Ethiopia Minor

A Geographical Description of the Province and Kingdom of the Jalofo Heathen

PART I

Chapter I

The location and fertility of the land, and the nature and occupations of its inhabitants.

The famous Province of the Jalofo runs from the Senegal River, which lies in 16° or so and has the Fulos beyond it on the NE side, as far as Porto de Ale. It has a total length of 92 leagues, according to the rhumb of the nautical needle. The river, which makes its way eastward into the interior for a great number of leagues, is one of three which originate in and are fed by Lake Meotis. Since our topic leads us first to Senegal, that is, to its fast-flowing river, it would not be right to undertake a discussion of the sources of the other streams until we have revealed to the curious the courses of those of the Senegal. This way there passes the regular commerce of the North-Europeans, (a) who are not content with Senegal's gum-arabic which they come here chiefly to lay hands on, anchoring at the bar of the river because of its shoals, but who (also) carry off a large quantity of ambergris which is found along the African coast as far as the castle of Arguin, by dealing with the Fulo heathen and transporting it in launches, which they build, in the port mentioned, for this and for similar trade in ivory, hides, and various other commodities. And that is enough on this /f 2v/ river.

(a) The king of Ancalhor, the most powerful lord of Cape Verde, accepts much from foreigners, etc.
Now we are in the neighbourhood of Cape Verde. The coast runs SW from the Senegal mouth to here, and then it forms a very large bay as far as Cabo dos Mastos (Cap Naze) which is only 7 leagues. Cape Verde stands in 14°40' and projects out into the sea, to the West, a very long headland which has sand-dunes on it and a number of palm-trees, some date palms, some common palms. It lies eastward of Santiago Island, which is otherwise called Cape Verde Island. It is much better known to true cosmographers by the name first given it and derived from the name of its cape, but in Ethiopia it is incomparably better known by the name of the glorious apostle [i.e., Sant' Iago or St. James]. It has itself a higher esteem for the name it received from Heaven than for the name given for earthly reasons, the latter being wholly inferior, much to be scorned and little worthy of boast. (b) I mean that (to call an island after) a cape, as if it were wholly that, (is misleading). But I want this to be my last word on the coastal seas of this province, for the mainland invites me to discuss its situation.

While the heavens showed themselves generous towards the mainland in fertility of products, they were correspondingly mean in providing it with adornment and requisite beauty. They deprived the motherland of nearly everything in order to augment its principal offspring, that is, the islands, in whom they brought together all dignity, elegance and grace. The unfortunate region has very little of these, for while it lacks continuing breezes from the sea it is over-rich in destructive heat from the sky, so that it is without freshness, on account of the dry sands with which nature has covered its wide plains. Yet these plains hold much promise, to judge by experience with the normal crop, which is milho, so that no crop can

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(b) Cape Island, Santiago Island, why.
fail to be productive; and the without the labour of agriculture being so necessary here. For the Jalofo man, though almost without agricultural knowledge, has, thanks to the easy clearing of the ground and a small contribution of rain from the heavens, so good a harvest in his fields from four or five good showers that he considers further labour pointless. The district nearest the sea lacks running streams and springs, which are so uncommon that they are found only in a few places; and such wells as there are in the land go so deep that regularly they reach 100 fathoms. This is the reason why the stock graze in distant lands, and the chief reason for the lack of forest, the great disadvantage of the district. For as the lack of /f.3/ springs and streams makes the district less valuable, so the lack of green trees makes it also melancholy and sad. However, there are some palm-trees, but in number so few that they cannot make the land much more agreeable.

Nevertheless the country is rich in stock of various kinds; cattle, goats, and sheep - some coming from the interior; farmyard hens, which are very tasty but smaller than ours; camels in large numbers; and horses, generally small ones, though they do have a few Arab horses which the lords and those better circumstanced buy from the Moors who trade here. They also do not lack those animals one of which the Lord employed on his solemn entrance into Jerusalem, indeed they possess many of them; yet they are of no use to the people of the land, or to the more noble Jalofoos, because none will ride them, considering this an unworthy practice. Among the wild animals in the country there are lions, tigers, leopards, deer, gazelle, civet-cats, foxes, mongooses, squirrels and different sorts of monkeys. Among the birds are ostriches, parrots and little ones with four wings, the two extra emerging beyond the bend of the wing as they fly. Although the land has these creatures in such abundance and is inhabited
by an adequate number of people, the normal lack of rain renders it dry, sterile and poorly provisioned. This is the reason why the heathen cope with thirst by drinking sour milk mixed with flour from their milho. The sea has no less abundance of creatures, and furnish the land with snappers, meros, chernes, esmargals, and saw-fish, and with quantities of mullet and other fish, to such an extent that on any day without a storm some 30-40 canoes go out to sea two or three leagues and return in the evening with an astonishing load of fish.

What shall I say of its ports? They are not inferior in what they produce, since they supply the land with what it lacks, by means of a large number of foreign ships and launches which anchor in them and are laden with various cargoes: iron in large quantity, exotic oysters, fine coral, crystal, all sorts of amber, beads, spirits, nortas and precious stones from the East for female/f.3v/ use such as quepo, laqueca and brandil, silver ear-rings and bracelets, red cloth, and other goods of different kinds (c) suitable for trade.

The inhabitants are so impressed by these imports that as well as accepting the services of all merchants they provide them with the best facilities in Guinea for the dispersal of their goods; and, as they admit themselves, they are always so little concerned about transactions with foreigners that they largely lose the grace and friendship of the true merchant, Christ Jesus. To come now to the third and fourth points (of this chapter), it is necessary to allow space for some information, first about the government and way of life of the country, and then about the comings and goings of the foreign guests who trade here.

Cape Verde has its own king, who for his seat has selected the town of Ancalhor in the hinterland, 18 leagues from the cape.

(c) Goods from Flanders, France, etc.
He keeps a slave at the port as alcaide, as is commonly the case at the ports of the other kings of this province. The alcaide acts as receiver of the presents, which all kinds of foreigners pay in return for the water and other provisions required for their ships. The coast (of this kingdom) runs SE from the Cape as far as Porto de Ale, which now belongs to another Jalofo king. The port lies two leagues beyond Cabo dos Mastos, to the SE, and in it there is a settlement of Portuguese, some dozen or fifteen houses. This kingdom of Ancalhor is 34 leagues long, that is, from the Senegal River as far as Cabo dos Mastos; and 22 or 23 leagues across, to where it meets (the kingdom of) the Grand Jalofo. On the East it has a boundary with the Fulos, with whom it is regularly at war, its king putting in the field 800 mounted men who carry shields and a spear like a javelin but shorter, because they are small men. This kingdom (of Porto de Ale?) extends from the creek as far as Ponta da Sereno, seven leagues SE, that is, along the coast. And from Porto de Ale to Labeia where the king lives is 12 or 13 leagues. The kingdom meets on the NW and North with the lands of the king of Ancalhor and on the NE with (those of) the Grand Jalofo who formerly was emperor, the lesser kings being subordinate to him since he had subjected them wholly to his rule. But having made too much show of his power he wholly lost it, and some of his territories, so that today for this reason his kingdom is the smallest and weakest of the three. The third kingdom (i.e. Lambaia) borders on the SE and South with one called Berbecim, and this kingdom of Lambaia is the most fertile in the whole Jalofo province.

(d) Jabo, king of Ancalhor.
(e) 'Justice by the iron' in Jalofo is by running it hot along the tongue three times.
(f) Berbecim kingdom.
The king who governs it today is 23 years old, a young man of
great energy, who being so, has seized the kingdom which did not
belong to him, since the legitimate heir was a brother of his deceased
father, brothers being the obligatory heirs and not sons. This young
man is a pagan and does not profess the Moslem faith as his father
did, the father never drinking wine.\(^{(g)}\) For this reason the son
differs in every respect. He is a very good friend of the Portuguese
which his father particularly failed to be, for if he had any feeling
for us he concealed it beneath his self-interest. The son's name is
Dechapir. He has a gentle nature, which promises well in terms of
affection for our holy faith; and when the Lord grants that he
receive holy baptism, great will be the gains, not only for Grace
but also for His Majesty's royal treasury and for his vassals who
throughout these parts are continually assailed by various pirates
and are daily vexed by them. The king is powerful and much feared
by his own people. He can put into the field 1000 mounted men armed
with shields and spears, and 300 archers.

From Sereno to Rio Berbecim the coast runs SE, and belongs
to the King of Jagau, a Berbecim. The country is 11 leagues in
length, and in the middle the Portuguese have a settlement called
Porto de Joala which is used as a base and a route for trade with the
heathen. Trading vessels from Cacheu come here to participate in the
exchange ashore. The port is a very convenient one on account of a
river which enters the land about half a league further on and
curves around to run alongside the houses of the residents. The entrance
to the river has nine spans of water at high tide, and once within it
boats are secure from the regular threats from pirates. But apart
from the vessels of merchants who trade only with the native heathen
fewer ships come here than to Porto de Ale.

\(^{(g)}\) Spirits in quantity.
Now that we have given this information (about the kingdom), we can go on to /f.4v/ speak about the character of these heathen, or of those as far as Joala, where we are forced to make a digression as the heathen (there) are different. The Jalofo is one of the most handsome of the heathen and the tallest and best proportioned in Ethiopia. All Jalofos have facial features so pleasing that it is worth seeing them for that alone. But they accept the burden of work unwillingly and the seventh of our mortal sins predominates with them. To see a Jalofo is to see a true portrait of laziness. Given then that they are like this, nevertheless there is among them great ingenuity in skilled work and they have a great variety of trades. The better part of the Jalofo nobility live in the hinterland and keep to the Mohammedan sect. Their way of bringing up children is the same as that among the other heathen. Men who are boxeria teach boys Arabic and thus educate them to their ministry. The Jalofo organises his sleeping the same way as do the others, making a bedframe from poles and using a mat as a mattress and a coverlet, and protecting themselves from cold at night with the fire they normally keep. Their houses are covered with thatch and resemble pavilions or tents in an army camp. Their furnishings are limited to a mat, a quiver and some spears. This is common among persons of lower rank who practise the following device. They hide the better part of their precious stones and other valuables out of fear lest the kings, who are greedy, should learn about them and invent pretexts to rob them of them, by imputing to the owners, and accusing them of, deeds which they have not committed. In this way the kings enjoy the fruit of the labours and achievements of the poor vassals, against all right. Normally the people dress in Moorish shirts of black and white which they make from their own cloth. The women who also dress in these, are very good-natured and friendly, especially
to those of the Portuguese nation, (h) which the men are not; and the women so exceed the men in this respect that it is by the women's specific warnings that the Portuguese (often) escape great misfortunes. The women generally take more care of themselves and dress better, with more style, and at greater expense, than do all the other women in these parts of Ethiopia. This is particularly true of the women who live in the kingdom of Lambaia, to whose king the two ports of Cape Verde and Ale belong. In entertaining guests the Jalofo has much to learn, for though he places all his confidence in outward show he is so curte in behaviour that there is no heathen in whose /f.50/ house the guest suffers more than in his. In their eating habits they are especially nasty, and it often happens that the tableware, consisting of either of a wooden bowl here called a tagarra, or a gourd, is used at a meal without having been washed; (also) master and slave eat together.

When two equals meet, the mode of salutation is for them to touch the ground with their hand and then, after bringing it up, to touch the head with it. If they are of different standing, the older takes the right hand of the younger and sniffs it twice. (i) The

(h) Jalofo woman, kindly natured, loving to all, "propter retributio

(i) Jalofo polite habits. The Jalofo woman lies down with her body on the ground, her eyes looking down, clapping her palms instead of (? saying) peace. She greets more noble persons from a distance with much courtesy. On leaving, all shake hands as a salutation, saying "Alama sole vitola. Alame dia la Alame cant: meaning, "God be with you on the way". Ordinary men and women greet each other, squatting and sniffing each other's hands. The king does not employ women at table, he is served by men. His tablecoths are of ox-hide. The king is treated respectfully and with great courtesy. Those who come to visit him, if peasants, take off their shirts and cover their head or face with earth, etc., as a sign of respect. When the king gives the order they get up. This is generally the practice whenever one enters any place where the king is.
heathen of the coast are inferior in polite habits to those of the interior. As the nobility reside in the latter it is more sophisticated. Yet the coastal people are true heathen which the others are not, since the king and many of the leading men are very enthusiastic boxeris of the accursed sect, for as well as trade and other goods, the Moors have brought them the infernal sect of the infamous prophet, and these grandees are so spell-bound by the ministers of the false sect that the kings do nothing of importance without their counsel. When they go to war or despatch armies, apart from covering their shirts, shields and bows with large numbers of amulets, and encasing their arms with others and hanging some from their necks, (the boxeris) prepare for them certain medicines which, the boxeris say and the kings believe, if carried provide a royal assurance against loss of life. (The boxeris) affirm this, not because they believe it or think it true but, as they admit to some of the Portuguese, because it affords a means to keep in the good graces of these grandees, so that by attending in this way to what the grandees want to hear the boxeris obtain the best part of their lands. And these hellish priests are so clever and double-dealing that they take care never to accompany these kings to war, and when the kings ask them, they excuse themselves by saying that since the weapons will be aided by their prayers it is the same whether they go (themselves) or send others. During battles they remain preoccupied in their intercessions to the false prophet, beseeching him to obtain from the Most High a victory for the soldiers. And if these poor wretches fail to gain a victory, the boxeris attribute it wholly to their failure to keep the observances of the sect, from which lapse alone any setback results and chiefly derives so they persuade the ignorant people.
These lords are not without those who incite to military prowess while a war lasts. /f.5v/ No-one does this better than the Jews (Judeus). According to popular tradition the Jews were among the earliest inhabitants of the district we are discussing, but after these were conquered their (exact) origins have by today been almost forgotten. These heathen excel in airs and graces, and they are no different from the Jalofo heathen in good looks. The women wear many sorts of garment that the kings give them. The Jews are clowns and singers; they play drums and in time of war march in front (of the army) playing them, to excite their betters by their actions and to enable them to find new strength when they are exhausted. If any (soldiers) lack courage and a virile soul they call them cowards and say to them with a great show of sorrow and passion: "Ah, your father did not behave like this! Your ancestors behaved differently on like occasions and in similar enterprises! Do not inflict the infamous mark of cowardice on the head of your line and on the lineage from which you descend!" In times of peace, they place themselves at the doors of kings and lords, although they are not able to pass within. From here they call out to these important persons and make such pointed remarks, inventing an interminable litany of praise and a history of their prowess, at the same time making such an uproar on their drums, that the poor men are worn out; and since no offence can be taken with the Jews or with their actions, if the grandee has nothing else at hand to give them in order to gain his freedom from that inferno of importunity, he takes off his shirt or his cutlass and gives them that. The Jews have other tricks. As nothing makes them blush, the whites have no better debt-collectors when kings and grandees are debtors. So much is this the case that if the king himself is a debtor these clowns provide a means of extracting payment from him. The whites speak to one of the Jews and explain the position, and at the same time give him a fee for the job.
What he does is this. He goes as a singer to the house where the king who is in debt lives, and he talks about the debt loudly and with many grimaces and gestures, and in a disparaging aside, he says: "No honour to you for not paying your debt!". The wretched king finds himself so importuned that sometimes these clowns end up by going back to the creditor with the money in their hand.

Members of this group of the heathen have no fixed possessions and they do not farm. All of them are so looked down upon that, when they die, they are not buried as the Jalofo man is, but are placed in the forked branch of a monkey-bread tree, since it is said, and generally believed, that if they were buried in the earth there would be no rain and instead great drought. So when they complete their days, they find a place in the forks of trees. (j)

Although they have no fixed possessions, their /f.6/ chattels are so considerable that they can cause great envy. They are rich in this way because they are rewarded by all for the occupation they profess, which is to utter pleasantries and flattery which, filling the ears of those who listen, bring the Jews reward from their listeners' valuables. They are great horsemen and so dexterous that they gallop on their horses while playing the drum. Neither the lords nor any other group among the people of the land will have them in their homes or feed them, unless they are in their service. If the Jews lack anything, the others do not hesitate to provide it for them, but they go about so well stocked that it is not (usually) necessary. They adhere to the (Moslem) sect. At their 'burials' there are less tears than normal but more jousts and festivities.

Although the coastal Jalofo whom we are now discussing have only limited social and political organisation, nevertheless they have enough rascality (k) and sharp-dealing in their trade with

(j) Children, first dismembered, are placed in the forks in baskets.
(k) Lascaris - certain shameless Moors of India.
Many of them, speaking French as if it were their native language, have developed such ways by their regular trade with the pirates. Cape Verde is a true training-ground for these pirates. They regularly live there while they carcen their ships, and build launches and sloops to enable them to rob the entire coast of these provinces, from which they carry off in an average year 200,000 cruzados (worth of goods). Their seizures have left the coast as poor in wealth as it is rich in misery and destitution for the Portuguese, who suffer great losses on the coast because of their enemies. This could be remedied by means of two or three warships, which would patrol the coast, go in to the cape, and rout the pirate in this way greatly benefitting not only our sea routes within this Ethiopia, but also those to the Malagueta Coast, to Mina, and to Brazil. Of no less value would be the prizes which by this strategy would be taken from among the ships which anchor in Biziguiche Bay, in its renowned port of Arrecife, nine leagues from Porto de Ale. Annually three or four ships anchor here; and the French and some Flemings, who also anchor a mile away from Porto de Ale because of the bad bottom and poor anchorage, annually export 50,000 hides and 200 quintals of ivory, together with the ambergris and gold which comes to this place and to the renowned port of Joala from the entire coast of Ethiopia. What was stated above about the royal officers who live in the sea-ports and receive presents (for the king) is the general practice /f.6v/. These officers are admirably punctilious in what they do, in order to cultivate the goodwill of the lords and keep them friendly.

To conclude this chapter, let us speak of the occupations of the heathen. The men work in the fields and they fish and weave, making their very well-known cotton cloths by sewing together from six to twelve strips. Some of these cloths are so valuable that those that are taken from these parts to Spain are worth 6000 reis. The looms are different from ours.
All of them are traders. The Jaofo people in the kingdom of Lambaia are so enthusiastic that they give pledges to the Portuguese and go up-country to trade in the three fairs which are normally held every week. The main fair is called Ricai fair, and 2000 persons go there. The products of the country are sold; that is, cow-hides, cotton cloths, goats and hens - the latter in great quantities and so cheap that one can be bought for four strings of pocate beads worth at most 60 reis. The currency in use here is what the ships bring from all kinds of traders, coral etc. The main occupations of the women are to sew, cook and grind milho in wooden mortars which resemble our own grinding-bowls, these ones being an ell in height. (1) They do this last task from midnight onwards, in order not to be seen at work, and during the day they take it easy and treat it as time off. I have spoken about idolatry. For the heathen who live near the sea, the burial rites of the Jalofo are in every respect the same as those of other idolaters, and they have celebratory feasts in which food abounds, etc.

(1) Jagomai, king of the Berbecis, challenged the king of Bercalo, sending him in scorn a spindle. Bercalo attacked him, making his araga about a league (away). Each king at the same time sends out his jagarefe, and they both finish up speared on the road. The kings are surprised at the delay on the part of their ambassadors, and send others, who come with news of what has happened. Jagomai orders his filade, and clears a village which lay right across the road. The village was wholly encircled by thorn-trees. The Jalofo struck at the village, and bury themselves with loot. They lose their lives when Jagomai falls on them with fury, not with a spindle.
Now I come back to Joala. Having given due praise and shown a grateful heart for the love with which they receive us and the welcome they give our boats, we ought to be no less generous in giving our love to the heathen (there), because they are exceptionally friendly to the Portuguese nation and have no connections with the pirates. These connections are multiplying among the coastal peoples of the two (kingdoms or ports) of Cape Verde, as we have sufficiently illustrated above, and this is the main reason for the hatred of us which this Jalofo scum has developed. Having said that, and the subject being different as the circumstances are, in order that matters may be appropriately dealt with in the right place let us speak now of the Berbecim heathen. [f. 7]