

ERRORS, CONFUSIONS, AND MISINTERPRETATIONS IN WRITINGS
ABOUT THE GAMBIA.

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Introduction

As one reads guidebooks and account by visitors who have been to The Gambia, it is amazing to find how many erroneous pieces of information, (particularly in the historical area) have found their way into print in recent years. Many people are involved - those officially concerned with tourism, official guides, self-appointed guides, but even in the educational system one finds errors being perpetuated in school books. Scholars who are producing excellent material, have their moments of carelessness, when something that is erroneous finds its way into print. Once in print an error is difficult to eliminate.

Sometimes the fault is not with the author - an editor or printer has made a change, and the author has never been shown the proofs... This has happened to me several times.

One common source of error, which I have noted both in publications and in manuscripts that I have been shown, is that the writer has quoted statements made by H.F.Reeve in his book on The Gambia published in 1912. Reeve was engaged in surveying the boundaries of The Gambia, and knew the upper river area extremely well, but he cannot be regarded as a scholarly historian. Things he was familiar with himself are accurate, but his interpretation of various historical events is suspect !

Obviously , if anyone finds I have made mistakes in the present work, they can always let me know.

David P. Gamble

STRANGE THINGS IN ACCOUNTS FOR TOURISTS

- (1) In The Gambia. Country Study Guide. International Business Publications, Washington ,DC.

[This seems to have been produced in Moscow.]

p.161 "Please note: Not all types of filth are available, so you would be wise to take in what you need. "

However, on the previous page the heading is Photography, so this is a misprint for film.

- (2) p. 162 under the heading Sightseeing

we have a curious paragraph:

"Road limbs to the attain towns in the Gambia me relatively good ad weather roads with the exception of certain stretches. Local stases ran from Banjul along the roast r cad to the hotels and beach area and for the adventurist offer cheap reliable transport. Long distance buses, however are not frequent or reliable. Should you wish to explore the country further but do not wish to take an organised tour, we recommend private transport bird. "

Maybe the typesetter had been drinking too much vodka, but the proofreader also let it pass. Maybe the author typed this while riding in a taxi over bumpy Gambian roads. Maybe it was handwritten, and his writing was unreadable.

Let it be said that rest of the publication is more accurate and contains a great deal of useful information, bringing together material from Governmental and international sources.

The size of The Gambia

In Michael Tomkinson's Gambia (1987) he writes: (p.8)

"The country is the victim of some geodetic dithering, elastic dimensions, and an area that varies with each official source. The Commonwealth Fact Sheet (1977) , gives a total of 4049 square miles (= 10367 sq.klm,). In the Government's The Gambia in Brief , 4045 square miles (10,356 sq.km.). With its 4003 miles (10,247 sq. km)*, the Encyclopedia Britannica further reduces the country's size." *(10,368 sq.klm, in 1972 edition).

Variable figures continue down to the present day. The Statistical Abstract of The Gambia for May 1993, published in Banjul, gives us a total of 10689 sq.klm, of which 8612 is dry land, and 2077 wet. I interpreted the latter to mean "swamp land", - mangrove swamps and rice swamps etc.

However, in the Statesman's Year Book for 2003, they give a total of 10,689 sq.klm. with 2077 as inland water. Is this a misinterpretation on their part ?

A series of major reference works - The Commonwealth Year Book, Africa South of the Sahara (2002), The Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara (1997) give the area as 11,295 sq.km. or 4361 sq.miles.

But other versions exist. Hutchinson's Guide to the World (1998) gives 10,402 sq.km & 4016 sq.miles. The Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations (1998) gives 11,300 sq.km & 4363 sq.miles.

Some writers round off the figures, e.g. Andy Gravette : The Gambia (Landmark Vistors Guide) , 2003,uses the figures "just over 11,000 sq.km. or 4,300 sq.miles. The Official Republic of The Gambia web site, 1996 ? gives 4000 sq.miles or 10,360 sq.klm.

Craig Emms: The Gambia (The Bradt Travel Guide,) 2001 , gets the number of sq.km. right (11,300), but magnifies the square miles to 7,022.

The CIA Fact Sheet (2000) gives a total of 11,300 sq.km,
land 10,000 sq.km, water 1,300 sq.km.

HANNO THE CARTHAGINIAN

In the Insight Guide: Gambia and Senegal, 1999 ed., we read

"..around 500 BC...Hanno the Great, a Carthaginian navigator, visited the West African coast, in his Periplus or Circumnavigating Voyage, he related encounters with elephants and hippopotami along the rivers he named "Chertes" (the Senegal) and "Bambotus" (the Gambia)."

(Written by Andy Gravette...)

But if one looks at the text of the Periplus of Hanno we finds no mention of elephants, the river he mentions is called "Chretes" and there is no mention of the Bambotus. This name seems to have come from the river Bambotum of Polybius (Pliny, V, 1, 10).

A former Governor of The Gambia, Governor H.R.Palmer, published a book in 1931 called "The Carthaginian Voyage to West Africa in 500 B.C." in which he provided a translation, done by Falconer in 1797, of the Greek paraphrase of a Punic inscription on a monument at Carthage, which was said to have been erected about 500 B.C. by Hanno after a voyage to the West Coast of Africa . Hanno's mission was to reestablish colonies on the Moroccan and Mauritanian coast, and explore further. The text is short, and consists of 18 sections.

The sentence "We came to another river that was large and broad and full of crocodiles and river horses", is considered by Palmer to have been the river Gambia. But crocodiles and river horses (hippopotami) would have been found in almost any African river, and in earlier centuries would also have been found in many rivers much further north. There is no specific geographical feature which would identify the river as being the Gambia.

Nevertheless, in an article in the Crown Colonist for June 1943, Sir Thomas Southorn, a later Governor, stated: "Hanno the Carthaginian, over 2,500 years ago took ships up the Gambia river and Carthaginian settlements were founded on its banks." This is wild speculation. He admits that no trace of the Carthaginian settlement remains..

Phoenician sites are normally easily identified. According to D.B.Harden "The Phoenicians on the West Coast of Africa," Antiquity, No.87, Sept.1948, 141-150, Phoenician sites were typically islands with good anchorage, near the mainland, or on short peninsular headlands. Phoenician temples were normally small rectangular cellae with open courtyards around. Houses would vary..the main building walls would be of stone, either properly faced, and square blocks. A common feature was a cothon, an inner basin type of artificial harbor. Their tombs were vertical rock-cut wells with chambers opening off them laterally, in later days shallower chamber tombs cut in the rock or built of masonry below ground level. There would be a lot of grave furniture, pottery, bronze objects, jewellery, coins, and imported objects of Greek or Egyptian manufacture. Their sanctuaries consisted of compact urnfields, where animals were sacrificed, and small children might be buried.

No one has ever found any such archaeological remains on the Gambia river.

In 1976 Jacques Ramin prepared a French/English edition of Le Periple d'Hannon/ The Periplus of Hanno. In it no mention is made of the river Gambia. Ramin believes that the two rivers Hanno went up - the Chretes and the river where there were hippopotami - are the Senegal and the Faleme. Phoenicians sought sources of tin and copper, and possibly gold, for which Bambouk was famous. Bambouk might have been the "Bambotus".

Tony-Kirk Greene of Oxford produced a very favorable review of Ramin's work (West Africa, 7 Nov.1977, 2265-66). This was followed by a response from Dr. Robert Cornevin, who had resurrected the work of Henri Tauxier on the subject. Tauxier had shown that Hanno's Periplus had been known to Greeks and Romans only in the first century B.C., about the time of Caesar. It did not present any characteristics of an official travel report by a Carthaginian admiral, nor was it the tale of an eye witness. He holds that it was put together by a Greek or Roman writer who had read a little Herodotus, Ephorus and Polybius, and produced a fictitious narrative.

Gabriel Germain had reached a similar conclusion in an article published in Hesperis in 1957.

So the inscription may be the mangled version of a true event, a tribute to Hanno, but not an accurate account of a specific voyage.

To my mind, there is no convincing evidence that he ever explored the river Gambia.

Henry Fenwick Reeve in his book The Gambia, published in 1912, devotes many pages to the earliest voyagers on the coasts of Africa. The Phoenicians - the circumnavigation of Africa recorded by Herodotus, "The Periplus of Scylax", the attempt of Sataspes (A Persian noble, 500 BC to circumnavigate Africa, The Carthaginians (450 BC)- the Periplus of Hanno, and so on. The text allegedly quoting from Hanno, give generalities which might have applied to any area of Africa, not specifically to The Gambia. Would one apply the term "densely wooded area" to mangrove swamps ? and saying that at night the shores blazed with fires would hardly apply to the mangrove areas found in the lower river.

On page 18 of Historic Sites of The Gambia, 1998, Allen Meager writes:

"The Jolas claim to have come from the east. Their own oral traditions place their origin in the south east, possible Zimbabwe. The story relates that they moved through Tanzania to take up a sedentary life in Egypt. On leaving Egypt, supposedly around the time of King Solomon (c.972-932 B.C.), they again migrated, this time into the Maghreb. Later drought forced them from the Maghreb to travel southwards across the Sahara and across the Niger where they settled in close communities with the indigenous Malinkes. They ultimately moved again further south, and then west to the Atlantic Coast bringing with them palm seed, cotton and rice.

Assuming that they originated from Zimbabwe, a country already noted as having a megalithic tradition, it would be fair to suggest that they would have carried this tradition with them as they migrated. During their transit through Tanzania they again touched a megalithic tradition.... Travelling on into the Maghreb, they would have been exposed to the megalithic tradition of Morocco..."

Martha T. Frederiks in We have toiled all night, makes a reference to this passage, saying she has found this tradition only in the writings of Meager. However, Meager does not indicate where he obtained this elaborate story. I myself have never come across any such tradition, and doubt the accuracy of a Zimbabwe origin for the Jola.

As there was an important megalithic culture in Morocco, in the Atlas region, to my mind there is more likely to have been a direct link between the Moroccan and Senegambian areas, with the ancestors of the present day Berber being involved with the building of megaliths.

But wild theories abound. Ivan Van Sertima in They Came Before Columbus, 1976, relates the building of megaliths to the preparations of Abubakari's (of Mali) efforts to build a fleet to cross the Atlantic. He regards the megaliths as crude stone observatories which were used for astronomical calculations (p.45), which would aid in navigation. But the Senegambian sites have been dated to between 400 and 1000 A.D., while Abubakari was apparently making his preparations about 1310 A.D.

A recent book in French by Jean-Yves Loude: Le Roi d'Afrique et la Reine Mer, Actes Sud, 1994, has a chapter in which three adventurers travel through the Gambia, searching for griots who might know of the tradition of Abou Bakari II of Abubakari's venture, and visiting the stone circles. (Chapters V & VI deal with their experiences in The Gambia). *

* I have seen only the Gambian section of their work, so I don't know what they found further on.

In the Gambia News Bulletin for 22 May 1973, p.1-2, we find that Mr. Harold Lawrence, an American professor of history, also came on a two week visit to try and find out whether West Africans had sailed from the banks of The Gambia - under the leadership of Kankang Musa. but no details were given of his findings.

GEORGE THOMPSON AND RICHARD JOBSON

In the beautifully illustrated guidebook : The Gambia and Senegal (Insight Guides), 1990, and 1999 editions, we find:

"Few adventurers trekked far into the interior, however, unless like George Thompson in 1619, it was to chart river banks. Thompson explored as far up the River Gambia as Tenda (Tendaba) around 60 miles (100 km.). Just a year after Thompson's trip, Richard Jackson followed the English explorer's maps and succeeded in penetrating deep into the Gambia between 1620 and 1624...Jackson wrote of his expeditions in his book The Discovery of the Land of King Solomon- the first detailed account of life in the Senegambian hinterland."

There are an incredible number of errors in these few sentences. In the first place, there is no record of any chart being made by Thompson. The Tenda reached by him was not Tendaba, which is a port in Kiyang, not far from the mouth of the river, but a region some 450 miles up river, beyond the Barrakunda Falls at the junction of the rivers Gambia and Nierico.

The explorer who followed Thompson was Jobson, who was sent out to relieve him, but found he had been killed by one of his own men, and his journey took place in 1620-1621. The title of his book was The Golden Trade, or, a discovery of the River Gambia...

The title The Discovery of the Land of King Solomon comes from a petition later presented to the King seeking further funds for exploration (The discovery of the Cuntry of Kinge Solomon, his riche trade & trafique within twentye daies saile of England), which contains little descriptive material.

The account of "Mambo Jambo" which follows on page 42 is equally confused. The term in Mandinka is Mama Jombo (Grandfather Jombo) and was the term for a masked figure which appeared on special occasions. He spoke in a special language which had to be interpreted by an attendant. Hence the term mumbo jumbo in English for incomprehensible speech. This was first described by Francis Moore in 1732, well before Mungo Park's time.

The mythical snake is a totally different entity and is widely known as ninki nanko. (Andy Gravette)

So again the author/is producing nonsensical rigmarole.

Alas, some of his material is reproduced in other works e.g.
Andy Gravette's The Gambia (Landmark Visitors Guide) , p.21

George Thompson and Fattatenda

Reeve, in The Gambia (1912) writes that Thompson made a settlement at Fath Tenda..." (p.48), but he does not state what his source was for this piece of information.

In 1931 W.T.Hamlyn in a school book [A Short History of The Gambia], wrote "George Thompson...sailed up as far as Kassan, where he left his ship and went in his boats as far as Fattatenda."

In the history section of the Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of The Gambia, Colonial Reports Annual, 1933, we read [Thompson]..reached Kassang (Gassan) a Portuguese trading station, some 147 miles up the river.....Thompson, continuing his explorations, founded a settlement at Fatta Tenda, about 240 miles from the mouth of the river." W.T.Hamlyn might well have been the contributor of this section in the Annual Report .

J.M.Gray in his History of The Gambia (1940) does not mention any association between Thompson and Fataatenda.

In the course of my own researches on the voyage of Richard Jobson, I have come across no documentary evidence which would indicate that Thompson made a settlement at Fataatenda.

In Captain Stibb's account of a voyage made up river in 1724, he writes "This port, like many others, has not a house nearby, serving only for a landing place...[to Suteco about 3 leagues away].

In 1732 the African Company established a Factory (trading station there), and had a house built upon the Rock beside the Port..."by reason of the Convenience of its situation for trade."

Nevertheless the inaccurate information has continued to be repeated through the years.

1945. "A Short History of The Gambia" (1931) was re-issued as

"Stories of The Gambia" by C.B. (Miss C. Buckley, Acting Director of Education, Sept 45- Feb 46).

1967 The book was revised by Dr.Florence Mahoney, who repeated the information unchanged.

1975 A revised edition of "Stories of the Gambia", p.22. No change.

1982 Florence Mahoney's "Stories of Senegambia", p.26. No change.

1991 Demba Faal: "People and Empires of Senegambia: Senegambia in History AD 1000-1900. " p.97.

Copies the same material, presumably following Florence Mahoney's work.

Once a piece of erroneous information gets into print, it is extremely difficult to dislodge.

The Stone Circles

In various publications Andy Gravette makes the statement that Richard Jobson "first discovered the stones in the 1620s". He mentions a "curse on those disturbing sacred sites", including Jobson as one of the early victims (The Gambia & Senegal [Insight Guides] , p.164, 1990 edition). (cf The Gambia (Landmark Visitors Guide, 1999 ed. p. 86.)

His statements are not accurate. There is no mention in any of Jobson's writings of his seeing stone circles - which he was unlikely to do, as he was sailing on the river, rather than travelling by land.

Sandi munku joyoo (James Island)

In a newspaper article, Weekend Observer, 28-30 Jan. 2000, the writer explains the name as follows. "One of the explorers [who] lived on the island was called 'Sandy'. This Sandy used to bake bread which used to be exchanged for other food items from the local inhabitants..."

[munkoo is the Mandinka word for powder, flour, etc.]

The reality is that the island was named after the nearest community on the river bank, followed by the Mandinka word for island joyoo. In this case the settlement was San Domingo, an old Portuguese trading settlement .

A griot Sirif Jebate derived Sandemunku Island from Sang ning Nyunku , where San was said to be the name of a Portuguese trader, ning = and, while nyunku referred to 'thick bush'. At least he got the Portuguese connection right.

ALBRED A (UPPER NYOOMI) - C.F.A.O. STORE .

In the book Sites et Monuments en S n gambie, 1988, there is a section on the slave trade at Albreda, with a photograph of the old C.F.A.O. (Compagnie Fran aise d'Afrique Occidentale) building in 1982. The text implies that this was originally a trading establishment from which slaves were exported. A English tourist guide (Andy Gravette's The Gambia, 1999) has a photograph of the same building with the caption "Slave holding barracks, Albreda."

However, the structure is typical of trading establishments of the 19th and early 20th century - a trader's store below, living quarters above, with a veranda where people could shelter from heat and rain, and where artisans such as tailors could carry out their business.

A French plan of Albreda in 1847 shows a large building on the site, but the name of the owner is illegible. Some later details are given in Historic Sites of The Gambia, 1998. "The building was not built by the CFAO but bought by them in 1902....It has not been possible to trace the history of its ownership earlier than 1881. In that year an Alfred Beneck sold the land to the Marseilles-based firm of Charles Auguste Verminck....During 1881 Verminck merged his holdings into the new Senegal Company - Compagnie Senegalaise de la C te Occidentale d'Afrique (CSCOA). The Senegal Company, in turn, was amalgamated with the CFAO (1887), though the transfer of the Albreda holdings to CFAO did not take place until 1902." The CFAO ceased trading there around 1956. In 1979 they sold their rights to the plot to the Gambia Government for the nominal sum of one dalasi.

As the external slave trade had been outlawed in 1808, and Albreda been transferred from the French to the British in 1858 and was regarded as having 'Colony status', this meant that anyone who had been a slave but wished to claim their freedom had the right to do so,

So one can hardly accuse the CFAO of complicity in the slave slave !

- 1 Daniele Gosnave, Babacar Fall, and Doudou Gaye
Sites et Monuments en Senegambia, 1988, 99-101.
- 2 Given in James Island: A Background with Historical Notes
on Juffure, Albreda, San Domingo, Dog Island by Winifred Galloway.
Banjul: Oral History and Antiquities Division, 1978, between pp.
46 & 47. "A plan of Albreda Trading Station in 1847". From
National Archives, Dakar, Series 13G316.
- 3 Historic Sites of The Gambia: An Official Guide to the Monuments
and Sites of The Gambia.
Banjul: National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), 1988.

ALBRED A (ALBADAAR) - UPPER NYOOMI - THE FLAG OF FREEDOM

A detailed account of the "Flag of Freedom" is given by Winifred Galloway [James Island: A Background with Historical Notes on Juffure, Albreda, San Domingo, Dog Island. Banjul : Oral History and Antiquities Division 1978.] pp. 48-50.

The site is considered by the people of Albreda to be a major historical landmark.

"In 1858 when the French traded Albreda to England in exchange for British renunciation of their claim to gum rights at Portendic on the Mauretanian coast, the British established a police post at Albreda. Next to the police post, which was located just across the road and down a little way from the former French Residence, they erected a flag pole and raised the British flag. According to local traditions, any slave who managed to reach the flagpole and touched it immediately received his freedom, and no one dared enslave him again..."

In 1803 the international trade in slaves had been outlawed, and in British territory slavery was no longer permitted to exist. Lord Mansfield's decision in 1772 ruled that the rights of slave owners could not be upheld on British soil, so slaves automatically became free, when they were on British territory. However, if they left British territory, they might be recaptured again !

The ruling applied only to "Colony areas" - Bathurst, Kombo St. Marry, and MacCarthy Island, but when Albreda was taken over from the French it was considered as "Colony status". The British had not attempted to abolish slavery in the rest of the Ceded Mile, though the overseas slave trade had been abolished.

In 1940 in the course of building market stalls at Albreda, the old flag staff base was uncovered, and in writing about it the Commissioner wrote "At the beginning of the last century, slaves could secure their

freedom by touching it with their forehead three times." [Annual Report, North Bank Province, 1940.]

When the Protectorate was declared [1894 ?] one of the points made by the early Commissioners was that slavery was now at an end.

The same tradition of touching the flag pole was also found on MacCarthy Island [Janjangbure]. In an account dictated by Tamba Sanian aged about 90 in the 1930s, we read " People who escaped from being a slave used to come across to the island and [if they] caught hold of the flag post...then [they] would be free. These freed slaves would become residents of the town [Georgetown]."

Tourists going to Jufure after landing at Albreda wharf pass the site of the flag, and tourist guides provide an explanation, but the story has been somewhat changed. They state that if a slave managed to escape from James Island, and was able to swim to Albreda and touch the flagpole, he would be considered free. However, the fort on James Island had been destroyed by the French in 1779, and since that time no slaves had been exported from the island, whereas the flagpole was not erected until 1858 . There was also an inconsistency if one was talking about the English involvement in the slave trade, in stating that one could become free by touching a British flagpole.

The site was also marked by placing an old cannon in the circle marking the site of the flagpole, but I am not sure when this was done - it was there by 1986.

In a recent account: [Paula Ebron : "Tourists as pilgrims: Commercial fashioning of transatlantic politics", American Ethnologist, 26(4), 2000, p.926] the flag pole had been transformed into a "freedom tree". [The Mandinka term yiroo - basic meaning , tree, was also used for a wooden pole, flagstaff etc.].

"As we walked to an adjoining town...some touched a well known stump, [a visit in 1998]

part of a tree referred to as the freedom tree. We were told this was the place of freedom. If one managed to escape while being taken on board the ship bound for the new world and could swim to shore and touch this tree, that person would have gained his or her freedom...."

In 1998 there was a new touch. At the "Roots Festival" there was the hoisting of a Black Flag, symbolising the "Back to Africa Movement" of Marcus Garvey.

Jane Banks McIntosh in A Pilgrimage to Senegal and The Gambia, West Africa, 1996 adds further confusion. p. 83. "our guide pointed to the spot from where Africans were taken to the Island of Goree and told that if they could swim back to the Village from the Island, they could go free." [The village in this case was Albreda.]. She had visited the "Slave House" at Goree, and it is true that slaves were taken from Albreda to Goree, but the story about swimming from the Island refers to James Island, not Goree Island which was at least 175 km away. As she remarks "Of course many were not able to swim back, and so they drowned."

NUMBER OF SLAVES TAKEN FROM THE GAMBIA.

In her travel book A Pilgrimage to Senegal and The Gambia, West Africa, 1996, Jane Banks McIntosh, describing her visit to Juffureh and Albreda writes (p.78) "During a period of time between 1475 and 1807 thirty to forty million slaves were transported from this Village (i.e. Juffureh) to sugar plantations in the United States and the Caribbean Islands. Some were taken from there to the island of Goree in Senegal and held there until they were sent on to the United States."

It is not clear where she obtained this figure of thirty to forty million slaves. The real number was very much less. Francis Moore, who was trading from James Island in the 1730s, at the peak of the overseas slave trade, mentions (p.41) that if there had been an extensive war inland, a caravan of 2000 slaves might reach the Gambia, but on page 43 he estimates that the number leaving the Gambia each year was more or less one thousand. [This would have comprised slaves coming from up river, as well as from the Jufure/Albreda/ James Island area.]

TWO STORIED STONE BUILDING IN OLD JUFURE

The Methodist missionary, Rev. William Fox, describes a visit he made to Jufure in, it would seem, 1839. [He is often unclear as to dates].¹ He writes "Jillifree is a small Mandingo town on the north bank....It is situated on a rising plain, five or six hundred yards from the river, is well stockaded with strong, tall mangrove timber, and has four entrances. The houses are built of mud, covered with grass and are tolerably substantial and comfortable. It contains a population of about one thousand souls... The house in which we are staying is a stone building, belonging to Messrs Chown and Messervey, of St. Mary's [i.e. Bathurst (Banjul)] - the only stone house here. It is situated between the town and the river, contiguous to both, and is surrounded by shrubs, flowers, and evergreens of various descriptions; the guava, banana, paupi (i.e. pawpaw/papaya), lime, and orange are among the number of fruit trees which are in great abundance."

The first overseas traveller to seek it out in modern times (1961) was Richard Owen,² who was following the route of Mungo Park. An elder from Jufure, then at an earlier site than the present day village, took him to the old building. "We followed him along an overgrown path across some well-wooded ground and, there as much part of the scene as the trees and tall grass, was a large iron-stone structure, weathered and mellow, with the patina of age, tufts of grass sprouting from crevices between the stones. It has been a two-storied building but the roof, the first floor and one side wall had fallen..." Owen noticed a number of bricks in the structure, and mentioned that many sailing vessels had carried bricks as ballast. There were traces of other buildings in the vicinity, a caved-in well, and remains of a dome-shaped oven, which was said to have collapsed only fifteen or twenty years previously. Nearby had been a pond where once cattle from Jufure village were watered.

Owen believed that the building had sheltered Mungo Park, but I found nothing in Park's narrative to indicate that he had spent a night on shore. The vessel in which he was sailing arrived on the 21st June 1795, duties were paid to the alkalo and his attendants, and they continued their journey upriver on the 23rd.

In all probability the old stone building was built after the Ceded Miles along the river had been yielded to the British (1826, later reconfirmed after the Barra war in 1832). This would have made its construction more than thirty years after Mungo Park had passed up river.

To add to the confusion many local people may well state that this was a "Portuguese " building, and was used during the days of the slave trade.

1 . Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions....1851, p. 394.

2. Saga of the Niger, 1961, p.28.

MUNGO PARK

- (1) A remark by a traveller, Helen Hodson, in Travel, January 1957, shows how curious distortions can find their way into print. She writes : "Lions, of the maneless type, are also seen, often sitting as though in conference on the tomb of Captain Mungo Park."

She confuses the monument, set up to mark the former site of Pisania, the trading station where Mungo Park stayed before setting out into the interior in search of the Niger, with his tomb. On his second expedition he perished at the Bussa Rapids in Nigeria, and his body was never recovered.

- (2) On a visit to Georgetown in 1972 with Dr. Peter Weil, I remember him talking to an old man, who said he remembered when Mungo Park used to go up and down the river. We dismissed this as a product of his imagination, as he was nowhere near 180 years of age.

Later I realized that there was a steamer called the Mungo Park, owned by the French Company (C.F.A.O.) which went up and down the river, and was used by officials when the Government Steamer -the Mansakillah, had broken down, a not uncommon occurrence. The Mungo Park was a stern-wheeler, of 150 tons, drew six feet of water. An illustration of this ship is given in H.F. Reeve: The Gambia, p. 130. (1912). A detailed description of a journey on her is given by Mary Gaunt: Alone in West Africa, 1912, pp.23-27. So the old man could well have been familiar with this steamer in his childhood.

- (3) Another occurrence of the name Mungo Park is given by Francis Bisset Archer in The Gambia Colony and Protectorate, 1906, p.3 .

"A tree exists some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Bathurst, along the Cape Road, known as 'Mungo Park's tree,' under which, it is stated, he used to rest on his way to the Cape St. Mary. It stands in a sylvan glade, and was near an old

village called Juku, since forsaken. This record is mentioned, as most people in the colony know the place as "Mungo Park."

There is nothing in his writings to indicate that Mungo Park was ever in the Kombo region. The island of Banjul was still an unsettled swamp, and people going to the interior would have no reason to go there. Ships normally sailed up river to Jufure where they paid dues and took on fresh water before proceeding further up river.

However, in Alfred Marche: Trois Voyages dans l'Afrique Occidentale, 1879, p.47, the author describes how, when out hunting past the cemetery, about three miles from Bathurst, he came across a monument erected to Mungo Park. He thought at first it was devoted to the famous explorer, but found instead that this Mungo Park was a British officer killed in a local revolt, which was put down with the help of the French.

So does anyone at present know of this monument or of the "Mungo Park tree" ? ¹

A useful article on Mungo Park is given in West Africa, 24 Sept. 1971, 1102-1103 - on the bicentenary celebrations of his birth (11 September 1771). near Selkirk in Scotland.

1 On a visit to The Gambia in June/July 2004, it seemed to me that all memories of this had long since vanished.

KATABA FORT

There is confusion between two different places in guidebooks - e.g. Michael Tomkinson's Gambia (p.80), and suprisingly in a government publication- The Historic Sites of The Gambia (p.68).

The place that is visited by tourists is at Ngeyen Sanjal in Upper Badibu. Here are the remains of a fort built by Seet Kani Ture⁽¹⁾, a Wolof warrior, as a place of refuge in case of attack..There was a stone building in the center with encircling fortifications. There were two gates, one on the east, the other on the west. Seet Kani was killed in a battle near Saba (Lower Badibu) during the Seet Mati war. When the Protectorate was established his descendants elected to go to the French side of the boundary, and now live at Medina Sabax in Senegal, but they still come to visit the old site, and explain its history to the present generation of schoolchildren. (1) Possibly helped by Governor V.S.Gouldsbury , 1877-84 .

In 1928 a Commissioner wrote: "It is a square structure built of squared stones..about 30 x35 feet, surrounded by a wall of rough stones enclosing say an acre, which included the well, dwelling huts, etc. The outer wall was topped by a stockade of logs and thorns when in use. Now all is a ruin, the outer wall only just traceable, the fort itself with nothing but the wall standing. No guns left."

However, because of its historic importance for local people, they still maintain the area, and tell visitors of its significance.

But in various writings it is being confused with another town called Kataba, east of Kuntaur in Niani, the capital of a 19th century king called Koli, who was continually at war with a warrior chief, Kemintang, resident at Ndungu Siin (now in Senegal).

Koli yield^{ed}/an island in the river to the British which they named MacCarthy Island, in the hope that an British presence would give him some

support against Kemintang. But the British erected only a small walled fort on the island for its own protection.

In 1834 Kemintang had seized, rightly or wrongly, a vessel belonging to a British trader, William Goddard. Negotiations to obtain reparations failed, and at a dinner party in Bathurst, a hurried punitive expedition was put together against Ndungu Siin. The name appears in various accounts as Dünkaseen, Dungasien, Dunnyasseen. Field pieces, rockets, ammunition etc. were hurriedly assembled, and the expedition of less than 200 men sailed off up river. But they had to cover the last part of their journey by land, 30 miles along a narrow path, and were not well organised to do so. Ndungu Siin had strong fortifications and was prepared to stand a long seige. The expedition's rockets had little effect as Kemintang had had the thatch removed from the houses. Their ammunition was finished, and their food and water ran out. Consequently they had to beat a hasty retreat back to the river, leaving their guns behind. Kemintang's forces did not attempt to pursue them, being content to take the guns as trophies. The disastrous affair is described in detail in Sir Henry Huntley's Seven Years' Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa, Vol.2 Twelve Months on the Gambia. London 1850, 270-280.

Koli still tried to obtain British support. In 1841 an agreement was made. He agreed to yield a square mile of his territory, and allow the English to build a fort there. In the meantime a small detachment from MacCarthy Island was sent to support him. But the Government in London refused to ratify the agreement, and denied permission for a fort to be built, holding that the authorities in Bathurst could not take sides in local disputes. So the troops had to be withdrawn.

Kemintang eventually died in 1848. But Kataba began to face trouble from the forces of Momodu Nderi Ba from the west in the 1870s.

In 1825 Gray [Travels in Western Africa in the Years 1818, 19, 20 and 21 from the River Gambia....London. 1825.]

described the town as being a 'walled town, of no very great extent or respectable appearance .' Hecquard [Voyage sur la Côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique Occidentale, 1855, p. 161.] passed nearby, without turning aside to visit the 'king'. He stated that the town had about 2000 inhabitants, but the fortifications were falling in ruins.

So far as I can find out Kemintang's surname was Kamara. This was the ruling clan of the area. The ruler of a branch of the Kamaras in Western Niani almost perished in the river, Because of his survival the clan name of Sabali (Failing to meet death) was adopted there.

The Names for an Island-

Lemain, Janjangbure & MacCarthy's Island

The island is mentioned in the writings of early Portuguese travellers, but is not specifically named, nor is there any indication that they ever had any base on the island. It appeared to be a swampy place, and in general Portuguese traders would have been attracted to towns on the mainland which also had good ports on the river.

When the island was yielded to the British in 1823¹, it was known as Lemain Island. Many islands were named after the nearest large town on the mainland. In this case it would have been that now appearing on maps as Lamin Koto. The name Lame was mentioned in the Portuguese traveller (Donelha)'s account, his travels probably dating from 1585. Lamain is shown on the 1661 map of the river, which was probably drawn in connection with Vermuyden's expedition, and Lemain on Leach's 1732 map, which became the standard map for the next hundred years or so.

The British were looking for an up-river base which could be used to protect their shipping and traders, and also as a place where freed slaves, either from captured vessels, or from Sierra Leone, might be settled. In 1823 Major Grant, then Commandant of the island of St. Mary, sailed up the river for this purpose, visiting chiefs near the river "in order to promote good feeling and understanding between them and the traders." The Methodist missionary, John Morgan², was invited to accompany him. Also in the expedition were a Sergeant and 12 privates of the 2nd West Indian Regiment, some government labourers, 12 liberated African men, and two prominent traders.

At this time the ruler of Kataba (Niani) was at war with the ruler of Ndungu Siin (now in Senegal), called Kemintang, and getting the worst of it. The country near the river was suffering as a result of this warfare. On the way up it had been suggested (by the traders ?)

that Lemain island might be a suitable place for a settlement. The King of Kataba was asked if he would be prepared to cede it to the British, and he and his elders seemed willing to negotiate. Apparently he himself had used the island as a place of refuge during local wars. Now he felt that with the British on the island, even with a small force, he might be in a stronger position against Keminjang.

But at this point no final agreement was made. Major Grant wished to continue further up river, and went as far as Kantalikunda (in Kantora), then turned back before the Barrakunda Falls. On his way down river, he decided that Lemain Island would be the best place for a settlement. It was about half way between Kantalikunda and St. Mary's Island. So he sent word to the King of Kataba, who came to the island to continue negotiations.

A treaty was concluded in April 1823, yielding the island for an annual payment of 100 dollars worth of merchandise to be paid to the King, and 10 dollars worth of merchandise to be paid to Alcaide Wooda Maddy. [It is not clear from the treaty where Wooda Maddy was living, but later we find mention of a small Mandinka settlement on the island called Morokunda.]

MacCarthy's Island

A cannon, soldiers, and black settlers were landed, and the union jack was raised. The name MacCarthy's Island was bestowed on it, in honor of Sir Charles MacCarthy,³ the Governor General of Sierra Leone and its dependencies (one of which was the Gambia). He was soon to lose his life in an expedition against the Ashanti (January 1824), of the then Gold Coast (now Ghana).

"All hands set to, cut down and burnt the bush, and erected a mud wall fort, which in honor of his Majesty George the Fourth, was called Fort George. " Fox (278-9) ⁴ describes the original fort as a "mud-walled fort, seventy four feet in length, ten feet high, and three feet in thickness all round, with a bastion at each corner." The fort did not last very long. A writer in 1840 stated that the original fort had disappeared...the hospital was a wretched hut, and the jail was a hollow tree with a door fixed to the opening. [No doubt a hollow baobab tree.]

The settlement which grew up beside the fort was called Georgetown.⁵ Morokunda seems to have been about half a mile away, and was left on its own. The missionary (John Morgan) looked for a suitable plot of land for the Methodist Mission. This was granted by the Major, though not officially confirmed later, and some adjustments had to be made. [A picture of the Wesleyan Mission Premises in 1835 is given in W.Moister's History of Wesleyan Missions, 1871, p. 187.]

The Major then returned to St. Mary's, leaving the Sergeant and 12 men behind as a garrison. As the island was now considered British territory, the ruling given by Lord Mansfield in 1772 that no slaves could be held on British territory was in effect. One of the first acts that occurred was that the Sergeant had to try and defend a group of people who had been captured as slaves, whom their "masters"

wished to claim back. He refused to yield them, but the local war lord then claimed that they were not "slaves" but "prisoners of war"- an idea perhaps suggested by local slave traders - and they therefore had to be surrendered.

But the tradition soon arose that if any slave escaped from the mainland, and touched the flag pole, or a certain tree nearby, it indicated that he/she was claiming his/her freedom. A register was kept of those who did so, and they could live as free persons on the island. If they were to^{go to} neighboring districts, they might be reclaimed or recaptured, as British law could not then be enforced on the mainland.

Soon merchants began to build stores near the fort.

The formal mission station was not developed until about 1832. A number of discharged soldiers were induced to settle, and given land to farm, and slaves who had claimed their freedom formed part of the new town.

* known as foroyaa sootoo = freedom wild fig tree.

or foroyaa yiroo = freedom tree.

Janjangbure

The name first appears in the literature in the account of a journey by Grout de Beaufort to Senegal and the Gambia in 1824 & 1825. In 1824 "il se trouvait sur les bords de la Gambie à Guiauguiaubourey, lieu dont aucun voyageur n'a parlé..." [He found himself on the banks of the Gambia at G..., a place not mentioned by any (previous) traveller nor recorded on any map.] The principal occupation of the place was the exploitation of timber ("Bois rouge" = red timber), but caravans of Serahuli sometimes came there with gold, though this was rare. Grout de Beaufort died further on on his journey.

The name next appears in the account of Mohammedu -Sise... by Capt. Washington. [Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, Vol. VIII, 1838.] . Capt Washington refers to "MacCarthy's Island, as we term it, the Janjan-Bure of the natives, an island with an area of about 3 square miles..."

Then it occurs again in the narrative of Hyacinte Hecquard [Voyage sur la côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique Occidentale. Paris, 1855, p. 162.] In 1850 he was travelling on the north bank of the Gambia and after leaving Diamali (Jamali) came to a village of Mandinka traders called Dhiendienboure , located opposite "Makarty Island," to which the name was also applied.

Hecquard crossed over to see the Commandant, and was treated by the doctor, Dr. Thompson, for an attack of fever. On his recovery he visited a trader, Richard Lloyd, who offered him transportation on one of his vessels which was going to Fataatenda. Hecquard provides a "plan de Georges Town," showing the layout of the main streets and the "fort area". The town had then about 1000 inhabitants.

In the middle of the town the missionaries had an establishment with schools for both boys and girls.

The "fort" - the residential area of the commandant consisted of various buildings put up at different times. One formed the residence of the commandant, another was for the officers. One was used as a prison, another the barracks for the troops. Behind this was a stable, storerooms, and a guard house. A wall surrounded the area. It was proposed to build a hospital later. At that time the garrison consisted of 46 soldiers from the West Indian Regiment. The soldiers were also able to cultivate land. ^a

Trade involved the purchase of groundnuts, wax and hides. In the dry season long distance caravans might come in with gold and ivory, but these were becoming fewer. There was intense competition between the traders on the island.

On the extreme east of the island was another small settlement (Fort Campbell) (30 houses or so) at Fatoto. A small fort/with a detachment from the main garrison, some Mandinka and Wolof traders, and a small establishment put up by the missionaries.

a The garrison was finally withdrawn in 1866 as an economy measure.

There are many different accounts explaining the name Janjangbure.

(in 1864)

1. The missionary John Morgan wrote...."according to a tradition which the writer learned from an intelligent Mandingo, from the circumstances of two men living and dying there called Jan and Jam (John and James). Bray in the Mandingo...signifies, divided [from bori = to run] or scattered, and denotes the insular position of the land. John and James were probably deserters from Fort James. (p.81)."

- 2 In an article in The Gambia News Bulletin , 19 June 1980, p.3. we read "About 1819, two hunters , Jang Sankare and Bury Sidibeh migrated from the Mali Empire into the Gambia....They settled at Kayai, in the Niani District. They were hunters and they made several expeditions along the Gambia River to shoot hippopotami which plagued the rice fields. The story goes that on one outing they shot a hippo which they later found dead on the banks of an island. That island became known as Jang Jang Bury....

[They]...removed the animal's teeth and brought them to Bathurst on foot to sell to the Portuguese who controlled business at that time....The Portuguese bought the merchandise. Soon a flag was hoisted on the island as indication that it has become Portuguese settlement..... then they discovered that the island was under the jurisdiction of Kumintang Sabally, then King of Kataba , whose personal property the island was. Subsequent negotiations gave them the island for a rent of £20 a year. The Portuguese built a fort which still stands today on the river banks to defend their territory.in 1821 the Portuguese settlers at Georgetown...ceded the island to the British. On March 12, 1823, through the initiative of Sir Charles MacCarthy..a band of volunteers set out to establish an up river settlement at Georgetown- second name from the first British commissioner George Macclean..."

There are a large number of inaccuracies in this.

Portuguese had ceased to be a factor in river trade in the 1700s, and the few that remained had been absorbed into Mandinka communities. So they never raised a flag, nor built any fort. Kumintang said to the king of Kataba, has been confused with Kemingtang of Ndungu Siin, who was the enemy of the King of Kataba. Sir Charles MacCarthy was at this time resident in Sierra Leone. The name George Maclean I do not recognise. Maybe he is being confused with Major Macklin.

3 Winifred Galloway in her A Brief History of Janjanbure (1983),

gives the tale of two elephant hunters from the east Jang Sankareh and Bure Sidibe, who came to lodge at Niani-Kayayi. They wounded an elephant during one of their expeditions, and it took refuge on the island, where it died. The two hunters followed it there, took the tusks and went to sell them to the Europeans at Bathurst during the time of Governor Charles MacCarthy. The Governor asked the hunters to show him where they had gotten the ivory, so they led him back. When he arrived he stood at about the place where the Commissioner's place is now, and asked the men to tell him their names. One said "Jang", so he wrote that down. The other said "Bure". He wrote that down too. So that is why the island is called both Janjanbure and MacCarthy Island.

Another Georgetown tradition says that two farmers Janjang Touray and Bure Jebata from Jamali Niani used to cross over to the island every rainy season to make their farms there....Eventually other people from Jamali settled on the island too, but since Janjang and Bure were there first, people always used to call it "Janjang ning Bure yaa," that is "Janjang and Bure's place." Later the phrase became run together into a single word, Jangjangbure."

↳ A Commissioner who was stationed on the island in 1933 -

G.N.N.Nunn, stated that the name was derived from the Mandinka word "janjang" to scatter, and "huri" to run. It was said to have acquired this name in the days when raids and slave dealing were prevalent, and people would flee to the island for refuge. The King of Kataba (Kolli) had apparently used it as a place of refuge during local wars (Gray p. 335).

Certainly when there was raiding on the mainland, people used to try and hide their cattle on the island. However in the early days of British settlement the island was raided several times in spite of its garrison, and cattle seized. But on one occasion at least, the soldiers pursued the raiders and got back most of the cattle. (Fox, p. 105).

- 1 An attempt had been made in 1785 to purchase the island for use as a penal settlement for convicts from England. But later in the year the Committee of the House of Commons condemned the scheme. A first year's rent had been paid, but as no more payments were made the island returned to its previous owner. (Gray: History of The Gambia, 277-280.)
- 2 John Morgan: Reminiscences of the Founding of a Christian Mission on The Gambia. 1864, pp. 87-90, 101-104.
- 3 The name MacCarthy was spelt in various ways. McCarthy, M'Carthy, MacCarthy.

The name MacCarthy's Island was used during the 19th century, and the form MacCarthy Island was adopted only in the 20th. century.
- 4 William Fox: A brief history of the Wesleyan Missions of the Western Coast of Africa, etc. 1851.
- 5 The name was changed in 1975 to Janjangbure.

There are many descriptions of the island in the 19th. century :

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Huntley, Sir Henry: | <u>Seven Years' Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa</u> . Vol. 2, 1850.
(visit in 1840). |
| Poole, T.E. | <u>Life , Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and The Gambia</u> .1850.
(refers to period 184-50.) |
| Moister, W. | <u>Memorials of Missionary Labours in Western Africa....</u>
(1866). |
| Mitchinson, A.W. | <u>The Expiring Continent</u> . 1881 . |
| Rancon, A. | <u>Dans la Haute Gambie....</u> (1891-1892)
1894. |

The So-called "OLD SLAVE HOUSE" at Georgetown on MacCarthy Island
(Janjangbure)

Such a structure is not mentioned by any of the 19th century travellers, nor by the Methodist missionaries, though the site is perhaps only a couple of hundred yards away from their mission. It is clearly shown on a 1919 plan of Georgetown, but bears no name, though other major buildings are identified by the names of major firms - Maurel & Prom, Bathurst Trading Co., French Company, Maurel Freres, etc . The block also appears on a map given in Andre Rancon's Dans la Haute - Gambie...1894 .

The first mention of the term "slave house" that I have been able to trace occurs in a song by Fabala Kanuteh, recorded by Samuel Charters in 1974 (The Roots of the Blues, 1981, 30-31, 42-46) . In it he describes how Musa Molo built a "slave house" so as to be able to sell slaves to the Portuguese. But Musa Molo was then living in the Casamance (Fuladu), not The Gambia, and was a leading figure in the period 1880-1900, whereas the Portuguese had vanished from the Upper Gambia by the late 17th century. . There is nothing in the Portuguese travel accounts to indicate that they ever had a base on MacCarthy Island (Lemaine Island/ Janjangbure.). Samuel Charters went to Georgetown to look for this slave house, but none of the traders could tell him where it was. A policeman eventually directed him to an old building by the river. Charters thought that the building did not look old enough to have been built in the days of the slave trade. It seemed to him to have been built by Europeans, rather than by a local chief, so he concluded that what he had been shown was probably just an old commercial building.

In the early days of the Protectorate Georgetown had become the major outlet for products (groundnuts, hides etc.) from the Upper River, and small ocean going vessels would come up to Georgetown itself. Later

as the river began to silt up, the major port for the export trade shifted downstream to Kuntaur. In 1970 because of further silting, Kau-ur became the limit for ocean going traffic. So the building at Georgetown looks as if it might have been built in the early 1890s.

But because of the interest in possible slave trading sites that followed the publication of Alex Haley's Roots (1976), mentions of the "Old Slave Market" began to increase. A colored postcard was prepared by the African Photo Agency and sold to tourists (1980s ?) Terry Palmer's guidebook, Discover The Gambia, 1988, has a photograph with the caption "All hope abandon, ye who enter here; the slave house, Georgetown."

The authors of Historic Sites of The Gambia (1998), after historians had examined the site, did not share this view. It had, for example, a tiled floor, not in keeping with a slave house, and iron hooks in the walls would seem to indicate that part of the building was used for meat carcass storage.

Local people also felt that a building with a ramp leading down to the basement was used as a holding centre for slaves about to be shipped down river. But this is close to the police post and Commissioner's office, and no one would ever have attempt to ship slaves from such a site. Again a tourist guide perpetuates the error. Andy Gravette's The Gambia (1999) states "Across the road, the basement of the newish building is said to have been another 'factory' where slaves were held before shipment down river to be auctioned."

Various guidebooks still give erroneous information. The booklet The Gambia: The Smiling Coast, (1995), states "Here stands the old slave market. The Insight Guide- The Gambia and Senegal (1996) still has "Old Slave House " But there is a ray of hope. The Lonely Planet Guide The Gambia and Senegal, (1999) now labels the building "Old warehouse."

I don't know why the people of Janjangbure are so persistent in their claim to have been involved in the slave trade, instead of emphasizing that this was one of the earliest places where slaves could claim their freedom. But if one is a stranger and crossing at the ferry, one is hassled by boys and young men wanting to show you where the slaves were held before being taken down river. And Nana Grey-Johnson uses the idea of a building where slaves were held in his novel I of Ebony, perpetuating the idea that a building on the river bank was a "Slave Factory ."

Erroneous interpretations of place names

Someone comes up with a nonsensical interpretation of a place name. Other historians quote the passage believing it to be true, and when a number of leading authorities have repeated it, it becomes harder to make people believe in its inaccuracy,

A good example occurs in the meanings given to various Gambian place names by Avelino Teixeira da Mota in Mar, Alem Mar (1972), p. 159. He was a distinguished scholar, but did not speak Mandinka, and relied on information provided by a local administrator, Antonio Carreira. But Carreira did not speak Mandinka all that well, and completely misinterpreted the Gambian names. Firstly, he changes Sutuco to Sutucuo. Then he interprets cuo as things (kuwo in Gambian Mandinka), and takes sutu to mean night, and comes up with "coisa misterioresa da noite" "mysterious things of the night!" But the Gambian word for night is suutoo with a long u, sutoo with a short u is "thick forest", the name meaning "at the back of the forest"; a meaning duly confirmed by an inhabitant of that town. Jalancoo, he does not realize, is simply "at the back of the shrine (jalang), the word being common in pre-islamic place names. There is also a word ko used in eastern Mandinka to mean stream, river, but I am not sure of the tone or vowel length. One finds it with river names "Nieriko" which flows into the river Gambia.

But Carreira's interpretation was also quoted by George Brooks (who was using a secondary source), and the late Paul Hair (of Liverpool University) wanted to use it (before I stopped him.) . When one has leading historians in Portugal, England, and America using the same data -erroneous though it may be - it is harder to correct.

The Last Unicorn

In the Daily Observer, 1 April 1997, p.5, there appeared an article by C.Thomas.

"Like many expatriates resident in The Gambia, I fell in love with the country at first sight. I returned again, and again, and yet again, until retirement from work in the UK enabled me to settle in the country of my choice.

Reading of the travels of Mungo Park inspired me to further read of whatever had been published on the history of The Gambia, both ancient and modern, and also listening to the tales of my garden boy, who was an animist as well as a Moslem., further inspired me to sit and listen to many other story tellers.

I discovered that oral history and folklore of The Gambia was handed down from father to son.

A story about one small village on the North Bank fired my imagination. This story was about a beautiful horse like creature with a single horn protruding from its forehead. Could this have been the mythical Unicorn I asked myself ? For there is no recording of it ever having been sighted on the African continent.

It was only recently that evidence of this story came into my possession from an ancient ship's log. I tried to piece together the information on these pages with what I had already heard from my visits to the North Bank. I can now verify the fact that the last Unicorn was indeed found on this continent.

According to the story a sailing ship that was running short of water and fresh fruit, anchored in the mouth of the River Gambia. The Captain, being uncertain of the mood of the local native population, took ashore an armed party to scout for water and fruit. They landed on that part of the North Bank now known as Barra, and were fortunate to find the natives friendly and willing to help the sailors to fill their water barrels and to collect some

fruit.

Confident that his crew and ship would be safe, the captain accompanied by a small party of sailors and natives, decided to explore a little further inland. It was then that the creature was sighted. The fabulous Unicorn.

The captain immediately realised the importance of his find, and what riches and fame it would bring him if he could capture and transport the creature to Europe. He gave chase,^a completely ignoring the warnings of the natives that the capture of the animal would bring ill-fortune on all those involved.

For the rest of the day the sailors chased and harried the helpless creature, but without success. Eventually, the captain, now thoroughly exhausted, decided that a dead unicorn was better than no unicorn at all, and called on his best marksman. The natives, realising what was to happen, implored the captain to desist and again gave warning of the dire consequences of such an action.

Ignoring the natives, the captain gave the order to fire. The shot failed to kill the poor animal, and although mortally wounded it leapt into the sea and attempted to swim to safety. Some distance from the shore the waves closed over its head and it disappeared from view. Thus perished the last unicorn.

The captain and crew, now thoroughly annoyed, relieved their frustrations on the natives by burning some of their huts, and returned to their ship and set sail.

Did the natives forecast of ill-fortune and bad luck settle on the captain and his crew? All I can tell you is the name of the ship as it appeared on the pages of the log - "The Marie Celeste". "

a The captain was unfamiliar with medieval traditions which held that a unicorn could be tamed by the touch of a virgin.

Much has been written about the 'Marie Celeste'

From J.G.Lockhart's book : The 'Mary Celeste', 1958, we learn that the ship sailed from New York for Genoa on November 7th, 1872, under the command of Captain Benjamin S.Briggs of Marion, Massachusetts....He was accompanied by his wife, and by their little daughter,aged two. Besides the Briggs family, the Mary Celeste carried seven men. The cargo consisted of 1,700 barrels of alcohol , consigned to Messrs H. Mascarenhas & Co. of Genoa. She was a half brig of 282 tons, built in 1861.

On December 5th, 1872 the vessel was spotted by the Captain of the Dei Gratia, a brig of Nova Scotia, bound from New York to Gibraltar under Captain Morehouse , who was a friend of Briggs, and had dined with him in New York before the Mary Celeste sailed. But the ship did not respond to any signals , and she was not maintaining a steady course. The men of the Dei Gratia could detect no sign of life aboard. A boat was lowered to approach the brig. The craft appeared sound, her sails set, her timbers undamaged, yet apparently nota soul aboard her.

Her cargo was properly stowed; there was no lack of food or water. But one hatch had been displaced and lay wrong side up, close to the hatchway it had covered. Otherwise there were no signs of confusion. The ship's papers, with the exception of the log book, were missing. The ship's boat had gone, and the davits were swung out with trailing ropes. The last entry in the log was recorded on November 24th, eleven days earlier, when theywere 110 miles west of the island of Santa Maria in the Azores At 8 a.m. the following morning, they were passing north of the island...

So , unmanned and unsteered, she held her course for the better part of 10 days and nights until she reached a point 373 miles east of the island of Santa Maria, where the Dei Gratia found her.

A.A.Hoehling in "Lost at Sea," I. Mary Celeste: The missing log, 1-26. (1984).

On p.8 he writes that Captain Morehouse (of the Dei Gratia) noted an entry in the log book up to 24th November, and an entry on the log slate dated 25th November showing that they had made the Island of St. Mary...."

A variety of speculations - mutiny, murder, sea serpents, subsurface pirates, upheavals... have been put forward to account for the abandonment of the ship. The likeliest explanation was one put forward by James Winchester. "Under pressure caused by high temperature, the alcoholic fumes [of the cargo] had escaped through the porous red casks. This had generated a gas which blew off the fore hatch. Volumes of vapor resembling smoke belched forth, leading Captain Briggs to believe that his vessel was on fire, and about to blow up. So he abandoned ship immediately."

But once the hatch had blown, ^{and the fumes escaped,} there was no further explosion, and the ship sailed on, leaving behind the small boat in which the crew had escaped, with little food or water, no compass, and maybe a hundred miles from the nearest land. How they eventually perished no one knows.

The US consul Sprague at Gibraltar in May 1873 wrote to the consul at Genoa that he was forwarding the Mary Celeste log book by steamer. Consul Spencer, if he ever received the log, never acknowledged it.

No copy of the log had apparently been made, for purposes of the inquiry, and the original log simply disappeared.

When I inquired of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts whether the log had ever been found [They had published a book on the Mary Celeste in 1942, reprinted in 1988], the librarian replied that to his knowledge the log had never been found.

So, in these accounts we have a reference to the island of Santa Maria, which is clearly in the Azores, but Hoehling writes of "the island of St. Mary," which is at the mouth of The Gambia.

A record of shipping (entering and leaving) the Gambia is published in the Government Blue Books. Unfortunately no dates are given, and vessels are not named. But in 1872 there was one vessel from the United States entering: 261 tons with a crew of 9 (p.329) with cargo
leaving : 231 " " " 10 (p.332) "

(Mary

This might well have been the Marie Celeste, which had a crew of 9, the captain and his wife, with 7 other crew members, but not counting his 2 year old daughter . If she was counted this would bring the total to 10. In an earlier description the Marie Celeste was regarded as being a vessel of 282 tons.

I wrote to the editors of the Daily Observer in 1997, but received no reply. A letter to Mr. Bakari Sidibe of the OHAD (Oral History Division), likewise produced no reply. Donald Wright, who had collected oral traditions in Nyoomi, could not recall any mention of a unicorn.

So, now in 2004, I have the following questions which maybe some one can answer.

Does the log of the Mary Celeste still exist? If so, there would be many institutions interested in publishing it. Could a xeroxed copy not be placed on record in a public library ?

Does the mysterious author of the article, C. Thomas, still exist ?
Where is he to be found ?

Does anyone know of any local traditions about the unicorn.?

The English had long been fascinated by the unicorn.

In Eliot Warburton's Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers, vol.3, p. 361, he writes: "...the natives (of the Gambia) affirm that there are many unicorns in their country, relating their shape, and how they go, accompanied with other beasts, to the water, who will not drink until he hath dipped his horn therein."

This statement relates to the year 1652.

An Irish group, the Irish Rovers, have recorded a song called "The Unicorn", in which they explain why unicorns are not as plentiful as they used to be. At the time of the Great Flood, a pair of them were supposed to go on board Noah's Ark. But they were playing around, and failed to turn up before Noah was forced by the rain to close his door. So they were swept away by the flood.

DRAGONS

Several writers of guidebooks give tales about 'dragons'. Webster's dictionary defines 'dragon' as 'a monster represented as a gigantic reptile having the tail of a serpent, a lion's claw's, wings, and a scaly skin.'

David Else in The Gambia & Senegal, 1999, provides a story from Abuko Nature Reserve. 'Around 1912, the stream was tapped by a British Colonial official to supply the growing settlement of Banjul. Local inhabitants were unhappy with this turn of events, mainly because they believed, along with the crocodiles a malevolent spirit or 'dragon' lived in one of the largest pools and would become angry at the intrusion. When a watchman guarding the early waterworks inexplicably died, their worst fears were confirmed. The colonial official acted fast, and asked his superiors for a large mirror to be sent from London, which he set up by the side of the pool. The story goes that the dragon came out of the pool, saw its own reflection and was scared off, never to be seen again.'

Craig Emms in The Gambia: The Bradt Travel Guide, p.46, 2001, writes: "Dragons or ninki nanka are the most feared of all animals in the Gambia. They live in remote areas...(and) are able to kill by merely looking at someone. Fortunately..there also exist professional dragon slayers who are immune to such effects, and who will for vast sums of money go and slay dragons. Since no one else can look at a dragon without dying, clients must rely on the word of the dragon slayer that the deed has been done."

Andy Gravette in The Gambia [Landmark Visitors Guide], p.92 , 1999 ed. mentions a huge dragon which lives on Kai Hai Island. "In some tales it was a vast python with an addiction for local human meat."

The old Mandinka newspaper Kibaro, for August/September 1955, p.3. gives an account of ninkinanko found at Bakau (Kombo).

So, according to local tradition, ninki nanko is a large serpent which lives in remote swamps. It has the power to kill anyone it sees with a glance from its eyes. But, if the person has a mirror, then the killing force is directed back to the ninki nanko, which is killed by its own lethal power .

Nevertheless I feel that the term 'dragon' represents a European belief, not a Gambian one, and that the term ninki nanko should be used for the West African concept, rather than 'dragon'.

The Boundary between Senegal and The Gambia.

Travel writers delight in telling a nonsensical tale about the boundary.
David Else: Backpacker's Africa, 1988, p. 217.

"...the border was declared to be the distance from the river a British gun-ship could fire cannon-shot, thereby being in a position to 'protect' the territory."

Andy Gravette: The Gambia, 1999, " During the 1890s the French and English came to an agreement as to how they would divide the land up. It was decided that the British should fire their most powerful cannon from the centre of the Gambia River, James Island, into the north bank. Whatever distance the cannonball travelled would determine the extent of British territories each side of the river. It is commonly thought that this shot was fired north, landing in a place known as Berending, around 16 kms (ten miles) inland. This established the width of the British Protectorate at around twenty miles across. This boundary has changed over subsequent years, but still the story is relevant." (p.25).

In The Bradt Travel Guide: The Gambia, by Craig Emms and Linda Barnett (p.10) it is written : "It is said that the borders of The Gambia which to a great extent follow the twists and curves of the River Gambia, were set by a British gunboat that sailed the length of the river. The gunboat was supposed to have fired its gun both north and south, and the border was placed where the shells landed." They remark, "However this is probably just a fanciful tale as there is no historical evidence to support it." (2001).

Donald R. Wright in The World and a Very Small Place in Africa, 2004 comments: "This is the version of history that teachers teach in Gambian schools, local authors write about in books on Gambian history, and taxi drivers tell their riders when conversation allows..."

Wright wonders who was given the task of standing out in the wooded savannas, ten miles or so north and south of the river, waiting to spot where the shells hit. I would wonder why anyone would think the shells (cannon balls ?) , would always land at the right distance. How far could they reach in the late 1890s ? Whenever I have been shown trees which were damaged by cannon fire, they have always been between one and two hundred metres from the river or creek !

The real story, however, is somewhat different.

In 1679, following an expedition by Ducasse against the *Damel* of Kayor and the *Buur Siin*, France made a series of treaties with the leaders of Rufisque, Portudal, and Joal. The coast from Cape Verd to the River Gambia, to a depth of six leagues, was to be yielded to the French for purposes of trade, without payment of any duties, and excluding all other foreigners. This presumably formed the basis of the right to establish a trading post on the north bank of the River at Albreda, a post which was subsidiary to Goree.

Possessions in Senegambia changed hands during various wars, but eventually by the Treaty of Versailles (September 1783), St. Louis, Goree, etc. which had been captured by the British were returned to France, which in turn guaranteed the possession of James Island (Fort James), and the River Gambia to Great Britain. In the treaty no mention was made of any rights to land along the river. In 1785 a treaty between the Governor of Senegal and the King of Baara, confirmed the right of free trade in Barra, the right to place a residence there, and to fortify their factory (at Albreda). This remained in French hands until 1857, when it was yielded to Britain.

Further up river France continued to expand its influence, and

signed treaties with local chiefs which placed Firdou, Saloum, Rip (Badibu), and Niani under French protection. They claimed the right to appoint a chief in the Sabach/Sanjal area. Eventually an Anglo-French convention met in Paris in August 1889 to define the boundaries. Britain wished to claim the river basin comprising the territory between the left bank of the river Saloum and the Gambia, and all the riverine countries as far as Fouta-Djallon.

(E. Rouard de Card: Les territoires africains et les conventions Franco-Anglaises, Paris, 1901, p. 24.) But France did not agree, and would yield a distance of only 10 klm on each bank of the river as far as Yarbutenda. British influence was not even permitted to reach the Barrakunda Falls, as France still was trying to have a port on the navigable portion of the lower river. At the meeting in Paris, "In the absence of any geographical features, which could provide a natural boundary, those boundaries had necessarily to be determined with a ruler and compasses." (J.M.Gray: A History of The Gambia, 1940, pp. 464-465.) . Joint Anglo-French surveying parties were sent out to begin marking out the boundaries, beginning work late in 1890. Sometimes prominent trees were marked, sometimes actual boundary pillars were set up. Modifications were made by the Boundary Commissioners in various surveys in 1895-96, 1898-99, and 1905-06. (Sir E. Hertslet: The Map of Africa by Treaty, reprint of 1909 edition, volume 1.

When the boundaries were provisionally made, villages near them then would decide whether they wanted to be under British or French jurisdiction , and would make the appropriate move. Sometimes the village might be in one country, their farmlands in another. The tale is told of one instance where the boundary cut through one man's house, one room was in The Gambia, another in the Casamance ; and

of a tree, one half of which was in Senegal, the other half in The Gambia.

Dominique Hado Zidouemba: Les sources de histoire des frontieres de l'Ouest Africain, Dakar: IFAN, 1979, list 16 articles from 1891 to 1976 concerning the frontier.

Misunderstandings and Mistranslations of individual words.

In many books and articles a non Gambian uses a term without any real understanding of the word, or distorting it badly.

(1) Samuel Charters in his Roots of the Blues, 1981, p.15 comes up with the idea that the word for musicians in Wolof is katt. But there is no such word in Wolof, and the usual term is gewel.

In Mandinka one has tantang-jaloo drummer

kooraa-jaloo player of the kooraa

where jaloo is also the word for "griot", "musician", etc.

But in Wolof the ending -kat is equivalent to the English -er

e.g. bey to farm , beykat farmer

just as in English one has

drum and drummer

(2) Paulla A. Ebron in Performing Africa, 2002, instead of using the normal form for a female of the jaloo class , i.e jali musoo (singular), jali musoolu (plural), invents a word of her own jali musaloo, e.g. Jali musaloo Aminata Suso, et al.

(3) Andy Gravette in The Gambia & Senegal (Insight Guide) - language section (p.332) has the Gullible Traveller reply to the question Nanga def ? (How are you ?) In Wolof, with the words jamba rek. The correct reply is jama rek - peace only . Jamba is one of the words for marihuana, which it is illegal to possess !

- (4) In the Bradt Travel Guide, Craig Emms invites the traveller to "take a cool drink under the bantaba." (p.38). The bantabaa is the large raised platform on which people sit in the village square. "Under the bantaba " would be a very cramped space, where odd bits of garbage accumulate, and lizards and many obnoxious insects run around. Maybe he was thinking of a baobab tree, in the shade of which a bantabaa is often built, or perhaps a bantango tree (silk cotton tree) often found in village squares. But "under the bantabaa" calls to mind a very different picture !
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- (5) In Marloes Janson's book The Best Hand is the Hand that Always Gives, (2002) about griottes and their profession, p.90, she writes:
 "Later Surakata told me that daaniroo at the market came into being at the time of Adolf Hitler, who is called 'Bomoo Keloo' in The Gambia." True, The Gambia did declare war on Germany, but Bomoo Keloo means 'the Burma campaign' , where Gambian troops were in action against the Japanese.
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- (6) On a plan of JUFFURE between the road to Albreda and the river, is a building labelled ALEX HALEY'S HOUSE.
 This however is not a place where Alex Haley lived, but a former Maurel & Freres Store, which has been converted into a museum, depicting the slave trade, and the history of the Haley family. The label is somewhat misleading.
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- (7) In The Gambia Social and Environmental Studies: Pupil's Book 3.

p.16 we read "Many of these antiquities, like the ones below, are kept in a special building called the National Museum. The Gambian National Museum is in Banjul and can be seen in the top picture."

Unfortunately the illustration is not that of the National Museum, but of a building in the Quadrangle with the clock tower (the former Secretariat).

- (8) The Lonely Planet Guide, prepared by David Else - The Gambia & Senegal, mentions the various types of Wolof drums, the tama, the sabar, the mblatt, and the gorong (p.40). The mysterious term here is the mblatt, which I cannot find in any of my Wolof dictionaries, and was unknown to various Gambian Wolof. Nevertheless the word is repeated on p.49 of Craig Emms' The Gambia (The Bradt Travel Guide). Can anyone enlighten me?