary Black settlements. A market is held there twice a week, but of the 6,000 traders who used to be found at the market, if one is to believe the old history writers, there is not a sign. Indeed it would be difficult to find this number in the entire kingdom, even if every individual were counted as a trader. The chiefs of the European fortresses used to stay at the king's court, too, even if they had forts in Jachen, or in the present Fida.

There I lodged with the local kabossie, a man of about 65 years of age who has extraordinary charm. He treated me with genuine courtesy, which won him my great respect, and he took care of my people, allowing them to help themselves abundantly to the best food. I stayed there only a couple of days and then journeyed back to Fida.

Near the town, to the north, there is a wide but not deep river. Crossing this river I saw, for the first time in Guinea, a kind of bridge. It was || p.

[22] Cf. Newbury 1961: 28.

[23] Jakin was, in fact, separate and distinct from Whydah. It was the port of Allada and became tributary to the kingdom of Dahomey in 1724 (not 1729) when the latter conquered the kingdom of Allada. See Snelgrave 1734: 149–51; Dalzel 1793: 11; Law 1987: 321. The date of the Dahomean invasion of Whydah to which Isert referred was 1727. See Snelgrave 1734: 28, 31, 34; Norris 1789: 67; Dalzel 1793: 16–20; Rømer 1760: 273; Akinjogbin 1967: 70–1; Law 1987: 321–2. Truro Audati, or Trudo Audati, was the throne name of the king known traditionally as 'Agaja'. He ruled 1708-ca.1740. See Snelgrave 1734: 5 ff; Dalzel 1793: 27–65 *passim*; Burton 1864: 59, 100, 107–8; *idem* 1893: II 269–72; Le Herissé 1911: 15–6, 294–9; Akinjogbin 1967: 110–40.

[24] On the conquest of Savé/Sahe, the capital of Whydah, by Agaja, see Snelgrave 1734: 14–7; Burton 1893: I 87–8; Newbury 1961: 23; Akinjogbin 1967: 71, 101.

157 || made of rushes braided together like a coachbasket and was laid on the water like a pontoon. The banks of this river are extremely marshy and soft.

While crossing the bridge, which is a good 300 paces long, I saw a meadow covered with red flowers, just as our meadows are covered with yellow dandelions in the spring. On approaching I saw that it was that garden flower so much beloved nowadays, 'Impatience'.[g] In the undergrowth I found a special aloe-like plant.[h] Its leaves are nearly three ells long and three inches wide, and flecked, like the leaves of most kinds of aloes. It has many branches, most of them coming out at right angles to the stem. But one of the branches stretches above the others, shoots into the air like a palm tree, and is often a good foot in diameter. I was not lucky enough to find one in bloom. The oil palm[i] is very common here, as is a special kind of coconut whose flesh, which is commonly eaten, has an extremely pleasant, sour taste and a mammea-like scent.[k] || p. 158 || It usually contains two or three kidney-shaped stones, and it is covered with thick fibres, making the fruit somewhat troublesome to eat. I often saw the ginger plant, both the true ginger[l] and the false ginger[m], in the dark forest here.

According to Desmarchais, the kingdom is made up of 26 provinces.[25] But there are hardly that many towns and villages. It borders to the west, Afla; to the east, Badagrie [Badagry]; to the south, the sea and to the north the former kingdom of Ardra [Allada].

At present Fida is a very significant settled area, a good one and one-half miles in circumference, if one includes the areas planted with maize which are scattered here and there through the town. Each European nation that has a fort here also has a Black settlement around it. In addition to this, these settlements are also made up of various villages. When one walks through the town it is not unusual || p. 159 || to be greeted, often at the same moment, in three different languages, since every Black who lives in the town has learnt at least so much of the language of the fort to which he is attached that he can give a greeting in it.

[g] *Impatiens Balsamina Linn.* [Garden Balsam. See Willis 1973: 591.]

[h] Resembles *Pandanus odoratissimus Linn.* [A species of Screw Pine. See Irvine 1961: 785; Willis 1973: 848.]

[i] *Elias Guineensi Linn.* [Cf. Dalziel 1955: 499–506; Irvine 1961: 776–7.]

[k] *Mammea americana Linn.* [Now known as *Mammea African, Sabina*, commonly 'African Mammy Apple' or 'African Apricot'. See Irvine 1961: 148–9; Willis 1973: 709.]

[l] *Ammomum Zinziber Linn.* [*Aframomum*. Cf. Dalziel 1955: 470–2; Willis 1973: 1240; Chittenden 1977: 2309–10.]

[m] *Ammomum Zerumbet Linn.* [See [l] above.]

[25] See Labat 1730: II 13–5.

In roughly the middle of the town is the market, with properly built stalls where the traders can bring their wares for sale in the morning and then leave in the evening. Every fourth day is the weekly [*sic*] market to which the foreigners may bring their wares.[26] In the stalls one finds every possible kind of European as well as local trade goods, at prices that are not exorbitant. Traders sit between the stalls with cooked bread, or *kankis [kenkey]*, called *dabbedabbe* by the Blacks here, and with maize, fruits, wood, etc. Except for the slave trade which is the province of the men, trading of all kinds is left to the women.

By African standards the King of Dahomet is extremely powerful, since the greatest king of Dahomet, Truro Audati, who was initially only a common kabossie, conquered the great kingdom of Ardra, and then Fida, and made the people his subjects. Even though various kings are now his subjects and must || p. 160 || pay him annual tribute, yet there are even greated princes in the land, to whom he himself has to pay tax, for example, the King of Benin.[27] The King of Benin is probably the greatest king in Guinea. His kingdom lies in an easterly direction from here, along the coast. In addition, there are the Ayos [Oyos], a very numerous nation lying north of the kingdom of Dahomet, whose military consists entirely of cavalry.

It is said of this Truro Audati that once, when he was about to be trapped by these Ayos and was in danger of being surrounded by the enemy cavalry while he himself had none, he used a ruse to win the victory, when otherwise he would have been beaten. It happened thus. In his camp he had a great supply of European wares, and among them a considerable quantity of brandy. He knew that the Ayos, like all Blacks, were great lovers of this drink, which, however, was very expensive in their country because they live so far from the sea. Consequently they did not know, as did the Dahomeans, the adverse effects of drinking too much of it. During the night he had had all these wares brought into a small village. || p. 161 || In the morning he attacked the Ayos and then retreated after some fighting, and in apparent disarray, through this village to which he had had the wares brought. The Ayos, believing that they had gained a complete victory over the Dahomeans, pursued them and took all the abandoned wares as booty. They drank this noble elixir so eagerly that two-thirds of the army was soon intoxicated and fell asleep. Truro Audati, who had had them watched closely by spies, waited for the right moment

[26] For a three-day market in Whydah, see Bosman 1705: 352.

[27] Isert was evidently mistaken in this, exaggerating the range of Benin suzerainty. It was to Oyo that the king of Dahomey was tributary. See Dalzel 1793: xii, 175; Le Herissé 1911: 319; Mercier 1976: 224; Akinjogbin 1967: 162–3; Hargreaves 1967: 43; Fage 1969: 104; Law 1977: 164–5.

and attacked them while they were in this disorder, and won a decisive victory over them. Those who had not been asleep escaped, with difficulty, on horseback.[28]

In later times the Ayos could often sufficiently humble him to the extent that they were able to make their way to the seashore. But the King of Dahomet sought constantly to avoid war. Moreover, it is a fact that the sea is a fetish of the Ayo Blacks, and its view is forbidden them by their fetish priests, on penalty of death.[29]

The present King of Dahomet is a man of about 50 years of age, well-built, and with great intelligence.[30] He never comes || p. 162 || to Fida but always stays in Dahomet, presumably because he fears for his life, since he rules the Fidas with extreme despotism in order to make certain that, while under the yoke of slavery, they do not revive the idea of again choosing their own king.[31] He maintains a viceroy and four kabossies in Fida, who keep him precisely informed as to what is going on among the Whites as well as among the Blacks. This viceroy lives in the government palace, which is a spacious building, but not higher than one storey, built of clay and thatched with straw. There are so many courts and fore-courts inside that you can hardly find your way out again. In the centre of the palace there is an assembly room to which the Europeans are brought when they have business with the governor. The assembly room is open on one side, like a gallery, and is decorated with columns. There is nothing inside but Black stools, and, at times, a European chair.[32] The Black stool used here is of an original kind. These stools are higher than the usual stools of the Blacks. They are made of palm-leaf stalks which are laid on top of each other in squares, and are so artfully || p. 163 || fitted together that the stools are reasonably comfortable to sit on.

The present viceroy is one of the most reasonable men I have come to know among the Blacks. He speaks the three European languages used

[28] Isert is undoubtedly indebted to Snelgrave for this famous but possibly apocryphal tale (Akinjogbin 1967: 82 n.3). See also Snelgrave 1734: 56–9; Dalzel 1793: 14–5.

[29] On conflicts between the Oyo and Dahomey, see Akinjogbin 1967: 81–92, 126; Fage 1969: 100–4; Law 1977: 157–69. The last sentence appears to have been lifted directly out of Snelgrave 1734: 59. For a comment, see Hargreaves 1967: 43–4.

[30] The throne name of this king was Adahoonzou II, but he was known by his traditional name, Kpengla. He ruled 1774–89 (Fage in Dalzel 1793/1966: 12). For the history of Kpengla, see Burton 1893: II 279–88; Le Herissé 1911: 17–8, 305–9; Newbury 1961: 27; Akinjogbin 1967: 153–74 passim; Law 1977: 173–4, 221, 222, 223.

[31] On the establishment of royal power in Whydah prior to the defeat by Dahomey, see Fuglestad 1977: 507–8. For conflicts surrounding the legitimacy of the king of Dahomey, see Akinjogbin 1967: 116; Law 1987: 327–8.

[32] A later source describing the viceroy's palace in Whydah remarked that the use of chairs was forbidden and that the viceroy sat on the floor (Burton 1893: I 65).

here. It would be more advantageous if he actually spoke to the Europeans himself, but he has to use an interpreter. I have often had occasion to hear proof of his admirable proficiency in English when he has corrected the interpreter, the latter having translated inaccurately something that had been said earlier in 'Negro'.[33] He is greatly respected by the Blacks, with a nearly oriental humility. When he appears in public, either on foot or on horseback or mule, he always has a retinue of between 100 and 200 armed Blacks. The present viceroy seldom allows himself to be seen during the day since he is an opponent of the foolish ceremony which, however, he cannot disregard on such occasions. In his hand he always carries a sword of a special shape, which is made in the country and is a gift from the king. Every Black who || p. 164 || meets him is bound, under penalty of losing his life, to show him the proper respect, in the following way. With his face bent to the earth, or while kneeling, he claps his hands loudly three separate times, and finally concludes by snapping all the fingers of his left hand. At night only the snapping of the fingers is required. If a Black approaches the viceroy, the Black has to observe the same ceremony but he has to do it on his knees or on his haunches, as monkeys usually sit, and he is not allowed to sit on a stool in the presence of the viceroy. All these shows of homage are acknowledged by the viceroy by a slow clapping of his hands.[34] When the Black has performed this ceremony, he can speak as confidently with the viceroy as with any other ordinary Black. Taken all in all, the Fidas are the most cultivated nation of the Gold Coast.[*sic*][35]

There are many elephants in this area because it is flat everywhere, has good pastures, and sources of fresh water and wooded areas are plentiful.[36] The governors here, therefore, usually arrange for a great elephant hunt annually.[37] This time it was the turn of the French to arrange it. || p. 165 || All of the European officials, and the captains of the ships, of which there were six here, were invited to it, and I was by no means left behind. In advance I imagined vividly what a pleasure it would be to see this giant among quadrupeds in its natural state. The Europeans, about 30 in

[33] Isert apparently used English as his language of communication with the Blacks in Whydah.

[34] On making obeisance and the clapping of hands, see Bosman 1705: 341; Dalzel 1793: vii-viii, ix-x; Burton 1893: I 174.

[35] Cf. Bosman 1705: 340.

[36] The presence of elephants, savannah animals, in this particular area of the coast is explained by the fact that the savannah extends to the sea in the so-called Dahomey Gap. Cf. Wills 1962: 155, 157, 158.

[37] The governors in 1785 were Olivier de Montaguere at the French St. Louis Fort, Lionel Abson at the English William's Fort, and Francisco Antònio Fonseca e Aragão at the Portuguese Fort of St. John the Baptist.

number, were all carried in litters, and in addition there were 80 Blacks. All together this made a marvellous sight.

After a long march through the tall, dew-wet grass, on three different occasions I had the pleasure of seeing small herds of these majestic animals. It is rare that an elephant is found alone. At first they appeared to pay us very little attention, but when a number of people began to arouse their distrust, and when some daring individuals began to shoot at them, they ran at a small trot, which is a half-gallop for a horse, into the thickest bushes, where no one could follow them. Small trees which were in their way when they were running away were uprooted without much ado, and the path was cleared. The elephants ||p. 166|| paid no attention to the many thickets which would have torn the hide of other animals, but moved as lightly and proudly through them as if they were on a carpet. When running, they carried their trunks over their heads and laid back on their backs. The elephants that I saw must have been a good seven to eight feet tall, in my judgement. These were not nearly as large, however, as those found further inland. The elephants here have tusks of only between 25 and 30 pounds, while tusks of between 100 and 150 pounds can be obtained from the others. Their colour is usually blackish-brown, but it is said that those that have the larger tusks are a species called the Black Elephant. The white species, which is found in East India, is unknown here. The natives have not mastered the art of taming them. If they could manage to do this, it would be of great advantage to them, since the horse is not only very rare here but expensive to keep.

When the Blacks shoot an elephant, which is not a rare occurrence here, they usually carry the best meat, which is from the breast, to the king or viceroy; and the latter also made a present of it to me once. It is hard and as indigestible as gristle. ||p. 167|| They make war helmets out of the ears, and other implements of war out of the hide.

We hunted until the heat of midday, but were not lucky enough this time to fell one, no matter how many times we shot. The hunt is never successful if the elephant is not hit in the back of the head, between the ears, where an ordinary flintlock bullet can kill him. At other places the bullet bounces off. We had our meal *à la campagne*, and returned to Fida in the evening, where no one arrived more satisfied than I, since I had stuffed my herbal full of plants which I had hitherto not seen. But on the journey I had a strong paroxysm of fever, which, presumably, I had caught there after being exposed too long to the sun. This fever, a three-day alternating fever, has plagued me for a good eight months, with frequent relapses. When it has left me for a fortnight, it comes back again for an equal period of time.

The area around Fida is one of the most attractive of all the places

where the Europeans have settled in Guinea. The ground is ||p. 168|| level and blessed with meadows in which there are fresh water sources scattered all around. It rains more often here than in Akra, thus resulting in an uninterrupted Spring. Planting is done twice a year, in March and in October. The English and French forts have large gardens planted with orange allées, and from these gardens they obtain all kinds of vegetables, Seville oranges, oranges, limes and other fruits throughout the entire year. If there are no slaves available in the fortress, the Seville oranges can often lie rotting under the trees in heaps many feet high. The French and Portuguese have a splendid way of making use of the surplus. They bring a number of casks full of the fruit on board ship when they are going from the Coast to West India, and they treat their slaves during the trip with this wonderful fruit as a restraint to scurvy. The French fort keeps 120 Blacks just to maintain its gardens.

The farther I come into the Bight of Benin, the more enthusiastic I find the people in their worship of idols. At Orsu [Osu], around Christiansburg, they have no public fetish temples; here they have more than ||p. 169|| thirty. I have seen some here which have several forecourts and a number of rooms, and are surrounded by beautiful trees. I like to go to such places because I always find those trees there which are rare in the country and are planted because of their rarity.[38]

The most eminent of the temples is dedicated to the snake, which is the superior godhead here.[39] Each temple has its own school, in which the priestesses teach the children singing and dancing. The fetish dance is performed here nearly every day. This nation seems to be very accomplished in this. A group of girls, occasionally supported, have no other occupation than to sing in the temple and dance publicly. Their outfits are beautiful. They wear as many as half a dozen waist cloths, one over the other, but in such a fashion that they can all be seen.[40] All kinds of beads are very tastefully arranged around their necks, and on their wrists and ankles; and the upper part of their bodies are naked, as is common. When nature has supplied them with heavy breasts, they wrap them in silk cloth so that during the jumping they do not swing back and forth too much.

||p. 170|| Their music is quite varied. One of the most attractive forms is produced when they dig a deep hole in the ground, some 15 feet in

[38] On sacred trees, see Burton 1893: II 92–3.

[39] Cf. Burton 1893: I 59–63. Worship of the python snake-god *Dangbe* occurred in many places along the Guinea Coast. See Müller in Jones 1983: 161; Bosman 1705: 369–83; Rask 1754: 123–4; Le Herissé 1911: 102, 110–1; Spieth 1911: 143–4; Herskovits 1938: II 245–55; Sprigge 1969: 111–2.

[40] Cf. Bosman 1705: 350–1.

diameter. Across the hole they lay two beams of very hard wood, and, transversely over this, staves of varying thicknesses, but without fastening them together.[41] The staves are struck with small canes, like the sticks for kettle-drums, to the rhythm of the different drums by which they are being accompanied at the same time. I have seen these women dance up to three hours in the unbearable heat, and even taking part in the most utterly tiring dance, during which they had nothing to refresh them other than that the priestess wiped away their sweat from time to time. When I asked how it was possible that they could stand it so long without injury, I was told, 'It is the Fetish that strengthens them.' But I also know that because of this Fetish they often go home ill, and must pay for their excesses with their lives.

At times the men walk in an orderly procession around their huts, playing a quite special type of music produced on horns, drums and a great number of large iron || p. 171 || cow-bells on which they strike the rhythm with sticks of the same material. At that time from the temple they hang out the fetish flags, from four to seven in number. These flags are made of white linen, and in fact the entire roof is often covered with them.

Once I saw another strange procession. Three priestesses, who are more important here than priests and who are easily recognisable because they never shave their heads, as do other women, but comb their hair (or wool, if you will) into large tresses, walked in front and sang a song in a highly melancholy tone.[42] priests followed them and then some more women, all of them belonging to the temple. Then, as they marched up and down the street, all the Blacks fled into their houses, pulling their children behind them from the street, and they hid until the procession was over. On my asking the reason for their flight from the procession, I was answered, 'Anyone who wilfully watches the procession would certainly not live more than three days.'

|| p. 172 || The fetish snake is the highest deity here and is esteemed above all others. It would go badly with a European if he laid hands on one and killed it.[43] I have seen a number of specimens of this type of snake, and it is indeed a marvellous sigh to behold! When grown the snake is of the length and thickness of a person's arm. Its background colour is grey, but this is overstrewn with yellow and brown flecks. It appears to know that no one would dare to do it harm, therefore it goes

[41] For the pit xylophone, see Nketia 1982: 81.

[42] On the status of priestesses in Whydah, see Bosman 1705: 384. For the taboo against looking at the women, see Burton 1893: I 126.

[43] Cf. Bosman 1705: 376–7.

boldly into all the houses. It is truly a harmless animal that has never injured anyone. When I was once strolling about in the garden of the fort I saw one rolled up asleep under a tree. I was overjoyed at my discovery and gazed at it a few moments with delight, even entertaining the notion of fetching a container in order to preserve it secretly in *spiritus*. To my great annoyance, a Black, who was a worker in the gardens, came along at that very moment and chanced to see the snake lying there, as I had done. My prey was now lost. Like a fury, the Black flew out of the garden and came back immediately with a fetish priest. The priest || p. 173 || when he saw the snake lying there, threw himself full-length to the ground, face down. He kissed the ground three times, murmured some words to himself, then, placing his cloth so that he would not lose the snake, he lifted it so adroitly in the cloth that it did not even awaken. He carried it into the temple, where there is always food and drink available for it, which it may or may not eat.

Here is a description of a less common parade which I saw at Fida. One afternoon, as I was sitting quite contentedly at my window with my book, there suddenly arose a noise out-of-doors and a group of people congregated, so I surmised a procession was on its way. It was not long before the viceroy and the kabossies came by, riding on their hinnies, one behind the other, with a large crowd behind them. The kabossies dismounted in front of the Fort, and they danced there, one after the other.[44] The people did the same, and they made music. In half-an-hour all the prominent men were assembled, most of whom were very quaintly dressed. The important men all wore dressing robes without sleeves, most of them made of silk; the lesser ones, on the other hand, wore robes made of || p. 174 || white linen cloth, and some had proper clothes, like Europeans. The most eminent kabossies had hats of chased brass in the shape of round hats [*sic*], which they had received as a gift from the king, without whose favour no one would dare to wear such adornment.[45] On the whole, the entire performance appeared to me to be like one of our masquerades. They had three flags with them, two Dutch and one English, and three large umbrellas. Three well-dressed men each carried on his head a brass basin with hoops of the same material over it, so that it had the appearance of a royal crown.

After they had danced vigorously, they came into the Fort — the prominent men, the basin bearers, the flag and umbrella bearers — and all entered the assembly room, where I had the opportunity of observing everything in detail. The important men took some refreshment, then

[44] The fort is presumably the English William's Fort.

[45] On the significance of the use of chased brass, see Herskovits 1938: II, 358.

they fell to their knees and kissed the ground three times. As proof that the king had sent them they presented the governor with a beautiful staff.[46] Maintaining their position, they said that the King had ordered them to show the Whites their evidence of victory over the Badagries (a nation six miles east of here, on the coast, where there had once been a Dutch || p. 175 || and an English factory), whom he had completely defeated six months earlier. Thereupon they opened the crown-shaped basins. There were seven heads in the three basins, in two of them three heads each, and in the third, only one head but also a right hand which had once belonged to the most important kabossie of Badagrie.[47] All of these heads, in spite of their being already six months old, were as fresh as if they had just been cut off that day. Upon my inquiring by what method they had preserved them, I was told that they smoked them with straw, as we do hams, which does no harm to their already black skin, but instead gives it an even shinier appearance. The flags and umbrellas were also spoils of war – umbrellas, together with drums, being the great symbols of victory in war.

The Fida Blacks are well-built and of large stature, but their features lack the softness which one observes among the Akras and other Guinean nations. The women are extremely ugly. There I saw a milk-white Black woman, who had been sent to the Governor by the King of Dahomet, || p. 176 || with his compliments – to show that he was also able to send him a white woman.[48] She was extremely ugly, not more than four feet tall, and seemed to be a freak. I also saw a Black with completely white hands and feet. The latter condition occurs, at times, after a serious illness, but in this case it was congenital.[49]

Among the valuable natural products here I saw a bright yellow cotton, which is said to grow in Dahomet. But the export of either the fibre or the seed is forbidden, under penalty of death. The fibre is reserved exclusively for the king's use.[50]

|| p. 177 || The Fidas are a very industrious nation. Not only do they weave pretty cloth, but they also make cloth, both coarse and fine, out

[46] On staffs, see Burton 1864: 134, 272; McLeod 1981: 95–101.

[47] For a report on the war with the Badagries in 1784, see Dalzel 1793: Chapter VI. The 'most important kabossie' was Prince Davee [Dovi the Akran], commander of the Badagri. See also Newbury 1961: 27, 32; Akinjogbin 1967: 165–7. On the exhibition of the heads of enemy leaders, see Law 1989: 401–3.

[48] Albinism occurred throughout Africa and excited comment from a number of European writers. See Ulsheimer in Jones 1983: 40 and note; Snelgrave 1734: 50–1; Bowdich 1819: 292.

[49] Isert is probably describing *vitiligo*, a condition characterised by local lack of pigmentation. This occurs among Whites as well.

[50] For the various shades of colour found in cotton fibres, see Picton and Mack 1979: 30.

of grass. They take the leaves of a certain grass[n] which are one thumb wide and more than an ell long. These leaves are laid out in the sun for a few days, which changes their colour from green to yellow. They then tear the leaves to form threads, knot them together, wind them up, and weave with them.[51]

The Fidas, like the Popos, dig up two kinds of stone, which have a certain resemblance to lapis lazuli, or hyacinth stone. One kind is very dark blue, with small grains of metal mixed into it, possibly gold or pyrites.[52] Out of this stone they grind cylinders of the thickness of a little finger, and these, thick as they are, they fix into their ear lobes. Lacking this stone, they use the natural red coral[o], or even only pipe stems. The second variety, which resembles the hyacinth closely, is said by the Blacks to be found in the ground, hollowed out in the shape of short pieces of pipe stem or of coral. That explanation seemed strange to me at first, but considering that the stone seems to be of an encrusted type, the story seems quite credible, since I do not know of any of the Blacks' instruments with which they could bore such long, thin holes in the hard stone. Both kinds of stone are exceedingly expensive everywhere, and are regarded as highly as gold.[53]

In January comes the great memorial feast celebrating the forefathers of the King of Dahomet.[54] All three governors are invited, and unless they can plead illness as an excuse, they dare not stay away. || p. 178 || In the event of illness, they would have to send another white man in their place. The feast is held in Dahomet, which is three days' journey from here (about 20 miles). All the kabossies and a number of ordinary Blacks from all the provinces of the kingdom gather there at that time in order to profit by the celebrations. The Europeans were served from the royal

[n] *Cyperus*. [A sedge, probably *Cyperus articulatus Linn*. See Dalziel 1955: 516; Willis 1966: 322; Chittenden 1977: 614–5.

[o] *Isis nobilis Linni*. [This is a precious, richly red coral secreted by a gorgonian *Corallium mobile*. Cf. Ben-Amos 1980: 20, 25, 48, 64–8; Fage 1962: 345, 346.]

[51] The contention that early writers were mistaken in their descriptions of cloth made of grass, inasmuch as the fibre was actually from the raphia palm (Picton and Mack 1979: 32), is contradicted by this clear identification of grass fibre by Isert, who was an expert botanist.

[52] Pyrite is a common mineral consisting of iron disulfide. Because of its brass-yellow colour and metallic lustre it is often called 'fool's gold'.

[53] These are the so-called 'aggrey beads'. Cf. De Marees 1602: 225 n.; Bosman 1705: 119 and note; Barbot 1732: 273; Rask 1754: 84–5; Bowdich 1819: 259, 267–8; Monrad 1822: 255; Freeman 1898: 396–405; Fage 1962: 343–7 and 1981: 209–10; Brydon 1976: 94, 106; Kalous, 1979: 203–17.

[54] This ceremony, held in the Dahomean capital Abomey, was called 'the yearly Customs' by Europeans but 'the yearly head thing' [*Khwe-ta-nun*] by the Dahomeans (Burton 1893: I 229).

kitchen. A platform had been built in the form of a scaffold, on which sat the King, his retinue and the Whites. The ordinary Blacks stood around below the platform, the representatives from each district standing together in their own groups. On the platform there were many kinds of European cloth, as well as brandy, cowries strung together in strings worth two *thalers*, and all kinds of foodstuffs.[55] The king called one of the kabossies to him. The kabossie came crawling on all fours and received the king's orders, which usually were to fetch so many strings of cowries, so much cloth, or whatever it might be, and throw these down to his people. The kabossie, who knew his people, gave them a sign as they stood waiting for the goods with their hands already raised, that they were to come and catch || p. 179 || everything that was thrown down, before it reached the ground. The king repeated this with each of the other kabossies.[56] But the conclusion crowned the performance – the blackest of barbaric customs. Specifically, they had 40 to 50 unhappy slaves, comprising slaves taken in war, criminals, or those born slaves, whom they had kept throughout the year for this festival. Five or six of these sat crowded tightly together under the platform, watching the whole world enjoying itself, and waiting impatiently for the terrible pronouncement. When everything had been distributed that was to be distributed that day, the victims were brought before the king, who studied them once again to make sure they were the correct ones, then, on the spot, gave orders for their execution, which was performed on a block with an axe. While this was being done, one of the ministers stood there with a saucer and filled it with the blood of the unfortunate, which he presented to the king. The king dipped the very tip of his little finger into the blood and licked it off with his tongue. The bodies were thrown into a grave in the royal burial place, and the heads were stuck on poles around the area. || p. 180 || With this performance, repeated 10 to 14 times, the day ended.[57]

This barbaric performance appears to be a symbolic representation of their earlier common practice of eating their conquered enemies. That they do not do it now, and that they have never sold human meat at the market, as some writers tell us, of this I am convinced.[58] If one asks the

[55] When Isert speaks of cowries worth two *thaler* it is difficult to know whether he means the small cabess (2000 cowries) used at Christianborg or the large cabess (4000 cowries) used on the Slave Coast.

[56] On redistribution, see Law 1987: 333–6.

[57] For other descriptions of the annual ceremony in Dahomey, both in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Norris 1789: 100, 136; Burton 1893: I 229–31, 232–56, II 12 f.; Law 1985: 57, 60, 67–9; *idem* 1987: 325–6.

[58] European writers in earlier centuries exaggerated the extent of cannibalism in other parts of the world but Isert showed some scepticism about the extent of the practice, and his view that cannibalism had a symbolic aspect is now generally accepted. On ritual cannibalism and human sacrifice, see Law 1985: 58. Isert's comment on 'some writers' probably refers to the citation of Robert More's report earlier in the century (Snelgrave 1789: 51–3). See also Law 1985: 58; *idem* 1989: 405.

king why he does not abolish this dreadful custom, which is a financial loss as well, since he could sell these 50 people who are executed annually, he answers that he is not permitted to terminate a custom that is as old as the kingdom itself, and that he fears that if he did so, his subjects would rebel against him.[59]

An example of how despotically the King of Dahomet rules will be illustrated in the following story. One morning, when the king, in his royal pomp, was climbing up on his platform, he passed by the unfortunates who were to be executed during the day, and had been assembled there and were lying at the foot of the platform. One of them could not contain himself, but sighed aloud, 'Oh how lucky he (the King) is and, alas, how || p. 181 || miserable am I!' The king, hearing part of this, asked what the delinquent had said, whereupon it was reported to him. At this he turned round immediately and said, 'Surely that man is no fool.' He himself raised the slave up, and ordered that his chains be removed, that he be given clothing and travelling money, and that he be allowed to travel to his own province. Then, later, when the king again appeared publicly, a large group of people crowded close, in order to be able to see him. Still needing to fill the place of the man to whom he had just so generously given his freedom, he grabbed the very first person in the crowd, ordered him to sit down, had him put in chains, and had him executed the same day, together with the others! I ask you, even under an absolute monarch in Europe, could such things, if attempted, go uncontested?[60]

Now, this time I have not deserved the reproach that my letters are always so short, have I? In the hope that you are pleased with me, as I am with the whole world, I am, etc.

[59] For commentary on the execution of slaves instead of their sale, see Dalzel 1793: 218, 221; Law 1985: 54, 85–6; *idem* 1987: 332.

[60] On exercise of the royal prerogative, see Dalzel 1793: 218–9; Burton 1864: 313; Le Herissé 1911: 53, 243; Herskovits 1938: II 55–6; Law 1985: 86–7; *idem* 1989: 407–10. Isert's entire description of this ceremony may be based upon what he had heard and read. There is nothing in the text to indicate that he was actually present at the ceremony, or that he had ever visited Abomey.

Eighth Letter

Main Fort Christiansburg
on the Guinea Coast
16 October, 1785

In my last letter from Fida I sent you a description of the journey from Prinzenstein to Fida, and, in the same letter, I entertained you with considerable detail about the Europeans as well as about the natives of these places. Now let me tell you about the habits and customs of the nation which lives around our main fort, a people known as Akras, and about their land of Gah [Gã], as it is called in their mother tongue.

First, however, I must report that on 1 April I sailed on the brigantine *Ada* from Fida back to Popo, where I went ashore. From there I continued the journey by hammock to Rio Volta, which I was taken across, and then to the main fort, which is about 50 German miles from Popo, a distance I ||p. 183|| covered comfortably in six days. I shall not weary you with a repetition of all the forts, lodges and settlements along the way, since I have already told you about them.

The clothing of the Akras is in general like that of the peoples living on the other side of Rio Volta and as far as Benin, the so-called 'Slave Coast', differing only in a few details, especially as regards the fair sex. Fastened around their hips the men wear a belt or band made of decoratively plaited leather, or a silver chain, or a string of beads. Through this, and between their legs, they pass a small strip of cotton or linen cloth, or a piece of silk cloth about half an ell wide and two ells long, and they let the ends hang down in front and behind.[1] The longer it hangs down behind, the more beautiful it is considered to be. This attire, whose true purpose is to cover the privy parts, is an absolute necessity for each adult Black; and probably their earliest clothing had the same intention, since a single plantain leaf is sufficient to be used thus. Indeed, each master must supply it for his slaves. In the language of the country it is called

[1] One ell = 1.14 metres

täklä [*tɛklɛ*].[a] p. 184 Besides this they have a large *pantjes*, or length of cloth, called *mammale*, which for a grown Black is three ells long and as wide. The *mammale* serves at night as a coverlet, in the morning as a robe, and during the day as formal dress. In the mornings when it is usually cool here, they wrap themselves in it, leaving only one arm uncovered. In the daytime, however, and on formal occasions, it would be a breach of the rules of decency to cover the upper part of the body with anything at all.[2] At such times the *mammale* is folded downwards and tucked in a little on the left side; but, since it does not stay there very well, and is constantly falling off when they move too much, they are forced to secure it repeatedly. They often open and rewrap it, or play with it, just to keep themselves occupied, as our ladies do with their fans.[3] The kind of cloth from which the *mammale* is made indicates ||p. 185|| one man's wealth and privilege in relation to another's, just as, among our own people, the officer is distinguished from the private soldier. The *mammale* is usually of coarse cotton cloth brought here from East India, or of printed cotton, or of chintz, or of half-silk or silk cloth.

When a Black has on both the *täklä* and the *mammale*, he is fully clothed. However, for decoration and formal wear (for luxury holds sway here also) there are many other things to observe in the dress of the Black. All the Blacks shave their heads: the elders who have begun to turn grey have their heads completely shorn, while the younger ones leave some hair on. With chalk they then draw a pattern on their heads, indicating where they want some hair to remain, and it is amazing how adept they are at removing all the hair between the patterns. Many have patterns of fortresses, flowers, bouquets, etc. on their heads. Some fasten a small gold bell in the remaining hair. Those parts that have been shaved must be shaved again at least every eight days; wealthy men are shaved daily.[4] On the parts where hair normally appears, other than the head and chin, neither sex tolerates ||p. 186|| any hair; and even a beard is worn by very few. Young warriors allow their beards to grow on their chins to a length

[a] When those who write about their travels mention completely naked Blacks, this must be interpreted to mean Blacks dressed only in a *täklä*, since I believe that this has been their custom, if not from time immemorial, at least for a longer time than the Europeans have been coming here. [For *täklä* and the larger cloth, *mammale*, see Second Letter[23]. Isert's reference to other writers may have included De Marees (1602/1987: 114a).

[2] Cf. Monrad 1822: 235–6; Daniell 1856: 4–5. This custom continues to be observed today (McLeod 1981: 145).

[3] The 'dance of adjustment' of the large cloth is noted in Cole and Ross 1977: 16.

[4] On men's hair styles, see De Marees 1602/1987: 16b; Brun in Jones 1983: 64, 87; Hemmersam ibid.: 109; Müller ibid.: 182, 204; Bosman 1705: 119; Labat 1730: I 318; Barbot 1732: 236; Rask 1754: 135–6; Rømer 1760: 86–7; Meredith 1812: 110; Kyrematen 1964: 70.

at most of three inches. Their beards are always black, but otherwise very much like those of Europeans.[5]

Their further ornamentation is so extremely varied that one could write a book if one wanted to describe all the kinds of adornment. Some wear ear-rings of the European kind; others, especially the Krepees, wear a necklace of beads. They make a type of bead out of white mussel shells which they grind with stones for this purpose. Other men, very prominent ones, wear on their breasts strings of genuine red corals[b] as thick as a thumb, for which they may have had to pay the Europeans the value of two males slaves (220 *thalers*). The nobility wear aggreys, a variety of bead made of mosaic, on their wrists and around their necks.[6] They set the greatest store by these aggreys. Some individual examples of this type of bead, of the thickness of a finger and one inch long, are at times worth the price of seven persons, while others of the same type do not exceed the price of one ounce || p. 187 || of gold. The reason for some being so much more expensive is that these had been worn by such-and-such a great general or a king, and the more such great men one can prove to have used them, or the more important battles they had been in, the greater their worth. The dregs of our European nobility are not alone in being proud of their ancestors! This art of mosaic has either been lost here or was never known. Nobody could give me the least bit of information on where these beads originally came from.[7] It is possible that in the Golden Age of the Egyptians some communication existed between them and the Blacks of the Gold Coast. Indeed it may be presumed, and probably not without some grounds, that the Gold Coast is the Ophir mentioned in the Bible, the place from which King Solomon acquired his gold, ivory and monkeys.[8] Today, there is no knowledge of intercourse or trade in that direction, nor has there been any for as long as the Europeans have been frequenting this place (since 1452).[9]

[b] Isis nobilis Linn. [See also Seventh Letter[10].]

[5] On beards, see Müller in Jones 1983: 181, 182, 204; Meredith 1812: 110.

[6] 'Mosaic' presumably refers to the Venetian *millefiore* beads (Fage 1962: 344).

[7] For beads on the Gold Coast, see De Marees 1602/1987: 16b, 26a, 48b, 88b, 113b and note; Müller in Jones 1983: 161; Bosman 1705: 119 and note p. 527; Barbot 1732: 273; Rask 1754: 136; Bowdich 1819: 259. 267–8, 270 n.; Monrad 1822: 255; Daniell 1856: 5. For a discussion of aggrey/akori beads, their possible identification and origin, see Fage 1962: 343–7; *idem* 1981: 209–10; Kalous 1979: 203–17.

[8] 'Ophir', as Solomon's source of gold and riches is found in the Old Testament (I Kings 10.11).

[9] Isert was probably refering to the first official Portuguese expedition, which founded the Fort of São Jorge da Mina and was sent out in 1482 — not 1452. He may have found the latter date in Barbot 1732: 146, where it is wrongly given as the date of the establishment of the fort.

The Blacks often wear a number of rings or bracelets on their arms. These are made of ivory; or of copper, or brass, or of both metals worked || p. 188 || together; or of iron. They hang loosely on the lower arm, often up to 20 of them if they are made of ivory.[10] But sometimes the Blacks wear one in the middle of their upper arm, constricting the thick flesh there to such a degree that, had it been a European wearing it, it might be feared that he would develop gangrene at that spot. Their fingers are also covered with rings, especially the thumb. Like the bracelets, they are made of various kinds of metal, but most often of silver and gold. The thumb ring often has a crown on it of up to an inch in length, which stands up like a grenadier's hat. Fastened below the knee they often wear strings of beads from which hangs a bundle of raffia fibres into which various knots have been tied. This, however, is only used when they are going on a journey.[11]

The ornamentation of the fair sex is certainly different from that of the men (see the title page). A Black lady, when she wants to be well-dressed, must make a toilette of at least two hours in order to arrange all the components of her costume. Her head takes the most time, || p. 189 || since she can create on it all manner of intricate decoration. She shaves it in patterns as the men do, but in styles different from those of the men. On the crown of her head she leaves a wide tuft of hair into which she fastens some kind of gold ornament, the tip of the red tail feather of a parrot and often some reed-heads.[12] After this she bathes her entire body carefully, and then before the make-up is applied, she rubs it with a variety of perfumed ointment procured from a tree[c] which grows in the districts lying further inland. All types of colours are used for this body colouring, the most common being white, which is made from fine clay, or bolus. From the Europeans they get a blue which is a Prussian blue. They stir it into water, as painters do. Then, using all kinds of figures which they have carved out of wood, they press the forms into the dye and stamp them on to their foreheads, cheeks, chin, breasts, stomachs,

[c] I have not had the pleasure of seeing this tree. According to the descriptions which my Black has given me, it is a Croton. [Since Isert is speaking of a perfumed oil, the plant might be the *Canarium schweinfurthii Engl.* Croton has no exudate and is not scented (A. A. Enti, personal communication.) See also, Irvine 1961: 508; Huber 1963: 68.]

[10] For bracelets, see De Marees 1602/1987: 26a, 89a; Bosman 1705: 119, 121; Labat 1730: I 324; Barbot 1732: 237.

[11] For protection on a journey, see Monrad 1822: 237; Reindorf 1895: 122–3.

[12] For women's hair styles on the Gold Coast, see De Marees 1602/1987: 17b–18a; Dapper 1670: 469 b–70 a; Müller in Jones 1983: 205–6; Bosman 1705: 120; Rask 1754: 136; Kyermaten 1964: 70; Sagay 1983: 22. The red tail feather of the grey parrot has special ritual significance in a number of localities in Gold Coast/Ghana (Rømer 1760: 68; Rattray 1927: 19; Field 1940: 82, note 2; Brydon 1976: 139).

arms and legs. The face is given the more costly ||p. 190|| colours, that is, blue and green, but the rest of the body has to make do with the cheaper white. If a woman lacks time, she often does the colouring coarsely with her fingers, a method the men always use. But when she is to make a public appearance, she calls in three or four other women in order to hear their opinions on which patterns or which colours would be best for the occasion. It seems to me that they differ in this respect from European women who, when their natural colour has been blurred by the passage of time and they wish to replace it by artifice, must do it secretly. When all this has been done, she starts on the costume itself. She uses masses of strings of beads made of multi-coloured glass, or of shells from a species of small snail obtained from the Assianthee kingdom, or of blue lapis lazuli, or polished agate, etc. These are distributed over her entire body — around her throat, wrists, legs, etc. — in such a way that the most expensive ones are wound around her neck and hands. In addition she wears silver or even gold bracelets on her arms in place of the arm rings which are used by the men. These bracelets have pendants of gold pieces, such as *louis d'or* or *Johannes*, ||p. 191|| which they obtain by trade with the Europeans.[13] Her fingers and toes are also be-ringed with gold and silver. Around her ankle, where we usually wear spurs, she has a stout anklet fashioned from silver, which can weigh from 16 *loth* to one pound.[14]

Like the men, the women have their *täklä*, but this one is not more than a small handbreadth in width. They do not let it hang down in front but throw the end to the back, where instead it is then rolled up into a ball so that when the large *pantjes* covers it, it looks more or less like a saddle. This even has the same use as a saddle because, when the woman wants to have her child with her while she is at work, she can let the child ride on it.[15] Next, over this *täklä* is worn the large *pantjes* (*mammale*) which is the same size as the men's, that is, three ells square. This is thrown over the hips so that it resembles the short skirts of our women. The opening of this covering cloth is in front, so that the knees can be seen, and sometimes more. Since none of the European cloths is ever three ells wide, it is necessary to sew several cloths together. This is done ||p. 192|| in an artistic seam, often with a floral pattern in varicoloured silk thread, and the seam must lie straight across the saddle.

[13] For body ornamentation and jewelry, see De Marees 1602/1987: 18b–19a; Dapper 1670: 470; Müller in Jones 1983: 206; Barbot 1732: 238; Rask 1754: 137; Rømer 1760: 86–7; Monrad 1822: 237–8; Sagay 1983: 21. The *Louis d'or* is the French gold coin used 1640–1803, and the *Johannes* is the Portuguese gold coin, the *João*, minted 1722–1835,

[14] One *loth* = ten grammes.

[15] For the 'saddle', Gã *atófo*, see Müller in Jones 1983: 205 and note 284; Bowdich 1819: 318–9; Monrad 1822: 236; Daniell 1856: 5–6.

The *pantjes* is tied over the hips by means of another folded silk cloth. In the knot in front of the *Regio Critica* hangs a large bunch of silver keys, small bells and Spanish *thalers*, which makes a jingling sound while the woman is walking so that one can hear her at a distance of some hundred paces when she appears in public.[16] Around the upper part of her body is another large *pantjes* the same size as the lower one. This is wrapped around under her shoulders, with its outermost end thrown over them and allowed to hang down over her back. These cloths must always be made of fine material, either calico or silk or fine East Indian fabrics.[17]

The women perfume themselves not infrequently, even as our charming gentlemen do, for which purpose they keep a real civet cat[d] in most of the houses. From this animal, using a small spoon, they extract, once a week, the aromatic oil from its special sac. If they ||p. 193|| lack this oil, which has become fairly expensive because of its widespread use, they take the whole sac of the animal and hang it around their necks. And, if they lack this as well, they obtain a type of leaf from the Mountain Blacks, which is just like our woodruff, both in scent and structure.[e] These leaves are plaited artfully into a rose, and hung on the breast, instead of the sac, for ornamentation as well as for their perfume.

A lady of rank (as illustrated in the first figure on the title page) wears, in addition to these decorations, a number of other ornaments, a description of which would take too long to write. Ordinary women also wear two large *pantjes*, but the rest of the ornamentation is lacking, either wholly or in part.

When a woman believes she is pregnant, she changes her adornment immediately. From that moment she lets her hair grow, no longer applies body colouring, and puts away all her gold and bead jewellery. Instead the priestess gives her a kind of cuff of raffia which she wears on her wrists during the first month, and later around her knees, and at the end of her pregnancy she wears a thick roll around her ankles. The cuffs are thick bands ||p. 194|| of a type of pliant raffia whose ends hang down to a length of one-half ell. These ends are full of knots, each of which,

[d] *Viverra Zibetha Linn.* [For the capture and breeding of the civet cat, and the removal of musk, see Hemmersam in Jones 1983: 108; Müller *ibid.*: 205, 242; Bosman 1705: 251; Bardot 1732: 210–11. Isert's statement about women hanging the sac around their necks makes no sense since it would result in a destruction of the source.]

[e] *Asperula odorata Linn.*

[16] Keys and bells as ornaments are mentioned by De Marees 1602/1987: 19a, 19b; Dapper 1670: 469 b; Müller in Jones 1983: 205; Monrad 1822: 236; Rømer 1760: 87; McLeod 1981: 45, 78. Bells were apparently out of fashion earlier in the century (Rask 1754: 127).

[17] For women's clothing in general, see De Marees 1602/1987: 17b, 18a, 19b; Müller in Jones 1983: 205–6; Bosman 1705: 121; Barbot 1732: 238.

coloured with the fetish colour, or red earth, is supposed to be beneficial at the delivery or for the child. Some families force the woman to wear an antelope skin during the entire pregnancy, a skin she must not remove; and if she has to work, she hangs it over her back. The closer her time for delivery comes, the greater the number of amulets that she obtains from the priestess, who, for payment in cash, does not neglect to impart a profusion of good advice and blessings. Indeed, the priestess comes daily and strokes and presses the naked abdomen with her hands to such an extent that one might fear that these benedictions would result more in physical injury than in moral benefit. During the last eight days the pregnant woman's head is smeared with a softened red clay or loam, rubbing so much into her hair that it resembles a cap made of pitch, and during these days she is led thus in a procession through the town. This cap must not be wiped off until after the delivery. (See the third figure.)[18]

Unmarried women, even in finest array, wear only a large ||p. 195|| *pantjes* from the waist down, and the upper part of the body must be bare at all times. Indeed, the Adampos [Adangbe] may never wear more than the *täklä* (see the second and third figures) until they are engaged to be married or have made the so-called 'marriage custom', which means that they must make a certain great sacrifice to the fetish. Although at this time they are forbidden to wear more clothing than a small strip, they wear even more strings of beads, and costlier ones. Hence they have six to eight strings of polished carnelians[f] to which they fasten their *täklä*. Each bead is an inch long and as thick as a finger, and each costs three stuber (six threepence) when purchased from the Europeans. A string of such beads can cost up to three ounces of gold (60 *thalers*).[19]

Children of both sexes can run around without shame until their eighth year without wearing anything at all, apart from a string of beads. It is amusing to see how very small children are hung about the arms and legs with such terribly thick beads that at times the poor creatures cannot walk for the weight of the beads.[20] If it happens that a woman's first or second

[f] But it is in fact only agate, to which this name has been given. [It is not clear who actually used the term 'carnelian'.]

[18] For pregnancy practices, see Bosman 1705: 208; Barbot 1732: 242; Rømer 1760: 87; Monrad 1822: 51; Field 1937: 161–70; Azu 1974: 35–6. Isert is practically alone among early writers on West Africa in refraining from comment on the apparent or alleged ease with which Black women delivered their babies. See De Marees 1602/1987: 11b; Müller in Jones 1983: 217–8; Bosman 1705: 122; Labat 1730: I 319; Barbot 1732: 242; Rask 1754: 132–3.

[19] For girls' puberty rites among the Gã and related groups, see Field 1937: 185–91; Huber 1958: 99–109; *idem* 1963: lbs f.; Opoku 1978: 112–23.

[20] For the use of beads on children, see De Marees 1602/1987: 12b; Bosman 1705: 123; McLeod 1981: 144.

child dies ||p. 196||, the third child must be particularly watched over. To this end a large quantity of mussel shells, snail shells and other things are fastened into its hair, and must not be removed until the child is past three years of age. During this time its hair must not be shaved.[21]

At Fida I once saw a female slave who had been brought from very far inland. She was wearing a finger-thick bead in her lower lip, which had been pierced for this purpose, as one pierces the ear-lobe. Such singularly striking fashions are seen here daily, since the slaves come from faraway districts. All the Dunkos (from a country which lies behind the Assianthee kingdom) are scarified over their entire bodies or just marked on their faces. They have their special patterns for this so that, by these signs, one can recognise their nation of origin and their rank. Apart from this they also have their own family marks. Some of the most even-tempered slaves are those who have scars comprising three lines on each side of the face [and body] reaching down to the hips.[22] On the whole the Black is well-built. One seldom, indeed almost never, ||p. 197|| finds deformed adults among them, a fact that has given rise to the conclusion that such children are murdered at birth. But this is absolutely false.

The Akras have particularly fine facial features, but they are not as large and strong in body as the Krepees. The Mountain Blacks and Assianthees are always more black in colour. They are more agile than the inhabitants of the coast, and generally have a more pleasing figure. It is a fact that the facial structure of the majority of the Blacks is clearly different from that of the Europeans. But now and then one sees faces which, apart from their colour, would be considered beautiful even in the middle of Europe. Generally the Blacks have a somewhat ape-like appearance in that their cheek-bones and their jaw-bones are more prominent than ours, and their nose-bone is, on the whole, smaller than ours. This has given rise to the belief that the mother flattens the nose of the infant as soon as it is born — which claim, along with other such reports, is a fabrication. Blacks are found here, although rarely, whose noses can measure up the best European 'brandy-noses'. When the nose ||p. 198|| is very flat, the nostrils do not lie the long way, as ours do, but transversely. This kind of Black always has very prominent lips. Their facial features have much in common with those of the Jews. Their hair is never straight

[21] On the significance of children's hair, see Rattray 1927: 66, 149 n. 2; Field 1937: 179, 198–9.

[22] For scarification, both cosmetic and medicinal, on the Gold Coast in general, see De Marees 1602/1987: 18a, 18b, 19a, 88b; Brun in Jones 1983: 89; Rask 1754: 144, 177; Bowdich 1819: 183; Monrad 1822: 237; Freeman 1898: 424–8; Field 1937: 177; Jefferson 1974: 120 f.; Oldendorp 1777: 290–2. Long incisions, from shoulder to hips, are mentioned by 'D. R,' in De Marees 1602/1987: 118a.

but always like wool — crinkled and black — but on rare occasions a fiery red can be seen. If the hair were combed straight out it would stretch to a length of one-half ell, but it is impossible to keep it straight. The crinkly hair, or wool, the flat nose and the protruding lips — these are always the characteristic trait of the Black nation. Their hair alone distinguishes them from the Moors who now live on the other side of Senegal, on the Moroccan coast, and who are often considered to be part of the Black nation but are clearly distinct from them.

As regards the colour of the Black, the philosophical naturalists have strained their brains not a little. In my opinion, the earliest of these naturalists explain the matter best, and they wrote that it is due to the extraordinary heat which obtains here without variation. Others say that it originated with Cain, the murderer of his brother, || p. 199 || whose family were destined to have the black colour as a punishment. Others say they are descendants of Cush or Phut, one of the four sons of Ham,[g] who was supposed to have become this colour. Still others would have it that the first Black was a bastard, originating from a European and a variety of ape, etc.[23]

In my opinion the origin of the colour of the Black can be attributed as much to the climate as to a more special cause. It holds for all nations that the closer they are to the equator, the more or less brown they are. The Spaniards and Portuguese are of exactly the same complexion as the Mulatto, who is the offspring conceived in Africa of a Black woman and a North European. Indeed, by the third generation in descent from those who were the original offspring of a Black woman and a European, one cannot see the difference [between them and Europeans] apart from the red cheeks, which are never found among Africans, even if they have European ancestors on both sides.[24] Yet, if the torrid zone is the reason for the black colour of these || p. 200 || people, why, then, are the Peruvians, the Mexicans, the Guianese and other inhabitants close to the equator in Columbia of a dark copper colour and not black like them? Why do the Blacks have wool on their heads instead of hair, like the others? Why are the Blacks well-bearded while the others have not the slightest trace of a beard?

[g] 'Essay on the slavery and commerce of the human species', etc. Philadelphia 1786, p. 116. [The reference is to an essay by Thomas Clarkson. The Philadelphia edition, published by J. Cruikshank, was a reprint of the original London edition of the same year.]

[23] For a discussion of theories extant in the eighteenth century which attempted to explain the origin of different skin colours, and especially that of black skin, see Greene 1954: 31–41; Curtin 1973: 34–57.

[24] Isert's reference to 'red cheeks' may refer to the reddening of the cheeks due to blushing, that due to physical exertion, or that due to sunburn.

I do not believe that one can settle on any final explanation of the origin, however it seems to be certain that the heat is not the only cause of the black colour. We know that the colour of a person's skin lies in the mucous cells (*corpore mucoso*) under the epidermis of the skin. Perhaps the ancestor of the Black travelled through the Libyan desert, where his body was completely and absolutely at the mercy of the sun, without any refreshing drink to cool his blood which was positively boiling. He perspired as long as his blood was able to secrete enough moisture. But when this stopped and his sweat pores (*pori*) became steadily more and more expanded due to the persistent heat, the dark-coloured part of his blood seeped through the skin and filled || p. 201 || the *corpus mocosum* with its colour. The blood itself became a much darker colour because of lack of moisture, and the hair crinkled up as well, because of the presence of heat — just as it would under the curling iron of a wig-maker! Obviously this metamorphosis was not the work of one day. Years, even centuries were required. But, you may ask, if this is the case one might have to conclude that this applies equally to the European who has been in Guinea for half a century. I answer 'Not so!' No European can ever be exposed to such a deprivation of moisture that he would sweat blood for a long period of time,[h] and the change that occurs after a short period is insignificant. Yet, most of the Germans and Danes, if they have been here a long time, become a dirty yellow colour on those parts of the body which are exposed to the sun. It would require more time for one who was naturally white to change from a North European to a Black than it did for that || p. 202 || ancestor of the Black who was, in all probability, an Asian who already had an olive colour. This is my theory of the origin of the Black's colour. If you can give me a better one, fine! I will be satisfied! But do not talk to me about 'ape-bastards'. This theory could be considered if the Black had no ability to reason, but if the Black does not excel over the European generally, he is at least equal to him in every way.[i]

The languages are very different from all the European languages in construction and expressions. They are very diverse, and I am convinced that there must be more than 30 distinct kinds of languages in Africa,

[h] It happened once to the author himself that, during a march, the sleeve of his shirt became a blood-red colour from sweat, which was presumably a consequence of the covering being too thin for protection against the sun.

[i] The afore-mentioned treatise, 'Essay on slavery, etc.' includes an English poem written by a Black female slave in Boston, a poem which, by reason of its ingenuousness clearly reveals a poetic genius. [The reference is to Phillis Wheatley, b. Africa 1753?, d. Boston, Mass. 1784. While still a child she was purchased as a slave by John Wheatley, a Boston tailor, to be a servant to his wife. In the Wheatley household she began writing poetry at the age of thirteen, and her first poems were published in 1770. Her total published output of more than 50 poems enjoyed great popularity in England.]

without counting the numerous variations. All of them have this in common with the languages of most uncultured people, or of those who learn their language only through oral tradition, that they have a limited vocabularly and the words often end in vowels.[25] As an example I shall cite some words from the three languages || p. 203 || used by those peoples in the areas near and under us. These lands lie not more than 20 miles from each other and yet their languages are as different from one another as are German and French, and the Black who does not understand each language is forced to use an interpreter. For example:

[25] In fact we all learn our language mainly through oral tradition. As regards the extent of vocabulary, most if not all unwritten languages have elaborate esoteric vocabularies for medicine and ritual and other cultural areas that not everyone knows. It is true that the languages of that part of Africa favour open syllables, i.e. syllables ending in a vowel. But so does French, given all the unpronounced final consonants (Mary Esther Dakubu, personal communication). See also Greenberg 1959: 21–3.

	Akra	**Assianthee**	**Krepee**
head	ithu	otri	ota
eye	hinmä	wannua	onuku
nose	gungho	onüny	amonthi
mouth	onabu	wanu	onu
ear	toy	uwasso	otuh
tooth	hgennedy	uisse	adu
arm	nindeh	osa	assy
finger	nindeh-bi	— —	allowy
stomach	mussu	uafnu	dommä
thigh	nanne	onánn	affoh
bread	abullo	abodo	aphhae
water	nuh	inssuo	itchi
fish	loh	agünny	alla
egg	uvaule	akokokkrissa	koklosi
maize	ablé	abró	blofoë
millet	má	kokothé	lili
house	thiun	odánni	hommä
spoon	avalé	atré	gáti
pipe	blä	tabacinny	tamási
knife	kakla	zikkang	hä
fire	la	egia	dio
wood	lai	ingena	na ke
European	blofunny	obróng	jewuddé
Black	mudihn	onupatuntún	amaibo || p. 204 ||
iron	dadethie	— —	ojah
sword	kranthe	— —	ehä
plantain	amadah	abrodeh	abolodiu
banana	aquadah	— —	karatt
musket	tuh	otruo	otu

Come here immediately! (**Akra**) Ba biane nenäh!
(**Assianthee**) Bram prim prim prim!
(**Krepee**) Wakabah!

How much does this cost? (**Akra**) Onine inghe oheh?
(**Assianthee**) Wadde otong nesseng?
(**Krepee**) Nuokenénne oflettio?[26]

[26] Isert's Gã ['*Akra*'] glossary seems to be the most consistently accurate, which leads one to think that his main interpreter was a Gã. Errors in some of the expressions may have been due to the interpreter not understanding what Isert wanted, or Isert not understanding which language was being used. In Isert's Twi and Ewe lists many of the parts of the body begin with an 'o' or 'u' or 'w', these representing possessive pronouns. He may have said 'What's that?' and was told 'his/your X'. (I am indebted to Mary Esther Dakubu for this information and for checking the Gã and Twi lists below, and to Felix Ameka for checking the words and expressions in Ewe.) Isert's glossary was one of the sources used by Rasmus Rask (1828: 3).

	Modern Gã	**Modern Twi**	**Modern Ewe**
1 head	yitso	tiri	ta
2 eye	hiŋmɛi	àntwa/ani	nku
3 nose	gugõ	ɛhwéne	nɔti
4 mouth	onabu/naabu	anó	nu
5 ear	tue/toi	asò	to
6 tooth	nyanyɔŋ	ɛse	aḍu
7 arm [hand]	nine	ɔbasá	abɔ
8 finger	wao/wabii	nsátéaa	asibide
9 stomach	musu	afúru/yafuna	dome
10 thigh [leg]	shwuɔ	sere	ata
11 bread	blodo/bodobodo	paanoo	abolo
12 water	nu	nsu	etsi
13 fish	loo	adwén	akpa
14 egg	wɔlɔ	kosuá	azi
15 maize	abele	aboro	bli
16 millet	ŋmaa	kɔkɔté/atoko	*fo*
17 house [room]	tsu	ɔdàn	xo-me
18 spoon	awale	ateré	gatsi
19 pipe	bɛlɛ	abuá	atamazi
20 knife	kakla	ɔsékán	xɛ
21 fire	la	ogyá	dzo
22 wood [fire-wood]	lai	enyena/egya	ati
23 European	Blɔfonyo	Obũroni	Yevu-de
24 Black	Mɔdiŋ	Onipatuntun	Ameyib
25 iron	dade	dade	ega
26 sword	klante/dukpe/tsi	afẽnã	adekpui
27 plantain	amadaa	ɔbórɔdé	abladzo
28 banana	akwadu	kwadú	akɔḍu
29 musket	tu	otúo	tu

30 Come here immediately!
Ga: Ba bianɛɛ!
Twi: Bra ha seesei ntem!
Ewe: Va afii fifia! [lit. 'Do it quickly!']

31 How much does this cost?
Ga: O nine, ɛnyɛ ohe?
Twi: Wade, oto ne sen?
Ewe: Nu-o ke nene afle fio?

The nourishment of the Blacks comes partly from the plant kingdom and partly from the animal kingdom. The Coast Blacks cultivate Indian corn in abundance. The women grind it on an inclined stone with another stone fashioned into a roller, just as our painters do colours. They dampen the corn continuously with water and rub it until a fine dough is formed. They then let it ferment through the night and bake it the next morning in a large reclining pot (*Bojang*) which has been coated with clay.[27] The bread made of this dough tastes just like our rye bread. Using another method, they take a spoonful of the soft dough, drop it into a pan of boiling palm oil, and let it fry there into a cake known here as an 'oil cake'. || p. 205 || Still another method involves wrapping the dough in the husks of ears of Indian corn and then cooking it in a pot of water, like a pudding. This is called *kummy* by the Blacks and *kankis* by the Europeans. This *kummy* is their original type of bread. Baking is something they first learned from the Europeans, since one never finds a baking oven in the places where no European has stayed. From coarsely ground Indian corn they make a kind of stiff porridge called *gigi*, which, together with *kummy*, forms the daily staple meals of every Coast Black. They also make a gruel called *flatta* made from finely ground corn. This must stand to sour for 24 hours and is healthy nourishment.[28]

They have various vegetables, such as the leaves of the edible hibiscus,[k] corchorus,[l] and cleome.[m] Out of this they make a kind of stew which can be pulled in ell-long, slimy strings out of the bowl, like bird-glue. It does not have the most inviting appearance. Apart from these they have yams, plantains, and bananas, and || p. 206 || especially cassavas,[n] which thrive in the sandy, open areas. The Blacks prefer to eat these cassavas after they have been roasted in a fire, like chestnuts. Small millie, called *mah* in the Blacks' language, is grown here as well, but not as extensively as

[k] *Hibiscus esculentus Linn.*[Okra. See Dalziel 1955: 128–9; Willis 1973: 558.]

[l] *Corchorus olitorium Linn.*[The species name should read *olitorius*. Jews' Mallow, Nalta Jute. See Dalziel 1955: 96; Willis 1973: 209.]

[m] *Cleome pentaphylla Linn.* [Now known as *Gynandropsis pentaphylla D.C.*, and called 'cat's whiskers' in the West Indies. (A. A. Enti, personal communication). See also Dalziel 1955: 21–2; Heywood 1982: 100.]

[n] *Jateopha Mannihot Linn.*[The name should read *Jatropha*. This is cassava but there is a confusion of names. Cassava has a tuberous root, so this plant is *Manihot utilissima. Jatropha*, of the same family *Euphiciacaea*, has no tuberous root stock (A. A. Enti, personal communication). See also Dalziel 1955: 150–4.]

[27] For the corn-grinding and fermenting processes, see Müller in Jones 1983: 208 and n. 292. The same methods are in use today.

[28] With very few changes these recipes are in use today. See Dede 1969: 13, 21 *kenkey*; 49 *komi*; 30 'oil' dough cakes' 17 *gigi*, or *dzidzi*.

Guinea corn.[o] It is used as much for making bread as for brewing beer. There is a great variety of fruits which are eaten raw, the most usual ones being bananas,[p] pawpaws,[q] pineapples,[r] and limes.[s]

Like most of the inhabitants of the coast, the Akras fish in the sea as well as in the lagoon. They catch great quantities of fish which they consume both fresh and sun-dried. The most common fish of all is the herring, and there are days when 40 fresh herrings can be purchased for one *stuber*. In July and August, a large type of migratory fish, called *sinkesu*,[t] comes || p. 207 || here in great numbers. The catches are so large that the canoes often come back so laden that they can scarcely stay afloat. These fish are dried and sold, at a good price, to the people living further inland. A large variety of tame and wild animals found here are used by the Blacks for food. Of the domestic sorts there are pigs, sheep, goats, oxen, chickens, Guinea fowl, turkeys and Turkish ducks. Of wild game there are various species of hart, roe, antelope, wild boar,[u] hare (the kind here, however, being only half the size of the European kind), buffalo, elephant, *etc.*, as well as wild duck[x] and other edible birds of which the lagoons are full. There are also patridges[y] and quail,[z] but these do not have the agreeable flavour of the European varieties.

[o] *Holcus bicolor*. ['Small millie' is probably millet. For a discussion of the kinds of millet grown in pre-colonial West Africa, and the confusion of terms, see Lewicki 1974: 24–32. See also, Dalziel 1955: 538–40; Chittenden 1977: 1989; Heywood 1982: 309.]

[p] *Musa sapientum Linn.* [Cf. Dalziel 1955: 468; Willis 1973: 767.]

[q] *Carica papaya Linn.* [See Dalziel 1955: 52–3; Willis 1973: 204.]

[r] Bromelia ananas Linn. [See Dalziel 1955: 467; Willis 1973: 164.]

[s] *Citrus medica Linn.* [Now known as *Citrus aurantifolia Swingle*. this is the sour lime, common in southern Ghana. See also Willis 1973: 257.]

[t] *Scomberis species*. [*Sinkesu* is allegedly a corruption of *cinq sous*. According to a Danish source written in the early eighteenth century a Frenchman had pointed to a fish for which he offered to pay *cinq sous*, five *sous*. The Gã fisherman assumed that that was the foreigner's name for the fish, adopted it accordingly, and it became the 'local' name from then on (Rask 1754: 7). To the best of my knowledge the term appears only in the Danish sources of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I am told that there is no fish called *sinkesu* in Ghana, but that the red sea bream called *sikásika*, 'golden gold' is caught in great numbers in August (Mary Esther Dakubu, personal communication). I suggest that a Dane, hearing '*sikásika*', reproduced it as '*cinq sous*', either unwittingly or as a jest, and fabricated the above tale to buttress the assertion. Isert's identification of the fish is probably incorrect. The *sikásika* is of the family *Sparidaw*, breams, porgies, and not of *Scombridae*, mackerels, tunas (Cooper 1972: 110–11, 134–5). See also Cadenat and Paraiso 1951: 25–6.

[u] *Sus Barbirussa Linn.* [*Sus scrofa*.]

[x] Including especially the *Anas viduata Linn.* [For descriptions of African ducks, see Serle and Morel 1977: 30–4.]

[y] *Perdix senegalis Brissonii*. [The reference is probably to francolins (Serle and Morel 1977: 55–6).]

[z] *Tetrao sp. nov.* [For African Quails, see *ibid.* 57.]

Fish are either fried in palm oil with Spanish peppers,[aa] or cooked in a ragout, with slices of the unripe fruit of the hibiscus and fish which has been dried a little beforehand and is half rotten. Some palm oil and good || p. 208 || Spanish pepper is added to this. Such a dish is held in high esteem by the Blacks as well as by the Old Coasters. It is called *flau flau* [*flfl*], and it presents the newly-arrived European with such a revolting appearance and odour that these alone are sufficient to cause nausea. As well as fish, they have great quantities of crabs. The Blacks take the meat of these crabs, chop it up and mix it with other meat and spices — either paradise corn, called *malaguette*[bb] here, or another species of black pepper which is brought from the mountains — then fill the shell with the mixture and roast it. This produces a very pleasant dish called *kot inkim*. Another dish, called *inkim*, is prepared when they slaughter a sheep or a goat. They take a pot into which they have put some handfuls of salt and Spanish pepper, and catch the blood of the slaughtered animal in it. The blood is stirred vigorously as it runs in, until it is clotted. They then smoke it briefly over the fire and the dish is finished.[29]

The Blacks refuse to eat lettuce. When they are asked the reason || p. 209 || for this they answer that they do not eat grass as animals do. They vary their diet very little. What tastes good to them one day is good every day. They have a hot meal twice a day, in the morning at ten o'clock and in the evening at seven o'clock, and they drink either water or beer with it. Here in Akra a couple of oilcakes are also eaten in the morning.

Their beer, called *pito* here (*madah* in the Blacks' language) is brewed from ordinary corn, or maize, or from Indian corn. First the corn is made into a malt, then the procedure is the same as it is in Europe, except that no hops are used here. This beer is pleasant enough, and resembles our half-beer when it is three days old; but it has the disadvantage that it ferments quickly and cannot be kept in a closed bottle. The Adas and Popos are particularly renowned as brewers of good beer.[30]

In matters of religion the Akras, like all the Blacks on the Gold Coast, are given to idolatry. They recognise a Supreme Being who has created the world and everything in it, to whom they have given the name *Numbo*.

[aa] *Capsicum baccatum Linn.* [Spanish pepper, Chilli. See Dalziel 1955: 185, 428; Chittenden 1977: 386–7.]

[bb] *Ammomum Grana Paradisi Linn.* [Grains of paradise, *Aframomum melegueta*. See Dalziel 1955: 470.]

[29] For '*kot inkim*' [*kotokyim*], see Dede 1969: 42. For a modern version of *inkim* [*kyim*] which includes meat, see *ibid*: 39.

[30] For *pito*, see De Marees 1602/1987: 21b, 42b, 57b; Hemmersam in Jones 1983: 111 and n.55; Bowdich 1819: 319; Monrad 1822: 241. This drink was not fermented (Müller in Jones 1983: 210–11; Rømer 1760; 336).

But they believe that this exalted ||p. 210|| Being is too eminent to be concerned with the activities of people.[31] For this reason there have been established a multitude of sub-godheads who are concerned with human dealings and activity. This is what is known by that very famous word in Guinean history; 'fetish'. The Blacks always turn to the fetish with their prayers and their sacrifices, since they are of the opinion that it can perform good as well as evil deeds. All the temples and manifold idols are directed fundamentally to the glory of the fetish, whether it be a bird, a snake, a stone, a tree or whatever, and all are rendered divine homage, as it were. Occasionally the reason for the choice of fetish can be traced to a specific occurrence. For instance, it is reported that, in Fida, the snake now worshipped once killed a poisonous snake at the very moment in which the latter was about to bite a person. This circumstance made the Blacks notice it, and when they found that it was a totally harmless animal which had, nonetheless, rescued them from their arch-fiend, the poisonous snake, they concluded that this was the fetish, or, in other words, 'in this snake lives the guardian angel and we must do everything to honour him'.[32] This and similar reasons have ||p. 211|| provided the basis for their worship of idols, which has spread very widely through the industry of the fetish priests — who always get their share.[33]

When anyone wants to make a sacrifice to the fetish he always enlists the services of the priest. If, for instance, a person is ill, the fetish is asked if he will get well again. If the fetish answers 'Yes', the petitioner must sacrifice a sheep, a hen, an egg, *etc*. These sacrifices are thrown down at the crossroads, where quantities of them can be seen. The hen is often given as a sacrifice while still alive. That is, a pole is driven into the earth and the hen is bound to it until it either dies or is taken by a wild animal.[cc]

[cc] The *Canis Carcharias L. Krang*, called the Bush Dog by the Blacks, gets its meals most commonly in this way. It is counted among the godheads of the Akra Blacks, who would never venture to shoot it, though it seizes so many children and sheep. At Ningo a temple is dedicated to it where it is provided with edibles every evening. These greedy animals seem to know this and come to fetch the food. They are as large as the European wolf, with which they have a great deal in common in their behaviour. They are so brazen that they often lie on the steps of the Fort at night and howl. If these bush dogs have nothing better to eat they go hunting for crabs in this way: when the breakers roll back, leaving the beach covered with crabs, the bush dogs cut off their retreat to the sea. They have often seized adults, not killing them right away but dragging them off into hiding. All those victims that I have seen have had their faces taken into the mouth of the animal, been thrown over onto their backs and dragged away. [There appears to be some confusion among the early writers about this animal/these animals. It is probable that reference is to two different animals: (1) the African Hunting Dog, (*Lycaon pictus*) and (2) the hyena (*Crocuta Crocuta*). Cf. *Mammals of the World* 1964: 1167, 1265. It is the Lycaon which is of the family *Canidae*. The hyena, however, belongs to the family *Feloideaor* the cat-like carnivores. Isert's term *Canis carcharias* (meaning shark-toothed dog) is not found in modern literature. (I am indebted to J. A. Pedersen for this information.) For the hyena as a sacred animal, see Rømer 1760: 339–40; Bowdich 1819: 265; Monrad 1822: 32; Field 1937: 39, 73, 77–8, 86; Sprigge 1969: 110–11. One source, in contrast to the others, states that the hyena is fair game when alive, but revered when dead (Rask 1754: 202).]

At times the petitioners ||p. 212|| get off more easily by being ordered only to hammer together a few small sticks at the crossroads, or to bring vegetables or bread, *etc*., to that spot. If you try to point out to the Blacks that it is a totally useless practice for them to throw down such things at a place where they can see for themselves that the fetish does not take them, they answer, coldly, that that is none of their concern. They have given the fetish the sacrifice and if he so desires, he can take it.

The Blacks have no other holiday than their New Year, which comes in August and lasts eight days.[34] During this time they are in a near frenzy of enjoyment, dancing, singing, drinking and shooting — the only amusement they know. Apart from this, every man celebrates the day of the week on which he was born. On this day he decorates himself more than ||p. 213|| usual, painting himself with white colour, and if he has a white cloth he must wear this prized possession.[35]

Another religious ceremony is to 'eat fetish'. Like most of their religious ceremonies, this varies between different areas. I shall give you an example from the Labodi [Labadi] fetish, which is considered to be the most powerful here, and anyone who acts contrary to its orders is sure to die from it (say the priests).[36]

Thus, when a treaty of any importance is to be made, as, for example, during a time of war when an armistice is to be declared or an alliance between two nations formed, the most prominent men of both nations must swear in the presence of all the people, or 'eat fetish'. Everyone gathers at a place chosen for this ceremony. The person officiating makes a speech to the people gathered there, explaining the reason for the

[31] For *Numbo/Nyoŋmɔ*, see Reindorf 1895: 270; Monrad 1822: 1–4. This could refer to a rain god since a Supreme Being, in the European sense, has no important rôle in Gã worship (Field 1937: 61–3). The description of *Numbo's* aloofness is comparable to that of the neigbouring Akans' *Onyame*, 'a typical West African "withdrawn" god' (McLeod 1981: 57).

[32] For snake worship, see Seventh Letter [38].

[33] Descriptions of and comments on the activities of fetish priests were virtually universal in the early sources (De Marees 1602/1987: 33a–33b; Hemmersam in Jones 1983: 118–20; Müller ibid. 161–2, 182–3; Bosman 1705: 147–8; Barbot 1978: 334–5; Rask 1754: 86; Thonning 1801: 31–3; Monrad 1822: 2). A modern source claims that 'fetish' is not a component of Gã worship and that their priests are not fetish priests (Field 1937: 4).

[34] The 'New Year, is undoubtedly *Hɔmɔwɔ* Cf. Monrad 1822: 40; Daniell 1856: 29–32; Quartey-Papafio 1920: 126–34, 227–32; Field 1937: 6, 66, 88–9; Opoku 1970: 52–6.

[35] The signifance of the colour white is treated in the Third Letter [12].

[36] The Labadi fetish appears to enjoy a pre-eminence that has been remarked upon for nearly 200 years (Rømer 1760: 58 f.' Monrad 1822: 40; Field 1937: 39 f.).

convention. Finally, he urges them to reflect carefully on what they are doing, and when a decision has been reached the Chief Priest of the fetish rises and calls the lesser priest to have the fetish come to them. Before this the Chief Priest has spread smoke around in a circle, using a kind of torch of grass straws bound together.[37] When the lesser priest ||p. 214|| has arrived with the fetish, — which, it is said, is in the form of a human head made of solid gold — neatly wrapped in a red cloth and lying in a large tub carried on the priest's head, the Chief Priest acts as if he is possessed. He stands staring unblinkingly at the fetish as it approaches him, howls and wails, distorts all his limbs and speaks unceasingly to the fetish. It is alleged that the fetish answers him but the ears of the profane cannot hear this. The Chief Priest asks humbly for forgiveness for having disturbed the fetish in his residence, the temple.[38]

Finally, after much gesticulating, the priest tremblingly takes the tub from the head of the lesser priest, puts it on the ground, and makes a large circle of sanctified ashes around it. The participants who are going to 'eat fetish' step into the circle, one after the other, having first been thoroughly fumigated by the Chief Priest with his torch. They walk around the tub three times, while murmuring some unintelligible words, during which time the entire congregation wails in a most unpleasant tone, which is modulated by opening and closing their mouths with one hand. After this, the Chief Priest steps ||p. 215|| into the circle again, takes a bottle of brandy, pours some of it on the fetish in the tub, saying some unintelligible words as he does this, and then gives the participants a little from the bottle. Following this he takes two smooth, round stones from the tub and touches the arms, breasts, loins and feet of the candidates in a special manner. I cannot interpet this last part of the ceremony otherwise than in the following way: if the participant does not keep the oath to which he has now eaten fetish, his arms and legs will be broken.[39]

We Europeans are ourselves often obliged to swear an oath this way to the Blacks, since they are then somewhat more obliged to fulfil their pledge. It would be desirable if the act of swearing an oath was considered binding, then we would not be exposed to as much strife as we often are. But it is the case here just as it is with most contracts in Europe — oaths last as long as they are to the Europeans' own advantage, and when that ends they change their minds, just as the Blacks do here.

[37] For the Chief Priest, see Field 1937: 40; *idem* 1940: 202 n.2.

[38] Isert's source regarding the head made of gold may have been Rømer (1760: 91).

[39] On the general practice of 'eating' or 'drinking' fetish, see De Marees 1602/1987: 10b, 55a-b; Müller in Jones 1983: 174–6; Barbot 1732: 313; Rask 1754: 182; Rømer 1760: 92; Monrad 1822: 35–7; Reindorf 1895: 124. On treaties and their duration, see Smith 1973: 611–2.

The Blacks practise circumcision. There is no particular time stipulated when they must be circumcised, but normally it happens between the sixth and ||p. 216|| the tenth years. It is done without any ceremony, by a priest or any other Black who knows how. The foreskin is cut off in one stroke. The boy is then given an apron made either of a mat which has been ludicrously stuck through with blood-stained feathers here and there, or of a deerskin striped with blood. The apron is hung from his neck and he has to wear it for an entire month, without any other covering at all.[40] During this time he is an object of sympathy. Should a woman be walking along the street selling cakes or fruits and come upon such a newly circumcised boy, she does not hesitate to offer him some of her wares free of charge. The reason for the Blacks' circumcision is very unclear and seems to have more an economic than a religious basis, since there is not the slightest mention either of sacrifice or of a fetish, which must precede all other activities of importance.[dd]

||p. 217|| When a child is fourteen days old a feast is held in order to give him a name. A number of persons of both sexes gather in the courtyard of the house and seat themselves, as usual, in a circle. The child is then laid naked on the ground in the middle of the circle, and a priestess, or even a priest, albeit more rarely, then jumps over the child both forwards and backwards, while repeatedly calling out the name the child is to have. Normally they have two names: the one taken from the day on which they were born, and the other given by the family. They never have the father's family name, but each has his own name. Nor is the wife ever called by her husband's name, instead she uses her own name.[41]

The fetish priests are great swindlers, keeping their people in ignorance,

[dd] It is incorrect, as some travel writers maintain, that the weaker sex are also circumcised. At least it cannot apply to Akra. [Cf. DeMarees 1602/1987: 11b–12a; Müller in Jones 1983: 218. A later source takes issue with Isert, stating that women in the neighbouring Ningo underwent an 'incision' (Monrad 1822: 58). A medical doctor later in the nineteenth century categorically contradicted this claim as applied to the Gã but remarked that some Adangbe women performed *nymphae elongatio artificialis*, i.e. artificial elongation of the *labia minora* (Daniell 1856: 11). For male circumcision, the ages at which it was and still is performed, and for treatment afterward, see Müller in Jones 1983: 218; Barbot 1732: 244; Rask 1754: 134; Daniell 1856: 10–11; Field 1937: 176. One early source makes the enigmatic claim that 'those who become *Remidorer* (fishermen) are not circumcised' (Rømer 1760: 88–9). The Gã name of the ceremony is *hiianii*, 'men's things', and its purpose, *efee nuu*, 'he is made a man' (Kilson 1974: 49).]

[40] The antelope skin may have had ritual significance, as it does today among the Krobo (Huber 1963: 169 n.).

[41] For descriptions of the naming ceremony, *kpodziemo*, and the process of choosing names, see Barbot 1732: 244; Monrad 1822: 52, 53; Daniell 1856: 8–10; Huber 1963: 147 f.; Field 1937: 171–3; Azu 1974: 36–40; Kilson 1974: 49.

to the level of fanaticism. They perpetually busy themselves fabricating amulets in all shapes, intended for use against all manner of dangers and illnesses. These amulets are sold to the people only upon payment. Sometimes the amulets are pieces of leather with nine cowries, or 'snake skulls', either glued to each one or strung on. These are hung ||p. 218|| around the neck by a thick band covered with fetish colour.[42] Another type of amulet, intended for prominent people, is a very small species of gourd in the shape of a phial. The seeds are removed without the shell being broken, and the gourd is filled with all manner of things like burnt bones, feathers and the like. The number of these amulets is great, since each Black wears a variety, no two of which may be alike.[43]

They have a vague notion regarding resurrection. They believe that, after death, a person simply moves over to another world in which he will be installed in the same position as he held here. This belief results in the barbaric custom that, when a king or other prominent man dies, a number of his wives and slaves are executed and buried with him, so that he will immediately have their services in the other world. The Blacks have no concept of hell.[44]

They set great store by a worthy funeral. To this end, the first concern of a young man is to make the so-called 'man's custom'. This involves his building a small house formed like a pigsty, after which he invites friends who are the same age as he is, and he feasts them. When this finishes, he is stuffed through the small opening into the house with much ||p. 219|| clowning, and there he has to stay the night.[45] Thereafter, when he dies, these friends will be obliged to fire muskets over his grave, which would otherwise not be done.

Every single Black is buried in the room in his house where he died. At the moment of his death and for a good hour afterwards, his closest relatives hold him in a sitting position, meanwhile calling out his name with all their might, offering him food and drink, and unceasingly pleading with him to stay with them. But since he does not heed them and remains dead, they prepare themselves for his burial, which will take place the

[42] For 'fetish colour', see Reindorf 1895: 126.

[43] For details of fetish priests' practice, see De Marees 1602/1987: 33 b ff.; Bosman 1705: 150–2, 156–8; Barbot 1732: 316; Rømer 1760: 60–2; Bjørn 1788: 200; Monrad 1822: 31, 32, 34, 40; Jenkins and Geary 1985: 58. Isert's closest personal contact would have been with the people of Osu and Labadi. The present-day practices of the individual towns of the Gã are listed separately in Field 1937: 6–8, 64–72, 41–2.

[44] On ideas concerning life after death, see De Marees 1602/1987: 36b; Müller in Jones 1983: 179; Bosman 1705: 156; Barbot 1732: 307; Rask 1754: 149, 189; Rømer 1760: 104; Field 1937: 197; Parrinder 1951: 115–7.

[45] For male initiation among the Gã, see Rømer 1760: 235–6; Monrad 1822: 55–6; Field 1937: 191–5.

same day if he has died in the morning, otherwise they wait until the next day. The deceased is swathed in his white cloth and tied to a board. Prominent people have a kind of coffin made for their dead and bury them to the singing and wailing of the family, as well as that of women hired for this service. In the case of prominent people all this lasts for eight days. On each of these days all the young men assemble, attired in military habit, and they fire muskets for half the day, during which time they are given refreshment provided collectively by the family. ||p. 220|| If it is a kabossie who has died, gifts come from the surrounding towns in order to make the funeral as impressive as possible. While the ceremony continues all kinds of excesses are allowed with impunity. No one permits his sheep or other livestock to run loose lest they be killed and the meat claimed in order to be used for the common good. The closest relatives use a kind of mourning attire, that is they wear a dark blue sash around their waists, and put aside all ornaments of gold and all beads.[46]

The Akras were once a mighty nation who had their own king until they were defeated by the Aquamboes in the preceding century. Their king and a great number of Blacks were forced to flee across Rio Volta and as far as Popo, where they settled. Subsequently they founded the kingdom of Popo, of which I have given you a detailed description earlier. Akra is now a republic in which the kabossies and their grandees together exercise the supreme power in the town. The settlement called Ursu [Osu], which lies beneath Christiansburg, is at present under the kabossie Naku.[47]

||p. 221|| The Blacks have their own law of the land, and here in Akra it is executed by the kabossies and the grandees. Since crime is committed only rarely, the code of law does not have to be as extensive as ours. Most of the cases occur as a result of debt or adultery, and, at times, though rarely, robbery. Murder hardly ever occurs here. If a Black owes another a certain sum which is to be repaid within a certain time and he fails to pay, the creditor lets the debt continue for the same length of time. After this the creditor demands no less than one hundred per-cent interest. If the debtor still does not pay, the capital plus the interest doubles again, and so on. When the creditor sees that by himself he

[46] For funeral customs among the Gã and their neighbours, see De Marees 1602/1987: 90a–93a; Müller in Jones 1983: 257–8; Bosman 1705: 227–30; Barbot 1732: 281–285; Rask 1754: 189–90; Rømer 1760: 243–5; Monrad 1822; 10–26; Daniell 1856: 16–20; Field 1937: 196–205; Adjei 1943: 84–98; Huber 1963: 192f.; Azu 1974: 48–51; Kilson 1974: 50, 61, 63. Isert's final sentence indicates that dark blue was the colour of mourning for the Gã. This was also true of the Ewe (Ellis 190: 160) and of the Krobo (Huber 1963: 211).

[47] Naku was an ally of the Danes and fought on their side in the Sagbadre War. See Third Letter [3]. For the government of the Gã, see Reindorf 1895: 113–8.

cannot recover the debt, he brings a suit before the elders, and, if this does not bring rapid results, without asking he seizes as many members of the debtor's family as are required for their market value to cover the debt. He then informs the debtor that he has *pingaret* (seized) them and that the debt must be paid within a few days, || p. 222 || or else his family, or the captives, will be sold. Indeed, if the creditor lives in another town and people from the debtor's town come there, he takes them also, as compensation, whether they be relatives or acquaintances of the debtor or not. Such minor cases not infrequently give cause for serious wars between whole nations.[48]

Adultery is punished more severely here than robbery. When an ordinary Black is caught with the wife of another, the latter has the right to sell him, or the guilty man can redeem himself by paying money amounting to his own value [as a slave]. But if the wife was that of a grandee or nobleman, he must pay the value of three slaves. If it was one of the king's wives, the culprit is executed and his family sold. The king and the elders often deliberately possess so many wives as a form of commercial enterprise, with the intention of profiting by adultery. Should the women see a personal advantage in becoming informers themselves, they do not hesitate to make known all the details of their affair. For this reason most of the Blacks first 'eat fetish' with the woman with whom they plan to have a || p. 223 || *jouer d'amour caché* before allowing themselves to become more deeply involved with her.[49] This prudence normally has the desired effect — the woman, for her part, denies everything and remains silent, but in return she demands a much greater show of devotion on the part of her lover.[50]

The jealousy of husbands in this country goes to such extremes that if a man is discovered sitting on the same mat as another man's wife, he is certainly liable to punishment. As restricted as is the life of women, equally unrestricted is the freedom allowed to girls. It is no disgrace,

[48] *Pingaret* is panyarring, that is, enslaving a pawn. The term was derived from the Portuguese *penhór*, a pawn, pledge, surety, and the verb *penhóràr*, to distrain. See, Brun in Jones 1983: 88–9 and n.259; Bosman 1705: 178–9; Rask 1754: 192–3; Rømer 1760: 297f.; Bowdich 1819: 257; Monrad 1822: 41).

[49] '*Jouer d'amour caché*', in this sentence, should read '*un jeu d'amour caché*, a secret love affair.

[50] For descriptions of adultery as a cause for punishment and a source of profit among the Gã and other peoples on the Gold Coast, see De Marees 1602/1987: 10a-b, 35a, 49b, 51b–52a; Brun in Jones 1983: 89; Müller ibid.: 157, 174–5, 189–90; Bosman 1705: 200–05; Barbot 1732; 300; Rømer 1760: 130–1; Bowdich 1819: 257; Monrad 1822: 59–61; Daniell 1856: 13–4; Rattray 1932: 50, 131, 154; Field 1940: 40–3; Huber 1963: 112–14; Azu 1974: 27–8.

either for the girl or for the beau of an unmarried, unbetrothed woman to be caught in Cupid's business. On the contrary, the girls are encouraged in this practice.

Robbery, I may say, was very rare, or was hardly ever known to occur among the Blacks in earlier days, before the arrival of the Europeans. Before that time the Blacks' needs were few, and they had a surplus of the things they needed, so they felt no necessity to steal. Things are now changed. The Europeans have introduced them to a number of luxury articles || p. 224 || for which they have acquired a taste, and, like all things that excite vanity, these articles please the person, who can then no longer do without them. The resources to obtain these necessities begin to dwindle — well then! — they resort to robbery. And since they cannot buy anything from the Europeans except by selling people, they take their brothers and confederates wherever they can seize them. This kind of robbery often results in fights, and people on both sides are killed. Thus robbery leads to murder, which was practically unknown here before this time. Adultery, indeed all the crimes with which the Black is now tainted and whose punishment always concludes with the sale of the sinner, are, so to speak, encouraged. It is then the enlightened nations, the Europeans, the Christians, who instruct the Black in sin![51]

As regards labour, the Blacks divide themselves conveniently into three main classes. One class cultivates the land, the second class is that of the hunters, and the third that of the fishermen. This division is maintained successively from father to son.[52]

All cultivation of the land is done by individuals using a hoe, and the people || p. 225 || do not know how to use oxen in their work. But if they did, how much more richly their efforts would be rewarded because they could then harvest over a thousandfold more! The Akras chiefly cultivate maize, which grows best on their land, leaving the cultivation of plantains and bananas to the Mountain Blacks. Everything is planted in the same way as we plant vegetables.[53]

[51] Isert is confirming his commitment to the concept of the 'noble savage' corrupted by civilization. He shared the attitude prevalent among many eighteenth century travellers writing for home consumption. See Fairchild 1961: 97–139; Curtin 1973: 49–51, 226. For comments on robbery and murder in early sources, see De Marees 1602/1987: 53b–55a; Dapper 1670: 464, 465; Müller in Jones 1983: 157–8, 190; Bosman 1705: 167–72; Barbot 1732: 301, 303; Rask 1754: 192; Bowdich 1819: 258; Monrad 1822: 6.

[52] For professions taught by fathers to sons, see Bosman 1705: 123; Barbot 1732: 261a; Rask 1754: 184.

[53] The method of planting referred to here is dibbling. It is remarkable that Isert makes no mention of the slash-and-burn practice noted by De Marees 1602/1987: 56a; Brun in Jones 1983: 84–5; Müller ibid.: 220–2; Rask 1754: 185–7.

The hunters here also have a rich harvest. If the trackless forest did not make their profession so difficult to follow, they would have a very comfortable life here, since there is a great deal of game, comprising birds as well as four-footed animals. Two kinds of hart and a deer-like animal are the most common game animals found here. Guinea fowl and ducks are found in abundance. As for the smaller birds, like the snipe, the partridge and others of that sort, the Black does not consider them worth the cost of the shot, unless he knows that he can sell them to the Europeans for a high price.

Fish are also found in the greatest abundance, both in the lagoon and in the sea. They are caught with nets and hooks. The larger fish, that is, the *sinkesu*, the shark, the dolphin, and the dorado, are caught with hooks || p. 226 || using herring as bait. There are caught a quarter of a mile from the shore, and when this has been done, the fishermen paddle up to three miles out to sea in their canoes, on which they also sometimes set a sail made of a mat. They do not return before the evening.

All other occupations, such as weaving, trading of slaves, cultivation of crops, etc., are carried out by each head of a household independently at his own home, or else, at least, he orders his children or his slaves to perform these tasks.

Household work is the responsibility of the women alone. Sometimes they take part in the tasks of the men, such as cultivation or planting, but this is not common, and it is a fabrication to say that the Black women support the men completely. Because foodstuffs are obtained here with so little effort, and because the preparation of these is always the same, it follows that the occupations of the women are far more numerous than those of the men.

Since the Blacks live in such an enchantingly delightful climate, it is no wonder that they have a taste for amusement. Their games are as numerous as they are inventive, and they spend most of their time in such enjoyment, || p. 227 || the work necessary to support their existence requiring so little time.

Each sex dances by itself in the public area. They often enact allegorical-pantomime ballets which are not without taste. During the time that the husbands of the Akra women were at war with the Augnas, the women here daily 'danced fetish' (as they say). They acted out the battle by fencing with wooden swords, by sitting in the canoes which were on the beach and pretending to paddle, throwing some individuals into the sea, taking trowels and building a wall, and so on. Pure allegory. The paddling in the sand meant that our soldiers crossed Rio Volta, to fight the Augna and drown them. On the other hand, the brick-laying meant the building of Fort Kongenstein. When they dance they perform a

tremendous number of leaps. In so doing they move every muscle of their bodies to a rhythm which is often beaten only on a small drum.[54]

The most harmful, but at the same time the most common of the games is the 'cowrie game'. It is usually played by two people. They throw three cowries into the air, as we do dice, || p. 228 || and when all three belonging to one player land with the slit down, he has won the stake. It has happened, for instance, that a player has first lost his entire property and then has staked his own body on the game. If his opponent is lucky enough to win him, he allows himself to be taken without further ado to the slave-trader to be sold.

They have a number of other games to while away the time. One of these is made of a long piece of wood which has 14 two-inch deep holes, placed in pairs. Into these they distribute a certain number of stones or nuts. The player, by switching the pieces in the holes, wins or loses according to rules which resemble our game of draughts.[55] Another game requires the use of a two-foot square mat on which one player places a seed, or a large bean,[ee] and the other player flips his own seed or bean towards the first one. If he knocks it off the mat, the other player has lost. It would be too tedious to describe all the kinds of games and their variations.

I have already told you about their musical instruments when discussing the wars. || p. 229 || They have still other instruments which are used partly to pass the time, partly for accompaniment to dancing. A whole orchestra of different instruments which are not used in war is called a *kittenspiel*. It is expected of a kabossie or grandee that he support a band of such musicians. The ensemble consists of between four to six flutes, a kettle drum, several bells and a few triangles.[56] The flute is like our German flute in diameter, but is more than one and one-half ells long, and has

[ee] *Dolichos lignosus Linn.* [Australian Pea. See Dalziel 1955: 240; Chittendon 1977: 702).]

[54] Since this was called 'dancing fetish' there was undoubtedly ritual significance to this type of pantomime/dance. Also performed among the Akan, it was called *mmomomé*, 'to dance and pray for prosperity' (Christaller 1933: 319). See Brun in Jones 1983: 92; Opoku 1978: 44–7.

[55] Isert has described two different games here. The game played on the long board is *wari* and is not the same as *Damespiel* [draughts] (Rattray 1927: 383 f.). A term in modern Twi, *damedame*, refers to a game which resembles European draughts (Rattray 1927: 273 and fig. 183).

[56] '*Kittenspiel*' is the *kete* ensemble, see Rømer 1760: 241; Rattray 1927: 143, 193, 196, 199, 201, 281, 282; Nketia 1963: 128–33, 149, 182; Kyerematen 1964: 57, 61; Wachsman in Baines 1961: 49–50.

only four finger holes, or notes.[57] It is blown from the top, like ours, and produces a similar tone. The kettle drum is similar to our tympani. It is made of a very large calabash or pumpkin shell, over which a sheepskin has been stretched. Only one drum is used by each player, who hangs it from his neck and strikes it with the flat of his hand. Around his wrist the player has fastened several small iron rings, and these make a jingling sound at each beat. The triangle is made of iron and is without a base. The player holds it by the ribbon in his left hand and using a rod of the same material, strikes ||p. 230|| it in accompaniment to the kettle drum.[58]

With all these instruments they make passably tolerable music which is similar to our janissary music. When they have their complete orchestra playing, the prominent men usually dance through the settlement, stopping in front of the doors of their friends, where they are splendidly treated with brandy, beer, palm wine and other things. This happens more frequently during the moon-lit nights. To perform this kind of dance is known as *bringar*, or they say, 'Such-and-such a grandee is *bringar*-ing.'[59]

Apart from these instruments they have several small ones played by only one person, for their own enjoyment, among whom there are often virtuosi who devote themselves completely to the instrument. The most famous of these instruments is called their 'violin'. It is made of a small box some three inches wide and six inches long, whose sides are sewn together and whose upper side is covered with sheepskin. Through the middle of the box, along the complete length, a stick one and one-half feet in length and of a thumb's thickness, has been placed in an inclined position. Eight strings are attached to the extended point ||p. 231|| in such a manner that they are about one inch apart and, crossing over the leather of the box, they are fastened to the other end of the stick. In the middle of the leather there is a bridge to tighten the strings. The strings themselves are made of the runners of a willow-like plant.[ff] When the Black plays the violin he places the box against his chest, holds the stick in one hand, and plays with his fingers, as we play the harp. It is said that various virtuosi have brought misfortune upon themselves when they have placed themselves under the windows of the grandees at night and satirised them with their playing. This is done when the tones of the

[ff] *Cuscuta americana Linn.* [I have been unable to identify this particular species.]

[57] Four playing holes on the flute do not limit it to a range of four notes. Overblowing and different combinations of fingering increase the number of notes possible.

[58] Curiously, Isert uses the word *Dreifuss* [tripod] for *Drieck* [triangle].

[59] *Bringar* is from the Portuguese *brincár*, 'to jest, sport, or play'.

strings express their names and their deeds in a manner intelligible to others. The players are often detected and must migrate to West India as slaves.[gg]

The Blacks spend most of the day smoking tobacco, for which ||p. 232|| both sexes have a great fondness. I have not been able to find out if this habit is native to the Black or if he first learned it from the Europeans. It is said that tobacco grows wild further up in the country, but the Blacks are not fond of it. Instead they would rather have the Brazilian variety which is brought here by the Portuguese in great quantities. At times, however, when the ships are delayed, it can be very expensive, so that one roll (60 to 80 pounds) costs 40 *thalers*. The Blacks pay this willingly rather than use their own poor variety of tobacco. As with other articles of luxury, very likely the Portuguese at first made the Blacks a gift of it, since the word 'tobacco' [Portuguese **tabaco**] has been retained in all the Black tongues I know, except for the accent, in the form *taba*.[60]

Between times, when the Blacks are not smoking tobacco they are constantly busy polishing their beautiful teeth. I believe that Nature has given them more beautiful and stronger teeth than we have, but they spend not a little time on them in order to preserve them. A certain kind of wood which is very fibrous and somewhat astringent is ||p. 233|| their preference for use as a toothpick. It grows far inland and for this reason is offered for sale in the market at rather a high price. The Blacks have such a toothpick in their mouths constantly and they polish their teeth with it, as if with a metal polishing stick.[61] Possibly this is the reason that the Blacks have better and healthier teeth than we do. A particular Black nation, who must live very far inland, file their front teeth to a point; other nations even make them triple by cutting each tooth twice. But there is also a nation with naturally pointed front teeth. This can be

[gg] A picture of this instrument, as well as the strings, can be found in Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbadoes, Nieves, etc.*, Vol. II, tom. 232, pp. 3 & 4, where the famous Knight has, presumably, seen it among the Blacks who had been brought there from here. [The reference is to Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica, with the natural history of the last of those islands*, 2 vols., London 1707–1725. The drawing is pl. 3 of vol. I, immediately following the Introduction. See also Bowdich 1819: 361–2; Stanley 1874: 135; Nketia 1963: 4; Wachsman in Baines 1961: 42–4.]

[60] Tobacco, smoked in pipes, was recorded in West Africa by 1610 (Paul Hair, personal communication). See also Bosman 1705: 306–7; Barbot 1732: 199 a-b; Cardinall 1927: 85–6; Ozanne 1965: 6; Purseglove 1976: 302; Garrard 1980: 37. It is not clear what Isert means by 'the accent'.

[61] For Isert's European frame of reference regarding dental hygiene and the use of metal polishing sticks, see Strömgren 1935: 143–55. On chewing sticks, see Müller in Jones 1983: 153; Labat 1730: I 317–8; Irvine 1961; xlviii.

proven by the fact that the teeth are covered on all sides with strong enamel, which is lacking on the filed teeth.[62]

Scarification of the skin, or making marks on the body, has been done away with by the Akras and is now practised only by the inland nations. The Akras used to make a small cross on each cheek as a distinguishing mark, very much like that used by a nation further inland from Popo, who call themselves Sabalu [Savalou]. A single, very old man, certainly over ninety, is a survivor of that time. Perhaps the reason that each nation was given its particular mark was to make them || p. 234 || distinguishable one from the other. I have not seen the procedure by which they make these marks. I am told that a cut is made with a sharp stone or a mussel shell, and then the wound is rubbed with charcoal dust. The resulting scar is always darker among the reddish Blacks.[63]

Polygamy is practised universally among the Blacks. Indeed, the greatness of a man here is dependent upon the number of wives he has, just as is the case among most of the Asians. It is said that the King of Assianthee has 3,000 wives, of whom the first three he married have preference and can to some extent give orders to the younger wives.[64] The marriage ceremony is not impressive. When a man asks for another man's daughter he must be prepared to pay the parents-in-law as much for the bride as one would pay to buy a female slave. When he is in agreement with both parents, they set the date for the marriage, here called *cassaren*. The day before the wedding the bridegroom must send all his gifts to the house of his prospective parents-in-law. These gifts usually consist of six to eight cloths of different materials, a couple of ankers of brandy, a || p. 235 || few dozen pipes, some tobacco, various beads and an ounce of cowries (16 *thalers*). When everything has been found to be satisfactory, the parents inform the bridegroom that he can fetch his bride the next day, by which time preparations will have been made to make certain that there will be available a super-abundance of *pytto*, or country beer. The next day, towards midday, when the bridegroom believes that the bride is dressed, he sends a message to her house asking if she would not like to visit him. She comes in her best attire, fully adorned and accompanied by a great crowd of women, all festively costumed. They take their places in the bridegroom's house where all are treated to brandy, beer and palm wine, and each is given a long pipe, whether she smokes or not. Towards

[62] Isert is one of the few early writers who did not equate filed teeth with cannibalism. Oldendorp (1784: 305), in speaking of cannibalism, does say that pointed teeth, *per se*, are not an indication of the practice. For other comments, see Brun in Jones 1983: 71; Rømer 1760: 21–2; Cardinall 1927: 111.

[63] See [22] above.

[64] Cf. Bowdich 1819: 289; McCaskie 1981: 486–7 and n. 40.

evening they begin to dance, and usually do not conclude the festivities before daybreak.[65]

It is strange that the Blacks seldom eat at festive times. However, at funerals they often have roast beef and mutton. They also serve a small meal at the naming of a child, as we serve a meal at a christening.

|| p. 236 || The children are often betrothed by their elders when they are very young. Indeed, it can happen that two fathers may affiance their children while they are still in the wombs of their pregnant wives, so if the children, when born, are of different sexes, they will be forced to marry when grown, whether it is to their taste or not, because their fathers' vows must be fulfilled.[66]

The Blacks show an extraordinary tenderness towards their children. They almost never strike them. A mother can nurse a child for as long as four years, if another has not come to replace it before that time. It is admittedly the case that a father has the right to sell his children, but this happens so extremely rarely that it is difficult to imagine it. And when a father is forced to raise money to pay a debt, he will first try every other possible way before seizing his children. A touching example proving the truth of this tenet happened here recently — to the greater honour of humanity! An Agraffi [Agave] Black (one of our people at Rio Volta) had fallen into debt, possibly due to a misfortune. When the time came for him to pay, he had no means of doing so. He went to his creditor || p. 237 || and told him that since he had no way of paying he was offering his own body, which the creditor could sell if he so desired. The delighted creditor took him to Fort Königstein immediately and sold him, whereupon, along with other slaves, he was transported to our main fort in neck chains. Here he stayed for about six weeks, until the ship by which he was going to be sent to West India could obtain a full load. During this time his son, acting more on a noble impulse than out of simple filial devotion, had made the decision to release his father from chains. The paternal tenderness which had kept the father from selling the son in place of himself, which right he had by nature and custom, had given rise to this inimitable idea in the son. Therefore, with some of his relatives, the son came to make an exchange of slaves. This kind of negotiation is often undertaken here, when the Europeans find it to their advantage. At that moment I found myself in the warehouse because of this exchange, and I demanded to be shown the slave they wanted as well as the man who

[65] *Cassaren* is from the Portuguese *casár*, 'to marry', literally 'to set-up house' (Barbot 1732: 239–40; Rømer 1760: 242–3; Monrad 1822: 46–8; Daniell 1856: 12; Meyers 1931: 399–409; Field 1940: 37–40; Azu 1974: 25–6, 29–33; Kilson 1964: 50, 53).

[66] Cf. Brun in Jones 1983: 86–7; Rask 1754: 256–7; Daniell 1856: 11; Field 1940: 40. On child betrothal in Asante, see Bowdich 1819: 302; McCaskie 1981: 491–2.

was to be given in his place. Since the latter was a handsome young man ||p. 238|| who had many more years ahead of him than did his father, the exchange was very attractive. The chained man was brought before the young, unhappy one. Oh, God! How deeply moved would even the most hardened trader of people have been by that scene. When the son of the Agraffi Black saw his father in chains, he threw his arms around his neck and wept tears of gratitude and joy at being so fortunate as to be able to free him. The chains were released, the one was taken out and the other put in. The son was very calm and asked his father not to grieve on his account. Meanwhile, I told the story to the Governor [Kiøge]. Filled with love of mankind, the Governor discussed with the father and the relatives the possibility of raising the amount to pay back that which had been paid for him, within a fixed time. They promised that this would be done, the son was taken out of chains and they all went home happy.

It cannot be said that one finds paupers here. Every single house or family is obliged to take care of its own members, and if one among them is suffering privation, the whole family must suffer as well. Poverty cannot easily occur here, for instance, but for a long-lasting drought. On the contrary, || p. 239 || there are always fish in the sea and an abundance of game in the forest.

In fishing the Blacks use both hooks and nets. The latter are fashioned out of the fibre of pineapple leaves. This marvellous plant, which is justly given first place among the fruits of the torrid zone, not only tickles the palate with its wine-like, aromatic and refreshing flavour, but also offers, in its leaves, the material for fishing. The Black takes the fresh leaves, soaks them for a few days in water, dries them and then beats them with a wooden mallet until all the leafy matter is removed and nothing but pure fibre remains. It is more than two ells long, as white as our ordinary flax, and even as fine, if not, indeed, finer. If it were considered worth the trouble, it would be easy to establish a factory for this material, since pineapple fibre is unquestionably easier to obtain than linen fibre, and the plant, once planted, can be used thus for ten years or more.[67]

The gold mining of the Blacks is as simple as it is easy. They have two methods of obtaining this metal, for which they know ||p. 240|| the Europeans sigh so longingly. One method, used by the coastal Blacks, consists of collecting in basins, at certain times of the year, the beach sand which the breakers have thrown up at specific places. The basins are then filled with sea water which is stirred thoroughly and then poured off, taking with it the sand, until at last some gold is left lying in the bottom

[67] For the use of pineapple fibre, see Rask 1754: 53; Bowdich 1819: 314; Irvine 1947: 23 f.; Grove and Johansen 1968: 1388.

of the basin, if the sand contained any. This system produces only a little gold at Akra, since a woman can stand and pan an entire day, and, if very lucky, she can collect at the most gold worth one *Reichsthaler*.[68] But further inland, at the foot of the mountains, or in the mountains themselves, gold is mined. Holes are dug in the ground as much as 20 feet deep, or as deep as they can make them without the earth sliding back too much. The earth which has been dug out is clay mixed with sand containing gold, and is often found to contain gold at a depth of only one ell. They work with the earth in the same way as is done with the sand on the beach, separating the gold from the sediment. The gold lies loose in the earth, in small kernels the size of groats, but solid nuggets are also found at times, some weighing an ounce and more.[69] ||p. 241|| It is said that the King of Assianthee owns such a large, massive nugget that he uses it as a stool, and that it takes four men to carry it, using attached poles.[70] This mighty king is said to keep a number of slaves in a mine, each of whom must deliver two ounces of gold to him daily. When a mine does not yield this sum they dig another.[71] The earlier very renowned gold-miners, the Akims, have either lost the art of gold-mining or no longer dare to mine gold, since their king is tributary to the King of the Assianthees, and, were the Akim king's nation to become wealthy, the King of Assianthee would very quickly deprive him of his wealth. Akim lies only five days' journey from here. In its golden age the Europeans of Akra could trade with the Akims to a value of more than a thousand *thaler* in one week; now there is often not so much gold as one ounce, in spite of the fact that, as it always has done, the land lies so close to us.[72]

The Blacks possess a very sound philosophy. In their conversations they always use very appropriate metaphors. If a Black wants to say, for instance, that something makes him very unhappy or heavy-hearted, he ||p. 242|| expresses it with such words as, 'It burns my stomach.' They

[68] Evidently panning for gold on the beach was universally considered to be women's work. See Dapper 1670: 460; Bosman 1705: 80–1; Barbot 1732: 288; Rask 1754: 83; Rømer 1760: 175; Park 1896 edition: 236; Mentzel 1968: 16–7; Garrard 1980: 129, 130, 131, 135.

[69] All descriptions of gold mining must have been at least second-hand, derived ultimately from hearsay evidence because no Europeans had actually seen the mines in the eighteenth century. For mining of gold, see Dapper 1670: 460–1; Ulsheimer in Jones 1983: 35–6; Müller *ibid.*: 253; Bosman 1705: 80–1; Barbot 1732: 228–230; Rask 1754: 83; Rømer 1760: 20; Mentzel 1968: 13 f.; Garrard 1980: 132–5.

[70] The reference here was probably to *Sika Dwa Kofi*, the Golden Stool of Asante. Kyerematen 1964: 25; Cole and Ross 1977: 137–8.

[71] Cf. Garrard 1980: 148.

[72] On gold mining in Akyem, see Bosman 1705: 78; Rømer 1760: 173–9; Macdonald 1898: 104–8; Garrard 1980: 57–58, 140.

have a great variety of such expressions, but no more come to my mind just now.

The Blacks have certain illnesses which are native to the land, or endemic. To this group belongs an illness which we call *Franzozen*, the English call *gaas* [yaws] and the Blacks call *gattoo*. This illness consists of lesions which can spread to the entire surface of the body. The lesions are large pustules with a flat surface, often as large as a *stuber*, and full of thick pus which always has a clayey appearance externally. The disease is venereal in nature, since it can be cured in the same way as venereal disease, but it is quite different from the true *Venus disease*. It is believed that most of the Blacks have had this illness once in their lives.[73]

The Guinean muscle worm[hh] is a plague in the country because it is very common among the Blacks and, not uncommonly, it even attacks the Europeans. It lodges between the muscles, most commonly in the foot and calf, || p. 243 || but it can also be found in all the other muscular parts of the body, and even in the scrotum. When the creature has reached adulthood, a swelling proportional to the size of the worm appears at the spot where the head is closest to the skin, and there is usually a low fever. The worm is usually as thick as a straw and from one foot to three ells long. Often it bites its way through the skin by itself. Otherwise, when it appears that there is actually pus in the swelling, an incision is made in the skin and an attempt is made to get hold of the end of the worm. It is then rolled up on a stick or a roll of bandage to the extent that the patient can tolerate the pain, but without breaking the worm. The sore is then covered with only a small strip of bandage. The Blacks, however, take the leaves of a quadrate wild vine,[ii] crush them to a paste on a stone and put that over the wound because they consider it to be a very good suppurative. The worm is wound out daily until it has come out entirely. If it happens that the worm breaks and one cannot get hold of the end of it again, || p. 244 || infection and suppuration result, in which case it is treated like any other abscess. Otherwise the wound usually heals as soon as the worm has been removed. This worm is the main cause of the many leg ulcers seen here. However, its origin remains a mystery. The present

[hh] *Vena medinensis Medicor. Gordius medinensis Linn.* [*Dracunculus medinensis*. Human infestation is indeed caused by drinking raw water containing fleas (*cyclops*) which have been infected by the worm (Irivine 1961: 808). The method of winding the worm out gradually, as described by Isert, is still the standard treatment today.

[ii] *Cissus quadranguleris Linn.*

[73] *Franzozen* ['The Frenchman'] was the name used for syphilis by the Germans, based on the supposition that it was referring to the French who had introduced it to Germany. Isert's description is correct, since yaws, like syphilis, is caused by a spirochete but the disease is not venereal (Irvine 1961: 814).

commonly accepted opinion, that the intestinal worms are congenital, cannot be true for the Guinea worm. If that were the case it would mean that this particular congenital worm's existence was not apparent until the person came here, into the climate which favours its development. But this theory is not well supported. I am inclined to believe that the worm, either as an adult insect or as a worm, lives in brackish water from which its atom-like eggs become mixed with the blood of a person when the water is drunk. It thereupon fastens itself to muscle and the worm is hatched there. For at Fida, where there is very good, fresh water, the Guinea worm is unknown, while at Akra, only 60 miles away, it is common.[74]

If, as it is said, the European has been infected by the Black, || p. 245 || it is incomprehensible that Guinea worm has not been carried to West India, too, since so many slaves have been taken there; while here in Guinea, there is no instance of a European having become infected unless he has drunk brackish water. A further confirmation of the validity of this theory is that Guinea worm is also found in a part of Arabia where people are sometimes forced to drink bad water.[75]

The pox is also rampant here, but in contrast to the Guinea worm, it has been introduced. One seldom hears of anyone dying from it. During my stay here I have not seen any natural pox, and I am inclined to believe that it has been totally wiped out in Akra, since variolation is as common as circumcision.[76]

Venereal disease in all its forms is found here but it is much more easily cured than in the northern climes. Apart from this, the most common illnesses among the Blacks are as follows: fever due to infection, dysentery, dropsy, consumption, rash, swollen knees and open wounds. Respiratory ailments are almost unknown, however, a fact particularly ascribable to the gentle climate.

|| p. 246 || The European is held in very high esteem by the Blacks, who always look upon him as their superior, even when the Black is a free man and the European has no power over him. For instance, when a

[74] On Guinea worm, see De Marees 1602/1987: 98b–101a; Dapper 1670: 462–463; Bosman 1705: 108–9; Rømer 1760: 293–4; Monrad 1822; 280–3.

[75] Isert was forced to retract the hypothesis that the worm was not carried to the West Indies when he himself became infected while there. See Twelfth Letter 370–1.

[76] Since inoculation, or variolation, against small pox was an ancient practice, known for centuries in Asia before being introduced to Europe in the early eighteenth century, Isert would have been entirely familiar with it. This homeopathic procedure appears to have been in widespread use in Africa as well (Herbert 1975: 539–59). For inoculation against small pox in Accra, see Meredith 1812: 194. The inoculation, made by applying a scab to a scratch above the wrist, has been seen in the twentieth century in the Gambia (Dr. Charles Bowesman, personal communication,).

European accuses a Black of something he has not done, the Black answers, 'Father! How could I do such a thing to you? You are my father and mother.' By this expression he means, in fact, his superior.[77]

Now you have a whole handful of reports about our Blacks. With the next ship will come a few words about our Master Europeans in this Libya. Until then, I am, etc.

[77] The appellation 'father' was, and is, common usage and reflects attitudes of respect, regardless of skin colour.

Ninth Letter

Main Fort Christiansburg
in Guinea
20 April, 1786

In my last letter dated 15 October last year I entertained you with the customs and habits of the children of this land. Now let us shed some light on how we ourselves act in a land in which both our blood and our habits change.

All of the Europeans who are staying in Guinea, regardless of what nation they come from, are in the service of either their king or a company. It was the Portuguese who first sailed along the Guinea Coast, in the mid-fifteenth century. Finding the people on the Gold Coast most courteous they built various fortified places, or forts, there, in which they kept their wares and carried on trade with the inhabitants.[1] At first the articles that they took in barter from the Blacks as payment for their wares were limited principally to ||p. 248|| gold and ivory. But at the end of the century, after Columbia was discovered, the sumptuousness of the products from there increased in Europe. However, since the Europeans, for their own safety, had exterminated most of the native Columbians, they began to lack workers to provide them with these products, so they turned to Africa which they knew was teeming with people at that time.[2] Even though there were large numbers of people, the difficulty of travel and the climate in Africa would have made conquest too difficult for the Europeans. Thus they got this idea: buy Blacks and take them to their plantations in Columbia.

They had learned by experience that the Blacks were more robust by nature, and more suited to work, than the weaker Indians. For this reason,

[1] For Portuguese exploration and early settlements and trade in West Africa, especially 'Gold Coast'. see De Marees 1602: 202–5; Blake 1942: I 3–63.

[2] The 'extermination' of the Caribbean people was far more complicated than Isert supposed. Maltreatment of labourers, local conflicts, and altered diets all played a role, but the introduction by the Europeans and Africans of new diseases was a major cuase of the demographic collapse (Cambridge History of Latin America 1986: II 8–14).

despite the cost of their transportation — during which many were to die on such a long trip — and other difficulties, they found that the transfer of these unhappy souls, which cost little or nothing at first, was a very profitable business. In this way began the Black slave trade which has been such an important undertaking during these last two centuries — to the shame of mankind.

||p. 249|| Portugal was not long alone in enjoying the privilege of trading on the Guinea coast. The English could not possibly tolerate the Portuguese enjoying so marvellous an advantage. To this end they too formed various establishments. On the Gold Coast they founded their present main Fort Cape Coars [Cape Coast], and on the River Gambia James Fort, in the year 1553, whereupon various others followed gradually. These people [*sic*] carried on the Guinea trade almost alone from that time untill 1637, after which the Dutch, who had made themselves nearly masters of all the Portuguese holdings in East India, now made an attempt on their African forts, too. Without difficulty they conquered Georgia Della Mina [Elmina] which is their main fort still today. Then they acquired the rest of the Portuguese forts, which were ceded by a peace treaty in 1641 whereby the Portuguese, once the sole masters of this coast, were driven away completely.[3] Even now they dare not trade here, and if they want to trade on the Lower Coast, that is at Fida and Portonovo, they must drop anchor first at the Dutch fort and pay a large tariff.[4] ||p. 250|| Nonetheless, they carry on a good deal of trade on the

[3] Having engaged in scattered activity on the Guinea Coast from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Dutch made a serious effort to wrest the Atlantic trade from the Portuguese after the formation of the Dutch West Indies Company in 1621, and they succeeded in conquering the fort at Elmina on the Gold Coast in 1637. By 1642 they had captured all of the Portuguese forts on the Gold Coast and had become the strongest European power on the Guinea Coast (Fage 1969: 66). Isert's phrase about 'these people' who monopolized the trade until 1637 must refer to the Portuguese, although in the text it is juxtaposed with a comment on the English. In the case of the latter nation, although there had been individual trading voyages to West Africa during the sixteenth century, no attempt was made to establish a permanent footing there until the seventeenth century. The English traded in the Gambia from the 1610s, building a fort on James Island in 1618. On the Gold Coast, their main stronghold, Cape Coast Castle, was not established until their takeover of that fort from the Dutch in 1664. Isert's date of '1553', correctly that of the first English voyage to the Gold Coast, was probably borrowed from Barbot (1732: 146). But the date, as intimated in the text, has no connection with the establishment of any forts. The name 'Georgia della Mina' is a corruption, perhaps Isert's own, of 'S. George de la Mina', an anglicized version of the original Portuguese 'São Jorge da Mina'.

[4] In the early eighteenth century the Dutch West India Company did try to impose control on Portuguese trade with West Africa and to oblige the Portuguese ships to call first at Elmina on the Gold Coast to pay a ten per cent duty on their cargoes. However, it is difficult to imagine how this control could have been effective as late as the 1780s, as Isert claims it was. (I am indebted to Robin Law for this information).

coast, but this is trade from Brazil rather than from Portugal. Their ships carry only tobacco and, at times, a little brandy.

From that time on the Dutch acted as masters of the Coast. By 1781 they had eleven forts, which it would be too time-consuming to describe here, since they have already been well-described in other books.[5] Their chief fort is the afore-mentioned Della Mina, which is very spacious and solidly built, and is the residence of the Chief of all their possessions, who bears the title of Governor-General. It lies some 24 miles west of Christiansburg. A council made up of the eldest commanders of the other forts, a treasurer, and a secretary, has been appointed to assist the Governor-General. This Council has the right to impose capital punishment on both Black offenders and Europeans. The Dutch maintain upwards of 200 European soldiers, along with a captain and a lieutenant, half the force being at the main fort and the remainder distributed among the remaining forts. They have recently received a priest, after having been 14 years without one, and he has plenty to do in christening the Mulatto children produced during that time. ||p. 251|| But they are not satisfied with him because he excommunicates the people who fancy polygamy, which is considered *bon ton* here. The main fort has a physician and two surgeons and in addition each fort has its own surgeon. The latter, in practice, rank under the chief-surgeon and receive their medicines from him.[6] A large ship laden solely with victuals, supplies, etc., brings European necessities here annually. These are carefully distributed among the employees in proportion to their wages, and the employees have the advantage that no appreciable percent has been added to the price. The trade is left to the chief of each fort, without restriction, with one exception: they must sell the slaves they have acquired to their own nation only, and they have to pay a small fee to the Company.[7] However, it is easy to imagine that they are not very conscientious in their accounts of slave purchases.[8]

In the year 1781, the various forts belonging to the Dutch were captured by the Engish, including the fine Fort Crèvecoer [Ussher Fort] at Akra,

[5] The Dutch forts were described by Bosman, c. 1700, as the following: Fort St. Anthony at Axim; Fort Batenstein at Butri; Fort Orange at Sekondi; a fort at Shama; Fort Vredenburgh at Komenda; Fort St. George d'Elmina at Elmina; Fort Conraadsburg at Fetu; Fort Nassau at Mori; Fort Amsterdam at Kormantin; Fort Leysaamhed at Apam; Fort Crèvecoeur at Accra (Bosman 1705: 3, 5, 15, 16, 20, 27, 41–2, 46–7, 54, 58, 60, 67). A twelfth fort, Fort De Goede Hoop, at Senya Bereku, was established shortly after Bosman left the Gold Coast (Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 35–6). Isert may have counted only those described in Bosman.

[6] For the administration of Elmina, see Tilleman 1697: 65–6; Bosman 1705: 93–103.

[7] This is the Dutch West Indies Company, formed in 1621 and dissolved in 1795.

[8] On Dutch rules for payment of duties and factors' delinquency in this respect, see Rømer 1760: 38–41.

a half-mile from Christiansburg. It was then wholly || p. 252 || converted to a stone building. All these forts were, of course, handed over to the English in the condition in which they then were, and it will in fact be a long time before they can be restored to their earlier state.[9]

The English have nine forts on the Gold Coast, of which Cape Coars is the main one.[10] It lies twenty miles west of Christiansburg and four miles east of Delmina. The English administration is the same as that of the Dutch, except that they give each commander of a fort the title of 'Governor', while the Dutch have had to be satisfied with 'Chief Trader', 'Trader' and 'Noble Sir'. The Governor-in-Chief of the English is president of the Council, and his second in command, the governor of Annemaboe [Anomabu], is vice-president. The other governors all have the title 'Member of the Council'. They have no treasurer but they do have a chaplain. The present one is a Black, born in Africa, who has studied in England and is a very learned and agreeable man. [11] The medical staff arrangement is the same as that of the Dutch. They have only a few European soldiers, most of the soldiers being natives or Mulattos.

|| p. 253 || the government gives 15,000 pounds sterling annually for the support of the forts, and the salaries of the staff, soldiers and Company slaves. Each governor carries on trade as he himself thinks fit.[12]

The least important of the trading nations on the Guinea Coast is France. To be sure, the French have sought repeatedly to establish themselves on the Gold Coast, bu this has never led to any lasting results.[13] In the year 1744, the French began to build a fort not far from Annemaboe, twelve miles from here, but soon had to give it up.[14] In the present year, with the permission of the Dutch, they have begun to build a fort again

[9] The English capture of the Dutch forts east of Elmina occurred in 1782, not 1781. The campaign was led by Captain Shirley and the seizure of Crèvecoeur was made possible by aid from the Danes at Christiansborg. Crèvecoeur was badly damaged during this action. All of the Dutch forts were returned by the English after the Peace of Paris in 1784. See Johannesen 1966: 44–5; Nørregaard 1966: 138–42.

[10] The English forts were at Dixcove, Secondi, Komenda, Cape Coast, Anomabu, Kormantin, Tantumquery, Agona (i.e. Winnebah), Accra, and Prampram. See Bosman 1705: 14, 18–9, 27, 31, 48–9, 52, 63, 66; Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 37, 40, 41–2.

[11] The Black chaplain was Philip Quaque. Cf. Bartels 1952–5: 153–177: Ward 1967: 202–3.

[12] The management and maintenance of the English forts was in the hands of the Company of Merchants Trading to West Africa, an association which had replaced the Royal African Company in the early 1750s. See Martin 1927: 34–41; Davies 1975: 344. The Council of the Company did not have the right to impose capital punishment, indeed it had no military or civil authority in respect of the commission of crimes (Martin 1927: 54–5). See also Rømer 1760: 42–5.

[13] Cf. De Marees 1602/1987: 103b–104a; Labat 1730: I 269–75; Barbot 1732: 146a 160b–1a; Hargreaves 1967: 61; Fage 1969: 70–4.

[14] The French tried to build a fort at Anomabu on the ruins of their earlier Fort Charles in 1751 (Van Dantzig and Priddy 1971: 41). See also Rømer 1760: 45–7.

on the same spot, but it has not much probability of being completed since two-thirds of the workers have already died. The only fort they have is at Fida, which I have already described fully in another letter.[15] In Senegal, however, they have a fine establishment; but the Blacks from there are of only limited use, so the French ships prefer to pursue their trade on the lower coast of Guinea, that is at Benin and Calbar [Calabar].[16] However, the latter places are far from being able to provide || p. 254 || the possessions of that nation in West India with enough slaves, so the slave ships of all nations are permitted to bring their cargoes to the French islands. The exception is the island of Domingo where the French king, in order to encourage his nation in the slave trade, pays a fixed sum to each French ship for the import of every single slave.[17]

The fifth nation having possessions in Guinea is that of the Danes. At present we have four forts and six lodges, or trading stations. The forts are: Christiansburg, Friedensburg, Kønigstein and Prinzenstein. The ldoges are: Labodei, Thessing [Teshi], Temma, Ponny, Aflahu and Popo. These establishments lie within a stretch of fifty miles along the coast. Along this stretch we alone are the masters of trade, except for an English fort, called Prampram, lying between Christiansburg and Friedensburg. Since I have already told you about each of these places, I shall not repeat myself now.

The supreme command over all our possessions is held by the Governor of Christiansburg, who exercises authority over all the other possessions as their Chief. A council made up of the commanders of the other forts has been established for him, without || p. 255 || which he cannot treat any matter of importance. The second in rank in the Council is the Chief Trader and Commander of Friedensburg. The other two commanders are called 'Traders' and vote according to their length of service. At the more important lodges, command lies with the factor, and in the less important posts there are assistants, junior officers, or, in some places, only a soldier. The annual salary of the governor is not more than 1,000 *thalers*, plus 500 *thalers* for table allowance. The Chief Trader and Commandant of Friedensburg receives 500, and the other commanders 400 *thalers* each.

Commercial posts are held by assistants, under-assistants and reserve assistants. The factors and the two chief assistants, who take care of the book-keeping and secretarial work, receive 400 *thalers*; the other chief assistants at the lodges and forts, 300; an under-assistant, 250; and a reserve assistant, 10 to 12 *thalers* a month.

[15] Cf. Seventh Letter, pp. 150–1.

[16] Cf. Labarthe 1803: 179–81, 183; Hargreaves 1967: 39–42, 59–66.

[17] On Domingo, see Labarthe 1803: 22.

The religious staff, when it is compelte, consists of a clergyman and a catechist. The former is paid 400 *thalers* and the latter 250 *thalers* annually. The same conditions obtain in the medical service whose Chief Surgeon, stationed at Christiansburg, || p. 256 || is paid 400 *thalers*, and the second one, stationed at Friedensburg, 300 *thalers*.[18] But in addition they receive a bonus for each slave shipped out — an amount which can at times equal their salaries. Furthermore, the surgeon at Christiansburg is supplied witha Mulatto who performs bandaging and other surgical tasks, for which he is paid 12 *thalers* monthly.

The military personnel at the main fort consists, at present, of a sergeant, two corporals, two drummers, two pipers, twenty musketeers, one chief gunner, one assistant gunner, two constables, and two assistant constables, the last mentioned being Blacks. The other forts have one sergeant, one corporal, one drummer, one piper, ten musketeers, and, to man the cannon, two constables [*sic*] and a few Company slaves. A gunner is paid 20 *thalers*, a seargeant 16, a corporal 14, and the European soldiers 10 *thalers* monthly. But the Mulatto soldiers receive only 8 *thalers*.

There are also a number of artisans here in the service of the King. The person who is in charge of these and of the Company slaves is called the *Baas*, and receives 20 *thalers* a month.[19] Masons, smiths, joiners and coopers are || p. 257 || usually paid 14 *thalers* a month, or more if they are particularly skilful. The total number of Europeans here, at the time of writing this, amounts to not more than 38 people, and the posts are fairly well filled.

In addition there are 200–250 slaves in service who are not sent out of the country. The male slaves are given one *thaler* monthly and the females one-half *thaler*. Indeed, some of the younger girls are paid only one-quarter *thaler*. These wretched souls are most poorly paid for their work, and if they were not able to supplement their pay by one means or another, they could not possibly manage. Admittedly the free Black is not paid any better when his services are hired, but there is this difference, that he has his family in town and they have to feed him. The English have already recognized the drawbacks of the system and give their slaves twice as much as we give ours.

For the adminstration of all the establishments, the King pays 25,000 *thalers* annually to the Company which, if that is insufficient, is forced to supplement it from its own coffers.[20]

[18] Clearly Isert himself falls into this category.

[19] The 'Company' is the *Kongelige Danske Østersøiske og Guineiske Handels-Compagnie* [Royal Danish Baltic-Guinea Trading Company]. Cf. Nørregaard 1969: 143–51.

[20] On the administration of the Danish establishments, see Tilleman 1697: 90; Monrad 1822: 358–60, 374–9; Lawrence 1963: 26, 52–4; Nørregaard 1969: 164–6.

|| p. 258 || All trade is undertaken here is the monopoly of the Company which, to encourage that trade, pays the chiefs of the forts and offices considerable commissions.

On the whole, the Europeans here seldom live in a manner suitable to the nature of the climate. Instead of becoming accustomed to the fruits of the land, they prefer the products of their own lands and do not take into account that they have left their northern stomachs behind in their fatherlands. It is common knowledge that the stomach, as well as all the other organs of the body, becomes sluggish in a hot climate, and thus has not the strength to digest the foods for which it was designed. The extraordinary amount of meat which it is customary to serve at the tables of the rich here is veritable poison to the Europeans, if they do not take it in moderation. They ought to go to the natives of the land and see how four people relish one dish containing not more than one pound of meat or fish, with quantities of grain or other foodstuffs from the plant kingdom. Therefore they are healthy, while the Europeans are constantly plagued by illness.[21]

|| p. 259 || In fact, it appears that certain northern Europeans, especially Norwegians, are totally unsuited to this climate. When they arrive in this land, even though they have never before in their lives been ill, they are like a fresh-water fish that has been placed in salt water. They become misanthropic, fretful, and do not know why. First they complain of a headache, usually accompanied by vomiting; after 24 hours often follow convulsions; after 36 hours a pustule-like rash appears on the forehead and the calves, and the patient dies — a man who had been perfectly healthy 48 hours earlier.

You may well ask what kind of demon could cause so precipitous a death. I cannot answer, other than that the too great full-bloodedness and health of the person were overcome by the heat of the climate. The most frequent cases of this type which I have had to treat have been when a newcomer of this type has had the misfortune to be exposed to the midday sun. A putrid, bilious fever drives them into the ground. If that same full-blooded person had at that moment been generously bled || p. 260 || and given a sufficient dose of an emetic two hours later, it would have broken the illness, as if often does. On the following day one resorts to *China* [cinchona], in a decoction with sulphur, camphor, musk, etc.,[22], and if, on the third day, the slow pulse has not increased, then it is high time to

[21] For comments and descriptions of European diets and life-styles, see Bosman 1705: 106–8; Rask 1754: 63; Rømer 1760: 264–8; Monrad 1822: 363–6.

[22] On 'China' and cinchona, see Aaskow 1718: 64–72; Garboe 1950: 57–60; Larsen 1968: 112–3. 60. The alkaloid 'quinine' was not extracted from cinchona bark until 1820.

have recourse to vesicant plasters. But these plasters must not be applied casually. If I want to get the desired effect from their use I apply plasters the size of a quarto sheet, one to each calf and a similar one to the neck. The use of vesicant plaster is the method preferred by all doctors in treating this illness.[23] Happy is he who is able to judge the right moment to apply the plasters, since this illness does not always have exactly the same course or the same duration. A phase of the illness that one patient has on the second day, another may not have until the third, or even the fifth. And if the vesicant plaster is applied at the peak of the symptoms, it usually aggravates the illness. However one should not delay, if, in a patient who had had a strong and rapid pulse before, it has suddenly begun to sink, and if even only || p.261 || slight drowsiness is noticed. In the event the latter occurs, and the pulse does not change, one must not fail to use vesicant plaster, and if after 12 hours it has drawn clear, large, raised blisters, the patient is usually out of danger. But should the skin look as if it were flayed and it is blood-red with little or no dampness, there is little hope.[24]

In the meantime, cinchona and the other medications are used according to circumstances, not forgetting to give the patient good wine to mix with his drinks. The wine of Madera is particularly suitable.[25] In this way one can often save the patient, but his recovery is slow.

One of the greatest evils of this illness is that the patient often has continuous retching if he is given any medicine. It is almost to no purpose to try to administer a tonic, either internally or externally, and it might be immediately concluded that the illness was caused by an inflammation in the stomach and intestines, if it were not observed that the patient could still keep down a sour drink. Among the many attempts to relieve || p. 262 || this malady, the most useful is the hip-bath (*semicupium*), if the patient is seated in it for a quarter of an hour before the paroxysm, and this is repeated as often as the attacks occur. This is the most dangerous of the illnesses to which newly-arrived Europeans often succumb.

More fortunate, on the other hand, are all those who have fallen victim to the cold remittent fever. It is indeed a tedious illness, but does not cause the patient to be bed-ridden, and is never dangerous.[26] The older

[23] The vesicant, or 'blistering' plaster is one which heats and irritates the skin, e.g. mustard plaster.

[24] On diseases in West Africa, see Larsen 1968: 105–23, 188–94; Kingsley 1986: Appendix II 680–91.

[25] Wines were an important component in medical treatment in the eighteenth century. One early source noted that the Rhine and French wines were more acidulous than others, and that the Italian and Spanish types were more inflammatory (Aaskow 1718: 105–8).

[26] On fevers, see Maegraith 1966: 441 f.; Larsen 1979: 19, 21.

Coastment often fall victim to this if they have too eagerly worshipped Ceres or Venus.[27] The bacchanal appears to thrive very well in this climate as long as the two afore-mentioned ladies are not involved — an involvement of which we have a number of living proofs.[28]

The illness which, for the older Coastmen, usually blazes the trail to Elysium is dysentery. From the heat of the atmosphere, and from eating meat, drinking, and using too much Spanish pepper, they have not rarely weakened their viscera in such a way that if they first get diarrhoea it very soon becomes dysentery. The surgeon does himself a disfavour || p. 263 || if he is an adversary of astringent medicines. On the contrary, if the fever is not perceptible and the intestines have been cleaned out by a purgative, one might adminster a mild astringent mixture (which I tried here) made of a decoction of the bark of a young mangrove[a] in which gum arabic has been dissolved. However, one must be much on one's guard against puddings and meat. The most harmless food is a panada accompanied by wine. The most important part of the cure is a strict diet, something to which the patient seldom cares to adhere.

We have the advantage here over the inhabitants of Europe that we have no respiratory illness of any kind. On the other hand, we have the equivalent in the fever tumour, the muscle worm, and the numerous leg ulcers which are characteristic of this land.[29]

The fever tumour is a cirrhotic abscess on the liver, or, at times but less often, on the spleen. It develops very gradually and advances every year. Patients have been seen who have had this for 15 and more years without any noticeable difficulty, until, || p. 264 || on some occasion, it has caused insufferable pain brought about, for instance, by overeating, by great exitement, rage, etc., so that the tumour reaches the point at which it bursts, and this usually brings about death. A friend of mine, an English surgeon, persuaded one of these fever tumour victims, a countryman of his, who was suffering an attack of great pain, to let him open the patient's side, because he believed there was an abscess on the liver. The patient gave his permission, the surgeon opened his side, found what he was looking for, and in this way cured his patient completely.

If this malady is recognized in time it can in many cases be prevented

[a] Rhizophora Mangle Linn. [Mangrove. For the use of the astringent bark in native medicine, see Dalziel 1955: 87. See also Willis 1966: 965; White 1983: 262.]

[27] By mentioning Ceres, the goddess of agriculture in Greek mythology, Isert was making an oblique reference to eating. In Isert's context, Venus, the goddess of love, represents venery.

[28] On the efficacy of certain kinds and amounts of spirits, see Kingsley 1986: 685.

[29] On muscle worm and leg ulcers, see Maegraith 1966: 414–5.

by treatment with soluble, internal medication, such as, for example, with the pill made of *Galban Gummi*, or of sagapen with soap and rhubarb.[30] The latter has often served well if used daily and the patient has been wary of too much punch. But if too much punch is drunk it may, in my view, be the very cause of the malady. What strengthens my opinion is that almost no Black is ever found to be suffering fromt his malady while || p. 265 || nearly half the Europeans either have the fever tumour or think they have it — since it is a matter of *bon ton* here either to have it, or at least, to have had it. Their description of it — that it wanders around the entire lower part of the body, settling in the intestines, sometimes here and sometimes there — is really an error, since, if this happens and the wandering is felt, it is noting but constipation in one or the other intestine. A similar myth is that of the wonder cure, the expulsion of the fever tumour, which the Black is supposed to know. The older Coastmen recount the phenomenon to the newly-arrived doctor. Indeed, even any soldier who has been in the country for three years longer than the doctor, believes himself to have a better insight into medicine than the latter.

But where am I going? I forget that I am only writing a letter and not a medical treatise.

The Europeans' entertainment in this land is limited. He who has not learned to enjoy his own resources comes off the loser, since society here is so limited that one has not much choice. And because || p. 266 || each person is acquainted with all the behaviour or manners of the others, and sees in them, regrettably, so little of merit, one seldom finds another with whom one wishes to keep company. Since public diversions are totally lacking, the refuge of such gentlemen is usually Bacchus, gaming, and Venus, in all of which a number of our former citizens have so excelled that they have had to pay prematurely with their lives for their debauchery.[31]

One of the most peculiar customs here is the marriage of the Europeans to the daughters of the country. It is called *cassare*[b], a word which comes from the Portuguese and means to set up house. When a European arrives here one of his first considerations is to acquire one of these bed-fellows, in spite of the fact that I give each one the well-meant advice not to enter

[b] Not '*callisaren*, as it is often balhornized. [Johann Ballhorn was a sixteenth-century printer in Lübeck: he published an ABC book 'augmented and improved by Johann Ballhorn', but the 'Augmentation and improvement' consisted simply in doubling the f's, l's, t's and s's (Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie 1875).

[30] *Galban gummi* is an aromatic, bitter gum-resin. 'Sagapen' is *sagapenum*, a gum-resin derived from the juice of a member of the carrot family [Ferula persica] and formerly used as an anti-spasmodic, as well as externally.

[31] Baccus was the god of wine in Greek mythology. On recreation, see Bosman 1705: 107; Monrad 1822: 364–6; Lawrence 1963: Chapter Four.

into such an arrangement, at least for the first year, since I have often been struck by the harm that results. If he has now chosen one to his taste (a rejection has seldom to be feared) he then sends a humble || p. 267 || memorandum to the High Council wherein he announces the name of his chosen future half and asks that he may be given permission to take her as his (*quasi*) wife. The Council, which looks very positively on such a connection, because the European would not then be so easily plagued by homesickness, answers that he is so permitted, but that he must immediately pay one-half month's salary into the Mulatto treasury, and an equal amount when he leaves, as well as four percent monthly during his stay. When this has been acknowledged, the celebration takes place, a celebration which is no different from the one I described to you in an earlier letter about the Blacks, except that the bridegroom in this case usually gives a dinner party where the bride, probably for the first time, eats at table among the Europeans. It is understood here, however, that neither an engagement nor a marriage ceremony has taken place here, and the new husband can send his wife packing the next day if he feels like it.[32]

The children who are born to such a pair are always christened and instructed in Christianity. If the child is a boy he will be employed as a soldier in the king's service as soon as he is ten years old, || p. 268 || and thus will enjoy a monthly wage of eight *thalers*. Poor girls and boys, as long as they are not otherwise supported, are given one *thaler* from the Mulatto treasury for their sustinence, a sum which is ample for them.[33]

The property of the man is not held in common with that of the woman, but each keeps his own privately. A Black woman is paid one *thaler* monthly and a Mulatto woman two *thalers* monthly by their husbands, and they are given clothing twice a year. They have the right to demand this, and if the husband refuses they have the right to complain to the Council. In such a case they would be paid the sum, which would then be deducted from the husband's salary. Sometimes there are among the soldiers such ne'er-do-wells that they cannot manage their wages themselves. In such cases the wages are often paid to the Black wife who then has to provide the European with food.[34]

The happiness of all those in service in the country is dependent, for

[32] 'Cassarring' is from the Portuguese *casar*, to marry or, literally, to set up house. An earlier source called it *callischare* (Rømer 1760: 245). The Danish Bishop Worm handed down a dispensation permitting all the Danish men in Guinea to take one wife on condition that he converted her to Christianity and took her back to Europe, if she wanted to go (ibid.: 245–6). The authorities looked upon these marriages as an advantage (ibid.: 333–4; Nørregaard 1969: 166–7). See also Eighth Letter 234–5.

[33] On the 'Mulatto treasury', see Monrad 1822: 378–9; Nørregaard 1969: 167–8.

[34] On treatment of the Black woman after marriage, see Rømer 1760: 247.

the most part, on the nature of the Governor's temperament. Everyone tries to emulate him, even, indeed, in inconsequential things. If he is excellent, all the others are courteous; miserly, the others will outdo one another in that respect, and so it || p. 269 || goes through all the ranks. And, 'as Heaven is high and Europe far way' (as they say here) at times a governor rules here more despotically than the most absolute monarch in Europe. Unfortunate are those who are in service when a bad man rises to the governorship. And since the mortality rate is usually so high in this country, and everyone gains promotion, it has often happened that people from the lowest ranks, such as soldiers, artisans or cabin boys have risen to the rank of governor. Since these people usually have lacked the opportunity of training their reasoning abilities, their government is often a mixture of petty arrogance and cruelty. This falls not a little tediously on those men (perhaps of greater insight) who because of less seniority in service must be subordinates. It has often cost them their lives. There have been instances where some men to whom it was necessary to give a flogging one day were given the supreme command the next day. [35]

To the honour of our nation, we have at present a certain Kiøge, a governor who is as courageous as he is judicious.[36] He is as much beloved by the Blacks as was || p. 270 || Schielderup earlier — a governor who was very highly praised by a Frenchman.[c]

The extraordinarily high mortality rate of the Europeans in this land has caused people in Europe to believe that the climate alone is to blame. But they are mistaken in this. From experience alone one could judge the opposite. In this land from which the Europeans have been able, by a moderate reckoning, to export 60,000 people annually who would never return, the population is still very high, even after 200 years of such export. This fact alone is proof enough that the climate is harmless. According to these calculations, it is clear that during this last hundred years six million people were exported, and one can, without stretching the truth, easily assume that in the preceding centures, from the beginning of the Black trade, at least twice as many were exported. This makes 18

[c] Histoire philosoph. et politique Vol. 4, page 325. [The reference is in Raynal. In the Amsterdam edition of 1770 it is found in Vol. 4, p.283. Søren Schieldrup/Schiellerup was the Governor at Christiansborg from 1735 until his death ten months later, in June 1736.]

[35] Of a total of 85 Danish-Norwegian governors, 49 died in office. The longest term of service was ten years, the shortest two days. Twenty-four served one and one-half years or less. Cf. Reindorf 1980: 134–40. For comment on 'tone' set by the governor, see Monrad 1822: 370–3.

[36] For Kiøge, see Second Letter[1].

million in all who were exported. What a figure![37] In fact, this figure by itself equals the population of a fairly large and populous land, || p. 271 || namely, France. It is something other than the climate on the Coast which is unhealthy. It is rather the perverse way of life of those who come to this land that is more the cause of the mortality than is the country itself. Some die from the preconceived idea that it is impossible to live in a land where so many die such a short time after their arrival. Still others become homesick and grieve themselves to death, probably because they have contracted to stay here a certain number of years. As for others, alas! a great many bring such a host of primordial illnesses with them that when these are activated by the hot climate, death is certain.[38]

Those people who, in my experience, are best suited to the climate are young people, of from 25 to 30 years of age. Whoever is over this age should stay away from here since he will seldom reach a higher age. Moreover, the climate is less salubrious for apparently very healthy, sanguine persons than it is for the person who is thin and weak by nature. People who are very sanguine and who come here should not let themselves be deceived by prejudgment.[39] In this hot climate they must || p. 272 || not neglect to be well bled, and this should be done immediately upon arrival. They should keep an extremely lean diet during the first year, drink great amounts of cold water, and bathe daily. If all these things are faithfully observed, barring any damage to the character, I can assure them that their bodies will adjust to the climate and even in the unhealthful air of the coast, they can become as old as they would have done in their fatherland.[40]

Regarding trade and how it is carried on I have already regaled you at length in an earlier letter. Keep well, etc.

[37] For a slave census, see Curtin 1969: 101, 106–7, 211, 269. According to Curtin's estimates, the number of slaves exported by Isert's time would have been in the neighbourhood of nine million — just half of Isert's estimate.

[38] On the way of life on the Coast, see Rømer 1760: 335–6. An early nineteenth century source points out that 'The tone since Rømer's time (who describes it as brutal to a high degree) is, if not ennobled, at least finer' (Monrad 1822: 363).

[39] For a similar *caveat* to full-blooded people, see Kingsley 1986: 684–5. Tragically, Isert's theory that the 'climate' was in no way at fault was disproved by the high mortality at Frederiksnopel – and Isert's own death. See Editor's Appendix 4.

[40] Cf. Monrad 1822: 368.

Tenth Letter

Main Fort Christiansburg in
Guinea, 10 August, 1786

Be prepared, my Father, for the reading of a letter describing my inland Guinea journey which, should it give you only one-hundreth part of the enjoyment I experienced, will still be worth the trouble of reading it.[1]

By that time I had been in this land for nearly three years and I had been only a few miles inland. A high range of mountains was always visible to me, mountains which could not have been more than five miles away. Completely covered with large trees, they provided the most enticing view.[2] What could be more natural than that my desire grew each day to discover a way of going there at some time. During the time I was pondering this, a marvellous opportunity presented itself. I would be enabled ||p. 274|| to travel, as safely as possible, 150 miles into the interior where I could make most important contributions to our present knowledge of natural science.[3] A sister of the king of Assiantee had heard that I was considered knowledgeable about herbs, and since she was afflicted with an old complaint which her priests and fetishes had not been able to cure, she decided to come to the coast and avail herself of my advice. She did this, and I was lucky enough to be able to cure her. Since I became fairly well acquainted with her during that time, and told her of my great desire to see Assianthee, in a natural and friendly manner she invited me, in her brother's name, to visit him.[4] Who could then be happier than your son! From that moment I made preparations for my journey. I hired 25 Blacks, some of them to carry my baggage and some

[1] This Letter, and the following one, are the only ones in which the addressee is identified.

[2] For the Akuapem-Togo Ranges, see Boateng 1970: 161.

[3] Isert's judgement of distances in the interior of Africa was highly exaggerated. Since the mile in Isert's time equalled seven and one-half kilometres, his proposed journey to Asante would have taken him far into Mali.

[4] The sister of the king of Asante in 1786 was probably Ama Sewaa who later became the queen mother. It was not uncommon for Asante royals to consult European doctors (Tom McCaskie, personal communication).

to carry me, because, if I undertook it, such a journey would last for at least six months, and since there would be no opportunity on the journey to buy any European products, I had to be well-provisioned.

My journey started early in the morning of 7 June. I had covered two miles uneventfully when I found myself in a small village ||p. 275|| called Aschiama [Ashongman]. Here the wealthy ursu Blacks have their country homes, or, as they call them, their *rossar* places. The village is pleasantly situated on a rise, but since the real mountain range lies a good couple of miles further inland, they often suffer from a lack of rainfall, just as the Coastal Blacks do. As a result, their harvest of maize — which is widely cultivated here — and their raising of poultry are often damaged. At times the Whites have made pilgrimages here for their own pleasure. After my Blacks had rested briefly I continued my journey unimpeded and reached the foot of the mountains in the afternoon. It is impossible to reach this place by any other means than on foot, partly because the steep path is made up of loose stones. They are of coarse-grained granite, of gneiss, and also, although rarely, of quartz. The entire landscape here takes on a different character from that of the coastal region. Lofty trees with impenetrable bush underneath cover the rocks. The earth is no longer sandy, but either is loamy or is in fact good garden earth. I crawled through this labyrinth until about four o'clock in the afternoon, when I arrived at the first ||p. 276|| good-sized Black settlement encountered on a journey in these mountains. It is called Abodee [Aburi] and is about eight miles from Christiansburg.

The kabossie of the place, named Ozain [Osei], an old man of about 80, in company with his high council, received me with that proud bearing common to the Blacks here, yet politely. I must remark here that the Blacks, although an unpolished nation, observe etiquette to an extraordinary degree and would sooner go hungry and thristy than be neglectful of it. The complimentary reception consists of this procedure: the natives, while seated, receive the greetings of the stranger after which he seats himself and they repeat the performance, one after the other, according to rank, by walking round in a circle to greet him, and then, after having passed him thrice, by seating themselves again.[5]

For my refreshment I was served all kinds of products of the country, a hospitality which I had to reciprocate with gifts of European products. The following morning my journey continued, and on that day, as it had been on the previous one, it followed the same trackless route. On the way I passed the following Black settlements: Tiasso [?Atwerasi], Schen-

[5] In modern practice the visitor greets the hosts first, in an anti-clockwise direction, then the hosts greet the visitor in the same manner. Cf. Denteh 1967: 6–7.

tema, Tutu, Mampon [Mampong], ||p. 277|| Otaky [Abotakyi], Manno [Amanokrom], and Mamfeng [Mamfe].[6] In Mamfeng the king of Assianthee has a high official who is in charge of the collection of customs, so the Black slave-trader is required to make payment to him. The official has been placed there because all the routes leading to the coast from Assiantee and Akim converge there.[7]

A fetish priest is the kabossie who rules Schentema. When these swindlers have acquired some degree of reputation it is easy for them to make themselves powerful and rich. A slave who is not well satisfied with his master makes an effort and comes to this village. Then he goes to the fetish house, or the temple of the idol, and seats himself inside on a kind of altar. The fetish priest, who goes there daily to make sacrifices, asks him what he is seeking. He answers, 'I want to give my body to the fetish.' the priest, who now understands him perfectly, accepts him, and from then on he is in reality the slave of the fetish priest for the rest of his life — without the priest's having had to pay a single cowrie (the customary payment here) for him. As a result half the population of this Black settlement are his slaves. Usually these swindlers are kind to them in order to attract more slaves.

||p. 278|| The Black settlements mentioned above lie not much more than half a mile from each other, although the last one, to which I have just come, was a good mile from the preceding one It is called Kommang [Kwaman] and is the residence of his Ducal Highness of Aquapim.[8] He is the *Kabossier en Chef* [Paramount Chief] over all the Black settlements through which I passed today, and many more as well. This is why the Europeans add the title 'prince' or 'duke' to his name in their books. His predecessor, who was a harder man, had the right of life or death over his people without having to ask permission of his elders or ministers, but this one, in contrast, has had that power restricted. His name is Attiambo [Atiemo] and he is one of the most well-built Blacks I have ever seen. He is probably about 45 years old.[9] The Blacks never know their real age, since they do not count years. but if asked their age, they answer, 'I was born when such-and-such a great man died, or when such-and-such a battle was fought', or when some other generally known, important thing

[6] See Map 1, p. 256.

[7] For the Great Roads and Route V, see Wilks 1975: 7–8. The Asante official to whom Isert refers was the head of the Asante *nkwansrafo*, or customs station, at *Mamfe*, located some eight English miles east of Adawso on Route V (Tom McCaskie, personal communication).

[8] This is probably the present-day Akropong.

[9] For 'Attiambo', see Third Letter[6].

had happened, just as is the practice among our own people here and there in the countryside.

Accompanied by his entire royal household he greeted me, showing many signs of friendship and honour, ||p. 279|| in the same way as was done in Abodee; but he made certain changes in that custom since we had known each other very well as comrades-in-arms during the Augna war. He embraced me in European fashion, letting his head rest on my shoulder a long time, and he hugged me so hard that I could have cried out.

Immediately after the first complimentary greetings were over and I had sat down, a large pot of palm wine was brought out and His Highness drank first — a good calabash full (about 18 ounces). His most prominent ministers followed his example and not until this was done was I served.

It is a custom among the Blacks that when a stranger is brought something to drink the host must taste at least a little of it first before it is offered to the guest, as proof that there is no poison in it. In earlier times this custom was certainly necessary, since they sought to rid themselves of their enemies in this way. Now they know a more profitable method — namely, to sell them to the Europeans.

I was then shown to my room, which was in the rear courtyard. The houses of ||p. 280|| the Mountain Blacks are square, being built of poles, and the walls are covered with clay.[a] The interiors are kept very clean. The floor is washed every morning with red earth, which gives it a very nice appearance. This is much the same as is done with the hearth in Germany. The houses are not more than one storey high, including those of the kabossies, in contrast to the dwellings of the Coastal Blacks which usually have two storeys.[10] The rooms in which treasures are kept have doors of a hard wood quite closely resembling mahogany. But the rooms where they receive visitors are a built like verandas with one side open.[11] The bed that was brought for me was a kind of cot not more than one foot off the floor. It was made of beautifully plaited cane upon which various mats were laid; first the coarser ones, then the finer ones, and a couple of Black *pantjes* were laid on top of these. According to their taste it was a bed in which a king would not be ashamed to lie. ||p. 281|| I,

[a] Here I have not seen the termites *Termes fatale Linn.* which are found in such great numbers in the coastal region. If they had been here they would soon have destroyed the wood work.

[10] Isert may have been referring specifically to the storeyed dwelling of the kabucee in Little Popo, a house which he said surpassed the others on the coast. But the houses of the Blacks on the coast were not 'usually' two-storeyed structures, being only single-storeyed.

[11] For the 'open room' or *dampan* see Bowdich 1819: 305; Dupuis 1824: 83; Christaller 1933: 63.

however, found it so hard and uncomfortable that I believe the slaves in our gaols are more comfortable.

As soon as I had settled into my house gifts were brought for both me and my Blacks. These gifts were cowrie shells — the currency of the country —, sheep, goats, chickens, and also prepared foods, for such time as I might wish to savour them. When I had recovered somewhat from my journey I began to look around the area. It is wooded everywhere, but most delightful. Mountains, cliffs and valleys alternate in a beautiful arrangement. Fresh water, which is so rare in much of the coastal area, as well as being impure there, is excellent everywhere around here. Close to the town, issuing from a rock face, is a perpetual spring whose water is crystal-clear and cool. There are trees here of an incredible circumference. I measured one of the largest, whose trunk was not less than 45 feet in circumference, or 15 feet in diameter. It is not the same species of tree which Adanson has described in his account of Senegal,[b] but a different species. It was impossible for me to collect anything from its branches || p. 282 || because they were too high, which disappointed me somewhat. For if a Black cannot grasp at least nearly all the way around a tree he will not climb it, although otherwise he can climb like a monkey. The tree was just like a round tower in appearance. Since it neither was in bloom nor appeared to have fruit, it did not vex me so greatly when I was unable to get a closer look at its branches. Otherwise I would have tried to shoot them down, a method I have often been forced to use. Other plants that I found there were the paradise grain plant[c] and the false paradise grain plant,[d] together with another new species. I saw a tree of very tall, straight growth with tulip-like flowers whose beauty can be imagined but not described[e]; a new aloe, planted by the inhabitants, who make rope out of the fibres of the leaves; a new species of citron with articulated leaves; and a host more of mostly unknown trees and species of bushes.[12] A variety of Spanish cane grows in the thickest bush in the swampiest places. || p. 283 || It is straight, well-proportioned and often six feet high. One wishes that they would treat it as the Chinese do, because, after being dried, this variety would have the strength that Chinese cane has, but

[b] *Adansonia digitata Linn.* [The Baobob. See Dalziel 1955: 112–5; Willis 1973: 20; Hepper 1976: 31; Chittenden 1977: 37. Michel Adanson, 1727–1806, was a French natural historian whose work was based largely on studies in Senegal. In 1763–4 he proposed a system of plant classification which differed from that of Linnaeus.]

[c] *Ammomum grana paradisi Linn. [Aframomum granum-paradisi.* Cf. Dalziel 1955: 470.]

[d] *Ammomum Zerumbet Linn.* [Ginger].

[e] A new genus of *Tetrandrieæ*. [That is, a species having four stamens.]

[12] For ropes made of leaf fibres, see Hepper 1976: 132.

would exceed it in beauty[f]. At the root of the tree I found a parasitic plant which in its entirety is a flower. It has precisely the form of a half-buried pine cone which has opened, but is entirely bright red. The Blacks use it for the treatment of veneral disease.[g] The palm tree occurs here only rarely, with the exception of the oil palm[h] and the wine palm[i], both of which grow wild here in great abundance but are also cultivated. The true coconut palm[k] and the monkey coconut palm[l] are not found here, nor are the other kinds which are so common in the plains. In a word, as soon as one climbs up to the mountain range from the seaboard one finds that || p. 284 || the entire vegetation has another character, and I believe that of the types of vegetation there not 20 of the same kind grow here.

In respect of the species of animals here I was less fortunate in making discoveries. The elephant, so common in the area around Fida, is not seen here, and the game that is so abundant in those plains is rare here, probably because of the lack of grass which cannot thrive in the impenetrable forest. Therefore the inhabitants compensate [by hunting for] a variety of monkey and the wild boar. Of the many species of birds here the majority are parrots, of which I distinguished six species.[m] Insects are numerous and I observed many new varieties.

In the field of mineralogy [*sic*], if quarrying were to be practised here the results would not be inconsiderable. The cliffs are made up of pure *saxa*, that is, of granite, of gneiss and its variations and at times also || p. 285 || of a quanitity of dry quartz and black shale. However, I was not able to find limestone. The soil varies, being mostly rich clay of all colours, or a black mulch. Sand is never found here.[13]

The climate appears considerably healthier here than at the seaboard, regardless of how much the doctors cry out against the wooded areas in

[f] A *Heliconia?* I found it in half-ripe fruit but could not find any flowers, thus I remain in doubt as to which genus of plant it is. [For Heliconia, see Willis 1966: 527; Chittenden 1977: 975.]

[g] I thought at first it was the *Aphyteia hydnora* of Mr. Thunberg, but it is actually quite different. it belongs to *Icosandria*.

[h] *Elais Guineensis Linn.* [Oil palm. See Dalziel 1955: 499–507; Irvine 1961: 781; Hepper 1976: 155–6.]

[i] A *Phoenix?* [See Irvine 1961: 782–4; Willis 1966: 866; Hepper 1976: 154–5; Chittenden 1977: 1553. See also *Raphia gigantea*, Dalziel 1955: 510.]

[k] *Cocos nucifera Linn.* [See Chittenden 1977: 515.]

[l] A *Borassus?* [See Dalziel 1955: 496–7; Willis 1973: 151; Hepper 1976: 154–5; Chittenden 1977: 298.]

[m] Namely, the *Psittacus erythacus* and *pullarius Linn.* The four other kinds appear to be species that are new to us. [Cf. Serle and Morel 1977: 102–3.]

[13] Isert's use of the term 'mineralogy' is misleading. Clearly he means 'mineral deposits'. See Boateng 1970: 56–8.

a torrid climate. Admittedly, the high altitude at which the land lies contributes to this.[14] On the whole, it is much colder here than at the seaboard, which was proven by my thermometer registering a drop of ten degrees as soon as I was up in the mountains. The wind is only slight, yet the air is clean, and I accept as beyond any doubt the new teachings of the physicists, to the effect that the plants or the trees absorb a part of the combustible air during the day.[15] Otherwise, according to the opinion of the ancients, it ought to be very unhealthy, which is contrary to what experience proves. So it is small wonder that if a tree is cut down in the unhealthy area on the assumption that this improves the air, the purpose is not fulfilled and the climate becomes worse rather than better. Those Europeans who live || p. 286 || in the fort at the seaside should establish a hospital and vegetable garden here. All newcomers from Europe should be brought here immediately upon arrival so that they can become accustomed to the climate more successfully and comfortably than they can by being instantly exposed to it in a wretched, close room, with the sun's rays beating down and being reflected from the naked white sand on the beach. A vegetable garden would be of extraordinary benefit to the Europeans in this area since not only the Whites in the fort but also the ships lying in the roadstead could be supplied with vegetables. At present they receive little or nothing of these. And I am convinced that all European vegetable plants could grow here, since it is known that they grow in Italy and we enjoy a similar climate here in the mountains.[16]

The Aquapims, or Mountain Blacks, in some respects differ in their customs from the Coastal Blacks. Their language is very different from Akra, so much so that unless an Aquapim has learned the language of the Akra, he cannot make himself understood at all. The Aquapim language has a great similarity to the Assianthee language, from which it differs only || p. 287 || in dialect. The Aquapims are of only medium stature but very well-built. Their skin is usually blacker than that of the Coastal Blacks. They wear a beard more commonly than those on the coast are in the habit of doing. The Aquapims are very dextrous, quick on their feet, and in general they have keen minds. They are expert in the handling of firearms, and the majority of them know how to hunt, a necessity for them because of the lack of fish, other than the dried fish they obtain by

[14] The average height above sea level of the Akuapem range is 455 metres (Boateng 1970: 14, 161).

[15] By 'combustible air' Isert was referring to the theory of G. E. Stahl that combustibility was a material substance, *phlogiston*.

[16] Tragically, Isert's theory was disproved by the extremely high mortality among the settlers of the plantation he started in Akuapem in 1788. See Editor's Appendix 3 for 'Frederiksnopel'.

trade with the Coastal Blacks. Their clothing is not different from that of their neighbours.

Indeed the Aquapim lives almost as if in the first innocence of Paradise, with but few differences. Everything he plants he harvests more than a hundredfold. As a result, a Black works three or four weeks at the most throughout the entire year. He spends the rest of the time in purely enjoyable pursuits and in practising his customs. The head of a household never works himself, but has one or more slaves, or even his children, who plant the maize and yams, cultivate the plantains and bananas, cut down either the old plants or the old stems || p. 288 || — new stems shoot spontaneously from the root — tap palmwine, go hunting, etc.[17]

The Aquapims make very few dishes out of the maize and raise no more than they think they can eat freshly roasted. Their preferred vegetable from July to December is the yam[n], which is said to be far tastier here than it is in Columbia. When it is roasted they eat it as we eat bread; or they cook it in a soup containing meat and crushed palm nuts; or they make a kind of pleasant tasting dumpling of it. They plant it in the same way as we do the potato, but the root is so large that a single one can weigh 25 pounds or more, hence they cut it into small pieces. The yam is best when it is roasted or cooked until it becomes snow-white, and it tastes much like potatoes. I once made an experiment with it to see if *emmer*, or starch flour, could be made out of it. The experiment fulfilled my expectations when, from an eight-pound root, I actually obtained one-half pound of very good starch which had a great similarity to that obtained from the potato. By experiment I noticed also that the root is capable of a spiritous fermentation, but since I had no distilling apparatus, and could not obtain one here, I could not || p. 289 || determine how much *spiritus* it was able to produce.

In the remaining six months of the year there are no yams available, because they are harvested only once a year and cannot be stored for the rest of the year. Consequently the Aquapims use the fruits of the plantain tree[o] instead, a tree bearing fruit the whole year and found throughout the forest. For the preparation of plantains as a vegetable they are plucked from the tree when they have become large but are not yet fully ripe. They are then cooked in water until they are very soft. The leathery skin is removed and the fruit is crushed, with a pestle of very hard wood, in a wooden mortar made out of a tree trunk, until the pulp acquires the

[n] *Dioscorea sativa Linn.* [On *Dioscorea Linn.* see Dalziel 1955: 488–93.]

[o] *Musa paradisiaca Linn.* [*Ibid*, 468–70; Willis 1973: 767.].

[17] Isert now seems to have learned that cutting down the stem of the banana/plantain plant after the fruit is harvested is an acceptable process. Cf. Third Letter 69.

characteristic of a very light dumpling or pudding. This is then placed in a calabash in the form of small balls, and when it has reached this stage it is called *foi foi*.[18]

About the time this vegetable is finished they have ready a tasty soup which has been prepared in the following way. Two or three handfuls of the ripe || p. 290 || nuts of the oil palm are cooked in a sufficient amount of water until their fibrous, pithy, oily part is very soft and most of it has come apart in the water. but to make use of all of it they pour the entire affair [*sic*] into a hair-sieve and through this they strain everything that has loosened from the stones and fibres. The meat of chickens, sheep, goats, monkeys or other game is cooked in the sieved sauce, and when it is finished they pour this vegetable-meat soup over the dumplings. Then the dish is ready, except that it needs the further addition of salt and Spanish pepper. One such dish makes an entire meal, without bread or any other accompaniment. I must admit that this dish of the Blacks agreed very well with me. It alone made up my diet during the entire time I stayed in Aquapim.

To be sure, they have other forms of nourishment, but these are not at all as common, although enjoyed at times as delicacies. In this category belongs the edible arum,[p],or what in Columbia is called *tannies*, of which || p. 291 || they cook the leaves like a cabbage and eat the root like yams. The leaves of this plant are much like our spinach and the root is like our chestnut. Throughout the whole year there are also great quantities of fresh fruit to eat, the major part of which grows wild. The main fruits are the banana,[q] the pineapple[r] and the pawpaw.[s] Limes also grow wild here.

In cases of necessity their drink is water. But the head of each household sees to it that in the monring his slave, or his son, or his daughter, brings him a pot containing some 12 – 20 *kannen* of palm wine, and this is consumed in the course of the day.[19] The head drinks first and then he serves his entire family according to age. While sitting on their haunches all must immediately drink to his health. This drink so beloved by the Blacks is obtained by them in two ways. One way is that they dig up the trunk of an old wine palm which they presume will grow no more. In the middle of the trunk, which is placed over the hole || p. 292 || where the

[p] *Arum esculentum Linn.* [Now *Colocasia esculentium Schott*, Cocoyam. See Dalziel 1955: 481–2; Willis 1973: 97; Dickson 1971: 79].

[q] *Musa sapientum Linn.* [See ° above.]

[r] *Bromelia ananas Linn.* [Cf. Dalziel 1955: 467.]

[s] *Carica papaya Linn.* [*Ibid.* 52–3; Willis 1973: 204.]

[18] '*Foi foi* [*fufu*] is the name of the form. The balls can be made of cassava, yam or cocoyam (Dede 1969: 14).

[19] One *kanne* = approx. Two litres.

root had been, they chisel out a square hole deep enough to reach the centre of the trunk. A pot is placed in the hole in the ground in such a way that the opening in the trunk lies directly and perpendicularly over the pot. By this simple and easy method, from one trunk they collect only a few *kannen* of palm wine each 24 hour period during the first four days, but 10 to 15 *kannen* during the following eight to ten days. After this time the tree dies. If the wine does not run well at the beginning, they make a small fire of grass around it, thus promoting the distillation. It is easy to dig up the palm tree since its fibrous root does not measure much more than one and one-half ells in circumference and it never has a central root like other trees.

The other way of tapping, which produces the so-called 'sweet palm wine', is by cutting off the crown of another kind of wine palm, making a slit in the remaining trunk, and inserting a small palm leaf. This leaf is bent down and the other end is fixed into the opening of a calabash or bottle, so that the sap drips along the leaf into the container hanging under it. A || p. 293 || medium-sized trunk yields not more than two *kannen* in 24 hours and cannot be in use for more than three days, since by then the trunk will have been dried by the sun. This method of collecting palm wine is in fact somewhat more troublesome, but the wine is sweeter and more pleasant in flavour.[20]

In the course of my walks I often encountered girls coming out of the forest with large pots full of wine on their heads. As soon as they reached me they presented me with a reed, and they went down on their knees so that I could drink through the straw more comfortably, sucking from the pot. Indeed, if a number of girls came at the same time, they argued with each other for the honour of having me drink from their pot, each one maintaining that her wine was the sweetest. For this reason I often found it necessary, in order not to incur their displeasure, to taste some wine from each of their pots. Palm wine is similar in appearance and taste to must, and before it is 48 hours old is very good for the health and refreshing, but after that time it develops a bitter taste and goes to one's head.

The fetish worship that the Aquapims practise resembles that of the Coastal Blacks very closely, || p. 294 || but the latter serve their fetish much more poorly, in that at various points in the roads and at crossroads the Aquapims construct a kind of altar formed from the stalks of palm leaves.[21]

[20] For methods of tapping palm wine, see Hemmersam in Jones 1983: 110; Müller in Jones op cit: 223; Irvine 1961: 779, 782, 784; Boateng 1970: 87; Dickson 1971: 73.

[21] The Akuapem belong to the Akan people, and crossroads or *nkwantanan* are places of special significance in Akan thought. Considered to be the *loci* of supernatural powers they are to be approached with caution, and the spirits inhabiting them require propitiation (Tom McCaskie, personal communication).

Cooked and raw yams and all the kinds of food that they themselves use are collected at the altar, and in addition, a calabash of wine is placed there. In the ground around the altar they fix a number of sticks each of which has been painted white and has a kind of raffia wound around its middle. In the centre of the road leading from Kommang to another small Black settlement I found twelve human heads planted side by side in the ground at the root of a tree, and beside them some pots and bottles filled with water and half-buried in the ground. These were surrounded by a sort of fence, although this was a very extensive area. When I inquired as to the reason for these heads having been placed so strangely — an arrangement which I had never seen before, notwithstanding my having been in the country for nearly three years — I could see that they did not want to reveal the true reason. Nevertheless, I was finally told that they were the heads of a particular family. ||p. 295|| I could not conceive of their being the heads of a conquered enemy, because had that been the case, they would not have been shown so much honour; while members of families here would always have been buried with their heads in place. Even if these were the ransomed heads of friends who had been conquered in war, they, too, would have been buried in the same manner as intact bodies are.[22]

I stayed in Aquapim for ten days, partly in order to become better acquainted with the lie of the land and with its boundaries, and partly because my friend Attiambo did not want to let me go. In fact I would always have found sufficient nourishment for my spirit had I stayed an entire month. I made daily excursions from here to the surrounding area and always found my efforts rewarded! The Duke, however, did not allow me to go with my Blacks alone, but always gave me an armed escort of his own.[23] The concern the Blacks showed for me was exaggerated. If a stone was lying in the road, or a branch was hanging so low that it might hinder me, these things had to be cleared away immediately. Such exaggerated shows of politeness, and the extraordinary curiosity to see a White man, since none had been here before now, ||p. 296|| resulted in people crowding around at every place in which I was seen, which hindered

[22] Isert is justifiably suspicious of the reasons given him. Persons whose heads were so placed were certainly not being shown any honour. On the contrary, an honourable burial would not have left the heads exposed in that manner (A. Adu Boahen, personal communication). Nor is it likely that the heads belonged to war captives. It is clear from the presence of pots of water — a common feature — that this site had ritual significance. This is confirmed by the fence or *pampimi* around it, an obstruction to prevent the free passage of evil sprits (Tom McCaskie, personal communication). For yet another interpretation, see Monrad 1822: 23–4.

[23] The 'escort' provided for Isert was probably also intended to monitor and restrict his movements. See Bowdich 1819: passim.

me somewhat in my walks. Old women could not even abandon their cupping when I went past their houses, but came running out holding to their temples the large gourd used here for a cupping-glass. They wanted to see that wonderful animal, the European, about whom they tell each other daily so many things before they have ever seen him. Indeed, if I wanted to have peace in my room I had to place a guard in front of the door to keep people from storming the house. Everything about me seemed to them a source of wonder. Once, when I was eating in front of a crowd of people, the entire crowd cried out, 'Look! The White Man can eat, too!'

To the same extent that a derogatory picture of the inland people had been painted for me, to that extent did I find them delightful. They have a far better mental attitude than do the Coastal Blacks who are acquainted with the Europeans, and the Mountain Blacks have a greater degree of hospitality. Not only does my host provide very generously all the necessities which I and my Blacks require, but often ||p. 297|| when I appear in the town while on a walk for exercise, here or there a prominent man will come running out of his house pleading with me to bestow honour on it by drinking a gourd of palm wine. And if I accept the invitation, I cannot but enjoy thoroughly the happy faces of my host and his family, all of whom enter in order to be able to observe me more carefully. However, much as they want to look at me, they never overstep the great respect which they are bound to show to their own prominent people, that is, by keeping themselves at a certain distance. But I am usually a source of terror to the children who, if I come upon them unexpectedly, give forth a loud scream and run away. Boys of between 10 and 12 years of age have dared to run behind me, but they were always on their guard, and if I turned around, simply to speak to my servant, or if, with something else on my mind, I happened to touch my sword, the entire lot took to their heels.[24]

Aquapim is supposed originally to have been settled by people from a nation lying further inland, most probably by the Assianthees, with whom they have ||p. 298|| a great deal in common, both in custom and in language. Even their name seems to indicate that they originated from another nation, since it means, '1,000 slaves', that is, *pim*, '1,000' and *aqua* or *quaqua*, 'slave'.[25] According to my rough estimate Aquapim is 30 miles long and 25 miles wide. Inland, on the east it is bordered by

[24] Fear of the white man was probably related to fear of *sasabonsam*, the mythical evil spirit, variously depicted as white or red.

[25] For the origins of Akuapem and various translations of the name, see Reindorf 1895: 90–2; Kwamenah-Poh 1973: 8ff., 21, 34, 48 n.6, 132–3; Wilks 1977: 487–534.

Aquambo; on the seaward side by Krobbo [Krobo]; on the south, or towards the coast, by Akra; on the west by Fanthee [Fante]; and on the north by Akim. The population living in this widespread district, if I reckon from the 1,200 men who can carry arms — I am told that this is the number — and if I include wives and children for each man, the highest estimate possible is a total of not more than 9,000 persons.[26] Their numbers must have been tremendously reduced since towns are mentioned here and there which once must have been flourishing but of which nothing is known today except the name. I now want to give you a superficial description of the bordering lands, lands I myself was not lucky enough to see, as will become clear later.

Aquamboe || p. 299||, once a mighty kingdom, conquered the Akras in the last century, forcing them to flee to Popo.[27] Since that time the Akras have been living in a republican state. Aquamboe still has its own king but he pays tribute to the Assianthees. In their finest period the Aquamboes were the terror of the Europeans. At that time they had upwards of 6,000 warriors, but now they are very much reduced and only a little stronger than Aquapim. Despite that, a few years ago the newly enthroned king, in order to show his power, allied himself with the Augnas with that intention. They marched to the coast and fought our Ajugas and Pottebras, burning their towns while the inhabitants sought shelter under the cannons of our Fort Prinzenstein. The Aquamboes camped with their army not more than a quarter of a mile from the Fort, but did not consider it wise to attack it. Instead they played politics by sending an envoy to our Fort with the message that we need not fear any hostilities from them; they had always been friends to the Danes and would remain so if || p. 300 || we did not support their enemy. To emphasize this, their army retired and few months later their king sent several prominent officers to us at Christiansburg, to eat fetish in his name with our Augnas and Quittas as a sign of friendship, or, in other words, to swear to their good faith.[28]

Krobbo is only a small republic having perhaps some 500 men in arms. They all live on a mountain in the area of Friedensburg.[29] A very high mountain, shaped like a hay-stack, it stands out distinctively from the rest of the range. It is this mountain which actually has the name Krobbo, and it is to this place that the inhabitants flee in the event of an enemy attack.

[26] For other census estimates, see Kea 1979: 57–9.

[27] Cf. Reindorf 1895: 21–2; Kwamena Poh 1973: 22–5.

[28] On Akwamu-Anlo relations, see Kea 1980: 371–92; Green 1981: 81–90. On Akwamu-Danish relations, see Rask 1754: 150–3; Nørregaard 1966: 63–75; Justesen 1980: 350 ff.; Green 1981: 147–8, 160–1.

[29] The Krobo area was not confined solely to the mountain but included the surrounding plains (Huber 1963: 15).

On the top of the mountain there is a fresh spring, making it possible for refugees to stay there a long time provided they are well supplied with food. There they can resist a siege of 50,000 men, since the mountain is absolutely impossible to climb, other than by a narrow footpath on one side. Even the Assianthees, when they had forced a passage to the sea at the beginning of this century, and had subjugated all the other larger nations, || p. 301 || had no mere trivial encounter with the Krobbos. The latter simply retired to their mountain and did nothing more until they saw the Assianthees, said to have been 3,000 in number, climbing the mountain. Then they rolled large stones down on them. For this reason the Assianthees found it necessary to enter into fair conditions of peace with them.[30]

Fanthee is also a republic, but one of considerable size. It stretches along the coast from Akra, from which it is separated by a very large lagoon, called the 'Akra lagoon'. Most of the Dutch and English forts lie in the Fanthee district. The inhabitants are industrious and plant a large quantity of maize — it is, therefore, the granary for us as well as for our Blacks.

Akim is a kingdom which lies further inland above Aquapim, that is to say to the north. The Akims must have been a highly populated country in earlier times, before they were subjugated by the Assianthees. One can draw this conclusion from the fact that the Akims in former times frequently defied the Assianthees; and from the large amounts of gold which they used to mine and trade with us at that time.[31] Now they are about as strong as the Aquamboes, whom they counter-balance, and || p. 302 || like the Aquamboes they are tributary to the Assianthees. Their former king (whose name escapes me) once wanted to make war on another small nation, and since he first had to have permission from the king of Assianthee to make certain that the latter would not attack his land during the war, he had to promise to deliver to him half the booty if he succeeded in winning a victory.[32] The king of Akim then went to the battlefield and did in fact defeat the enemy but as he did not collect very much booty he felt that he had the right to keep that small amount himself. However, he learned after some time that the king of Assianthee was about to send an envoy to him to demand his head. He know that that decision, once made, could not be ameliorated, so he invited his most prominent ministers to come to him one evening. He announced to them his impending misfortune and stated that he was prepared to dispatch himself to the

[30] This invasion took place in 1742 when 20,000 Asante troops drove through Akim as far as Accra and the towns lying east of it (Tom McCaskie, personal communication).

[31] For Akim-Asante relations see Kwamena Poh 1973: 34–7, 76–9. For Akim gold mining and trading on the coast, see Seventh Letter [17].

[32] The king was Ofosu Apenten (Tom McCaskie, personal communication).

other world. The ministers, unwilling to allow their king go on such a long journey alone, promised to accompany him. To this end there were brought in as many kegs of gunpowder as there were persons gathered there, on each of which one individual seated himself; || p. 303 || an anker of brandy was placed on the ground in their midst; and so the gentlemen drank to a happy journey and smoked tobacco until the king gave the signal that each one should insert his pipe into his keg of gunpowder. All did this and in this heroic way made an end to their lives.

The capital of Akim is only three days' journey from this place (Kommang) and since I needed to go only a little out of my way on the route to Assianthee to visit it, I anticipated with delight the discoveries I would make there, particularly if I could see the gold mines which were once so productive but are now no longer being worked. But I deceived myself mightily in making these plans, because as I was on the point of travelling there I received from the government an order to return without delay, on the grounds that my presence was required at the establishment. With how much sadness I set out on my return journey to the coast, to the Libyan wasteland, you can imagine without my swearing to it. A hundred times I looked back towards the north where Akim and Assianthee lay, but in vain! I was denied the joy of seeing them on this occasion. || p. 304 || Perhaps a lucky star will once more appear to me and bring me back here! But when?

I had hardly arrived again at Christiansburg when I fell victim to an extreme gall fever. In spite of this I travelled the next day to Friedensburg where my business called me. The fever increased to such an extent that I began to doubt that I would survive. But fortunately, on the sixth day it took a reversal and I recovered very quickly after that. Since that time I have felt such an antipathy to this land in which my hands are so tied that I have no inclination to stay here any longer and instead I shall return to Europe with the first ship available. It will probably sail in six weeks time.[33]

This is therefore my last letter from Africa. But since I must first go to Columbia before I can sail on to Europe, I shall write more to you from there. Until then, live well, etc.

[33] Isert's sudden 'antipathy' and his precipitous decision to leave Africa is readily understood in light of his burning desire to explore the interior, as indicated in his letter requesting funding from Sir Joseph Banks (Editor's Appendix 2). The frustration of having the fulfilment of this dream suddenly destroyed at the start, and his irritation at being recalled to fulfil his contractual obligations, which required him to participate in the slave trade, certainly provided him with sufficient cause for an immediate departure.

Eleventh Letter

Christiansstad on St.
Croix in Columbia
12 March, 1787

'*Et moi je dirois à celui qui attenteroit à ma liberté, si vous approchez, je vous poignarde.*' Rainal[1]

I am still alive, Father, and have put behind me an ocean voyage of 1200 miles. But it was by a hair's breadth that I still exist! — 'Suffered a shipwreck? Been ill?' No! Murdered by the hand of an unhappy Black!

It was on 7 October last year that I left Africa and boarded the ship 'Christiansburg' which sailed that very evening. Picture the tumult in front of a ship of black slaves, a ship which, when used in the King's service would hold no more than 200 people, now holding more than 452 slaves, who have to be kept in check by 36 Europeans.[2] Imagine the sight of such a || p. 306 || multitude of miserable people — some who were by chance born to slave parents; some who were captured in war; some who were stolen and innocent of any crime; some who, for other casual reasons, were sold to the Europeans — all of them now about to be transported in heavy chains from their fatherland to another country which they do not know. Their future cannot possibly hold anything good in store for them when the Europeans use such violent means to secure them. In their own country they have themselves heard such dreadful tales of how the slaves are treated in Columbia that one is appalled when one hears them. I was once asked by a slave, in complete earnest, if the shoes I was wearing had been made of Black skin, since he had observed that they were the same colour as his skin. Others say that we eat the Blacks and make gunpowder of their bones.[3] They cannot imagine that they will be

[1] 'As for me, I say to him who would make an attempt on my liberty, "If you approach, I shall run you through!" ' Raynal. Cf. Preface [1].

[2] Another source gives the number of slaves on this voyage as 457 (Green-Pedersen 1973: 72).

[3] The slaves' fear of being eaten, and their blood drunk, was often cited by the early authors. Cf. Monrad 1822: 297.

used only for the cultivation of fields and other manual labour, since, in order to sustain themselves here, this kind of work requires so few hands and demands so little time that it would be absolutely superfluous to bring ||p. 307 strangers into the land to do it.[4] Furthermore, they give no credence to all the assurances from the Europeans that they are going to be taken to a beautiful country, and other similar cajolery. On the contrary, whenever the opportunity presents itself they take flight or kill themselves, since they fear death far less than slavery in West India. Indeed, all precautions must be taken to prevent their having the opportunity of committing suicide. For this reason on the French ships they are not even allowed a narrow strip of loincloth for fear they will hang themselves by it, which has in fact happened.[5]

This prejudice, and the too strict treatment these unfortunates not infrequently are forced to suffer at the hands of barbaric captains, often results in a conspiracy among them. They conspire at night that, notwithstanding their chains, they will kill the Europeans whom they so greatly outnumber and let the ship drift in to land. Usually this kind of mutiny occurs either while the ship is in the roadstead or during ||p. 308|| the first day, when the ship is sailing away from the coast. During my stay on the Guinea Coast I have heard of a number of sad examples. In the year 1785 the slaves on a Dutch ship revolted on the very day that the ship was to sail to West India. The Europeans were overpowered and beaten to death, except for a young cabin-boy who had climbed to the top of the main mast. Before the Whites had been completely overpowered, they had shot off several alarm signals which had been heard on land, and a number of canoes manned with armed, free Blacks had been sent out to help. As soon as these approached the ship and the rebellious slaves saw that they had to become the losers, they decided to do away with themselves. With this in mind, one of them ran with a firebrand to the powder magazine and blew it up. The canoes did not fish up more than some thirty Blacks, and the cabin boy as well. The rest, more than 500 in number, fell victim to the waves.

Less lucky were the Blacks on an English ship, who also rebelled on the Gold Coast that same year. They ||p. 309|| had killed all the Europeans, cut the anchor rope, and let the ship drift to land. When it reached the breakers, all the Blacks jumped overboard and swam to shore. But, to their great sorrow, the free Blacks standing along the shore fished them all up and sold them once again to the Europeans. The ship and its cargo were good spoils for the Blacks at the point where it drifted into land.[6]

I report these two examples only from hearsay, but now a word about an uprising of slaves on a ship on which I found myself. A slave ship is equipped amidships with a strong, high, [transverse] wooden partition called the bulwark whose side facing forward must be extremely smooth, without any open grooves in which the slaves might get a fingerhold. On top of this wall there are as many small cannons and guns as there is room for, and these are kept loaded at all times and are shot off every evening in order to keep the slaves in a state of fear. There is always a man on watch near these, who must pay meticulous attention to the movements of the Blacks. In the stern section on the other side ||p. 310|| of the bulwark, all the women and children are kept, while the men are kept on the forward side of the bulwark where they can neither see the women nor join them. The men are alway chained together, hand and foot, in pairs. Moreover, along the row in which they sit on the deck, a strong chain is drawn between their feet so that they cannot stand up without permission, nor can they move from the spot, except when they come up on deck in the mornings and are locked in the hold in the evenings. But, since their number is so great, they can only enjoy this exercise every second day, having on the other days to stay below, where they are packed together like herrings.[7]

It was on the second day of our sailing, when most of the Krepees were on deck, that they started to rebel. At that moment I found myself alone among the Blacks, and since I understand the language of the Akras I was exchanging pleasantries with some of them and with some Dunkos (a most well-mannered nation). Because there is always a great tumult with such a number of people, I noticed that it had suddenly become extremely quiet. ||p. 311|| Since most of the crew were below, eating, I decided to go to the bow of the ship to see if everyone was at his post, in case the Blacks had some kind of rebellion in mind. When I had reached about midships the door of the bulwark was opened, because the first mate intended to come out to join me. But at that same moment there arose from all the male slaves a shriek of the most horrifying tone that one can

[4] Carried away by his sentiments Isert has made a sweeping statement that ignores the truth. He knew perfectly well that 'strangers' were brought in to work the land in Africa. Indeed later in this letter, ||p. 340||, he states clearly and unconditionally that the Africans were accustomed to slave-trading and that they could not 'work the fields otherwise than with slaves.' Following this precept he based his own plantation/colony on the use of slave labour, albeit the cultivation was initially to be for the sole purpose of sustenance. See Editor's Appendices.

[5] Cf. Green-Pedersen 1973: 45, 52.

[6] On slave revolts on ships, see Bosman 1705: 365a; Rask 1754: 75–6; Rømer 1760: 320; Green-Pedersen 1973: 42–5.

[7] On the placement and treatment of slaves on the ships, see Bosman 1705: 365; Rømer 1760: 320: Monrad 1822: 302, 304–5; Westergaard 1917: 140–44; Green-Pedersen 1973: 39–41.

imagine. It resembled the one I had heard, at an earlier time, when they were going to attack in battle. Hearing this cry, all the men, who were usually seated, stood up. Some of them hit me on the head with the hand-irons with which they were chained together, so that I immediately fell to the deck. But since they were also chained at the feet I was able to crawl away from them, and I reached the bulwark door. Here I now battered in vain, because, when the crew tried to let me in, such a number of Blacks seized the door that the crew had great difficulty in closing it. Furthermore, it is established policy that it is better to let a European be killed than to allow the Blacks to gain control of that door, since they could then make their way to the || p. 312 || stern of the ship, which is full of weapons hanging there. It would then be a simple task for them to become masters of the ship. Meanwhile I was not left idle at the door for long, but was immediately forced to seek the deck as before. When the Europeans in the stern of the ship realized what was happening on the other side, they tried to keep the bulwark free from attack, by stabbing with bayonets from above. In order to be able to kill me more easily, the slaves pulled me by the foot to the bow of the ship, where one of them, using a razor he had seized from another who was in the process of shaving him when the rebellion began, made a slash across my forehead and temple, through my ear to deep down as far as my neck. But while he was working on my neck, not being able immediately to achieve his purpose due to the thick silk scarf I was wearing, I was delivered by a shot from the bulwark which went through his chest. This made him fall backwards and the other slaves who were holding me released me. Thus I was free again. More musket shots were fired, and there was also firing from two three-pound cannons loaded with grape-shot, so that the Blacks withdrew as far as possible towards the bow to || p. 313 || to avoid the shots. As a result, the door of the bulwark was left free and I had just enough strength to crawl to it, leaving a trail of blood marking my path, since my right temple artery had been severed. The mate, too, had a number of wounds, but not as serious as mine, and since he was a better sailor than I was, he had saved himself by leaving the deck throught the cannon port and then climbing up again on the other side of the bulwark. From the bulwark an attempt was now made, using either kindness or force, to bring the Blacks to their quarters below. Some of them had, in the meanwhile, hammered off their irons, but when prodded by guns, those who had not been party to the conspiracy went to their quarters without any further resistance. The others, however, when they saw that they could not succeed all sprang overboard into the sea. Some boys from the same nation as the rebels but lacking the courage to take such a drastic step were deliberately pushed over by the older ones. The slaves below

deck were secured, || p. 314 || and with great haste small boats were launched. As many slaves as possible were fished up, some living, some dead. It was astounding how some pairs, although they each had only one hand and one foot free (because they were chained together by the other hand and foot), were very adept at staying above water. Some were stubborn even in the face of death, defiantly casting away the rope which had been thrown around their bodies from the ship in order to draw them up, and diving under with force. Among the others there was a pair who had a difference of opinion, the one demanding that he be saved, the other, on the contrary, so desirous of drowning that he pulled the first one under water with him, with great force. The first one cried piteously and was pulled up with his comrade who, however, had already given up the ghost.

The uprising, before it could be completely quelled, lasted for two hours. Upon counting our men, we found that we had lost 34 Blacks in the action, all of whom had drowned. None of the Europeans, however, had died, but two, as mentioned before, had been wounded.

|| p. 315 || As for me, I was only in a very moderate condition. Since I had lost so much blood my strength ebbed away so quickly that I could not even bandage myself, but could only wrap some handkerchiefs around my head to try, if possible, to prevent further loss of blood. Because of this effort the weakness got the upper hand and I fell full length to the deck in a faint, from which I recovered only after a few hours. By the Captain's orders I had been taken immediately to a proper bed and my head moistened with warm wine.[8] When I awoke the whole episode seemed to me to have happened in a dream. I was surprised to find where I was lying and to see the Black women who were sitting around me, crying tears of sympathy. I tried to get up but then I received the message. My head, which was as heavy as a hundredweight, partly because of the

[8] The Captain was Jens Jensen Berg, who wrote of the uprising: "But on the morning of the ninth a general revolt broke out in which the Blacks, maddened to distraction, attacked the crew, overran the upper gundeck, captured the foreship, the main deck and the lower hold, threatening to blow it all up. In spite of the fact that they had been treated in a humane manner and the greatest consideration shown to meliorate their living conditions, their desire for freedom was so overwhelming that they made this desperate attempt. Attempts to use mild means were useless, so the attack had to be met with weapons to restore order. This was accomplished, with varying degrees of success, after three hours. But the sad outcome was that 34 Blacks had lost their lives, while on our side the first mate and the surgeon and a third man were wounded, the surgeon seriously (see the publication P. E. Isert's *Reise nach Guinea*, printed in Copenhagen 1788). That day was the saddest of my life. Indeed, to strike out against the enemy of one's fatherland needs no great persuasion for a man, but to be forced to strike down friends and innocent people who were only fighting for their freedom, is a heavy burden." (Berg 1900: 185–210).

fomentation, partly because of the blood seeping through which had soaked all the cloths, reminded me of the cause. Due to the many blows from hand-irons, some of which had fractured my skull, my head was violently inflamed, so that when I awoke after 24 hours the wounds gaped ||p. 316|| to a width of two fingers, and since my temple muscle was completely severed I could not get my teeth apart but was forced to live on purely fluid nourishment. As serious as this condition seemed at first, still I recovered from it, happily enough, so that on the day we arrived in West India the wounds were healed, a process which had taken precisely two months.

Are you asking why the Blacks were so inflamed precisely against me since in those few days I could not have done them any harm? I found out later that since I boarded the ship so late they had concluded that I was the owner of all the slaves, and that it would be best to send me into the other world first, after which the Europeans, like mercenaries, would surrender all the sooner. After this, however, they treated me very well during the rest of the voyage, so that when I went down to them in the morning they received me with loud applause, which to the unpolished nations is as much a sign of approval as it is in our theatres.

One of the ringleaders of the conspiracy was a Black who had already been in ||p. 317|| West India and in England, and had come back to the Coast from there — I know not why — as boatswain in the service of our establishment. He had fallen deeply into debt, so in order to get rid of him they had sent him on our ship to West India. This villain had persuaded the Krepees that they should beat the Whites to death, then he would bring the ship back to land, since they were fairly far out to sea. Moreover he told them much of both truth and falsehood about West India: that it is a land of torment where they would be given little to eat but much work and many beatings. This was indeed a dangerous man, and it was certainly necessary, after the uprising, to isolate him completely from the others. Therefore he was given residence in the pigsty where, neither by his tongue nor any other parts of his body, could he be dangerous any longer.

Had it not been for that unhappy uprising, we would have made a very favourable journey, since we had no more than seven dead on the crossing, which, for such a great multitude of people, and in such conditions, is a very small number. There are examples of ships having brought to the West Indies ||p. 318|| not more than half of the slaves they had bought on the African coast.[9] The length of the journey and especially the treatment of the Blacks are to a great extent the factors which give rise to the high mortality so common on slave ships. On this ship the greatest care was taken to maintain cleanliness, and the slaves had to exercise on deck every second day, as well as they could in the space they had. They were provided with as much fresh air as possible by means of ventilators which were, admittedly, not of the best sort — being made only of sacks of sailcloth whose upper ends were positioned above deck with open wings to catch the wind, and whose lower ends were placed below deck in the hold.[a] In the evenings, before the slaves were allowed to go down again, all the chambers were well fumigated with dampened gunpowder.[10] Their food ||p. 319|| consisted for the most part of products from their own land, such as maize, rice and yams. They seemed to find our pearl barley very tasty. On the other hand, the so-called 'horse beans' which are the usual provision on slave ships were not at all to their taste. We were lucky enough to catch great numbers of dorado[b] every day, so that not only was our entire ship's company well provided, but a considerable amount was dried for future use. Some of these fish weigh 150 pounds. When they are fully grown, they are called *halbe Kurte*. It is common knowledge that this variety is more numerous the closer one is to the equator.[11]

Water, on the other hand, is a very precious item. A man is given not more than three quarters of a *kanne*, or 24 ounces, daily. This is very little considering that according to medical dietary rules one's intake should be four pounds of fluid every 24 hours, and that here in this torrid area it is so much more imperative to pay attention to this. The slaves' food is always cooked ||p. 320|| dry, so they cannot relieve their thirst in this way.[12] Therefore it is not strange that one hears of the high mortality which often occurs on slave ships. On the other hand, it is incomprehensible when one hears of the great number of sailors who die on warships after a short cruise. They have been provided with all the necessities in abundance; their number does not begin to approach the number on a

[9] For statistics on slave mortality on Danish ships, see Vibæk 1966: 172–3. Isert may have been referring specifically to the ship *Accra* which lost 257 out of 592 slaves purchased in 1781; or to the *Gehr. Guldberg* which lost 103 out of 250 in 1784 (*ibid.*).

[a] Herr professor Kratzenstein in Copenhagen has one type in which one end of the sack ends in a metal pipe, under which a cauldron is placed with a fire under it, so that the air, by virtue of the fire, evaporates in the metal pipe and is driven out. Thus new air constantly rises out of the slave-hold through the pipe. [Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein (1732–95) was a medical doctor and physicist. by the age of 23 he had already achieved a reputation for his studies in physics and he held professorships both in Denmark and in Russia. Kratzenstein gave numerous popular lectures in order to increase interest in natural science, and was ahead of his time in many areas. For a print of the 'Fredensborg' showing the same ventilation arrangement, see p. 253. See also Green-Pedersen 1973: 53.]

[b] *Coryphaena hippurus Linn.*

[10] On fumigation, see Larsen 1968: 68.

[11] On food rations, see Monrad 1822: 304; Green-Pedersen 1973: 54.

[12] On water rations, see Rømer 1760: 321; Westergaard 1917: 140–1.

slave ship; their spirit is not tormented with fears of the future, as are the slaves. Would not the cause of the high mortality, then, lie in incidental things? How much would it not be to the benefit of mankind to find the causes and prevent them! Then one would not see the unwillingness and the desertion which are now so usual when the sailor has been drafted into military service![13]

A few days after our arrival here the fate of our Blacks was decided. They had been brought ashore, adorned according to the best of their country's custom, allowed great freedom of movement, treated with the delicacies of their own land, so that they were convinced that they had come to a paradise. || p. 321 || But appearances were deceptive. The day of their sale had come. They were arranged in rank and file and none of the buyers was allowed to see them on that day until the predetermined moment. Then the door was opened. An army of buyers stormed in and like madmen grabbed the particular Black men and women they had decided upon the day before when the Blacks had been exhibited for inspection, and they took them to the seller to agree on a price. Since the entire business was conducted in such a frenzy that I myself soon became alarmed, one can easily imagine what the Blacks' reaction must have been. Before four hours had passed most of them had been sold. The rest, numbering 48, were for the most part frail or ageing Blacks who were sold wholesale the next day, through the bank, for 200 *thalers* apiece. The sum for all the Blacks sold came to 97,000 and a couple of hundred *thalers*.[14]

St. Croix was first settled by the English and the Dutch, in 1643. They could not tolerate each other for more than three years and the former chased the latter away. The English stayed there peacefully || p. 322 || until 1650, when they were dealt the same fate by the Spanish that they had forced on the Dutch earlier. This nation was less fortunate than the English, since the few Spaniards who had been left to hold the island could not withstand the might of 150 Frenchmen who had come from St. Christoph to settle here. The French soon made progress here and saw their numbers increase in eleven years to 822 Whites and a proportional number of Blacks. But this was the highest number they reached, and from that time their number decreased at the same rate as the one at which it had increased earlier. Those remaining were all transported to St. Domingo in 1696.

After that this lovely island lay waste for all of 37 years until Denmark

[13] Cf. Larsen 1968: 60–74.

[14] For other descriptions of slave auctions, see Westergaard 1917: 141, 144; Vibæk 1966: 135–7; Green Pedersen 1973: 55–6.

bought it from the French for 160,000 *Reichsthalers*. A mighty sum! Now there are many individual plantations which could be sold for twice that amount.[15]

The administration of the settlements in this land is by a Council appointed by the Government, which is made up of the Chief, who is the Governor-General over all our three islands, three Councillors and one Secretary. Subordinate to this is a || p. 323 || lower court, associated with the police, which settles less important cases, said to be not few in number here; and a customs house has been established here, too, to collect taxes.

St. Croix is the chief island of the royal holdings in Columbia. It is at present so well populated that a large immigration would not be favourable. There are about 3,000 Whites and 24,000 Blacks, including all their shades of colour.[16] There are two towns, one on the east coast and the other on the west coast. The former, which is the capital, is called Christiansstadt and the other is called Friedrichsstadt. Christiansstadt is fairly regularly laid out and comprises various streets and crossroads. The houses are in general built completely of wood with shingled roofs, but there have now appeared a number of massive two-storey masonry houses. The Government House is splendid. Most of the buildings are provided with balconies or galleries which are extremely useful in a hot climate.[17] There are various churches here, such as Danish, English and Dutch churches. There is also the *Herrenhuther* [Moravian Brethren] Mission, of which most of the inhabitants are members. || p. 324 || The Moravian Brethren have an excellent establishment outside the town.[18] The town is built around the harbour, which is small, and no ship can enter without a pilot. There is a small fort on the east side of the harbour which can cover the harbour. A garrison stationed in this fort, under the command of Lt. Col. Mr. Hederich, is usually 120 men strong. Another battery has been erected on the reef opposite, and this can prohibit entrance to the harbour.[19]

The land, typically in these countries, is quite flat with a few hills scattered about. It is cultivated nearly everywhere, except for some small mountain tops where forest and grazing land have been left. Throughout the entire country one finds roads so well cleared that it is possible to travel everywhere in a carriage, which, however, is a rarity in these

[15] For the history and purchase of St. Croiz, with slight differences from Isert's account, see Westergaard 1917: 199–212.

[16] On the population on St. Croix in 1786, see Vibæk 1966: 103.

[17] Cf. *ibid.*: 203–4.

[18] The *Herrnhuter*, or Moravian Brethren, had established their headquarters outside Christianssted. For their history, see Oldendorp 1777: vol. II. On the role of the chruches, see Westergaard 1917; 34, 159; Vibæk 1966: 208–15.

[19] Cf. Oldendorp 1777: 264–7; Westergaard 1917: 8, 210; Vibæk 1966: 223.

countries. The major products of the land are sugar and a little cotton. but the other Columbian products, such as cocoa, coffee, indigo, and *roucu*, or Orlean, are not found here.[20] They would not grow here because it seldom rains, as the higher islands in the east deprive us of the rain which comes from that direction. || p. 325 || But the sugar is extraordinarily good and far better than the French product, which cannot easily be sent to Europe in a raw state because it is so sticky that it must be refined once in this country. All of ours, however, is sent out raw, apart from that from one single plantation where it is refined once. The quality of the rum or brandy that are made from syrup always depends upon the quality of the sugar cane from which it is taken. Therefore the rum of St. Croix is preferred to that of the French islands.

The export of sugar from St. Croix alone is calculated to average 16 million pounds annually, not counting the considerable quanitity which is secretly exported to foreign ports. It is calculated also that a good 1,000 bales of cotton are harvested currently.[21] The cultivation of this product is now beginning to be expanded through the efforts of Chief Conductor von Rohr, who has travelled throughout the greatest part of the mainland of central Columbia, at the King's expense, in order to find the best variety of cotton, and to plant it on our islands. On this laborious journey || p. 326 || he has discovered not less than 21 truly different kinds, among them those from Spanish Guyana and another kind with red leaves which is particularly outstanding because of its extraordinary fineness and whiteness. Before this we had not more than three different kinds on our islands, none of them highly profitable and of a dirty colour, apart from one kind which the planters prefer and which they call'year round' because they believe, although mistakenly, that this kind bears throughout the entire year. I shall not torment you with further dry descriptions of these products since my respected friend will, himself, soon make known in print his efforts in this field.[22]

The weather in this part of the world is nearly as hot as it is in Guinea, although the land lies at a good 17 degrees north latitude, but here it is

[20] Cf. Raynal 1770: IV 19. The red grains from the dye-yielding *Bixa orellana*, or roucu, were used both as bodily decoration and as protection against mosquito bites (Devèze 1977: 22).

[21] On cotton and sugar exports, see Westergaard 1917 7; Vibæk 1966: 70–1.

[22] Lt.-Col. J. Ph. B. von Rohr (1735–92) was trained in physics, mathematics and medicine and held the posts of surveyor and supervisor in the Danish West Indies 1757–85. In 1783 he was sent on a two-year tour to the neighbouring islands to study the cultivation of cotton. Following that tour von Rohr was also sent to the Danish colonies in Africa but was lost when the ship he was on sank in 1792. He published his findings from the West Indies in *Anmerkungen über den Cattunbau zum Nutzen der Dänischen Westindischen Colonien*, 2 vols., Altona/Leipzig, 1791–3.

subject to more fluctuation, while it is more stable there. One also notices that the 'winter', in respect of crop infertility and drought, occurs at the same time of year here as does ours; and May, when abundant || p. 327 || rains set in, is also the month of Spring here. The sugar harvest usually begins in January and ends in July. However, some large plantations make sugar throughout the entire year. From the first planting of the sugar until the harvest takes 18 months, after which it is cut every year. This can be repeated seven times. Some planters, on the other hand, consider it more advantageous to harvest it not more than four times. Cuttings are planted in fertile soil in furrows which are two to four feet deep and six to eight feet apart. Most of the work comes from the many weeds which grow there, from which the fields must be cleared frequently by the use of mattocks. When the cane has reached the proper size, it is cut down and pressed through three perpendicular, vertical iron rollers, these being kept in motion by a mill run by wind, water or even horse power. In this way the juice is pressed out and it runs through a pipe mounted there, into a special cauldron for cooking. By this process it is turned into sugar. Usually a handful of quicklime is added to each cauldron containing 400 *kannen* of juice || p. 328||, so that the sugar will granulate more easily. There are, in fact, various techniques in the preparation of sugar, which would take too long to describe here.[23]

Of the various foodstuffs which are planted here the principal ones are the following: two different kinds of yams[c]; 'stock yams', or cassava[d]; potatoes[e]; Angolan peas[f] and the edible arum, most of which originate in Guinea, except for the cassava, whose poisonous aspect the Black does not know. And since the species that is found in Africa is very similar to this one but is not poisonous, it happens, not rarely, that a Black who is a recent arrival reveals this fact if he is not warned in good time how to use this plant.[24]

The transformation of this poisonous plant into an excellent food plant is brought about in the following manner. The root, which is usually one foot long and four to six inches thick, is peeled and then grated as one

[c] *Dioscorea sativa* and *alate Linn.* [Water Yam. See Dalziel 1955: 489–90; Willis 1973: 368–9.]

[d] *Jatropha Manihot Linn.* [Two generic names have been combined here: *Jatropha* is the Barbados nut while the *Manihot* is cassava. Both, however, belong to the family *Euphorbiaceae* (A.A. Enti, personal communication).]

[e] *Convolvulus Patatas Linn.* [*Ipomea batates*, sweet potato].

[f] *Cystisus Cajan Linn.* [Pigeon Pea (Willis 1973: 179).]

[23] On the production process, see Vibæk 1966: 114–8, 116–7, 120–3.

[24] For the presence of hydrocyanic acid in some varieties of cassava, see Dalziel 1955: 151–4. See also Irvine 1961: 242.

grates a horse-radish ||p. 329||, using a large copper grater. Then it is placed in a cloth and compressed in a press, or weighted down with a large stone until no more moisture comes out. The pressed residue is then thrown into a pot and dried over a fire, a process which cooks it a little. It is then ready for use. Others have an iron plate for this purpose, on which they usually bake the pressed root in thin cakes as we bake waffles. The white Creoles, as well the Blacks, consider that this bread has an excellent taste and they often prefer it to our wheat bread. The kind which is only dried in a pot over a fire is called *farin*.[25]

The most pleasant variety of fruits is also available here, and those that cannot be raised here are brought, for a low price, from the Spanish island Portorico, which lies close by, directly across from us. All the fruits that seem to be characteristic of the hot regions, such as coconut, banana and plantain, can be found, as well as the fruits peculiar to Columbia: ||p. 330|| mammee-apple,[g] soursop,[h] sugar apple,[i] avocado, [k] water-lemon,[l] grenadilla,[m] Barbados cherry,[n] two kinds of Columbian plums,[o] guava[p] pomegranate,[q] cashew,[r] star apple,[s] sapote,[t] sapodilla[u] Spanish lime,[x] and many other kinds.

Some marvellous fruits have been brought here from East India, such as the rose apple[y] and the mango,[z] which are, to be sure, not the very best tasting fruits but are enticing because they are out of the ordinary. Vines grow well here and bear twice a year. Oranges of all possible kinds, limes and guavas ||p. 331|| are found in such abundance that the Whites do not set great store by them but leave them for the Blacks.

[g] *Mammea Americana Linn.* [Also St. Domingo Apricot Willis 1973: 709; Chittenden 1977: 1242–3.).]
[h] *Annona Muricata Linn.* [*ibid.*: 69.].
[i] *Annona Squamosa Linn.* [Also Sweet Sop, Scaly Custard Apple (*ibid.*)].
[k] *Laurus Persea Linn.* [Cf. Willis 1973: 639.].
[l] *Passiflora laurifolia Linn.* [*ibid.* 859).].
[m] *Passiflora quadrangularis Linn.* [*ibid.* 859.].
[n] *Malphigia glabra Linn.* [*ibid.* 708.].
[o] *Spondias Mombin* and *Mirobalanus Linn.* [Yellow Mombin (*ibid.* 58, 1090).].
[p] *Psidium pyriferum Linn.* [*ibid.* 956).].
[q] *Punica granatum Linn.* [*ibid.* 966).].
[r] *Anacardium occidentale Linn.* [*ibid.*: 58.].
[s] *Chrysophyllum cainito Linn.* [*ibid.* 251.]
[t] *Achras mammosa Linn.* [Cf. Chittenden 1977: 28.].
[u] *Achras sapota Linn.* [Sapodilla Plum (Willis 1966: 11).]
[v–w] missing.]
[x] *Melicocca bijuga Linn.* [Cf. Chittenden 1977: 1281.].
[y] *Eugenia jambos Linn.* [Also Jambul (Willis 1973: 774).].
[z] *Mangiferra indica Linn.* [*ibid.* 710.].

[25] *Farin* is known as *garri* in Ghana today. See Dede 1969: 154, 155.

Pineapples, avocados and cashews take pride of place as a sweet and indeed they are truly delicious products upon which only a real beast of prey who eats no fruit at all would look with disdain.

All the varieties of European vegetables are found here but they are usually somewhat tougher than they are in Europe. The asparagus is excellent, but the white cabbage forms only loose heads. The carrots, however, grow to an excellent size and have a delicious flavour.

The island has no native domestic animals, but all the species found in Europe have been transplanted here and have multiplied greatly. However, they never become as fat as those in Europe, a fact which is probably attributable to the great heat since they perspire more here than they do in Europe. Sheep and goats, on the other hand, which can live more easily off dry fodder, become fat enough here.[26] The Guinea fowl,[aa] which has been brought here from Guinea, has become as good as native.

||p. 332|| The soil here is of several types: most of it is a yellow or reddish clay, and, at times, but rarely, a rich garden mould. It is always strewn with stones[bb] of various sizes, indeed in most places there is solid rock at a depth of as little as two feet, so that it is remarkable that they can enjoy such good harvests from such poor soil.

The quantity of these stones makes the earth in large measure more difficult to work than usual. Since they cannot use a plow everything must be done by the mattock and the sweat of the unhappy Black, and since the price of these slaves increases nearly every year, the planter squeezes as much as possible out of them, just short of working them to death.[27] The usual treatment of these miserable souls in this country, particularly of those who have been set to planting, is beyond the bounds of humanity. I saw it, ||p. 333|| and Oh! would that I had never seen it! I have seen how, for petty, often imagined misdemeanors, they were displayed publicly at a stake and their flesh was slashed with a whip! The backs of most of them carry the bloody testimony of their whippings all their lives. Nor is it always enough that their skin has been cut open. No! That would be too short-lived pain. They must be subjected to further tickling! So the

[aa] *Numinda Meleagris Linn.*
[bb] These are, for the most part, *Saxa*, principally gneiss and grey slate, but drier quartz and blende are not rare. Pure limestone is not available so they have resorted to using mussels, and especially coral, to burn for lime. The coral is so accessible that it has been used for building material.

[26] On domestic animals, see Vibæk 1966: 112.
[27] On the slaves' work-day, see Westergaard 1917: 158–9; Goveia 1965: 130–1; Vibæk 1966: 139.

wound is anointed with Spanish pepper and salt![28] And what was the crime for which this poor sinner deserved such mortal pain? 'The dog has run Maron!' (that is, run wild, run away), shouted the infuriated slave master,[cc] 'Put him in an iron collar with a pair of horns sticking out of it so that he will be recognized!'[29]

The inventiveness in plaguing the Black is boundless. But no one is more barbaric to his slaves than that delightful brute, the free mulatto — the cross between the European and the Black! A woman of that group who lived in my neighbourhood ||p. 334|| had a female slave who had broken something of hers. In order to take a thoroughly painful revenge on her, she tied the slave's hands together and hung her thus from a nail, having first removed her vest. Then she stuck her slowly with a needle all over her body, so that the poor soul screamed fearfully. This operation continued for more than an hour, until a pitying neighbour came running and pleaded for her release.

I once saw, on a woman, the peculiar method used to break the Blacks' habit of drinking rum, which they do as the only relief they know for their misery. Covering her entire head, she actually had a mask made of tin which was closed under her neck with a lock. There were openings for her eyes and also small holes for her nose, so air could enter. but without prior permission, that is, the unlocking of the mask, she could not partake of the least thing. She was forced to wear this muzzle day and night.[30] Oh, the pity, that this invention has not reached northern Europe! In that case, I fear, all the houses would be swarming with such masked people. Certainly they would be ||p. 335|| more deserving of wearing this ornament than are the miserable Blacks!

In most cases of misdeeds among the Blacks the fault lies with the Whites themselves. The Whites demand that the Blacks be faithful to them and not run away, yet they themselves give them the excuse, by giving them both poor food and not even enough of it. It happens, not rarely, that a Black with a shrunken stomach comes to his overseer and asks for some food. The overseer can be so tyrannical as to let him have a dozen strokes of the riding crop for his brazenness. These monsters of

[cc] The person who holds this post carries the title of 'financial secretary' and he is in charge of the Blacks and of the plantation. The English call him 'manager'.

[28] The use of salt and pepper in the wounds may have been to heighten the pain but claims were made for their efficacy in disinfecting and healing (Vibæk 1966: 140). The practice was also reported from the Slave Coast (Rask 1754: 76).

[29] The word '*maron*', derived from American-Spanish *cimarrón*, 'a wild, savage fugitive', was extended to designate the descendants of escapted slaves. Cf. Fage 1969: 120. On 'Maroon' societies today, see Price and Price 1980: 14–5.

[30] On the use of a muzzle, but one made of leather, see Vibæk 1969: 151.

cruelty often do not give the Blacks even the food that their employer has allotted them, but enrich themselves by way of the stomachs of the unfortunates, who are in no position to provide themselves with food in any other way. It is a melancholy sight to see these unfortuante souls being driven to work, which begins before sunrise and does not end until late at night. A group of thirty, with their mattocks over their shoulders, always has two *bombas* (a Black placed as an oversser) supplied with horrible whips. The *bombas* let the whips ||p. 336|| fly in the air much of the time, as we do when we drive our oxen in front of the plow. If one of the workers forgets himself he is immediately cured of his transgression by dint of this whip. This ghastly toil and the beatings, together with a wretched diet, either soon kill them or totally deform these so well-built Blacks. Oh, what were you — and what are you now? I have not infrequently asked myself these mournful questions upon seeing a troop of these wretches with their drivers.

A Black slave has absolutely no rights. A White person who has no connection at all with him can beat him half to death without any reason, and the slave dares not make the slightest move of resistence. If he does anything, even if it were only to raise his hand in defence, he has incontestably forfeited his life. It is in fact certainly necessary to exercise a strict regime, since the slaves must at no time be allowed to reflect on their situation but must always be kept sweating under the yoke of tyranny, lest they come upon the natural impulse to rebel — of which there have already been several horrible examples in Columbia.

But, say the champions of slavery, the Blacks are obstinate people, indolent, ||p. 337|| given to thieving, drinking and all the other sins that result from those vices. And do we not have Blacks here who, when asked if they want to go back to their fatherland, answer with a 'No!'? I shall not answer these gentlemen further, but if they are to be converted from their unbelief, they have only to take the trouble of travelling to the inland of Africa, to see there whether they do not find signs of innocence and the most upright people everywhere. Great sins, such as murder and thievery, are completely unknown, except where these agents of Belial hold sway; where the lure of European products has now taken hold; and, alas!, I fear, the greatest part of Africa is already contaminated![dd] It is possible that a Black who is used here as a domestic servant has no desire to return to his fatherland ||p. 338|| since he has a tolerable life here,

[dd] There are a large number of Blacks in the interior of Africa who know nothing of the Europeans and their trade. Proof of this is the fact that a mighty nation called Sabas, living several hundred miles inland from Fida, and whose existence became known only a few years ago, like the Dunkos have no knowledge of firearms. [On 'Fida', see Seventh Letter *passim;* on 'Dunkos', see Sixth Letter [12]].

and is uncertain as to whether or not he could be sold again, if he returned to his own land, in which case he would probably not be placed in as good a post as he has now. But one should ask the legions of plantation Blacks what the answer would be if it was in earnest that they would actually be returned to Africa. But what is the use of adding my complaints about this unnatural and unjust traffic to the sighs of worthy philosophers about the great, unquenchable vices of the Europeans, who have partly exterminated, partly corrupted the people of two entire continents! If only there were a means possible to make an end to this continuing evil. Compensation is clearly impossible!

Should we break our habit of using sugar, coffee, chocolate and other luxuries brought from this place to Europe — articles now become so necessary? No! That would make as great a number of Europeans unhappy as it would probably make the Blacks happy. Why were our forefathers not sensible enough to establish plantations of these products in Africa? || p. 339 || There one could get enough workers for only a small wage! But the discovery and conquest of Columbia was more pleasing to their vanity. They were certainly sufficiently knowledgeable to do the same thing in Africa, but that seemed to them too large a continent and too heavily populated to be as easily subjugated as one which is mostly islands and a mainland that is divided by great rivers. When they had murdered the native population here and peopled the land with Africans, whom they had either bought or simply stolen, they believed that they could settle the property undisturbed. In return for this, Nature revolts and torments the conscience!

Africa is still that part of the world where, by establishing the planting of all those products which are now brought to Europe from Columbia, the shameful exportation of Blacks from their happy fatherland could gradually be stopped. Willingly would the Blacks concede to us the best and largest areas of land which have lain fallow for thousands of years, if we came to them with an olive branch in our hand instead of || p. 340 || murderous steel; and, for a small payment, they would help us. And since they are already used to slave-trading there and cannot work the fields otherwise than with slaves, so should we accustom ourselves to buying them for a certain number of years, and to giving freedom to them as well as to the children born in slavery after they have reached a certain established age. Such a principle, to which each citizen of this new state would have to be bound, would produce totally other kinds of slaves than those found in the Columbian colonies.[31]

[31] For Isert's own attempt to realise this plan, see Editor's Appendices.

I am too upset to be able to write any more today. Next week I am travelling to the French islands. Live well, etc.

Twelfth Letter

St. Pierre on Martinique
10 July, 1787

In my last melancholy letter from St. Croix I announced a journey to the French islands, which did in fact take place on 3 April. But since I had to travel to St. Thomas first and had to stay there a short time, I shall entertain you briefly with descriptions of the other two Danish islands in West India.[1]

St. Thomas is the oldest establishment of our nation in this part of the world. It has been occupied by us since 1672. At that time, however, it lay waste apart from the occasions when some English pirates stayed in various places on the island in order to consume their booty. On these grounds the Court in London believed that they had the right to the island and presented this claim to our Court. But we gave them no hearing and continued with the cultivation ||p. 342|| on the plantations. The island is eight miles northeast of St. Croix. Its length is not more than three and one-half miles and its breadth some two miles. It is mountainous, consequently it cannot have as good as roads as there are on St. Croix, but on the other hand it has a number of rain brooks which create very pleasant pastures. However, the principal advantage of this island is its safe harbour, where more than a hundred ships from the equator can stay. For this reason its first settlers long ago declared it a free harbour where all nations could trade. It was here, four years ago, that such a quanitity of goods was landed for sale that there was hardly any more room on shore to store them. After that otherwise common depot of Columbia, St. Eustacius, had been conquered, all the trading nations that were involved in war found asylum here.[2]

The products are only few since part of the island remains uncultivated.

[1] The three Danish islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John, are now known as the Virgin Islands and form part of the territory of the U.S.A.

[2] For St. Thomas, see Westergaard 1917: 2, 3, 4–7, 37–44, 121–36, 144 f.; Vibæk 1966: 51, 53, 80, 89; Williams 1970: 81, 89, 175.

The products are mainly sugar and some cotton.[3] But because all of the foreign nations can trade here most of the trade is with North Columbians, who supply provisions and who pay better than do the Europeans.

||p. 343|| A great number of the merchants residing here live chiefly by contraband, trading particularly with the Spanish island Portorico, which lies close to this one. Most of the wares brought here are hardware or yard goods, and are paid for in *piastres*, coffee or tobacco.

There are a number of orchards here. I particularly enjoyed an allée purely of coral trees with bright red flowers.[a] The town consists of only a main street, but has a number of beautiful buildings. One is forced to use rain water here, as is the case on St. Croix, since the town has no fresh-water wells.[b]

Nearby, to the east of this island, lies the island of St. Jean [St. John] which is the third of the Danish settlements. St. Jean is somewhat smaller

[a] *Erythrina Corallodendrum Linn.* [*Erythrina corallodendron*. Cf. Chittenden 1977: 779.]

[b] Here I became acquainted with an historical botanist, Herr Doctor Crudi, who had collected many natural products, some here and some on St. Lucie, and had sent them to Herr *Hofrath* [Privy Councillor] Schreiber in Erlangen to acquaint him with them. ['Crudi' refers to Johann Wilhelm Crudy, born 1753 in Germany, died 1793 in the West Indies. Crudy studied medicine in Germany and travelled to Amsterdam in the hope of being given a posting to the Dutch East Indies. Arriving too late he was offered an interim position in the West Indies with the promise of a future transfer to Ceylon. However, he remained in the West Indies for the rest of his life. Crudy arrived in the West Indies when England had declared war on the Netherlands and his ship was captured by the English. He was released and given a post as doctor to the British Naval Hospital on Pigeon Island. Eventually he left the British service and travelled to other islands working as a doctor and collecting specimens which he sent regularly to Schreber in Germany (see below). He then settled on St. Thomas where he went into private practice and continued to collect specimens for Schreber. It was there that he met Isert. Toward the end of his life he moved to St. John for the sake of his health, and was given a salaried post at the Danish garrison there. See Solereder 1911: 146–50.

'Schreiber' refers to Johann Christian Daniel von Schreber (1739–1810), a leading German botanist and zoologist. He studied briefly with Linnaeus and returned to Germany where he became professor of medicine and botany and was made director of the botanical gardens in Erlangen. Schreber was a central figure in the world of natural science at the turn of the eighteenth century. See Stafleu 1971: 145, 286; Stafleu and Cowan 1985: 328–31.

As a confirmed Linnaen and Latinist Schreber was among those who felt compelled to rename and reclassify a number of plants that had been described by others, such as Fusée Aublet, a contemporary. It was thus that the genus name *Isertia* came into being in 1789, the year of Isert's death. The name was given to a plant already described by Aublet in his *Histoire des Plantes de la Guiane Françoise*, 1775: vol. I, 317, under the name *Guettarda coccinea* Schreber was of the opinion that this species did not belong to the genus *Guettarda*, therefore he created a new genus which he named *Isertia*, while retaining the species name *coccinea*. Schreber's contention that *Isertia* was a new genus is still valid and the name is in use today. The species occurs in South and Central America. (I am indebted to Peter Wagner for the information on *Isertia*. See also Schreber 1789–91: vol. I, 234.

[3] Cf. Westergaard 1917: 8, 121–7.

than St. Thomas but, like it, is also mountainous. It has, however, excellent soil where the work of planting is richly rewarded. ||p. 344|| Even though cultivation has been carried on here since 1719, a good part of the island still lies fallow, which is regrettable considering the excellent soil. The crops, principally of sugar, are sold mainly on St. Thomas. On the west coast, where the sea forms a harbour, for some time there has been a small fort and the beginnings made of a town. The staff consists of a captain, a lieutenant, two sergeants and 20 men.[4]

Around these islands and St. Thomas lie a countless number of small islands, or keys, some of them inhabited, some lying waste. The next day my journey continued, and I saw various small islands belonging to England, such as Tortola, Kingstown, Annegade [Anegada] and others. These small islands are convenient hiding places for our smugglers, who bring their sugar here in order to sell it to England.

In the distance we saw the large, splendid island named 'Crab' or 'Borriken' [Vieques] because of the great number of crabs found there. This lovely land ||p. 345|| , a good deal larger than St. Croix, lies there permanently unutilized, a fact we can credit to jealousy. To be sure, it has no good harbour, yet it has a better roadstead, marvellous fresh water sources, and good soil; and it holds promise to the labourer of the highest rewards for his endeavours. The Spaniards had plantations here in the very early days, but since they were alarmed by the extent of smuggling to other nations in the vicinity, they abandoned the island and concentrated entirely on Portorico. In the last century the English, considering it wrong that such a beautiful land was not utilized, began to cultivate it but were very soon attacked by the Spaniards. Some English were killed, some driven away, and some were hauled off to Portorico. We Danes, too, sought to make a settlement here after 1717, but the English, who were irked because they could not themselves settle this lovely land, could not peaceably tolerate our activities and sent vagabonds to rob our new settlers. Shortly after this the Spaniards, who insisted on their old rights to the island, drove away all the inhabitants. Since then it has been used in common by these three nations, ||p. 346|| so that each is allowed to cut wood, to fish, etc., but not to undertake any cultivation. However, the planters from St. Croix still nourish the hope that perhaps, in time, an agreement between the Courts of Madrid and London might be reached in favour of our nation. In that event a great number of the inhabitants of St. Croix would come to this island with their slaves because land on

[4] The harbour was Coral Bay. For St. John, see Westergaard 1917: 3, 4–7, 8, 121–36; Williams 1970: 89, 94, 106.

St. Croix is considerably exhausted in some places, and Crab Island has, among other advantages, that of a supply of fresh water.[5]

In the morning we saw the islands of Saba, St. Martin and St. Eustacius. I spent two days on the last named. From a distance out at sea it looked like a haystack, but upon a closer view it proved to be made up of two high mountains, of which the higher one to the east has a crater (of a burnt-out, fire-spouting mountain). It is dry, stony, and has absolutely no water sources. In spite of this it has been planted everywhere, indeed even on the peaks of the high mountains. The town is built partly down by the shore and partly on the mountain, on which there is a ||p. 347|| strong fort. Down at the shore there is not room for more than one street, and that is so closely built that the second storeys are built overhanging both sides of the street, with the result that the inhabitants can, without any other aids, easily make their way from windows on one side to those on the other.[6] In this street all the people are merchants, for the island gets its riches from free trade with all the nations, its own production being insignificant. It has this inconvenient feature, that ships must lie in open roadsteads, and for this reason it is much less suited to be a general West Indian depot than is St. Thomas. However, during the last war, St. Thomas had higher duties on merchants' wares than did Eustacius, consequently the former was less frequently visited by the trading people.[7]

Because I wanted to climb the crater I made a walk which took me through a plantation. When I found myself about halfway through a field in which there stood nothing that I could have damaged, a *bomba* (overseer of the Blacks) came and informed me in very polite language that there was no road this way. I explained to the Black my intention of ||p. 348|| climbing the mountain. Before I realized it, the Black's master, the chief overseer, came storming out of the house like a fury. When he judged that his voice could reach me he shouted with all his might, in English, demanding to know what I was seeking. I turned around and explained my intention to him. 'Then you may be an d—'d Rascal!' he answered. "But Sir, 'tis the very first Day I am in the Island, I know not the Laws yet, of it. If it is not allouded, to walk on the ground of others, I am ready to leave it!" "You ought to know it, Your Villain' Immediately out of my Plantation or I'll shoot you as a Dog!"[8] He said the last with

[5] For Crab Island, see Westergaard 1917: 73, 80, 87, 102, 111 n., 119, 213, 199; Williams 1970: 81–2, 89.

[6] The overhanging storeys provided shade to the streets below (Vibæk 1966: 203–4).

[7] For St. Eustatius, see Pares 1936: 350–1, 370, 384, 456, 487; Westergaard 1917: 12, 109; Goveia 1965: 6; Williams 1970: 175, 305.

[8] The entire conversation is reported in Isert's inadequate English. Cf. his letter to Banks, Editor's Appendix 2.

such heat that his blood seemed to be boiling in all his veins, and I did not consider it worth the trouble to answer him, but lifted my little Black (with a portfolio on his head in which to put plant specimens) over the prickly pear[c] hedge, made an extremely deep bow to the injured Englishman, at which he was not a little taken aback, and went very meekly || p. 349 || another way to the crater — a route which was at least a quarter of a mile longer. Oh Rousseau, Rousseau, how little would your salubrious teaching be valued here! You, who could not bear it that man should use the fruits of the land he himself has raised purely for his own benefit, see here an example of personal gain going so far that the owner will not even allow the foot of the wanderer to tread his fields! How different was the behaviour of this, a person of my own colour, a Christian, from that of the wild Black of the Gold Coast! This one forbade me to walk in his fields, while those others removed stones and twigs from the path so that I would not injure myself.

Finally I saw the crater. It is strewn everywhere, both outside and inside, with small stones made up of fine grains of granite, gneiss and a type of hard pumice. I could not find any lava. In the course of two days I was easily able to survey the flora of this place, which is very sparse, but there are nevertheless some plants which are peculiar to this land.

|| p. 350 || My journey continued the next day and I very soon caught sight of the lovely sugar islands of St. Kitts, or St. Christoph, and Montserrat, both belonging to England. The first one formerly belonged half to France, but has now been entirely ceded to England.[9] On the 9th we arrived safely at Basseterre on Guadeloupe.

Guadeloupe is an attractive island which is actually made up of two islands, with a channel navigable enough for a small ship between. The French call it 'the salty stream' (*revière salée*). This half is called Basseterre and the other Guadeloupe. On Basseterre is the capital, of the same name, where the government has its seat. The most important posts are those of the General and the Administrative Officer. The latter is in charge of all civil affairs, the former of military affairs. The present General, Baron de Clugny, is a friend of the learned and tries to support them as much as possible.

The town has no harbour but only an open roadstead. On the east side, close to the town, is the Fort, which is a complete fortress and merits preference over many || p. 351 || fortified places in Europe. The town is without walls; it has regular streets adorned with lovely buildings, some

[c] *Cactus tuna Linn.* [*Opuntia tuna* Prickly pear. See Irvine 1961: 90–1; Willis 1973: 175–7; Chittenden 1977: 341, 1432–3.]

[9] On St. Kitts, see Goveia 1965: 51, 52, 54; Williams 1970: 80–1, 89.

of them having three storeys. On the main street there is a promenade, along which tamarind trees have been planted, and it is frequented regularly by the fashionable class of the inhabitants in the evenings. Fountains have been placed here and there which give forth healthy, crystal-clear water. Both in and around the town there are many gardens which are nearly all supplied with running water and which provide the inhabitants with the most delicious vegetables. Green peas, artichokes and asparagus grow beautifully here throughout the year. The many trickling streams add not a little to the beauty of the town. Not far from the Fort, near the town, there is an extensive plaza for exercising the troops, and even this has been provided with a fountain. The Government House is only average.

The roads in the country are very bad and cannot be compared with those on St. Croix, so even the ladies must resort to riding, in which they have great skill. || p. 352 || On the coast the land is extremely mountainous. One of the largest of the mountains is a volcano which does not erupt, however, but often emits smoke. Around it one finds the usual volcanic mineral products, such as iron pyrites, calcites, vitriol, pumice, etc. The French call it '*la Soulfrière*'.[10]

The districts around Basseterre are extremely attractive. Mighty mountains are interspersed with valleys, with ripping brooks running through them constantly. A pleasant forest lies about a half mile from the town. It is known as 'The Park' and is very much frequented, as are such places in Europe. For my part, I always found my walks on that part of the island highly rewarding, apart from the time that I was once almost guilty of high treason when, as I had done on Eustacius, I had to pass through a plantation, this one belonging to a Chevalier P . . . . Madame la Chevalière had been watching me for a long time while I was in one of her meadows, noticing how I looked under the flowers, plucked one here and there, and placed it in the portfolio on my Black's head. Nothing could be more natural than that it should arouse her feminine curiosity, she who || p. 353 || had probably never before in her life seen such an animal as a botanist. So now, to lighten her distressed heart, she secretly sent a Black to reconnoitre. Perhaps attracted by the similarity of colour, he first began to interrogate my Black, while I was creeping around in the bushes. My Black, who because of his short stay on the island had not yet learnt as much as four words in French, answered him in English, saying that he did not understand, and that his master was over there in the bushes. Now the former had had enough. He ran quickly to his mistress, bringing the news, "An Englishman! Here on the plantation in the middle of the island." Immediately the Black was sent back to bring me his mistress's

[10] The name is *La Soufrière*, sulphur mine.

nolens volens. I followed him. On the way, the Black was at great pains to inform me that the plantation belonged to Chevalier P . . . , and that Madame insisted on speaking to me.

"*Monsieur, quel est, que vous fait dans ma habition là?*" she asked when I reached her. "*Je suis botaniste, Madame, & persuadez vous voulez excuser,* || p. 354 || *ma liberté pour faire une ramasse des plantes pour vous inutile.*" At this point I opened my plant folio and showed it to her. "*Avez vous y la permission du Monsieur de Clugny*?" "*Oui, Madame de tout le Conseil*", was my answer.[11] She seemed to be ashamed of her curiosity, made a deep bow, and dismissed me. While I was descending the mountain, going down towards the town and making notes about the new adventure, the eyes of the *Chevalière* followed me constantly. Perhaps she thought "He is actually a spy who intends to sketch the terrain of our island and is using botanizing as a cover for his treachery", thoughts for which I can hardly blame her when I consider that it was not so long ago that the English were masters of this island.[12]

Another day I made a journey to the plantation of Mr. Detsmarrais Gaudet, which lies only a quarter of a mile from the town. There I found only a small garden but saw that which I had for so long a time wished to see, namely, the three fine oriental spices — the cinnamon, clove and || p. 355 || nutmeg trees. The first was just then in bloom. Besides these I also saw a number of precious plants, among them the screwpine[d] and the Chinese apple tree, or *Wawanga*, which was just then bearing its fruit resembling our rennett apple in taste and size. I saw the wild cocoa tree[e] blooming in its characteristically majestic form.

On the 21st, my journey continued by sea to the other part of the island, known by the name of Grandterre. The town there is called Pointe-à-Pitre. One can make this journey overland, certainly, but it is extremely difficult because of the many high mountains one has to cross. Since we were travelling eastward, that is, straight into the wind, we did not arrive there until the next day, despite its being not more than five miles from Basseterre. There have been cases of ships having been *en route* on this short journey for eight days.

The town is only a little smaller than Basseterre. It is built in an extremely regular fashion and has many excellent buildings. Outside of

[d] *Pandanus odoratissimus Linn.* [Cf. Willis 1973: 848].

[e] *Carolinea princeps Linn.* [The correct modern name is *Pachira aquatica* (Chittenden 1977: 1464).]

[11] The entire conversation is reported in French. Some of the errors, such as '*habition*' may have been the printer's, but Isert's command of French, as of English, clearly had limits.

[12] Cf. Pares 1936: 186 f.; Williams 1970: 94.

the town the country is || p. 356 || marshy nearly everywhere, and generally speaking, the entire land is very flat. Therefore the air is not as healthy by far as it is at Basseterre, and it causes frequent putrid fevers and other illnesses.

I soon became acquainted with Mr. Debadier, naturalist to the King, who had already been here for five years. He is a very industrious scientist in most of the branches of natural science. Formerly he occupied himself chiefly with the study of insects, from the egg stage on, which he described and drew. The great destruction of these small animals in this climate has now wearied him somewhat of this field of natural science. Therefore he now works mainly with crayfish, crustaceans and sea plants that are found here in not inconsiderable numbers, particularly in the harbour, where they live. Whatever time this industrious investigator has left over he uses in the practical application of natural science on his plantation (which, at present, is only in miniature), that is, by the planting of cotton, Guinea grass, bananas, potatoes, *et al.*, and the raising of a few animals. At his place I saw an excellent || p. 357 || method of raising rabbits, which deserves emulation.[13]

Guinea grass[f], brought here because of its great usefulness, is much cultivated since it has proved to be good fodder for the horses. It is reproduced either through root-cuttings or by seed. As in the case of sugar it is kept free of weeds by the use of the mattock. The hedges or fences around the plantations here are of the citron tree[g], the Galba tree[h] and the logwood tree[i]. All three kinds are to be preferred to the pinguin[k], which is usually used for that purpose on our islands: the first because of its utility, the second because of its beauty and the third by reason of its density.[l]

[f] *Poa . . .* ? [Cf. Willis 1973: 922].

[g] *Citrus medica Linn.* [Cf. Irvine 1961: 493–4; Willis 1973: 257.].

[h] *Calophyllum calaba Linn.* [Cf. Irvine 1961: 144–5; Willis 1973: 516–7.]

[i] *Hæmathoxylum campechianum Linn.* [Also known as Logwood (Willis 1973: 525). See n. [l] below].

[k] *Bromelia Pinguin Linn.*

[l] The campeachy wood, or 'logwood' of the Englishmen, is the famous dyestuff which caused a war in 1736 between the English and Spanish in Columbia, a war which lasted until 1743. The wood does not achieve its colouring properties until the tree is completely grown or has died. [Cf. Irvine 1961: 310; Willis 1973: 525. Presumably Isert is referring to the War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739–43. This war was a result of conflicts between England and Spain in the interpretation of trading principles and rights in Spanish America.]

[13] Little is known about de Badier ['Debadier']. Plant specimens collected by him in Guadeloupe are in the de Candolle herbarium in Geneva, and a few articles by him are extant, including one on various methods of cotton cultivation in Guadeloupe (Peter Wagner, personal communication).

||p. 358|| The Galba trees are allowed to shoot up into fully grown trees by being planted one foot apart. Both of the other kinds are held back by pruning. In respect of all three kinds, the planters assert that there are no harmful effects on the sugar fields. Hedges of poinciana[m], coral tree[n] and thorny volkameria[o] can also be found here, but they seem to me to be by far less useful than the foregoing types.

Many less prosperous farmers reside here, living solely by the cultivation of plantain. I noticed that this fruit grows far better in deep soil than on the mountains; that the plants are placed fairly closely together, that is, only eight feet apart; and that they are generously fertilized. On one such plantain plantation (*bananière*) I once saw a stem bearing 252 plantains — adequate nourishment for one person for 25 days.[14]

Most of the local plantations are for sugar. This plant is extraordinarily tall and strong here but it is too watery, ||p. 359|| a condition caused partly by the marshy ground, or by too much rain. As a result it gives much less good sugar than plants on higher and drier ground. Since the rum obtained is always dependent on the nature of the sugar cane it is of only an inferior quality here.

There are also coffee and cotton plantations which, following new methods, are now planted together, the one below the other. The coffee here is of a somewhat poorer quality than that on Martinique. Tobacco, indigo and cocoa are cultivated less now than formerly.

The number of Europeans on Guadeloupe runs to about 12,000 Whites and [there are] 60,000 Blacks of both sexes and all ages. This includes the military, consisting of one regiment of infantry, bearing the name Regiment of Guadeloupe, which when complete has 1,500 men divided into three battalions, and one company of artillery. The staff is in Basseterre. In addition all the inhabitants are enrolled in a land militia designated the volunteer corps (*Corps de Volontaaires libres*) whose commander is a ||p. 360|| Lieutenant-Colonel. The volunteers are divided into various divisions, or companies, which are distinguishable by their uniforms, and they also have their own captains, lieutenants, ensigns and junior officers.

It is the general opinion that European women are less fertile in a hot

[m] *Poinciana pulcherrima Linn.* [Also called Barbados Pride. For 'Flower Fence', see Irvine 1961: 279].

[n] *Erythrina corallodendrum Linn.* [See note [a] above].

[o] *Volkameria aculeata Linn.* [A species of Verbenaceae (Irvine 1961: 313; Willis 1966: 909, 1176–7.].

[14] This statement may contain a misprint, but if not it probably involves a misconception. It is unlikely that ten plantains a day for 25 days could be considered 'adequate nourishment'.

climate than they are in Europe.[15] That this is not universally true is proven by the wife of my excellent host Mr. St. M . . . She has given birth 17 times and is still considered a beauty. The same condition applies to the ageing of Europeans in this climate. recently I saw a woman, born of European parents, who already had 91 years behind her, was the grandmother of many grandchildren, and still enjoyed entirely good health.

Guadeloupe has a theatrical company with one theatre in Basseterre and one in Pointe-à-Pitre. The theatre here is almost too small for the number of spectators. The company is giving performances here at the moment. They present almost nothing but operettas, such as *Rosenfest*, *Melomanie*, the beautiful *Arsene, Zemire* and *Azor* and others.[16] To the last named they have added a new prologue in pantomine ||p. 361|| related to the story of the play. At the end they always present a ballet, which is ingenious considering that the theatre is in this part of the world. Only musical performances are popular here. The rest are virtually banned from the theatre. Among the actors, Mr. Fleuri stands out particularly (as a comedian, of course). Mademoiselle Martin sings enchantingly beautifully — to the same extent that her Venus-like form awakens admiration and adoration. The company has a royal pension. A so-called 'Major de Place' has the post of Director, that is, he arranges for the presentation of the plays and has charge of the theatre.[17]

The Fort at Pointe-à-Pitre is only a small one, but it has a sea battery in front of it which can sweep the surface of the water at the mouth of

[15] Isert's comment may be a response to an earlier source: 'The climate in America is much more favourable to the propagation of the African than that of the European since the former reproduce even more under the burden of labour and the miseries of slavery than do the latter in their life of ease and freedom.' (Raynal: 1770: V 61).

[16] It has proved impossible for me to identify a play with the title *Rosenfest*. It may be *Rosanie*, performed in Paris for the first time, in 1780, or perhaps *La Rosière* (Brenner 1961: 14). *La Mélomanie*, first produced in 1780, had a libretto by Grenier and score by Champein. *La Belle Arsène*, by Favart, had its first performance at Fontainebleau in 1773. For *Zémir and Azor* there are two possibilities; a comic-ballet by Marmontel and Grétry, or a ballet by Dehesse. (I am indebted to Solveig Schult Ulriksen for her aid and guidance in this field.) Cf. Brenner 1947; *idem* 1961.

[17] It appears that the professional theatre on the French islands was well-established and of high quality, in contrast to the theatrical experience available at the Danish settlements. The latter possessed only amateur theatre, and the occasional visit of a travelling English company, who supplemented their number with local amateurs. As for other forms or recreation on the Danish islands, there were public and semi-public balls, sports for men, such as riding, racing, bullfights, cockfights, and '*maroon*-hunts' on horseback and with guns and dogs. The islands also had a Planters' Club, many taverns, and 'elegant mulatto girls' (Vibæk 1966: 207–80).

the harbour, thus protecting the city from the sea side. From the land side it is protected by a bog that entirely surrounds the city.

The harbour is excellent and is perhaps one of the best natural harbours in Columbia. Fully a thousand ships can be kept here in absolute safety, a fact of great importance in these waters during the hurricane season. Ships of medium size ||p. 362|| lie so near the bank in front of the merchants' warehouses that they need only lay a plank from land in order to off-load and load. The harbour is enclosed by various small islands, of which the largest is called Cochon. These are made up entirely of petrified coral and crushed shells, to which the entire island presumably owes its existence. Scarcely ten kinds of plants grow wild here. yet there is a man living here who has established a plantain plantation and a beautiful kitchen garden, providing by artifice what Nature seems to have forgotten. Around this island, in the harbour, there is a veritable treasure trove for the collector, where he can find fossil plants and shells, and I recollect in pain, as I write this, that circumstances allowed me only one day to fish in that Golden Fleece.

Mineralogy was limited largely to products that have been brought here from the sea. Not far from the sea one finds all the mountains made up of petrified coral of the hardness of a medium-hard sandstone. In these there can often be found impressions of plants, but more often of species of snails, ||p. 363|| and among these, not infrequently, ammonites.[18] Petrified wood is common. I saw an agatized piece from a palm tree in which the marrow containing the interwining fibres was very distinct indeed.

After I had stayed on Guadeloupe for nearly a month I continued my journey to Martinique, which lies east of here, that is, to windward. Having passed the islands of Mariegalante, and Dominique, and other unimportant ones, after five days of sailing I arrived at St. Pierre.

This is one of the foremost trading places in Columbia. There is nothing lacking in the storehouses up and down the street, which offer wares from the whole world. Even skilled craftsmen and artisans of all classes are found here. But I could not make out how there can be artisans of the King of France when Paris is over 1,200 miles away. On one house there is a notice board on which have been painted four colossal teeth with roots, tongs and keys and the legend *Dentiste du Roi*; on another, *Arquebusier du Roi*, and so on, through all the classes of artisans.[19] ||p. 364||

St. Pierre has about 2,000 houses at present and some 30,000 inhabi-

[18] Ammonites [*Ammonoidea*] are any of numerous flat, spiral fossil shells of cephalopods.

[19] '*Arquebusier*' is a variation of *Harquebusier*, a matchlock gun invented in the fifteenth century. It was portable but heavy and was usually fired from a support.

tants — White, Black and their offspring. The streets are laid out in a regular fashion and the largest (*Rue Grande*) is nearly half a mile long. All of the houses are built of stone and most of them are three storeys high. For building material they use a coarse grey pumice stone or lava which is quarried from the shore.

I was very fortunate in meeting two lovers of, and experts in, natural science. One is the estimable brother of that Aquart after whom Herr Mining Advisor von Jacquin has named a plant, and the other is the General Director M. Baron de Foulquier.[20] The latter, in spite of his exalted position and great burden of business, can be found examining plants if one goes to see him before the clock has struck six [in the morning]. Through the intervention of these two (to whom I am unable to express my gratitude adequately) I was in a position to undertake as many botanical trips, to whatever places, as I desired.

My first trip on the island was to the Piton de Carbet which lies approximately in the middle ||p. 365|| of the island, with my friend Aquart accompanying me. We were given lodgings by a planter who lived a good half mile from the Piton, and we arrived at his home at about ten o'clock on the first evening. It was our good fortune that the horses knew the way better than we did, since we often had to ride quite close to a chasm from which there was no hope of rescue if we had once tumbled in. Futhermore, it was so dark that one could barely make out the tops of the trees that grew in the chasm. But the experience is soon forgotten when one has reached one's destination. Our *Don Quixotic* ride was scarcely behind us when we had to decide how early in the morning we would have to rise in order to climb the Piton (mountain peak) at the right time,and who would have to accompany us. Then nobody wanted to stay at home. Not only the son and son-in-law of our worthy host (whose name is Grandcourt) but everyone else wanted to come along! Everyone wanted to be a hero! At four o'clock, before the sun appeared on the horizon, we set out again and travelled, as we had done yesterday, over hill and dale, until we reached the foot of the Piton where we had to give up and ||p. 366|| continue on foot. We then began to climb, with those in front having to clear a way through the thicket with their swords, since a human being had perhaps never walked here before. This thicket, although it was so much in our way, was still very useful for us to hold

[20] The plant to which Isert referred was the genus *Aquartia N. J. Jacquin* (Farr, et al. 1979: I, 117). The plant was first identified in 1760 on Santo Domingo and is now included in the Nightshade family. Nikolaus Joseph Jacquin (1727–1817) was a Dutch-born Austrian botanist who held a professorship in botany and chemistry at the University of Vienna from 1769 and was given a noble title in 1806. His stay in the West Indies was 1755–1759. For Jacquin's biography and bibliography, see Stafleu and Cowan 1979, II: 407–413.]

on to, since without it we could in no way have advanced on the soil which was as soft as butter.

Tired and soaked through, we finally reached the top in the course of one and thee-quarters hours. It was flat but not over 40 feet in diameter. How I now regretted not having taken my barometer along, since this mountain has not yet been measured by a physicist and it is not inconsiderable. By approximate estimate it is 1,000 *toises* high and the base a further 2–300 *toises* above sea level.[21] It has a sharp conical shape so that its top forms an angle of 70 degrees from its base. It is nearly always wrapped in clouds and from the top one cannot see to the bottom. We fired off several shots, but the flashes were not seen nor were the shots heard, although people lived quite close by.

||p. 367|| Our first task on the summit was to build a hut to give us some shelter from the continuous rain. I botanized in the moss which is found around here in unbelievable quantities and has covered all the trees. The height of the trees decreased as we approached the top, but the number of cabbage palms[p] increased, so the top of the mountain seemed to be the right place for them. Since we had provided ourselves with food, we ate *à la campagne*, and the cabbage palm was eaten raw as a dessert. The edible part of this tree is the inner marrow, or heart, of the unopened leaves, which has some similarity to our nut kernels, but when cooked it is like our white cabbage, except that this vegetable is more tender than cabbage is.

After we had seen everything, and written our names, to be preserved in a bottle which was then buried up to the neck in the earth, we started our descent. This was more difficult than the ascent since we slid at every step and often collided with the person in front. The thicket which we had to hold on to was for the most part a thorny fern[q], ||p. 368|| or even a thorny kind of palm which injured our hands. Not until late evening did we reach our lodging. My left foot was very swollen and since I was not aware of having sprained it, it was concluded that I had been bitten by a poisonous snake, so numerous here. One person called for *Eau de Luce*, while another for serpent herb. But that this was not the cause of the swelling, time would show. On this occasion the swelling went down after 36 hours and we could set out on our return journey to St. Pierre undisturbed.

My second journey was to Fort Royal, which is barely three miles from here. The town, built according to a pleasing plan, bears the same name. It

[p] *Arecæ*, new species. [Cf. Irvine 1961: 779, 816 n. Willis 1973: 845.]
[q] *Polypodium spinosum Linn.* [*Pteris spinosa*, a Fern].

[21] One toise = six French feet, or approximately two metres.

is actually the seat of the government, which is made up of the Governor-General, the Superintendant, and the Consul. The Superintendant, however, is in St. Pierre most of the time. Formerly the government of Guadeloupe was under their charge but it has now been declared independent. Yet the General of Guadeloupe must attend general meetings of ||p. 369 the Council in Fort Royal when the business concerns the common good of all the Caribbean islands.[22]

Fort Royal has a beautiful and fairly safe harbour but it is by no means as large as the one at Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe. The Fort lies in the middle of the harbour on a small island connected to the mainland by a bridge. Around the town itself there is a small canal leading from the sea.

In spite of the fact that Fort Royal is a very important fortress, another very extensive one, Fort Ludwig [Fort Louis], has been built on the hillock across from the town. Some hundred soldiers work daily on this outer bulwark, for which they receive additional wages. The drinking water for this fort is carried by a drainage channel from a high mountain in the vicinity. The military system on Martinique is in all other respects the same as it is on Guadeloupe.

The fishing industry is extremely lucrative here, so that the inhabitants in Fort Royal can live much more cheaply than those in St. Pierre.

I now made an inland journey on this part of the island, to a plantation owned by the brother of my friend Aquart, where I stayed for a fortnight. Here I believed I had come to a veritable paradise, so magnificent was the region! My delight in it ||p. 370|| was somewhat disturbed when, a few days later, having spent the entire day wading through a brook to make an examination of the trees and plants which grew on its shores, I noticed a small blister on my foot in the area where I had had the swelling a fortnight earlier, while on the mountain-climbing expedition. I opened it and to my not inconsiderable surprise discovered a Guinea worm.[r] I tried to see if it was possible to roll it out, but I failed, since it could not be brought out more than an inch without causing me the most severe pain. This irritation must have been the cause of a fever I had as soon as I returned to the house, a fever which lasted all night. After this I treated my worm by what is probably the most elementary method with which a worm has ever been treated, that is I rolled it daily over a small roll of linen, bound a cloth over it, and continued my walks but, *nota bene*, half

[r] *Gordius medinensis Linn.* [The Guinea worm is a slender nematode which attains a length of several feet and occurs as an adult in the subcutaneous tissues of various animals, including man, in warm countries. Isert's comment, that he had carried the worm for eight months, agrees with a modern source (Maegraith 1966: 501).]

[22] On Fort Royal, see Pares 1936: 246–7, 295.

limping. The great amount of motion and the wading in water, which I could by no means avoid, might have been the reason that it healed so quickly. In fact it healed in eight days while a cure in || p. 371 || Africa usually takes a few months. The worm was one of the largest I have seen. When finally completely rolled out it measured fully two ells long and was as thick as a hay-straw. I learned from this experience that one can carry the Guinea worm in one's body for at least eight months without experiencing the least discomfort, because it was just that length of time since I had left Guineas.

Here, however, one can be attacked by a kind of flea by walking around barefoot, as I do at the moment. It is called *chique*[s] by the French, and it normally buries itself under the sole of the foot. It lays its eggs there, from which a spawn appears, causing a swelling and discharge. However, it is easy to rid one's self of them.

In addition, I made many short inland trips, for example to the mountains Pelée, Kalebasse and others, with the descriptions of which I shall not detain you, since there have been published detailed topographies on that subject already.[t]

Another family also lives on this island, made up of the earlier natives of the land, namely the Caribs, who live quite isolated from the others || p. 372 || and have little taste for the customs of the Europeans and the Blacks. One of their most peculiar customs is said to be their wedding celebration. At that time they perform a dance that has more the appearance of a funeral ceremony than a wedding. They walk in pairs several times around the bridegroom's house, with their heads hanging down, singing a song as melancholy as the dance itself.

The Europeans have adopted some of the customs of the Caribs. Among these is that of having a meal on the plantations on Sunday afternoons, a meal which is called 'eating *kallalu*'. It is a sort of cabbage cooked like spinach, with various other vegetables, to which they have added crayfish. Recently they have also devised a beverage made out of cocoa beans to have with coffee, instead of ordinary milk. It is prepared like almond milk and imparts a very pleasant flavour to the coffee.

The entire population of Martinique comprises about 15,000 Whites and 80,000 Blacks and Mulattos, of whom 2,000 are free Blacks and 500

[s] *Pulex penetrans Linn.* [Chigoe, or Chigger].

[t] S. Bertin, *Topogr. medicale de la Martinique.* [It has proved impossible to find this source as Isert cites it. The reference may be to Bertin, *Des moyens de conserver la santé des blancs et des nègres aux Antilles ou climats chauds et humides.* S. Domingue et à Paris 1786, eight vols. (T. D. Johansen, personal communication). Mont Pelée, 1,350 metres above sea level, was the *locus* of the tremendous eruption in 1902 which destroyed St. Pierre and, with its accompanying whirlwind caused the death of 40,000 people.]

are *Marons* [Maroons], or slaves who have run away from their masters. They have fled to the inaccessible mountain-top and live chiefly by robbery.[23]

|| p. 373 || The products of this land which are produced for export are sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton, a little indigo and *roucu*; and for use in the country, manioc [cassava], bananas, yams and potatoes. Of sugar they reckon an annual production of 30 million pounds, mostly once-refined; of coffee, three million pounds; of cotton, 800,000 pounds, and 40,000 pounds of cocoa. Of these amounts a good tenth part falls into the hands of the North Columbians through smuggling, in spite of the presence, usually, of two warships and three frigates which are supposed to keep a watchful eye on this trade.

The North Columbians as well as those of other nations, if they do not come directly from Europe, have freedom of trade here, but they must take their payments in bills of exchange, rum or *malas* (syrup). The traders, however, know very well how to freight sugar and coffee, even though it is risky. They load small boats with these articles at night and send them off the Eustacius, or to another free harbour, where the ships call and take on cargo for Europe.

Martinique lies most conveniently for the Columbian trade, so one finds stores of wares here from all over the world. From Martinique all the other French settlements in this part of the world have the opportunity of supplying themselves with all the necessities.

|| p. 374 || The most excellent entertainment of the French in this part of the world is the theatre. They have a superb theatre in St. Pierre, which surpasses in size and style many famous European theatres. It has a large courtyard and in front of the gate there is an approach where the sedan-chair bearers have to ascend on the one side and descend on the other. It has four tiers of boxes, and surrounding the first tier there is a gallery in which one can stay until the play begins, or on which one is able to get a breath of fresh air during the performance without losing one's seat in the box. There are no divisions in the rows, so each person follows his own inclination as to where to go. The fourth circle is called 'Paradise for the coloured people' (*au paradis pour les gens des Couleurs*) to which all are banished who cannot trace all of their ancestors back to Europeans. Here one often sees *Christiser*[u] whose skin is much whiter than even that of the northern Europeans.

During my stay here they presented nearly exclusively musical perform-

[u] People of the fourth generation after an alliance between a European and a Black woman. [For *Christicer*, see Monrad 1822: 276 note.]

[23] On '*Maroons*' see Eleventh Letter [30].

ances and operas. Recently I saw *Orpheus and Euridice* fairly well presented.[24] The audience appears to know better than I do how to show their pleasure — before the performance was finished, a laurel crown was thrown to Orpheus from the box to the stage, ||p. 375|| a gesture that was mightily applauded from the *parterre*. One misfortune for the northern European is that in the theatre he can hardly tolerate all the musk-perfumed gentlemen. And, as if that were not enough, they poison the air all around them, each one being possessed of a fan with which he spreads the scent like a hurricane spreads dust. It would be unfitting to his position if a French Creole[v] went to the theatre without a fan.

This town is as strictly watched by the police as is done in Europe. In the evenings, as soon as it is dark, all the streets are illuminated, so that, as I have often seen, the lamps have continued burning even four hours after sunrise. Prominent people have their way lit through the streets with torches, made in the country from the resin of a very tall tree called the rubber tree (*gommier*)[w]. This resin has a pleasant armoma, like incense; the wood is very much like our beechwood and is frequently used for poles.

The weather here is extremely humid, yet not unwholesome. Because of this the country is very fertile, since it is like a constant Spring, and this brings forth the most delicious delicacies, as well as a lot of vermin. The oposuum[x], or *maniko*, ||p. 376|| is a very destructive animal which lays waste everything, both plants and birds. I recently saw a live one with its five young hanging onto it.

A poisonous type of snake is very common here. Formerly 60 to 80 Blacks were killed annually by its bite. Now various cures to conteract the bite of this destroyer of people have been discovered, among them a certain plant[y] has proved to be especially effective. I see some of these animals nearly daily on my walks. Once, when I was taking my lunch under a tree by a brook (*rivière monsieur*) and was chewing my dry lunch bread, I was not a little terrified when I looked around by chance and caught sight of one such monster close to me with its neck stretched high into the air as if it were saying, "Give me some!" I avenged this impertinence by dint of the superiority I considered I had over him in the effectiveness of my botanical walking stick, and I brought down such a

[v] A Columbian of European origin. [On Creoles see Goveia 1965: 244 f.]

[w] A new genus of *Hexandríæ* [*Hexandria* simply means having six stamens, like lilies. The term is not used for purposes of identification today (Per Sunding, personal communication)].

[x] *Didelphis Marsupialis Linn.*

[y] *Aristolochia anguicida Linn.* [Cf. Irvine 1961: 37; Chittenden 1977: 176.]

[24] The opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*, composed by C. W. von Gluck, was first presented in Vienna in 1762.

hero [of a beast] that, preserved in ethyl alcohol, it must now serve to be placed on show.

This, then, is my last letter from outside Europe to you, my journey to North Columbia having been brought to naught, because if we intend to reach Europe this year, it is high time to depart. Indeed tomorrow I shall travel from here to St. Croix and then I shall write in capital letters on the notice board: GOD WILLING TO COPENHAGEN. Keep very well until I see you in person, etc.[25]

[25] Since this last letter was dated July 1787, Isert must have sailed home from the West Indies on a different ship from the one he took from Guinea, the *Christiansborg*. The Captain of that ship reported on his arrival in Copenhagen, 'Arrived safely in the home city at the end of June 1787' (Berg 1900: 195).

Appendix of Meteorological Observations

These observations have been made during a two-year period, partly on the journey to Guinea, partly in Guinea itself.

The weather in the torrid zone is less subject to change than is that in the north temperate climate. Here one nearly always enjoys high temperature, except in the harmattan period from December to the end of January, and in the so-called '*sinkesu*' season which lasts through July, August and September. During these periods the air is cloudy and hazy at times. During the other months the rainy season prevails, that is, the 'small travat season', as it is called here, comes in October, and the 'large travat season' in April, May and June.[1] The rainfall is different here from that in Europe, since it hardly ever occurs here without thunder and lightning. When a travat is building up, the sky may be completely clear apart from a small black cloud in the east. In the course of about a quarter of an hour to half an hour a storm builds up in the east, making the sky completely black. Thunder and lightning follow, and with these comes the rain, after which the storm subsides. The rain is usually a cloudburst but seldom lasting more than two hours, and then the sky is as clear as it was before. There are seldom more than twelve such travats in the course of a year.

The harmattan season is one of the peculiar seasons in this country. A dry fog prevails, which is so thick that one cannot see much over a hundred paces. I call it a fog since the air is as thick as it would be in a fog in our part of the world, but it has the totally opposite characteristic that this fog is dry to the same degree as ours is humid. Following are several illustrations of this. I had brought along an instrument for measuring humidity (hygrometer) of the type used by Mr. De Luc.[2] It consists of a

[1] 'Travat' is from Portuguese **travado** and refers to what is now known as a line squall.

[2] 'Mr. de Luc' refers to Jean André Deluc (1727–1817), a geologist and physicist, who was born in Switzerland but spent most of his life in England and Germany. In addition to his numerous geological studies he was also engaged in important research in the field of meteorology.

cylindrical tube of very straight ivory, three and one-half inches [*sic*] long and about two *linien* in diameter. A 14-inch-long glass tube is attached to its top, the joint having been made airtight with lac. The cylinder is filled with quick-silver so that in a condition of highest humidity — that is, in water — the quick-silver fills the cylinder just level to its top.[3]

On my own hygrometer the scale is so devised that the 14-inch length of the glass tube is divided into 145 equal parts, or degrees, with 'O' degree showing the highest humidity. Moderately damp air causes the quick-silver to rise to 50–60 degrees, both here and in Europe. This instrument was once ruined on a journey, by accident, but at one time (in November '85) I wanted to use it for experiments during the coming harmattan season, so I put it into its former workable condition. How great was my surprise when, on the 20 and 21 February, 1786, I saw it rise so high that the quick-silver column exceeded 145 degrees and, since the tube was open, the quick-silver ran out. I hung a container under it to collect all that had run out. Since all the quick-silver in the cylinder had been measured I calculated that the tube should have been some three inches longer, and that the quick-silver would have reached 170 degrees. Such a dryness coupled with the heat commonly causes coughing which, however, does not last long and can be relieved by sprinkling water in the room frequently. The grooves in the floors and the doors become so wide that one can see through them; barrels which are not full enough come loose from their bands and fall apart; the foil behind mirrors contracts, and there are more of such remarkable phenomena.

The atmospheric pressure is always the same here, that is, the barometer stays at 29.5 inches (English measure) as if nailed to the spot. During a period of six months I have not been able to observe a difference of more than one tenth of an inch over or under that mark. For this reason I did not find it worth the trouble to make a column for this on the observation chart. The same circumstance applies to the wind which is always a westerly trade wind here. In the daytime it turns somewhat southerly, and at night northerly, the former being called the 'sea-wind' and the latter the

[3] *A linien* = 1.3 cm. The brevity of Isert's description of the hygrometer that he used makes it difficult for a lay reader to understand it. The apparatus worked on the principle of the expansion/contraction of the ivory cylinder. When the cylinder was totally immersed in water — that is, in a state of highest humidity — it expanded fully and it was filled with mercury to the very top. In this way the 'O' point was established. The hygrometer could then be carried around, and as the humidity in the atmosphere decreased, the cylinder contracted, forcing the mercury into the glass tube, which was marked in degrees. Thus, the lower the humidity the higher the column of mercury and the higher the measurement. (I am indebted to Mathis Winsnes for this explanation.)

'land-wind'. During the rains it is easterly, but as soon as they are over it goes back to its old place.

The temperature of the air both on the shore and at the lagoon is extremely high throughout the year. The greatest heat I have recorded was at the Rio Volta on 20 February 1784. The thermometer, which was hanging in its usual place — in an open room facing north — measured 91 degrees [Fahrenheit] at 12 o'clock midday. I brought it straight out into the sun and saw that after a quarter of an hour it measured 130 degrees, where it stabilised and remained until 1:00 o'clock. Then it began to fall. In the month of March the same year, and even at the same place, I once had a reading of 93.5 degrees which rose to over 134 degrees when I brought it into the sun. This heat exceeds by far the 107 degrees Fahrenheit recorded by Adanson in Senegal in 1738.[4] Presumably it is the white sand as well as the shining surface of the water that generates the great heat by reflecting the sun's rays. Or it might be the many bogs which are found in the region of the shore and which produce a great deal of combustible air. When I set the cylinder of the thermometer in the apparently burning sand it always fell five degrees from what it had registered when hanging in the sun. The lowest reading was on the mountain in Aquapim on the mornings of 11 and 12 July, 1786 when it registered 69 degrees. The region around Aquapim is totally wooded and there are no bogs.

On the journey to Guinea various samples of sea water were tested with a hydrometer at considerable distances from each other, to determine the quantity of its salt content.

All of the instruments which I have used for these observations were made by Mr. Professor Kratzenstein in Copenhagen. It is to him that I and the entire community of those knowledgeable in physics owe our thanks because, by dint of the accuracy of these instruments, we can be spared problems.[5]

The first column of the observations shows the location; the second, the date; the third, the hour; the fourth, the thermometer reading on Fahrenheit and Réaumur scales; the fifth, the hygrometer reading; the sixth, the wind direction; the seventh, the force of the wind judged by eye, using a scale of six degrees of with 'O' representing 'calm'; the eighth shows the weather, and the ninth the salinity, from a half ounce, or *lothen*, contained in a *kanne*, or 32 ounces, of sea water.

[4] For Adanson, see Tenth Letter [b].
[5] For Kratzenstein, see Eleventh Letter [a]

[Editor's Note: Following this explanation is the Table of Meteorological Observations. It covers pp. ix-lxx and is not included in this edition. The full listing of nine items was used from the beginning to p. xvi, when they had reached Calais. After that Isert recorded only the location, the date and the thermometer readings, at three fixed times every day (6.00, 1.00, 9.00), together with brief weather descriptions. Readings for the area around Christiansborg in October-December 1783 are on pp. xxi-xxiii; around the Volta River area from December 1783 to September 1784 on pp. xxiii-lvii; around Whydah from November 1784 to April 1785, on pp. lvii-lxiii; at Popo and back to Ada in May 1785 on pp. lxiv, lxv; and back to Christiansborg in May and June 1785 on pp. lxvi-lxx. Isert reports the loss of instruments and other materials as well as the near loss of his life when the canoe in which he was travelling overturned. But he had a reserve thermometer at Christiansborg (p. lvii).

END OF ISERT'S TEXT

Editor's Appendices

1. Chronology

1756	20 October:	Isert is born at Angermünde in Brandenburg.
1783	2 July:	Sails to the Gold Coast for the first time.
	15 October:	Arrives at Christiansborg in Accra.
1784	14 February:	Installation of the commander-in-chief of the allied armies at Fort Kongensten, Ada, in preparation for the *Sagbadre War*.
	25 February:	The army is mobilised.
	27 February:	Start of the war.
	18 June:	Peace treaty signed in Pottebra. Isert returns to Keta to begin construction of Fort Prinsensten.
	22 June:	The cornerstone of Fort Prinsensten laid.
	11 October:	Isert sails eastward to Popo and Whydah to trade.
	2 November:	Arrives in Whydah.
1785	13 January:	Letter sent to Sir Joseph Banks asking for funds.
	1 April:	Leaves Whydah to return to Accra.
1786	7 June:	Starts his journey to Asante.
	8 June:	Arrives in Mampong, Akuapem.
	18 June:	Is recalled to Christiansborg as he is about to continue his journey to Akim and Asante.
	7 October:	Leaves Africa for Europe by way of the West Indies.
	8 October:	Slave uprising on the ship.
	? December:	Arrives at St. Croix.
1787	after July:	Arrives in Copenhagen.
1788	?	Publishes *Reise nach Guinea*.
	3 April	Marries Dorothea Elisabeth Plum in Copenhagen.

	14 July:	Isert, his wife, and prospective settlers leave Copenhagen on the *Fredensborg*, bound for Guinea.
	14 November:	They arrive at Christiansborg.
	21 December:	Frederiksnopel is officially established at a flag-raising ceremony in Akuapem.
1789	16 January:	Iserts sends his last letter from Guinea.
	21 January:	Isert dies.
	17 February:	Dorothea Elisabeth Isert gives birth to a daughter christened Pouline.
	25 February:	The mother dies.
	18 March:	The child dies.

2. Letter to Sir Joseph Banks

Commentary

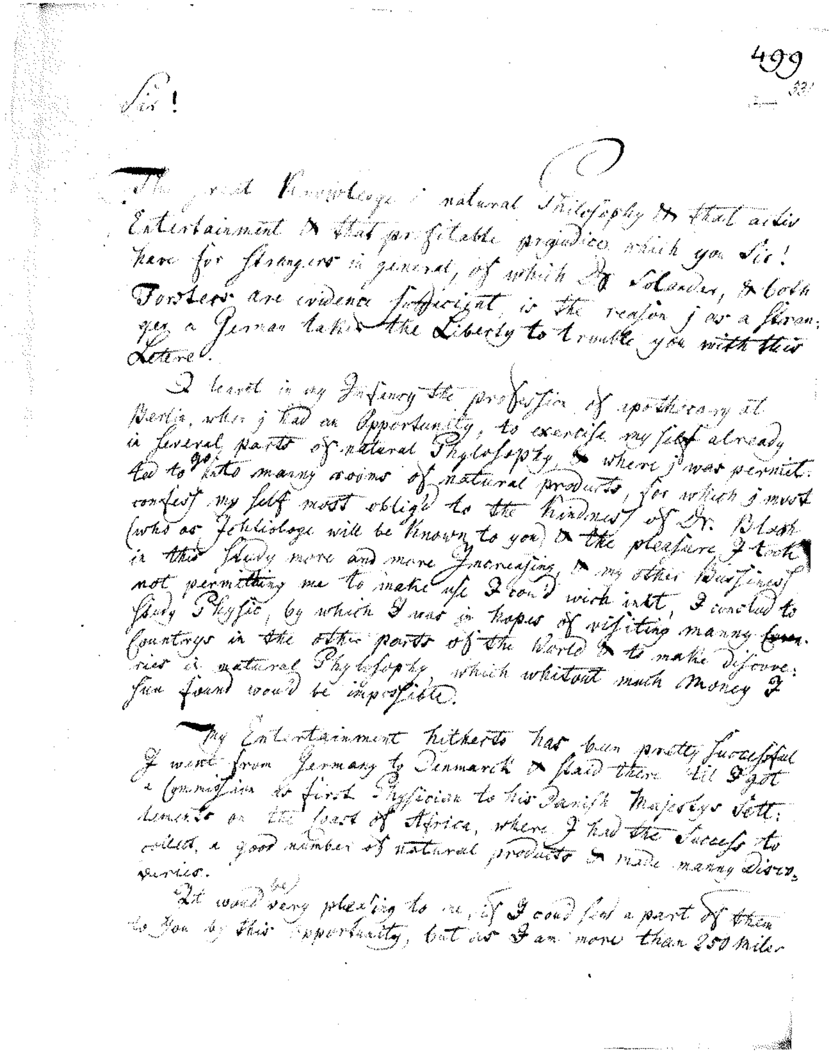
Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), the renowned British naturalist and explorer, had a particular interest in botany. Banks sailed with James Cook on his first voyage around the world, and the experience and collections that resulted from that voyage launched Banks into a career that culminated in a position of 'undisputed authority in the field of science policy in later years.' (Stafleu 1971: 221). Banks personal herbarium and library at his home at Soho Square in London became an international centre of taxonomic research. Banks was appointed honorary director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew; he was elected president of the Royal Society in 1778; and he organised and supported many expeditions which provided Kew gardens with living specimens from all over the world. The Banks herbarium and library are now at the Natural History Museum.

Isert's letter to Sir Joseph Banks gives us important insights into his wishes *vis-à-vis* his situation. Isert left Christiansborg in October 1784, sailing eastward to fulfill a commission to trade at the 'River Gab Boon'. His anticipation was great and he looked forward to visiting even more places and making important 'discoveries' along the 'Lower Coast'. Having picked up wares at Prinsensten he sailed to Anecho ['Little Popo'] to begin trading. While in Anecho he received an invitation from the Viceroy of Whydah to stop there for trade. As a result, in Isert's words, 'We anchored at Fida [Whydah] since we had decided to do our trading there and not at the River Gab Boon, as had been our earlier plan.' The 'we' indicates either that Isert was not alone in making the decision or that his commitment to the Company prevented him from following his own inclination. His note to the above statement reads, 'It was not a little disappointing for me not to become acquainted with that great river on this occasion.' He rationalised — 'Even before this we had not held the best opinion of trade at the River Gab Boon, since we knew the inhabitants only from their bad side.' But he placated himself with a 'first', '. . . we decided to make an attempt there [at Whydah] since Danes had never traded there from time immemorial . . .'. This was small comfort,

and the letter he sent to Banks from Whydan two months later provides ample proof of his feelings. Isert wanted desperately to explore but he was trapped in trading — slave-trading at that. The motive behind the request in the letter also gives an insight into Isert's sudden decision to leave Africa two years later, when his private excursion into the interior was cut short by a call back to duty.

The letter to Banks places Isert in the milieu of which he wished to be seen as a member. Indeed his frequent mention of famous naturalists in the text of the book was not a matter of name-dropping but acknowledgement of the work of, or meeting with, peers. Bloch, Schreber, Crudy, von Rohr, Kratzenstein, Adanson, *et al.* were among the most highly respected of the late eighteenth century naturalists. Isert was undoubtedly a member of that coterie and was honoured posthumously by Schreber, who named a genus of plants after him. Unfortunately there is no record of an answer to Isert's letter by Sir Joseph Banks, but we know that his request was in vain. Thus the acceptance of Isert's plan to establish a colony in Guinea came as a welcome opportunity for him on two counts; to make a constructive contribution to a more humane method of producing sugar and to establish his own reputation.

In the text of the letter, the remarkable use of the term 'Entertainment' in the first and third paragraphs was clearly the result of an unfortunate choice from a dictionary. The German term *Unterhaltung* means both 'support/maintenance' and 'entertainment'.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Sir!

The great Knowledge in natural Philosophy & that active Entertainment & that profitable prejudice which you Sir! have for strangers in general, of which Dr Solander, & both Forsters are evidence sufficient, is the reason I as a stranger a German take the Liberty to trouble you with these Lettre.

I learnt in my Infancy the profession of apothecary at Berlin, wher I had an Opportunity, to exercise my self already in several parts of natural Phylosophy & where I was permitted to go into many rooms of natural products, for which I must confess my self most oblige to the kindness of Dr. Bloch (who as Ichthiologe will be known to you) & the pleasure I took in this study more and more Increasing & my other Business not permitting me to make use I coud wich itt, I concluded to study Physic, by which I was in hopes of visiting many Countrys in the other parts of the World & to make discoveries in natural Phylosophy, which whitout much Money I first found woud be impossible.

My Entertainment hitherto has been pretty successful I went from Germany to Denmark & staid there til I got a Commission as first Physician to his Danish Majestys Settlements on the Coast of Africa, where I had the Success to collect, a good number of natural products & made many discoveries.

It woud be very pleasing to me, if I coud send a part of them to You by this opportunity, but as I am more than 250 miles

Illustration 3. Facsimile of original letter to Sir Joseph Banks.

distant from Christiansburg is proper place & where I have my
[illegible] & a French Ship just on the point of going. I very sorry
I cannot have that full Satisfaction & send only 13 Fruits which
I beg to have the Honour, to make a present of to the Bo:
tanish Garden, with som Descriptions of new Plants, which,
should You find worthy enough, should be glad they could find a
place in Actis Societatis.

I am now 2 Months here & have found several of natures
products which I have not seen before at Accra, from here
I am going to the River Gabbone & perhaps to that Island
situated under the Aequator nam'd St. Thomae, where I likewise
hope to make a number of new Discoveries, from thence I
return to Christiansburg, which probably will be in the
Month of May. —

Since I came into this Service I have had an Opportunity
to make several Discoveries in a short Distance from our Set:
tlements which is always some part of that rich and little
discovered part of the World Africa. It would afford me a great
deal of pleasure to make a Voyage up into the Heart of the
Country, which as yet is without Description, but as it is
not possible while I am in this service, and will take a great
deal of money, I conclude to make You Sir! a proposition,
if it should please You I will go into the English service for
Natural Philosoph, make Discoveries for the Society & send
naturals & fruits to that Museum. Salary I shall re:
quire is four — 500 l. p annum. As travelling in this
Country is excessive dear, & when I buy a Natural from Negro
they are the same.

The scheme of my Voyage should be as followes: if I re:
turn to Christiansburg, I make a Voyage to Akim, Aqua:

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pim & Asiantheé, from which I return to the windward Coast
& to the River Sierra Leona, Gambia & Senegal, where from
I hope to go to the West Indies & especially to the English
Island of Jamaica, where I shall have an Opportunity to collect
many things that we know not, but from our great Brown
pictures, & bring in our Classifications. —

What will most favor this Expedition, will be a good Painter
which You would get to follow me, as I am not well acquainted
with this art, and have not time for it. But if in that
time his Majesty would send Ships out for Discoveries, or to
South Sea Islands I am always ready to com to Europe &
go with them.

With respect to my Ability to engage for a Natural
Philosopher You will be satisfied by applying to the Danish
Natural Philosophers, or to Dr. Bloch at Berlin. —

I hope dear Sir! You will be so kind to give me an An:
swer soon as possible, if my proposition is agreable to You
or not. In the mean time

I remain with respect

Sir

Your most humble &
obedient servt.
Paul Erdman Isert
first Physician at
Christiansburg
to Accra.

Williams Fort at Whydah
in Africa 13th Januar
1785.

To
Joseph Banks esquire.

Transcript

Sir!

The great Knowledge in natural Philosophy & that active Entertainment & that profitable prejudice which you Sir! have for Strangers in general, of which Dr. Solander, & both Forsters are evidence sufficient, is the reason i as a Stranger a German takes the Liberty to trouble you wit this Letere.[1]

I learnt in my Infancy the profession of apothecary at Berlin, when I had an Opportunity to exercise myself already in several parts of natural Phylosophy, where i was permitted to go into manny rooms of natural products, for which i must confess myself most obliged to the Kindness of Dr. Bloch (who as Ichtiologe will be known to you) & the pleasure I took in this Study more and more Increasing, & my other Business not permitting me to make use I could wish it, I conclud to study Physic, by which I was in hopes of visiting manny Countrys in the other parts of the World, & to make discoveries in natural Phylosophy, which whitout much money I sun found would be impossible.[2]

My Entertainment hitherto has been pretty successful. I went from Germany to Denmark & staid there til I got a Commission as first Physician to his Danish Majestys Settlements on the Coast of Africa, where I had the Success to collect a good number of natural products & made manny Discoveries.

It would be very pleasing to me, if I could send a part of them to you by this opportunity, but as I am more than 250 miles distant from Christiansburg my proper place & where I have my things & a French schip just on the point of going, I very sorry I cannot have that satisfaction & send only 13 fruits which I beg to have the honour, to make a present of to the Botanish Gardin, with som Descriptions of new Plants, which,

[1] Daniel Carlsson Solander, 1733–82, was Swedish and a pupil of Linnæus. He accompanied Banks on James Cook's first voyage around the world and on a voyage to Iceland. Solander, a highly gifted naturalist in his own right, was Banks's companion and colleague. He became librarian and curator of the Banks library and collection at Soho Square, and was also appointed keeper of the Natural History Department of the British Museum.

'The Forsters' were Johann Reinhold Forster, 1729–98, and his son Johann Georg, 1754–94, both born in Germany. Joseph Banks sent them on Cook's second voyage, 1772–5, when he himself was prevented from going. The elder Forster received a professorship in Halle in 1780. Equally knowledgeable in zoology and geology as he was in botany he was the author of many works, including *Geschichte der Entdeckungen und Schiffahrten im Norden* (1784).

[2] Marcus Elieser Bloch, 1723–99, was a German naturalist and physician, who became famous for his work in the classification of fish. His *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte der Fische*, Berlin 1782–95, nine volumes, was the leading opus in ichthyology in the eighteenth century.

should you find worthy enough, schould be glad they could find a place in Activ societatis.

I am now 2 Months here & have found several of natures products which I have not seen before at Accra, from here I am going to the River Gab bone & perhaps to that Island situated under the Aequator nam'd St. Thomae, where I likely [?] hope to make a number of new Discoveries, from there I return to Christiansburg, which probably will be in the Month of May. –

Since I came into this service I have had an Opportunity to make several Discoveries in a short Distance from our settlements which is always some part of that rich [?] and little discovered part of the World Africa. It would afford me a great deal of pleasure to make a Voyage up into the Heart of the Country, which as yet is without Description, but as it is not possible while I am in this service, and will take a great part of money, I conclude to make You sir! a proposition, if it should please You I will go into the English service for Natural Philosoph, make Discoveries for the Society & find naturals and fruits to that Musaeum. Salary I schall require is four – 500 £ p.annum. As travelling in this Country is excessive dear, & when I buy a Natural from a Neger they are the same.

The scheme of my Voyage schould be as followes: if I return to Christiansburg, I make a Voyage to Akim. Aquapim & to Assianthée, from which I return to the windward Coast & to the River Sierra Leona, Gambia & Senegal, where from I hope to go to the West Indies & especially to the English Island of Jamaica, where I schale have an Opportunity, to collect manny things that we know not, but from our great Brown pictures, to bring in our Classifications.[3]

What will most faver this Expedition, will be a good Painter which you would get to follow me, as I am not well acquainted with this art, and have not time for it. But if in that time his Majesty would send schips out for Discoveries, or to south Sea Islands I am always ready to com to Europe & go with them.

With respect to my Ability to engage for a Natural Philosopher, you will be satisfied by applying to the Danish Natural Philosophers, or to Dr. Bloch at Berlin.

I hope dear Sir! You will be so kind to giv me an Answer, sun as possible, if my proposition is agreeable to You or not. In the mean time

[3] Patrick Browne, ca. 1720–1790, was born in Ireland and made a first voyage to Antigua in 1737. Forced to return home because of illness, he went to Paris where he studied natural science, and especially botany. Browne became a doctor of medicine at Leiden in 1743. He returned to the West Indies and settled in Jamaica to practice medicine, and to continue his botanical/zoologocal research. His chief publication was *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica*, London 1756.

I remain with resepct

Sir
Williams fort at Whydah
in Africa 13 Januar
1785
To
Joseph Bancks esquir
Your most humbl &
obedient sirv't [?]
Paul Erdmann Isert
first Physician at
Christiansburg
to Accra

3. Materials Relating to Frederiksnopel, [Frederik's City]

Commentary

The idea of a settlement in West Africa was not new. One had already been started in Sierra Leone by Granville Sharp in 1787, albeit that was a settlement to be managed by Blacks. Isert's plan was conceived during his visit to the West Indies in 1787 after he had seen the inhumane treatment of the slaves on the plantations there. He probably realized and planned his scheme for a settlement during the voyage home. The plan drew on Isert's extensive knowledge of the people and the country around the Danish establishments on the Gold Coast, and on his own expertise in botany. Isert was able to convince the Finance Minister (Count von Schimmelmann) and Privy Councillor Brandt that the effort should be made. The suggestion was undoubtedly timely because not only the plantations in the West Indies (where the Schimmelmann family had several of their own), but the Danish establishments on the Guinea Coast were experiencing serious financial difficulties. The idea of a plantation in Guinea that could eventually produce sugar without the expense of transporting slaves across the Atlantic must have been attractive. And Schimmelmann, as portrayed by Christian Degn, was in the personal dilemma of being very deeply involved in the slave trade while, as a devotee of Rousseau's philosophy, hating the trade and his own part in it.[1]

The original idea of a plantation, perhaps imitating those in the West Indies, grew into a project for what must be termed a Crown colony. There can be no doubt, given the contents of the draft, the instructions, and Isert's last letter, that the intention was for the first Europeans to settle permanently and prepare for later arrivals. There was to be local government responsible directly to the Crown, and plans for the future structure of the colony were put forward. The start, however, was to be modest. A small sum of money was committed to the project and a letter sent by Schimmelmann to the governor at Christiansborg set the tone.

[1]Cf. Degn 1984: 194.

The undertaking was to be teated as a 'private' project which merited the risk of a small stake because of its interesting prospects. Should it prove successful more would be expended on it. The missionary aspect was part of the picture for the future. The instructions specifically prohibited the planting and cultivation of sugar, albeit that production was the ultimate aim. However, sugar cultivation was a long, expensive and very labour-intensive undertaking and the new colony was to be self-sufficient in the production of food as quickly as possible. The colonists were not to raise products for trade during this first phase.

Isert was made captain in the infantry in order to give him more personal authority. Among the group of prospective settlers who sailed with him was another man named Isert, apparently his brother (Degn 1984: 234). They sailed on 14 July, 1788, on the *Fredensborg*, under the command of Captain J. J. Berg, the same man who had been captain of the ship on which Isert had sailed from Guinea to the West Indies.[2] It is curious that neither Isert nor Berg mentioned one another in connection with the later voyage. We have only the mutual reference at the time of the slave revolt on the earlier voyage. Berg's biography shows that there must have been a community of interests. Berg, too, felt uncomfortable as a slave-trader; he, too, was very interested in navigating the Volta River; they had met before and spent several months together. Yet Berg made no mention of carrying the first settlers of a new colony to West Africa. And, after having landed the group, Berg spent several months on the Gold Coast while waiting for cargo. During that period Isert died, an event which could not have escaped Berg's notice but was ignored in his acocunt. Another curious omission is one on the part of Isert. On the way to the Gold Coast the ship stopped at Sierra Leone, to trade at the young settlement which had been established there. Isert, on his way to start his own colony, made no mention of this short stay nor of any impressions he may have received.

The draft for organisation and the instructions

There are in existence both a plan for the colony, written by Isert, and the actual instructions for the establishment of the colony, written by the ministers Ernst von Schimmelmann and Brandt. Both documents have been translated from German into Danish and have been published in Thaarup's Archives (vol 3: 231–268). I have used both and find that the Danish translations are reliable, apart from the occasional difficulty with proper names.

[2]For *Fredensborg*, see the drawing in the Appendix.

The sections of Isert's plan presented here are those which do not appear in the instructions. In general, the plan and the instructions are in line but the former goes into details presumably not considered necessary in the latter. However there is one intriguing difference. The plan states specifically that the colony should be established, if possible, in a mountain area, a location which would be healthier for the Europeans. The instructions, however, state that the territory 'must have communication with the Volta River'. The land around the lower reaches of the Volta is lowland savannah, whereas Akuapem, which Isert knew well, is more than 300 metres above sea level. We know that at that time the Danes were striving to gain control of the mouth of the Volta, and naturally there was great interest in investigating the navigability of the river. A colony close to the river was much to be desired. It thus seems likely that Isert was persuaded, or directed, by his superiors in Copenhagen to proceed to the Volta. His journey to Mlefi, an island in the river, his judgement of its unsuitiability, and his change of locus to Akuapem are reported in his last letter, included in this appendix.

Isert's plan for the life of the Black slaves in the colony was a logical consequence of the outrage he had felt upon seeing how they were mistreated in the West Indies. There was to be no inhumane treatment, they would enjoy the rights of judicature and of the ownership and disposal of property. They would have the right to be provided with support from their masters when their working days were over. Of particular interest is his plan for the appointment of a kind of *ombudsman*, a protector of the rights of the serfs — the status which he envisaged for them.

Having taken on the responsibility of establishing a colony Isert suddenly assumed the roles of moralist and missionary. Class distinctions both among the Europeans and the Blacks were to be maintained and visible. Nakedness, even half-nakedness, was to be prohibited. Religious services were to be conducted with 'dignity and formality'. Polygyny was declared illegal but not retroactive in the case of Blacks who already had several wives when they came to live in the colony. Miscegenation would result in immediate expulsion from the colony, with the children of such alliances being disinherited. Thus the original goal of the colony had now been expanded to include proselytisation, each colonist being called upon to assume the duty of a missionary. Lost in the past were the invocations to Rousseau, for now the 'noble savage' was to be tamed.

The treaty

The treaty of land acquisition, signed by Isert and Chief Atiemo ['Attiambo'], cites the geographic location as Krobo ['Krobbo']. Krobo is in no

way synonymous with Akuapem. It lies east of Akuapem and its people are related to the Adangbe, while the Akuapems are Akans. Considering his knowledge of the people and their languages Isert would not have made a mistake in this respect. The answer undoubtedly lies in the likelihood that the treaty had been prepared in Denmark and was based on the intention of establishing the colony close to the Volta River. It must have been retained as written despite the change of locus, on the correct presumption that Atiemo was incapable of reading the text. If so, Isert showed limited respect for his Black counterpart and friend. Yet Isert in turn may have been misled, or even deceived, by Atiemo. He recorded the 'purchase' of all the land in Akuapem which was not being used by the inhabitants, and estimated this at fully seven-eighths of the country. A pretty purchase indeed, but the question arises of the reality of the 'purchase'. Was it not simply the usufruct that he had 'bought', rather than the land itself? By apparently agreeing to sell land, was not Atiemo shrewdly strengthening his own position? He could be assured of a continued European presence which would result in personal and communal profit, military support in future conflicts with other Europeans and other African nations, and enhanced status for himself and Akuapem in the eyes of other local rulers. The price for the land was not agreed upon immediately, nor had it been fixed at the time of Isert's death. Atiemo used the treaty a few months later, shortly after Isert's death, to demand payment from Governor Kipnasse (Kiøge's replacement) for land, for the work done in clearing a path to the plains, and for the building of the headquarters. Misunderstandings, deliberate or otherwise, arising out of the difference between European and African concepts of land rights, were to become a recurring theme as the move toward colonising intensified in the nineteenth century.

Isert's last letter, *Pro memoria*

Isert's last letter, written two months after his arrival in Guinea and five days before his death, describes the establishment of Frederiksnopel, its progress, status, and immediate needs. It was written during a journey to Fredensborg Fort at Ningo, to obtain supplies and materials. The letter is replete with pride of accomplishment and confidence for the future. The shape of the future colony was as clear to Isert as was its projected size. If the pressure of dwindling funds is easily discernible, so is Isert's impatience to make the colony grow. Had he lived to carry out his plan he might have established an impressive colony for Denmark.

The Aftermath

At the time of Isert's death Governor Kiøge had returned to Denmark and Kipnasse had taken over. Because illness and death had taken a great toll in the colony a replacement for Isert from among the colonists was impossible, hence Chief Assistant J. N. Flindt was sent from Christiansborg to Akuapem to take charge. Kipnasse was under pressure from Atiemo to pay for land and buildings in accordance with Isert's contract, and he remarks in a report to Copenhagen that he felt compelled to satisfy Atiemo's demands, although he could ill afford it. His reasons were that the project appeared to be of special interest to the king and a refusal to pay might put Denmark in an embarrassing situation. Governor Kipnasse was soon replaced by A. R. Bjørn. Flindt reported that Bjørn not only had little interest in the colony but that he deliberately put obstacles in the way of its progress. The most telling instance was Bjørn's immediately summoning the smith Ole Fynsberg to the coast for a building project, thereby depriving the colony of its most important worker. Flindt's anger and frustration, ill-concealed in a letter to Schimmelmann, dated March 1791, contained his resignation of the commission to act as director of the colony. But Schimmelmann was not yet ready to give it up. He appointed J. P. B. von Rohr to take charge of the colony. Von Rohr was an expert botanist and medical doctor who had had years of experience in the tropical climate of the West Indies in the service of the Danish king. He set sail for Guinea in September 1792 but, tragically, the ship sank and all of the passengers were lost. Frederiksnopel gradually dwindled away.[3] Dorothea Elizabeth Plum Isert's brother honoured Isert with a memorial poem in the journal *Minerva*.[4] And Kiøge wrote an obituary based on their days together in Africa.[5]

Isert's scheme for the establishment and management of the new settlement

[To avoid repetition only those sections which do not appear in the final instructions have been included. The original is in the Royal Archives in Copenhagen.]

The new Colony in Africa shall be based on agriculture and dependent

[3] Cf. Flindt, *Pro Memoria* 1791. For a contemporary report and comments, see Wadström 1794: 175–8, 316–7. See also Degn 1984: 230–8.

[4] For a reprint of this poem, see Grove 1903: 128–30.

[5] See Editor's Appendix 4.

upon the products of cultivation. The lands to be used for cultivation shall be acquired from the chief and the inhabitants of the country by means of gifts and other compensation.

The Colony shall, if possible, be established in the most fertile mountain areas both because of the healthier air found there and to protect the Europeans, as far as possible, from the burning heat of the climate.

Not all the uncultivated land shall be in the hands of private persons as their property or copyhold but a third of the land shall be held in common. The same shall apply as the Colony acquires new lands.

To what extent and under what conditions free Negroes shall be allowed to settle shall be determined more specifically.

The Colony may in common receive credit from private persons and enter into contracts in financial affairs. But no debt may be contracted in Europe by persons who are not Danish subjects; the debt in such cases shall not be legally recoverable. Whoever does not live in the colony shall not be able to own real property.

If a royal subject does not live in, or is not settled in, the Colony but wishes to have establishments and plantations, it can only be arranged in the following way: that he chose certain persons or families for whom he has received permission from the directors of the Colony that they may settle there.

[In return] for the capital which he provides and which is used for cultivation and the establishment and equipping of a plantation, he retains a certain tax on the products saleable in Europe. This tax shall be seen as a certain guarantee or copyhold tax which the man who is settled by another's fortune must pay annually. The settler is then dutybound to manage and keep the transferred establishment in good condition, so that its value shall not be diminished. Other conditions may also be agreed upon, such as leasing, repayment in a certain year, etc.

If a farmer settled under such conditions does not maintain the agreed-upon duties he loses the right to retain the property.

If the government itself settles a colonist it can be done under similar conditions.[1] When private persons entrust money or wares to the directors of the Colony these can be used on behalf of the European entrepreneur to settle new planters. The tax, guarantee, or lease of such establishment by special agreement, shall be determined by the directors but shall be retained by the entrepreneur.

No lease tax can be terminated in less than 25 years, and it shall be decided more specifically how often, and how much each time, a contract

[1] [From *Thaarups Archiv*, Vol. 3, p. 255–62.]

owner may increase the tax. If a lessee or his heirs agree to the determined increase, they may retain the settlement.

When a new planter leaves the Colony for good he must give over his settlement or obligations to another.

These points can be decided more specifically in consideration of local conditions, but must be in the spirit of the project.

[§ 8 in the Instructions addresses the purchase and use of slaves, stating that the Blacks bought as slaves shall have the status of serfs.]

These serfs' master shall practise only natural power and judgement over them, but not injure them; the punishment that their master can administer to the serfs shall be [generally] determined. The punishment of lawbreakers is a public matter, not that of the master, and the serf, just as the free Black, shall be entitled to the decision of a court of law.

Those serfs who are established on a property or are used to its service shall not be given over to another unless it be a transfer of the property itself, to the cultivation of which they are allotted and must follow.

When a serf is taken in as a member of the master's family and has not been used in agriculture for a certain length of time, he shall not longer be seen as a serf. He then has his freedom and is to be considered a person who works for a wage.

Those born as serfs shall remain so unless they are freed.

When a Black who has served as a serf for a number of years has reached a certain age and is no longer able to earn his keep, his master shall be responsible for his support if he frees him.

No one may own slaves or cultivate the land outside the colony.

None of the freed Blacks in the colony shall be allowed to practise greater rights over slaves brought in than the Europeans do.

No property, including serfs, belonging to any European can be sold to or taken into possession by any Black.

Absolutely no land can be transferred to anyone who is not a member of the colony.

Slaves from neighbouring nations who flee to the Colony shall not be given protection there unless their master can be persuaded to release them for his purchase price. A similar agreement shall be sought with reference to serfs who run away from the colony.

Everything that a serf acquires of moveable or immoveable property, all that he inherits, all that his master or others give him as gifts, belong to him, and he has absolute right of ownership to keep them or give them to his children, relatives, strangers, either while he is alive or after his death. But he cannot acquire debt or enter into contracts or obligations of any manner unless it is recommended or guaranteed by his master.

The master may not disturb family relationships. Man and wife should

not be separated from one another, and minors not taken from their parents against their will; but their upbringing and training can be undertaken by their master if the parents neglect it.

Immediately upon establishment of the Colony it shall be seen to that the Colony has sufficient strength for its defence and that it can be increased. When the population of Europeans has grown to a certain degree, all the young people who do not yet own property shall be assigned to the defence of the Colony, and they shall bear weapons and learn to use them. Leaders shall be chosen from among those who own land or are heads of families. These leaders shall conduct military practice for the others, which, however, must not be held on certain Sundays or holy days.

These leaders can, in addition, be considered magistrates who shall keep watch over the customs which are not subject to the force of law.

The chief officers of the colony shall also have military status, and those who hold such offices shall be the leaders of the inhabitants.

The salaried soldiers shall make up a special corps.

The Colony's white settlers shall be divided into ranks distinguished by a military uniform, which they must not neglect to wear on Sundays and holidays. They shall provide their own weapons and uniforms.

Religious services shall be carried out with the highest possible dignity and formality, according to the ability of the colony to do so. The Protestant faith shall be the only public faith and shall be taught in both the German and Danish languages.

Dependent upon the condition of the Colony's economy there may be held public feast-days on certain Sundays and holidays at the common cost, with the goal of establishing bonds of social relations and good will among the inhabitants of the colony.

The Blacks and serfs should be able to take part in public feasts on certain days, on which days, with the newly established association in mind, public speeches could be delivered warning about vices which may have crept in and which are not subject to the force of law.

It shall be one of the main goals of the colony to spread the teachings of the Christian religion among the Blacks, and to teach it in their language. Each Christian settler should accept this as his high calling.

By the law of the Colony polygamy shall not be tolerated. However, exempt from this rule shall be those Blacks who have received permission to settle in the Colony's district and who had several wives before settlement.

No marital connection shall take place between Europeans and Blacks, as stated earlier. Whosoever breaches this law must leave the Colony.

[cf. Instructions § 11].

The children of such illegal marriages between Europeans and Blacks shall not be heirs of their European parents, neither by law nor testament.

When the Colony has increased in size a person shall be chosen to act as protector of the rights of serfs. This man shall also act as the public informer concerning undesirable behaviour, in order to prevent it. This office shall be filled by an independent inhabitant of the Colony, one who has no other public office.

None of the Blacks, whether free or serf, may appear in public naked or half-naked.

The free shall be distinguished from the serfs by means of their clothing. For public religious services there shall be stipulated a certain costume which they shall wear at such times.

The Colony shall, in the King's name, enter into alliance with neighbouring nations; and when it becomes stronger it shall not look with indifference upon the oppression or destruction of other nations, but always, as far as it is able, seek to support the oppressed.

Schimmelmann and Brandt's instructions to Isert

Instructions for Mr. P. E. Isert

Since His Royal Majesty of Denmark and Norway, etc. has most graciously agreed to approve the plan presented to His Majesty for a Colony-Establishment in the area of the Rio Volta in Africa and has thus given approval to Mr. P. E. Isert's proposal, for which authority has been given to him on this date, we wish further to inform Mr. Isert of His Majesty's intention concerning the rules and laws which must be made the basis of the Colony's foundation and expansion, and the Mission to be connected to it in time, when this projected enterprise has actually been realised.

1. When Mr. Isert has succeeded, after friendly negotiations, either through purchase, promise of a yearly payment (for which he is authorised in H.R. Majesty's name), or by any other means, in acquiring from the Blacks a stretch of land of which he can take possession in accordance with royal authority and in His Majesty's name, and with the usual ceremonies by which assurance would be given of the relinquishment, or a promise on the part of the Blacks according to their custom, there must, as far as possible, be taken into account that the extent and location be of such nature that, when the time comes for the Colony to be expanded, there will always be available enough uncultivated land to serve a number of new planters. In that respect it seems to us that it would not be disadvantageous that, as soon as an extensive uncultivated territory has

been taken into possession, which territory, however, must have communication with the Rio Volta, that no great suzerainty be exercised over such territory at first, and that all the Black nations be allowed to retain peaceful possession of rights to hunting, fishing, grazing, roads, etc.; that in the beginning property rights only be exercised over that area which is designated for living quarters and agriculture, since one must absolutely prevent the awakening of jealousy and mistrust on the part of the Blacks by too extensive challenges, either by making inroads into whatever areas it may be, or by depriving them of the use of anything without compensation and without voluntary consent on their part. All disagreement with them must absolutely be avoided, so that the Blacks in this establishment may not be subjected to any violence or humiliation from any white colonist.

2. In the territory thus acquired Mr. Isert shall initiate those institutions for building and cultivation which he deems to be of primary necessity.

3. It is held to be the basic principle that the future Colony shall have an indissoluble and continuing bond to the Motherland. Mr. Isert is hereby advised to keep this in mind in every instance where this principle could be an influencing factor.

4. But the intention is by no means to make the connection of such a nature that the Colony, in respect of necessary subsistence, be dependent on the Motherland; rather an attempt must be made to assure that the Colony acquire enough land to produce those African products that the Colony will need, so that in respect of support it will not depend upon a continuous supply from Europe; except in cases of unsuccessful harvests and similar unexpected occurrences.

5. Mr. Isert must, therefore, immediately see to it that, no matter how great the country's fertility might be for the cultivation of valuable commercial products, he must first and foremost concentrate on the necessary means of support of the Colony, before advancing to the cultivation of such products as could be articles of trade; and that, later, not all the lands be used for the latter products, thus resulting in neglect of the cultivation of the former.

6. For the sake of progress in the cultivation of the fields of the Colony it would be most suitable that the most easily cultivated West Indian products be introduced, so that, implicit in the nature of the matter, the cultivation of sugar should not be considered.

7. It is much to be desired that the Colony, as far as possible, be made up only of people who have reason to be satisfied with their fate, and, since conditions seem to make it necessary, at least in the beginning, to use slaves for cultivation, the arrangements in respect of the slaves should be such that they have reason to consider themselves fortunate in having

escaped a harder fate in West India, and in their good treatment in Africa, just as they must also immediately be presented the prospect of being, as are the other inhabitants of the Colony, under the protection of the law.

8. The Colony must be permitted to buy African slaves from the slave-traders who offer them for sale for transportation to West India. But at the Colony these slaves must be considered purely as serfs, who are to be used only for cultivation and work in the fields.

9. Such slaves or slave-families, once purchased, must either be properly established by being allotted a piece of land adequate to produce the products necessary to their support, or they may be kept as farm hands and maidservants of the owner. In the latter case they must be given a certain diet daily, and other special rules must be laid down, to be respected until formal law shall have been established.

10. Since the purchase of slaves is to be allowed solely to promote the cultivation of the land, it must not be permitted that sales be bought to be sold again, or for indulgence in actual trade. Much less should a slave who has once been brought into the Colony as a serf ever be sold again outside the Colony.

11. Regarding Europeans who settle in the Colony, it is desired that these always make up one race, a people in themselves, and it must always be the law for the Colony that between the Europeans and the country's black inhabitants lawful marriages or alliances do not take place.

12. Among those who have established themselves in the Colony the most complete agreement must be preserved, as far as possible, and care taken that all work be for the attainment of the common goal. Thus, it must not be allowed that anyone, at his own pleasure, occupy uncultivated land or settle outside the Colony's district, even if he has acquired special permission from the country's inhabitants, but each individual shall be given a certain portion of the commonly acquired land to cultivate, assigned by the authorities on certain conditions.

13. No Danish subject, much less any stranger, may be allowed to settle or stay in the acquired territory without permission from the Director of the entire establishment, for the present, Mr. Isert, and later, when everything is progressing satisfactorily, without permission from the Colony's director and chief authorities.

With a project of this kind it may be impossible to be able to foresee all contingencies which might arise, or prescribe rules adequate to the realization of the plan. Judgement of each contingency and decisions based on the broadest knowledge and in good conscience must always be the main principle. Therefore in the foregoing instructions, we have, on the whole, touched on those points concerning the purpose of the establishment, the principles upon which it should rest and the main goal one

wishes to attain. We leave all the rest to Mr. Isert's insights and knowledge of local conditions, and, judging from his zeal for the project, we are assured that he will use all his ability to find the best means of implementing the project, and in like manner, that his integrity will not let him act otherwise than in accordance with his duty and the oath made to the king. We expect reports as often as possible on his progress in the founding of the establishment, which can henceforth bear the name of the Royal Danish African Mission's Establishment, and we shall also do everything we can so that the project, in accordance with His Majesty's consent, can be appropriately supported from here. Furthermore, we must recommend to Mr. Isert, concerning the immediate arrangements he must make immediately, that he exercise the strictest economy, so that, regardless of the outcome of the project, as little as possible of the royal interest be hazarded. Therefore, for all the assistance he receives, by royal permission, he must present us with a careful account, as fully documented as possible, since these sums shall be regarded as an advance, which the developing Colony shall repay. Reports shall be addressed and rendered to both of us.

Should Mr. Isert, due to weakness or other mishap, be prevented from carrying out this project himself, we authorize him to appoint another suitable person to whom he can transfer authority and these instructions.
E. Schimmelmann
Copenhagen 10 July 1788
C. V. Brandt

Excerpt of a letter sent by Schimmelmann and Brandt to Governor Kiøge

[Kiøge is requested to be as helpful to Isert as possible . . .]

It is desired that the venture, at least in the beginning, attract as little notice as possible, and for this reason the implementation has been assigned to Isert so that it can have more the appearance of a private affair which has only found favour with the Government, the latter having no direct share. Therefore Isert is bringing with him only a small number of people, but we merely await signs of progress in order to support him with more resources and to expand the establishment, as far as circumstances will allow . . . Negotiations are already under way with the directors of the Moravian Church, and as soon as reports are received by Mr. Isert's successful progress, they will immediately arrange to send missionaries.

. . . Mr. Isert has been granted a letter of credit for up to 6,000 riksdaler, which we request Mr. Lt. Col. [i.e. Kiøge] to honour. If Your Excellency, according to your own conviction, should find it necessary and useful to increase this sum by some thousand riksdaler, we hereby authorize you to do so, and guarantee that your appropriation will be repaid from the Royal Finance Collegium. And we entrust this same arrangement to your successor, in the even you have already left Africa before this question arises. We do not believe that a larger sum should be allotted in the beginning because the entire project is to be considered only a trial, and only as such has it been presented to His Majesty, since no one can vouch for its successful outcome.

Nonetheless, the prospects are important enough to consider a rather indifferent sum expended upon it not ill-advised, regardless of the outcome. As soon as a report of favourable results arrives, we shall see to the appropriation of more considerable support in the form of people, wares and money. . . . Furthermore it is His Royal Majesty's express desire that no obstacles be placed in Mr. Isert's way, but that it be left entirely to him to choose which rules he wishes to apply to the realization of his undertaking and which direction he wishes to take.

Copenhagen, 10 July 1788
Schimmelmann. Brandt.
[From Thaarups' *Archiv for Statistik, Politik og Huusholdnings-Videnskaber*, Copenhagen 1797–8, Vol. 3: 239–40.]

Treaty for the acquisition of land

The Treaty between H.M. the King of Denmark and the Republic of Krobbo on the Gold Coast at the River Volta in Guinea, agreed to and concluded by the first party, P. E. Isert, Royal Danish Captain of Infantry and Governor of the African Colony, and by the second party, the Kabucee of Krobbo and his most prominent noblemen.

1. His Majesty the King buys from the Republic all the land with its accessories which is owned but not being used by any of its inhabitants at present.

2. On the land thus purchased His Majesty has the right to cultivate as he chooses, establish plantations, and in all respects treat it as his own property.

3. However, all the Krobbos will be permitted to remain in their dwellings undisturbed, and keep the land they already have occupied, and should they, in the future, feel inclined to establish themselves in the

district belonging to the King, not only will they be free to do so, but they will even be considered as, and treated absolutely as, citizens of this state, in accordance with the law of the European Colony.

4. Between both contracting powers an everlasting friendship shall prevail, and the agreed terms shall be scrupulously honoured. In the event the Colony is attacked either by Europeans or by other inland nations, the Republic is duty-bound to stand by the Colony faithfully with all its able-bodied people, and keep the enemy out. On the other hand, the Colony shall support the Republic in like manner with a quantity of war materiel.

5. No European, of whatever nation, may be allowed to settle in Krobbo's domain without first being given permission by the Colony's royal government.

6. The Royal Colony has a permanent agreement with the Republic, stipulating that if slaves or others from the Colony run away to the Republic, or the reverse, they shall be extradited without exception. The Colony shall pay a reward of two riksdaler for each extradition, but the Republic shall obtain theirs without payment.

7. Any head of a household who tries to conceal such a fugitive and is discovered, shall be fined double the value of the fugitive, besides having to deliver him up.

8. If any miscreant comes into the domain of the Colony to commit murder or robbery and is caught, he shall be punished according to the law of the Colony, regardless of the nation of his origin.

9. Should any of the Colony's inhabitants be in debt to one of the Republic's, the latter shall not have the right (as it is otherwise in the custom of the country) to distrain upon the debtor's Blacks. Instead he must submit the case to the Government, which will be obliged to recover the debt and satisfy the creditor.

10. For the acquisition and permanent observance of these rights H.M. King of Denmark shall pay, as a voluntary gift [ ] in various wares to the Republic of Krobbo.

11. That there shall not be a lack of encouragement to the Republic to show friendship to the Colony's inhabitants in the future, His Majesty grants: to the Kabucee of Krobbo, the monthly salary of six rdl., two bundles of tobacco, two bottles of brandy and one-half dozen pipes; and annually, at the time of their New Year, to all of the grandees or noblemen, four ankers of brandy, six dozen pipes, twelve bundles of tobacco, four pieces of cotton, as well as a fine sash for the Kabucee. But it must never be assumed that this payment of salary comes before the month or year have passed, and the salary must be deserved.

12. For the greater confirmation of this treaty three identical copies have been signed and sealed by both parties.

Thus negotiated.
Atiambo's mark
P. E. Isert

Isert's first report, and last letter, from Guinea, written a few days before his death.

16/1 '89 *Pro memoria*

It is with pleasure that I hasten to send a report to Your Excellencies on the commission so graciously granted to me to found a colony in the vicinity of the royal establishment in Guinea in Africa. Your Excellencies may remember that on 14 July last year I set out on the journey for this expedition. It was a successful journey but very slow since we did not reach the roadstead at Christiansburg until four months later, that is on 14 November.

I set about immediately to carry out the plan of which I had made a draft during the long-lasting journey. With this in mind I travelled via Fort Fredensburg to the island Malfi [Mlefi]. This large island lies about 22 miles east of Christiansburg and is in the River Volta, from whose shore it is separated only by a small channel. From the sea the distance is approximately ten miles inland. The water is always fresh here since the sea-water never comes so far inland. It is navigable for medium-sized ships. This latter condition, particularly, gave me the opportunity of examining the area around the river more carefully this time, to investigate the possibility of making a start on a colony, but the results did not live up to my expectations. The earth here is loamy, and in it one could, in some places, raise sugar and cotton, but there is a total lack of building materials and other comforts, not to mention the fact that I have found the climate here to be the hottest and most unhealthy for a European on the entire coast. In spite of these inconveniences I have not given up all hope of colonizing this area at some future date, or at least of having free passage to the Rio Volta. And when the Blacks there, who were eager to learn the reason for my journey, were informed that His Majesty wanted to establish a settlement there, they were pleased. This can prove to be to our advantage when we have a surplus of Europeans at our present colony who have become acclimatized.

From Malfi I travelled back to Fredensburg, noting carefully the lay of

the land, and continued on the following day to the mountains of Aquapim, whose situation, healthy climate and good soil for crops were already well-known to me. I then sought out the chief of this land, Duke Attiambo, and informed him of my intentions. Recognizing me as his old friend from the Augna War, he received me with the greatest show of friendship. He called his Council together and pointed out to them what an advantage it would be for the country to have the Europeans among them.

After some debate they approved the opinion of the duke and the next day they showed me the place where I could start the establishment. I chose a location that would be far from all the Black villages, with the proviso that I could build and plant anywhere in the entire duchy where no one had settled on the land before. This came to seven/eighths of the land, which measured at least 20 square miles in all. It is a distance of about five to six miles from the seashore, making transportation somewhat difficult. However, the fertility of the soil, the fresh water, the frequent rains, building materials, etc., easily balance out this fault. Furthermore I shall plant cotton on the plain from the seashore to the mountains since cotton thrives very well in that area, and I have already come to an agreement with the coastal Blacks about this. The plain encompasses a stretch from Christiansburg to the Rio Volta of approximately 20 miles in length and five to ten miles in breadth.

I had my first house erected by the Blacks in their manner of building, and immediately thereafter I had them cut a direct path through the impenetrable forest to the seashore, an undertaking for which, lacking serfs of my own, I had to use Aquapims.

21 December last year was the solemn day on which I moved into my house and the land was delivered to me by Duke Attiambo and his council. This was done when he, with his two most prominent men, planted the Danish flag in front of the door and swore everlasting fidelity and friendship, in accordance with the treaty signed earlier between His Majesty of Denmark and himself. A copy of this treaty is hereby enclosed for Your Excellencies.

The Aquapim nation is one of the best black nations I know on this coast. They are extremely well-satisfied with the establishment of the colony, and seek to assist me as best they can, at a low cost. For the building of my house and clearing of a road a mile and a half long, on which 100 to 200 Blacks worked daily for three weeks, I did not have to pay more than the value of three male slaves, *circa* 400 riksdaler Danish currency. The Council have not yet agreed on a price for the purchase of the land, but I am hoping to acquire it for the value of five male slaves. However, in order that they not make things too difficult for subsequent Europeans, I have, in accordance with the customs of the land, instituted

a monthly salary for the most prominent men of this country, namely, to the duke, five rdl., and to both of the other prominent men, one rdl. Danish, as well as a gift to all of the Blacks at their New Year of about 60 rdl.

With the artisans that I have brought with me I am now engaged in building a stone house to be the Government House of the future city which I have christened *Frederichsnopel* in memory of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince.[1] When this is finished I shall plan the building of barracks, a guard house and private dwellings. My intention is that the city will be surrounded by a simple wall and moat, so that, should some of the great inland kings in future be roused by envy, we would be secure against them, since with just such a simple fortification supported by some 24 cannon, we could certainly hold off the forces of all the African kings; and we need not fear the might of the Europeans because we could hold them off by rolling stones down from the high mountains.

At present, the few Blacks I own are being employed in the removal of trees and the planting of food crops, as well as of cotton, tobacco and indigo. I am provided with the seeds of most of the European garden produce, which appear to thrive admirably on these mountains, as do the small number of European domestic animals which I have brought with me and which were not found here before.

Your Excellencies can see from this report, which all of your servants here can verify, how far I have fulfilled His Majesty's order and the obligations I owe as a faithful subject. It is now my most fervent wish that Your Excellencies will continue to approve the complete establishment of this Colony and its attendant Mission with the same warmth with which you once so graciously supported my proposed plan.

Following are a few humble suggestions which I hope can bring the Colony most easily and rapidly to a high degree of development. The Director of the African Colony should send out a notice making His Majesty's establishment known. This announcement should state that we have positions open here for all types of artisans and workers. Furthermore, that His Royal Highness intends to advance to each of these colonists money, or its equivalent, according to what it is believed each one requires to cover his necessary expenses. Free passage is to be promised to each person, but it must not be permitted that a married man leaves his wife or children in Europe.

[1] Curiously, Isert states that the name Frederichsnopel [Frederik's City] was chosen in 'memory' rather than in 'honour' of the Crown Prince. Actually Crown Prince Frederik was alive and acting as regent for his father, Christian VII, who was mentally disturbed and had been incapable of ruling for years. The Crown Prince became Frederik VI in 1808 upon his father's death.

The excuse such people might offer that they do not understand the cultivation of these products is of no importance since I myself will take pains that they acquire both the theoretical as well as the practical knowledge. Furthermore, this activity wil always be supervised by a Council member of the local government. I wish this announcement to be made public immediately, preferably in Altona or Hamburg, so that too frequent emigrations from the Fatherland can be avoided. When as a result of this announcement a group of one hundred and fifty people has been recruited it will be necessary to lease a ship of 130 to 140 *commerce lasten* for their transportation. One might perhaps, mention to the captain of the ship the possibility of a half return cargo without the ship having to stay here longer than three months. The captain of such a ship must not only be a discerning man, but humanitarian as well. He must be considerate enough to be able to give each passenger two *potter* of beer or water daily, even if the journey might be protracted to 14 to 16 weeks. If that same ship could bring a large boat with a foredeck which could be left in this country, so much the better, but it must have copper fittings. When the ship arrives at the Coast it should halt at the Dutch fort called Chama [Shama] and there hire a so-called 17-man canoe into which to load the wares and freight for landing. It should then sail past Christiansburg to a distance of four miles to a place called Sincho, which is distinguished by eleven palm trees standing quite alone on a small rise close to the shore. Just in front of these it should cast anchor a good quarter of a mile from land. I have humbly enclosed a list indicating what cargo this ship must have, partly to support the Colony at its beginning, partly to buy slaves and partly for fortification. The acquisition of these wares requires a knowledgeable and conscientious man, one who does not assume that the Blacks buy any kind of poor wares. For this task I would suggest the merchant Aug. Chr. Shaarup. Since these matters are so important it would not be inappropriate for the Board to establish a government here made up of the governor, two advisors and a secretary. These people should be fully fluent in the German and Danish languages as well as having insight into economic management and finance. Thirty soldiers, preferably young people even if they have not been in service before, three corporals and five constables would be needed for the entire military requirement, and, of civil servants, one clergyman, two catechists and two competent surgeons who have insight into pharmacology. It is also necessary to have five young people skilled with the pen who could be hired as copyists. Regarding the *Herrnhüther*, or Moravian Brethren, who are so well-suited to conversion of the heathen, an executive board will determine what rules to make.

It is always injurious to an incipient establishment to engage many servants who are given a high wage. For this reason only the number described above are likely to be necessary to the subsistence of the Colony.

These are the few remaining thoughts which I have taken the liberty of presenting to Your Excellencies. I shall await that first ship from Europe longingly since my so graciously advanced capital has nearly become too little for its intended purpose.

I am being given support here by the Governor [at Christiansborg] as far as possible, and I owe the present Governor, Mr. Kipnasse, as well as the rest of the members of the Council, my sincere thanks. Your Excellencies will yourselves expand and improve upon these suggestions of mine in accordance with your great and broad knowledge. I look forward to further instructions and the speediest reception of rules to help me understand how I should carry out further orders from the very highest quarters. It would also be desirable if, three months after the departure of the first ship, another, smaller, ship be sent out, on which armaments and soldiers are not included, but with more future settlers so that the number of Europeans in the Colony, at its beginning, will total at least 300 people.

Most humbly, from
P. E. Isert

Frederichsnopel in Guinea
16 January 1789
to
Your Excellencies the Gentlemen of the Privy Council
Counts von Schimmelmann and von Brandt

[The German original of this report is in the Royal Archives in Copenhagen, in the Schimmelmanske Papirer, 1765-1802. There is a Danish translation in Thaarups Archiv, Vol. 3: 241–8.]

4. Isert's obituary, written by J. A. Kiøge

[Published in *Adresse-Contoirs Efterretninger*, No. 154, Friday, 17 July 1789. Kiøge himself died on 4 October that same year, having spent his last months at home striving unsuccessfully to clear his name of charges of corruption while in office at Christiansborg. Clearly this is the thought behind the last sentence of the obituary. I have been unable to identify the occasion on which Isert saved Kiøge's life, nor can I explain the obscure reference to 'Astrup'.]

Worthy, industrious, indefatigable, kind Captain P. E. Isert! You are no more. — Only one person mourned for you, yet only briefly did she mourn, since she is already with you. How many have ridiculed and mocked you? But I — and perhaps I alone — mourn for you deeply and painfully. Your intention was honourable, and your courage was perhaps greater than your strength. You were in fact a stranger among us, but to your credit we are obliged to say that you were as one of us. You wrote and spoke the Danish language like a native, and you wished to spread the fame of Denmark to the most distant foreign lands. It is with genuine feelings of obligation and affection that I now speak out publicly of your well-deserved fame, when all others are silent. How much misery and privation you have endured together with me there are only few Danes who know. Therefore, excellent Isert! since we can no longer meet here I send my sincere, ardent thanks to you. Thank you! for all your concern when you were with me — Thank you! for your industry and tirelessness when you were with me. Thank you for your dogged zeal at Dudubei on 30 March, 1784. Thank you for your affection and solicitude on 13 May the same year, when you prevented me from rushing precipitously into a sudden violent death. Thank you for having fortified me on that great next day by persuading me to take some refreshment, which your concern [gleaned from ?] from the good Astrup had seen to, since you knew that for two days I had partaken of nothing but poor water. Noble man! You have said that I saved you when, on that same great day, you fell in a faint among your dead and dying. With what great emotion do I recall now, what offence to the soul occurred after that moving scene with you.

Your friend, Duke Atiamboe, was in great need and asked for help, which I sent him; but which immediately cost the lives of many worthy men.

Alas! that you and I should survive all that — and that you should end your days there, where you so strongly desired to be. Perhaps an erroneous hope has brought about your death. Perhaps your fatigue has shortened your days. The pity, oh the pity, that it happened so quickly. Yet it is better to be dead than to survive to live in pain or oppression.

5. Measurements used by Isert

By decree of 1 May 1683 the Danish *alen* was to be equal to two *Rhinelandish* feet. Ole Rømer, the astronomer, was commissioned to establish the standard, and fixed the *alen* at 62.81 cm. All the other measurements were then established in a fractional relationship to the Rhinelandish foot of 31.4 cm. The *potte*, a measure of volume, is 1/32 of the cubic Rh. foot. In all probability these fractions, as were others (such as 1/62 of a cubic foot), were used in order to keep the new measure as close as possible to the earlier ones.

Alen:	62.81 cm.
Anker:	According to the decree of January 1698 the *anker* was to contain 39 *potter* [of 0.968 litre each] of wine, but it usually held 40 *potter* and was thus equal to 38.72 litres.
Commerce lasten:	an obsolete measure of approximately two tonnes of shipping tonnage.
Ell:	The English ell = 1.143 metres. This is not in the Danish system, and Isert seems to have adopted it when speaking of cloth.
Pot:	31.4 cm.
Kanne:	Or *kande* = two potter = 1.93 litres.
Klaftern:	A span, equal to 189 cm in Isert's time.
Linien:	1.31 cm.
Lot:	Or *loth*, equals ten grammes.
Mil:	A 'land mile' = 12,000 alen/7.5 kilometres A 'sea mile' = 7.408 kilometres A 'kvartmil' = 1/4 sea mile, or 1.85 kilometres.

Pegel, Pægl:	An old Danish-Norwegian fluid measure = 1/4 *potte*, or 0.242 litre.
Potte:	0.968 litre.
Quentche:	An obsolete liquid measure (a drachm/dram) = 3.5 cc, or 3.8 g medical weight.
Rheinlandish foot/inches:	1 Rh. foot = 31.5 cm. 1 Rh. inch = 2.6 cm.
Toise:	A French lineal measure used chiefly in military contexts = 6 French feet or 1.9 metres.
Tomme:	The inch = 1/24 *alen* or 2.62 cm.
Tonne:	Or *tønde* = 144 potter, or 139.39 litres.
Dates:	Denmark-Norway adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1700.

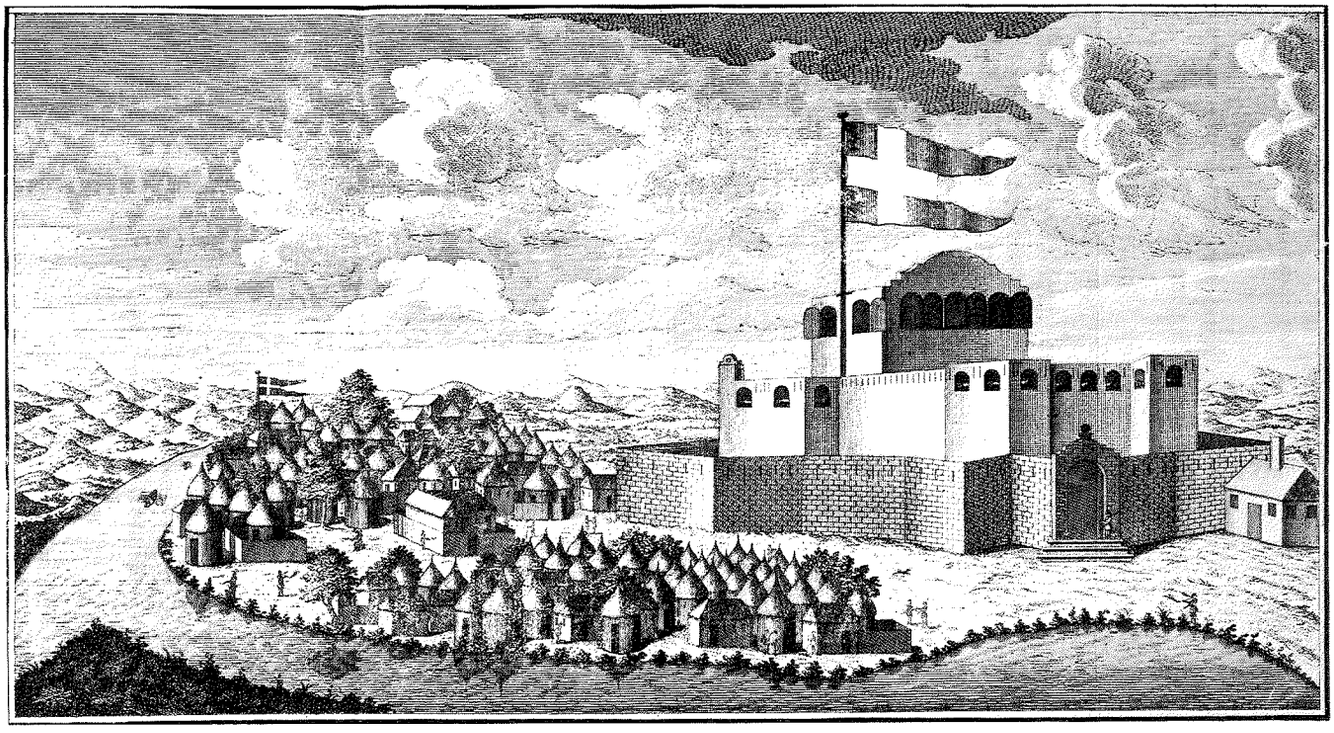


Illustration 4. Fredensborg Fort, a drawing by L. F. Rømer.

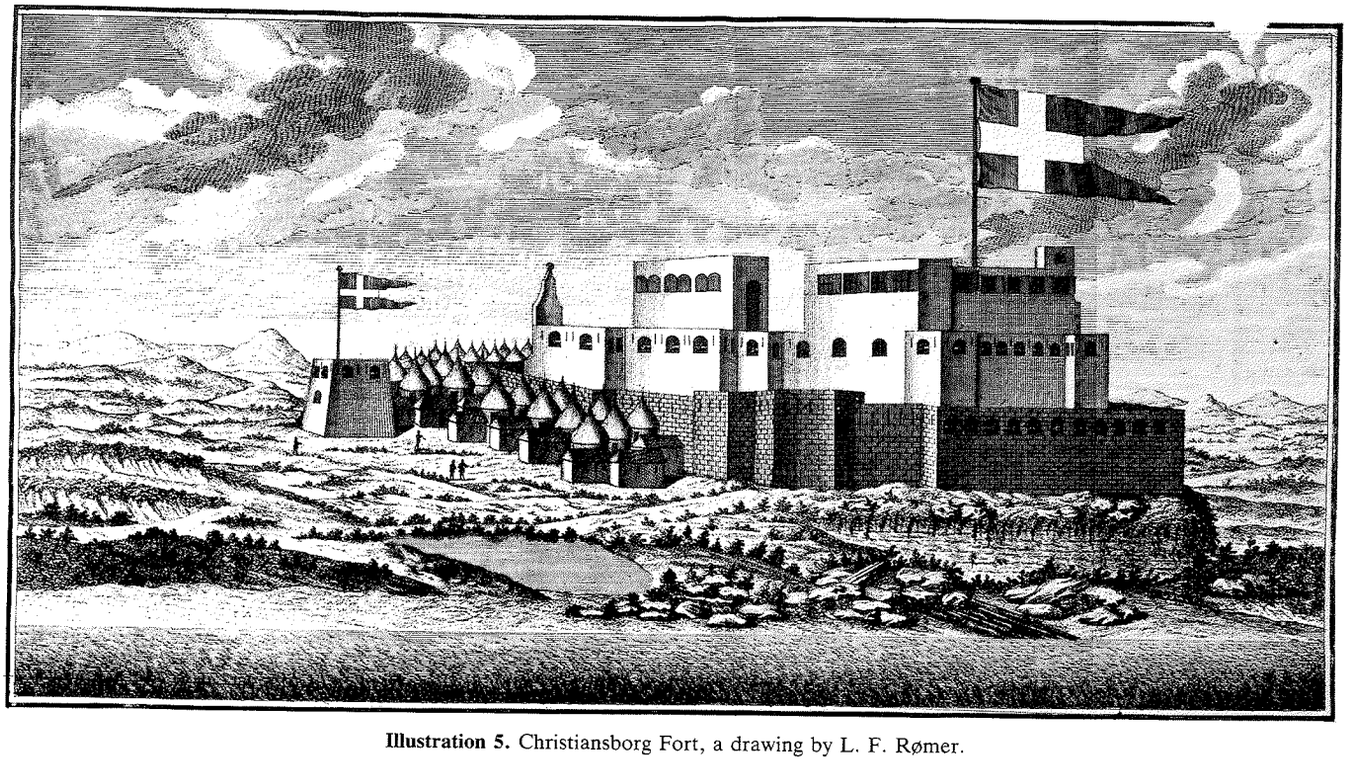


Illustration 5. Christiansborg Fort, a drawing by L. F. Rømer.

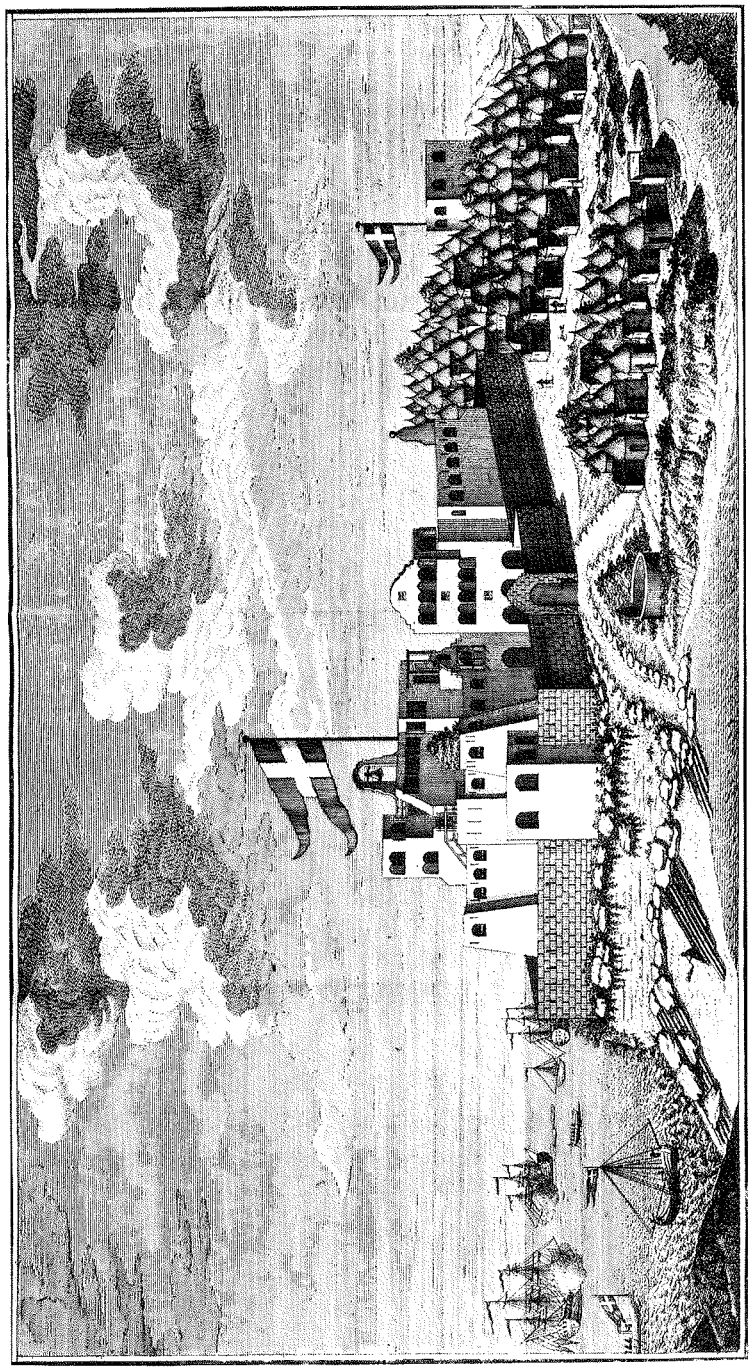


Illustration 6. Another view of Christiansborg Fort, a drawing by L. F. Rømer.

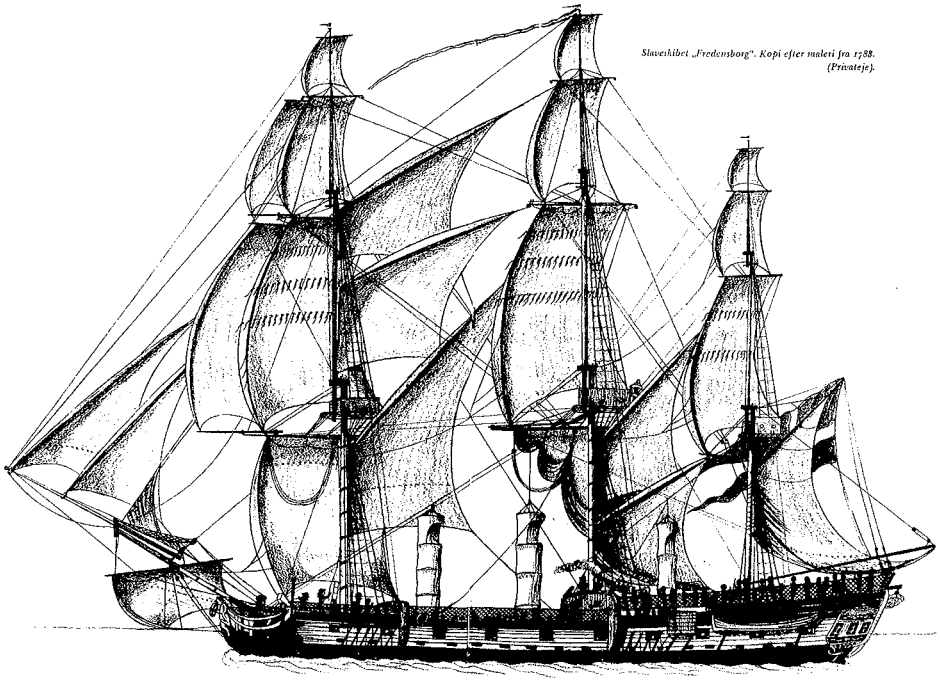


Illustration 7. Drawing of original water-colour of the *Fredensborg*, the frigate on which the prospective colonists sailed in 1788. The drawing clearly shows both the bulwark dividing the ship, and the three stacks, made of sailcloth, to provide fresh air to the hold. The arrangements are the same as those on the *Christiansborg*, on which Isert sailed to the West Indies. The original water-colour is in the possession of Major H. W. Harbour, Helsingør.

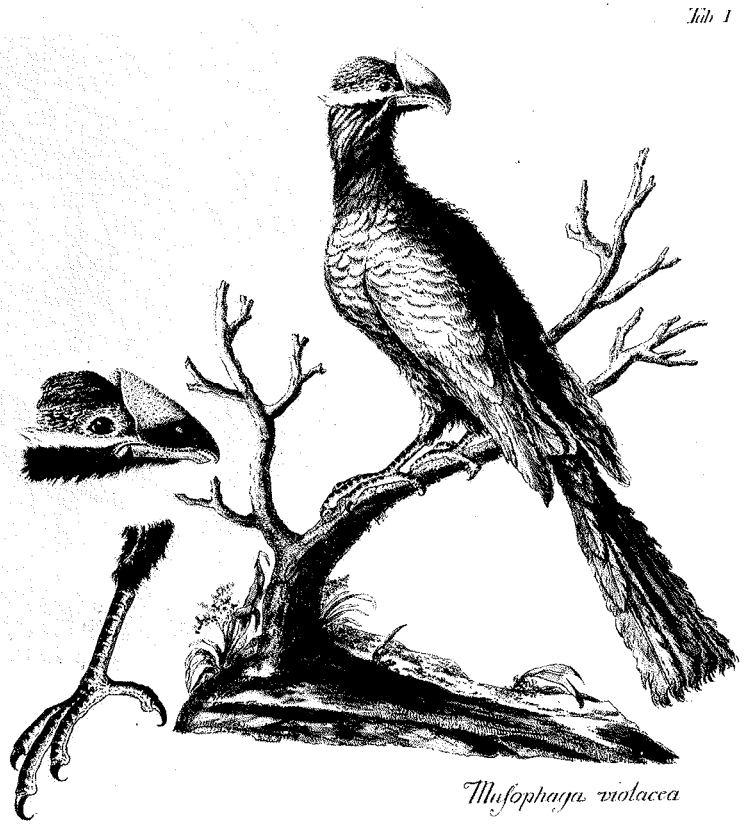
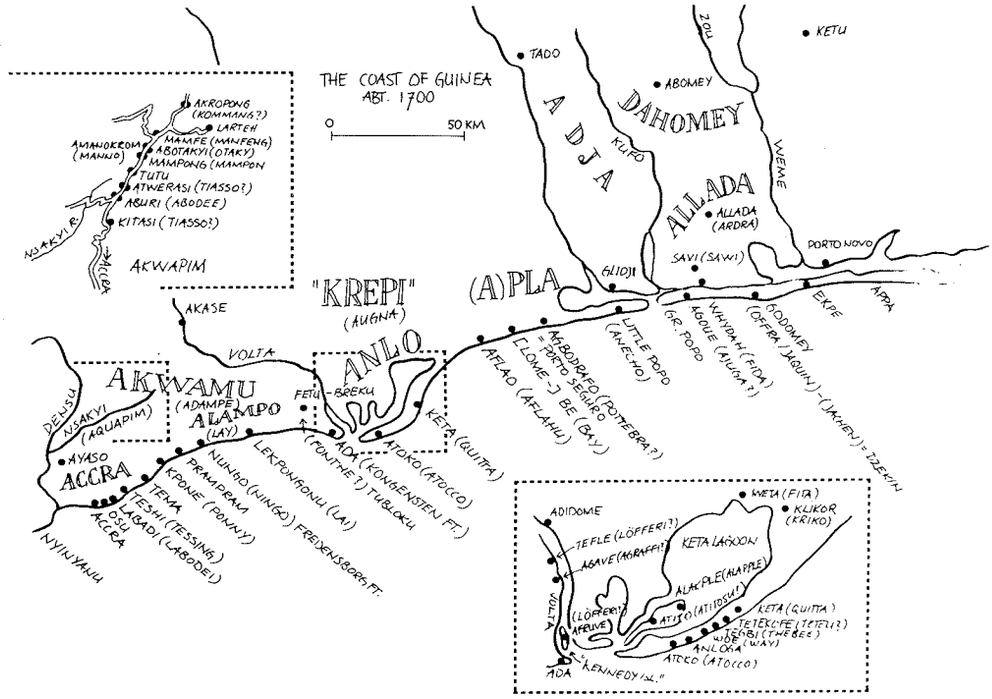
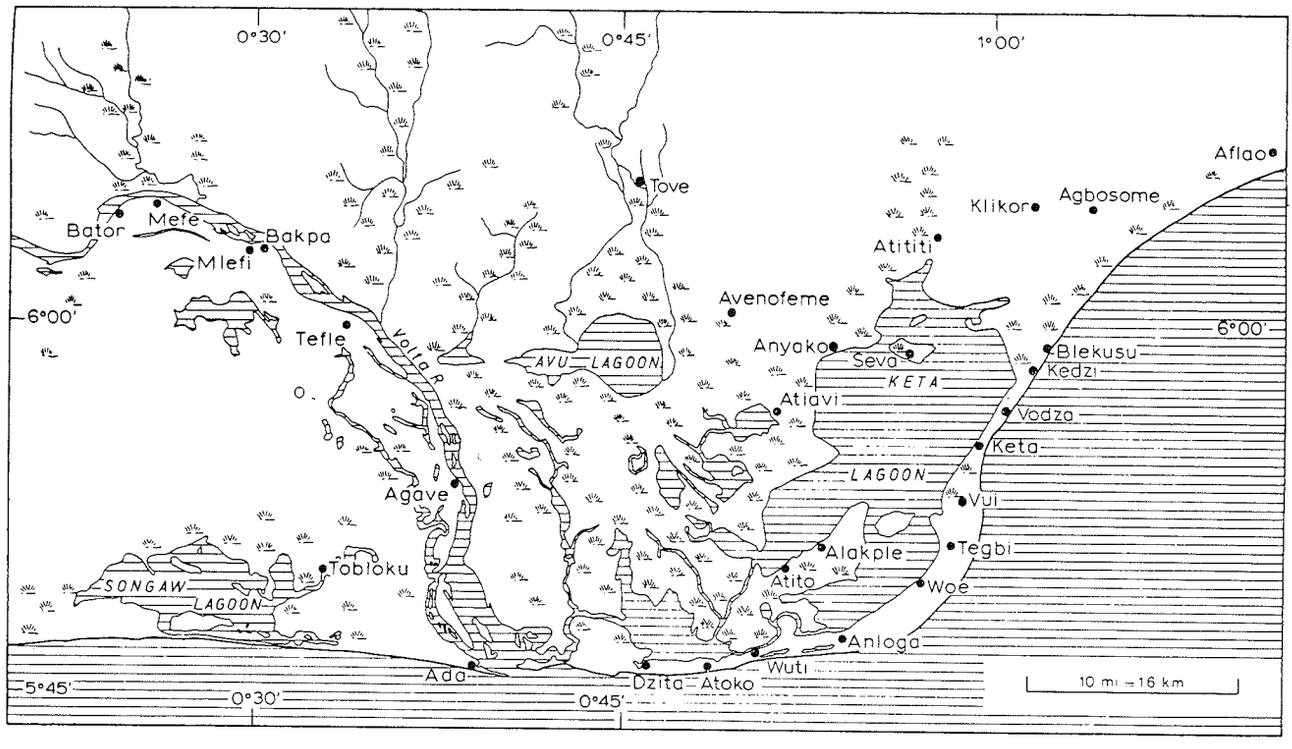


Illustration 8. Violet Plantain-eater (*Musophage violacea*), a drawing by P. E. Isert. Only two drawings of birds made by Isert are in existence, to the best of my knowledge.

Illustration 9. Red Bishop (*Loxia Franciscana*), a drawing by P. E. Isert. The Latin name given by Isert is no longer used as the species' name, but is still the name of the sub-species which inhabits West Africa and which was, in fact, first named by Isert. Its full name is *Euplectes orix franciscana* (*Isert*). I am indebted to Alan Tye for this information.



Map 1. Gold and Slave Coasts, showing the places Isert mentioned in the text. The modern names are given, with Isert's versions in parentheses.



Map 2. Topography of the Volta Delta, with present day localities mentioned in the text. This is the area where the *Sagbadre War* was fought.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

BIFAN	Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire
CUP	Cambridge University Press
HSKÅ	Handels- og Søfartsmuseet paå Kronborg Årbog
JAH	Journal of African History
JAS	Journal of the African Society
OUP	Oxford University Press
RA	Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen
UCP	University of California Press
UCLA	University of California in Los Angeles
THSG	Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana

The letters Æ, Ø (ö), and Å (AA) are placed at the end of the alphabet.

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