Of the Province of the Sousos

SINGLE CHAPTER

Of the locality and its wealth, the quality and industry of its inhabitants. Discussion of its government and customs.

The locality lacks nothing in comparison with the most healthy localities in thin Guinea; and all of those can with reason rather be envious of it. The land stretches away to the north and it is made very pleasant and delightful, not only by the variety of trees, but also by the abundance of fast-flowing streams which make their way amongst them, their waters breaking over rocks. It is surrounded by mountains and hills in large numbers, with as many valleys. Not only is all the land high and mountainous, with great ranges, but it also has some passes which are so high and steep that they can only be climbed with great difficulty. In some parts the vegetation is so dense and the brushwood so thick that they are impenetrable, etc.

As for its fertility, this is sufficient to sustain life and provide daily rations; the land is suitable for all kinds of seeds. Nowadays it grows rice, milho and funde; and such vegetables as pumpkins, beans, macarras, yams and potatoes. Goats are raised, as are cows, which the Fulos drive, also some sheep, although these are few, and hens. Its wild animals are gazelle, buffalo, pangler, kelima, which look like a black goat but are bigger, wild boars, porcupines, wolves, lions, tigers, etc. Among the smaller animals various snakes including some ones of Gambia already mentioned, which are speckled in different colours. Its birds include parrots, ducks, peacocks, etc.; and there are also monkeys. Its fruits are maniopes, foles, and two kinds of plums, one kind which is round, like our white plums, and the other kind long, like Saragoesa plums.

The common trade is in their white cloths, which they call cates; and in some gold which comes by way of the Fulos and Mandingas; in ivory because there are plenty of elephants; and in a few slaves, the occasional cows, goats, and rice. They buy this merchandise with salt, iron and various other goods, such as protective clothing, precious stones
from the East, coral, basins, *manchelae*, that is, seed-pods of a kind with large *bricreia*, pierced and threaded on a string, 'dove's eye' beads which are greatly esteemed here, and other sorts of beads such as *minina* and 'milk-curd', *marfere*, etc. As for the natives, they are all corrupt like the rest: they only care for those who make them gifts, and then they are very grateful. Apart from the general propensity for farming, hunting and fishing, they are also remarkable traders, an occupation which they practise from childhood. While going about this business, when they have to stay overnight and sleep, they build a hut to shelter them and their merchandise, so that the rain will do them no harm.\(^{(a)}\) The Sousos are wont to suffer much from their boils and from hunger and thirst. A Souso may go three or four days without eating, making do (by chewing) a cola nut. They are excessively mercenary, to the extent that they would kill their own parents for a drop of wine. They need no requesting to go to war or to begin an attack, for they are the first to strike. When they do this on the king's orders, as commonly happens if (his) debtors fail to arrive with their payment, then these soldiers are feasted with a great deal of meat and honey wine; he who eats and drinks at these banquets never turns back, since he knows (? that if he does) he will not bring from the battle any booty other than an old mat.

They are great weavers, hence their regular trade in *catesa*. The women spin (\(^{[?]}\) weave) and help in the fields. And as potters they are famed, because their cooking pots are better than those of any of the other heathen in these parts; this is the occupation which in Ethiopia belongs to this sex. Fine mats are also made here, and other objects of interest. They behave respectfully towards individuals according to their rank. Now let us talk about the government of this heathen people.

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(a) They are heathen of great intelligence, astute, treacherous and deceitful.
Amongst them there are major kings called Farins, who are equivalent to emperors, and who are known by the lands they rule. The Grand Concho is called Farim Concho because he is lord of Concho. He is the head of all that Province of Sousos. Great things are told about his household, its authority and its utensils which are affirmed to be of gold, even the arrows of state, etc. (Another ruler is) Tamasso; and Farim Puta (is so-called) because he is lord of the Putas, who are virtually Sousos too. He is the ruler who overcame the Manes, as already mentioned in the chapter dealing with their journey into this province. /f.134/ (Other rulers are) Farim Cania, etc. Below the emperors are subordinate rulers; the persons of second rank in the Kingdom, and immediate successors (? to the king), are called Solatequis. This position is reached through grades of honour. The Camalonzos succeed the Quindes when they die; and the Quindes succeed the Solatequis. Individuals holding these ranks are similar to (our) dukes and marquises. Then come the Catequia, who are captains. Colemanchos are the equivalent of colonels for the Faris; they organise wars. Mangatunala is the ambassador of kings; ambassadors always travel accompanied when they are sent off on any business. (Then there are) Jagarefes of the Faris, to whom all embassies from kings and lords of lower status, in this order, are first directed.

When the guest arrives, the jagarefe receives him and takes the embassy to the Farin. First he makes request to the pages (for entry), on behalf of the guests, then they order him to go in and explain the reason which has brought the king or nobleman. When he has done this, he returns, the Farim having agreed on a time when the king is to appear before him. Next the jagarefe brings the guest accompanied by his men. The Farin goes outside to hear him. When the guest comes before him, he does so most respectfully, wearing only his shirt tied round his waist, and baredaahed, as is the common practice of vassals in front of these Farins; and when vassals go before such lords they prepare themselves at once. Thus the guest remains standing, without stirring, and in silence, for about two hours. The Farin remains seated, with (his) bexerim on his left, a privileged position reserved for
the baxterimi; he takes his seat on a cow-hide. The Farins who have trade with
us possess chairs of state handsomely inlaid with metal and covered with
velvet, as Massacander, king of Bena did. If it is a serious matter, the
judeus also sits down in front of the Farim and covers his head. These judeus,
with their natural loquacity, act as orators and flatterers, and on these
occasions as advocates for their guests. The king with the page beside him
gives the word briefly, for those lords keep them (? pages, judeus) and
bring them for this purpose. Immediately after this, the vassals, who have
accompanied them to this place, come out one by one, naked and bareheaded,
each one demonstrating his bow and shouting. The king or noble does likewise.
Others come out on the Farim's side, and when they have performed the same
ceremony, the guest speaks about his business to the Farim, who settles it
verbally. The baxterimi makes a great speech about this, praising the emperor,
or if there is no emperor (present), the chief jagarefe. Once the audience
is finished, /f.134v/ the dinner, etc., follows. This is a splendid affair,
consisting of produce from the land and an abundance of wine.

In judicial trials the king always participates, and if things proceed
without his participation, he imposes punishments most rigorously. These
trials are carried out in Ethiopia by oral communications (only). The Court
of Appeal or Chamber of Audience is a building known as Fungco, which can
hold four hundred men, more or less. Here the parties attend in person;
but women send advocates because they are prohibited from attending any sort
of public or judicial activity. In the presence of the king, the jagarefe
put forward the case, for or against; when it has been examined and summed
up by the officer of justice, the Farim gives sentence. This is then
followed by a sermon from the baxterimi.

In the system of succession to the kingdom, the oldest son takes over,
if he is capable. If he is not, the dead king's brother comes (to power).
This is how Massacander happened to become king of Bena, because Damu or
Calamamamba, who rules today, was a minor at the time of his father's death,
so the brother of the king of Bena had to succeed (?) Thus the order of
succession is always maintained amongst the eldest sons, and when they die their sons succeed. These cannot be excluded, however many brothers the king may have, for only if the nephews are minors can the brothers enter the succession, or when the family of such nephews dies out. The institution of the king is as normally practised among most of the heathen, donning a red cap is the main mark of the rank. Each person among them, women as well as men, has a house of his or her own, but they only enter these on occasions of duty. They are not as sensual as other heathen. As for matters of domestic regulation, they are just like all the natives of Ethiopia in the upbringing of children, etc. Including abuses in sleeping and other things; but there is no need to speak of these again.

Let us now deal with their customs (b) and general dress. The men wear Moorish shirts and breeches. The women wear nothing at all before they are circumcised, except that of them wear on their heads caps of cloth or silk, each according to her means; and the men wear the same. Around their waist they wear a string of precious stones from India, hollow and shaped, (such as) unpolished cossoure, brandil, and laqueco. The erroneous practice of circumcision is common to the Sousos, Fulas, Jalofas and Mandingas, and also the custom in the Serra das Rendacrossas. They also mark their faces and bodies, and some file their teeth. The reason why the women wear nothing is so that the markings on their bodies, /f. 135/ which they make in order to appear attractive and dignified, may be seen.

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(b) Customs. They are courteous and punctual; they do not invite a white man to eat or drink in their homes, unless (the host ?) is a king or nobleman. The others send home anyone they have.
They show great respect to their uncles and older relatives and do not sit down in their presence. When they meet them on the road, they greet them in the local way, which I shall explain, and with their (salutations), guarnaceus, that is, wishing them good-day, and onimarem, wishing them good-evening. They all have personal names. The King of Bena is called Benacobe; this is his surname, deriving from his race and family. The name of the King who was the predecessor of this Calamatamba, his nephew, and who died, was Massacander; (but in this case) the surname was not significant, since only in the Sape language does it mean 'candle'. The real reason for his name is this. As a youth he was called Massa, and he worked for Simão Caldeira of Cape Verde Island, from whom he took the name Caldeira; but since the Souso youth could not say 'Caldeira', his master called him 'Massacander', using an incorrect form of the surname. This (contact with Portuguese) led to the king being a lascarim or man of two worlds, and to his knowing as much about our customs as was known here about the punctiliousness (c) with which he ran his household.

Everything was kept under lock and key, and some things counted, which they had to put up with. He would only trust a certain boy, or the wife who was closest to him, so that in all respects he was a Portuguese, and even sometimes dressed like one; but he did not know how to lay hands on the vestments of faith, as will be explained later, nor how to profit from the holy labours of Father Baltasar Barreira. Eagerness for conversion and great zeal for the salvation of his soul drove the king to open for the first time the forests and dense bush of his kingdom (to the Gospel). It would have weighed well with him today if he had prevented the loss of past goodness caused by (the intervention of) evil spirits; but since Massa Caldeira belonged to their fraternity, at his death they all assembled, to produce such great storms and raise such tempests at this time, that it seemed that everything would be carried by the winds.

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(c) Punctiliousness in this is common; and cleanliness to all the Souso, etc.
Each king has his own particular greeting. The King of Bena is
greeted Teshenka Gomara, and so are the lords and nobles, men and women.
There is also a general greeting, which is Caressa for men and Sacira for
women. The greeting of the King of the Putases is Jatona. When these
people meet each other, before they say these words, they strike each other
on the head with their hands, and sniff their noses, as one does when
sniffing scent. Then, having first taken off their caps, they take the
other's right hand in their own and kiss it many times. The women perform
this ceremony squatting; when women hand over anything they do it on their
knees, cola, water, etc. When a person brings a message it is not called
out from a distance; but the messenger comes up close and delivers it
kneeling, /f.135v/ most reverently, for he is a figure of dignity, and this
can happen anywhere, in the village, on the roads, etc. (d) Men greet each
other with the normal bow towards the ground. When women kneel, it is before
a person in authority, to whom they make a bow and perform the ceremony
(described), for it is not befitting that a woman should kneel before a
slave or a youth.

With regard to their marriages (e), one should note (the following).
As I said, (at first) they wear no clothing; and the women in order to
become some man's wife, are required first to undergo the common rite of
circumcision. After this, the husband, who has already considered her as
his spouse from birth and has each day (since ?) been giving her father
(contributions towards) the amount of the dowry, so that the father will
give her to him, clothes the woman and takes (her) possessions in one lot
to his house. If afterwards the woman rejects him and goes to her father's
house, or another man's house, the husband demands from him the amount of
the dowry. And once this is paid, the wretched woman is free and without
any obligation. But if this cannot be arranged, the adultress herself pays
by selling herself to fulfil the contract; and when this happens, the
father finds himself without either his daughter or his money.

(d) How they regulate their affairs.
When traders travel, they do not take their wives with them; they carry and cook for themselves. Their superstitions are those common to all the heathen. If daybreak is not clear (?), they will not sow or cut or thresh rice, and will not be guests anywhere.

The circumcision of women takes place at the age of sixteen or seventeen. This is a time of great festivity which counts much as a wedding, because it is after this ceremony that the husbands take the women home and give them four or five pieces of clothing.

There is nothing (further) to say about idolatry; all forms are general. The Souso drink the milk of the Mohammedan sect. Women of the neighbourhood who are about to give birth make confessions in a way not to be approved. Also there has reached here the evil belief concerning those who fall ill, that witches are eating them, as they say. If one of them falls ill and dies, the king puts out a decree that they should all assemble and bring chickens, each family head bringing his own marked (?) chicken. They take 'red water', and when ten grandees are present, they open its mouth and pour in a few drops, then they release it. If someone dies, they say that there is a witch in that house. Up to three times they will forgive, but the fourth time there is no pardon or remedy, and they punish the culprit with death, as they do thieves also. Before they give the red water to the criminal, they first give it to the chicken; if this dies, they take the matter to the king; then they administer the water in the manner already mentioned.

(f) Having now an advocate of his/their (to speak) for and against the party. The party accused in this form: "You, there, turn yourself into an elephant, or a leopard, etc.", until they specify the one to which he is understood to belong. They say, "Turn yourself into a pumpkin". They name all the creatures and plants, and if he happens to fall down as one is being named, they say that he turned into that. If he does not die, he is considered innocent and ( ? they) pay him.
The burials of this heathen people [136] are without the excesses practised by other heathen; except that each (corpse) has a shroud whose value indicates the wealth of the man. Only when it is the king or some important lord do they put pieces of gold, etc., (in the grave). They do not kill people (to bury with the corpse), and the mourning at the burial lasts one day. Finally, a few (mourners) kill cows, goats and so on. They do not have the distribution ceremonies which the Temonees and the Windward heathen have. Two or three months after the burial they have the final wake which is without as many affronts to God, or excesses, as those of the other heathen peoples. The ceremony among them known as satage is famous. This takes place seven days after the death of a heathen. All the people of the village assemble at the arrival; and in front of the king, they make offerings to God for the soul of the dead man, one with rice, another with a rice cake, others with various offerings. After the ceremony they divide out all the offerings among themselves.

They have holy days and feast days, when they do no work; these are Thursdays, Fridays and Mondays. The days of the week have their own names: Sunday, oata; Monday, tene; Tuesday, talluta; Wednesday, aradaha; Thursday, alacana; Friday, ariajuma; Saturday, simeti. Children are given names according to the day on which they were born. If it is Friday the child is called Arajuma or Sajuma. But they do not use the name of Tuesday, as they consider this day ill-omened, and so call it Bad-day; and their experience is that those born on that day do not live long. This is the belief of the Mandingas.