

Jojo Cobbinah

Dr.  
Amo's

Lonely – Novel –  
Planet

pmv



# Introducion

*1706. The Dutch West India Company donates an African child to the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel. The little slave soon impresses his patrons with his extraordinary intelligence. Sponsored by them, the young African studies philosophy, medicine and law and finally receives doctorate degrees at the Universities of Wittenberg and Halle. Lecturing in Halle and Jena, he becomes one of the most articulate political philosophers of his time in the German-speaking world.*

*Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo's good fortunes end when scientists "discover" black people as the long-sought missing link between man and beast. When he then falls in love with a white woman, he is made an object of public ridicule.*

*What happens after that is part of the dramatic reconstruction of a true life story highlighting the fundamental dilemma that has accompanied African immigrants in the white world ever since Prince Henry The Navigator's men penetrated the shroud surrounding Africa on the eve of the Age of Discoveries.*

**Jojo Cobbinah**

**Dr. Amo's Lonely Planet**

**Novel**

**Unabridged edition**

**Trial Edition 2012**

**© 2002 Jojo Cobbinah, Printed in Marburg, Germany,**

**© 2012 pmv Peter Meyer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main**

**ISBN 978-3-89859-001-3**

**[www.petermeyerverlag.de](http://www.petermeyerverlag.de)**

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IMPRESSUM

*To all the victims of the Slave Trade:  
The millions who survived  
The millions who lost their loved ones  
The millions dead.*

*Unless Nyankopon nods consent  
No storm can blow my wawa down  
Only He can see in the darkness  
Where we came from, where we go.*

## Prologue

This whole thing began a long time ago.

When religious zealots from the Arabian Peninsula crossed the Red Sea to bring a new religion to the vast region lying to the west of Arabia, a land they called Afrikia. Their message was simple: Believe or die. Africans who met them had to decide quickly. Faced with the glistening swords of these determined warriors, millions of fear-stricken Africans across the sprawling land mass of arid plains, verdant valleys, wind-swept plateau, craggy mountains and fertile oases, converted instantly to the new religion. They wanted to save their lives.

Only the Akans, a little-known group of people tucked away in the south-western precincts of the great Sahara, decided to find an alternative to the dilemma. Except for one reason, they would have readily converted to Islam. This reason was what they abhorred above everything else in their lives: the prospect of losing honour. The new religion required people to clean their anuses with sand or water. This, the Akans would not do. In their culture, a man who put his hands to his anus ceased to be a man. So when the hordes of Almoravid riders from Morocco finally

reached the Akans within the borders of the ancient empire of Gana in the twelfth century, the first people to pack their belongings and leave for good were the proud Akans, who had vowed never to surrender their freedom to anyone. Abandoning their God-given homeland to seek a new one in the depths of the tropical forests to the south became their only alternative. What they wanted was a place the roughriders could not reach with their horses, a place where the Akans could escape the dictates and constraints of a religion and culture they considered absolutely repugnant.

The Akans marched through unknown territories, fought wars of survival and succeeded in preserving their language and culture. In the end, they created a new country for themselves, far away from their original home. Since those days, they have had a proverb in their language which says:

*Disgrace does not befit a person of Akan origin.*

– *Aninguase mfata 'Kaniba.*

All of this happened at a time when the rest of the world was not watching, long before the first Europeans arrived on the West African coast of Guinea. They, and all the others who have since tried to breach the honour of these people, have been taken aback by the tenacity with which the Akans have always rallied together to defend it.

# Part I

## Kramo

*I went by smocks embroidered with fine silk.  
I thought who wears it sells good talismans.  
I least suspected smocks on charlatans.*

Francis Kayper-Mensah, “Adinkra Poems”

– 1 –

## Nana Yankey’s Dream

“Is there any country of the white people that is ready to enter an alliance with us on our conditions?” King Yankey kept asking his councillors during their weekly meetings.

None of the councillors knew an answer, but the King was quite convinced that there must be such a country. His conviction had been nurtured by recent strange developments. Those days, no night passed by without the King dreaming about just that possibility.

In his dreams, he was the centre of attraction of a big wedding ceremony during which he got married to a woman with pure white skin. After the wedding, the many relatives of the white woman formed a circle around him, and each of them shook his hand and gave him a tight hug. Since he had never had anything to do with white people, the dream frightened him and had been occupying his thoughts for a while. What significance did such a dream have?

Discreet as he was, Nana Kwamenla Yankey did not disclose his



strange dream to anybody at first. When he had almost forgotten it, the dream came back again with full force.

“I wish I could interpret this strange dream,” he said after telling his wife about it one morning.

“Do you think there’s any special message behind it?” he asked her with a wrinkled forehead after describing his experiences.

“What a strange question!” she replied, looking him straight in the face and shaking her head in disbelief. “This is nothing for ordinary people to interpret. The dream can only mean one of two things. It’s either the herald of good things to come or it announces the beginning of events that will have serious implications for our country. Don’t waste time thinking about it. Discuss the whole thing with your councillors and consult Nana Egyambra, our great oracle. But do it quickly,” she advised with a worried face.

“You’re right, my dear. I shouldn’t have asked what is so obvious. Of course, I’ll immediately consult Amakye Doku, our Chief Priest in Egyambra. He’s the only living being who can communicate with the gods and the ancestors. This is truly a case for them to look into.”

Nana Kwamenla Yankey was the Omanhene, the King of Evaluê. He ruled this little Kingdom on the Gold Coast of West Africa at the end of the 17th century. But for a sticky little problem, Evaluê would have probably been one of the happiest places on earth, if it had not been the type of country white people liked – a country full of shimmering gold and thick, precious diamonds. After heavy rains, it was not a rare feat to collect gold nuggets from the ground. Or to wash gold dust from the countless streams and rivulets that criss-crossed the land.

Here, the earth itself was very rich. The many big and small rivers, the streams and lagoons all teemed with fish. The forests were full of rare hardwoods. The soil was verdant and fertile. Spices and fruits of all kinds grew: black pepper, malagueta, chili, paprika, ginger, wild cloves, nutmeg, groundnuts, tiger nuts, paw-paw, oranges, watermelons and a whole lot of other magnificent

crops.

That was why more than a century before the rest of Europe came to know about the existence of Evaluê, the Portuguese had claimed this land for themselves. Ten years after landing here in 1478, they had begun to build formidable fortifications on the coast to prevent others from encroaching on 'their' area. The huge cannons they had once posted there to prevent so-called interlopers were still in place and could be admired by anybody who cared to do so. From their other colonies in America and Asia the Portuguese had introduced assorted peppers, rice, maize, yam, cassava, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, tomatoes, tobacco, sugar cane and a lot more, which they had successfully cultivated in Africa. Many of these were still thriving on Evaluê's rich soils, bringing relative prosperity to the Kingdom.

But it was not for agriculture that the Portuguese had started building forts along the West-African Coast. Finding gold in a country full of natural resources had spurred them to export the precious metal to Europe. The natural wealth of the land and its new products had all added to its attraction for other pale-faced aliens from hardly-known places with strange names like Denmark, Sweden, France, Britain, The Netherlands and what have you. Now they were all determined to travel long distances, fight storms and risk shipwreck in order to reach the Gold Coast.

Evaluê had one big problem.

It was nestled between two Dutch-controlled bastions and constantly had to fear for the freedom of its inhabitants. Fort Battensteyn, belonging to the Dutch, was located in Butre to the east and was just two walking days away. Fort Santo Antonio, the other Dutch stronghold in Axim to the west, lay three walking days from Pokesu, the capital of Evaluê.

Dutch Santo Antonio?

Yes, the Dutch had occupied Santo Antonio a hundred years earlier, after chasing out the original occupants, the Portuguese, who had built it over a century and a half previously. Taking it over by force, the Dutch had not bothered to change the fort's

name. A fact that did not seem to worry anybody in Axim, Pokesu or Holland.

With Pokesu and Axim, Evaluê possessed two important ports, both hotly coveted by the Europeans. Already, the French, owning two forts, and the British, with about twelve, were pressing Nana Kwamenla Yankey for alliances and special rights. The King knew that if he did not react positively, his country would soon be invaded by one of the “friends” who usually came with one hand open and the other clenched into a fist.

The Omanhene opted for a policy of neutrality with all his immediate and distant neighbours. His greatest hope, in fact his sole wish, was to keep the peace in his Kingdom and increase the welfare of his people through peaceful interaction with all countries. This he wanted to do by safeguarding the lucrative trade that had been going on for many years between his country and the white people coming from many places around the world. Among these were the businesslike Dutch, the obstinate British and the haphazard French.

The name Gold Coast, a rough translation of ‘mina d’ouro,’ had been given to this strip of African coastline by the Portuguese. On their arrival here in 1471, they had claimed that the land they thought to have just discovered belonged to them. And all that simply because they had been the first white people to have reached it.

People here normally laughed at such absurd ideas and would have done so in this case, too, had it not been for the earnestness with which the Portuguese had taken up the issue. The Portuguese had believed in their idea of having discovered land so strongly that they had actively prevented all other people from even putting a footstep on the territories they had considered to be their property.

This state of affairs would have remained so for a long time, had it not been for the highly motivated Dutch, who came generations later to drive the Portuguese out of their strongholds in West Africa. The luckiest of the Portuguese, escaping the deadly Dutch assaults, sailed farther off to the west and south-west of the

same coast. There again, they occupied other people's lands and tried their luck at finding what they had lost on the Gold Coast – gold. This is how the Portuguese ended up settling down in N'zadia N'kong, which later came to be called the Congo, Benguela and Lobito, today called Angola.

Because of Evaluê's nagging problem, Nana Yankey did not sleep well. In fact, he was plagued with nightmares. The proximity of the Dutch to his Kingdom and the covetousness of some of Evaluê's powerful and belligerent neighbours were among the root causes of his sleepless nights.

Not even in return for military advantage did Nana Yankey want to become a vassal of the Dutch and their local ally, Asante. He feared losing his independence. At a time when everybody else was making efforts to secure strong allies in times of war, little Evaluê had been cheeky enough to rebuff all advances. Its single-minded leaders were only interested in continuing their tradition of trading with everybody.

Nana Yankey had five major reasons for his political stance. Firstly, he abhorred war. Secondly, he wanted to preserve the peace at all cost. Thirdly, he detested the trade in slaves. Fourthly, Evaluê's independence had to be safeguarded. Lastly, he was convinced that peace was the necessary prerequisite for profitable trade.

All the attempts to avoid alliances of any sort had been made for those reasons. In his view, the slave trade brought only chaos to those African nations that participated in it. He wanted none of it and is prepared to do anything to prevent his people from becoming victims of undertakings that brought profits only to the foreigners who indulge in them. His current wary attitude had been born out of experience won by dealing with white people for a long time.

"They've always come to cart off valuable goods in exchange for things ordinary human beings here don't need," stated the King. "The white people who come here do so to acquire as much gold and to collect as many slaves as possible. All they give in return

is plenty of alcohol, gunpowder, guns, glass beads, iron and cotton products. They call this kind of lopsided exchange ‘trade’, but a lot of people here have realised in the meantime that it’s just another name they use for stealing the real things that matter. For, indeed, what can anybody in his right mind do with brandy and glass pearls? Especially in exchange for gold, ivory and people?” he frequently asked his councillors. Whenever King Yankey sat to discuss topics of national interest, he often put this question to his critics, quite a few of whom wanted to get rich quickly: “If the slave trade were not profitable for them, the white people, would they travel all the way to our land to participate in it?” “Very unlikely,” a councillor had once remarked. “What I’d like to know: Would we eat grass if these people didn’t come here with pearls, alcohol and gunpowder?”

None of King Yankey’s critics ever provided any good answers to such questions. But honestly speaking, who could really answer such difficult questions? Of late, however, more and more people here had been asking themselves these questions. Many were in no mood to continue being the fools of ruffians and rogues coming from abroad. There was a reason for that.

Not long ago, the Omanhene of Butre had signed an agreement to trade unconditionally with the Dutch merchants of Elmina. When the Dutch had then stationed soldiers in Butre and appointed a sort of governor to take charge of the garrison, they had used their powerful weapons to establish their own rule and dictate to the inhabitants. When the Butre people had rebelled against Dutch bullying, the white people had simply sailed further up the coast to the Kingdom of Egyaa close to Anomabo and imported several hundreds of people for resettlement in Butre. Of course, the new arrivals had been armed by the Dutch and charged with seeing to it that the Butre people did not revolt. The ‘treaty of cooperation’ that Butre had then signed with the Dutch had made the village suddenly become the enemy of all those who had a score to settle with the fat-headed cheese sellers, as the British here call the Dutch. At the cost of his throne, the

Butrehene was forced to support whatever policies the Dutch, owning already 17 forts on the Gold Coast, adopted for this area. Peaceful Butre, now a loyal and staunch ally of the treacherous Dutch, had become an enemy of the British, the French, the Danes and the Swedes in no time. Now Butre had a Dutch commander living in Fort Battensteyn, a stone fortress perched high over the little town. The commander had not as yet shown any interest in the welfare of the Butre people. At least, he had done nothing to underscore the supposed interest the Dutch claimed to have had before gaining actual military control.

Since this episode, King Yankey was even more convinced that all alliances were bad. They solved one problem and lead to another.

“A proverb in our language says:

Only the fool lets someone step on his testicles twice.

I, Nana Kwamenla Yankey, son of Amenlema, will never put my testicles on the anvil for irresponsible people to hammer on. By any means possible, I’m determined not to let Evaluê suffer Butre’s fate. Therefore, I say: No compromising alliances!”

The worry lines on Nana Yankey’s face were becoming more visible each day.

To him, life under subjugation was the most terrible thing that could happen to any people. Alone the idea of being forced to obey other people’s laws, live foreign cultures, worship unfamiliar gods, pay unjustified tribute and possibly speak strange tongues; these prospects were simply unacceptable!

And Nana Yankey’s thoughts were not born out of unfounded fear. The Asante Kingdom, the new major power on the western seaboard, had succeeded in extending its territory with staunch Dutch support and was now threatening to overrun the British-held territories to the east of Evaluê. The least the Kingdom of Evaluê and its leaders wanted was trouble within and without its borders. If the leadership and people of Evaluê did not want to be overrun and ruled by their powerful neighbours, quick solutions had to be found.

What made the situation so difficult was that neutrality had also not brought any advantages to Evaluê. On the contrary. Evaluê was isolated and an object of constant threats from powerful As-ante and its most prominent ally, the Dutch.

Nana Yankey and his elders were aware of the precarious state into which they had manoeuvred their Kingdom. Evaluê needed a powerful ally, but one with different motives and aims. An ally ready to do serious but clean trade in gold, ivory, metal and spices. but excluding the exchange of human beings.

Yes. That episode with the Omanhene of Butre and his fundamental blunder with the Dutch were still on the mind of the wise King. The Omanhene of Butre had trusted the foreigners blindly and not bothered to consult the gods about his encounter with the white people. The Dutch had ultimately deceived him and the gods revenged the neglect by not heeding the prayers of those people when they dearly needed help.

Nana Yankey was too clever to repeat such a mistake. Before beginning any such adventure, he was determined to ensure that no tricks are involved. He made up his mind to consult the Oracle of Egyambra and sacrifice to its powerful deity. This deity could do what humans could not do. He was convinced that somewhere on earth, there had to be a country ready to do what he was looking for. He was sure to find that country with the help of the oracle.

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## Part III

*He who recognises the necessity to adapt is wise  
and conscious of the Divine.*

Epictetus (Greek philosopher and former slave)

= 1 =

### The Loss in Surinam

The Africaense Galleij, with about five hundred and some odd slaves, a few paying passengers, big brother Kaku Anto Miezah, little brother Kwasi Adiaba Amo, and their good friend Jacobus Eliza Capiteyn sighted land on a sultry afternoon in late August 1706. It was like waking up from a dream.

The privileged treatment on the ship had left the boys healthy and surprisingly fit, despite the seemingly unending nature of the journey. As if to welcome them, swarms of shrieking seagulls flew low over their heads, some plunging occasionally into the sea to lunch on inattentive fish.

With land in sight, the team of young boys was allowed on the open deck to see the fast approaching land. From there, they could make out a low, green outline shimmering in the far distance.

“Where’re we going now?” Jacobus Eliza asked Herr Bodel in a broken voice. He was nursing a bad cold he had caught by often staying too long on the upper deck with its strong, sometimes biting winds.

“What you see over there’s the coast of Surinam. In half a day, we’ll be in Paramaribo. Be patient until we get closer and you’ll get a better idea of where we are going,” said Herr Bodel.



“When shall we get there?”

“I say, by the end of the day. Before the sun goes down,” he controlled himself to utter patiently. The names the man mentioned were new to the boys, and it was useless asking further questions which engendered further incomprehensible answers. They would have to wait and see. For the moment, the boys accepted the promise and continued to gaze out into the open expanse of ocean spread before them like an endless question.

The entire coastline of the country they had reached was an impenetrable thick forest which loomed in front of them like a formidable green barrier. The sea had an opaque, brownish dirty colour, intriguing and full of mystery.

Soon the ship had found an opening in the wall of jungle facing them and begun to penetrate it slowly. Obviously, they were sailing into the mouth of a big river that emptied into the sea at this point. It was like being swallowed up by a huge dragon. Then the contours of a large town spread on both sides of the river also came into view, revealing houses with red tiled roofs and painted in a glistening white which stood out in the waning sun.

“We’re now in Surinam and this is Paramaribo, its biggest town,” the boys’ supervisor announced, drawing closer to them on the railing.

“What a funny name,” said little Amo laughing.

“There’s nothing funny about it. Pa-ra-ma-ri-bo. Actually not difficult, if you say it slowly.”

“But is this not Africa?”

“Not at all. We left Africa months ago. What you see here is another country, er, continent – South America. And the country we’re in now is called Surinam. Red-skinned people live in it, but it’s ruled by our King.”

“People with red skin? I only know about those with black or white skin. Like you and me,” said Miezah.

“Well, you’ll grow to see there are more strange things in the world. Far more than you can imagine,” replied the sailor.

Because of his lighter skin, Capiteyn wanted to know if the comment was directed at him and asked if the sailor thought it was

strange that people had different colours.

“Not strange, but unfamiliar.”

“Whatever its name is, this looks like a big place,” said Capiteyn, obviously satisfied with the answer.

“Yes. We’re now in the estuary of a huge river also called Surinam, and this city here is much bigger than Axim, Elmina and Dutch-Accra. I’ll show you around town later. I’ve been here several times,” the man with the moustache promised and disappeared into the bowels of the ship.

Except for the houses on the waterfront, with porches pegged on wooden stilts, almost everything about the place resembled the home they had left behind several weeks ago. Strangely, most people they saw walking about were just as black as the people back home.

Hundreds of onlookers had come to see the arrival of the Africaense Galleij. This happened whenever a ship arrived. Crowds always came to the port for various reasons: to meet friends and relatives, to purchase slaves, to receive goods from Africa and Europe, or simply to look at what was going on. In the huge bay were several other ships with assorted flags fluttering in the wind. Other ships were belching out hundreds of Africans who were continually marched off into silent, low-lying warehouses that lined the riverbank. Goods were being carted in all directions. Across the bay, more white birds, mostly seagulls, shrieked and fought over fish; horses and donkeys laden with produce made their way through crowds of people. A lot of coming and going took place, everything was alive and in motion around the port. Whenever a slave ship laden with Africans threw anchor here, a familiar ritual that had stood the test of centuries began.

The day of arrival saw frantic activity everywhere. A schooner manned by four skippers immediately pulled alongside the Africaense Galleij. Out of it came grim-looking, ugly bearded men with flexing muscles. They unloaded and transferred buckets of palm oil and countless bales of coarse Indian calico to the au-

thorities on the Africaense Galleij. The calico was to be cut into little strips for making what the Dutch called 'pantjes', the typical loincloth which slaves were given to wrap around their waists before leaving the ship. The palm oil was for smearing the skin of the slaves to let them appear healthy.

Just as their supervisor had said, the world was indeed full of strange things. From the safe haven of their hideout on the upper deck, the boys became spectators to a scene that seemed to originate from a dream world. They looked on and did not have to pay to watch it. In fact they were part of the show, but nobody made them aware of it.

First, all the paying passengers were cleared and allowed to leave the ship as quickly as possible. Then preparations for the landing of the human cargo began. The newly arrived were marched onto the ship's main deck in droves. An endless line of captives, most of them in an utter state of dilapidation, peered into the broad daylight wincing in the bright sun, after days of living in complete darkness. They were driven up in groups to get fresh air and to exercise their weakened limbs. A dull drum beat delivered the tact for a few push-ups, turns and arm-raising amidst loud shouts and commands, occasionally accompanied by whippings and bootings. Even though the boys knew all along that there were plenty of people packed into the ship's belly, they were still fascinated by the numbers that had been stacked into the vessel.

Disembarking times also meant the time had come to wash down the filth of months of incarceration. The captives were made to sit in long rows, after which several buckets of seawater were emptied over them until a broad black and stinking stream flowed off the deck into the sea. This exercise was accompanied by moans, groans and shouts of pain from the slaves, whose various wounds apparently smarted from the saltwater. When it was thought that an adequate level of cleanliness had been reached, fresh water was also thrown at them to rinse off the salt. To complete the cleaning phase, the slaves were ordered to smear their bodies with the palm oil supplied the day before. This reddish oil

from Africa was known to soothe the skin and help heal wounds. In the bright sun, the poor souls looked fresher and more presentable, with their black bodies glistening in the sun like polished shoes. Fresh cornbread and fish soup thickened with potato was served on deck to pep up the weakened bodies. Next to follow were the customs officers who entered the ship to take inventory of the gold, elephant tusks and all other imported goods from Africa. After clearance, the slaves were marched off the ship and herded into the warehouses of the slave trading agents who bought entire shiploads of people and goods for further retailing. All captive passengers would await the auctioning here.

Back on the ship, Jacobus overheard a conversation between the Captain and one of his officers in Dutch.

“Is everything ready?”

“Not yet, sir, but it won’t take much longer.”

“Get your men to hurry up. Tomorrow will be a busy day. Cazimierc, that blood sucking Pole, will arrive early next morning to start the selections,” informed the Captain. “You know what follows then. I want you to get everything ready, so that no time’s lost. The faster we are, the quicker the business is over with.”

“I’m aware of this, sir. We’ll do our best to complete the whole exercise as fast as possible.”

This conversation meant nothing to Capiteyn, but he instinctively felt that something important was in the offing.

“Tomorrow’ll be a special day here,” he told his friends in their cabin. “The sailors are speaking in undertones and talking about things to come. Don’t know what it’ll be, but it sounds like it’s something special. We’ll see whatever that means tomorrow.”

The next day after breakfast, they hid themselves on the open deck to see what was going to happen. All hands on deck were apparently needed for the job to be done, so nobody paid any particular attention to their whereabouts. They looked on.

The man who came to do the selections was an independent merchant, often employed by the bulk traders for his expertise in

selecting slaves. He arrived in the company of two assistants. Cazimierc had two important jobs. The first was to select the slaves into groups, before the rich plantation owners would come to do the actual buying. The second was to conduct the auctioning itself. Though this was normally the bulk agent's duty, the Pole was entrusted with it because he was reputed to have a good eye for the right people and a knack at determining the right price.

Cazimierc, red-faced from too much aquavit, and armed with a musket dangling at his side, walked into the warehouse with a half-grin, followed by his assistants, all silent, and with empty expressions on their faces. Before beginning with his work, he gave his assistants a little lecture.

"Our duty here," he paused for effect, "is to ensure that the sick or maimed slaves are sold first. This means meticulous inspection. Keep in mind. If we make any mistakes, we lose money. Every kind of blemish reduces the price of the individual involved."

For this exercise, all slaves were ordered at the sound of a gong to stand up. Then another gong signalled them to strip off their pantjes to the naked body. Once again, the boys were confronted with naked people. This time, much more plainly. They were close enough to observe naked adults for the first time. What they now discovered was shocking. Adults had a lot of hair growing in between their legs, just like the many monkeys they had seen while growing up on the Gold Coast! They giggled around and instinctively closed their eyes for shame, but opened them again in order not to miss any part of the exercise going on.

"No teeth, less teeth or bad teeth means less value," Cazimierc instructed his men in a heavy foreign accent. "Slaves with dental problems are bad workers, cause trouble and cost money," he continued, moving from captive to captive, squeezing muscles, sometimes licking the chins of the young men to make sure they were adolescents – whom Portuguese buyers paid a much higher sum for – and occasionally stopping to pull a penis here and a testicle there for closer scrutiny.

“Sexual ailments of any sort are dangerous and we don’t want any mass infection,” he said out loud. “Plus, some of our customers are interested in increasing their flock and we have to ascertain that there are enough strong males for the job. If you have worked on a cattle farm, you’ll understand what I mean,” he added with a big laugh.

Finished with the men, he turned to the women and began the same procedure with them, too. Every now and then he stopped in front of a female captive, took hold of her breast and squeezed it to see if milk came. That meant that she had recently given birth to a child and would not achieve the highest price. Sometimes he just gave the order to “put her down,” at which his men seized a woman and threw her on her back roughly. His assistants would then pull the woman’s legs apart amidst shouts of protest, whereupon Cazimierc would stick his finger into tufts of hair between her legs. Why he did this was not clear, but it seemed to be meaningful to everybody present. Except for the boys, nobody seemed to be surprised at this strange exercise. They looked on in amazement. More or less the same procedure was also applied to the children on board, only not as brutally. Cazimierc seemed to enjoy his work. He had a strange look of satisfaction on his face while conducting the inspection. No sign of perturbation could be perceived in his countenance. With a turn of the finger, he signalled to his men where every slave was to be sent.

“On the right, the premium slaves, in the middle the choice group, on the left the ordinary people. The surplus here is sick and should be sold immediately at the usual low rates,” he instructed continually. Finishing his job, Cazimierc nodded approval, spoke a few words with the crew members and left the ship with his assistants.

All along, the boys were quiet witnesses to the strange game that was being played right in front of them. Too young to understand what was going on, Amo and his friends were nevertheless mightily impressed by what they saw. Everything seemed to have a logical place in the design of things, they figured. If not, the

gods would otherwise not permit such things to happen, would they?

The next time the supervisor came to join the boys, little Amo was impatient.

“You promised to take us to town. When are we going?”

“I promised, and I mean it, but not today. We have a lot to do at the moment. Tomorrow is auctioning day. We’ll have more time after that.”

“What is auctioning day?”

“That is when the people here come to buy what we have brought from Africa.”

“Including the people?”

“Including the people.”

“How mean.”

“Everybody’s born with his own fate.”

“That’s what we call ‘nkrabea’.”

“So you even have a word for it?”

“Not only one.”

“I’ve got to go help the sailors, you little professor.”

“Don’t forget your promise.”

“I’ve got to go now!”

Auction day was like a feast day.

It gave the boys an opportunity to see the kind of people inhabiting the country, apart from the workers they saw. Early in the morning, countless white people grouped around the warehouses where the imprisoned people were kept. They arrived in carts, on horseback and on foot. Some were portly, with bloated, bearded faces, some were elegantly dressed in coats with cravats and some were accompanied by women with hats on their heads. Some also came without wives.

Before the actual selling began, the prospective buyers were allowed to take turns peeping through small windows into the sweltering warehouses which exuded a slaughterhouse stench that pervaded the entire area. A good first look was important. It enabled interested buyers to preselect before the auctioning proper

would begin. This mode of trade had been introduced recently to replace the former practice of letting buyers rush into the warehouses to do a personal physical selection which included digging into unclean mouths, examining teeth, pulling limbs and fingering sexual organs. The stampede and the ensuing general commotion were found to be grossly unacceptable. Now it was possible to select from a distance and wait for the auction to begin. This was largely considered to be a more elegant practice. When a person was presented for sale, the auctioneer began with a studied litany of attributes to enhance the slave's qualities, in order to achieve a good price: "valuable slave, no vice or malady"; "mild Igbo woman, freshly arrived, good for house work." Buyers, in turn, bargained hard to keep the price down. "I don't want any of the boys to be around tomorrow at branding time, understand?" the children overheard the Captain say to one of his assistants after the auctioneering was over.

"Yes, sir!"

"See to it that they are occupied on the ship. It's nothing for children."

"Yes, sir!"

The boys could not make much out of what they heard and continued prowling around the ship with nothing to do. Until early the next morning, when two men rushed into their sleeping compartment and woke up the still sleeping boys with a lot of door wrenching and general commotion.

"Miiza," a voice boomed. "Who is Miiza?"

Miezah sat up instantly, rubbed his eyes and stared into the doorway, not knowing what was going on.

"Come on, boy"

"I?"

"Yes, if you're Miiza."

Miezah staggered to his feet, pulled his pantjes together, took a jar of water, rinsed his mouth quickly and got ready.

"Follow me!" one of the two strangers commanded.

"Has he done anything wrong?" asked Amo before they disap-



peared.

“It’s branding time and he’s part of the group,” answered one of the men tersely.

“What’s that?” little Amo asked again.

“When somebody buys a slave, he writes his name on the slave. This is done with a hot piece of iron.”

”But he’s my brother, not a slave.”

“We have our instructions.”

“Does it hurt?”

“It hurts a bit, but it’s done quickly and is harmless.”

“Really harmless?”

It was time to kill the conversation. They knew the little brat would not stop, once he got started.

“Keep quiet now and continue sleeping. We’ll soon bring him back. The rest of you should remain on board while we’re away, understand?”

“Yes, sir!”

The door slammed shut again and was locked up from behind.

Just as the Captain had remarked, brand-marking, the next phase of the sordid business, was indeed not for the faint-hearted. Strong men were needed for the exercise. A slave was held in check by four men, while his or her shoulder, back or buttocks was rubbed with palm oil before a hot iron tong with initials embossed on it was pressed on the flesh for a few seconds. For the rest of the day, the boys could hear varying pitches of screaming, screeching and moaning that continuously filled the air from the warehouses on the riverbank.

“I’m sure they’re killing all the people,” Amo declared in undertones, his eyes filled with horror at the noise reaching them through the hatches.

“Why should they kill people that they’ve brought here to sell? It doesn’t make sense,” Capiteyn said.

“But why do people shout then, if it’s harmless like the supervisor says?” Amo continued stubbornly, the next time their supervisor entered their cabin to bring breakfast.

“Children, I’m too busy now for extended conversation. Excuse me. When I have more time, we’ll talk some more about that,” the kind man said as a form of consolation, quickly leaving before the boys could start new arguments. He knew their habit of constantly asking questions until it was sometimes embarrassing to reply.

When Miezah was hurled back into the cabin after what seemed like several hours, he was a sorry sight. His eyes were reddened from shedding tears and on his left shoulder was a big dark bump with inscriptions on it. He said it burnt terribly, so he was left to relax in peace. When the pain had subsided and Amo could talk to his brother again, he reminded him of the last admonitions Mama Bosoma had given them before departure.

“You must be strong. Don’t forget what Maam said. No disgrace to the family and to ourselves.”

These words coming from his little brother worked wonders on Miezah. If such a little chap could already express such sentiments, then it was his duty to play his role as big brother properly. He stopped crying, wiped his reddened eyes, primed himself up and decided to be brave.

Some few days after the awful flesh-burning, Miezah’s departure day came. The whole thing had been dangling over their heads like the legendary sword of Damocles. Whereas Damocles’ sword, held up by one string of horsehair, did not fall, it was a different affair in Miezah’s case. He was no Greek, after all, and the gods of Pokesu, responsible for his protection, were too far away. Fate had to take its course.

Cazimierc, the wicked man of the days before, had selected Miezah for a group of choice slaves already reserved for a Dutch-run sugar cane plantation located upcountry. Early in the morning, a tall, grim-faced sailor with a bald head and exploding muscles stormed into the cabin where they were sleeping.

“Miezah!” he commanded, looking around to see who carried this name. The silence that ensued was paralyzing. Nobody dared talk. When Miezah had been pointed out, the tall man began shouting.

“Come on boy, we have no time to waste. Your boat is waiting with plenty of other people in it. You’ll spend four days on the boat. Come on!”

There was no time for farewell. The man gripped Miezah’s hand and pulled him towards the door with some force. His whitened big eyes, the apprehension in his face, the expressionless countenance of his grabber were the last things Amo and Capiteyn ever saw of him. Before another word could be uttered in any direction, the man had disappeared with Miezah. The last thing they heard were some shouts of protest from Miezah. The two remaining boys thought they heard the word ‘nkrabea’ – fate – but they were not sure whether this was so, and if yes, what Miezah meant by it.

The shock of separation rooted all the children to their beds. The last impressions of Miezah’s departure would remain imprinted on Amo’s memory for the rest of his life. The word nkrabea, too. The day Miezah disappeared was ntwo-bena, an unlucky Tuesday on the Akan calendar. Back home in Evaluê, nobody would have gone out on such a day.

Unlike their usual penchant to eat constantly, the boys could not swallow anything that day. What was poor Amo to do without Miezah? He already missed him so, and found it almost impossible to imagine that he would never see his big brother again. He sat in the cabin for a long time, his face buried in his hands and weeping quietly. Capiteyn tried in vain to comfort him.

“Siisi, be strong. If you believe in God, everything’ll be all right.”

“God my foot! Where was He when they took my brother?”

“He knows and sees everything. He will take action at the appropriate time.”

“Djato, go to hell!”

“Must you always use such terrible swear words?”

“I don’t care.”

“Think of Judgement Day.”

“Judgement Day my foot!”

Capiteyn knew now that there was nothing he could do to console his friend, so he left him in peace and went to feed the

piglets, which had by now grown faster than he could have ever imagined.

**= 2 =**  
**Homesickness**

Paramaribo, with about nine thousand inhabitants, was a run-down town, which, apart from the port, consisted largely of an agglomeration of decrepit bars, mute warehouses, big mansions for rich plantation owners and sprawling, low-lying quarters for the multitudes of slaves who worked on the plantations. As a hub of international business, the town served as headquarters for sailors, traders, missionaries, businessmen, plantation owners, prostitutes, slave drivers and their servants.

Paramaribo was certainly as good a place to wait for the European winter as any other in the Americas, but when news came that his ship would not be able to continue the journey to Europe right away, the Captain was downcast. A mast that had broken in the course of a strong storm would have to be replaced completely, and this would take at least two months to complete. If not, the ship would not make it to Europe. The late summer months were known to be the period of terrific storms; no ship would make that journey with an already impaired mast. The next possible departure month would be January or February 1707.

“What exactly should we do with the little boys in the meantime?” Sergeant Bodel enquired in a concerned voice at the local office of the DWIC.

“Paramaribo’s full of sin and crime. Certainly no place for aspirants destined for higher duties,” he lamented.

“You’re quite right,” replied the clerk in charge of the local office.

“Just this morning, we have received instructions on how to deal with them. The instructions say we should send Kwasi Amo and Jacobus Capiteyn to Providentia until a fast ship arrives in the coming weeks.”

“No idea where that is.”

“It’s a humid and dusty upriver town, two days by boat from here. I’ve been there before. There’s a good orphanage in Providentia, but little else to talk about. The orphanage is run by Pietist missionaries from Moravia,” explained one of the managers at the office.

“Thank God for that. Since I shall not be with them in Providentia, kindly see to it that they continue their language lessons there. We began with them on the ship, they have learned a great deal already, and I’m sure by the time we set off again, they’ll be perfect,” pleaded the Sergeant, who had grown to like the boys.

“The people in Providentia are good-natured, God-fearing and nice. The boys will be safe there and might even end up liking it there,” said the clerk warmly.

“No doubt, no doubt,” replied the Sergeant and left it at that. Providentia came to life on market days.

The town itself was surrounded by a dense, impenetrable jungle sparsely populated by strange-looking people who wore next to nothing and spoke in strange tongues. It was as if Onyame the Almighty, had opened the jungle and placed the town exactly where it was, closing it back again after finishing his job. In the immediate vicinity of the small town were neat columns of cleared land on which extensive plantations of sugar cane, tobacco and citrus trees disappeared into the hazy distance. Then, as if erected by an unseen hand, a dark green forest full of big trees, small trees, vines and ferns too thick for larger animals and humans to penetrate rose to enclose the isolated civilisation.

Snakes, lizards, centipedes, millipedes and myriads of insects seemed to be the only ones capable of making their way through the thickets unimpeded. Otherwise, as the boys soon learned, parrots, monkeys, sloths, potos and other arboreal fauna were the real masters of this humid, impenetrable Kingdom of foliage. Right beside the orphanage in which Jacobus and Kwasi lived was the marketplace, often frequented by a largely black, mulatto and native population – the people supposed to have red skin – which gathered there from the outlying districts to trade off goods at specific times.

On such market days, society appeared to congregate on the same spot, with many of the people coming from the surrounding jungle country to trade off their wares on the dusty streets. The boys saw rich traders and plantation owners carried around in litters by slaves. They learned to differentiate between the smell of palm oil, untreated pará and other exotic items that filled the air on such days. Most conspicuous were the huge black women balancing trays of venison, fish, fruits or other tropical products on their heads. The few that they talked to spoke a funny, broken Dutch dialect which they hardly understood but could still manage to comprehend. These strange black people often warned them not to venture afar from town and gave shuddering accounts of ghosts, dangerous snakes, wild animals, cannibals and meat-eating plants in the immediate vicinity. Sometimes they also related other blood-curdling stories which were hard to believe but were supposedly true.

However, much reminded of home, too: the humid climate, the profuse vegetation, the variegated colours; in fact the whole atmosphere around town. The boys soon found pleasure walking through the market stalls to look at the wares on sale, like fresh and dried coconuts, palm fruits, mangoes, pears, pineapples, guavas, papaws, assorted monkeys, edible larvae, colourful butterflies, birds, bats, insects any many more.

Sometimes Kwasi and Jacobus sat to tell the same stories they had heard over and over again back home. Especially moonlit nights made them horribly homesick. Here, there was no Mummy to tell them Ananse or Adanko stories, no happy children to sing and dance tchehekule with them into the deep night, nobody to serve them fried fish with etuku or fomfom.

Capiteyn and Amo were taught how to read and write, how to garden and rear animals; they learned about the value of medicinal herbs and how to survive in the jungle. In addition, they received Bible lessons, continued with their language lessons and enjoyed a large measure of freedom. It was really often like home, but since they knew their journey was not at its end, they were also impatient to continue.

“The Captain said we were going to live in a country with white people. I don’t think this is it,” protested Amo one day.

“No, it isn’t,” replied Capiteyn. “If you had listened carefully, you would have known that we will continue our journey there later.”

“When is later.”

“Soon.”

“How soon?”

“Don’t know. It’s supposed to be very cold there. Simon, the African cook here has been to Holland before and he says it is so cold there that lakes, rivers, and even parts of the sea become hard like stone in the cold season.

“No, that’s impossible.”

“Surely. He’s been there, he must know. He says that was the first time he understood the Bible story about Jesus Christ walking on water. The water was hard. All Jesus had to do was go over it.”

“The Bible did not say that it was cold in Egypt.”

“Well, you don’t know Egypt, so believe those who know. The cook is a widely travelled man and he knows what he’s talking about.”

“I still don’t believe it.”

“He even said the cold burns like fire.”

“I’ll only believe it when I see it myself.”

“You’re a doubting Thomas. You’ll go to hell like all the others who want to see God before believing in him.”

“I will not.”

”You will.”

“You’re a liar anyway.”

“I’m not.”

“Did you not last tell me that white people lived below the sea?”

“It was Kaku who said that.”

“As you can see now, this isn’t true,” said Capiteyn.

“If it’s not, tell me what’s right.”

“Their homes are just beyond the horizon. When the boats are too far off, you just don’t see them.”

“Who told you all this?”

“My former Pastor in Kankan told me. He said the belief had come about, because ships carrying white people suddenly appeared from nowhere. Since the masts of their ships seemed to pierce through the water before the huge ships actually appeared, many people thought they came from under the sea.”

“I remember seeing it myself. It was always fascinating to watch the ships get bigger and bigger and it really looked like they came from the underworld.”

“If it were so, we would be under the sea now, wouldn’t we?”

“We would not be able to breathe as we are doing presently.”

“So you see, only fish can live in the sea.”

“Yes. Only fish can live in the sea.”

Capiteyn was relieved. For once, the troublesome fidget had accepted what he said without too much argument.

In the weeks following, repair works were carried out on the broken mast of the *Africaense Galleij*, a ship owned by the rich Dutch shipper Jan van Zanen. While this major repair went on, the ship was also cleaned and readied for the next phase of the journey. A group of the ship’s hands was entrusted with clearing the decks of all the filth that had accumulated since departure from Africa. Only the lowliest of the crew members were drafted for this tedious assignment. Sometimes, healthy but unsold slaves were also committed to the hard job. The most difficult parts to clean were the slave quarters, with their mixture of excrements and urine that stank everywhere. These days, cleanliness was given extra attention. Entire decks were lime-washed to subdue the unbearable stench that exuded from the ship’s walls. The entire ship was emptied and cleaned with a lye of caustic soda, after which buckets of vinegar were splashed on the planks – for disinfection and freshness.

With the ship clean, skilled carpenters were hired to remove the boards and partitions installed in West Africa to accommodate the greatest possible number of slaves. With the partitions gone, more space became available for stowing the valuable goods that were to be loaded for Europe. Other minor repair works were



also carried out by the regular sailors. Whatever needed attention received it now – torn sails were mended, worn ropes replaced, broken masts repaired. Tackles were renewed and barnacles removed from the vessel's underside. These slowed down any ship and increased costs. When the rough work had been completed, the planks on deck were tarred and polished. In the end, the ship's entire body was painted.

Absolute peace reigned after all the works had been completed. For the crew members this was the most enjoyable period, a time to kill time and relax. It was simply beautiful to forget the hard life of a sailor for some time, to gather strength, write letters to loved ones, gamble, booze and whore around in the poorly lit bars of Paramaribo.

**= 3 =**

### **Setting Sail Again**

It took a long time for January to come to hot and humid Surinam. And when it did, preparations for the onward trip to Europe began anew. Paramaribo port was now jammed with ships waiting to be loaded and cleared for the next haul to Europe. The warehouses were full of agricultural produce that would not stand any substantial delays.

This time around, one could feel the changes in the air and the suspense. The big plantations with their sweet-scented citrus, mango and cashew trees were now in full bloom, swarthy, bare-chested workers, their bodies glistening in the hot sun with sweat, moved through the unpaved alleyways of Paramaribo pushing or hauling bulky goods destined for the ships to Europe. The Africaense Galleij received, among other things, about 600 barrels of sugar (mostly received in payment for the slaves) that were loaded barrel for barrel into the ships hold, followed by about 120 bales of raw cotton, 40 barrels of syrup, 15 barrels of choice rum, five barrels of ground cocoa, two barrels of indigo, about ten turtle shells and 50 slaves ordered by wealthy nobles

throughout Europe.

For all eventualities, several tons of fresh water were filled into huge drums, plenty of good food was hauled on board: pepper, ginger, saffron, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, molasses, with the list continuing with dried prunes, currants, tea, salted beef and assorted vegetables. To supplement the diet with fresh products, three pigs, three sheep, 20 chickens, two geese and two ducks, all alive, were also brought on board for the home bound journey. Passengers boarding now also brought along live crocodiles, alligators, snakes of various sizes and shapes, tropical plants, herbal medicines, vials full of snakebite serum, oyster shells, seedlings, bulbs and dried flowers packed in marked boxes destined for museums, educational institutions and private homes in Europe.

As usual, most passengers were missionaries, wives of army officers, soldiers, arms dealers and businessmen on their way to various destinations throughout Europe. From the original group that started out from Africa, about 30 people had remained to continue the onward trip.

Amo and Capiteyn were returned to Paramaribo to resume their journey and were met by Seargent Bodel, who seemed to very happy to see his wards again. They had been well taken care of, he noticed. They had also grown bigger and much taller. Little Amo was now proficient in Dutch.

On board the ship again, their first task was to run to the deck to see if the piglets of yesteryear were still around.

"I'm sure they're big now," said Amo, running hastily to the place animals were kept.

"They've gone long time ago," informed one of the sailors on learning about the boys' wish.

"Gone where?" Amo asked in his innocent way.

"Pigs are there to be eaten, and that's exactly what we've done."

"You mean you've killed those little animals. That's mean! You could have waited for us," protested Capiteyn.

"For what?"

"To take leave of them."

“Don’t worry, boys. Pigs are being born all the time. You’ll soon get another chance to play with some of them when new ones are born.” Saying this, the seaman quickly left the boys to stifle any further discussion.

“I don’t think I want to eat meat again,” said Amo to Capiteyn after the seaman had left.

“Come on, Siisi. There’s no reason to make a tragedy out of a few silly pigs.”

“Better shut up before I stop talking to you, ” he snarled before taking a look across the deck to see what was happening.

The boys stopped arguing shortly after this to watch sinewy black men busily load their ship in the tropical sun. Amo was still more shocked at the loss of the pigs than anybody would have imagined and he really meant his threat to stop eating meat again in his life.

From the safe distance of the high deck, they looked on with interest as the unloading went on. For hours on end, all one could hear was the rallying call and answer of the workers in a strange language as they heaved heavy loads from the ship onto horse-driven carts :

*Tchoo boi!*

*Yei*

*Tchoo boi!*

*Yei*

*Tchoo boi!*

*Yei*

“The next stage of our journey will take us about six weeks under the best constellation,” the Captain announced in a booming voice. “We’ll first sail to Danish St. John’s. This phase will require great precautions to be taken against pirate attacks in the coastal waters. The goods on board are attractive targets for pirates and other paid ruffians who live on captured booty. They’re all known to be extremely cruel people who do not hesitate to kill passen-

gers on board and set fire to ships. Other dangers are fires, explosions on board, disease among the crew, storms, shipwreck. These are all things we don't wish but must expect. Let's all hope and pray that we never meet any of these mishaps. It's a particularly painful way to perish, and we all want to see our loved ones again."

On the 19th of March 1706, a beautiful day with sunny blue skies, the Africaense Galleij fired a four-pound cannon to initiate departure procedures, after which a six-gun salute was fired before anchor was lifted. The final destination was Amsterdam.

Ten days after departure from Paramaribo, the Virgin Islands were sighted. Some distance off-shore, a bearded man who hardly spoke entered the ship to steer it through the dangerous coral reefs that surrounded many of the uninhabited rocky outcrops and islands. Soon, anchor was thrown at a little town called Christianstad. The sight of people walking on their shadows signalled that it was noon. For the slaves still on board, the procedure that had become familiar by now was begun all over again: washing, examining, selecting, smearing with palm oil, auctioning, branding and departing to the plantations. The Captain and his crew had been absent from their home countries for almost a year and were now impatient to get back there as soon as possible.

"We've no time to lose. St. John's is small and we have a long way to go," said the Captain, eager to get things done faster. With provisions loaded, rolls of tobacco, bales of cotton and barrels of exquisite rum on board, the ship took a straight course towards the east.

"We're headed for the Portuguese islands of Cabo Verde, just off the African coast. This is always the most dangerous part of the journey," the sailors explained to the passengers.

"Pirates haunt the West Indies, and there's no land between here and the islands. Apart from that, doldrums can also occur by the least deviation from course. If we hit doldrums and it lasts too long, there's real risk that our water and food supplies could be-

come exhausted. It's essential to have enough of everything on board before we set sail."

Now on the open stretch of water and with nothing much to see, it was terribly boring for the boys on the ship. Amo missed his big brother. At other times, his parents. The big seaman with the bushy moustache had told him that Miezah would be in safe hands, but what did that mean?

To supplement the diet on the ship, some of the sailors threw hooks into the sea to catch fresh fish for the table. They were always successful, and the boys helped them enthusiastically to clean all sorts of big and small fish.

Five weeks after sailing from the West Indies, the Africaense Galleij sailed majestically into a sunny little port situated on a hot volcanic island. Before the boys could start wondering where they were, the Captain made an announcement.

"Welcome back to Africa! We're now in Mindelo on the Cape Verde Islands, an archipelago in Portuguese possession. Main reason for stopping here's to get fresh water, more food and tropical fruits. A few paying passengers are also ready to board. In three days we'll be off again," he said.

The news irritated the boys.

"Say, didn't the same Captain tell us in Surinam that we had left Africa long ago?"

"Yes, he did. I guess we've come back."

"It doesn't make much sense to me."

"To me neither, but am not worried. They know what they're doing, I'm sure."

"Me too, but I wish I knew what's happening."

"Then ask the Captain himself."

"I will, when I see him."

From Mindelo, the ship took a straight northern course, carrying them through rough seas to the Spanish-occupied islands of the Canaries. The next stop in Santa Cruz de Tenerife would last four days, just to load more bananas, citrus fruits and still more water. Almost a whole day before arriving at Santa Cruz, the snow-

capped Mt. Teide, a majestic mountain with its head in the clouds, loomed before them.

“I’ve climbed this mountain before,” claimed one of the seamen, as they headed for the port. “In those days, I was much younger. It took me three days to get to the top. It was full of snow. Believe me. I’ve never frozen more in my life than there. We were all unprepared for what we encountered at the summit. It was like getting closer to God.”

“Mmh. And who said He lives in the sky?” asked a missionary on board.

“If it’s true that God is everywhere, then he can also be up there, can’t he?”

“Right, if you see it that way,” the kind man replied. True or not, the imposing mountain with the white top made an unforgettable impression on all who saw it.

Ten full weeks after lifting anchor in Paramaribo, continental Europe was finally touched with a first call at the Spanish port of Cadiz, where the ship unloaded a lot of the goods brought from America. In return, countless casks of choice red wine were heaved on board. They were destined for the French city of Le Havre, from where further transport to England and the cold countries would follow.

“Only twelve more days and we’ll be in Holland,” promised the Sergeant. Capiteyn and Amo were doing fine and impatient to land in this Europe they had heard so much about.

Altogether, the entire voyage from Axim to the port of Texel had taken about a year. There had been so much to see, to do and to experience, but now it was time to begin real life, they thought.

**= 4 =**

## **The Great Russian Patron**

Tsar Peter of Russia toured France and other Western European countries between 1697 and 1698 and returned to his country

with lots of admiration for the scientific achievements he had seen in Western Europe. He was full of zeal and highly motivated to follow the good example and raise his own country to the level of the best in Europe. His conviction was that Russia could and should become a great nation like those he had seen in the West. Therefore, it was time to emulate his colleagues in Paris, Amsterdam, Vienna and London. To achieve this, he knew he would have to adopt unconventional methods.

“I’m aware that it’ll not be easy to convince the Russian people of what I want to do. My people are so slow and don’t seem to be interested in any other thing except eating and drinking vodka,” he told his wife.

“You’ll have to prove to them that knowledge is an essential commodity in such undertakings.”

“The question is, how can this be done effectively?”

“Look, my dear, the lead that the others have taken has nothing to do with an inborn superiority of the French, Dutch or British.”

“Quite right. I’m aware. The West is ahead because of the capacity of its people to learn and to use their brains. If we want to get out of our squalor, we’ll have to use our brains too, and work hard.”

“It’s about education, really,” she corroborated.

“But the Russian people must be forced to learn. To prove this, I’ll make an experiment which I hope will put a permanent imprint on the mentality of our people. For new ideas to get into our country, we’ll have to open it up to foreigners from the West. After we obtain a gateway on the Baltic, I intend to move our capital closer to the West. As a symbol of the opening, the new city will have to be accessible from the sea. As soon as I’ve driven away the primitive Karelians and taught the haughty Swedes a lesson or two, I’ll invite French and Italian architects. After all that, I’ll put in an order for some slaves from Africa. I have a mind to train them to the optimum and to let them do wonders after that.”

“What kind of wonders?”

“When the Russian people see that non-Russians and even slaves from Africa are capable of achievement, I’m sure I’ll not

have to preach constantly about the merits of education. They'll see it for themselves. How do you find my plan?" he asked his wife.

"Well, you're the Tsar. You have the power to do what you think is right. If you think this method will work, you can rest assured of my fullest support, you know. If there's nothing against the plan, don't waste time with it. We're already late enough," the Tsar's wife pressed on.

"Don't worry. I've already given instructions to my emissaries in Constantinople. They're busily looking around for slaves for us. As soon as they arrive, I'll select the best and have them given thorough instruction in whatever it takes to make productive citizens out of human beings. Discipline and the natural sciences will take priority."

In this resolve, the Tsar was supported by his wife Catarina, similarly enthused about the prospects for radical change in Russia.

In the first quarter of the year 1703, a group of slaves from Africa were brought to the court of Tsar Peter in the forbidden city of the Kremlin, inside Moscow. The potentate was away on a war mission against the Swedes and could not take possession of his new slaves until shortly before Christmas in 1704. Among the new arrivals was a bright nine-year-old chap called Ibrahim, who would immediately attract the Tsar's keen attention.

Ibrahim, allegedly born in Ethiopia of noble parentage, had been sold initially to Turkish buyers on a popular slave market in Cairo. These officials had brought him to Constantinople to serve in a harem. Completely unhappy with his fate, he sought to escape. When a good opportunity came, he allowed himself to be abducted by agents of the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, who promised him freedom. In the course of an undercover exercise, Ibrahim and his brother, accompanied by a few more slaves, were transferred to Russia.

Initially, just as in Constantinople, Ibrahim, already speaking Turkish, was destined to be the page of the Tsar's wife. When the Tsar saw him, however, he decided to use him for his resolved



purpose of transforming the Russian society. Ibrahim was of the type that the Tsar had been looking for. Even at his young age, his quick wit, intelligence, noble comportment and self-confidence impressed the Tsar right from the beginning.

“With people like him, I’m sure I can demonstrate to the Russian people that knowledge can do wonders,” he concluded.

The Tsar’s designs in Russia did not escape the attention of his good friends in Brunswick-Wolfenbützel. When the Tsar informed them in subsequent letters that he now had a wonderful, young adjutant from Africa with whom he was going to carry out his experimental project, the news kindled a lively interest in Wolfenbützel as well.

The same topic was intensively debated by Duke Anton Ulrich and his wife, Elizabeth Juliana von Holstein-Norburg, in their summer residence of Salzdahlum. In long letters, the two leaders exchanged views on the issue, with the Tsar extolling the exceptional qualities of the boy from Ethiopia. His wife Catarina’s letters to her German friends were equally full of praise for Ibrahim Hannibal.

“Our young man promises to have a bright future, and if there’s anything I can do to make it happen, I’ll do it,” wrote the Tsar’s wife.

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### **Arrival in Europe**

The Africaense Galleij arrived in the Frisian port of Texel, which served as a gateway to the interior of that country in the late summer of 1707.

The boys wondered immediately on arrival about the place they had come to because they were welcomed by myriads of insects and mosquitoes that literally attacked them on sight.

Also, the cold and strong winds blowing already announced the harder times to come. It rained in torrents. Back in Providentia

there had been constant talk of the cold in Europe, but neither Kwasi Adiaba nor Jacobus Eliza had imagined what it implied. Now confronted with the first forebodings of winter, they began to realise they had come to a country totally different from any they had known till now.

The early September weather was so cold that the boys refused to leave their warm bunks on the ship. Strictly speaking, it was not even the cold itself that was bothersome. It was the wind. It blew with a biting dryness that sank into their pores and made them shiver. That wind could cut through skin like a knife was a sensation they had never known till now. After they had washed and dressed in clean clothes, the Captain asked to see them. "Cold?" he asked on noticing that they were freezing. He began to smile.

"The real thing will come in about two months. This is nothing," he told them. But the Captain had been in the tropics often enough to know what the present climate meant to the boys. He ordered two native sailors from the Gold Coast, who worked on the ship, to fetch the poor boys warm clothes and shoes. Long before the ship docked in Texel, the seamen on board had become very busy. Sails were lowered and bound to the masts, huge ropes were made ready to hold the ship, ladders were hung alongside the ship for the passengers to alight.

"Wait a little bit," advised the Sergeant, when he noticed the impatience of the boys to finally see the Europe they had long waited to see.

"Why?" asked Amo.

"We have to wait on board until further notice. The people to welcome us are not yet in sight," informed the Sergeant.

"Why not?" Amo asked.

"First things first. Now's the time to unload the goods brought from the New World," the Sergeant replied curtly, his temper with the boy rising.

As usual, from the safe distance of their deck, the children followed the progress of work on the quay, fascinated by what the

ship could carry. Instead of plenty people, an unending stream of goods was now loaded off their ship. Then the Captain finally came into the picture. He greeted Herr Bodel and addressed the children directly.

“We’ll first take you to Amsterdam to get you used to the weather, the cold rain and the changed environment. After that, we’ll bring you to your final destination,” he informed them.

Outside the ship, another officer sent by the Captain of Africaense Galleij took Amo and Capiteyn by the hand and led them through the customs formalities. Soon they were out of the main gate and walking into the open. The officer, with Amo on the hand, accompanied the newly arrived leisurely out of the main building and towards a waiting coach.

Two young officials from the DWIC met them halfway. These two looked and walked like soldiers. They marched up briskly and shook hands, introducing themselves to the Sergeant and the officer from the ship. A stiff cold wind began to blow again, and the boys pulled their faces.

One of the men who met them was tall and elegant, the other rather short, dark haired and more like the types they had met in Surinam, Capiteyn noticed but said nothing.

One gaze told the new officers that the boys were still pretty badly dressed for the weather. The light cotton shirts and trousers given them were from Paramaribo and not the best stuff to suit the climate here.

“No wonder they are freezing. We’ll have to get them some fitting clothes before we do any other thing. I mean proper shoes and clothes from here.”

“We anticipated this so we’ve brought some clothing along. We’ll have them dress up right away,” said the Sergeant.

The children from the tropics were a scene to watch when they reappeared in their new outfits. They had never walked in footwear of any sort before and could hardly walk in their heavy new shoes.

“You’re looking magnificent, all of you,” remarked Mrs. Mareike

van Bentum, also a passenger from Surinam, patting each of the boys on the shoulder. “Your parents would be proud of you today if they were here to see how elegant you are now.”

Was it an honest opinion or was the woman only poking fun at them? How could they possibly look good in these funny clothes, the children wondered.

“For me,” began Amo when the adults around were not listening, “I know my parents would not be happy to see me like this. You don’t have any parents, so I guess it wouldn’t matter.”

“Don’t begin again to annoy me” Capiteyn growled.

“You know this is a fact, so no need to blow your top.”

»Welcome to the Netherlands,« said the taller of the two men to the officer accompanying the children.

»Did you have a nice voyage?«

»It was smooth sailing,« replied Sergeant Bodel. Then he turned to the children. »Welcome to Holland.»

“Thank you,” replied both boys in Dutch.

“Oh, you speak Dutch,” exclaimed the man with the somewhat darker complexion!

“Quite well,” replied the officer with some pride in his voice. “The bigger boy has been speaking Dutch for half his life already. The smaller one started learning during the voyage and I must say he’s learned tremendously fast. He already understands a great deal. I’m sure he’ll be totally fluent in a month or two. Quite an intelligent chap,” the officer remarked.

»I wish you all welcome and a nice stay. Happiness depends mostly upon oneself. With a bit of goodwill, things always work out,« said the elegant man, half to the newly arrived and half to himself.

After exchanging a few niceties, the tall officer excused himself and directed his attention to the Captain of the ship who had joined them in the meantime. The man opened a little leather bag he was carrying, took out a paper roll bound with a thin cord and presented it to the Captain.

“This is an important letter from the Company. Our instructions are to ask you to read the contents immediately and to take

prompt action.”

This said, the Captain reached into his pocket, took out a penknife and cut the cord to unroll the letter. He read it slowly, said nothing, and began to shake his head. Then turning to the boys, he began to speak.

“We’re taking you to a hostel to rest for two days here in Texel. Then you’ll join another coach for the final ride to Leyden, which will take you through Amsterdam, the most beautiful city in the world. You’ll stay in Leyden for many years and receive your education there.”

The children nodded, still shy of the many unknown faces poring at them and totally ignorant of their future.

If Paramaribo had been exciting, Amsterdam was simply beyond description. The city was gigantic! It spread out for miles on end. And it also felt unreal to walk properly on land again. In addition, it took some getting used to the different airs and smells of such a big place. Though tired from the long voyage, they did not want to miss the sights and sounds they were currently experiencing, riding in a coach to an unknown destination in a new city.

Rows and rows of big houses on broad streets lined with trees met them and swept past. Amsterdam was endless. Houses and streets seemed to grow out of water, only linked by hundreds of bridges. Was the city built in water? Boats, too, were everywhere. On the banks of the rivers meandering through the city stood high gabled, storeyed houses with tiled roofs. The sound of horses pulling the coach as they sped along on streets made of stones produced a peculiar clacking sound that pervaded the whole atmosphere and gave the boys a feeling of importance. Churches were everywhere, literally hundreds of them, with thin towers pointing high into the skies.

When they finally got to the town centre, the scene was indescribably exotic. Thousands of white people congregated at certain spots for whatever reason. It was both fascinating and terrifying. They had come to a country full of people belonging to a tribe totally different from what they were familiar with. All peo-

ple had pure white faces! And though they did not look quite normal to the boys, all seemed to be perfectly human. At close examination, the faces were not completely white. They were in all kinds of shades: from ash to yellow, from pink to scarlet. People's noses and ears were apparently too big for their heads, because it made them look threatening and ominous. The same was also true of their hair in many colours, which, when not kept in place by a hat or cap, looked like slipping off their skulls.

People were busily rushing from one place to another, some on foot, many on carts pulled by horses and many others on boats that moved in all directions. This was a city in turmoil. There was noise everywhere. The boys had heard a lot about The Netherlands before actually arriving here, but now everything was quite different. Speechless, they found Amsterdam a place with its own singular charm. Wherever they went, they discovered that they had come to a rather old city crammed with young and energetic people who in some unexplainable fashion looked well-fed, powerful, knowledgeable and dangerous.

For the first time in their lives, Amo and Capiteyn realised that they looked so different from all other people. They did not make out any more black persons in the masses of people they saw. Too impressed and awed were they by the spectacle that they did not understand what they were experiencing. They just sat in the cart and let the new world pass by, unable to put what was taking place into proper words.

The next day broke early and was much friendlier than the previous one. The sun came out shining intensely in a blue, blue sky. The African children started to take cognizance of their surroundings. In a way, it appeared they had returned to a place they knew from a previous life. Several of the place names already sounded familiar and now Capiteyn, who knew the alphabet, read the street signs with interest, as they treaded along. They found no words to really describe their feelings. Being the eldest, Jacobus Eliza was the first to loosen his tongue on their first outing.

"I'd always thought the city was so famous because it was new,

but it's not," he remarked while they were taking a stroll back to their hotel with their supervisor.

"Why did you think so?" asked Herr Bodel.

"Don't really know. I just thought it."

"Wrong again!" Amo said with a tease in his eyes.

He was wide awake now and observing everything with childlike eyes. He did not want to miss anything that could be important. On their third day in the Netherlands, they were picked up early in the morning for the journey to their final destination. After a quick breakfast, they were asked to get into a coach pulled by four strong horses and driven by a man who did not cease to shout instructions at the horses. The animals seemed to understand the strange language.

The new country they had come to was full of houses with big propellers in front of them. These were everywhere. Someone explained they were used for grinding corn, but it was still unclear how that functioned. They saw no corn anywhere around. Mysterious the mills looked, all the same. At times, their big wings turned around, as if driven by ghosts, only to be stopped abruptly by an invisible hand.

It was late in the evening when they arrived in Leyden. The boarding house of the school they were to attend was still on recess for three more days. They were therefore sent to a hostel and entrusted to an elderly, resolute lady.

Mevrouw Van Rijn, so she was called, ran the place. She received them warmly, spoke in a strange tongue to them, smiling all the time while running up and down to get them fixed up for the night. After about half an hour, she beckoned the tired but hungry boys to table and served them boiled cabbage and pork stew, after which they were given the chance to wash for the first time since Paramaribo.

"Better than the dog food on the ship," Capiteyn said at washing time, after gulping down a glass of water to push the sumptuous meal. That night they slept like logs in the house of Mevrouw Van Rijn.

Amo had turned six on the high seas that year without taking any conscious note of it. What he still knew was that his brother was three kundums older and that he was five kundums younger than Capiteyn. Now he was in Europe and ready to face life.

Leyden, their new place of residence, looked like a pleasant town to live in. The school Capiteyn and Amo were to attend was a sizeable institution run by the Dutch West India Company. It consisted of a group of several low buildings set within a large wooded park on the edge of a town populated by seemingly rich people.

The classrooms were in long flat buildings with equally long corridors running in front of them. The dormitories, a series of plain halls each with about 20 wooden beds and lockers, were grouped in three red-bricked two-storey houses. About 22 boys from all over the world learned at the school, among them nine from the Gold Coast.

The most prominent landmarks of this town were a university attended by many young students, a big brick church with a long spire that stood in the middle of town, and a little nature cabinet. Apart from these, there was nothing spectacular about the place. The landscape surrounding Leyden was as flat as a saucepan and farming seemed to be the main activity. Fields upon fields of wheat, beetroot, carrots, lettuce and what have you spread out into the distance. Everywhere farmers with horses were seen tilling the land. All this was part of a new experience.

Apart from Dutch language lessons, bible studies and arithmetics, the pupils could choose between learning how to garden, do masonry or carpentry work. Their teachers were kind but strict people who did not tolerate whatever they viewed to be nonsense. Such things like smoking, drinking and girls which were forbidden right from the beginning. All pupils at the school were told by the authorities that these activities were not allowed and would be severely punished on contravention.

At school, nobody paid much attention to the fact that the African boys had black skin. But whenever they walked to town, the Africans were a sensation. People would flock out of their houses



to look at them, speaking excitedly to each other, saying things that the boys could not quite catch, except words like 'zwart' or 'zwartie', followed by guffaws on all sides.

What was so funny?

They never found out. Nor did they want to. The answer could have been either interesting or devastating, so it was better not to ask exactly. How they wished they were invisible! Their skin colour, they realised, was a self-proclaiming declaration, pointing out the weakness of their current position in a world that was so different from the one they had left behind. There was nothing to be done to alleviate the embarrassment caused by constant gazing. They could neither deny themselves nor hide away from public view; it was difficult owning up to what they were. From now on, they knew their origin would accompany them until the time came for them to leave Europe again.

Except for the short stay in the fort while awaiting the voyage to Europe, except for the time spent with the white missionaries in Providentia and except for Seargent Bodel on the ship, Amo had had limited personal contact with white people. But during his last months on the Gold Coast, he had observed his white masters in Fort Santo Antonio closely. At that time, he had found their way of life questionable and strange.

Now that he lived in their country, he found them even stranger, but for opposite reasons. Most people they met now were very nice to them. Some even showed genuine interest in their welfare and wanted to know about their country.

So this was Europe!

Amo and his friends did not recover quickly from the fascination white people had for them. They often talked about it.

"I don't know who said they're white. Some have skin like the pigs we had on the ship. In fact some of the people I've seen are so pale that they look almost transparent," little Amo once remarked to Capiteyn.

"Yes, I know. I've also noticed that their veins light up blue or

green in the sun!”

“But what confuses me is the fact that it’s so difficult to make out men from women. Both of them wear long hair and earrings. Some of the women, for some unknown reason, don’t seem to know that they are women. Though they wear gowns and frocks like women, they have backsides like men.”

“You’ve noticed it, too? Most have flat buttocks with no cleavage in the middle, unlike the women at home.”

“Take ten people and you have ten different types of eyes, noses and hair. On their heads are strings of hair that hang down like threads,” remarked Amo to his pals.

“Black, brown, white, yellow, red and so many shades in between,” Capiteyn added.

“Yesterday the gardener told me the red-haired ones are witches, but I don’t believe it,” Amo said.

“Have you seen their eyes too?” asked another boy from Java, who was listening to the conversation.

“Yes. There are just as many eye colours as hair. You watch them properly. God! Those deep green eyes; like the woman on the ship to Texel, I’ve forgotten her name,” Amo continued.

“Oh, I know whom you mean. She almost drove me crazy with them. She looked like a mysterious cat we used to have in Kankan when I was a little child,” said Capiteyn.

“Puzzling indeed. Some people have deep blue eyes, like extra coloured, and some have light-blue eyes which look watery, as if they had a disease in them. I doubt sometimes, if they can really see with eyes like that, but there’s actually no doubt that they do. Unbelievable!”

Amo occasionally examined his own eyes in a mirror and thought the brown pupils suited his skin colour perfectly, which was not the case with the people he met here.

Mirrors had fascinated him right from the first day he saw one. It was something he had never known in his previous life in Africa and he thought it was incredibly magical. One could take a slab of glass and see his own soul facing him in it. In the inn in Amsterdam where they had spent the first nights after arrival, Amo

had discovered a mirror in the dormitory and had been dumb-founded by it. For days he had kept running back to look at himself whenever nobody was watching. Whenever he felt unobserved, he had posed in front of the mirror, grimacing like the speechless mangabey monkeys that roamed the forests of Evaluê.

October and November were apparently rainy season months in Europe, because all it did was rain. A cold rain that permeated everything: the buildings, the streets, the coaches and even the food. The cold penetrated the skin and went straight into the blood stream to chill it altogether. And when the temperature dropped, thinking about anything else became impossible. The body and the mind became numb. Though fire was made to heat rooms so that the cold would not kill people altogether, it refused to go away and lingered on in all the spaces not reached by fire. Sometimes the rains stopped, but the skies remained grey and stayed so for days. The feeling was as if the heavy sky was going to drop on the earth.

“D’you now believe that cold burns?”

“I don’t, but I now understand what the man meant.”

“You mean the cook in Providentia. He had not lied at all. The Pastor here too says that the sea freezes sometimes.”

“When did he tell you that?”

“I asked him a few days ago.”

“I’ll believe it when I hear it from his own mouth.”

“Why don’t you ever believe anything?”

“Because I don’t!” Amo said and turned away, ready to go for a round of chess.

Europe appeared strange to the boys in a way that was difficult to put in words. Amo was not sure about his own observations until Capiteyn relieved his mind one day with some remarks.

“Strange people,” he told Amo when they were strolling through the school park and saw a woman walking her dog.

“Why?”

“Animals seem to be more important to them than people.”

“Why?” Amo pressed on.

“Because in the fort in Kankan, I often saw white people bellow out harsh commands on workers and even stuff some of them into the big prison without a sentiment. Then they would turn around to pat their ugly, stinking dogs tenderly on the head.

“Dogs? Puagh!”

“Oh yes, they love dogs better than people. In the fort, they always kept huge, ferocious dogs and plenty of cats. They often played, walked about or fed them profusely with good food, but they didn’t mind us much.”

“Don’t you like animals at all?”

“A bit, but not too much. They’re animals, you know, not people.” Capiteyn related how he and his friends once kicked a dog belonging to the fort manager in Kankan.

“We kicked the poor thing every time we saw it. When nobody was looking, of course.”

“Aw, that was not right.”

“I know now, but at that time we thought we were right. It was an unusually timid dog with an ugly face. This stupid dog was fed with better food than we got. While we were served with unsugared rice water and coarse bread every morning, the scoundrel regularly sucked on delicious bones. I’ve not forgotten it. Can you understand that?”

“What?”

“People here are well mannered and much kinder than the cruel lot we had to deal with in Axim, Accra and Paramaribo,” Capiteyn said.

“Yes, compared with what Miezah may be facing in Surinam, I think we’ve been lucky so far,” Amo replied.

“I believe so, too.”

“But I wonder why?”

“Don’t be too grateful, though. The food here is simply terrible, and I don’t care what anybody else says!”

“Well, it bothers me too, but that’s nobody’s fault. They give us what they also eat themselves. It is a poor country with a bad climate, as you see. How can things grow when it rains incessantly

like it does?”

“What really bothers me is the stinking cheese that they serve with every damned meal.

“They seem to enjoy food that smells!” another boy from the Gold Coast joined in.

“Like what?”

“My problem is with their old fish, sprouts, fermented cabbage and especially the fish they serve raw with absolutely no pepper on it.

“Salted fish, pickled fish, raw fish, stinking fish, morning, noon and night. Sick of it all,” said Capiteyn

“Really awful,” seconded another. “Can you imagine? They don’t know anything about rice and groundnut stew, fufu, etuku, atcheke, fomfom, grilled fish and pepper sauces.”

“Sure. And they’ve never heard of maize, oranges, bananas, pineapples, melons, pears or guavas.

“What surprises me is that they even seem to enjoy the tasteless food they eat day in and day out,” replied another chap.

“Unbelievable, really. Sometimes they just go out into the fields and pluck leaves which they don’t even bother to cook before serving,” Jacobus continued.

“One of my friends told me once that white people eat grass. I had not believed it at the time. Now I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”

“Radish, cabbage and fish. No wonder that they have such terrible breath.”

“And teeth too. If only they would not always draw so close when talking to us. Eagh!”

“Don’t worry boys. It’s a question of one man’s poison being another man’s meat. I won’t be surprised, if we do not all soon end up enjoying what we now criticise, and also begin to stink from our mouths” said Capiteyn.

“Never,” replied Amo.

“Just wait and see.”

Sundays were special days in Leyden.

People in and around the town flocked to the nature cabinet on Sundays to look at conserved objects kept in vials and glasses. The townspeople seemed to be so proud of this that it was among the first places the boys were taken to after arrival. There, they saw a human skull conserved in some liquid for the first time in their lives. People said this was the skull of a famous man called Descartes. He had been so intelligent that the scientists of his day had wanted to know what was in his head. In addition, the boys also saw dried penises of strange animals, foetuses of unborn babies, strange creatures from other continents and a lot of other incredible stuff. Why all this was done could not be really explained.

On Sundays, too, the boys attended church services dressed in their best clothes and listened to unknown pastors preach the word of God. Initially they had understood little of what was said, but slowly they began to seize the gist of things. When church was finished and the big Sunday meal (stuffed rabbit cooked with dried beans and stripes of cabbage) had been eaten at lunchtime, it was customary to attend Sunday School in the afternoons. There, they learned about the Scriptures and were prepared for baptism.

God, as their Dutch superiors taught them, had created all human beings in His own image and likeness. If a person led a good life, he or she would go to Heaven. If he sinned, Hell was the punishment. Therefore, the ultimate aim of every good Christian was to do the will of God and spend the rest of eternity in Paradise.

Within weeks of their arrival in Leyden, Amo and Capiteyn made huge strides on all fronts. Their superiors in far away Providentia had done their job well, their current teachers said. By the time the cold season really set in, before their first Christmas, the chap who always insisted on being called Kwasi Adiaba Amo was already proficient in Dutch. He was a thoughtful, lively child who often pestered his teachers with questions upon questions to which he did not always get satisfactory answers.

“There’s one thing I don’t understand,” began Amo one afternoon

after Sunday School, when lying on his bed and pondering over those questions that frequently came to his mind.

“If everything they’re teaching us is true, why then do they put so many people, also created by God, into prison and maltreat so many others on the ships and on the plantations?”

Jacobus sat up immediately.

“Don’t say things like that,” he commanded. “The Scriptures say: Thou shalt not judge thy neighbour.”

“I’ve not judged anybody. I just asked a question.”

“Foolish question.”

“But you cannot deny that what they say and what they do is not the same. Or am I sinning again by saying this?”

“You are being silly now, but there’s some truth in what you’re saying. Ours is just to obey our superiors and leave the rest to God the Almighty.”

“But if they’re true Christians, are they also not obliged to be nice to everybody?”

“Yes. But why do you keep on like this? Have they not been good to you? They have brought you here to learn to do God’s work. What’s wrong with that?”

“You still haven’t answered my question.”

“First tell me why you’re concerned with others?”

“Because the Bible talks about it.”

“I think you’re too young to understand everything in the Bible.”

“Maybe. But if so, tell me the right age.”

When Capiteyn chose not to answer the bothersome lad with his troublesome questions, Amo ended the discussion right there.

There was something wrong with the whole message. He could not put his finger on it, but he definitely noticed the enormous difference between Axim and here.

In fact, everything here was done differently. Jacobus was right. The white people had treated them well till now, yes. But all the same they were strange. They did not cook outside their houses and preferred to stay indoors when they were not working. The adults mostly sat to drink some strange tasting stuff out of big mugs while they talked on end, sitting in dark rooms full of

smoke.

“I wonder what they do inside their houses all the time,” Amo remarked to Capiteyn once but got no satisfactory answer. He soon advised himself that it was better to simply accept life’s realities and settle down to normalcy in the Netherlands.

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### The Order

The letters pouring in from Russia did not fail to have their desired impact on their addressees in Wolfenbuttel. The praises heaped on Ibrahim by the Tsar and his wife greatly impressed Duke Anton Ulrich. So much so that he also resolved to press on for the privilege of also owning African slaves as soon as possible.

Ever since she was young, Duke Ulrich’s wife had wanted to lead a court life in style. Like her husband, she wanted their dukedom to gain more culture and more fame. Tiny Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel needed to assert itself in order to be ranked among the foremost in Europe, and if slaves were required for that, so be it.

“Use your good contacts in Holland to order me some slaves, dear,” she encouraged him. “I would like you to have a bigger retinue and form a new and bigger music corps consisting of elegantly dressed Moors. I think we will need about 150 of them. I’m sure we could put the majority to good use here and even sell some. Didn’t you say we have good contacts on the North African coast?”

“Sure. Our country still keeps a little colony in Arguin, Africa’s Northwest, and I don’t see why this shouldn’t be possible,” the Duke informed his wife.

This said, he sent a formal request to Emden for forwarding to the Dutch West India Company in Amsterdam. When no reply was forthcoming, Lady Juliana demanded that another letter be sent directly to Amsterdam with a special, more personal touch.



*Salzdahlum-Wolfenbittel, 14th of November 1706*

*Dear Sirs,*

*After learning of the impending arrival in Amsterdam of a ship carrying many Moors, and after putting in an order for 150, we now have the honour of ordering a boy and a girl for my dear wife, each being five or six years old. Please make sure that whichever people you supply, are in good bodily condition and have attractive faces. On arrival of the ship, kindly inform us about it immediately, so that we can prepare for their transfer to Wolfenbittel. Please regard this as a matter of priority.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Duke Anton Ulrich*

Not long afterwards, the DWIC wrote back a short letter acknowledging receipt and promising to do everything in its power to fulfil the big order.

Almost a year passed with no further action discernible from the Netherlands. Meantime, the Duke's second wife, Lady Elizabeth Juliane von Holstein Sonderburg, instrumental in getting the whole project underway, fell sick and died suddenly, before any concrete reply could arrive from Holland.

In memory of his late wife, the Duke pressed on with the plan to obtain slaves from Africa. The big disappointment now made him impatient about the whole thing, and his daughter-in-law, Sophia Amalia von Holstein-Gottorp, wife of Prince August Wilhelm, also constantly pressed him for the promised slaves.

"Don't you think there is something behind this long silence?" she asked one day when they came on visit. "Can you explain it? The Dutch keep carting slaves to America but claim they cannot send a boy and a girl to us."

"I think I know why these cheese-heads are behaving the way they do," the Duke replied. "They're doing this on purpose. Just

to anger Brandenburg-Prussia. Berlin tells me that the Dutch are still annoyed that Brandenburg has a colony adjacent to theirs on the Gold Coast. Ever since we landed there, they've tried their best to evict us from our locations on several occasions. But I know they'll not succeed. We have no mind to cede our possessions to them, and our forts there are too strong for them to overrun," the Duke told his daughter-in-law.

"You're well informed about our possessions in the world, so you must do something about this particular issue. I urgently need a young Moor to help me with my daily tasks. And don't forget, your older son needs a helping hand too. You promised to fetch him a slave long ago, but nothing has happened since then."

Of course, Lady Sophia Amalia did not want to admit fully that she badly wanted to have an elegantly dressed Moor in her entourage. Few of the wives of the surrounding dukedoms had an entourage studded with Africans and she wanted to excel among them. She dreamed of how she would dress up such a boy in a wig or turban and let him carry her parasol whenever she went out for walks on Sundays.

Duke Anton Ulrich respected this woman and would do almost anything to please her, so he took up the matter seriously.

"Be patient, my dear. I know what I'll do to keep these cowards of the seas on their toes. I'll write a nasty letter of protest to the Dutch Royal Family and send another one to the Prussian King to press for redress."

Anton Ulrich's letter to King Friedrich I entreated upon him to threaten the Netherlands with the destruction of Dutch property on the Gold Coast if his modest request for some child slaves was not satisfied.

The King of Brandenburg-Prussia was amused at such a bluff but sent a strongly worded message to Holland to remind them of the need for cooperation and cordial relations. No doubt, Holland was stronger and more experienced on the Gold Coast and actually had no reason to fear Prussian attacks there. But the Dutch did not want to spoil their friendly relations with the House of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, let alone go to war with Brandenburg-

Prussia on such a flimsy excuse. Therefore, the DWIC sent conciliatory replies to Berlin and Königsberg promising to honour the request in the near future.

In a friendly letter to Anton Ulrich, the Director of the DWIC assured the Duke that he would personally ensure that the request was fulfilled. The person the Director had in mind was to be sent from Holland. Immediately. And free of charge.

The Director remembered that the Africaense Galleij and other ships had arrived in Holland with some boys for training in pastoral work. Couldn't any of those be transferred to Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel before relations deteriorated beyond repair? The Director asked in a letter to the school in Leyden, where the boys were undergoing training.

The reply that came was encouraging. Yes, they had nine African boys who were preparing for a promising future career. All had completed their language courses and were currently attending school. Yes, they had one bright chap who was still too young to begin the full course but who could excellently fit the description sent by the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Yes, this young man could be transferred as soon as the weather was stable and warm enough for normal travel, probably at the beginning of spring of the same year.

The Dutch West India Company was relieved at the good news. The company Director quickly sent a friendly letter to Wolfenbüttel, expressing his great pleasure in being able to send to him a nice young man with a promising future. A person they hoped would suit the Duke's purposes.

The news of the coming arrival of a young slave boy was not enough to cover one big dilemma the Duke had. His beloved wife of blessed memory, who had wished dearly for the young Moor, was no more.

Though he still wanted to have a Moor among his servants, he felt he was too old to be involved in the upbringing of such a little chap. There would be nobody around to take proper care of the boy. True, Lady Sophia Amalia, his son's wife, was keen to have

him, but she lived in Blankenburg and would disappear with him into their cold mountain abode at best. He would only then see the poor boy from time to time. He wished he could find a better solution before the boy's expected arrival.

The Duke talked to his secretary about the problem.

"Just a moment, sir," the secretary said. "Had good old Bodel not lived on the Gold Coast? If I remember well, this retired officer had worked for years for the DWIC in Africa. I know him well. I'll talk to him about the possibility of taking charge of the boy and maintaining him until a better arrangement is found."

As it turned out, the person in question was nobody other than Seargent Bodel, the same man who had earlier on supervised the boys on the Africaense Galleij till arrival in Texel.

He and his wife, a message they sent said, would be more than honoured to live with the Duke's lively boy until such time that the Duke would be ready to receive him in his castle.

In Reval, where Tsar Peter and his wife traditionally spent their summer holidays, it did not take long for the Russian Court to discover the great intelligence their young slave possessed. Both of them had taken a liking to the young man and personally saw to his upbringing and welfare.

"One thing is still missing," the Tsar told his wife. "My people will find it hard to accept a heathen."

"So why don't you have him baptised?" asked the Tsar's wife.

"It had not been that clear to me till now."

"But now that it's clear, where's the problem?"

"There's no problem."

"He'll just have to start off with his catechism soon, so that baptism can take place without delay. Since he comes from an Islamic background, I'm sure it will take time till he has learned enough of our Christian ways to merit the baptism."

His wife Catarina, still enthusiastic about Ibrahim, continued sending extolling letters to both the Duke and the other members of his family in Brunswick-Wolfenbützel.

"Our new acquisition at court is making rapid progress. We'll get

him baptised soon in the Church of St. Paraskeva in Vilnius, former site of a Lithuanian pagan shrine. I hope you do not miss the symbolism. The Electress of Saxony agreed to be his godmother, but her presence here now is unlikely. We hear she is in the throes of a divorce from her husband, who has now turned Catholic. The next time we set out again for Western Europe, his Excellency the Emperor will bring his new man along. Then you'll see for yourselves what kind of a genius we have."

The headmaster of the school the African boys attended was in his office writing his first progress report to the DWIC headquarters one late afternoon, when a seemingly stressed messenger rushed in with a rolled letter addressed to him.

"Headquarters in Amsterdam sends me with this to you," the messenger said handing over the letter he had brought to the Director of the school.

"I'm supposed to return with the results immediately," he added.

"Well, let's see what that demand is," said the Director, taking the roll and cutting it open immediately.

*Urgent. In the name of our company. Blessings from the Almighty.*

*One of the boys from the Gold Coast, preferably the youngest of them all, goes to Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, health permitting. Select and hand him over to the messenger for further transport. This is urgent, because we do not want to have any diplomatic difficulties with Prussia or endanger our activities on the Guinea coast in any way.*

*By order*

For a moment he looked irritated. He went over the contents once more. Then, seizing the full implication, the Director's eyes pulled together a little. He looked somehow sad. Turning to the messenger, he began with a cracked voice:

"The instructions you brought say one of the boys from the Gold

Coast must be taken to Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel.”

The decision was too much for him to take alone, he figured.

Each one of the boys under his charge was dear to him, especially Amo, that bright chap who never stopped asking intelligent questions during classes.

As a good Calvinist, he was convinced that his job of making fine preachers out of the children of heathens was doing the will of God. All was not lost yet. He went into the house and sent for some of the senior members of staff.

“This is the message from Amsterdam,” he said, after reading the letter out loud to them. “How’re we to find out who should go,” he asked the staff members.

“The message doesn’t say how. It just says select,” replied one of the teachers.

“It’s difficult to judge, but we must be honest to ourselves. I suggest we write the names of all the eligible candidates on pieces of paper and select two. Then flip a coin to choose who should go.

“I think your suggestion is as good as any other, but why so complicated? All of the boys are healthy and the message says the youngest should go. If none of you has a better idea, I’d suggest we choose the two youngest and then flip the coin to give fate a chance, as suggested.

“The choice is actually between Jakobus Anseh and little Kwasi Amo,” reasoned another teacher.

The Director took out a coin from his pocket without saying a further word.

“Anseh is heads, Amo is tails. Head stays here, tail goes to Wolfenbuttel,” he declared.

“Let’s clear the question at once, because the messenger is waiting to take the chosen one back with him to Amsterdam. We have little time,” the Director pressed on. They tossed the coin.

“Tails! That means Amo goes to Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, Anseh remains in Holland,” he declared almost in a flourish. “Mijnheer van Geldern, please go to the dormitory to fetch him and help him pack his belongings.”

The children from the Gold Coast were learning to play chess with one of their supervisors in the dormitory when a messenger came running.

“There’s somebody at the door asking to see Amo.”

It was in the late afternoon of a cold day in March, the usual time for tea or coffee. The foreign students had just returned from school. It appeared unusual that anybody at all would want to see a boy of six after school. Amo knew nobody apart from his teachers and supervisors. He was startled but got up to meet whoever it was. When he got to the door, he was relieved to see it was the assistant headmaster, Mijnheer van Geldern. A man Amo had never seen before accompanied him.

“How are you,” the deputy asked with a smile, trying to hide his personal feelings. He, too, liked the intelligent little boy and hated to see him go, but that was another thing.

“Fine, sir.”

“So let’s now clear one important thing,” he said immediately, preferring to go straight to the point. “Er, there’s been a fundamental change in your program,” he began, his gaze a little shifted to the ground. “The Company asks me to inform you that only eight of you will remain in Leyden to continue with the course in religious studies. You, Amo, have been chosen to go to the court of an important personality. The Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel wants you to live in his court. He has promised to treat you well and we don’t doubt it, because he’s a civilised man. So go with this messenger to pack your things for Amsterdam today.”

Nobody could really tell how Amo took this news, because nothing in his face disclosed approval or sadness. He was probably too young to understand the depth and the far-reaching consequences of the message. Like a mouse mesmerised by an attacking snake, the little boy turned mute with naked fear. He did as told. And when he had packed his few belongings in a little box, he was ready to go with the strangers.

“Won’t you say farewell to the other boys?” asked the Deputy, his

face somewhat flush with embarrassment. Amo did not speak. On leaving, he just gave a short wave of the hand without smiling. Before any emotions could be seen, he was whisked into the waiting carriage and soon disappeared around a bend, the trees bordering the long alley leading from school to town swallowing him up like a mouse in the throat of a snake.

Only a day later, the terrified boy was taken on a further journey to a place he did not know. Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel was just a jumble of words in his ears. Two strange-looking officers picked him up from the hostel in Amsterdam, where they had taken him to spend the night. The strange people said they were going to take him on a long journey to a place where he was being expected with great joy.

“It’ll take us about ten to fifteen days by coach. You’ll like it there, I’m sure.”

The men had come heavily armed with pistols and lances. Amo heard the strangers say there was a real possibility of the group being attacked by armed robbers. The instructions given them were strict and concise. The boy was to be delivered safely into the hands of one Sergeant Christian Bodel in the city of Brunswick. This man had been commissioned by the Duke to take care of Amo until such time that the Duke would request his transfer to Wolfenbuttel.

“Why’re you carrying arms?” he asked one of the men in his childish way.

“The times are hard and there’re simply too many unemployed former soldiers walking about. They’re prepared to use force to get what they cannot get through legal work.”

They travelled through flat country with countless villages along the route. Large parts of the territory they passed through were not much different from what he knew on the Gold Coast: burnt villages, some completely abandoned and many in a wretched state. There was talk of thugs along the routes robbing whoever passed by; there was talk of marauding bands ransacking towns, on the lookout for booty. They saw plenty of beggars and maimed people along the routes they travelled. Many of the towns they



rode past had been ravaged in previous wars and had not been reconstructed ever since. They also crossed uncountable control posts. His supervisors constantly had to pay money to all kinds of people at frontiers whose limits he could not define but which everybody else seemed to know. Sometimes they passed through walled towns with strong gates before and behind them. Occasionally they saw people hanging dead on trees and on poles, for reasons he did not know.

“Criminals and thugs of all sorts still roam about the countryside, attacking travellers and robbing them of their goods,” he was told again and again.

The Thirty Years War was long over, but gainful employment was still rare, and large areas of the Northern European Plains had not yet recovered from the devastations of those war years. Fear gripped him constantly. Especially at night when it got so dark that absolutely nothing could be discerned.

The two emissaries charged with the boy’s safety were really concerned about him and did their best to protect him from any mishap. They treated him like a raw egg which could only fall once.

The boy would probably have worried less, if he had known that he was a special kind of freight. But how was he to know that his supervisors had strict instructions to bring him safely to his final destination? Whatever the reason could be, little Amo was pleasantly surprised to see that his white companions did everything to keep him comfortable and safe. He had never experienced white people so dedicated to the fate of a child like him. They would interrupt the journey several times a day to eat, drink and also to feed and rest the horses. Amo felt lonely and terribly bored with two men who were nice but hardly spoke with him.

“When are we going to arrive,” he would often ask. “Soon.” The two could not bear the question anymore.

“We’ve told you over and over again that it’s a long journey,” replied the shorter man, a bit irritated. “Damn it all, I say. Don’t you see the irony of the situation? We two big men risking our lives for a slave boy from Africa!” he often complained to his

friend who never reacted to the statement.

“It’ll take us another three days if all goes well. You have to be patient,” the taller man would comfort Amo, trying to calm him down. Saying this, he often reached into a bag and handed Amo a piece of cake he had bought at the last stop. They had found out en route that the little boy had a liking for cheesecakes and apple pies. On discovering that, the unknown men often treated him to these excellent breaks at almost every opportunity. Of course, their main aim being to keep him satisfied and quiet. After what seemed to Amo to be a never-ending trip, the coach bringing him from Holland at last arrived at the outskirts of a town.

“D’you see the spires in the distance? The coachman asked the supervisors after a long day’s ride.

“To the left of the hills in the far distance?”

“Yes. The whole scene looks like that of a diadem placed on an emerald pillow,” one of them replied.

“Well said. I’d never have put it that elegantly, but what you see’s the court of the famous Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel,” announced the coach driver.

“That will be the boy’s final destination. But for the moment, we have instructions to head for Brunswick to hand him over to someone who’ll be responsible for his upkeep until the Duke is ready to call for him,” announced one of the supervisors.

Saying this, the coach driver turned to his horses, gave a hoot and a crack of the whip to speed them up. Then, veering towards the north west, he spurred the animals on to their final destination with some impatience.

On a cloudy late afternoon in April 1708, just before sunset, the coach bringing the long awaited human gift from Holland slowly approached Brunswick, the big city ruled by the rich Duke who was supposed to be waiting for the slave boy.

Little Kwasi Adiaba Amo, flanked by his two strong supervisors, had finally arrived. The emissaries had done their utmost to keep him in the best possible condition and had done a good job at

that.

Though it was early springtime, the winds that cut through their eyes during most of the journey had been rather unfriendly. To keep off the occasional cold pockets that met them en route, they had often wrapped a heavy coat around the little boy for protection. They continued to do it until the end of the journey.

The Dukedom of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel was very small but one of the 365 odd states making up the German Nation. Some of the states were large and ruled by powerful provincial princes called 'Kurfurst' – elector. These electors were responsible for choosing the emperor from their midst, just like the College of Cardinals in Rome did when a Pope died.

Lucky for Kwasi Adiabah Amo, he arrived in Brunswick at a time when the Dukedom was being ruled by an enlightened man with a long name: Anton Ulrich von Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel.

Though the boy did not know it at the time, his master-to-be was a well-travelled, highly educated man interested in the fine arts. Apart from owning probably the most extensive private library in the universe, he had even written several books, including novels and plays of high quality and was counted among the best scholars of his age in the whole of Europe.

For some reason inexplicable to ordinary observers, this Duke and his elder brother had always had a special interest in Africans, an interest that had led them to import and employ Africans at their court for several generations previously: as valets, footmen, mascots, stable and farm hands, musicians and soldiers. This intense interest had also led the Duke to write plays dwelling on African themes. One of them, "Armena, a royal mistress from Ethiopia," was about what the title itself said, and another one, "The Roman Octavia," was indeed about the wife of Emperor Nero, an allegedly beautiful black woman from somewhere in Africa.

In addition, Duke Anton Ulrich was deeply interested in international affairs. In fact, he was earnestly bent on raising the pres-

tige of his relatively small dukedom to a centre of enlightenment in Europe. The Guelph dynasty, to which he belonged, had ruled this Dukedom from the Castle of Wolfenbuttel for centuries, and it was one of the most prestigious aristocratic families in Europe. Weeks before Amo's arrival, a letter from Tsar Peter informed the Duke that the Tsar's wonderful slave from Ethiopia had been baptised in the Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva in Wilna. The event had been publicly celebrated in the presence of such an illustrious personality as Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. His gracious wife, Christina-Eberhardine, favoured as godmother, had not attended for reasons already feared months before. Her marriage with the King of Poland had deteriorated to an extent that it was not possible for the two to travel together to Russia for the feast.

"As is Russian custom, the Tsar's name has been integrated into the boy's own and he's now called Abram Petrovich Hannibal. Is that not a good sign?" asked the Tsar's wife, Catarina, at the end of her letter.

= 7 =

### Another Goodbye

Christian Bodel, whom the boys had simply known as the man with the bushy moustache on the ship, was at the main coach station in Brunswick to welcome the Duke's slave. Amo recognised him immediately and was greatly relieved to know he was not going to stay with a complete stranger.

"The world is small, no? I didn't think we were going to see each other again so soon. Whatever happened to the other young man?" the Sergeant wanted to know.

"Jakobus is still at school in Leyden" replied Amo.

"I hope he's fine and doing well."

"Yes, sir."

"Nice to see that you're also fine and growing fast. I'm sure we'll have a pleasant time together. That is, if you do what is expected

of you,” began the Sergeant at their first meeting.

“I’ll do my best, sir. Always.”

“Then I don’t see any problem coming between us.”

“No, sir.”

“Well then, welcome to Brunswick.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“So then, let’s go home to meet my wife and child.”

Thanking the guards who had delivered the child safely, he said farewell, took hold of the boy’s hand and led him out of the station.

“I hope you know why you’re here,” the Sergeant began on the way home.

“No, sir. All I know is, a rich king wants me to live with him.”

“Yes, that’s perfectly true, but this will come later. Meanwhile, we will stay together here in my house until the Duke calls for you,” he informed Amo.

“Yes, sir.”

Sergeant Bodel lived in a big house with many rooms. He had a child, a boy of ten called Wolfgang, who soon became a play-mate and a good friend of Amo.

Things were fine, but Amo often thought of his parents and missed them terribly in the new house, even though the couple did everything in their might to make him feel at home. Within weeks of his arrival, he was already repeating whatever was told him in German like a parrot.

“Fenchel, zum Abendessen, Pferdekoppel, Waldhaus ...”

Everyday he and Wolfgang played a game called “Was ist das,”

Amo would point to any object of his fancy and ask: “Was ist das?” Whoever was around would then supply the name of the object in question. Amo would then repeat it several times until he was sure it was stamped on his memory. This way, he added several words to his repertoire everyday and kept asking questions upon questions, often getting on the nerves of the adults around.

Not long after his arrival from Africa, Master Bodel fell sick with a strange disease nobody could identify. The doctor called to help left his bedside with a strange look on his face, unable to give any firm diagnosis.

Within days, the man's head began to swell out of all proportion. Then he began to bleed out of his nose and mouth. Ten days after it all began, the kind but strict man died after screaming for about two hours in great pain. Young Amo could witness the great distress the family was going through and feared much for what would happen to him now.

What was to become of the Duke's young slave became the biggest problem for Frau Bodel, who was not rich. She did not know what to do. She decided it was time to inform the Duke on Amo's behalf about the recent developments in a letter.

The Duke's kind reply came as a big relief. He regretted the Sergeant's death and had in the meantime found a solution to the problem of the boy's upkeep. Therefore, he invited the widow to bring the boy to his castle at an appointed date.

**= 8 =**

### **Acquaintance with Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel**

April 1708.

The two-span coach in which Amo, Frau Bodel and an armed guard had travelled from Brunswick was met at the main gate of the Castle of Wolfenbuttel by a group of servants waiting impatiently to welcome Amo and his former master's wife for a good part of the day. With the boy's credentials quickly established, Frau Bodel handed over two letters to the Chief Butler for the Duke's attention. One was a copy of the letter Frau Bodel had addressed to the Duke on the boy's behalf, the second was the original letter of introduction from the DWIC.

The Duke, the second letter urged, was to consider the little black boy as a gift of the DWIC and a token of the goodwill still existing

between the House of Orange and the Dukedom of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel. Further, this gesture was to be understood as an initial symbol heralding the good things still to come. The actual business of supplying about 150 more Negroes would follow as soon as the difficult conditions in Africa were overcome and easier access were possible, the letter said.

A young maidservant, hardly sixteen, met them at the castle gate. She immediately took Amo by the hand, smiled gently at him and asked him to say goodbye to Frau Bodel, who had made it a point to accompany him to Wolfenbuttel.

“Come along,” she said firmly, quickly whisking the boy through the heavy castle gates and immediately disappearing into a maze of winding staircases, past dark corridors with padded floors, unlit halls and cold rooms.

It was a huge place!

With rooms filled with musty air and strange scents. Amo wondered where he was being taken to. He kept looking around him with furtive, bright eyes. Along the corridors were pictures of dead people hanging on the dark walls. They seemed to be looking straight at him, even breathing heavily over his head. Fear was the only thing he could think of. The young maidservant, holding firmly onto his right hand, more or less pulled him into a big kitchen where coarse bread, a hot cheese soup with pieces of ground grain and chopped pork sausages were waiting for him. He was placed behind a big table and asked to eat.

Hungry as he was, he had had his last meal in the house of the late Herr Bodel the evening before, he hesitated at first but began to munch properly after a few words of encouragement. He ate hastily. Though he found the food unfamiliar, he did not stop stuffing his belly until the plate was empty. The maidservant watched on attentively while he ate, saying nothing but smiling every now and then. After he had finished, she asked the boy to drink, took his hand and led him through more long corridors and over several floors to another wing of the castle. They finally entered a big room with a low ceiling and with nobody else in it. A

huge bed with several pillows was the only thing that caught the boy's attention.

"This is your room for the night," the young maid announced in German, without asking if the boy understood or not. He did. The language spoken here and in Herr Bodel's house was similar to the one he had known in Leyden, though it sounded quite peculiar. "I'll take you to greet our honourable Duke soon. Then everything else will fall into place," she announced with a gracious smile. Not knowing what else to do, the maid asked him to undress, after which she tucked him into the cold, cold bed.

The boy was mightily frightened!

In his whole life he had never slept alone, and the room he was in now was simply cavernous and sombre. He felt like crying out loud but was too afraid to protest or to even talk. Amo sat motionless on the bed with his sad brown eyes cast down.

"Good night," the young maid said, blowing out the oil lamp and opening the door to go out. Before closing it behind her, she realised how hard it must be for him and came back to put her hand on his forehead. "My room is just beside yours, so don't worry," she tried to reassure him. "Should anything be the matter, just call out loud or run to my door which is the one to the left of you. My name is Katharina." Then she closed the door softly behind her and was gone.

Everything became still. One could have heard a pin fall. Fright seized the little boy. Anything could happen now. Ghosts and evil spirits could attack him, as well as the many witches who roamed throughout the world every night. He began to sob quietly into the big pillows on the bed. Though he was extremely tired, Amo could not sleep. The bed was oversized, he almost got lost in it. Though it was the most comfortable one he had ever slept in, he did not find the means to appreciate it now.

That night, Amo continued to be frightened and worried. He still did not know what was going on. He could be killed and presented as an offer to the gods here. True, he had been told a rich



king was going to take care of him, but who knew if this was true? And if yes, why and for what purpose did a king need him? A lot of the white people he had seen before were really cruel and nasty people. Who knew what they were now going to pull out of their sleeves?

Memories were still fresh. The echo of wailing slaves in the steep dungeons of the ship that brought him out of Africa reverberated once again in his ears. The ship's journey itself, the atrocities he had witnessed on the slave markets in Surinam, the loss of his brother, the wicked scenes he had observed on his transfer to Germany, the hard life in the house of Herr Bodel. Everything passed before his heavy, tired eyes like a sequence of unsettling dreams. He burst into tears and began to weep quietly into the pillows over and over again. Sometime into the night he fell into deep slumber and slept like a log, dreaming intensively of home. In his dreams, he saw his mother sitting on a bench, talking about his grandmother Akosua Nsowah. Mama Bosoma was dressed all in white and looking radiant.

"Your grandmother," she told Amo in the dream, "was a strong-willed woman who cherished her independence and defended her household like a cat. She never involved herself in other people's affairs, but once provoked, she would raise heaven and earth to defend herself. We still miss her dearly. Nobody in the family has forgotten how she fasted for days and mourned my dead father throughout the 35 good years she survived him. She died with a smile on her lips at the proud age of 88 kundums, happy to finally join her beloved husband. One does not often meet such women these days," she had concluded in the dream. This said, she broke into tears and began to weep bitterly. In this dream, Amo took his mother in his arms and comforted her, telling her not to weep.

When he woke up the next morning with thickened eyes, he did not know where he was. Providentia? Leyden? Axim? His confused gaze fell on the drawing of a man in heavy clothes hanging opposite his bed. He began to sob again, waiting for something to happen. It took him some time to realise that the encounter

with his mother had been just a dream.

He sat up gazing at the ceiling for a long time, until his door slowly opened. A young woman he had not seen the day before appeared in the door bringing him breakfast. Not knowing whether his hour had struck, he pulled in his head, rolled to the corner of the bed and waited with his big, bright eyes.

“No cause for alarm, young man,” the strange young woman assured him. She had noticed his apprehension and tried to put him at ease. “I’ve brought you breakfast. Fresh buttered bread and gruel. Eat it so that you’ll become strong and healthy,” she encouraged.

Like the evening before, she too pulled a chair and took position opposite him, watching with dancing eyes. She kept smiling to reassure him every now and then that all was fine. Amo ate slowly but well. And when he had eaten, she quickly removed the tray and asked him to dress up in a pile of clothes she had also brought along: a white, long-sleeved shirt, a brown woollen vest, long pantaloons, socks and heavy shoes.

“You look marvellous,” she said with raised eyebrows, “come along with me. We’re now going to the Duke’s wing to greet him. Our kind Duke is eager to see you, you know.” The boy nodded in silence, allowing himself to be gently pulled along.

At the main entrance to the Duke’s chambers, the maid was stopped by a black man who stood in front of a closed gate. After talking to the man in subdued tones for a little while, she handed the boy over to him and waved. The black man was very tall and looked strong. Amo looked up into his face and was immediately impressed by the bulging brown eyes that looked out of a broad face. Saying nothing, the strange man nodded, turned halfway to open a heavy, two-winged gate, took the boy’s hand and marched him over many flights of stairs to a dimly lit grand parlour. Still saying nothing, he knocked heavily on one of the walls in the room, left him there and carefully closed the door behind him. The room was cold, had big embroidered chairs and a carpet with intricate designs.

Before the boy could take in the scene properly, a door he had not noticed opened. There stood another huge man in fine robes who gently smiled and beckoned him to come closer. Behind the big man in robes stood a finely dressed woman with a benevolent smile. The boy stared in front of him and did not dare to move. After a short while, the man came to take his hand and led him around a corner into yet another big hall with carpeted walls and more pictures of dead people.

“Here comes our little guest from Africa,” he spoke out loudly to the woman behind him.

“What’s your name,” the man asked in a clear voice in German.

“Kwasi Adiaba Amo.”

“From which part of Africa?”

“Axim on the Gold Coast.”

“Do they really have gold there?”

“Yes, my father is a goldsmith. He has plenty of gold.”

“How old are you?”

“Seven. My mother says I was born on a Sunday, in the third moon phase of the second month of rains. She says it was raining when I was born.”

“Good God! The chap already understands our language!” exclaimed the Duke, apparently speaking to someone in another room.

“I’m coming, wait a little,” a male voice came ringing back. But the Duke was too curious to wait.

“Where in the name of the Lord, did you learn our language?”

“At first it was Dutch on the big ship. Between Rio Muni and Surinam. Then from Surinam till Amsterdam and Leyden. I’ve stayed in the house of Herr Bodel in Brunswick till now. That is where I began to learn his language.”

The Duke shook his head in disbelief. His eldest son August Wilhelm and daughter-in-law had joined him in the meantime and the three stood looking at each other in amazement.

“D’you believe it? The boy speaks perfect Dutch and a good deal of German. After only six months in our land,” said the Duke to the finely dressed woman in total surprise.

“Oh my God, does he!” she exclaimed, taking the boy’s hand. “He’s so small and so sweet. Exactly what I’d dearly longed for.” The Duke nodded in approval and turned back speaking loudly to yet another person the boy could not see.

“Ludwig Rudolf! Come on quickly,” he boomed.

“Come to meet our new arrival from Africa.”

A door to the side opened. In came a man dressed in an elaborately embroidered blue morning coat reaching to his ankles. He had a friendly face.

“Ludwig Rudolf, my second son,” said the Duke to Amo, while pointing to the fourth person who had just arrived. Then addressing his two sons, he began to speak in mild tones.

“This is the young man long promised us by the Dutch traders. He’s about seven years old, if I understand him right. He’ll live with us from now on. Forever, I hope. I entrust him into your hands. Let good care be taken of him, as arranged, until he’s big enough to work with us.”

Ludwig Rudolf, the younger of the Princes, was already a man of 35 and rather experienced in the ways of the world. He had already gone to war, participating in a campaign against the French, during which he had been taken prisoner. Not only that, the Prince had met black people before on his several travels.

“Welcome!”

The three unequal partners left the Duke’s living room hand in hand. Communication was absolutely no problem, since both Princes spoke fluent Dutch.

“Where should the young man sleep,” Ludwig Rudolf asked his sister-in-law in the evening of Amo’s second day in Wolfenbuttel.

“His room’s in the servants’ wing, in the attic, where everybody else sleeps.”

“Isn’t he too small to sleep among all the stinking rogues lodging there?”

“That shouldn’t be a problem. I can put him in another room and ask any of the bigger chaps to keep him company at night.”

“What about if he joins me in Blankenburg?” asked Prince Ludwig

Rudolf. My girls would love to have him around. And as you know, there's enough room there for him."

"No," said Prince August Wilhelm, I think he should stay right here for the time being. I have a room in my new abode right next door for him."

"Er, I think it's too early to take him anywhere," said the Duke.

"But before you start a fight on who should keep him, I'll let the poor thing sleep in my own chambers until he gets used to his present surroundings. Then every other decision can follow."

Then, turning to his younger son, he said: "Of course, you can pick him up every now and then for a visit to Blankenburg. But that should wait till a bit later. We'll watch to see what happens in the coming days and weeks. But don't forget. He's mine in the first place. He'll become yours completely when he grows up."

August Wilhelm and his younger brother thought their father was right and quickly agreed to the arrangement.

"I've no mind to challenge you on that, sir," Ludwig Rudolf said, trying to keep his father's good humour. With no protests coming, instructions were given for a second bed to be installed in the chambers of the old Duke.

The little boy was relieved and grateful upon hearing of the new arrangement. He abhorred being alone in rooms. Ghosts were everywhere and not all of them were good. What if he were attacked at night by an evil spirit? For fear that it could happen by just thinking about it, he quickly discarded the thought.

Before breaking up the audience, Ludwig Rudolf's wife, Lady Christina Luise von Oettingen, took the black boy's hand and smiled reassuringly.

"Don't worry, son, you're not alone. There are a lot of playmates around here, and we also have several young daughters who are eager to meet and play with you. You'll certainly feel at home with all of them soon."

Amo found out right the next day that he was truly not the only child or black-skinned person living in the precincts of the castle. Already living there were some adult slaves who were just as black as he was. The eldest of them, Rudolf Augustus Moor, an

African from a country nobody knew of, had been living in Wolfenbuttel as long as anybody could remember. He was married with a black woman, Juliana Rosina, also employed at the Castle. The couple had had many children, but none had survived beyond the first decade, Amo was told.

A younger dark-skinned man, also called Rudolf Augustus Malabar, was curiously different. He had strange curly hair and a skin colour that was neither black nor white. As he soon learned, this man was from a far-away country called Malabar. He was married and had a pretty, lively daughter, Sophie Henriette, almost Amo's age. Both black men had served the Duke's family for decades. Amo learned that the two had been purchased by the Duke's elder brother and co-regent, Rudolf Augustus, which explained why they bore identical first names. Kind Duke Anton Ulrich had adopted them on his brother's death.

Kwasi Adiaba Amo could only be described as a lucky boy. He quickly found a playmate in Sophie Henriette, Rudolf Malabar's daughter. After getting introduced to each other, Sophie insisted on showing him around the court immediately. She was smart, talkative and spoke impeccable German, to the boy's great admiration.

Another happy instance was the presence of the Duke's three granddaughters, who were now putting up in the nearby residence of Salzdahlum, Elizabeth Christina, Charlotte Christina and Antoinette Amalia. Amo was told they were all more than eager to meet him. They had never had a brother and had impatiently waited for the arrival of their new black playmate.

For another profane reason, Amo had indeed come to the castle at a very opportune time. Preparations towards a birthday celebration were in full swing. The Duke's youngest granddaughter, Antoinette Amalia, Amalie for short, was turning eleven on the 19th of April. The entire ruling clan had turned up at Wolfenbuttel for the occasion, and the whole castle was bristling with activity, in preparation for the feast.

Right the next day, Amo was taken to Salzdahlum by coach. It lay

just to the north and belonged to his new master, too. Assembled there were the other members of the Duke's big family consisting of the Princes, their wives and children. Equally living and working there was a slave maid called Johanna, a Creole woman. She had a substantial amount of white blood in her veins, even though her negroid features left nobody in doubt about her racial heritage. Johanna had two pretty young girls: Juliana, the bigger one, must have been of Amo's age, Johanna-Frederike was a little child just learning to speak.

As expected, all the girls – three princesses, a slave maid and her daughters – took to Amo instantly. The Princesses were particularly enthusiastic. There being no boys around, they promptly integrated him into the preparations for the celebrations ahead. Despite his not quite perfect German, Amo was asked to participate in acting a play.

Soon he was miming characters and correctly repeating sentences in German, a language he was not yet quite fluent in. The following days were filled with the learning and rehearsal of plays, songs, concerts; the entire court was full of activity, every face he looked into was new and fascinating. Strangely, he found everybody seemed to have a lot of interest in his welfare.

Tall and elegant Elizabeth Christina became his favourite at once. She was already fifteen and getting ready to marry King Charles of Spain. She was very happy about this and often spoke of her impending wedding right after their introduction to each other.

Quiet Charlotte Christina, the next in line, said she was almost 13, quickly adding with pride that she was promised already to Karl XII, King of Sweden.

Resolute Antoinette Amalia, the third girl, was turning eleven. She did not have a suitor yet but knew she was destined to marry one of her cousins, an eligible prince, who could one day become the reigning duke.

Even though it was not quite clear when exactly Amo was born, the Duchess ordered his date of birth to be also fixed on Amalie's birthday. This date was found to be quite close to reality and just

as appropriate as any other.

“There must be justice to the poor boy,” the Duchess insisted.

“He has to have a birthday like every one among us here,” she explained.

The happy birthday celebrations over, Elisabeth Christine stayed on in Salzdahlum to train to become a Catholic, and to learn the Spanish language. The black slave boy and the future Queen of Spain, the most unequal pair that anybody could think of, became inseparable. They would be seen not only eating, playing and singing together, but also vying with each other for the approval and love of their friends, parents and superiors.

Soon the cold winds disappeared. The already pleasant spring made it possible to stay outdoors for longer periods. Amo and the three young ladies took the opportunity to frolic, climbing trees, catching butterflies, identifying bird sounds and playing with the dogs at court. This cordial relationship continued until the time soon came for the eldest of the ladies to depart for Spain.

Not long after her departure, the remaining princesses prepared to return home to their parents. They told Amo they lived in Blankenburg Castle, supposedly somewhere in the Harz Mountains, a little to the south-east of Wolfenbittel. Hearing of the departure plans, Amo insisted on being with the girls and made so much noise about it that he was allowed to accompany his new friends to Blankenburg Castle.

**= 9 =**

### **The Noble Slave**

The Castle of Wolfenbittel was an enormous three-storeyed, four-winged complex with a tall tower in its middle. Located at the southern edge of the estate, the imposing edifice was surrounded by a moat fed by a canal cut to connect the court to nearby River Oka and to the River Elbe to the east.

To its eastern wing, across the open courtyard, were the library



building and the House of Armaments. The main house was flanked on the left by the visitors' wing containing guest rooms and a banquet hall. To the right was the last building with the workshops and tool rooms. Behind it were two sheds in which domestic animals were kept.

Each of the buildings had a garden in front of it and in summer, it was a pleasure to watch the sea of flowers sway in the breeze. The gardens were exceptionally beautiful, Amo found.

It did not escape his attention that life at Wolfenbuttel was lived in hierarchical lines. There was the privileged clique consisting of the Duke himself, his family and all their relatives. It was a big group, which fully enjoyed all of its rights and a life full of comfort. Then there was a large number of servants that did everything to keep life going at court. This class of people was also hierarchical. Everybody in it seemed to know his or her place in the order of things. There were soldiers, pages, cooks, butchers, gardeners, bakers, farm hands, musicians, lackeys, any many more. These were free men, paid monthly stipends for the work they did. But with nowhere else to go if separated from the court, they did not exercise their theoretical freedom.

The big pool of bonded workers living at court until death formed the largest group of workers. This group led a life full of drudgery. Their remuneration was only in kind: food, firewood or coal for heating and bales of material for sewing coarse clothes that reflected their social standing. In all, the class of servants and the class of aristocrats had little in common. But both sides lived in close proximity and depended on each other.

The only person who did not seem to know his rightful place in the stratified life at court was Kwasi Adiaba Amo, the son of free men from the Gold Coast. Slave, servant, noble. What was he? He was too young to care, and did whatever he wanted. Whenever opportune, he drifted to the privileged side to enjoy freedoms and comforts the other workers could not dream of. He was allowed to try his hands at sculpting, he learned how to play the flute and even took riding lessons.

At other times he slipped to the servants' side and insisted on

participating in chores like feeding the pigs, milking the cows, helping to prune the fruit trees or cleaning the long corridors together with Johanna and Juliana.

What most impressed the young newcomer right from the beginning was the fact that his master, the Duke, was fabulously rich, though he did not work. Everything around the whole town belonged to him. Not only all the houses and all the land; he also had plenty of good food, horses, guns, pets of various kinds and gorgeous clothes. Once, when Amo was strolling together with Prince August Wilhelm in the park adjacent to the palace, Amo surprised him with questions the Prince had not expected.

“Where did your parents get so much money from?”

The question took the Prince a bit unawares. Recovering from his surprise, he laughed out loud, amused at the innocent chap. He had asked a good question. Yes, where did all the affluence come from?

“If you really want to know, then listen carefully,” the Prince began, taking care to frame his sentences in simple, understandable language.

“Yes.”

“The income of our family comes primarily from the sprawling estate that we inherited from our ancestors. Part of the land is covered with forests full of game and valuable trees. Another part is land that is cultivated to produce income. The cultivated land is divided into many sections. We have planted one section with fruit trees, among them apple, cherry, pear and plum. Another section is farmland containing plots of wheat, beetroot, rye, barley and hops for making bread and brewing beer, the only good thing that we can drink even at fasting time. Still another section is a garden filled with food crops like cabbage, lettuce, radish, onions and whatever is required on a daily basis. In addition, there is an animal husbandry section with horses, poultry, cattle, sheep and pigs.”

“It’s plenty of work.”

“I’m not finished yet. An adjoining slaughterhouse is where the meat is processed into sausages, ham and the like. Then comes

the dairy section where butter, assorted cheeses and other milk products like yoghurt and sour cream are made. Far more than 100 workers are involved in keeping the court running.”

“100 people!”

“Far more than that. They alone populate the big, three-storied building with the main gate to the court. Some of the workers tend the stables, some are ordinary farm hands, and some are only employed as servants and lackeys. The work of the latter is indoors and those who work indoors are considered the lucky ones. So you see, money comes from hard work and a virtuous life. God always rewards those who lead good lives.”

“I’ll also work hard and lead a virtuous life. Then I’ll be rich too.”

“I’m sure about it. If you really do work hard. It’s a bit more complicated than that, but you’ll understand it better when you grow older.”

When they were about to separate that day, the Prince took the boy’s hand gently.

“By the way, young man. From now on you’ll be called Anton. It’s the name of our kind father, the Duke, and I’m sure it’s easier than the name you brought.”

“Anton?” he asked, surprised. “Anton Kwasi Adiaba Amo,” he repeated.

“No, simply Anton Amo,” the Prince suggested, almost holding his breath, not sure of the boy’s reaction.

“Anton Amo,” the boy repeated. “From now on I’m Anton Amo.”

“Alright?”

“Alright!”

...

# Epilogue

Any person travelling between Accra and Cape Coast will invariably pass by Shama. If going to Shama itself, all one has to do is to turn right at Shama-Junction or ask the bus driver to stop there. After that, there are only six more kilometres to go.

Fort São Sebastião and the tomb of Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo are both conspicuously present in Shama. His grave is at the foot of the fort, to the right, just before climbing the flight of stairs to the main gate.

The remains of this great African were brought to the present spot in 1927, when the sea threatened to wash away the old Dutch cemetery. Every now and then, somebody throws a plastic flower on the tomb. It also happens that a few of the tourists that visit the fort stop to read the inscriptions on the unassuming tomb.

It can be safely said that very few of the passers-by know who Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo really was. Above all, few people of Shama are conversant with the biography of this remarkable person. He was not a native of the place. And here again, one can legitimately ask, if that can be expected of a community which is largely left to itself to find answers to today's pressing problems? Left now is a little controversy that is becoming more acrid as Dr. Amo's reputation becomes better known. Prisi or Axim? Which of them is the real home town of Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo? Both places have legitimate claims to Dr. Amo's heritage and continue to fight for the transfer of his remains for a fitting burial site. As things go in Ghana, this problem will probably never be solved. And as long as this state of affairs remains, Dr. Amo's grave will remain where it is. Not a bad prospect for a man who never really found his peace on earth.

Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo was a real person. He was born near Axim in what is now Ghana. The circumstances of his arrival in Europe are controversial. One legend

says he was presented as a “gift” to the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel by the Dutch West India Company. Another says he was taken as a personal slave to the Region of Brunswick by a North German soldier, who died shortly after arrival.

What is certain is that he spent his early life at the court of the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel and later in other German states, such as Brandenburg-Prussia and Saxony, at the said time and in the places described. Undisputed is also the fact that he studied philosophy and law in the mentioned cities, was mentored by the named lecturers, wrote on the quoted subjects, acquired a doctorate degree, lectured at the venues stated and finally returned to the Gold Coast to live for many more years around the time stated.

Though parallel to him another African, Abram Petrovich Hannibal, also reached great heights of achievement in Russia, Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo is known to have been the very first African ever to go through such an academic biography of excellence. In the same measure, Nana Yankey of Pokesu, Jan Konneh of Prisi and Kaku Akaa of Jomoro were all real people who did what have been attributed to them. King Yankey paid an official visit to Berlin, Jan Konneh was a constant headache to the Dutch and Kaku Akaa was notorious for his brutality. Lastly, and though modern Germany (formal successor to erstwhile Prussia), does not like to admit it openly, Brandenburg-Prussia did indeed participate in the slave trade, even if at a comparatively subordinate volume, and constructed forts Gross-Friedrichsburg, Dorothea, Sophie-Luise and Takarary to promote the human trade. Traces of these edifices are still extant in the Western Region of Ghana. For want of accurate details on the private life of our hero, the story, as presented here, is completely fictitious, especially the things put into the mouths of all characters. Nevertheless, the novel is closely related to the real life of Dr. A.W. Amo.

*The stream crosses the path,  
And the path crosses the stream:  
Which of them is the elder?  
Did we not cut a path to go and meet the stream?  
The stream had its beginning long long ago,  
The stream had its beginning in the Creator:  
He created things,  
Pure pure Tano ...*

Akan drum language

## List of Twi words used

- Abampruwa – a box for keeping gold  
 Aborofo – white people  
 Abramo – a series of gold weights  
 Abusuapanyin – head of the clan or family  
 Adae – memorial day in Asante  
 Adonten – vanguard of an Asante army  
 Aduana – one of the seven clans of the Akans  
 Ahumantan (or Harmattan) – dry season with bone; dry winds reaching West Africa  
 from the Sahara Desert between November and March  
 Akora – old man  
 Akpeteshie – local gin distilled from palm wine  
 Akyeke – steamed maize meal  
 Amamre – tradition  
 Amanee – a ritual account of past events on returning from a journey  
 Apemadaka – a treasure box for keeping jewellery  
 Asafo – a military organisation that traditionally trained young men to police a community and fight in case of war  
 Bonini – childless person (said especially of women)  
 Dudo – a herbal concoction drunk to combat sickness  
 Durbar – a royal welcome to honour guests  
 Egya – Father; respectful title for elderly people  
 Famfa – bellows used by smiths to keep fire going  
 Fufu – pounded cassava and plantain. Popular food in Ghana  
 Kaba – upper part of a woman's attire  
 Kokoram – cancer  
 Krontihene – Commander – in – Chief of an Asante army  
 Nana – a title for Kings (also used for the elderly)  
 Nananom – plural of Nana; often used for the ancestors  
 Nsania – scales for weighing gold dust  
 Nyevele – God of the sea  
 Odikro – Head of village  
 Okomfo – Chief Priest  
 Okyeame – a King's spokesman  
 Otumfuo – "The Powerful", title of the King of Asante  
 Owura – Respectful title akin to Mr.  
 Saawa – spoon for collecting gold dust  
 Sanaa – an embroidered leather bag for keeping or carrying gold  
 Sepo – a short knife formerly used by executioners  
 Sikadwa – the Golden Stool of the Asantes  
 Tãm – a thin piece of loincloth worn by women.

## The times of Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo

- 1681 – First visit of Brandenburgers to the Gold Coast.
- 1682 – First Brandenburg Treaty of Friendship with an African country.
- 1683 – Construction of Fort Gross-Friedrichsburg, named after Crown Prince Friedrich of Brandenburg, in Pokesu, Gold Coast.
- 1684 – King Yankey of Pokesu pays a state visit to Brandenburg.
- 1688 – Friedrich III becomes Grand Elector of Brandenburg.
- 1695 – Founding of the Asante Kingdom by King Osei Tutu and his High Priest Okomfo Anochie.
- 1700 – Probable birth of Anton Wilhelm Amo near Axim, Gold Coast.
- 1701 – Friedrich III, Grand Elector of Brandenburg, proclaims himself King in Prussia and becomes Friedrich I.
- 1706 – Transfer of Amo and his elder brother on a slaver to Surinam, on the first leg of his voyage to Europe.
- 1707 – Anton Wilhelm Amo arrives in Wolfenbittel as gift of the Dutch West India Company to the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel.  
Anton Wilhelm Amo is baptised in Wolfenbittel.
- 1713 – Elector-King Friedrich I dies and is succeeded by Friedrich Wilhelm I (“the Soldier King”).
- 1714 – Duke Anton Ulrich dies in Wolfenbittel.



- 1714 – Trial and execution of witches is forbidden in Prussia.
- 1717 – Tsar Peter The Great of Russia and Abram Petrovich Hannibal visit the court of Wolfenbuttel.
- 1718 – Confirmation of Anton Wilhelm Amo in Salzdahlum.  
Jan Konneh defeats the Dutch in Pokesu.  
King Friedrich Wilhelm I sells Fort Gross-Friedrichsburg to the Dutch. End of Prussian colonial era.
- 1727 – W. A. Amo begins graduate studies in Law and Philosophy in Halle.
- 1730 – W.A. Amo enrolls in the University of Wittenberg and is awarded the degree of Master of Philosophy and the Fine Arts.
- 1731 – Duke August Wilhelm von Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel dies. His brother Ludwig Rudolf succeeds him.
- 1733 – King Friedrich Augustus of Poland, Grand Elector of Saxony, visits Wittenberg and is officially greeted by A.W. Amo, leader of the student delegation.
- 1734 – The Faculty of Philosophy in Wittenberg awards A.W. Amo the doctorate degree Magister Legens.
- 1735 – Duke Ludwig Rudolf dies in Wolfenbuttel. Successor Ferdinand Albrecht II dies after six months and is succeeded by Karl I.
- 1736 – Dr. Amo returns to the University of Halle to lecture Philosophy.
- 1737 – Dr. Amo presents papers on “De harmonia, seu Concordia rerum,” a topic dwelling on the thoughts of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

1738 – Dr. Amo publishes his major work of philosophy in Halle:  
“Tract on the art of philosophising in an accurate and sober  
manner.”

1740 – Friedrich II becomes King of Prussia.

Dr. Amo lectures Philosophy at the University of Jena 1745/46

Dr. Amo becomes a Prussian State Councillor in Berlin.

1746 – Dr. Amo leaves Prussia for the Gold Coast.

1753 – David Henri Gallandat a Swiss doctor on a slaver meets

Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo in Axim.

1784 – Dr. Anton Wilhelm Amo dies in Shama, according to the  
inscription on his tombstone.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Christel Schmidt, Nidderau

Dagmar Mundhenke, Nidderau

Dr. Günter Barudio, Frankfurt am Main

Inge Röll-Friedrich, Nidderau

Klaus Friedrich, Nidderau

Franziska Lüdtke, Marburg

Simone Schmidt, Frankfurt am Main

Maado Sitchet-Zierer, Augsburg

Michael Wolf, Marburg

Monte Adair, Nidderau

Regina Witt, Bad Vilbel

Sylvaina und Roland Gehrlich, Hamburg

Traudl Seher, Schöneck

*You all know what and how you have contributed to this.*

*I am filled with deep gratitude.*

### **Jojo Cobbinah,**

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### **His other publications include:**

**Ghana:** Praktischer Reiseführer für die Goldküste Westafrikas.

Peter Meyer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1991. 11. Aufl. 2012

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## IMPRESSUM

**Unabridged edition**

**Trial Edition 2012**

© 2002 Jojo Cobbinah, Printed in Marburg, Germany,

© 2013 pmv Peter Meyer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main

**ISBN 978-3-89859-001-3**

**www.petermeyerverlag.de**

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Ghana

*Praktisches Reisehandbuch für die »Goldküste« Westafrikas*

Jojo Cobbinah

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Stiche, 47 Stadtpläne, thematische und Lagekarten, Postkarte  
gratis, Sach-, Personen-, Ortsregister; ganz in Farbe.  
Umweltfreundliche Herstellung, klimaneutraler Druck,  
made in Germany  
ISBN 978-3-89859-155-3  
34 Euro [D], 43,5 SFr



