

DAHOMY AND THE ENDING OF THE
TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

The Journals and Correspondence of
Vice-Consul Louis Fraser, 1851–1852

For Elisée Soumonni
esteemed colleague and good friend

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ENDING OF THE
TRANS-ATLANTIC
SLAVE TRADE

The Journals and
Correspondence of
Vice-Consul Louis Fraser
1851–1852

edited by
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Introduction

The documents presented in this volume relate to a Vice-Consulate which the British government maintained in the West African kingdom of Dahomey, located in the coastal town of Ouidah, during the years 1851 and 1852, the Vice-Consul throughout this period being Louis Fraser. This material represents an invaluable historical source, most obviously and immediately for the nature and conduct of British policy towards West Africa in this period, which was mainly concerned with the suppression of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. But in addition, it serves as an important source for the history of Dahomey itself, which was one of the most powerful indigenous states in coastal West Africa at this time. Dahomey being a non-literate society, which generated no written documentation of its own,¹ the records of European diplomatic and other interactions with its people, and more especially its rulers, offer the nearest approach we can get to a contemporary indigenous voice and perspective on its history.

Dahomey

The kingdom of Dahomey was situated in what is today the southern part of the Republic of Bénin,² its capital being the town of Abomey, about 100 km inland from the coast. It was well-known to Europeans from the early eighteenth century onwards as one of the major suppliers of slaves for the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the Americas.³

Dahomey attained the height of its power under King Gezo, who acceded to the throne in 1818 (by a *coup d'état*, deposing his elder brother Adandozan) and reigned until his death in 1858.⁴ In 1823 he succeeded in defeating the

¹ With the exception of some letters sent in the names of Dahomian rulers, but which were written for them by visiting Europeans, of which some examples (including one written by Louis Fraser) can be found in Appendix 3 of this volume. These, however, present obvious difficulties, with regard to how far they really represent the views and expressions of their nominal Dahomian authors, as opposed to those who translated and transcribed them: for discussion of some earlier examples, see Thornton 2010.

² Formerly the French colony of Dahomey, which became an independent Republic in 1960, the change of name to Bénin occurring in 1975.

³ For the history of Dahomey, see esp. Bay 1998; and also the classic ethnographic study, Le Herissé 1911. For Dahomey in the 19th century, see also the unpublished theses of Ross 1967; Reid 1986.

⁴ For Gezo, see Djivo 1977.

Yoruba kingdom of Oyo,⁵ in the interior to the north-east (in modern Nigeria), to which Dahomey had earlier paid tribute, and initiated a series of successful expansionist wars, until his forces suffered a decisive defeat in an attack on another Yoruba state, the city of Abeokuta, to the east (also in Nigeria) in 1851. Despite this reverse, Dahomey remained a major military power under Gezo's son and successor Glele (reigned 1858–89), and maintained its independence until it was conquered by the French in 1892.

Through its role in Atlantic commerce, Dahomey became one of the African states most familiar to Europeans, and was regularly cited as an exemplary case in debates about the nature of African societies, and about the morality of the Atlantic slave trade.⁶ It was commonly regarded as exceptionally centralized and autocratic in its political organization—according to one writer of the late eighteenth century, no less than ‘the most perfect despotism that exists, perhaps, on the face of the earth’.⁷ It was also a highly militarized polity, which celebrated its martial prowess by the sacrifice of a portion of the captives taken in its wars in public religious ceremonies.⁸ Both these features were cited by defenders of the slave trade, who argued that those exported as slaves were thereby being rescued from the supposedly worse fate—of subjection to a tyrannical and arbitrary authority, or death—of those who remained behind in Dahomey.

These issues remained alive even after the legal abolition of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, since Dahomey was one of the principal areas in West Africa where the export of slaves continued on a substantial scale even after its legal prohibition, now directed mainly to Brazil and Cuba: the last trans-Atlantic shipment of slaves from Dahomey occurred as late as 1863. From the 1830s, there also developed an alternative trade for palm oil, which was in demand in Europe mainly as a raw material in the manufacture of soap, but this remained of secondary importance before the 1850s.⁹

⁵‘Yoruba’ refers to a linguistic group, comprising numerous separate states, of which Oyo (until its collapse in the 1830s) was the largest and most powerful. The term was not yet current in this sense in Dahomey in the 1850s, and does not occur anywhere in Fraser’s journals and correspondence (though it is employed in editorial annotations).

⁶See Law 1986a.

⁷Dalzel 1793, vii. For Dahomian political organization, see e.g. Lombard 1967; Glélé 1974. The picture of royal autocracy was certainly exaggerated, the King’s power being in practice constrained by the need for the consent of his senior officials: for the internal politics of Gezo’s reign, see Law 1997a.

⁸For human sacrifice and its connection to militarism in Dahomey and elsewhere in West Africa, see Law 1985.

⁹For the rise of the palm oil trade, including some reference to Dahomey specifically, see Lynn 1997.

Ouidah

The town of Ouidah (spelled ‘Whydah’ in nineteenth-century English usage), which became the seat of the Vice-Consulate, had been a major ‘port’ for the Atlantic trade since the 1670s,¹⁰ and was indeed the second most important point of embarkation of slaves in western Africa, exceeded in numbers exported only by Luanda, in Angola. Following its conquest by Dahomey in 1727, it also became the local centre of administration within the coastal area of the latter kingdom.¹¹ As such, it grew into a substantial urban settlement, with a population of perhaps up to 20,000 in the 1850s.¹²

The pre-eminence of Ouidah in the Atlantic slave trade had led to the establishment there of fortified trading posts by all of the three principal European nations involved in the trade—Portugal, Britain and France. With the legal banning of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, these forts lost their commercial function, and were abandoned—the English fort in 1812.¹³ During this lapse of an official British presence, King Gezo appointed the locally born son of a British soldier of the fort garrison as ‘Governor’ of the fort, and this position passed in turn to a grandson, called Madiki Lemon, who held the office in the late 1840s and early 1850s.¹⁴ However, the three European forts were subsequently reoccupied, in connection with the development of the trade in palm oil—the English fort in 1838, as a private venture, by the merchant Thomas Hutton, based on the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) to the west, whose agents thereafter shared possession with the indigenous Governor.¹⁵ Along with the physical premises, Hutton also took over the services of its African personnel, descended from former slaves and free employees of the fort, of whom the most prominent was a man called Midjrokan, who had inherited from his father the titular position of fort interpreter, but in practice served as the ‘headman’ of the fort servants.¹⁶

The flourishing of the illegal slave trade at Ouidah down to the mid-nineteenth century resulted in the development of a substantial Brazilian community in the town, comprising Brazilian slave-traders—with their African wives, children, slaves and clients—and also numbers of former slaves who had obtained their freedom in Brazil and returned to re-settle in

¹⁰Strictly, Ouidah was not a ‘port’, although often described as such, being situated about 4 km inland from the coast.

¹¹For Ouidah, see Law 2004a.

¹²Ibid., 73–4, 223.

¹³I generally refer to the ‘English’, rather than the ‘British’ fort, in conformity with local usage, in which it is known as ‘*le fort anglais*’.

¹⁴Referred to as ‘Madiki’ in Fraser’s Journals: for this man, see Law 2010a.

¹⁵Law 2004a, 204.

¹⁶‘Majerrika’ in Fraser’s Journals: see *ibid.*, 74, 204.

Africa.¹⁷ The leader of this community—and also the leading locally based slave-trader—down to the 1840s was the notorious Francisco Felix de Souza, who had assisted King Gezo in his seizure of the throne in 1818, and in reward was appointed as the King’s commercial agent at Ouidah, with the title of ‘Chacha’.¹⁸ This man had died in 1849, but his office of Chacha was inherited by his eldest son Isidoro Felix de Souza, and others of his sons were also prominent merchants in Ouidah in the 1850s.¹⁹ However, the de Souzas were now overshadowed by another Brazilian slave-trader, Domingos José Martins (commonly called by the British, ‘Domingo Martinez’), who had established himself within the territory of Dahomey in 1846, and succeeded Francisco de Souza in the effective position, if not the formal title, of the King’s principal commercial agent and adviser, down to his own death in 1864.²⁰

Despite the prominence of European and Brazilian traders in Ouidah, the town remained under indigenous African rule, supreme local authority (under the King) being vested in the Dahomian Viceroy, entitled the ‘Yovogan’ (meaning ‘Chief of white men’),²¹ who through most of Gezo’s reign (and on into the 1870s) was a man called Dagba.²² There were also a number of wealthy indigenous merchants in Ouidah, who traded in both slaves and palm oil, one of whom called Gnahoui served as the King’s official interpreter for the English language.²³ Louis Fraser as Vice-Consul in 1851–2, therefore, had to deal not only with the Dahomian King at Abomey and with his local representatives in Ouidah, the Yovogan and Gnahoui, but also with the leading Brazilian merchants, such as the de Souzas and Martins, and with the occupants of the English fort, including the indigenous ‘Governor’ Madiki Lemon and the ‘headman’ Midjrokan, as well as the agents of the British merchant Hutton.

The British campaign against the slave trade

The establishment of the British Vice-Consulate in Dahomey arose out of the British campaign to suppress the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Having prohibited its own nationals from participating in the slave trade in 1807, the British

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 183–8; and also Law 2001a.

¹⁸ See Ross 1969; Law 2004b.

¹⁹ Law 2004a, 214–16.

²⁰ See Ross 1965.

²¹ Rendered by Fraser as ‘Av-vo-gar’ or ‘Yer-vo-gar’.

²² Law 2004a, 174.

²³ ‘Narhwey’ in Fraser’s Journals: see *ibid.*, 175–6.

government went on to pursue a systematic policy of diplomatic pressure on other European and American nations to follow suit in banning the trade, combined with military pressure in the form of naval patrols to intercept and arrest illegal slave ships. Initially, the main focus was on the demand side of the trade—i.e. closing down the markets for slaves in the Americas. But frustration at the failure of this approach to bring the trade to an end led to a shift in British policy, from 1838 onwards, towards action on the supply side—i.e. shutting off the supply of slaves from Africa. This more positive ‘African policy’ was especially focused on encouraging the development of ‘legitimate’ (i.e. non-slave) trade as a substitute for the slave trade. But it also included the negotiation of treaties for the abolition of the slave trade with the rulers of African states.²⁴ Dahomey became one of the major foci of this campaign, because it was one of the main centres of the continuing illegal slave trade.

The maintenance of the Vice-Consulate at Ouidah in 1851–2 was one episode in the history of diplomatic negotiations between Dahomey and Britain over the slave trade and other issues which extended from the 1840s to the 1870s, after which Dahomey was effectively relinquished to the sphere of influence of the French.²⁵ The initiative for these Anglo-Dahomian negotiations came initially from the Dahomian side, when King Gezo co-opted private British visitors to his kingdom—the Methodist missionary the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman in 1843, the Scottish explorer John Duncan in 1845—to transmit messages to the British government, expressing his desire for friendly commercial relations, and more particularly for the official reoccupation of the English fort in Ouidah, abandoned since 1812.²⁶ As these initial contacts encouraged the belief that Gezo might be willing to co-operate in the suppression of the slave trade, they were followed up from the British side by official missions, from the administration of the British colony of the Gold Coast—by Lieutenant-Governor William Winniett in 1847,²⁷ and the Judicial Assessor Brodie Cruickshank, on Winniett’s behalf, in 1848.²⁸

²⁴ See Law 2010b, 151–2.

²⁵ For an overview of these negotiations, see Law 1995.

²⁶ See their published accounts: Freeman 1844; Duncan 1847.

²⁷ Described (briefly) in The National Archives [hereafter, TNA], CO96/11, Lieutenant-Governor Winniett to Earl Grey, Cape Coast Castle, 12 May 1847; see also the more substantial published account of another member of this mission, Dr Archibald Ridgway (1847).

²⁸ See his report, in House of Commons Parliamentary Papers [hereafter, HCPP], *Copy of Despatches from the Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast, giving an account of Missions to the King of Ashantee and Dohomey* [sic], 1849, incl. in no. 2, Report by B. Cruickshank, on his Mission to the King of Dahomey, 9 Nov. 1848.

The Dahomey Vice-Consulate

Although, after some prevarication, Gezo in fact refused to sign a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade,²⁹ he nevertheless contrived, by his personal charm and assurances of his goodwill and desire for friendship with Britain, to convince the British government that such an agreement might eventually be secured, and that it was therefore worthwhile to pursue a policy of constructive engagement with him. In 1849 it was decided to establish a British Consulate for the Bights of Benin and Biafra (in terms of modern political geography, the West African coast from south-eastern Ghana to Cameroun), based on the island of Fernando Po, the first Consul appointed being John Beecroft, a merchant active in the West African trade. Beecroft's initial instructions explicitly defined his responsibilities as including 'the ports in the territories of the King of Dahomey'.³⁰ It so happened that around the same time John Duncan, the same man who had visited Dahomey in 1845, was commissioned by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to return there in order to promote the cultivation of cotton,³¹ and the British government took the opportunity to appoint him also as Vice-Consul to Dahomey, subordinate to Beecroft, and charged with mediating in disputes between British traders and the local authorities, and promoting the development of 'legal commerce' in agricultural commodities as a substitute for the slave trade.³² Duncan arrived in Ouidah in August 1849, and took up residence in the English fort there, occupation of which he shared, or more accurately disputed, with Thomas Hutton's agents. From Ouidah, Duncan undertook two visits to King Gezo at his capital Abomey, the second in company with a British naval officer, Lieutenant Frederick E. Forbes, which again revived British anticipations that the King might be won over for the cause of abolition of the slave trade.³³ Duncan himself, however, fell sick, and was taken on board a British naval vessel on 30 October 1849, and died at sea a few days later.³⁴

²⁹ He did accept a treaty of 'friendship and commerce', guaranteeing liberty of trade and protection for British merchants, but making no reference to the slave trade, signed on 3 April 1847.

³⁰ HCPP, *Correspondence relating to the Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, no. 11, Viscount Palmerston to Consul Beecroft, 30 June 1849.

³¹ See Ratcliffe 1982, 92, 95–6.

³² See Duncan's instructions, in Appendix 1, no. 1. For Duncan's period as Vice-Consul in Dahomey, see also O'Connor 2006, 332–59.

³³ Duncan briefly describes the first of these missions in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, no. 6, Duncan to Palmerston, Ouidah, 22 Sept. 1849. A longer account of the second mission was published by Forbes 1851, i, 43–95; see also Forbes' original journal, as printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 9 in no. 9.

³⁴ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 9 in no. 9, Forbes' journal, entry for 30 Oct. 1849; incl. in no. 10, Commander Harvey to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 Nov. 1849; also Forbes 1851, i, 93–4.

During the vacancy in the Vice-Consulate which this left, a follow-up embassy to King Gezo in May–July 1850 was conducted by Consul Beecroft, again accompanied by Lieutenant Forbes.³⁵ The 1850 mission proved a seemingly decisive failure: Gezo not only insisted that he would continue the slave trade, but also proclaimed his intention to attack Abeokuta, where a number of British subjects (European missionaries and liberated former slaves from the British colony of Freetown, Sierra Leone) were settled. Beecroft concluded that only coercion would induce Dahomey to give up the slave trade, and proposed that the port of Ouidah should be blockaded by the British navy to this end.³⁶ He also proceeded to pursue a more aggressive policy of support for Abeokuta, beginning with the delivery of a gift of arms in January 1851, and culminating in a military attack on the coastal kingdom of Lagos, east of Dahomey, to depose the reigning king in favour of a rival claimant to the throne, in December 1851—with the dual purpose of imposing a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade on Lagos, and opening trade for Abeokuta there, to guarantee its supply of munitions to resist Dahomey.³⁷

Fraser's Vice-Consulate

Nevertheless, the British government back in London had still not altogether given up on Dahomey, and resolved to fill the vacant Vice-Consulate. The man now chosen for the post was Louis Fraser.³⁸ A modern study has described Fraser, on the basis of the records of his Vice-Consular service, as ‘a somewhat unsatisfactory, shadowy, even shady, figure’, and assumed that, like Beecroft (and several others employed in the West African Consular service) his background was in commerce.³⁹ In fact, he was an entirely respectable person (and deemed sufficiently eminent to warrant an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*), whose previous African experience was not in any commercial role.⁴⁰ Although of limited formal education, he had an established reputation (and a record of publication) as a zoologist, having been employed in the administration of the Zoological Society of London in various capacities, including as Curator of its museum (the forerunner of the

³⁵ See Forbes' published account (1851, vol. ii); and his original journal, in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220. Also Beecroft's journal, in TNA, FO84/816, ff. 154–229—another text which warrants publication.

³⁶ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, no. 9, Beecroft to Palmerston, 22 July 1850.

³⁷ For Beecroft's policy, see Lynn 1982.

³⁸ Sometimes spelled ‘Frazer’ in contemporary accounts (and hence also in modern scholarship), but he himself seems always to have used the spelling ‘Fraser’.

³⁹ Smith 1978, 44, 45.

⁴⁰ For Fraser's career, see esp. Moore 2004.

London Zoo) in 1844–6. He had also served on the British government's expedition up the River Niger (in Nigeria) in 1841–2, as official 'naturalist', and had subsequently made two visits to Tunis, in North Africa, to collect zoological specimens, in 1846 and 1847. His distinction as a zoologist is, indeed, reflected to the present in the naming after him of several species, especially of West African birds.⁴¹

Through the Zoological Society, Fraser had attracted the patronage of the Earl of Derby,⁴² and in 1850 was serving as curator of the Earl's private zoological collection at Knowsley House, Prescott, in Lancashire. It has been suggested, in fact, that it was the Earl's influence which secured him the Vice-Consular appointment, although no corroboratory evidence of this has been traced in the records of the Foreign Office.⁴³ Fraser himself, in a letter to Consul Beecroft, explained his motives for wanting the Vice-Consulate as a combination of commitment to the humanitarian project of suppressing the slave trade and the opportunity which the appointment afforded of pursuing his zoological studies:

It is not that I am in want of a situation, that has prompted me to volunteer for Western Africa and leave my family, but a hope that I may benefit them, and at the same time advance my favourite pursuit Zoology—so much required from that part of the Globe . . . I am very anxious to go, not only for the advancement of my favourite study, but to be enabled to support you, whom I have always respected, in carrying out a new light among the Darkies, having long felt that a few good men might do great things on that coast.⁴⁴

Fraser's journals of his stay in Dahomey do in fact include reference to his collection of zoological specimens.⁴⁵ Descriptions of West African birds collected by Fraser during his Vice-Consulate were published by the prominent ornithologist Sir William Jardine;⁴⁶ and by Fraser himself in a contribution to the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Viz. Fraser's eagle-owl, *Bubo poensis*; *Neocossyphus fraseri*, a thrush; *Deleornis fraseri*, a sunbird; also, the term *Fraseria* is applied to a genus of West African forest fly-catchers. There is also an African mammal (Fraser's musk shrew, *Crocidura poensis*), and 2 American birds (Fraser's warbler, *Basileuterus fraseri*; *Oreomanes fraseri*, the giant conebill).

⁴² This was the 13th Earl (died 1851), father of the 14th Earl who became Prime Minister in 1852, 1858–9 and 1866–8.

⁴³ Moore 2004, 102, 116 (on the authority of the 1888 edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*).

⁴⁴ TNA, FO84/816, Fraser to Beecroft, 29 Jan. 1850.

⁴⁵ See Fraser's Journals, pp. 48, 92, 94. Page references to Fraser's Journals are according to the text published in this edition, rather than relating to the pagination of the original manuscripts.

⁴⁶ Jardine 1852 and 1853: the first of these relates to birds collected on Fernando Po, presumably during April–July 1851, before Fraser moved to Dahomey; the second relates mainly to birds from Dahomey. The birds were supplied to Jardine by Fraser's agent in London, Hugh Cumming, who also sold birds collected by Fraser to the British Museum in Nov. 1851 and Jan. 1852 (Moore 2004, 104).

⁴⁷ Fraser 1853 (also relating to birds from Fernando Po).

Fraser's appointment to the Vice-Consulate had been mooted as early as January 1850, when Beecroft, who was currently on leave in England, recommended him to the Foreign Office, and Fraser travelled to London, to be interviewed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston.⁴⁸ Probably Beecroft knew Fraser from his service on the Niger expedition of 1841–2;⁴⁹ at any rate, it seems clear that it was Beecroft's recommendation, rather than the supposed intervention of the Earl of Derby, which was decisive in his appointment. Another candidate, Edward Dennis, also put himself forward for the post, with the support of the Church Missionary Society, the main British missionary organization active in West Africa, but Fraser was preferred.⁵⁰ (Dennis then proceeded to Ouidah in a private capacity, but died there before Fraser's arrival.)⁵¹ Fraser's appointment was delayed, however, probably because the Foreign Office was waiting for notice of the outcome of Beecroft's mission to Dahomey, which was received in London only in October.⁵² He finally received his formal letter of appointment on 4 December 1850.⁵³ He embarked from England on 10 January 1851,⁵⁴ arriving initially at the British colony of Freetown, Sierra Leone, from where he took a second ship which took him east along the coast to the Benin River (in modern Nigeria), where he met up with Consul Beecroft on 30 March.⁵⁵ Since in the meantime King Gezo had carried out his threatened attack on Abeokuta, albeit unsuccessfully (on 3 March 1851), it was judged unsafe for Fraser to proceed immediately to his post in Dahomey, and instead Beecroft took him to Fernando Po, where they arrived on 12 April.⁵⁶ There, further delays were imposed by a lack of shipping to take Fraser on to Ouidah, but he was eventually delivered there on 22 July 1851, like Duncan earlier taking up residence in the English fort.

Thereafter, apart from a brief absence between 11 September and 15 October 1851, when he went to consult Beecroft at Fernando Po, Fraser remained at his post until March 1852. During this period he made three visits to the Dahomian royal court inland: in August–September 1851, at Abomey; in

⁴⁸ See TNA, FO84/816, memorandum by E[ddisbury], 12 Jan. 1850.

⁴⁹ Beecroft was not a member of the expedition, but met its members at Fernando Po, and gave assistance.

⁵⁰ TNA, FO84/818, Dennis to Palmerston, 29 and 31 Jan., 28 May and 1 June 1850.

⁵¹ TNA, FO84/819, Dennis to Palmerston, 16 Oct. 1850, stating that he would embark for Ouidah on 21 Oct. Dennis referred to his intention to promote cotton cultivation in Dahomey: this suggests that he may have been connected with the initiative of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce referred to earlier, which had sponsored John Duncan's establishment at Ouidah in the previous year. Fraser refers to his death in his Journals, p. 42.

⁵² See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, no. 9, Beecroft to Palmerston, 22 July 1850, annotated as 'received October 11'.

⁵³ TNA, FO2/4, Lord Stanley to Fraser, 4 Dec. 1850.

⁵⁴ TNA, FO2/5, Fraser to Palmerston, HMS*t. Volcano*, Devonport, 10 Jan. 1851.

⁵⁵ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B., no. 10, Beecroft to Palmerston, 19 April 1851.

⁵⁶ TNA, FO2/5, Fraser to Palmerston, 30 June 1851.

January 1852, when the King was residing at the town of Cana, a few miles south of Abomey; and in February/March 1852, again at Abomey.⁵⁷ The first of these visits served to reinforce British scepticism about King Gezo's interest in signing an anti-slave trade treaty, and Beecroft's belief that he should be coerced into doing so.⁵⁸ Back in London, meanwhile, Foreign Secretary Palmerston had in any case resolved on coercion: in September 1851 instructions were sent to the Admiralty to institute a blockade of Dahomey, which was duly established from 1 January 1852.⁵⁹ Under this pressure, Gezo reopened negotiations, and Fraser, together with a naval officer, Commander Thomas G. Forbes (to be distinguished from the F. E. Forbes who had visited Dahomey in 1849–50) undertook a second mission to the King, on 1–14 January 1852. Gezo did now accept a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade, which he 'signed' on 13 January 1852. However, he refused to accept the standard form of treaty, which included the requirement to abolish human sacrifices, protect Christian missionaries, and expel foreign slave-traders, and authority for the British to use force to put down any revival of the slave trade. He also rejected an attempt to insert a clause requiring him to make peace with Abeokuta. Fraser and Forbes were sent back to attempt to persuade Gezo to sign the full treaty, between 23 February and 2 March 1852, but he refused to make any further concessions. Consequently, the blockade of Dahomey was initially maintained. However, when news of the treaty which Gezo had signed was reported back to the government in London, it was judged acceptable, and the blockade was therefore raised, in June 1852.

Shortly after his third mission to the King, believing his life to be in danger, Fraser abandoned his post at Ouidah, on 8 March 1852, and embarked for Fernando Po.⁶⁰ It was not immediately clear that this meant the end of the Ouidah Vice-Consulate. Indeed, in June 1852, the Commander-in-Chief of the British navy's West African squadron, when notifying King Gezo of the lifting of the blockade, requested Fraser's reinstatement.⁶¹ However, Beecroft had other ideas, and succeeded in persuading the government in London to follow his lead. In June 1852 he wrote to advise the Foreign Office that he was contemplating, 'should I find it requisite', to transfer Fraser to Lagos, where a pro-British king had now been installed, following the military intervention

⁵⁷ Note that the reference to the first of these missions in Law 1995, 294, is garbled, attributing it in error to the naval officer Commander A. P. E. Wilmot. In fact, although a mission by Wilmot to King Gezo was mooted, it was distinct from Fraser's mission, and was not in the event undertaken: see Fraser's Journals, pp. 112, 113.

⁵⁸ See Beecroft to Palmerston, 4 Oct. 1851, in Appendix 3, no. 2.

⁵⁹ HCPP, *Papers relative to the Reduction of Lagos* (1852), no. 43, Palmerston to Admiralty, 27 Sept. 1851; also Law 2010b, 157–8.

⁶⁰ Not in Nov. 1852, as wrongly stated in Law 2004a, 218.

⁶¹ See Appendix 2, no. 43.

in December 1851; and in September 1852 the Foreign Secretary, now Lord Malmesbury, wrote to confirm that the government did not consider it 'desirable, under present circumstances' to maintain a Vice-Consul in Dahomey, and approving Fraser's transfer to Lagos.⁶²

This was not in fact quite the end of Fraser's service as Vice-Consul to Dahomey, because of a matter outstanding from his residence there, arising from the alleged mistreatment of a British trader (Hutton's local agent), Andrew Stanfield, on which Fraser had reported on 5 March 1852, shortly before his departure from Ouidah. News of this incident eventually came to the notice of the Foreign Office, which in June 1852 sent instructions to the Admiralty that a ship should be sent to Ouidah to 'support Mr Fraser' (who was evidently assumed to be still in post there)⁶³ in demanding compensation for Stanfield.⁶⁴ When these instructions reached West Africa, Fraser was still at Fernando Po, and was despatched with a naval officer, Commander Henry R. Foote, for a last visit to Ouidah, on 25–26 September 1852, though once again his mission proved fruitless.

Fraser was finally transferred to Lagos in December 1852.⁶⁵ His career as Vice-Consul there was brief, since the British government decided in February 1853 to appoint a full Consul to Lagos, to suppress the Vice-Consulate, and to dispense with Fraser's services.⁶⁶ The new Consul, Benjamin Campbell, finally arrived in Lagos to supersede Fraser in July 1853.⁶⁷ The latter presumably returned to England soon after; he was in London by February 1854, when he initiated a somewhat querulous correspondence with the Foreign Office about disputed claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred during his term of office.⁶⁸ He later moved to Liverpool, from where he intended to take ship back to Lagos, though in what capacity and for what purpose is not indicated.⁶⁹ He did indeed set out for Africa: the explorer Dr William Balfour Baikie, who embarked from Plymouth on 24 May 1854 (on his way to take

⁶² HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, nos 9, 10. Beecroft to Earl of Malmesbury, 28 June 1852; Malmesbury to Beecroft, 13 Sept. 1852.

⁶³ Beecroft's despatch reporting Fraser's departure from Ouidah, dated 28 June 1852, was not received by the Foreign Office until 2 Sept. (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, no. 9).

⁶⁴ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 2 in no. 14, Lord Stanley to Admiralty, 2 June 1852.

⁶⁵ Smith 1978, 44, 153 n. 50.

⁶⁶ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, no. 17, Lord John Russell to Beecroft, 19 Feb. 1853.

⁶⁷ Smith 1978, 48.

⁶⁸ TNA, FO2/12, Fraser to Wodehouse, 16 Feb. 1854, dated at 80 Gower Street, London, which was apparently the address of his agent Hugh Cumming (cf. Moore 2004, 104).

⁶⁹ TNA, FO2/12, Fraser to Thomas Staveley, 3 March 1854, dated at 13 King Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool, stated that he was 'preparing to leave the country'; and his last letter, to Earl of Clarendon on 21 May 1854, that 'I leave here tomorrow, en route, for Lagos'. Smith 1978, 154, n. 64, assumes that this further West African visit was 'presumably to trade', but more probably Fraser would have wanted to continue his zoological collections.

charge of another expedition up the River Niger) recalled that Fraser was one of his fellow-passengers.⁷⁰ Baikie's ship did call at Lagos en route to Fernando Po, but whether Fraser in fact disembarked there is unclear; no further reference to him has been traced in the records of the Lagos Consulate, or indeed of that at Fernando Po.

Fraser was back in England by November 1856, when he attended a meeting of the Zoological Society in London. His later career included an extended visit to Ecuador, in Central America, again to collect zoological specimens, in 1857–60, and he eventually settled in the USA, and apparently died in North America sometime in the mid-1880s, but there is no record of any further visits to Africa.⁷¹

Assessment: Fraser as diplomat

In terms of British diplomacy, Fraser's Vice-Consulate in Dahomey was manifestly an unqualified failure. Although a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade was finally extracted from King Gezo in January 1852, this was not something for which Fraser could claim any credit, the negotiations on this occasion being conducted by his naval colleague, Commander T. G. Forbes. Fraser's failure was not wholly his own fault, since he had been given a job of immense difficulty. In July 1850 the Commander-in-Chief of the British navy's West African squadron had written to King Gezo threatening that if he attacked Abeokuta, and the British subjects resident there came to any harm, this would be considered a hostile act, and would provoke a naval blockade of Dahomey.⁷² Although this threatened blockade was not proceeded with, because of the defeat of the Dahomian attack on Abeokuta in March 1851, nervousness about a British attack on Dahomey clearly persisted. Even on his first arrival at Ouidah in July 1851, Fraser was viewed with suspicion; the French naval officer Lieutenant Auguste Bouet, who was engaged on a mission to King Gezo at Abomey at this time, observed, presumably reflecting what he had been told by Dahomian informants, that Fraser was 'nothing other than a spy charged with assuring the chances of success of an expedition against Whydah by the lagoon.'⁷³ Gezo was also

⁷⁰ Baikie 1856, 7, referring to 'Mr Louis Fraser, one of the survivors of the [Niger] expedition in 1841'.

⁷¹ Moore 2004, 103–5.

⁷² HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1850/1, Class A, incl. in no. 225, Commodore Fanshawe to King of Dahomey, 23 July 1850.

⁷³ Bouet, in Nardin 1967, 101. The lagoon runs parallel to the coast, between Ouidah and the seashore; presumably the attack was anticipated from Badagry, to the east, where British traders and missionaries were already established.

annoyed by the ‘strong language’ of letters from Palmerston which Fraser had to deliver to him in August 1851.⁷⁴ Fraser’s position was further compromised by the fact that Consul Beecroft, in reaction to his failure in Dahomey in 1850, as noted earlier, had adopted a policy of active support for Dahomey’s enemy Abeokuta, which led to suspicions that Fraser was acting as a spy for Abeokuta.⁷⁵ The last straw was the imposition of the naval blockade of the coast in January 1851, on which Fraser was not consulted—or even informed—in advance, but for which he nevertheless found himself held responsible by the local authorities.

This would have taxed the abilities of an expert diplomat; but Fraser was seemingly innocent of any skill in diplomacy, and manifestly ill-equipped for the post to which he had been appointed.⁷⁶ This in part reflected a general weakness of the system of consular appointments at this time; although the Consular service had become a department of state in 1825, it was not as yet really professionalized, with no provision for any form of training until 1855.⁷⁷ Fraser lacked, first, the requisite linguistic capacities, knowing neither Fon, the local language of Dahomey, nor (more critically) Portuguese, which served as the *lingua franca* of Afro-European communication there.⁷⁸ The casual racism of his characterization of British policy in West Africa, quoted earlier, referring to Africans as ‘the Darkies’, also suggests an attitude of cultural superiority and arrogance which was to be amply confirmed in his period as Vice-Consul. Despite his earlier African experience, he had no previous knowledge of Dahomey itself, but had nevertheless conceived a prior prejudice against it. In 1842, in the aftermath of the Niger expedition, he was actually on a ship which stood off Ouidah, but it made no attempt to land or communicate with the shore: as he later recalled, he was unimpressed with Ouidah, which he thought ‘although the best looking place on that part of the coast is miserable in the extreme, nothing but flat land, not a hill much less a mountain to be seen’.⁷⁹ He approached his task in a spirit of paranoia,

⁷⁴ See Fraser’s Journals, p. 74.

⁷⁵ Specifically, while Fraser was at Abomey in Sept. 1851 he received a letter from a military commander of Abeokuta, asking him to supply information about King Gezo’s intentions. Although he tried to conceal this, the contents of the letter became known to Gezo, and were made the basis for the accusation that he had come to Dahomey ‘as a spy, to see all I could and give information to his enemies, the Abbeokutans’: see Fraser’s Journals, p. 146.

⁷⁶ Cf. the judgement of Smith 1978, 44, on Fraser’s subsequent period as Vice-Consul at Lagos, that he was ‘inadequate for the post ... unable to provide leadership or even to put up an appearance of impartiality’.

⁷⁷ See Platt 1971, esp. 25–27.

⁷⁸ In response to a subsequent enquiry from the Foreign Office about his knowledge of foreign languages, Fraser claimed to know only ‘a little French and less Arabic’ (TNA, FO2/7, Fraser to Malmesbury, 17 July 1852).

⁷⁹ TNA, FO84/816, Fraser to Beecroft, 29 Jan. 1850.

assuming that he would face the hostility of the slave-merchants resident at Ouidah: in advance of embarking from England, he expressed his fears of being 'exposed to poison and assassination' there.⁸⁰

Arrived in Ouidah, he was quick to quarrel with the British naval officers with whom he was required to cooperate, beginning with the captain of the ship which delivered him there, Commander Arthur P. E. Wilmot. In his dealings with the Dahomians, he employed a combination of bullying and bluster. He also explicitly refused to defer to local cultural norms (including the expectation of introductory gifts), declaring on one occasion that he 'had not come to follow their custom, but to shew them English customs'.⁸¹ His first mission to Abomey ended with him storming out in anger, and returning to Ouidah without being formally discharged by the King. On the second mission in January 1852, King Gezo refused to deal with him, instead negotiating exclusively with Commander T. G. Forbes, and demanded Fraser's removal from the Vice-Consulate. His conduct attracted formal official censure from the Foreign Secretary, Lord Malmesbury, who, after receiving Forbes' report of the negotiations of January 1852, including King Gezo's refusal to deal with Fraser, wrote that 'there is reason to suppose that this ill-feeling towards you on the part of the King originated in your overbearing demeanour in negotiating with him or his officers on former occasions', and directed that, while it was necessary to be firm on the issue of ending the slave trade, Fraser should 'in future bear in mind that such firmness will lose none its weight if it is tempered by constant courtesy of manner and by a conciliatory disposition'.⁸²

Despite these admonitions, Fraser's manner remained uncompromising and abrasive in his final visit to Ouidah in September 1852, when he dissented from the more conciliatory attitude adopted towards the local authorities by the naval officer who accompanied him, Commander Foote. In conversation with Foote and the Yovogan, by Fraser's own account, he 'tried all I could do, to make them knock their heads together', with the predictable outcome that the Yovogan again demanded that he should be withdrawn and replaced by 'a man with a good heart'.⁸³ Indeed, the pattern was repeated in Fraser's subsequent brief tenure of the Vice-Consulate at Lagos, when he quarrelled with the locally established missionary the Rev. Charles A. Gollmer, as well as with British naval officers, and provoked the King here also to demand his removal.⁸⁴ Fraser's deficiencies as a diplomat, however, in no way reduce the value of his account as a historical source.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO2/4, Fraser to Palmerston, 8 Dec. 1850.

⁸¹ Fraser's Journals, p. 67.

⁸² HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, no. 1, Malmesbury to Fraser, 19 April 1852.

⁸³ See Fraser to Beecroft, 22 Nov. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 8.

⁸⁴ Smith 1978, 44–46.

The value of Fraser's account

As was noted earlier, Fraser's Vice-Consulate was one in a series of British diplomatic engagements with the kingdom of Dahomey over three decades, of which several others generated substantial published accounts—including, earlier, those of the Rev. T. B. Freeman in 1843, John Duncan in 1845, and Lieutenant F. E. Forbes in 1849 and 1850; and subsequently, the pioneer anthropologist (but also, in this context, British Consul) Richard Burton in 1863–4.⁸⁵ There were also French missions to Dahomey in this period which generated published accounts, notably by the naval officers Lieutenant Auguste Bouet in 1851 (shortly before Fraser's arrival),⁸⁶ and Lieutenant Albert Vallon in 1856 and 1858.⁸⁷ Fraser's account, in contrast, was never published in any form, and so has remained less known (and has exercised less influence on perceptions of Dahomey and its history) than these others. This seems ironic, in view of the fact that it relates to the one British mission to Dahomey which actually produced a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade, albeit one which proved ineffective in practice.

Fraser's journals and correspondence, like these other contemporary accounts, are valuable sources not only for the history of British policy on the suppression of the slave trade, but also for various aspects of that of Dahomey itself. First, his account of the day-to-day diplomatic negotiations is unusually detailed, and provides exceptionally full documentation of the Dahomian side of these exchanges, and therefore insight into the perceptions, objectives and tactics of Dahomian policy. The fact that Fraser evidently did not understand much of what he reported, it may be argued, however paradoxical this may appear, actually makes his account even more informative than if it had been subject to systematic authorial interpretation—in the manner, for example, of Richard Burton. Second, Fraser also provides detailed descriptions of Dahomian court ceremonies which he witnessed, which complement those in other contemporary sources, and which help to clarify certain confusions and obscurities in earlier treatments of the ceremonial cycle.⁸⁸ Third, his diaries of his residence in Ouidah itself provide detailed information on the commercial, social (and even religious) life of the town which is not really paralleled in other contemporary accounts—except, to a more limited degree, that of Lieutenant F. E. Forbes.

In evaluating the material in Fraser's Journals, it should be borne in mind that, although they are cast in the form of daily entries, they were evidently

⁸⁵ See Burton 1864.

⁸⁶ Bouet 1852. See also Nardin 1967, which includes the text of an unpublished report by Bouet.

⁸⁷ Vallon 1860/1; see also the account by another member of the 1856 mission, Dr Repin (1895).

⁸⁸ See, in addition to the annotation of the text of the Journals, Endnote 1.

not composed as a continuous journal, but represent, at least in part, a retrospective reconstruction. This is explicitly acknowledged in the journal entry for 30 July 1851, nearly four weeks after Fraser's original departure from Fernando Po for Ouidah, which notes that, because of various distractions, he had hitherto neglected his journal: 'although I have made three or four attempts, I have not succeeded in writing it up since my arrival, until this morning', with the consequence that it was 'very brief, [to] say the least of it, and I am certain I have omitted many things which I otherwise should not have done'.⁸⁹ In fact, the text of the first instalment of his journals, covering the period from 4 July to 24 September 1851, was not completed and transmitted to Consul Beecroft until after Fraser's return to Ouidah, from visiting Beecroft at Fernando Po, on 15 October 1851.⁹⁰ Some entries in the Journal, in fact, include explicit forward reference to information obtained only subsequently.⁹¹ It may also be noted that the first two (of six) of Fraser's Journals, covering the period down to 29 December 1851, bear the intriguing titles 'Copies of rough notes from the daily journal of Mr Louis Fraser' and 'Scraps from the daily memoranda of Mr Vice Consul Fraser', wordings which seem strictly to imply that they represent only a selection from longer texts. There are indeed a number of days for which there are no entries in the Journals: although some of these gaps may be due to nothing having occurred on these days which Fraser deemed worthy of report (and perhaps on occasions, to his being incapacitated by illness), some probably reflect selective editing from the original texts, either by Fraser himself or by a subsequent copyist.⁹² If there was such an earlier, more complete, text of Fraser's journals, however, it has not survived, or at least has not so far been traced.

It should also be stressed that to a considerable extent Fraser was reporting not what he had observed himself, but what he had been told by other people, especially his African interpreters, and in particular the Dahomian 'Governor' of the English fort, Madiki Lemon, who served as his principal interpreter. One of the most frequently recurring phrases in Fraser's Journals is in fact 'Madiki says ...' Indeed, one of the distinctive (and invaluable) features of Fraser's account, by comparison with those of other European visitors to Dahomey, is the frequency with which he refers to the input of his African assistants, who are much less visible in other accounts. The reason

⁸⁹ Fraser's Journals, p. 41.

⁹⁰ See Fraser to Beecroft, 15 Nov. 1851, in Additional Dispatches, no. 1.

⁹¹ See Fraser's Journals, p. 54 (13 Aug. 1851), relating to his journey from Ouidah to Abomey, but also including additional information which he obtained on the way back, on 8 Sept.; also p. 108 (7 Sept. 1851), referring to the dictation of a letter, and adding that this was delivered to Consul Beecroft on 22 Sept.

⁹² E.g. there is no journal entry for 18 Oct. 1851, although a separate note by Fraser (see Case of Richard Graves, p. 177) shows that he received a petition on this day.

for this difference is probably that Fraser's account, unlike those of, for example, Duncan, F. E. Forbes or Burton, was not written with a view to publication.⁹³ It therefore preserves a more complete sense of his day-to-day interactions with, and by implication his dependence upon, African assistants in dealing with the Dahomian authorities and the wider local society. The published accounts, in contrast, have largely edited out the role of such African assistants, in order, it may be suggested, to emphasize the author's own pre-eminent agency.

It may also be noted that Fraser had read some of the available published accounts on Dahomey, and sought to relate his own experiences and observations to them. In particular, he explicitly cites the books by John Duncan and (more frequently) Lieutenant F. E. Forbes, sometimes to corroborate but sometimes to correct their information.⁹⁴ In consequence, in some cases where Fraser appears to confirm information given earlier by Forbes, he may in fact simply be repeating what he had read in the latter's book. The final form of Fraser's account is therefore the outcome of a dialogue, not only with his African informants, but also with a pre-existing literary tradition.

The treatment of the texts

The core of this edition comprises the Journals of Louis Fraser, which cover the entire period of his residence in Dahomey, from July 1851 to March 1852. It also includes, as separate items, Fraser's summary, with supporting documents, of the case of Richard Graves, an African employed on a British merchant ship who complained about his treatment, which Fraser dealt with in October 1851; and other letters and reports by him which provide additional material, including some written after his departure from Ouidah in March 1852. It further presents, in three appendices, various other relevant documents: instructions issued to him by his superiors in the Foreign Office and Consular service; a selection of (in fact, most of) the documents referred to in his Journals and correspondence (including especially diplomatic correspondence between agencies of the British government and the Dahomian authorities); and letters and reports produced by other British officials (mainly officers of the navy's West African squadron) which refer to Fraser's activities. The originals of all these documents are located in the FO2 (Africa, Consular) and FO84 (Slave Trade) series at the National Archives (TNA) at Kew, London.

⁹³ Although presumably Fraser was aware that what he wrote might be included in the papers printed for submission to Parliament, as indeed some of it was, as noted hereafter.

⁹⁴ He also once cites the earlier work of Dalzel (1793): see Journals, p. 51.

Although Fraser himself never published any account of his Vice-Consulate, much of the material included in this edition was printed in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP), in the series of *Correspondence relating to the Slave Trade*. However, the coverage of HCPP series is not complete—for example, Fraser’s Journal of his third visit to the Dahomian royal court, and his diaries of his residence at Ouidah between and after his visits to the capital (together covering the periods from 15 October to 29 December 1851, and 19–21 January and 4 February to 31 March 1852), and a substantial ‘Commercial Report’ which he wrote after leaving his post at Ouidah (in May 1852), are not included.⁹⁵ Even some of the documents which are included are subject to some degree of truncatory editing, in particular excising his more overt criticisms of naval colleagues.⁹⁶ Moreover, the arrangement of this material in the HCPP series is user-unfriendly, in that it is not assembled together in a way that would facilitate comparison for purposes of interpretation and evaluation—with correspondence/reports from naval officers and Consular agents, for example, in separate volumes (Classes A and B, respectively), although (as noted earlier) they were often operating in conjunction. And perhaps most importantly, the usefulness of the material in its presently available unmediated form is substantially limited by the lack of contextualization, including the identification of individual persons, places and events alluded to.

The annotation in this edition seeks to supply this necessary contextualization, elucidating matters which Fraser’s cultural incomprehension leaves obscure in the original texts, and providing systematic cross-referencing to and comparison with other contemporary accounts, including those listed earlier. It is hoped that this will serve to advance understanding and evaluation of these other sources also, only one of which (Richard Burton’s account of his visit in 1863/4) has hitherto been the subject of a modern scholarly edition (published in 1966),⁹⁷ which, moreover, included only limited detailed annotation, and was of course unable to take account of the substantial relevant secondary literature which has been published in the last forty years.

Fraser’s account comprises not one, but a total of six separate journals. The first, entitled ‘Copy of rough notes from the daily journal’, covers the period from his departure from Fernando Po for Ouidah on 4 July 1851 to 24 September 1851, when he again embarked from Fernando Po, following his visit to consult Beecroft, to return to Ouidah. The second, entitled ‘Scraps from the daily memoranda’, covers his residence at Ouidah from 15 October

⁹⁵ Altogether, this material which was omitted from the HCPP, and which is now placed in the public domain for the first time, amounts to about a third of the volume of Fraser’s Journals.

⁹⁶ Omissions and other discrepancies between the ms. and HCPP versions are noted in the annotation to the texts.

⁹⁷ Newbury 1966.

to 29 December 1851. The third, entitled ‘Facts relating to my second trip to Abomey’,⁹⁸ deals with his second mission to the Dahomian royal court, between 29 December 1851 and 15 January 1852 (though the daily entries in fact stop at 8 January, owing to the King’s exclusion of Fraser from the negotiations). The fourth, entitled ‘Occurrences, gossip &c. at Whydah’, covers the period from 19 January to Fraser’s return to Fernando Po, after abandoning his post at Ouidah, finishing at 31 March 1852. However, it omits two periods in which Fraser was absent from Ouidah, which are covered in two further separate texts: the fifth entitled ‘Windward Treaties’, and relating to negotiations with communities on the coast to the west of Ouidah, between 22 January and 2 February 1852; and the sixth reporting ‘The last mission to Abomey’, between 20 February and 4 March 1852. In the present edition, the material in these fourth, fifth and sixth Journals has been rearranged in its proper chronological order, in order to yield a continuous sequential narrative: this has involved splitting up the fourth, ‘Occurrences, gossip &c.’ into four separate parts.

It should be noted that the texts of the Journals appear to be copies, rather than Fraser’s original manuscript texts (though some of Fraser’s letters are preserved in his own handwriting). In consequence, it has seemed legitimate at certain points where the text presents obscurities or other difficulties, to hypothesize miscopying as a possible explanation. The texts have been reproduced, as nearly as possible, in their original form, retaining their original idiosyncrasies of spelling, capitalization and punctuation. Where words seem to have been inadvertently omitted, and where the original text employs contractions, the additional words or letters required for comprehension or completeness are supplied within square brackets. All material within round brackets, in contrast, is in the original texts.

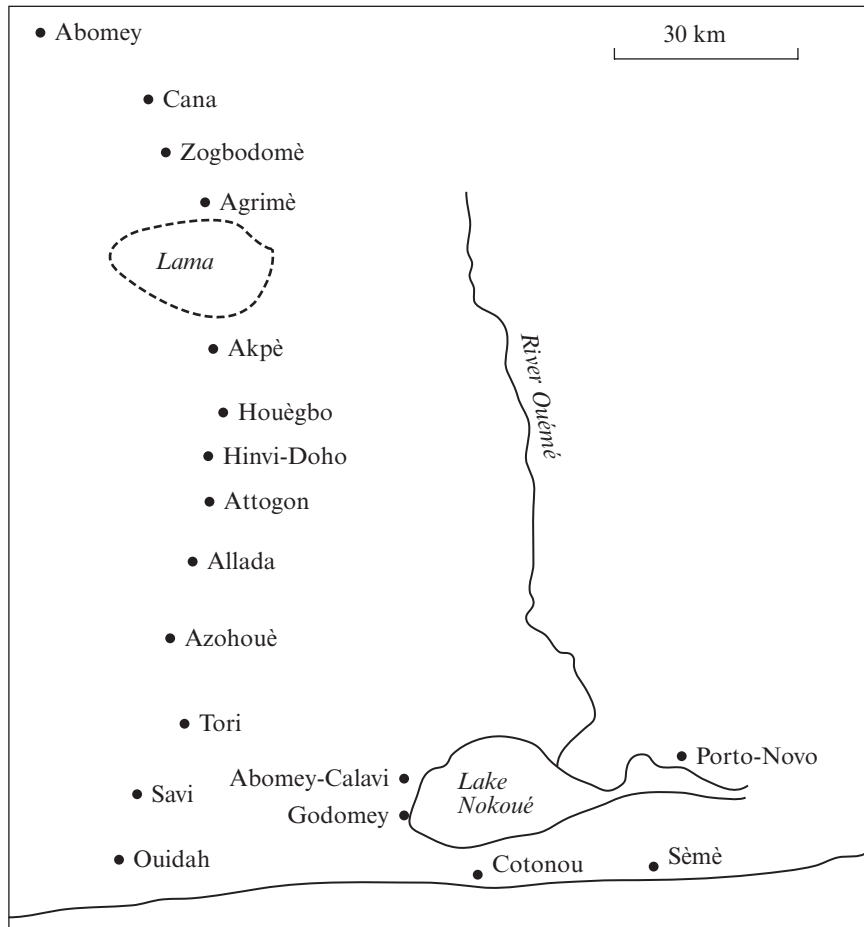
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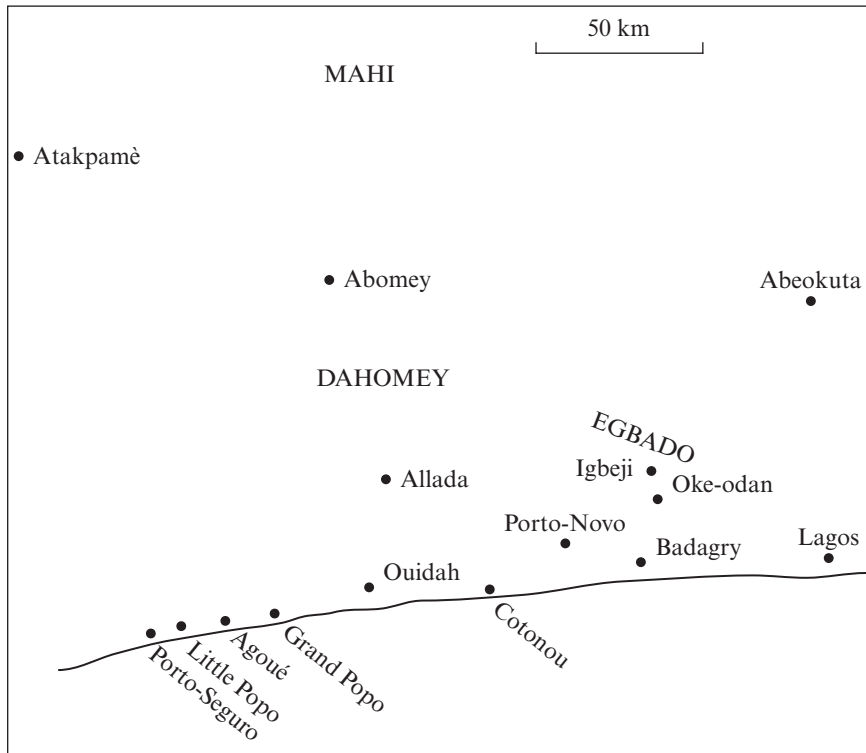
⁹⁸Sic, although in fact Fraser met the King on this occasion at Cana, rather than Abomey.

Abomey, in the Republic of Bénin, to identify and explore relevant locations, in February 2010 was undertaken with the assistance of Elisée Soumonni. For the interpretation of words in Fon quoted in Fraser's Journals, I have depended upon the dictionary by Fathers Basilio Segurola and Jean Rassinoux.⁹⁹

⁹⁹Segurola and Rassinoux 2000.



Map 1. Dahomey



Map 2. Dahomey and its neighbours

The Journals and Correspondence of
Vice-Consul Louis Fraser

Part 1
Journals



1. 'Copy of rough notes from the daily Journal of Mr Louis Fraser, H[er] B[ritannic] M[ajesty's] Vice Consul for the Kingdom of Dahomey—1851'

[4 July–24 September]¹

July 4. Having received instructions from Mr Consul Beecroft,² to join H.M.St. [= Her Majesty's Steamship] 'Bloodhound', all my traps³ were placed on board, and we departed at 4 p.m.

I purposely omit the details of the voyage, wind, weather and capture of the Slaver 'Deseada', in the New Calabar,⁴ as they belong more properly to the officers, in charge.⁵

11th [July] Came to, off Whydah, at 6.10 p.m.

12th [July] On shore, they hoist a blue and white flag⁶



14th [July] H.M.St. 'Sampson', Capt[ain] Jones, Senior Officer,⁷ anchored at 7.45 p.m.

15th [July] Breakfasted with Capt Jones. Capt. J[ones] wrote an official letter to the Av-vo-gar,⁸ informing him of my arrival and wishing to know, when he

¹Original text in TNA, FO84/886, ff. 48–129v; also printed (with omissions) in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 2 in no. 4. Transmitted to Beecroft at Fernando Po on 15 Nov. 1851 (see Additional Dispatches, no. 1).

²See Appendix 1, no. 4.

³i.e. luggage.

⁴i.e. the New Calabar River (one of the outlets of the Delta of the River Niger).

⁵See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, no. 165, Commodore Bruce to Admiralty, 31 July 1851, with inclosures, reporting the arrest of the *Deseada*, which was found to be equipped for the slave trade, and destroyed as unseaworthy; cf. also *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (2009) [hereafter, TASTD], voyage no. 4438.

⁶Cf. further reference to flags raised on shore, p. 27. Fraser does not explain the meaning of these signals. They may have related to the state of the landing: a later (1871) account noted that the English factory onshore raised a flag as 'the signal for a bad surf unsafe for landing' (Skertchly 1874, 3).

⁷i.e. Senior Officer in the Bigths Division of the British navy's West African squadron.

⁸Subsequently also spelled 'Yer-vo-gar': i.e. Yovogan, the title of the Dahomian Viceroy of Ouidah.

would be ready to receive me. dispatched it, by Lieut[enant] Elliot, with permission to land, if practicable. Lt. E[lliot] after waiting, outside of the surf, with a signal hoisted for a canoe,⁹ for a considerable time, without any notice being taken of him, retired to an English schooner, that was embarking Palm Oil, and endeavoured to bribe some of the men to take him ashore in their trade canoes, but they all refused, so leaving the letter with the master of the schooner, he returned on board.

In the afternoon, Capt Jones rec[eive]d a letter purporting to come from Signor Antonio de Souza,¹⁰ stating that the Av-vo-gar, Cha-cha¹¹ and all the other principal personages, were attending the Customs, at Abomey,¹² and, that the surf would not admit of my landing.

Mr Prior, one of Mr Hutton's agents,¹³ who wrote the above for De Souza, wrote also, saying his canoes and men should be at my service, on the morrow.

16th [July] Breakfasted with Capt Jones.

Received a letter from Mr Beart, one of Mr Hutton's agents,¹⁴ saying the surf was quite easy, that an English canoe was coming off, which was quite safe and at my service, that I had better repair to the schooner, as the canoeemen refused to come so far out.

Capt Jones wrote to Signor Antonio De Souza, to know if he was prepared to receive me, officially.

⁹Sandbars parallel to the shore (on which surf breaks) prevented European ships from approaching close to the shore in this region, so that African canoes were used to communicate with the shore (Law 1989, 224–9).

¹⁰Subsequently, often referred to simply as 'Signor Antonio': a younger brother of the 'Chacha' mentioned later in this sentence, and one of the leading Brazilian merchants resident in Ouidah.

¹¹Named later as Isidoro de Souza (see p. 44); the title of the King of Dahomey's commercial agent at Ouidah, originally held by Isidoro's father, the Brazilian slave-trader Francisco Felix de Souza.

¹²Cf. pp. 44, 51 (5 and 11 Aug. 1851), recording the return of the Chacha and his brother Ignacio de Souza to Ouidah. The term 'Customs' refers here to public ceremonies. The main 'Annual Customs' were performed at Abomey after the return of the Dahomian army from its annual campaign, normally in March; but in 1850, when the return of the army was delayed, they were postponed until May/June, when witnessed by Beecroft and Lieut. F. E. Forbes (see Forbes 1851, vol. ii, 12–171). In 1851, since the Dahomian army was again late in the field (attacking Abeokuta on 3 March), the 'Annual Customs' would also have been delayed, but probably not as late as July. However, there were other 'Customs' throughout the year, so the reference here is probably to some subsequent ceremony in the cycle: see further Endnote 1.

¹³Thomas Hutton, the English trader who maintained a factory for the palm oil trade, in the English fort at Ouidah. George Prior was currently his principal agent at Ouidah, styling himself 'Manager of the British Fort': see his letter to Fraser, 9 Aug. 1851, in Appendix 2, no. 8.

¹⁴A. T. Beart, who seems to have been normally based in Hutton's factory at Agoué, to the west (Jones and Sebald 2005, 62, n.37; cf. Prior to Fraser, 12 Aug. 1851, in Appendix 2, no. 11; also Journals, p. 172), but was presumably now visiting Ouidah.

The Sampson got under weigh [= way] and proceeded at 5 p.m.

Before the 'Sampson' was out of sight, a letter, from Signor Antonio de Souza, was sent off, stating that he was not authorized to receive me officially, nor could anything be done until Tuesday next (the 22nd); but if we wanted fresh provisions, he would supply them.

Mr Beart, who wrote the above, wrote me to say, that his canoes and men were at my service, in the meantime, and that he would do everything to forward my views; he also states that the Lagoon is so full that you go, almost, from the beach to the town, in a canoe.¹⁵

Lieut. Patey, Commanding the Bloodhound, answered Signor A. de Souza's letter, stating that I could not think of landing, under the circumstances, but thanking him for his proffer of fresh provisions, which he would gladly accept.

I wrote to Mr Beart, thanking him for his offers, and trusting that I should be able to secure them, when the proper time arrived.

A white flag was flying, on shore, for a considerable time, this forenoon, we acknowledged it, but they took no notice.

Received two Kroo-boys from the 'Sampson', to guard against accidents in case of the canoe capsizing in the surf.¹⁶

18th [July] Very hazy, damp and unpleasant, much rain, on shore.

The white flag, on shore, is hoisted ½ mast.

19th [July] H.M.B.[= Her Majesty's Brig] 'Harlequin', Commander Wilmot,¹⁷ hove in sight and came to about 5 p.m. myself and traps were transferred [sc. to the *Harlequin*] by 9 p.m.

22nd [July] Received a letter from Mr Prior in the name of Sig[nor] A[ntonio] de Souza, inviting me, onshore, officially.

¹⁵The lagoon runs behind and parallel to the seashore, and has to be crossed on the journey from the beach to Ouidah. The width and depth of the waters varied seasonally, but most of the journey to Ouidah was normally done overland; as explained later (p. 28), on this occasion the waters were unusually high.

¹⁶Kru, from the coast of the west of modern Liberia, were commonly recruited for service in British merchant and naval vessels at this period.

¹⁷Arthur P. E. Wilmot. This officer accompanied Fraser in his landing at Ouidah (see his account, in Appendix 3, no. 1). He subsequently played a leading role in the British attacks on Lagos, Nov.–Dec. 1851, and visited Porto-Novo to negotiate a treaty for the suppression of the slave trade in Jan. 1852 (see p. 151). In 1862–5 he was Commander-in-Chief of the West African squadron, and in this capacity undertook a mission to Dahomey in 1862/3: see his account of this later visit in HCPP, *Despatches from Commodore Wilmot respecting his Visit to the King of Dahomey in December 1862 and January 1863* (1863).

Started with Harlequin's whale boat,¹⁸ under a salute of seven guns from the Brig,¹⁹ when nearing the breakers, a canoe pushed off (belonging to Hutton's, Sig[nor] A. de Souza having neglected to prepare one) and landed us—i.e. the Commander [i.e. Wilmot], my self, my servant,²⁰ and the two Kroo Boys—high and dry upon the beach. We were received by Signor Antonio de Souza, Signor Domingo José Martinez,²¹ the masters of three or four merchantmen, lying at anchor, and were conducted to a wooden shed, which they called a Barracoon,²² and invited us to partake of Pale Ale and Scheidam,²³ here we had to wait until the business of the day was over, when all hands proceeded towards the town,²⁴ which is about two and a half miles, from the beach; a short walk, through loose sand, of about fifty yards, brought us to the edge of the Lagoon, which at this time is stated to be about double its usual breadth, in consequence of the King of Porto Nuovo,²⁵ having stopped up, the outlet to the sea; three days ago it was reopened, and the waters are now fast receding.²⁶ ourselves and all the merchants, got into one large canoe and the attendants into two others. The scenery is picturesque in the extreme, no lake in the world could present a much more beautiful view, the town with its white and apparently well built houses, in front, the water studded here and there with dwarf trees, long rushes and grasses, besides islets covered with vegetation, the bank, broken in every direction as if the

¹⁸ i.e. a boat like those used for whaling, double-bowed.

¹⁹ Artillery salutes were graduated according to the rank of the person honoured: Fraser received a 7-gun salute in his capacity as Vice-Consul.

²⁰ Named later (p. 32) as 'Coco'.

²¹ Domingos José Martins (subsequently, commonly referred to as 'Signor Domingo'), the leading Brazilian trader in Dahomey at this time. As later noted (p. 31) his main base was at Porto-Novo, to the east, but he also had an 'establishment' in Ouidah (see HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 10 in no. 9, F. E. Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 Nov. 1849).

²² i.e. a shed or stockade (Spanish *barracón*), used for the lodging of goods, or of slaves awaiting embarkation. Forbes earlier noted that 'each large factor has a temporary store' on the beach (1851, i, 46).

²³ i.e. gin (made at Scheidam, in the Netherlands).

²⁴ As was noted later by Burton (1864, i, 32), the merchants used their premises on the beach only for business during daytime, retiring to Ouidah town to sleep.

²⁵ Dahomey's south-eastern neighbour, whose indigenous name was Allada but which was more commonly called by Europeans by the Portuguese name of Porto-Novo ('New Port'); its capital was the modern town of Porto-Novo (now the capital of the Republic of Bénin), on the north bank of Lake Nokoué, 60 km east of Ouidah. For Porto-Novo in this period, see Videgla 1999.

²⁶ Presumably, the outlet to the sea referred to here was at Cotonou, on the southern shore of Lake Nokoué, 40 km east of Ouidah, where a creek of the lake reached within 100 m. of the seashore. The statement that it had been 'stopped up' is, however, perhaps a misunderstanding, since it was in fact open to the sea only occasionally, at times of exceptionally high water, until the French cut a permanent channel in 1885 (Law 2004a, 230, with n.258). The high level of the lagoon was more probably due to heavy rains (as suggested by Wilmot, in Appendix 3, no. 1), and the cutting of the channel intended to draw off the flood waters.

hand and mind of a Brown, Paxton or Stancliff had been engaged thereon,²⁷ and covered with Palms and other trees and shrubs, so peculiar to the tropics. The whole surface of the ground between the beach and the lagoon is covered with a dwarf shrub, generally about eighteen inches, but sometimes higher, bearing an edible fruit, resembling an Orleans plum, but smaller²⁸—after a journey of a mile or rather more, in the canoe,²⁹ the lagoon at this ferry is certainly not more than 12 feet deep, in the middle, although the water is so much higher than usual, I had an opportunity of noticing this, as we were propelled by four men, two in the bow and two in the stern, with long palm sticks,³⁰ we landed; hammocks and bearers, were in attendance and carried us probably half a mile, where we were detained, to drink water, with two old men, toll takers for the King of Dahomey, and he laughed and stared at, by about one hundred men, women and children.³¹

After some delay, a canoe arrived, now all seemed to be much on an equality for men women, children, dogs, slave dealers, merchants, Captains and ourselves, got into this one vessel, until it was so full that I believe every one expected, it would sink, added to which there was great shouting and shifting about of the people, by de Souza and the canoemen, for the purpose of trimming her,³² the canoe all the time rolling to such an extent, I fully anticipated we should have a bath, which would have been far from pleasant, for the effluvia arising, probably, from the decay of vegetable matter, caused by the waters receding, was very offensive, this unpleasant part of the journey was fortunately very short—we again landed and were then in the town of Whydah.³³

Martinz bade us good night and each person went his own way. The Commander, myself and De Souza walked leisurely up that part of the town,

²⁷Lancelot ('Capability') Brown (lived 1716–1783) and Joseph Paxton (1803–1865) were noted landscape gardeners. 'Stancliff' was presumably another such, but is not identifiable.

²⁸The African hog plum (*spondius birrea*).

²⁹Forbes in Oct. 1849 reported the lagoon to be 'about a quarter of a mile [= 440 yards] wide' (1851, i, 46); Burton in Dec. 1863 estimated the width as only 300 yards (1864, i, 33). In times of lower water, the lagoon was normally crossed on foot: e.g. Wilmot in Dec. 1862 reported that 'we were conveyed in hammocks across the lagoon' (HCPP, *Despatches from Commodore Wilmot*, 1).

³⁰This was the normal mode of propulsion for canoes on the lagoon (cf. e.g. Freeman 1844, 278; Duncan 1847, i, 109, 157; Ridgway 1847, 193).

³¹Duncan 1847, i, 112–13, refers to a 'ferry-house' on the north bank of the lagoon, where the watchman was obliged to offer travellers 'a calabash full of clean water'; Burton 1864, i, 34, describes a 'custom-house' on the north bank of the lagoon. However, because of the overflowing of the lagoon, Fraser's halt must have been made further inland than usual, probably at the village of Zoungbodji, mid-way between Ouidah and the beach (described more clearly by Burton 1864, i, 35–9).

³²i.e. adjusting the balance of the vessel.

³³The journey from Zoungbodji to Ouidah was more usually undertaken on foot: e.g. Duncan in 1845 was taken in a hammock, over a distance of 3 miles between the lagoon and Ouidah, the path going 'through marshes and lakes, which are not, however, deep' (1847, i, 119).

which led to De Souza's house,³⁴ where dinner was shortly after provided, for six or seven persons. The dinner was exceedingly good, consisting of fish, soup, several stews, Palm oil chop,³⁵ a roast hinder half of mutton, white bread, very good, yams, cassada [= cassava], farina,³⁶ with *vino tinto*³⁷ and Pale Ale for drink, after dinner—biscuits and coffee: followed by wine and scheidam, after which came tea with its &cs, such as bread and butter;—then scheidam and cigars, and winding up with a Liqueur called *crème d'anis*.³⁸

De Souza was very importunate for the introduction of cards, whether really to beguile our time, or for his own interest, of course, I cannot pretend to say, but I was determined, not to commence, at any rate, this one bad practice, gambling, so refused in toto.³⁹

Gleanings of the day

Martinz[']s] Palm oil trade, is said by his own clerk (Amadie, an Austrian)⁴⁰ to exceed 200,000 dollars annually:⁴¹ he has this year already chartered five vessels, to Bristol,⁴² besides supplying other quantities to different ships; he is willing to sign a treaty, on his own account, against the Slave trade, and also to assist the English Government to put an end to it.⁴³

³⁴ Probably at Zomaï, at the western end of Ouidah, where the first de Souza built a house which was assigned to his son Antonio in the division of his property after his death in 1849 (Law 2004a, 215); a later (1871) visitor mentions 'Zomai House, the residence of Sr Antonio De Souza', referring here to the son of the original Antonio (Skertchly 1874, 29).

³⁵ West African coastal pidgin English for 'food'.

³⁶ *farinha*, Portuguese for 'flour', usually applied specifically to cassava flour (cf. e.g. Duncan 1847, i, 192).

³⁷ i.e. red wine (Portuguese).

³⁸ 'Cream of aniseed' (French), i.e. an aniseed-flavoured liqueur (cf. Duncan 1847, i, 118, referring to 'aniseed wine'): perhaps Brazilian *cachaça* (sugar-cane rum), to which aniseed is often added.

³⁹ i.e. completely (Latin).

⁴⁰ Ricardo Augusto Amadie, actually a Hungarian: he later went to Lagos, from where he was forcibly deported (by Fraser, now Vice-Consul there) for alleged slave-trading in 1853 (Smith 1978, 36, 46–7).

⁴¹ In 1850 Martins claimed to have made \$80,000 from the palm oil trade during the previous year (Forbes 1851, ii, 85), which (on the assumption of a merchant's commission of 20%) implies a gross turnover of \$400,000, double the figure given here.

⁴² The Bristol firm of R. and W. King played a major role in the British palm oil trade from West Africa (Lynn 1997, 84, 100–1).

⁴³ Martins had likewise offered in 1850 that, if the British would pay him compensation to cover the cost of his tax payments to the king, 'he would stop the Slave Trade in the Bights; he would so increase the palm-oil trade as to render it necessary to the King'; and earlier in 1851 he was reported to have declared that 'he had come to the determination of having no more to do with [slaves], owing to the difficulties of the passage across to Brazil': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class A, incl. 3 in no. 198, F. E. Forbes to Fanshawe, 6 April 1850; 1850/1, Class A, incl. 3 in no. 141, Capt. Adams to Fanshawe, 24 March 1851. Cf. also the statement of willingness to cooperate in suppression of the slave trade from Antonio de Souza, reported subsequently (p. 32).

There is something about this Signor Domingo José Martinz, which is like what is said of the power of fascination which snakes have over birds, even myself, although in the same room, nearly a whole day, could not help looking at him, and as he moved out of my sight, occasionally I found myself involuntarily changing my position to keep him in view:—He is probably fifty years of age, although he does not look above forty, about five feet eight inches high, yellow skin, features rather good, eye penetrating, of rather a melancholy appearance, but you can see a playful smile, lighting up his countenance at times and dying away again, as rapidly as it made its appearance, on his head he wore a network scalp cap; his dress was, a kind of smock frock, with pockets in the sides, made apparently of figured calico, of a very dark pattern, breeches or trousers of the same, boots in shape, like our Life Guards 'Jacks'⁴⁴ but of a light brown color. On the route to the town, he was attended by his tom-tom or drums, also a considerable retinue, many of whom, it is said, belong to the King of Dahomey, he is here for a short time shipping Palm Oil, but his principal establishment is at Porto Nuovo;⁴⁵ much respect was paid to him, but at Porto Nuovo, they say the people prostrate themselves and throw dust on their heads, as he passes along;⁴⁶ he is from Bahia⁴⁷ and has been on this coast eighteen years;⁴⁸ his orders on England are extraordinary, he has ordered some five or six plate⁴⁹ chests, recently, each to cost £700; one, which arrived some short time since, was left by him, on the beach for five weeks without his taking the slightest notice of it: he is said to have an extraordinary assortment of valuable jewels and precious stones &c: he has even ordered shirts, the linen of which was made expressly for him; clothes of all kinds, he continually orders, but is seldom seen, if ever, in any other than above described: he receives the things, pays for, but seldom looks at them: he has now sent a vessel, he has done the same thing before, to Mess[rs] Forster and Smith of London with 80,000 gallons of oil,⁵⁰ and the only orders

On the attitude of the Brazilian merchant community in Ouidah on these issues, see also Law 2004a, 220–1.

⁴⁴ i.e. jack-boots, extending above the knee.

⁴⁵ Not the modern town of Porto-Novo, but 'Porto Novo on the beach' (cf. p. 152), i.e. the village nowadays called Sèmè, on the southern shore of Lake Nokoué, which at this time was effectively controlled by Dahomey, rather than by the king of Porto-Novo.

⁴⁶ In Dahomey, such prostration was normally accorded only to the King.

⁴⁷ The province in eastern Brazil, with which the Dahomey area was closely linked commercially.

⁴⁸ i.e. since c. 1833. Another account in 1847 stated that Martins had arrived in Africa about 12 years earlier, indicating c. 1835 (TNA, CO96/12, Thomas Hutton, Cape Coast, 17 March 1847). After periods of residence at Ouidah and Lagos, Martins had retired to Brazil in 1844, before returning to Africa to settle at Porto-Novo in 1846 (see Ross 1965).

⁴⁹ i.e. silver.

⁵⁰ Forster and Smith were the most prominent London firm engaged in the West African trade (Lynn 1997, 87).

with it, are, to send him a trade cargo in return, without naming the goods, quality or prices; lately it is said he chartered a vessel from England and after detaining her some time, paid the master five thousand dollars and sent her back empty, at the same time he had plenty of oil.

The capture of the “Galianna” in 1849 by H.M.S. ‘Cyclops’, with a trade cargo, from Bahia to Whydah, for which the English Government, is said to have paid the Portuguese Government £5000 [*in margin*: £2983 awarded by Mixed Comm[ission] at Loanda],⁵¹ is a very sore point with Signor A. de Souza, to whom she belonged, for he never received one penny, he being informed that it was taken off the National Debt.⁵²

Signor A. de Souza, says if the English Government, would allow him to ship two thousand slaves he would willingly enter into securities never again to aid or abet in slave traffic, and would render all the assistance in his power, to suppress it, which he says he could do from Cape St Paul to Cape Formosa [*in margin*: in other words, the whole Bight of Benin].⁵³

After dinner Sig[nor] Ant[onio] exhibited his sister and some of his wives, five of whom, he assured me were own sisters,⁵⁴ and half sisters of George Lawson of Popoe,⁵⁵ and his own cousins.⁵⁶

About 11 p.m. we retired to rest. The Commander was to sleep in a room adjoining to the one we dined in (this was Antonio’s own room and led to his women’s apartments) on the outside of which my three boys were sleeping, but I was to be removed from the house, but where I knew not. My black boy, Coco,⁵⁷ I suppose had heard of the intended removal, for he came to me, in

⁵¹ i.e. the Anglo-Portuguese Commission (for the judgement of illegal slave ships of Portuguese nationality), at Luanda, in Angola.

⁵² The *Galliana* had been built for Antonio de Souza in Portugal, and sailed from there first to Bahia, and then to West Africa; it was arrested on suspicion of involvement in slaving, but was released, for lack of evidence: see HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849–50, Class A, no. 9; also TASTD, no. 4756.

⁵³ Cape St Paul, 20 km east of the River Volta (in modern Ghana), and Cape Formosa, in the Delta of the River Niger (in Nigeria); these were conventionally regarded as the limits of the Bight of Benin.

⁵⁴ i.e. full sisters (having both parents in common).

⁵⁵ i.e. Little Popo (modern Aného), on the coast 60 km west of Ouidah, in modern Togo. There were two persons called George Lawson there, who were father and son, George Lawson Senior (died 1857) and George Lawson Junior (died 1859), both leading merchants (see Strickrodt 2003, 203–9): the reference here is probably to the latter.

⁵⁶ Implying that Antonio was himself related to the Lawsons. His mother is identified in family tradition as ‘Ahossi, princess of Glidji’, i.e. a member of the royal family of the kingdom of Genyi (of which Glidji was the capital, and to which Little Popo also belonged), to which the Lawsons were also related (De Souza 1992, 59; for different versions of the genealogy, see *ibid.*, 320; Agbanon 1991, 193). Antonio’s elder brother Isidoro de Souza was even more closely related to George Lawson Jr, their mothers being sisters (Agbanon 1991, 47).

⁵⁷ Cf. p. 115, which indicates that this man was from Accra, on the Gold Coast. ‘Coco’ is a variant of the common Gold Coast name Kwaku, given to a son born on a Wednesday.

great trepidation, to know what he was to do, I told him to go back and lay down, as at any price it would have been bad policy to raise a suspicion, so I quietly resigned myself to my fate. A lanthorn [= lantern], being prepared, we started off, and Sig[nor] Antonio took me to a house, on the opposite side of the street, if such it may be called, and left me there, for the night, telling me, that if I wanted anything I was to call out and a black (the term slave is never used)⁵⁸ would attend upon me; the room contained a very good French bedstead and mattress covered with a country cloth⁵⁹ without sheets or blankets, but curtained all round with drab damask; three large looking glasses, a secretary,⁶⁰ chairs &c. on a chair, by the bedside, was a Pot-de-chambre, which I was given to understand, was to be used for all purposes,⁶¹ the house not affording further accommodation; a large fan which I saw on a table, I took as my sleeping companion and found it very serviceable, in driving away the moschettos [= mosquitoes].

23rd [July] After a tolerable goodnight [sic], arose, dressed and went out to Signor Antonio's house, partook of coffee and bread about 7 a.m.

Sallied out with the Commander for the English Fort,⁶² on the road many people saluted us, some by a kind of bow, others by removing their cloth from off their shoulders. Arrived at the Fort, found Mr Stanfield, one of Hutton's agents,⁶³ who received us very kindly, invited us to breakfast and promised to do all in his assistance.

The Fort is a mud building about one hundred and ten feet long, with a thatched roof, containing six rooms, all in one row, with a broad verandah on the north side, running its whole length, attached to which are three walls, which enclose a large square, in which, is a row of open sheds, a cook-house, Powder magazine and four other small buildings, all this is surrounded by a broad and deep ditch, which at present appears dry, and is in a most filthy state, and will require much cleaning;⁶⁴ there is a considerable space of ground

⁵⁸ Cf. Fraser's later observation (p. 45) that the term 'master' was likewise 'never used'.

⁵⁹ i.e. locally made cloth.

⁶⁰ i.e. writing desk.

⁶¹ chamber-pot (French), for lavatory purposes.

⁶² The English fort was situated around the centre of the town, east from Zomai.

⁶³ Andrew Stanfield, evidently at this time a subordinate of George Prior, but later in 1851 apparently left as Hutton's sole agent at Ouidah.

⁶⁴ Cf. the description of the fort in 1863/4, 'a square or parallelogram, enclosing several acres, surrounded by a well-grown moat ... the main building is a huge half-white washed barn ... [containing] the "great hall" and five dwarf rooms ... [the yard] contains out-houses and offices for servants and followers ... a ... chapel [installed by the Methodist Mission which took over the fort in 1856], a "cook-house" ... a bathing-place, bachelor's quarters ... [a] circular powder-magazine' (Burton 1864, i, 85–6); the English fort no longer exists as a recognisable building, but its site is remembered, and is still referred to as '*le fort anglais*' (Law 2004a, 33).

outside, belonging to the Fort, its precise boundary I have not, as yet, ascertained, as it is not enclosed:⁶⁵ there are many guns lying about, some in and some outside the building, I fear they are not good for much;⁶⁶ the approach is by means of what has been a drawbridge, the place although better than I expected, is still in very bad repair.

Mess[rs] Prior and Stanfield have been very busy preparing two rooms [sc. in the fort] for my reception.

We made a very respectable breakfast.

A man arrived to secure one of the Fetish snakes,⁶⁷ which had crept into a shed in the Fort, we took the opportunity of witnessing the performance; before entering the shed into which it had crept, he knelt down, kissed the ground and rubbed his forehead with dust, it proved to be a very handsome species of python, or Boa Constrictor of the Old World, probably a new species, about three feet long, but stout in proportion,⁶⁸ therefore was nothing to fear, either from its poison or muscular strength, so much for the Fetish.

As the snake was carried along, on its return to the fetish house,⁶⁹ every one paid their respects to it, some by kneeling down, kissing the ground, and rubbing their foreheads with dust, others by taking off their hats, bowing or removing their cloth from their shoulders.⁷⁰

Visited the Snake Fetish house, counted thirteen specimens, all of the same size and species, except one which appeared much larger, but being coiled up and above me, I could not guess its length.⁷¹ Mr Stanfield promised to send the old fetish man, a gallon of rum. I made the Fetish man laugh by asking how it was, although he was an old man, I had much more beard than him.

⁶⁵ Referring to the 'English quarter' of Ouidah (also called Sogbadji), occupied by people in the service of the fort (ibid., 47).

⁶⁶ Burton later referred to 'twenty-four carronades still lying here and there about the court' of the fort (1864, i, 85); a few of these are still visible on the site to the present.

⁶⁷ The term 'fetish' (from Portuguese *feitiço*, 'artificial') was used indiscriminately to refer both (as here) to *vodun* (gods) and to a range of ritual objects and practices (including divination, see p. 118; and trial by poison ordeal, p. 170). Virtually every European visitor to Ouidah refers to its sacred snakes. These were believed to be incarnations of the *vodun* Dangbe (whose name is recorded by Fraser later, as 'Dagwee', p. 123), who was in origin the national deity of the Hueda kingdom, to which Ouidah belonged before its conquest by Dahomey in 1727, and remained one of the principal *vodun* of the town under Dahomian rule (Law 2004a, 23–4, 92–5).

⁶⁸ The Dangbe snake was in fact the royal python (*pythia regia*).

⁶⁹ The principal Dangbe shrine, in the main square of Ouidah, north of the English fort. See descriptions e.g. by Forbes 1851, i, 109; Repin 1895, 71–2; Burton 1864, i, 93–5.

⁷⁰ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 109, who notes that the snakes were 'allowed to roam about at pleasure, but if found in a house or at a distance, a fetish man or woman is sought, whose duty it is to induce the reptile to return, and to reconduct it to its sacred abode, whilst all who meet it must bow down and kiss the ground'.

⁷¹ Some later sources refer to one of the sacred snakes, larger than the others, who was considered their chief, but this no longer exists nowadays (Law 2004a, 92).

Madiki⁷² says I can shoot or take anything, fetish or otherwise, except the snake, that cannot be permitted by the King or Fetish-man; the snake has been a Fetish a long, long time, more than man can remember, it is a very good Fetish;⁷³ God make first woman, she no look but this snake come, make her look,⁷⁴ so it is no[t] possible for to get one.

The floors in many of the rooms, are formed of palm oil nuts, after the oil is extracted, studded in cement, in the same way as we use, in England, round pebbles for garden walks and grottos.

The streets are broad and for the most part clean, many of the men are very tall fine fellows, particularly those, which Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza calls his body guard.⁷⁵

About 5 p.m. Sig[nor] Ant[onio] returned from the beach, where he had been all day, and informed us, that the officials, were ready to receive me, we mounted our uniforms, and was [sic] compelled to get into hammocks, it being according to their ideas, below the dignity of a great man to walk, we proceeded some distance outside the town, towards the sea, to a large tree,⁷⁶ chairs were brought and we had to sit, the chairs being arranged across the pathway, The people began to collect one by one, then an official would arrive, with two or three armed men, make his bow, parade with his party, round us three times, making a bow each time he came in front of me, then take his stand on one side of the path; then another would arrive with perhaps twenty armed men and go through the same performance and in addition fire their muskets off at irregular intervals; then another lot, then another, the party by this time mustering some two or three hundred, at length came the Boayon one of the king's head warriors, who is at present

⁷² A Dahomianized version of the name Mark, i.e. Mark Lemon, the grandson of a soldier in the garrison of the English fort (prior to its abandonment in 1812), appointed by King Gezo as 'Governor' of the fort. He had also served as interpreter to Freeman in 1843 (1844, 250) and to Forbes in 1849–50 (1851, i, 53, 86; ii, 176).

⁷³ A popular (but erroneous) etymology of the name Dangbe is 'good serpent' (*dàn* = 'serpent'; *dagbè* = 'good').

⁷⁴ Cf. the later account of a French missionary, that 'God having made the first man and the first woman blind, Dan [= Dangbe] opened their eyes, and they saw good and evil' (Bouche 1885, 386). Although the reference to knowledge of 'good and evil' is probably an interpolation from the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, the basic idea of Dangbe giving sight to humanity seems to represent an indigenous concept: for other references and analysis, see Merlo and Vidaud 1966.

⁷⁵ Cf. the later account of Burton, that Antonio 'had thousands of armed and trained slaves' (1864, i, 105).

⁷⁶ Referred to in other sources as 'the grand fetish tree' (Forbes 1851, i, 50; Bouet 1852, 39), or 'the Captain's Tree' (e.g. Dalzel 1793, 227; Burton 1864, i, 39). The tree itself no longer exists, but local tradition recalls its site, just south of Ouidah town; it is nowadays alternatively called the 'Tree of Forgetting [*L'Arbre de l'oubli*]', from a story that slaves on the way to embarkation from the beach to the south were forced to walk round it, to make them lose their memories, but this practice is not recorded in any early source (Law 2008).

acting Av-vo-gar,⁷⁷ with his large umbrella and tom-tom, these being his insignias of office,⁷⁸ he wore a striped red and yellow kind of shirt, I think with breeches and shoes, he went through the same performance as the rest, but with the addition of a dance, at the end of which he fired a musket.

Glasses and bottles were now produced, we first of all had to drink water, afterwards rum, during which time there was a complimentary conversation, going on, such as:—How do you do? I hope you are strong? &c.⁷⁹

We commenced our advance to the town, amidst the irregular firing of muskets, beating of tom-toms, dancing singing and hideous shrieking [sic] of the armed men, the noise and clatter of the lookers on and as we passed through the town, the laughs, the joke and the chatter of the women forming altogether a regular Babel,⁸⁰ we arrived at the Fort, not without many chances of being tumbled out of my hammock, for if the least thing was in the way, some six or seven men would seize hold of it, lift it up, so suddenly, that I had much difficulty in keeping my place; here I was saluted with seven guns, after which twenty one were fired for the Queen.⁸¹

A palavar⁸² was now to be held in the Fort, a quantity of cowries was scattered among the crowd,⁸³ while the more favored, who were admitted up stairs, were discussing, brandy, gin, rum and cigars; when these formalities were gone through, the Commander was desired to take the chair, I think it was because he had the finest dress on,⁸⁴ I was placed on his right, whilst Sig[nor] Antonio took his left, my letters and commission were then exhibited and explained⁸⁵ we were then informed that all the head men were at, as they call it, Dahomey,⁸⁶ that, now I was once in the Fort, I was their master, that they were very glad to see an English Governor for they will not accept of my title

⁷⁷ Boya, the title of the head of the royal traders at Ouidah (Law 2004a, 175): ‘acting’ for the Yovogan in the latter’s absence at Abomey. The Boya came last in the procession because Dahomian conventions placed persons in reverse order of seniority (cf. e.g. Burton 1864, i, 41, ‘as usual, the junior ranks preceded’; 208, ‘juniors first’).

⁷⁸ The umbrella etc. were insignia of the rank of ‘caboceers [chiefs]’ in general, rather than of any specific office (see e.g. Ridgway 1847, 302; Burton 1864, i, 73; Béraud 1866, 378–9).

⁷⁹ This reception ceremony is also described by Burton 1864, i, 41–8.

⁸⁰ i.e. a scene of noisy confusion, perhaps also implying a multiplicity of languages (from the Tower of Babel, in Genesis, xi).

⁸¹ A salute of 21 guns was reserved for royalty.

⁸² More usually spelled (as later in Fraser’s own account) ‘palaver’: coastal pidgin for discussion/dispute (from Portuguese *palavra*, ‘word’).

⁸³ Cowry shells were the local currency in Dahomey: see Endnote 2.

⁸⁴ An early indication of Fraser’s sensitivity on issues of precedence, which was to be a recurrent source of tension with the naval officers with whom he was obliged to cooperate.

⁸⁵ i.e. Fraser’s commission as Vice-Consul, and the letters to King Gezo which he carried.

⁸⁶ i.e. the capital Abomey; ‘Dahomey [Danhomè]’ was strictly the name of the original royal palace there, but was applied by extension to the town and to the kingdom as a whole (cf. Burton 1864, i, 161).

of Vice Consul, when it was explained to them, they said, no? I was to be Governor of English Town,⁸⁷ that being their own and proper title;⁸⁸ Consul for French Fort⁸⁹ and Commandant for the Portuguese;⁹⁰ my papers were returned and after many assurances of pleasure, at my arrival, and their willingness to serve me, we all had another drink and cigars, shook hands, snapped fingers,⁹¹ the Boayon giving me a kind of hug, and parted. Rum was distributed among the people.

As soon as we got rid of our new acquaintances, we all, some eight or ten Europeans and half castes, repaired to Sig[nor] Antonio's to dinner, after dinner Nar-o-pay and Nassarah, next in authority to the Boayon,⁹² with a few attendants, came in and received Lord Palmerston's letters, for the King,⁹³ while the message was delivered they all knelt down and when the name of the King was mentioned they all kissed the ground.

When the letters were given to Nar-o-pay, he passed them to Nassarah, he to the next, he to another, and so on until they arrived in the hands of the man, who was to take them the first stage.⁹⁴ this was done, as I suppose, to make all generally answerable.

24th [July] Some carriers, having opened some kegs of powder, on the road from the beach to the Fort, extracted the contents and supplied the place with sand.⁹⁵ Mr Hutton's agent brought the case to me. I sent for all the head men,

⁸⁷ i.e. the 'English quarter' (Sogbadji), centred on the English fort.

⁸⁸ The title 'Governor' had been used for the chief of the fort during its period of occupation by the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa (to 1812).

⁸⁹ The French fort was currently (since 1842) occupied by the firm of Régis of Marseille, trading for palm oil (Law 2004a, 205; and for Régis in Ouidah more generally, see Soumonni 1983). Although permission to occupy the fort had been granted by the French government, the request of Régis for official status was rejected (Schnapper 1961, 164); if their agent was claiming the status of 'Consul', as seems implied here, this was unauthorized.

⁹⁰ The Portuguese fort had been reoccupied by the Portuguese government (in 1844), its personnel being appointed from the island of São Tomé, and headed by the Commandant of the military garrison (Law 2004a, 34).

⁹¹ Snapping fingers on hand-shaking was more characteristic of the Gold Coast, but was noted at Ouidah also by Burton later (1864, i, 36–7).

⁹² The former is also referred to by Burton in 1863 ('Nyan-kpe'), as deputizing for the Yovogan in a reception ceremony (1864, i, 53–4). Gnahouikpé and Nassara are the names of families in modern Ouidah: the former descended from a man who served as 'assistant' to the Yovogan (Law 2004a, 136–7), while the latter occupies a house close to the former site of the Yovogan's palace (*ibid.*, 20).

⁹³ These were eventually read to the King at Abomey on 20 Aug. 1851 (see p. 74).

⁹⁴ i.e. on the way to Abomey.

⁹⁵ Theft of goods in transit between Ouidah and the beach was a recurrent problem. Duncan in 1845 also noted the specific practice referred to here: 'The natives employed in carrying gun-powder from the beach to the town of Whydah are in the habit of stealing it. The greater part of the road being sand, they take out the powder and substitute sand' (1847, i, 197).

especially those belonging to English town, and gave them to understand that these things could no longer exist, therefore I should enquire into the case and punish accordingly. It was proved that the factory people had opened and examined all the kegs, upon the beach, so I mustered all the carriers, and their head men, enquired who did it, they all denied it. I then told the head man⁹⁶ I should hold him responsible and if he did not find out the culprit I would punish all hands, give him a double dose and disrate⁹⁷ him, after some squabbling amongst themselves, three men were accused by the rest. I enquired, of Nar-o-pay, the head man at present in the town,⁹⁸ what punishment he would award them, he declined, leaving it entirely to me, saying that if I wished it I might cut off their heads,⁹⁹ which pleasant pastime I declined but ordered them to be seized and lashed to trees in front of the Fort, close to the public thoroughfare, there to receive 18 lashes, each, and be conveyed to prison, which was done.¹⁰⁰

I then promised to follow this, or even a more rigid system, if they continued to steal, and those I found, incorrigible I would send to Dahomey for the King's pleasure, which they know full well would be the loss of their heads.¹⁰¹

25th [July] Paid some official visits. The Boayon called upon me, and said he had been flogging the men again, for I had been too lenient.

The Harlequin fired a royal salute in return for the shore one, on the 23rd.

26 [July] A Lieut[enant](?) A[ugus]te Bouet returned from Abomey, he has been up to see the King,¹⁰² and took with him, very handsome presents, amongst which were two brass field pieces,¹⁰³ some drums, and a military trumpet; for some time previous to his leaving Whydah¹⁰⁴ he was drilling Dahomans, three times a week, to the use of the above.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ i.e. of the fort servants, named later as Midjrokan (p. 60).

⁹⁷ i.e. reduce in rank.

⁹⁸ Presumably the Boya was now also absent, though he was back in Ouidah the next day.

⁹⁹ Probably not to be taken literally, since capital punishment in Dahomey could only legally be inflicted by the King (Law 2004a, 107).

¹⁰⁰ The prison was at the Yovogan's house (Duncan 1847, i, 124; cf. also below, p. 39).

¹⁰¹ Theft in Ouidah was in principle a capital offence (Law 2004a, 110).

¹⁰² See also subsequent references to Bouet, pp. 58, 95, 143: he was a French naval officer, on an official mission to the King of Dahomey, to negotiate a commercial treaty, signed on 6 July 1851. He embarked from Ouidah on 4 Aug. 1851. See Nardin 1967, and his own published account, Bouet 1852.

¹⁰³ Fraser subsequently saw these guns, in a procession at the royal court: see pp. 143–4.

¹⁰⁴ i.e. before his journey to the royal court at Abomey.

¹⁰⁵ Bouet's own account makes clear that this drilling was of the slaves of the French fort, preparatory to demonstrating the use of the guns at Abomey, rather than of 'the Dahomians' (1852, 40).

27th [July] Remained in the Fort, all day, it being Sunday, had several visitors, but I made them understand it was God's day, and not to be interfered with by business in any shape.

Countersigned a slave certificate, made out by Comm[ander] Wilmot, for which I charged one dollar.¹⁰⁶

28th [July] Many visitors and much bother.

Men cleaning Fort ditch and yard.

My traps coming up by degrees.

Received a sealed package marked "On Her Majesty's Service" addressed to the King of Dahomey from Commander Wilmot, which note¹⁰⁷

29th [July] Answered Commander Wilmot¹⁰⁸

Wrote to Mr T. Hutton.¹⁰⁹

Madiki and one of the King's messengers, also one from Narhwey,¹¹⁰ arrived from Abomey, with a message from the King, desiring or requesting me, to proceed, at once, to the capital: told them I should not be ready for a week, that if the weather held good, I would start at that time.

30th [July] Proceeded to the Av-vo-gar's house¹¹¹ to see Nar-o-pay and tell him, that in consequence of receiving the King's message, I would take the opportunity of releasing the men I had placed under punishment, otherwise, I should be obliged to report them to the King and they must know the result, which I did not wish to see carried out.

Nar-o-pay was at the Frenchman's.¹¹²

Received an apology from Nar-o-pay for being absent, and a message, saying he was now ready to receive me.

¹⁰⁶TNA, FO84/886, f. 133; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 4 in no. 4, authorizing Capt. Miguel Doderò of the Sardinian brig *Pallante* to take an African boy to Europe for education: this was intended to safeguard him against suspicion of slave-trading.

¹⁰⁷See TNA, FO84/886, f. 134; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 5 in no. 4, Wilmot to Fraser, 27 July 1851, requesting him to transmit a letter to the King of Dahomey.

¹⁰⁸See TNA, FO84/886, f. 135; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 6 in no. 5, Fraser to Wilmot, 29 July 1851, declining to transmit the letter as requested, on the grounds that 'all transactions and communications with the King and Kingdom of Dahomey belong exclusively to the Foreign Office'.

¹⁰⁹Fraser's letter to Hutton is not preserved; but see Hutton's reply, 9 Sept. 1851, promising Fraser assistance, in Appendix 2, no. 16.

¹¹⁰Gnahoui, the king's official interpreter for the English language, also mentioned by earlier British visitors to Dahomey between 1843–50 (Freeman 1844, 250, 'Niawi'; Duncan 1847, i, 119, 'Yamie'; Ridgway 1847, 300, 'Nowyie'; Forbes 1851, i, 53 etc., 'Narhwey').

¹¹¹In the main square of Ouidah (across from the Dangbe temple), north of the English fort. The site is now occupied by the Roman Catholic cathedral.

¹¹²i.e. the French fort.

Went to him after dinner, told him my mission, that the men must beg my pardon for the trouble they had given and promise not to repeat the offence; after drinking two or three times and smoking a cigar, the prisoners were produced, together with a fourth, whom I had neither seen nor heard of before, upon enquiry I found he was the owner of the house, on the side of the Lagoon, where these robberies were committed. All four were bound with cords, round the wrists, they were made, slave fashion, to kneel down before me, to thank me for my forgiveness and promised not to repeat the offence. I ordered them to be freed there and then, when all four set to, clapping their hands, to slow time, in token of submission, the palaver was then set.¹¹³ I thanked the officials, for having assisted, so readily, in carrying out so unpleasant an affair.

When I returned to the Fort, these men, were awaiting me, and offered their services, to be my carriers to Abomey. I declined them upon the grounds that the King would see the stripes upon their shoulders and he would naturally enquire the cause, of course, I must tell him which I did not wish to do, for fear of the consequences, so I thought they had better stay away.

Engaged a Sierra Leone man¹¹⁴ at half a crown,¹¹⁵ a day, as a check interpreter upon master Madiki.¹¹⁶

Madiki, says the King has sent down to English town, for soldiers, for the next slave hunt,¹¹⁷ which is to be upon Abbeokuta,¹¹⁸ but he tells me, he has sent word that in consequence of my intention of visiting him, the people cannot go as I shall want them.

Had a long palaver with Nar-o-pay and Nassarah and some others, about trade &c. from which it appears there is much difference made between the English, French and Portuguese, with respect to duties.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ i.e. settled.

¹¹⁴ i.e. from the British colony of Freetown, Sierra Leone, which was mainly populated by former slaves liberated from illegal slave ships by the British navy; there were a number of Sierra Leonians settled in Ouidah (see Law 2004a, 182–3).

¹¹⁵ = 2s. 6d. [£0.125, 30 pence]; but the payment was probably made in the local currency of cowry shells, rather than in sterling, ‘half a crown’ probably representing 1,000 cowries (see further Endnote 2).

¹¹⁶ Named later as William (see p. 82).

¹¹⁷ i.e. the annual campaign. The term ‘slave hunt’ was regularly used by contemporary European commentators of Dahomey’s wars (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 6, etc.), but it does not appear that it represented any indigenous usage.

¹¹⁸ Abeokuta, 100 km east of Dahomey (in modern Nigeria), which had been attacked by the Dahomians unsuccessfully on 3 March 1851. Fraser also alludes subsequently to Gezo’s intention to repeat the attack: see pp. 100, 104. But no such attack in fact took place—until 1864, under Gezo’s successor Glele, again unsuccessfully. For Abeokuta in this period, see Biobaku 1957.

¹¹⁹ Cf. HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 3 in no. 198, Forbes to Fanshawe, 6 April 1850, reporting that Hutton paid a ‘King’s duty’ of goods to the value of \$180, while the Portuguese slave-traders paid \$800.

In consequence of, as I suppose, the novelty of scene, the time wasted in performing and receiving visits, the general tumult, the receiving, unpacking and arranging my traps, my journal has been neglected, although I have made three or four attempts, I have not succeeded in writing it up since my arrival, until, this morning, the consequence is, it is very brief, [to] say the least of it, and I am certain I have omitted many things which I otherwise should not have done.

Evogarm, from Evo, whiteman, garm, great, or head of white man, so written and interpreted, by Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza's clerk or headman,¹²⁰ who has been many years in the country and speaks the language; how far the above is correct I cannot ascertain, but one thing is certain, it is generally pronounced Av-vo-gar.¹²¹

Received letters from the King of Dahomey, through Mr Prior,¹²² which I answered, in person, thanking him for his good intentions, in the first instance;¹²³ the second refusing;¹²⁴ and a third, which I have not got,¹²⁵ in which he wished to see 'a soldier, with a big head',¹²⁶ which I took upon myself I had come to represent.

The Lagoon, is open, from here to Arguey,¹²⁷ but in some places, in the dry season,¹²⁸ there is not more than six inches of water, consequently you must get out, while the canoe is hauled over the shallows.¹²⁹

Messengers go from here to Godomey by land, the rest of route by canoe as far as Lagos,¹³⁰ where it is so deep that canoes are obliged to be kept at the

¹²⁰Named later as Walter Hanson (p. 139).

¹²¹The explanation of the title is correct, from *yevó/yovó* = 'European'; *gã*n = 'chief'.

¹²²See texts, in Appendix 2, nos 3–5.

¹²³This letter (Appendix 2, no.4) merely transmitted the King's 'best compliments'.

¹²⁴This letter (Appendix 2, no.5) requested a gift of guns.

¹²⁵The original of this letter had been transmitted to a naval officer: see HCPP, *Reduction of Lagos*, inc. 12 in no. 40, Commander Strange to Fanshawe, 25 June 1851. However, a copy was appended to Fraser's Journal.

¹²⁶The text of the letter (Appendix 2, no.3) actually says 'a soldier with a *good* head'; the proposed business is not specified, 'to hear some palaver'.

¹²⁷Agoué, on the coast 50 km west of Ouidah. Actually, the lagoon was navigable further west; e.g. Duncan in 1845 went by canoe as far west as the River Haho, 25 km beyond Agoué (1847, i, 142–80).

¹²⁸This region has two dry and two rainy seasons: the main dry season in Dec.–April, followed by the main rainy season in May–July, and the lesser dry season in Aug./Sept., with the lesser rains in Oct./Nov.

¹²⁹Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 104, who recalls walking along the lagoon (in March, i.e. late in the main dry season), 'the water just above the ankles', and that 'although we poled in the middle and in the deepest water, the canoe, which drew about a foot and a half water, was constantly aground'.

¹³⁰Godomey, 30 km east of Ouidah, on the western shore of Lake Nokoué; Lagos is a further 100 km to the east (in Nigeria).

side, amongst the grass, and the poles, which are twelve feet long, scarcely touch the bottom.¹³¹

Mr Hastie, Mr Hutton's agent, it appears, was murdered, for the sake of the money he had about him,¹³² it was done by canoe men from Elmina, belonging to the French Factory.¹³³ After Hastie's death, the English Factory must have been ransacked, as there is scarcely a thing in it, and those have been added since.¹³⁴

When Mr Dennis died,¹³⁵ they broke into the house, in which he had been living, and stole everything except one portmanteau¹³⁶ and five dollars which was hidden between the leaves of a book, that was on the table.

A Brig, has been lying, here, which is said to have come, on purpose, to take Signor Domingo José Martinz, to Bahia, but in consequence of the new Brazilian law, he is afraid to go, for fear of, at least, being detained.¹³⁷ The same cause, is assigned, for the appearance of Signor Antonio's two sons from that country.¹³⁸

The country behind the town, is level and very beautiful, studded every here and there with small plantations of Indian corn.¹³⁹ The roads and paths are thickly stud[d]ed with fetish,¹⁴⁰ many of the places are very neatly kept, cleanly swept and look as if they had some idea of a garden.

¹³¹ It is surprising that Fraser does not refer to paddles, which a later (1863) report mentions as being used by canoes in deep water (Borghero 1997, 237).

¹³² Hastie had been Hutton's agent at Ouidah in 1849 (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 9 in no. 9, F. E. Forbes to Fanshawe, 1 Nov. 1849, journal entry for 5 Oct. 1849). His death was apparently due to drowning when embarking or landing in a canoe: cf. HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 141, Lieut. Dew to Capt. Adams, 27 Feb. 1851, reporting that 'since the death of Mr Hastie, the King of Dahomey has threatened death to any canoe-man who may lose the life of an Englishman'.

¹³³ Elmina, on the Gold Coast. Canoemen from the Gold Coast were regularly employed at Ouidah, all three of the European factories having Gold Coast families in their service for this purpose (Law 2004a, 40–1, 74–5).

¹³⁴ This perhaps relates, not to mere robbery, but to the levying of an inheritance tax by the king, which was sometimes applied to European residents who died locally (Ibid., 107, 118–9).

¹³⁵ Edward Dennis had been a rival candidate for appointment as Vice-Consul at Ouidah in 1850, but went to Ouidah in a private capacity (see Introduction, p. 9). He had witnessed the first of the letters written for the King of Dahomey by George Prior, 26 April 1851 (see Appendix 2, no. 3).

¹³⁶ i.e. trunk.

¹³⁷ A new Brazilian anti-slave trade law, enacted in Sept. 1850, had for the first time provided for effective penal sanctions against illegal slave-traders.

¹³⁸ Presumably, these sons were sent to Brazil for education, as was common practice in the Ouidah Brazilian community (see Law 2004a, 186).

¹³⁹ i.e. maize. Cf. Duncan 1847, i, 185, 192, found the country for 10–12 miles from Ouidah 'well cultivated', the principal crops being maize and manioc (cassava).

¹⁴⁰ i.e. with shrines of *vodun* (deities).

Most natives, I am informed, along the coast drink, the first thing in the morning, what is called tea, it is ground Indian corn, made of the consistence of thin gruel, and taken while still warm.¹⁴¹ The cost of a canoe crew.¹⁴²

August 2. Another messenger, arrived from Abomey, to hurry me on the road. All hands knelt down, kissed the ground, when they told me.

I am told there is a creek, which runs from Whydah to Egabomey,¹⁴³ which is kept a secret,¹⁴⁴ this forms the quickest and best route to Abomey and avoids the swamp.¹⁴⁵

It is said that Signor Martinez has had to fly from Porto Nuovo, to save his life, that he had from time to time so completely hemmed the King in, that he, the King, has been actually his slave, for some length of time, and that the King has taken advantage of the present disturbances, to rid himself of this thralldom.¹⁴⁶

The King of Dahomey, Av-vo-gar, Nar-o-pay, Nassarah, Sig[nor]s Antonio and Ignatio de Souza,¹⁴⁷ and all the head men, are all very much in the Huttons debt and I fancy, there is every chance of their remaining so.

Thirteen white men died of yellow fever, just before my arrival, a South American vessel brought it over the beginning of the season.¹⁴⁸

English American and Dutch are buried within the [English] Fort yard, close to the House;¹⁴⁹ French in the French yard and all other whites in the Portuguese Fort yard.

¹⁴¹ Referring to the maize pudding called *akansán* (or 'kankie'): Burton later noted that 'mixed with water and drunk, it forms a cool subacid drink, suitable for hot weather' (1864, i, 136, n).

¹⁴² The details are given in a separate document, see Appendix 2, no. 6.

¹⁴³ Probably Abomey-Calavi, on the western shore of Lake Nokoué.

¹⁴⁴ i.e. presumably, from Europeans. In the 1860s it was noted that navigation up the River Ouémé, north from Lake Nokoué, was 'prohibited to whites': see 'Map of the Slave Coast', after F. Borghero (1865), in Newbury 1961, opp. 77.

¹⁴⁵ i.e. the marshy area called the Lama, which had to be crossed on the overland route between Ouidah and Abomey (see p. 51). Fraser also refers later (p. 134), to the existence of a 'waterway' connecting Cana (15 km SE of Abomey) to Cotonou, on the southern shore of Lake Nokoué: this must refer to the River Ouémé, which is navigable by canoe as far up-river as Kpokissa, 35 km SE of Cana.

¹⁴⁶ The 'disturbances' referred to were a civil war which had occurred in Badagry, east of Porto-Novo, in June 1851, in which the supporters of Akitoye, the exiled King of Lagos who had formerly settled there (but was now with Consul Beecroft at Fernando Po), defeated and expelled the indigenous chiefs (Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 302–9). Martins was identified with Akitoye's faction, and this annoyed the King of Porto-Novo, who (according to a missionary source at Badagry) 'froze all trade with Martinez and even threatened his life', causing him to take refuge at Ouidah (ibid., 308–9). This expulsion was evidently only temporary, since Fraser refers to Martins as established at Porto-Novo again later: see p. 152).

¹⁴⁷ Ignacio de Souza, another brother of the Chacha, also prominent as a trader.

¹⁴⁸ Yellow fever (transmitted by mosquitoes) was in origin indigenous to Africa, but had been transmitted to America through the trans-Atlantic trade.

¹⁴⁹ The burial ground is described by Burton 1864, i, 86–8.

5th [Aug.] a.m. 3.30 the roof of a house about fifty yards off caught fire (west of the Fort) fortunately there was but little wind and that in a S.W. direction, so that there was no fear of our building catching without the wind shifted,¹⁵⁰ from the sound of voices some hundreds of persons, must have turned out, most of them, if not all, for the sake of plunder.¹⁵¹

Guns are going off, in all directions, at irregular intervals, in consequence of the arrival of the Cha-cha (Sig[nor] Isid[oro] de Souza),¹⁵² in town, from Abomey.¹⁵³

Visited the Portuguese Factory,¹⁵⁴ I was very politely received by the Padre,¹⁵⁵ who is a young mulatto, who has been educated in a Brazilian Convent, he seemed a very superior man, he spoke but little English, but that little very well, he stated that he spoke Latin, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese; but not English.

The building and yard are much smaller,¹⁵⁶ and in a most ruinous state, scarcely inhabitable, the Church or Chapel which stands in the centre of the court yard, was built by the Old de Souza,¹⁵⁷ is in good repair and well white washed, at least outside.

Paid my official respects to the Cha-cha, Signor Isidore de Souza, I shewed him my commission, which he handed to a tall Frenchman, whom I found afterwards to be M. Case the agent of the French Factory,¹⁵⁸ he declined reading it on account of incapacity, and Sig[nor] Isidore did it as well as he could himself, he made out Vice Consul, King of Dahomey, the signature Palmerston and the seal, then he returned it to me.

At parting Isidore said that his house would always be open, and whenever I chose to call he would be glad to see me, so far he was civil.

The town of Whydah is for the most part divided into large squares surrounded by high thick mud walls,¹⁵⁹ covered with thatch the same as the

¹⁵⁰ One of several references in Fraser's journals to fires in Ouidah and elsewhere: for the danger of fires, cf. Law 2004a, 79–80.

¹⁵¹ Later visitors to Ouidah also refer to burglary from houses which had burned down: see Borghero 1997, 54; Burton 1864, i, 56).

¹⁵² Isidoro de Souza (subsequently often referred to simply as 'Signor Isidoro'), eldest son of the first de Souza, and successor to his title of *Chacha*.

¹⁵³ From attending the Customs there (cf. p. 26).

¹⁵⁴ The Portuguese fort, on the east of the town (nowadays housing the Historical Museum of Ouidah); unlike the English and French forts, this was strictly no longer a trading 'factory', but was under official Portuguese government occupation (since 1844).

¹⁵⁵ The Portuguese fort had a Roman Catholic priest as chaplain among its personnel.

¹⁵⁶ i.e. presumably, than the English fort.

¹⁵⁷ i.e. Francisco Felix de Souza (died 1849), father of Isidoro, who had himself been a former official of the Portuguese fort, and had retained the keys to it until its official reoccupation in 1844 (Law 2004a, 168–9).

¹⁵⁸ Esprit-Cases, agent of the firm Régis at Ouidah.

¹⁵⁹ From what follows, this evidently refers to compounds.

houses, that is to say a wooden frame work or roof in the form of an angle and thatched with dried grass, the accompanying sketch forms a section; the wall is built about two feet or three high at a time, and then left to dry, which accounts for the divisions.¹⁶⁰



Each square, if belonging to a man of importance, contains many houses, for himself, wives, slaves, stores &c.; others although containing many houses, are let separately to tenants at so many cowries per week, they are inhabited by Sierra Leone, Cape Coast and other people;¹⁶¹ besides what may be called liberty slaves,¹⁶² who belonging to a father (the word master is never used) gives them permission to go and do as they like, provided they bring in their stipulated daily earnings;¹⁶³ the master never enquires whether they earn it or steal it; it is a well known fact, that they make more by robbing than by labour and it suits their natural dispositions much better.

Signor Isidore de Souza, is said to have thirty seven sons, his daughters have not yet been counted.¹⁶⁴

Received a letter from Commander Wilmot.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 65–6, 217, with n., who refers to 'courses or steps', and explains that 'the palace and city gates are allowed five; chiefs have four tall or five short, and all others three, or as the King directs'.

¹⁶¹ Cape Coast, on the Gold Coast. There were many persons from the Gold Coast (Cape Coast, Elmina, Accra) in Ouidah, most of them in the service of European traders.

¹⁶² This term would appear to be of Fraser's own coinage: at least, no use of it has been traced in slave societies of the 19th century.

¹⁶³ An earlier (1848) visitor to Dahomey likewise noted that it was 'a general practice, with the masters of slaves, to permit them to prosecute their own affairs, and to receive in exchange for this concession, a stipulated monthly sum derived from their labour': HCPP, *Copy of Dispatches from the Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast*, incl. in no.2, Report by B. Cruickshank, 9 Nov. 1848, p.15.

¹⁶⁴ Fraser later reports that Isidoro had '37 wives and 35 children alive': see Additional Dispatches, no.8. The published history of the de Souza family lists only 24 children of Isidoro, including 16 sons, but this is not comprehensive, but represents only those attested in surviving baptismal records (de Souza 1991, 297–8).

¹⁶⁵ See TNA, FO84/886, ff. 140–1; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 11 in no. 4, Wilmot to Fraser, 1 Aug. 1851, explaining that his letter to the King, which Fraser had earlier declined to transmit (see p. 39, with nn.107–8), was 'purely of a private nature'. Fraser did in the event deliver the letter: see p. 106.

7th [Aug.] Madiki assembled some of the [omission in text] as my carriers,¹⁶⁶ but as they were not all there, I would not have any thing to do with them, this is the third time he has played me the same trick, but I am determined not to be foiled, by this rascal; he assumes with the people [sc. of the English fort] a despotic power, and when I succeed in thwarting his plans, he cringes, hangs his head, and says:—‘*It no my fault*’, ‘*People no savvy*’;¹⁶⁷ it appears he will not let any one go but whom he pleases, so that the old fat lame blind and the lazy, are picked out for me.

There does not appear to be a species of roguery but what this man is mixed up in. Duncan was quite right, in his remarks;¹⁶⁸ but how Forbes can say he is too simple to be a rogue,¹⁶⁹ I know not; more particularly as Forbes lived at his house¹⁷⁰ and permitted him to be his head bottle washer &c.¹⁷¹ When I first arrived, my boys, could buy cotton in the market for 1½d per lb but what Madiki procured for me came to 3d and 4d,¹⁷² at which I grumbled, since then my boys have not succeeded in getting it for a less sum, plainly showing that instead of being an assistant, he is quite the reverse. I am certain the same thing is carried out with all the Palm oil &c. that Hutton’s buy. The very food we eat is taxed the same way.

The Factory wanted cowry bags, some days since, the ordinary price is 2½ strings each,¹⁷³ the moment they were enquired for, this Madiki, made them 3½.

9th [Aug.] Paid all my people subsistence in advance.¹⁷⁴

Gave King’s messenger a piece of cloth and two heads of cowries¹⁷⁵ between three of his followers, by desire of Nassarah.

¹⁶⁶ i.e. for his journey to Abomey.

¹⁶⁷ Coastal pidgin for ‘understand’ (from Portuguese *saber*, ‘know’).

¹⁶⁸ John Duncan, who had visited Dahomey as an explorer in 1845, and returned as British Vice-Consul at Ouidah in 1849. Fraser quotes from his published account of his first visit, in which he described the ‘Governor’ of the English fort (unnamed) as ‘a deceitful old scoundrel’ (1847, i, 216); but this in fact probably refers to Madiki Lemon’s father, rather than himself (see Law 2004a, 162).

¹⁶⁹ Lieut. F. E. Forbes had visited Dahomey on official missions in 1849 and 1850: Fraser quotes from his published account, which described Madiki as ‘too big a fool to be a rogue’ (1851, ii, 176).

¹⁷⁰ Forbes hired a house from Madiki Lemon, in preference to staying in the English fort (Ibid., i, 129–30).

¹⁷¹ This is inaccurate: in fact, Madiki served Forbes as interpreter; it was rather Midjrokan (see p. 60) who served as ‘head of followers’ (1851, i, 86).

¹⁷² Although these prices are quoted in sterling, they probably refer to payments in cowry shells; the English penny being conventionally equated with the ‘string’ of 40 cowries: see further Endnote 2.

¹⁷³ i.e. of cowries, which were strung in units of 40, conventionally valued at one penny sterling.

¹⁷⁴ i.e. again, for the journey to Abomey: the standard subsistence payment was 2 strings/80 cowries per day (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 52, etc.).

¹⁷⁵ The ‘head’ was 50 strings, or 2,000 cowries, conventionally valued at one dollar.

Received a letter from Mr Prior, Mr Hutton's Agent¹⁷⁶

Received a note from Mr Prior¹⁷⁷

My King's men, carriers, men and women, having after much palavering started, I entered a Kind of Palanquin,¹⁷⁸ carried on the heads of four men, which I had constructed of a country sofa,



covered with white and a red hood to it, with a small flag flying at each end; the red and white colors, were chosen by Madiki as being the favourites, and as he said not generally allowed except to great people!

Left Whydah Fort at 6 p.m. under a salute of 21 guns, in honor of the Queen, when the Union Jack was hauled down, and seven guns for myself, the guns firing and the novelty of my carriage seemed to give great satisfaction, great numbers of persons having assembled round the fort; I first proceeded to the Av-vo-gar's house, where Nar-o-pay, Nassarah and others went through the usual prostrations to the King's stick.¹⁷⁹ The Boayon was waiting outside his house, to greet me.

As soon as I was out of sight of the town and the people had left me, I changed into a country hammock, which Madiki had provided for me, the men not being used to carry in fours, I found it better to adopt the old country plan.

Arrived at Sav-vee,¹⁸⁰ at 7.15 p.m. from this spot the country is studded with Fan Palms from 30 to 50 feet, in height.¹⁸¹

Arrived at Torree¹⁸² about 9 p.m. much dew falling

Up to 12 p.m. my people continued arriving; my Palanquin somewhat damaged by the branches of the trees, on the road.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶See Appendix 2, no. 8, Prior to Fraser, 9 Aug. 1851 (complaining about thefts at Ouidah, and lack of repair of the English fort).

¹⁷⁷See Appendix 2, no. 9, Prior to Fraser, 9 Aug. 1851, 2.30 p.m. (reporting a further theft).

¹⁷⁸i.e. an enclosed litter.

¹⁷⁹Cf. p. 72, 'a country made stick, of white wood, and a black top, with about six pennyworth of silver in the shape of a ring round it'. The ornamentation of such canes was personalized, in order to authenticate messages: they are termed *makpo* in Fon, '*récales*' in French (see Adandé 1962). The requirement of prostration before the king's stick is also reported in other sources (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 25, 53).

¹⁸⁰Savi, 8 km north of Ouidah.

¹⁸¹*Palmyra* (or *borassus flabellifer*) as distinct from the oil-palm (*elaeis guineensis*).

¹⁸²Tori, 9 km north of Savi.

¹⁸³Fraser stayed overnight at Tori, as was standard practice (cf. e.g. Freeman 1844, 251; Duncan 1847, i, 206; Forbes 1851, i, 55; Burton 1864, i 151).

10th [Aug.] My drawers¹⁸⁴ and canteen¹⁸⁵ have not yet arrived, consequently I have fared badly, this morning:—no wash, coffee, tea or sugar, so I am compelled to put up with four eggs, three of which are bad, a glass of brandy and water, and a piece of biscuit.

Brandy and water not being very pleasant nor a very good thing at 5 a.m.

Received a dash,¹⁸⁶ of two small calabashes of Plantains from the Acting Headman [sc. of Torree]. I tried to explain to him, that I was different from other travellers, that I had come to live in the country, that I gave ‘no dash’ nor did I expect to receive any; their answer, for he was attended by others, was ‘all they wanted was to see me strong and anything in the place, that I saw, if only mention it, I should have[’]. This was said whilst they were on their Knees.

This apparent humility, going on their Knees when they speak, I think must have become habit, in consequence of the eaves of their houses, coming within four feet of the ground, and there not being convenience for admitting them beneath.

After much palavering, having started my people, I left Torree about 8 a.m. and journeying along a good clear road, on either side of which appeared like, but not actually, shrubberies and cornfields alternately.

Now the Fan Palms, begin to get scarce, the country is more thickly wooded and the trees increase in size.

Arrived at a village called Azoway,¹⁸⁷ here a halt is made, apparently by all persons,¹⁸⁸ there are a few stalls or [a] small market and women vend Kankie¹⁸⁹ &c. to those who may desire it.

I was presented with water and a drink, which I fancy must be ground Indian corn with water.

Here were immense numbers of butterflies,¹⁹⁰ many of which were quite new to me, but my present object being to reach Abomey, I postpone the pleasure of collecting until my return.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ Presumably a chest of drawers, a box containing sliding trays.

¹⁸⁵ i.e. box, for cooking utensils.

¹⁸⁶ Coastal pidgin for ‘gift’ (probably from Portuguese *das*, ‘[you] give’).

¹⁸⁷ Azohouè, 10 km beyond Tori.

¹⁸⁸ Azohouè is described by Burton 1864, i, 154, as the ‘half-way house’ between Tori and Allada.

¹⁸⁹ Fraser later (p. 103) explains *kankie* as ‘Indian corn [i.e. maize], ground very fine, and sifted, it is then boiled in water, kept stirred; until it is the consistence of thick paste, . . . put in a leaf and rolled up’. The word is actually Fante (the main language of the Gold Coast), *kankyew*; the Fon term is *akansán* (cf. Burton 1864, i, 136, n.).

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 56, who saw ‘thousands of butterflies of every hue, and most pleasant to the eye’.

¹⁹¹ Alluding to Fraser’s zoological interests: in fact, he began collecting specimens during his residence at Abomey: see pp. 92, 94 (2 Sept. 1851).

One or two of my women carriers arrived, it appeared that they had, all, mistook the road, and had gone a considerable distance roundabout.

I discovered my Hammockmen playing their tricks upon me. After some abuse poured upon the black guards [= blackguards] and a fair allowance of the same upon Master Madiki, I made the Headman and his crew, take an extra walk for their trouble.

Started again, and about 2 p.m. reached Har-lar-dar,¹⁹² the state of the road, would do credit to any Park in England.¹⁹³ The scenery was beautiful.

On entering Har-lar-dar, you pass a large cleared Fetish place, which is quite pleasing to look at, on account of its neatness.¹⁹⁴

Just before dark,¹⁹⁵ walked out, had a view of the King's House, where it is said, he keeps seventy-five women, poor things.¹⁹⁶ The building very much resembles the Portuguese Fort, at Whydah,¹⁹⁷ and seems in very little better repair, in front is a large cleared space or esplanade,¹⁹⁸ on which stands the large Bombax or cotton tree¹⁹⁹ mentioned by Duncan,²⁰⁰ it measured sixty-two paces round the exposed roots, that is leaving out the straggling ones; near this on some small trees are three skulls, which I suppose are those referred to by Forbes.²⁰¹ The town seems considerable and the market large.²⁰²

11th [Aug.] My Head Hammockman reported one of his crew as sick and left behind yesterday, I suspect with diarrh[o]ea or dysentery, or as he described it 'his belly run all away, too much'.

¹⁹²Allada, 9 km beyond Azohouè.

¹⁹³Cf. Duncan 1847, i, 207, 'the country resembling a gentleman's park in England'.

¹⁹⁴Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 58, 'on entering Allahdah, is a large cleared square, in which are the fetish houses'.

¹⁹⁵Fraser evidently stayed overnight at Allada—again, as was standard practice (cf. Freeman 1844, 252; Duncan 1847, i, 207; Ridgway 1847, 198; Forbes 1851, i, 57; Burton 1864, i, 157).

¹⁹⁶The 'palace' at Allada is also referred to e.g. by Forbes 1851, i, 56; Burton 1864, i, 156. Freeman in 1843 understood this building to be 'a royal residence, occasionally occupied by the King of Dahomi when he visits these parts' (1844, 252), but this is probably a misunderstanding; Duncan in 1845 described it rather as '[a] king's house built for the accommodation of white men' (1847, i, 207).

¹⁹⁷Freeman describes it as 'a large house, two stories high, of rather an European aspect' (1844, 252). Other accounts clarify that it was only the gatehouse which was built in 2 stories (Forbes 1851, i, 56; Burton 1864, i, 156).

¹⁹⁸i.e. a level area used for processions or recreational walking: Cf. Freeman 1844, 253, 'The area is kept very clean. It is swept every morning'.

¹⁹⁹i.e. the silk-cotton (kapok) tree.

²⁰⁰Duncan 1847, i, 208: 'Here I observed one of the largest cotton trees I ever saw, except one on the banks of the river Niger, which I measured when engaged in the Niger expedition in 1841, that measured fifty-seven feet'.

²⁰¹Forbes 1851, i, 57, refers to 3 trees on which were fixed the skulls of 3 brothers executed by the King at the time of the Dahomian conquest of Ouidah (in 1727).

²⁰²In contrast Forbes (1851, i, 58) thought the Allada market 'by no means large'.

After some wrangling with my carriers, I departed, leaving them to do as they could, for it is useless being troubled by them. I believe one or two are over laden, I told them to get two additional, at the same rate of pay, as themselves, they pretended it could not be done, they, no doubt thought it was a good chance for jobbing.²⁰³

On leaving the town, by the side of the path, lay twenty-eight cannon all overgrown with grass and weeds, without carriages,²⁰⁴ the one I had, lifted out, was a swivel,²⁰⁵ iron, and I should say a six pounder.

After passing, for some distance, along a path nearly overgrown with rushes or very broad bladed grass, the road improved and we seemed to be passing, through a wood (English)²⁰⁶ right and left were some immense trees two and three hundred feet in height.

The road seemed to take a very gradual descent, commencing a short time after leaving Whydah.

We passed the villages of Dun-oo,²⁰⁷ Atoogoo and Assegwee²⁰⁸ and stopped for a short time at Hay-vee²⁰⁹ and also at Whybo,²¹⁰ arrived at Hark-pay about 1 p.m.,²¹¹ just at this time we had a light shower of rain.

The road previous to entering this town, if, so it may be called, becomes sufficiently steep, to cause the Bearers and carriers trouble, at the same time it is not quite so good.

Just before reaching Hark-pay, I saw a Bombax or cotton tree, far exceeding, in circumference, the one at Har-lar-dar, it was not very lofty having apparently been shattered by some storm.

All the forenoon, cloudy and tolerably cool, after the shower it cleared off, Ther[mometer] 63.5 in the shade, where I am writing.

Butterflies, as mentioned by Duncan, as being so numerous, after leaving Har-vee,²¹² were not present, I presume they had migrated to Azoway.

A few monkeys [= monkeys], have been the only mammals, seen en route, apparently of the mona species.²¹³

²⁰³ i.e. being paid by 'piece-work', according to the amount of work done, rather than by the day.

²⁰⁴ Forbes 1851, i, 58–9, counted only 15 guns; but Burton 1864, i, 156, confirms the figure of 28.

²⁰⁵ i.e. a small cannon, on a pivot.

²⁰⁶ Presumably meaning a wood of English type.

²⁰⁷ The version of the text printed in the HCPP reads this as 'Bunoo'; but cf. 'Doonoo' in Forbes 1851, i, 59; 'Donou' in Borghero 1997, 60.

²⁰⁸ i.e. Donou, Attogon, Assihoui—villages to the north of Allada, on or close to (east of) the modern motor road.

²⁰⁹ Called 'Henvi-Dovo' by Burton 1864, i, 168: i.e. Hinvi-Dovo, 12 km from Allada.

²¹⁰ Houégbo, 10 km from Hinvi-Dovo.

²¹¹ Akpè, 7 km from Houégbo. Fraser stayed here overnight (as also did Winniett in 1847: Ridgway 1847, 299).

²¹² Duncan 1847, i, 208: 'an extraordinary number of butterflies, of various sorts and colours, were assembled in heaps on different spots on the road'.

²¹³ *Cercopithecus mona*, the mona monkey.

Birds seem scarce, except near towns, and then only a very few species.

Flowers are also scarce, this may not be their season.

Madiki says, Abomey means large place,²¹⁴ but the proper name of the capital is Dahomey, or the house in Da's Belly, see Dalzell, p.2.²¹⁵

Much squabbling with my carriers.

Several, if not all of the towns have granaries, raised about 2 ft. from the ground,²¹⁶ they are built of swish,²¹⁷ same as the walls and houses, about one foot thick, they vary much in size are generally larger at top, than at bottom, with two holes, in the lower part to draw the grain off, if Madiki speaks correctly, they are rebuilt every year.

I have received water, as a present, at most stopping places.

Signor Ignatio de Souza, sent his stick, he is on his return to Whydah.²¹⁸

12th [Aug.] Very cold during the night. We were all on the move by times [= betimes]²¹⁹ this morning. It being cloudy and not too hot, there was much wind. I walked to the edge of the swamp,²²⁰ to ease my bearers, as much as possible, to fit them the better for the fatigue of carrying me through the swamp, when I reached it I found it quite dry,²²¹ and so foot worn, that it was quite impossible to be carried, so I was compelled to walk the greater part of the way through, and I do not feel any better for it.²²²

The swamp had, from the size and general appearance of the trees, more the look of a neglected orchard, than anything I can compare it to, except about the middle of the first half, there some very large trees were standing.

²¹⁴The proposed etymology is evidently based on Fon *gbõ* = 'large', but it is incorrect: rather, the name means 'within the ditch' (from *agbõ* = 'ditch': cf. Burton 1864, i, 288).

²¹⁵Referring to Dalzell 1793. The etymology of the name 'Dahomey' given here is standard in Dahomian tradition: it is said to allude to an earlier local ruler, Dan, who was defeated and killed by the founder of Dahomey.

²¹⁶Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 60: 'Here each farm is supplied with a separate granary, raised, as in England, on supporters'.

²¹⁷i.e. compacted mud.

²¹⁸From attending the Customs at Abomey (cf. p. 26).

²¹⁹i.e. early.

²²⁰The Lama (this name recorded by Brue 1845, 58; Bouet 1852, 42, n. 2, 'Lamas'), Portuguese for 'mud': an extensive area of swampy ground, extending between Akpè and Agrimè, whose indigenous name is Kò (cf. Burton 1864, i, 172–3).

²²¹Fraser was travelling in the lesser dry season (Aug./Sept.). The Lama was more of an obstacle after rain (cf. p. 86).

²²²Cf. Norris 1789, 80–1, 'the path is so narrow, crooked, and bad, that it is impossible to be carried in a hammoc'; also Burton 1864, i, 174, 'The hammock became useless, the mud, hard-caked ... wounds the feet of the bearers; they march at the rate of one mile an hour, and the frequent irregularities of the surface make them sidle into the bush, where tree stubs abound, and where falls are imminent. The path was tortuous, but easy to a walker'.

In or about the centre of the entire swamp, we halted at a place called Woodromey,²²³ a few huts and some cultivation around them, here they presented me with some very bad water.

Started again, luckily the day was cloudy and not too hot, or I should have been knocked up,²²⁴ in consequence of so much walking and so bad a road.

On arriving at High-vay-ee²²⁵ I found one of my Croo Boys, with a large chameleon, at the end of a stick, himself and all the rest of the people terrified at it, they had tried to persuade him to throw it away, but he would not until I came, upon enquiring the reason of their consternation, one and all declared 'that if it chop (bite) man; man die'.²²⁶ They were in a terrible taking, at my handling it; finding the opinion general, I afterwards let it bite me, several times, to prove to them their error, they were dreadfully alarmed, particularly my headmen, Madiki and all; they are surprised, no accident, has, as yet, happened, I do believe, from their looks, they expected me to die there and then.

A similar thing occurred, when I landed, for the first time, at Sierra Leone, ten years ago,²²⁷ only the expression was different it being 'if he spit in your eye, he blind you' I tried the experiment upon myself at that time, but all the satisfaction I got was:—'Ah! white man sav-vee too much'.

A short time after leaving our last halting place, having passed through some high grass, we arrived at Ah-grim-may.²²⁸ Here is a King's house with; as Madiki tells me two hundred women, how he should know is more than I can tell.²²⁹

I have been visited by two or three Headmen and the King's 'Headman for women'.²³⁰ This last mentioned personage was a jolly looking middle aged woman, of a yellowed cast²³¹ with a white handkerchief or cloth round her head as a mark of distinction.

²²³Not identified, but cf. 'Ouondonou' in Bouet, in Nardin 1967, 123; 'Wondonun' in Burton 1864, i, 175, the latter describing it as 'the half-way house' (i.e. between Akpè and Agrimè), and situated in 'a kind of little island, which never floods'.

²²⁴i.e. exhausted.

²²⁵Other accounts give this name in a longer form, e.g. 'Avadi' (Freeman 1844, 254), 'Aiveji' (Burton 1864, i, 176): i.e. Aïvedji, at the northern edge of the Lama.

²²⁶The bite of the chameleon is commonly believed in Africa to be poisonous, incorrectly.

²²⁷In 1841, when Fraser was a member of the expedition to the River Niger.

²²⁸Agrimè, 15 km from Akpè.

²²⁹Freeman 1844, 254, also refers to a 'royal residence' at Agrimè; Burton 1864, i, 179, to a 'King's palace', occupied by 'King's wives'.

²³⁰Presumably, this means the head of the women in the royal palace at Agrimè.

²³¹i.e. colour (of skin).

Each of the visitors had sent me a present, but I could not distinguish which was which, but they consisted of water, two muscovy Ducks and two Fowls; also a number of balls of Kankie.

A King's stick arrived, to ascertain how I got over the swamp also compliments from Mayhoo,²³² Narwhey &c &c.

In the evening, one of Narwhey's people, on his road to Whydah, called with his master's compliments.

The King's messenger started with my card and compliments and Madiki's stick.

Madiki was in a terrible way, because I would not conform to the general rule and send a stick,²³³ when I told him that [I] had not one, he proposed to send an old sword, I have with me, then a loading rod belonging to my gun; but I am determined to try my own plan, of sending a card.

My men, had left a package at Har-lar-dar, came this evening to say they would return and fetch it; the distance is about thirty miles, which will make their punishment (sixty miles) severe and no extra pay: besides which it saves me making complaints.

Six swallows are now roosting in the shed, in which I am encamped²³⁴ notwithstanding there are six or seven persons and two lights on the move.

When Duncan and Forbes mention houses being erected, by the King, for the accommodation of white men,²³⁵ it must be understood that they are only sheds.²³⁶

Walked out could only find two or three houses, these compose the village.

Here, for the first time, I have seen one of those disgusting Fetishes mentioned by Duncan.²³⁷ This somewhat resembled a Leopard, about the head, it is in a sitting posture, with an erect penis some eight inches long; five or six in diameter and the foreskin drawn back.²³⁸

²³² Mehu (or Meu), the title of one the two highest-ranking officials in Dahomey, the other being the Migan. The Mehu was junior in rank to the Migan, but was responsible for trade, including oversight of the coastal port of Ouidah (Law 2004a, 98), so that he was more prominent in dealing with European visitors.

²³³ As earlier British representatives had done, including e.g. Duncan and Forbes in 1849 (Forbes 1851, i, 65).

²³⁴ Fraser stayed the night at Agrimè.

²³⁵ Duncan refers to king's houses 'built for the accommodation of white men' at Allada, Houégbo, Akpè, and Cana (1847, i, 207, 209, 212, 215); Forbes was in fact less explicit: although he alludes to 'palaces' at Allada, Hinvi and Cana (1851, i, 56, 60, 64), he did not stay in them.

²³⁶ Forbes likewise said of the house in which he lodged at Allada, 'it was a mere shell, entirely bare of furniture' (1851, i, 57).

²³⁷ Duncan 1847, i, 124–5, at Ouidah, refers to clay images in human form, with 'the lower parts of the body [i.e. the phallus] ... out of all proportion large, and ... exposed in a most disgusting manner'.

²³⁸ These were figures of the *vodun* Legba, as later correctly identified by Burton (1864, i, 81–3).

There is a tolerable share of cultivation round about.

The road is now composed of loose sand or gravel.

The soil in the swamp, is black and doubtless alluvial, there was scarcely a soft place the whole distance, all being as hard almost as stone.

The water, here is very thick and bad, I have had it boiled, even for my grog.²³⁹

There is a cold wind blowing from the westward.

Observed some English letters, on some earthen jars, intended to shew the maker's name. Madiki says they are done by the King's wives.²⁴⁰

13th [Aug.] Started by times, this morning, felt somewhat unwell, a little feverish to[o], perhaps from over exertion yesterday.

This part of the journey is cheering, the ground having a gentle rise, permitting one to have a view of the country, which has not yet been the case heretofore.

On the route, we passed a small square affair, upon legs or stilts more like a rabbit hutch, than anything else, decorated with fowls' feathers,²⁴¹ the messenger bearing the King's stick, took off his hat and made a great palaver as he went along, continually looking back as if there was somebody there, he was speaking to, many, if not all, my people joined in the palaver.

The Av-vo-gar's man, went close up to it, scraped both feet, one after another, as if making a bow. I enquired what they said and all about it—the answer I got was “it be fetish and no possible for tell me”.

On my return²⁴² I found this fetish is called ‘Da’,²⁴³ that they always enquire after his health, are glad to hear he is quite well, and promise to acquaint the King of it, which I firmly believe they never do.

My people halted at a small place called So-bo-do,²⁴⁴ but I proceeded to the commencement of Cannah or Cannahminah, as it is sometimes called.²⁴⁵

²³⁹ A mixture of spirits with water.

²⁴⁰ As noted later (Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 198), the manufacture of pottery was a royal monopoly.

²⁴¹ From what follows, this was evidently a ‘fetish’ or *vodun* shrine, the feathers being the remains of sacrifices offered to it.

²⁴² i.e. on his way back to Ouidah, on 8 Sept. 1851 (see p. 110).

²⁴³ Dan, a *vodun* represented as a serpent, equated with the rainbow, and associated with wealth; the Dan shrine (‘Danh-hwe’, i.e. ‘Dan house’) here was also noted later by Burton (1864, i, 187–8). Fraser seems to be the earliest European to record the name of Dan (as distinct from Dangbe, the python deity of Ouidah).

²⁴⁴ Zogbodo, or more commonly Zogbodomè, 7 km from Agrimè.

²⁴⁵ Cana (more correctly, Kanna), 7 km beyond Zogbodomè. The alternative name is recorded in various forms, including ‘Calmina’ (Norris 1789, 82), and ‘Calamina’ (Brue 1845, 59), as well as ‘Canamina’ (Duncan 1847, i, 215, etc.) and ‘Cannah Minah’ (Forbes 1851, i, 630. Its origin and significance are not known: Burton says that ‘Kana-mina’ was the name of ‘a palace once built

Madiki says Minah means 'my place'.²⁴⁶

Cannah is an odd place, there is no town or village, but every house or yard stands alone, with some cultivation around it.²⁴⁷

I was sadly disappointed after reading Forbes' account of this place: birds there were few, and of a very common species, either at Cannah or on the road I took,²⁴⁸ and as for the high state of cultivation, I could not perceive it,²⁴⁹ the whole place is, certainly, studded with small patches of cultivation, leaving all the other spaces in a state of bush: even the cultivated spot[s] were ragged and dirty in the extreme and nothing to compare, even with the neighbourhood of Whydah and its adjacents.²⁵⁰ They appear seldom, if ever, to weed.

After walking about one mile, through what is called the town, we arrived at our quarters, which is said to be one of the King's houses for 'white man', called Cam-boo-dee,²⁵¹ but just the same as the rest, a shed.²⁵²

The houses or sheds are built in all directions and distances, there is nothing pleasing about any of them.

The King's messenger, who started yesterday from Ahgrimmay arrived with the King's compliments, saying I could go to Dahomey²⁵³ tomorrow.

I started another messenger to say, that would be impossible as my carriers had not arrived; as soon as they did, I would let him know and wait his pleasure.

Self much better this afternoon.

Through the country, we have passed this morning, there is scarcely a thing to remind you, you are in Africa, except the color of the people. The tropical character of the vegetation has almost disappeared.

The path for nearly the whole of today's journey, has been covered with small pebbles, compelling my people to wear their sandals.

there ... by one of the Dahoman kings' (1864, i, 196), but no palace of this or any similar name is recorded in the survey by Monroe (2007).

²⁴⁶ Presumably this proposed etymology is from Fon *mi* = 'my', 'our'; but it is certainly incorrect.

²⁴⁷ Duncan 1847, i, 215, describes Cana as 'a large town', of at least 10,000 inhabitants, but 'scattered over a vast area of ground'.

²⁴⁸ See Forbes 1851, i, 63–4: 'the plains of Cannah are gay with birds of beautiful and magnificent plumage, of the most brilliant scarlet'.

²⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, i, 65: 'The cultivation in the neighbourhood rivals that of the Chinese'. Burton 1864, i, 199–200, was also dismissive of this claim: 'According to some enthusiastic travellers the cultivation rivals that of the Chinese, at present all such art has been lost'.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 190, 'There is palpably more field than habitation, and far more fallow than field'.

²⁵¹ 'Camboodee' is actually a title of office (as Fraser realized later, see p. 72), that of the treasurer of the royal palace. Freeman in 1843 also recorded staying at the house of the 'Kabada' in Cana (1844, 257), and Forbes in 1849 in 'the treasurer's house' (1851, i, 65).

²⁵² Fraser now stayed 3 nights Cana, before proceeding to Abomey on 16 Aug. 1851.

²⁵³ i.e. to Abomey.

The *Perenopterus niger* or Turkey Buzzards as they are erroneously called,²⁵⁴ are numerous, very clean in their clothing and respectful in their meen [= mien], if it was not for them, the towns, at least, would be uninhabitable.

The only bird of a gay plumage, that I have noticed, on the road, was the common grenadier grosbeak.²⁵⁵

I fancy that maidens exposed their breasts and mothers hide them,²⁵⁶ and very properly so, for pendant breasts are not a very pleasing sight.

We crossed two pools or small swamps this journey, each, perhaps twenty yards wide.

A thunderstorm commenced at four this afternoon, it rained till 7.

The old man, who precedes me with the King's stick, has come to say as near as I can understand the interpretation or misinterpretation, 'That God send rain, as a proof I am a goodman [sic], which is very good for me and also the King.' 'The Portuguese and all, pass but no rain come'. Is this a piece of humbug, to procure a glass of rum, or is it, they have been in want of rain and fancy I have brought it.

The messenger, to the King, that was started this afternoon, has just returned, saying 'that as I came, so he will receive me, and he can hear my palaver beforehand'. this I take to be, that I can go to Dahomey when and how it pleases me; this time he has kept my card!

The Thermometer fell 7° during the afternoon.

The fetish people are very clean and generally good looking, and decorated rather prettily, with beads, cowries, handkerchiefs &c., their skins shine again.

Madiki said they had been dancing, they were now clapping their hands and appeared to be begging for cowries &c,²⁵⁷ they each carried two or three calabashes which were also very clean and prettily figured.

Passed one of the Kings women, twice, who was attended by one female, in front, ringing a small, sheep bell which was slung round her neck,²⁵⁸ and two followers, they were all carrying water;²⁵⁹ the only distinction for this great personage, was an extra handkerchief tied round the waist.

Took a blue pill.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴The black vulture; strictly the term 'Turkey buzzard' applies to American species.

²⁵⁵A form of weaver-bird.

²⁵⁶Cf. Burton (of females in a procession), 'young girls, known by their nude bosoms' (1864, ii, 16).

²⁵⁷Other European visitors to Dahomey also refer to 'begging' as a feature of 'fetish' ceremonies: e.g. Forbes 1851, ii, 4; Burton 1864, ii, 155. It is questionable whether this practice should be interpreted as 'begging', since the money was given in return for religious blessing, rather than as an act of charity: see the debate on this issue (in relation to the neighbouring society of Yorubaland) between Iliffe 1984; Peel 1990.

²⁵⁸The bell was to warn men to give way, since the king's wives were 'considered too sacred for man to gaze upon' (Forbes 1851, i, 25; cf. also *ibid.*, 71; Duncan 1847, i, 257–8; Burton 1864, i, 191–2).

²⁵⁹The main water supply for Cana was half a mile SE of the town: Burton 1864, i, 190.

²⁶⁰of mercury and chalk, taken as a purgative.

14th [Aug.] There is a very light rain, I should imagine, it has continued all night.

Thermometer 76°, cloudy, with a light cool breeze.

A messenger from the King, and Mayhoo, arrived, bringing a bottle of scheidam for my drinking, saying at the same time, that they were both well, hoping I was the same and thanking me for the trouble of crossing the swamp.

My people all mustered to give me good morning, first the men then the women.

The people generally are very polite, in their way, taking off their hats, if they happen to have one, attempt two or three bows, by scraping first one foot then another.

This being market day, walked out about noon, that being the best time to see the market, passed round the walls of one of the Kings houses,²⁶¹ called 'By-yar-men',²⁶² which may be about a quarter of a mile square, and the height ten or twelve feet.²⁶³ Visited the Mayhoos house, where Governor Winniett stopped,²⁶⁴ this house is called 'Wo-dun-oo'; continued onto the market, called 'Me-hoe-Kee'.²⁶⁵ There was a scanty supply of Fowls and Sheep, a little cotton, Kankie and Dab-a-dab,²⁶⁶ dried herbs, plenty of Guavas, some Palm nuts, meat cut up and selling peicemeal, a good supply of Indian corn, pipes, pots, pans, peppers &c.

Numbers of the Grenadier grosbeak on the tops of the Indian corn.

Dogs are for the most part of a light red color, with a white tip to the tail, although I have seen black and white specimens; they are [a] long headed, long-tailed, long-necked; long-backed; long-eared, set of curs.

²⁶¹ According to Forbes there were 4 royal palaces at Cana (1851, i, 64); a modern survey also identifies 4 constructed down to Gezo's reign (Monroe 2007, 366–70). Bouet earlier in 1851 implied, however, that only the most recently built of these, established by the reigning king Gezo, was actually in use, while the others were 'falling to ruins' (in Nardin 1967, 123). Unlike the 'King's houses' recorded further south, that at Cana was an actual royal residence, albeit only on a seasonal basis: Burton described it as the King's 'country quarters' (1864, i, 198, 346). See further p. 123, n. 597, below.

²⁶² The name is given by Burton (1864, i, 216) as 'Banyamme': i.e. Gbangnanme, one of the royal palaces at Cana, built by Gezo, on the west of the town (Monroe 2007, 370, 'Gbengamey').

²⁶³ Burton 1864, i, 217, says 'about twenty feet high'.

²⁶⁴ William Winniett, Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast, on his mission to King Gezo in 1847. The published account by one of his party confirms that he stayed at Cana in 'the house . . . of Mowyie [Mehul]' (Ridgway 1847, 304).

²⁶⁵ Cf. p. 84. The name is given as 'Miyokhi' in Burton 1864, i, 335n.; i.e. Mignonhi, the eastern market of Cana.

²⁶⁶ As Fraser explains later (p. 103), 'Dab-a-dab' was 'cooked in the same way' as kankie, but from 'Guinea corn [sorghum]', rather than maize, and 'in a much coarser state . . . laid out into cakes, about the size and thickness of muffins'. The word is not Fon, but of uncertain origin; the Fon term is *wō* (Burton 1864, i, 137, n.).

It is curious to see how they Hurry out of the way, when they see me; I have frequently met them on a pathway, they invariably made room for me, by going some two or three yards on one side, these stick up their nose and point their tails, as if they were very intent watching something they had just perceived, the moment I had passed they rejoin the path and go their way.

Arrived a messenger, from Whydah, with a letter from the Rev. Mr Gollmer²⁶⁷ and an Illustrated London News from Mr Prior,²⁶⁸ also a letter [i.e. from Prior] (which I copy to shew the state of things.)²⁶⁹

Answered [Gollmer's letter] by promising to do all in my power towards the recovery of Dasulla—and [Prior's letter] by offering to return immediately to Arguah if it was thought I could be of any service, of which are copies.²⁷⁰

Madiki tells me that Mons. A Bouet, not only brought brass guns but shell also; he also tells me that Domingo's present to the King, this year, besides plenty of other things consisted of 800 muskets and 600 quarter barrels of powder. He [= Domingo] has been made a caboceer,²⁷¹ of his own place at Whydah, and the King has given him four wives.²⁷²

There has been some very light showers, during the day, the only change in the Thermometer being from 79° to 78°.

The King's decanter, was carried in a neat little striped bag, also a cloth, to cover it when not in use.

The people are busy gathering Guinea corn,²⁷³ of which, Madiki says they get two crops per annum.²⁷⁴

The Indian corn seems planted in succession [i.e. to Guinea-corn], although a great quantity is already gathered, there is much to cut, some nearly ripe and all different stages to within two feet of the ground.

²⁶⁷ Rev. Charles A. Gollmer, head of the Church Missionary Society mission at Badagry, on the coast 85 km east of Ouidah; in 1852 he transferred his mission from Badagry to Lagos, where he clashed with Fraser, now Vice-Consul there (Smith 1978, 37–8, 45). For his letter, see Appendix 2, no. 7, Gollmer to Fraser, 4 Aug. 1851, requesting Fraser to find and redeem a Christian convert captured by the Dahomians at Abeokuta, called Dassalu.

²⁶⁸ A popular English newspaper: from Fraser's reply to Prior (Appendix 2, no. 13) it was intended for presentation to the King (cf. also p. 105).

²⁶⁹ See Appendix 2, no. 11, Prior to Fraser, 12 Aug. 1851, transmitting Gollmer's letter, and also reporting a disturbance at Agoué.

²⁷⁰ See Appendix 2, nos 12 and 13, Fraser to Gollmer, 15 Aug. 1851; and to Prior, 15 Aug. 1851.

²⁷¹ 'caboceer' (Portuguese *cabeceiro*, 'head man'), i.e. 'chief'.

²⁷² Burton later also noted that Martins was 'a caboceer of Dahome, entitled to the umbrella, the chair, and other insignia of his order' (1864, i, 73). The rank of 'caboceer' was regularly granted to wealthy merchants in Dahomey: cf. Béraud 1866, 378–9.

²⁷³ i.e. sorghum, as distinct from 'Indian corn' (maize).

²⁷⁴ The people were still 'busy gathering' Guinea corn 11 days later (see p. 83) and by the beginning of Sept. they were preparing the ground for the second planting (p. 90).

They are gathering and drying the pods of the Calavances, a Kind of Bean.²⁷⁵

The smell of the Guava is delicious but they are scarcely worth eating, being too troublesome to separate the seeds: the Sierra Leone women, at Fernando Po,²⁷⁶ say they are not good for children, they make them man too soon, that is to say they cause an erection of the penis.

Observed a place, enclosed, the bottom of which was some inches thick of muck. Madiki said it was where the cows sleep at night.²⁷⁷

I make him incredulous, when I tell him, that, what he calls fine houses, are not near so good, as we give Horses and cattle, in England.

15th [Aug.] Sent messenger and card to the King, to say I was prepared to proceed to Dahomey, tomorrow, if it suited his pleasure.

Caboceer of English Town,²⁷⁸ sent his stick and compliments.

Messenger that I sent, this morning returned with the King's compliments, cards of today and yesterday returned, saying he was quite well, hoping I was the same, with compliments from Mayhoo and many others, they all 'wanting to look at my face'. A messenger was sent also, enquiring after my carriers &c., at which they all knelt down and rubbed their foreheads with dust. The King desires that I should be at the 'Big Tree' in Dahomey,²⁷⁹ before 'cockspeak'²⁸⁰ and take my coffee there.

After dark, the King's messenger arrived with two attendants, carrying scheidam in a small glass barrell, about 8 in long and 3 in diameter, mounted on four short legs; Rum in one of those glass experimental bottles with two mouths;



²⁷⁵ i.e. black-eyed peas.

²⁷⁶ There were many freed slaves (and descendants thereof) from the British colony of Freetown, Sierra Leone, settled in Clarence, Fernando Po (see Lynn 1984).

²⁷⁷ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 160: 'In consequence of the number of wild beasts, all cattle are housed at night'.

²⁷⁸ i.e. of Sogbadji quarter of Ouidah; this man is later named as Hechili (see p. 81).

²⁷⁹ i.e. inside the city gate of Abomey (cf. p. 62).

²⁸⁰ Cf. 'fowl's speak' in Ridgway 1847, 309: i.e. dawn (cock-crow), translating the Fon phrase *koklò kó asi*.

and a bottle of sweet wine, together with ten male soldiers, 'to fight (fire) for me and do me honor'; they kept up an irregular discharge for sometime and reported one hundred and thirty rounds.

Gave the headman and his attendants, a glass of brandy and cigar each.

The soldiers got a bottle of what the King sent, after which they fired once or twice, only. I suppose their ammunition was expended: they hung about for a considerable time, evidently waiting for a dash, at last, the messenger reminded me, he had been to me before, which I acknowledged and after some little further delay, he told me, if I wanted to see the men, by daylight, I had only to ask him and they should be produced, during this time there was much whispering between the soldiers and headman[,] they departed.

After all was clear Madiki and Majerrika²⁸¹ came to tell me that Narwhey has sent his boy, to dictate what presents and to whom I should give, as soon as I found the drift of their errand, I stopped them short, by telling them over again, that I should not give any presents to anyone, and neither Narwhey, or anyone else, had any business to interfere with me in that way. I did this principally upon Forbes' account of the scoundrel,²⁸² and told them moreover, that if I had any more messages with the same intent, or notice anything peculiar in Narwhey's conduct towards me, I would demand an explanation from the King. This settled the palaver.

I must be firm, for I am truly convinced, the higher the man, the greater the Knave.

Day fine.

16th [August] About 3 a.m. left Cannah. The road from Cannah to Dahomey is as broad as Portland Place,²⁸³ level and good and by far the prettiest part of the journey, being studded, with palm and other trees, at places apparently equidistant; on either side is a series of patches of cultivated Guinea corn, thickening as you approach the town. On the way they made me leave my hammock and walk a few yards, at which foolery, I was not the best pleased,

²⁸¹ Later described as 'headman', i.e. of the English fort servants (p. 127); the same man also served in this capacity for British missions in 1847 and 1849 (Ridgway 1847, 300, 'Mensarika'; Forbes 1851, i, 86, 'Majelica'), though his official position was 'fort interpreter' (Forbes 1851, ii, 177). The name is Midjrokan, which is that of a family which recalls its former service to the English fort.

²⁸² Forbes described Gnahoui as 'the greatest rascal I ever met', and 'as deep a villain as ever breathed' (1851, i, 53; ii, 176).

²⁸³ Portland Place, a street in central London, noted for its unusual width (110 feet/33 metres). Forbes in 1849 likewise described the road between Cana and Abomey as 'as wide as any high road in England' (1851, i, 64).

they said it was the King's place and must be done:²⁸⁴ we passed many fetish places.²⁸⁵

At some short distance, before reaching the Leopard fetish house, below mentioned, were two large carronades,²⁸⁶ one on either side of the road and pointing towards Cannah.²⁸⁷

At length we came to a neat cleared space, with two small houses in the road, making as it were three roads or passes; on one of the houses I saw an imitation of a Leopard, white with black spots;²⁸⁸ here they told me I must get out and walk, as the King himself was not allowed to pass without [doing so];²⁸⁹ after much squabbling and delay, I persisting I would not obey their fetishes, at length, finding it was useless on my part to resist any longer, I was glad to avail myself of one of Madiki's lies, he informing me it was not *fetish*, but it must be done, on account of its being the King's place,²⁹⁰ so I told them that was very different, thus making the best of a bad job; after clearing this barrier, the place was studded with small fetish houses,²⁹¹ until we reach a

²⁸⁴On a subsequent occasion, Fraser refers to this as a 'fetish place' (p. 157). Likewise, Bouet earlier in 1851 referred to two places between Cana and Abomey at which he had to get down from his hammock (the second being presumably the 'Leopard fetish' encountered by Fraser later this same day) as 'fetish barriers' (in Nardin 1967, 124). However, Burton's account (1864, i, 281–2), while also referring to having to dismount 'a few yards' out of Cana, describes the barrier as 'a log placed transversely on the ground [which] showed us the ... Kana Gate'; although Burton also noted that 'it had the usual surroundings of fetish sheds and spaces cleared for worship', it was by implication not as a 'fetish place' but as a city gate that it was required to be respected.

²⁸⁵Forbes estimated that there were no less than 60 'fetish houses' on the road from Cana to Abomey (1851, i, 68); Burton names several of these (1864, i, 282–7).

²⁸⁶i.e. short, large-calibred cannon.

²⁸⁷Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 68, 'within about a quarter of a mile of the [Abomey] city gates, on either side of the road, under sheds, stand a couple of two-and-thirty pounder carronades'.

²⁸⁸The wording 'on one of the houses' suggests that this was a painting or relief sculpture on the wall of the shrine. Burton later (1864, i, 288) also noted a 'fetish place', outside the city gate of Abomey, around which were shelters containing 'attempts at leopards, and other holy beasts'. Europeans generally reported that the leopard was the national 'fetish' of Dahomey (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 32, 160, 171). This refers to Agasu, the legendary ancestor of the Dahomian royal dynasty, who was supposedly the son of a human princess by a male leopard.

²⁸⁹Cf. Duncan 1847, ii, 288: 'About two hundred yards from the gates [of Abomey] is a fetish-house, in passing which all persons are compelled to dismount, if carried, and walk past a certain distance'. Repin in 1856 describes this as 'the temple of bad fetishes', and confirms that the requirement to pass it on foot was 'a formality to which the king himself is subject' (1895, 79). This tends to confirm the identification as a shrine of Agasu, since the latter's priest held first rank within the Dahomian religious hierarchy, before whom even the King was obliged to prostrate himself (as noted by Burton 1864, i, 352–3). See, however, the following note.

²⁹⁰In fact, Madiki may not have been lying, since other European visitors understood that it was the Abomey city gate, rather than the neighbouring 'fetishes', which required persons to go on foot: see e.g. Brue 1845, 60; Ridgway 1847, 309; Burton 1864, i, 289–90, the last specifying that this had to be done 'as if it were part of the King's palace'. Fraser himself later noted the requirement to go on foot through the city gates of Abomey (pp. 80, 109).

²⁹¹Cf. Burton 1864, i, 288, referring to 'another village of fetish hovels' near the city gate.

kind of bridge, merely pieces of timber laid side by side, over a broad ditch, crossing this we passed what they would call a gate,²⁹² close to which was one of the Mayhoo's houses²⁹³ and the 'Big Tree' before mentioned.

Here I dressed, distributed cloths amongst my people, so as to give them some appearance of uniformity.

Chairs were placed under the said 'Big-tree' and there I had to sit, walk, talk, smoke &c &c for about four hours, in my full uniform, to be talked at, stared at and [for] ought [= aught] I know laughed at.

The silver stripe down my trousers, was much admired, as they pointed and said 'dagbee-dagbee' (beautiful)²⁹⁴ but one and all seemed disappointed because I had no epaulettes and I had many enquiries, why I had not brought 'them things', pointing to my shoulders, the same as Duncan, Forbes and Gov[ernor] Winniett nor is it possible for me to make them comprehend, the different uniforms, after all I can say, they ask again—Why I did not bring 'them thing for the shoulders'.

Narwey made his appearance, he is a small, thin, active, shrewd, cunning devil and I am certainly not prepossessed in his favor, he is exceedingly troublesome, although he keeps telling me, all he is doing and saying is for my good, that he is only anxious that the King and the people should have a good impression of me, and that I should leave a good name behind.

At length, probably about noon, for I am nearly famished—sticks and compliments begin to arrive. A ricketty cardtable was brought.²⁹⁵

Soon after the table was set, one of the King's servants, his name is 'Oan-gah',²⁹⁶ arrived with water, gin and glasses which were duly displayed. The next, who arrived, was 'Attedeu', a Cabooceer, who resides at the Av-vogar's house,²⁹⁷ with his big umbrella and a small party of armed men, they marched

²⁹² Abomey was surrounded by a defensive ditch, and could be entered only through gates, of which there were 6 (Forbes 1851, i, 68; described and named by Burton 1864, ii, 234–8). The gate now entered was the south-eastern or 'Cana' gate, illustrated in Forbes 1851, i, opp. 69; also described by Burton 1864, i, 288–9.

²⁹³ The Mehu's compound was to the left of the road from the Cana gate, south-east of the royal palace: cf. e.g. Burton 1864, i, 291.

²⁹⁴ Fon *dagbè* = 'good'; *dagbedagbè* = 'very good'.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Burton, 1864, i, 206, 'a table ... a venerable article, once intended for cards, but [rough handling] ... had reduced its single leg to a singularly smashed and shaky state'.

²⁹⁶ Not otherwise documented.

²⁹⁷ Cf. 'Ahtinderhood [= Atinderhooh]' listed as 'Cabooceer' of 'Viceroy's Town' (i.e. the Dahomian administrative quarter of Fonsaramè) at Ouidah, in HCPP, *Slave Trade 1850/1*, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220, Journal of F. E. Forbes, 7 Oct. 1849; evidently representing Atindéhou, the name of a family which traces its descent from an official who served as 'assistant' to the Yovogan (Law 2004a, 102–3). This was probably one of the royal officials deputed to reside in the household of leading 'ministers' in order to assess their income for purposes of taxation (as reported by Forbes 1851, i, 34–5).

round three times, bowing to me, at each round, after which he came and shook hands, took his seat, his men firing a salute.²⁹⁸

3rd 'Boopay', a Cabooceer of Dahomey,²⁹⁹ with his big umbrella, and drums, after his three parades, he danced, shook hands, took his seat, men firing.

4th 'Har-o-pay', the King's brother,³⁰⁰ with his big umbrella, drums, armed men and flags, he dances the best of the lot, after his three parades, shook hands, took his seat, his men firing.

5th 'Guy-jo' head executioner, he never lies with a woman, but takes care of the King's house:³⁰¹ he was held on a horse,³⁰² his umbrella, drums, armed men and flags attended him, he went through the same performance as his predecessors.

6th 'Had-do-gwee' Drum maker,³⁰³ umbrella wanting, in other respects same as 4th.

7th Bo-vay-soo—Head Soldier (Poh-veh-soo of Forbes),³⁰⁴ the same as the others, but armed with blunderbusses instead of muskets.³⁰⁵ They plant the stock in the sand, by their side, when they fire them, so that it may receive the recoil

8th Av-vo-gar—his name is Dagbah³⁰⁶—held on a pony, he was attended by his flags &c. as the others and went through the same performance, he is a great fat, overbloated, blear-eyed monster of a man.³⁰⁷

May-hoo did not attend.

²⁹⁸ Forbes 1851, 73–5, describes a similar ceremony of greeting, which involved some of the same officers.

²⁹⁹ i.e. of the capital Abomey: cf. 'Boh-peh' in *ibid.*, i, 73, described as 'the governor of the capital'.

³⁰⁰ Also noted as a prominent member of Gezo's court in 1850: see *ibid.*, i, 73, etc., 'Ah-hoh-peh, the king's brother'; recalled in tradition as Ahokpe (Law 2004a, 164–5).

³⁰¹ Identification of this person's office is problematic, since other sources generally ascribe the role of 'chief executioner' to the Migan (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 22), and the description of his functions otherwise suggests rather the Tononun, or head of the palace eunuchs, so perhaps 'executioner' here is an error for 'eunuch'. Presumably 'Guyjo' (not otherwise attested) was this officer's personal name.

³⁰² On horses in Dahomey, where they were rare and used only in ceremonies, see Law 1980, 22. 'Held on his horse' (cf. also p. 98) means that he was accompanied by two attendants, walking on each side of the horse, who supported him in the saddle: this practice is described in several 19th-century accounts of Dahomey, and is also attested elsewhere in West Africa (*Ibid.*, 165–6).

³⁰³ Not identified. In 1850 the 'king's drum-maker' was named as 'Hoo-mah-hee' (Forbes 1851, ii, 99).

³⁰⁴ Forbes 1851, i, 74, etc.; 'Kpo-fen-'su' in Burton, 1864, ii, 35.

³⁰⁵ blunderbuss, a form of wide-bored musket, firing several shot simultaneously; Forbes and Burton also describe the Kpofensu as commanding a force armed with blunderbusses.

³⁰⁶ Dagba, the personal name of the Yovogan: cf. 'Dagwah' in Appendix 2, nos 4–5.

³⁰⁷ Forbes in 1849 also described the Yovogan as 'over-fat' (1851, i, 47); but Duncan in 1845 thought him merely 'rather stout' (1847, i, 118).

After this we all drank gin, over and over again, then they told me it was time to get into my Palanquin which was done, amidst firing, twisting of umbrellas and waving of flags. Their flags were very numerous of all characters, colors and descriptions, ragged and perfect, good and bad, large and small, all, seemed to be there.

The following was the arrangement of my own retinue
 3 men with muskets and bayonets
 2 Kroom Boys, armed, each, with cutlass and pistol.
 bearing, between them, by means of two poles my Union Jack
 Sierra Leone man,³⁰⁸ with white Ensign³⁰⁹
 Coco, my private servant
 2 women with small Flags
 Self in Palanquin, borne on the heads of four men
 3 women on each side of Palanquin, bearing flags
 My two small boys bearing my double barrelled gun, shot, powder &c.
 3 men, with muskets and Bayonets
 6 Flags, and pendants, borne by women
 All spare men and women completing the list

Every now and then as we went along, they stopped me, because, as they said they were going 'to fight for me', upon watching narrowly, I was rather amused to find, this continued firing was from one small two pounder, which was loaded, fired then carried to the next place,³¹⁰ this continued until we reached the King's place,³¹¹ in front of which was a cleared space, with some trees in it,³¹² and in which were some hundreds of armed men and women,³¹³ the procession went three times round this ground, each one bowing as he passed the King's seat, for I could not see him in the confusion; upon each round, Narwhey who was walking alongside my Palanquin, called my attention thus:—'now they go fight for you'. After the third round, I alighted, was taken by the hand by the Av-vo-gar, afterwards Mayhoo joined us, and we advanced, thus, slowly towards the King, all the officials in a stooping position, when nearing him all the Cabooceers &c. went upon their hands and

³⁰⁸ i.e. William, who had been hired as an interpreter at Ouidah (see p. 40).

³⁰⁹ A flag comprising St George's cross, with the Union jack in the upper left quarter, employed by the British navy.

³¹⁰ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 216: 'at every 100 yards a 3-pounder ship's swivel fired a blank shot, and was carried on the shoulder of a single porter to the next station'.

³¹¹ i.e. the royal palace: this was the main palace, called Agringome, in the centre of the town.

³¹² Nowadays known as 'Singbodji Square [*Place Singbodji*]'.
³¹³ On the female soldiers of Dahomey, recruited from the king's wives, see Law 1993. They were commonly referred to by Europeans as 'Amazons', a term which Fraser himself uses later (see p. 160).

Knees and in this way approached his seat, he was under a Kind of canopy, at one of the entrances, to the houses,³¹⁴ surrounded by numbers of women, old and young, armed and unarmed, he rose and shook hands and gave me part of his seat, after a few complimentary questions, such as 'How is the Queen of England' 'her children'—'her soldiers'—'her shipmen' we drank gin—during the time he was drinking or pretending to do, there was a general din, women shouting, before and behind him, while he is performing this act, handkerchiefs are held up before him, that the vulgar may not gaze,³¹⁵ and instead of pouring the liquor down his own throat it is thrown down some open and willing mouth, near him.

I could perceive a party of about fifty female soldiers, who were industriously employed, in dancing, singing shouting &c. at times I could see a party of men, doing similar, but there was such a crowd round, that all seemed confusion: he desired to see my muskets, he admired the bayonets, very much, and said they would be very good, if they only had flint locks, he then examined the caps, which one of the women, near him, pocketed as fast as she could get them. He then snapped a cap, which I put on a pistol and was much surprised to find, the cap itself left, after he had heard the explosion.³¹⁶

All the head men, his brothers cousins &c &c to a great amount, came, each took a glass of liquor, to drink my health, at last, I began to get tired of nodding my head, at them, in acknowledgement: then bottles of liquor were passed out to some of the people and the King handed three bottles over, one for my own servants, one for my Hammockmen, and one for my women.

He now said it was time to go to dinner, put on a large broad brimmed hat, and taking me by the hand, dragged me after him, through the crowd: when about twelve paces from the seat, we turned round and faced it, a clear space was made, this was to allow some of his principal and favourite women, to have a look at me

1st came Meiga's mother³¹⁷ and some eight or ten others, after making a kind of bow, three times over, they passed on.

³¹⁴i.e. of the palace.

³¹⁵This practice is described by several other visitors to Dahomey: e.g. Brue 1845, 66; Duncan 1847, i, 222; Forbes 1851, i, 28–9; Burton 1864, i, 244–5.

³¹⁶Percussion caps had been introduced in the British army from 1839, replacing the older flintlock ignition system for muskets. Fraser's account here seems to imply that they were still unfamiliar to the Dahomians: in 1850 the king already possessed one gun with a 'percussion lock', but it was regarded as 'useless', flintlocks being preferred (Forbes 1851, ii, 67).

³¹⁷A literal translation of the title Migannon, 'mother of the Migan', the latter (for whom, cf. p. 70) being the highest-ranking non-royal chief in Dahomey. The term 'mother' refers to female counterparts of senior officials, appointed from among the palace women (Bay 1998, 114–15, 239–41).

2nd Yarwhay—Mayhoo’s mother³¹⁸ and party—she is English mother also³¹⁹

3rd Gee-ee-dee—Head women [= woman] for Keys of King’s house;³²⁰ and party

4th Mee-high-ee-par—She attends King’s side, fetches anything that may be wanted³²¹

5th Female soldiers, ‘Ar-gar-hoo’ principal³²²

6th Female soldiers ‘Et-ten-gar’ principal³²³

He then walked with me some distance, then tried the muskets, examined my Palanquin, and flags particularly the Union Jack; we parted, the procession leading me to Mayhoo’s house:³²⁴ soon after I arrived, women came with seven calabashes of food, water and a bundle of sticks.³²⁵

They permitted me to have my dinner in tolerable peace.

³¹⁸ i.e. Mehunon, the female counterpart of the Mehu. Versions of the name ‘Yarwhay’ were also recorded by other British visitors to Abomey between 1843–64 (cf. Freeman 1844, 257, ‘Yawa;’ Duncan 1847, i, 231, ‘Klawie;’ Forbes 1851, ii, 66, etc., ‘Ee-ah-wae;’ Burton 1864, ii, 75, ‘Yewe’). See also Bay 1998, 208–9. Bay questions that Yawe was the Mehunon (1998, 343, n.61), but Fraser’s evidence on this is confirmed by Burton, who refers to ‘the Yewe or she-Meu’. This is evidently a personal name, rather than a title, since by 1856 the Mehu’s mother is named as ‘Egbelu’ (Vallon 1860, 1/338, 2/339; cf. also Burton 1864, i, 365).

³¹⁹ i.e. the person ‘appointed ... to furnish all English or white men with provisions during their sojourn in this country’ (Duncan 1847, i, 227–8). Likewise, her male counterpart, the Mehu, was sometimes described as the ‘father’ of European visitors (Freeman 1844, 257; Forbes 1851, ii, 206).

³²⁰ The name ‘Gee-ee-dee’ is not otherwise recorded, and it is not clear what office is referred to: perhaps the female counterpart of the Kangbode, the ‘treasurer’ of the palace (cf. below, p. 72), ‘Gee-ee-dee’ being presumably her personal name (by 1863/4 the female treasurer was called ‘Videkalo’: Burton 1864, i, 230; ii, 56).

³²¹ Cf. ‘Mae-ae-pah’, described by Forbes (1851, ii, 19, 123) as the female counterpart of the Tononun, or chief eunuch. The name is given by Burton later as ‘Mahaikpa’ (1864, i, 249), but he then heard that she had not been seen for 2 years and was probably dead; the female counterpart of the Tononun by 1863 being ‘Yavedo’ (ibid., i, 229).

³²² It is unclear to which office this refers. The spelling suggests Agau, the title of the commander of the right wing and commander-in-chief of the Dahomian army (cf. ‘Agow’, p. 168), but the next person in the procession, ‘Et-ten-gar’, seems to be the female counterpart of the Agau. Probably Fraser is confused, and this person should be the female counterpart of the Posu, commander of the left wing and deputy commander-in-chief.

³²³ Cf. ‘Hie-tengah’, described by Forbes as one of 2 ‘colonels’ of the king’s female soldiers (1851, i, 70). What seems to be the same title is given by Forbes elsewhere as ‘Hae-tung[ah]’ (ibid., i, 147) and by Burton as ‘Khe-tun-gan’ (1864, i, 222, etc.), and described more specifically as the female counterpart of the Agau, the commander-in-chief of the army.

³²⁴ This seems to imply that Fraser lodged in the Mehu’s house, as had some earlier visitors (Forbes 1851, i, 80; Bouet 1852, 60), and as he and T. G. Forbes did in 1852 (see Forbes’ journal, in Appendix 3, no.9, p. 257). Later, Fraser refers to going from his lodgings to ‘the Mayhoo’s house’ (see p. 73): but this perhaps refers only to movement within the Mehu’s compound.

³²⁵ i.e. for firewood, for cooking.

Then I had two or three palavers with Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Narwhey, all about presents, they would not understand my coming without, they told me I must give presents, I told them, no! they said it was the custom; I said I had not come to follow their custom, but to shew them English customs; they then said, it was not their custom, it was white man make it so.

At length they departed leaving me in peace.

Took a short walk, to a market near my place, it was very poor.

Day fine.

17th [Aug.] Sticks and compliments calling soon after daylight guns fired, gongs sounded, drums beat, voices heard, they said the King had risen.³²⁶

Much preparation, this morning they say the King has told Mayhoo 'to fight (fire) for me'.

At length the Mayhoo and Avvogar arrived, with umbrellas, drums, gongs, calabashes, horns &c. and some armed men; I was led outside, my house, by these two worthies, where under the shade of a tree and umbrellas, stood a table with water and gin upon it: their stools of office were there and chairs for myself and Madiki,³²⁷ the two old rogues sat and smoked.

Mayhoo, with his shrivelled old skin and nose and chin, nearly meeting, his hollow cheeks, quick impatient eyes; he looked more like a young Oran-Outan, that had just been shaved.³²⁸

After sitting here for some time, Narwhey standing at my right elbow, with a number of people around us, it was notified that the guns were ready, we then arose, and without saying a word, each drank a glass of gin (a treat, before breakfast), a shout was given, as a signal to fire, for the guns were at some distance; Narwhey said I was to listen, they were going to fight twenty one guns for the Queen of England, after a considerable sit, a messenger arrived, with twenty-one bits of stone, something like draughts, this I suppose was to show the number fired.³²⁹

We all rose again, drank another glass of gin, the shout and all went on as before, this Narwhey said was for me, the man returned with eleven bits of stone, this time.

³²⁶ Fraser observes later that the king's departure from and re-entry into the palace was announced by the firing of guns, drumming and shouting: see p. 84. Burton in 1863/4 also noted that the king's appearance in public was announced by 'a gun, fired inside the palace' (1864, i, 351).

³²⁷ Likewise in 1849, Madiki as well as the two British envoys Forbes and Duncan was carried in a hammock (Forbes 1851, i, 53): this was because he was considered a 'white man'.

³²⁸ The orangutan, a large ape from Indonesia/Malaysia. Two female orangutans were successively kept in the collection of the Zoological Society of London between 1837–42, which Fraser would doubtless have seen.

³²⁹ This practice was noted by several other European visitors to Abomey, sometimes with cowries rather than stones (e.g. Norris 1789, 91–2; Freeman 1844, 260; Ridgway 1847, 303).

Then the music and noise began, the soldiers commenced dancing, then Mayhoo gave me to understand that I must get plenty of rum ready, to give the soldiers and men for firing gins, I told him I had none, he referred to my private stock, I told him that was for my own use only, and not to give away: he told me he would dash me the remainder of the two bottles he had brought, with him; I told him, I did not want dashes, but he persisted, we then broke up and with the soldiers, entered the yard,³³⁰ where they danced and sang for about twenty minutes. When the bottles were passed out, Narwhey, giving me each to touch, one was given to the musicians and one to the dancers, they then departed.

Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar, Narwhey and Madiki, after some confab[ulation]³³¹ the two latter reported that the two former wanted to palaver with me: I invited them to coffee, and then they began, about the presents to the King: I repeated my former declaration; they told me I must dash the King to make him my friend: I told them, no! that the Queen of England did not pay tribute to anyone, that she had sent presents three times lately,³³² that the King has not granted her one request; that at the particular request of the King, the Queen of England had sent me to live in his country, to show them what is good; that my Queen paid me; I did not come to ask the King or his head-men for a single thing:³³³ all that was wanted of them, in the name of the Queen of England, was, to discontinue war, sacrifice and slave-trading and to substitute the making of Palm oil, the growing of cotton and coffee, and to allow Ivory to pass through the country:³³⁴ instead of giving me any reply, they turned round shrewdly enough and proposed that I personally should make a small dash for the King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Narwhey, if the Queen would not give me any: I told them, that would come to the same thing, and therefore it would not be done.

Mayhoo wanted to know why I did not trade; I told him I would buy cotton, if he had any;³³⁵ he immediately sent for a bag, which he positively stated, he had purchased in the bush, and it cost him four heads of cowries, about eighteen shillings sterling³³⁶ (there could not be any truth in this statement) it weighed 30 lb and was in seed, and according to the highest price,

³³⁰ i.e. of the house where Fraser was lodging.

³³¹ i.e. conversation.

³³² Presumably referring to the visits of Duncan, Fraser's predecessor as Vice-Consul at Ouidah, in Sept. 1849; Duncan and Forbes, Oct. 1849; and Beecroft and Forbes in 1850.

³³³ Referring to the receipt of gifts, not (of course) denying that he was 'asking' for political concessions, which in fact he goes on to specify.

³³⁴ Cf. Fraser's 'Commercial Report' (in Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 197) 'nor does the King permit Ivory to pass through his Kingdom'.

³³⁵ Fraser's instructions permitted him to supplement his Vice-Consular income by trading.

³³⁶ Giving the head a value of 4s. 6d. sterling, which was the exchange value of the silver dollar at this period (see Endnote 2)

allowed me by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce,³³⁷ it would come to ten shillings, saying nothing of the portorage to Whydah, eighty miles, packing, shipping, freight &c: the moment I told him its worth, he sent it home.

The Mayhoo, asked me to buy slaves.

He then complained that the hats, they got now, were only fit for boys, and wanted me to make book³³⁸ to some of my own friends, to send proper large hats, and they would buy them, I told him I could not do any such thing, but if they sent plenty of cotton, Palm oil, Ivory &c. to Whydah, at proper prices, plenty of merchants would come, and bring them all they wanted.

Before parting the Av-vo-gar said you must give me a bottle of your brandy, when I reach Whydah, it is very good.

They are gone, thank goodness: Have had my breakfast; and all is quiet.

There was no more guns firing, no drums beating, no singing. What does this mean?

The vultures are all hovering over one particular spot. Are they sacrificing?

Those of whom I enquire, say, no! they are making war palaver.³³⁹ Do they tell me true?

It appears to me, that the great anxiety, to get Englishmen in the country, evinced by the King and his sub[ordinate]s, is solely to procure presents: that all are interested in this one great scheme. If a Keg of rum is given to a set of men, does not the master, get some, if not all of it; If a Cabooceer gets a dash, no doubt, the King comes in for his share.

I am very glad I have come without presents, I shall see more of their true character, for I am certain, they are a fawning hypocritical lot.

The King is a tall athletic man,³⁴⁰ blind(?) in one eye³⁴¹ he seems almost like an automatum [= automaton], he sits and lolls while things pass, and appears only to move when strings are pulled; there is a state of apathy about him, which I never remember having noticed in any individual.³⁴² He has certainly a marked curiosity, at the same time, just to look at everything new, and throw it on one side next moment, like a child.

³³⁷The Manchester Chamber of Commerce was currently interested in the potential of West Africa as a source of cotton as a raw material for the Lancashire textile industry. It had supported the establishment of the Vice-Consulate in Ouidah in 1849 with this in mind, and communicated with Fraser after his appointment: see Ratcliffe 1982, 92, 95–6.

³³⁸i.e. write a letter: *wēmà* (lit. 'white leaf') in Fon means both 'letter' and 'book'.

³³⁹i.e. discussing war (more particularly, the choice of the objective of the next annual campaign).

³⁴⁰Echoing Duncan 1847, i, 224, 'The King is a tall athletic man'.

³⁴¹The French officer Bouet earlier in 1851 also stated that Gezo had 'lost an eye', as a result of smallpox, 'three years ago', i.e. c.1848 (Bouet 1852, 42); but already in 1847 Ridgway had noted that 'his right eye is somewhat diseased' (1847, 308). Forbes in 1850 refers merely to 'a slight cast in his eye' (1851, i, 76).

³⁴²In contrast, Forbes thought 'his appearance commanding, and his countenance intellectual, though stern in the extreme' (1851, i, 76).

I do not remember receiving the King's stick, this morning.
No food from the King, to day.

Compelled to give my people subsistence.³⁴³

Walked out to the N.W. gate, in the evening; the greater part of the enclosed space, between the gates, is either in waste land or in small patches of cultivation;³⁴⁴ houses are scarce, except close to the King's houses;³⁴⁵ there are four markets, two small and two large.³⁴⁶

On my return, from my walk, I was first met by Madiki, then Majerika, then Narwhey and many of my men, all of whom expressed their wrath at my walking off, without notice.

18th [Aug.] Sticks and compliments from the King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and one or two others.

Sent my card to the King.

Narwhey called.

Mayhoo sent to say, it was very late, before he left the King last night, and the King had sent for him again very early this morning; the reason he had not called on me.

The Meigan is ill.³⁴⁷

There has been something going on all night. Madiki says, at all times, the gong is going; one party takes it up for about an hour, then another and so on during the twenty four hours I can hear some music and singing.

Myself rather unwell

My boy, this morning, bought in the market, twenty pounds of cotton for three shillings and ten pence; thus proving the falseness of Mayhoo's statement of yesterday.

Not a soul has been near me today, since Narwhey's morning visit.

The King is giving dash, to his women,³⁴⁸ I have not been invited to the scene. Is it that Forbes saw too much[?].³⁴⁹

³⁴³ i.e. money (cowry shells), to buy food.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 70, 'within the city are large waste lands and many cultivated farms'; Burton 1864, ii, 238-9, 'two-thirds of it is a fine open country, scattered with trees and fields of bean and vetch'.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Burton 1864, ii, 239, 'to the west and south-west the buildings cluster thickest'.

³⁴⁶ The principal markets in Abomey were Adjahi and Houndjro (see pp. 77, 83, 84); Burton later refers also to two smaller markets, called 'Fousa' and 'Akodejogo' (1864, i, 335n.).

³⁴⁷ i.e. Migan, the senior chief of Dahomey, ranking next after the King, hence often described by Europeans as the 'prime minister' (e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 81). The Migan's illness may explain his absence from the meetings with Fraser; he was also reported 'sick', and consequently unable to attend ceremonies, in 1850 (*ibid.*, ii, 75, 136). But in any case, as noted earlier, it was the Mehu who was primarily responsible for dealing with Europeans.

³⁴⁸ i.e. distributing gifts: referring to a ceremony within the royal palace.

³⁴⁹ Probably alluding to the fact that Forbes, in his account of the ceremonies which he witnessed inside the royal palace in 1850, had given much prominence to the offering of human sacrifices;

No chop from the King.

My dinner consisted of mutton, purchased in the market, without bread, yam, fruit or anything else.

Mayhoo's women brought two jars of water, but not until Madiki had demanded it.

The negro character is:—Catch chop, go to sleep; chop again, sleep again; very good, fine gentleman now.

Mayhoo sent his compliments; I thanked him, but sent to know, how long I was to be kept here, and no notice taken.

The thermometer did not rise above 79° Day fine, but cloudy at times; a cold wind from the westwar[d].

Self suffering under an attack of prolapsed ani.³⁵⁰

19th [Aug.] Mayhoo's stick arrived, as did Avvogar's.

Madiki is very anxious to send my card to the King, I am his visitor, let him send to me first.

I am, certainly, not worse, this morning, but my throat is sore.

A person, is always in close attendance, upon the King, with a spittoon, filled with gravel and the moment, he turns his head, this machine is thrust under his nose and he expectorates into it. When he is sitting under his canopy, an old woman performs this duty.³⁵¹

His women or wives, that sit nearest him, and the Cabooceers, on duty, wear broad silver bracelets, six or eight inches, thin silver, some seem engraven others embossed.³⁵²

King's stick arrived, sent card in return.

Mayhoo and Narwey, have just been here, I asked Mayhoo for an explanation, why I was left here, without any notification of the King's intentions, that I considered it disrespect, that it was not the usual course pursued by the King, towards white men; I referred to Duncan, Beecroft and Forbes;³⁵³ all the answer I could get, was the King was busy, he has no time. I told him that

Fraser assumed that the Dahomian authorities, having registered British disapproval of this practice, now wished to conceal it.

³⁵⁰ Correctly *prolapsus ani*, i.e. eversion of the rectum, often associated with acute diarrhoea.

³⁵¹ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 240.

³⁵² Silver bracelets were understood by other observers to be a mark of the rank of 'caboceer' (e.g. Ridgway 1847, 302; Repin 1895, 100, 103; Burton 1864, i, 209, 237). Their 'embossed'/'engraved' designs derived from the fact that they were beaten out from imported dollars and other silver coins (Burton 1864, i, 148, n.); Forbes also noted some which were 'embossed with the lion of England and the heads of George the Third and his queen' (1851, i, 49).

³⁵³ Duncan and Forbes, having arrived at Abomey on 17 Oct. 1849, were admitted to deliver their message to the King on the following day; Beecroft and Forbes, arriving on 26 May 1850, were able to deliver their message only two days later (although they then had to wait until 4 July to receive the King's reply).

was not sufficient excuse, when a white man came from the Queen of England, that white man's time was more valuable than black man's, and did they expect I was to sit myself down here like a prisoner, confined to the house and almost without food?

Mayhoo then said I was at perfect liberty to go where I pleased—this was something. And he would tell the King my palaver. They departed.

Mayhoo brought with him a small calabash of guavas, as a present.

Four calabashes of food, from the King.

This is something gained.

Camboodee's stick arrived.³⁵⁴

Very fine, clear day. Thermometer 81.2.

Mayhoo, has sent a messenger from the King, saying he has been busy these two days and is busy today. Tomorrow I may make myself ready for an interview.

The King, has sent the following as a present:—viz. Two calabashes of ground Indian corn, one d[itt]o of salt, one d[itt]o Peppers; one d[itt]o of material for making Palaver sauce;³⁵⁵ one jar of Palm oil; one living Bullock; one goat, two Fowls. Narwhey came with them.

Sent my compliments and thanks to the King, telling him at the same time, it was not presents I wanted, but proper attention, such as my position, coming from the Queen of England, demands.

Dashed his people some rum.

Received a visit from the King's son 'Ag-glab-ay',³⁵⁶ he is a great, fat, sleepy looking fellow, with small eyes; he wore a blue cloth round him and either silver or bright steel curb chains, round his ankles; he is much pitted with the small pox.

One of the King's headmen offered me a country cushion for four heads of cowries, it is worth about one and a half. Is this sent by the King for sale?

Narwhey was very anxious, yesterday, that I should buy a country made stick, of white wood, and a black top, with about six pennyworth of silver in the shape of a ring round it; they only asked four heads, for that. I suppose Narwhey intended pocketing about three and a half if not the whole.

Everybody seems anxious to make something out of me.

Very poorly this afternoon and compelled to lay down, during which time, the King sent Narwhey to fetch me; I was compelled to send my Comp[limen]ts and say I was too unwell, therefore must be excused, this evening, but trusted

³⁵⁴ Elsewhere 'Cambodee', 'Cambodé' etc., and perhaps most correctly 'Kangbode' (in Burton 1864, i, 229, etc.), described variously as the 'treasurer' (Forbes 1851, i, 24 etc.), 'superintendent of the palaces' (Bouet 1852, 59, n.), 'high chamberlain' (Vallon 1860/1, 1/337).

³⁵⁵ Made with palm oil, with pepper, onions and tomatoes.

³⁵⁶ Not otherwise recorded—not the King's designated heir apparent, who was called Badahun (later King Glele).

I should be all right, by the morning, to attend. Madiki says he wanted me to see some dancing.

This is all owing to my message, per Mayhoo, this morning.

After dark, Mayhoo called, he said he could not go to sleep without seeing me. He begged hard for a bottle of brandy, so I gave him one, he says a little drop, first thing in the morning, does him good.

I am to be ready by 7 am tomorrow morning and he will send a message that I may go see the King.

Feel much better, now.

Madiki says there has not been a shipment of slaves, from Whydah, since Forbes left.³⁵⁷

Mayhoo asked me, if I had 'made book' on the King's remarks, upon my muskets;³⁵⁸ I said, yes; I infer from this that the King is begging some with flint locks.

20th [Aug.] Throat sore; mouth nasty.

Sticks and compliments from Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee.

Started about half past seven, without breakfast, for the Mayhoo's house and proceeded from thence to the square, in front, of the King's place,³⁵⁹ where bands of music were parading and groups of people standing and sitting about, everyone seemed to do as they pleased; here I had to sit under the shade of a small tree, for about two hours, it appears that one (Peter Brown's)³⁶⁰ of the letters I had brought from England, was missing. Mayhoo, Avvogan and others were rushing about furiously At length Narwhey said—Come, go and I went through one or two yards and sheds³⁶¹ and found the King sitting or rather reclining, on a country cloth, half naked, the other half wrapped in a blue satin cloth, with some black figures on, he was backed, not surrounded, by his women; he rose advanced and shook hands; chairs were placed on his right hand, for myself and Madiki, on his left, two women sitting on the ground and in front, lay Mayhoo Avvo-gar and others, I opened

³⁵⁷ i.e. since July 1850; cf. also the statement of the King, reported later (p. 75), that no slaves had been sold in the previous year. Bouet 1852, 83, says there had been no shipments from Ouidah for 16 months. This reflected the closing down of the slave trade into Brazil by British naval action from June 1850 (Law 2004a, 219).

³⁵⁸ Gezo had earlier 'admired' the bayonets on Duncan's muskets (see above, p. 65).

³⁵⁹ 'Place Singbodji', outside the main entrance to the palace.

³⁶⁰ Later referred to as 'the black interpreter' (p. 151); i.e. Joseph Peter Brown, a native of Cape Coast and an employee of the merchant Hutton (see Jones and Sebald 2005, 139, n.109). He had also offered his services as interpreter to F. E. Forbes in 1849, but was rejected, and visited Abomey on Hutton's behalf in 1850 (Forbes 1851, i, 53, 55; ii, 72: not named here, but the name 'Mr Brown' is given in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220, Journal of F. E. Forbes, 6 June 1850).

³⁶¹ i.e. evidently, he entered the palace.

the business, by showing and explaining to him, my credentials, he then handed unto me, Lord Palmerston's two letters,³⁶² the seals unbroken, I returned them, he broke the seals. I read them piecemeal, then rendered them as near as I could into Madiki's English, which is no joke, and then he interpreted, as well as he could, I suppose.³⁶³ I made some remarks, by way of explanation, respecting the shipment of slaves at Whydah; the difficulty of his finding a sale for slaves, that his revenue must be affected thereby, and why not accede to the Queen of England's request, before he was compelled, for then it would be too late; the strong language of the letter, I was bearer of,³⁶⁴ and the explanations I gave seemed rather to astonish him, for I saw the muscles of his face twitch, and soon after he gave me to understand, that all this must be kept secret, that another day, when he was alone, he would desire me, to bring my pen ink and paper, to make book for the Queen.

I read to him that portion of my letter, which I received from Lord Palmerston, referring to presents neither being given nor received, by officers, belonging to Her Majesty;³⁶⁵ his answer was that the Queen of England sent him presents every year and this year, she had sent me.³⁶⁶ Does he suppose, I am a slave for his use?

Two or three references were made to guns with bayonets and flintlocks.

He observed he had not received answers to some letter or letters, sent through Commander Forbes.³⁶⁷

I took an opportunity of saying to him, that in cases of palavers at Whydah, the only man I should consult, would be the Av-vo-gar, as being his representative. That should it not be possible for us to settle it, I should always be at liberty to go or send to himself. That the Av-vo-gar and himself

³⁶² These had been sent to the King in advance (see p. 37), but were only now formally delivered and read: one of the 2 letters was evidently Palmerston's letter to King Gezo of 11 Dec. 1850, introducing Fraser as Vice-Consul (Appendix 2, no. 2), the other presumably the earlier letter of 11 Oct. 1850, responding to the failure of the Beecroft-Forbes mission (Appendix 2, no. 1).

³⁶³ Cf. Fraser's later observation, that Madiki 'understands very little English' (p. 100).

³⁶⁴ Probably referring to Palmerston's letter of 11 Oct. 1850, which warned that, in the absence of cooperation from King Gezo, Britain would 'employ its own mean' to suppress the slave trade, and would no longer offer the him financial compensation.

³⁶⁵ See Palmerston to Fraser, 21 Dec. 1850 (Appendix 1, no. 3).

³⁶⁶ Official British government missions had come to Abomey at least once a year between 1847–50: Lieutenant-Governor Winniett in 1847, Brodie Cruickshank in 1848, Vice-Consul Duncan twice in 1849 (the second time with Lieut. Forbes); and Consul Beecroft (again with Forbes) in 1850.

³⁶⁷ Forbes and Beecroft had been given a letter from Gezo to Queen Victoria, dated 5 July 1850 (text in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. in no. 9); Palmerston had in fact answered this by his letter of 10 Oct. 1850, which Fraser had now delivered. Possibly Fraser had not grasped this connection; but alternatively, the King's complaint may have been that this letter did not in fact answer one or more of the particular requests he had made, which included that the British should blockade the slave trade at neighbouring ports, before he would consider agreeing to the ending of slave exports from Dahomey.

were the only authorities I acknowledged. He said very true and the Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar rubbed their faces on the ground as a token of submission to the King's word. That I should have, at all times, free and uncontrolled permission to go to any and all places within his dominions or to send any person or persons in my name. The same rubbing of faces took place.

I showed him Mr Gollmer's letter³⁶⁸ and asked him plainly, to deliver that man, 'Dassalu', up to me, that he had changed, he no longer belonged to the black men, but to the English missionaries, and looked up to white man's God for protection, that if necessary I would ransom him, if not, so much the better. He said all the Abbeokutans had been sold to Domingo,³⁶⁹ that he must be amongst them, for there was not one left in the town.

He assured me, privately, that with the exception of the above name[d] Egba³⁷⁰ he had not sold one slave this year, the Portuguese come they no buy.

After all was over, we drank gin twice, then he told me it was time for breakfast, after which I could come and see some dancing; he walked, as before, part of the road with me. Asked why I had not a large hat? Just as we were about to part, he whispered something to Madiki; which Madiki said he would tell me, when we reached the house.

After some delay, Narweh being present, Madiki related as follows—'I was to show the King, what he could put in book about slave trade, to please Queen'. I tried to describe to these two talented spiders, how it would pass through the convolutions of my brain and come out of my mouth when the King was ready.

During my absence, the King sent me 7 calabashes of food, viz:—Palaver sauce, chicken and Palm oil, chicken and palm soup, Kankie and Dab-a-dab.

Day very fine Ther[mometer] 86.5. Calm

The King sent for me, to see some dancing.³⁷¹ An umbrella was pitched for me just outside the women's boundary,³⁷² close to the drums and in front of the performers. The dancing, consisting of groups of ten or twelve, about five of which were old men, who would have looked much better in their coffins than leading these fiendish festivities, two younger, and the rest little boys, three or four years of age. The principal kept singing; the dancing, if such it

³⁶⁸ See p. 58.

³⁶⁹ i.e. those taken in the war of March 1851. They had been sold not for export, but with a view to ransom: cf. Gollmer to Fraser, 4 Aug. 1851 (Appendix 2, no. 7).

³⁷⁰ Egba, the name of the people occupying Abeokuta.

³⁷¹ From later references (see pp. 86, 91), this dancing formed part of a Custom called 'Hadj-jo-do' or 'Hadj-ju-do', performed 'in memory of the King's father'.

³⁷² A later reference (p. 160) describes the boundary as marked by 'a country rope'. Burton in 1864, however, refers to 'mid-ribs of bamboo-palm' placed in a line on the ground (1864, i, 249–50). Strictly the barrier divided those who lived within the palace (including the King himself, and the palace eunuchs, as well as royal wives) from those outside it: for the significance of this procedure, see also Bay 1998, 11.

may be called, consisted in throwing the legs about, twirling round and [w]riggling the body, not very elegant or decent to look at, but excellent exercise for the muscles. Three different lots went through precisely the same performance, one of the party coming forward every now and then, making a great palaver, to the drummers. As Madiki said, telling them if they made good drum, they could fight well and vice-versa.

Then some Oil dab-a-dab and Indian corn, were produced and a number of armed men were called. Madiki said they were the King's sons, this could not be correct, as some of them appeared quite as old as the King himself, I think they must have been part of the force, belonging to one of the King's sons.³⁷³ a long harangue was then delivered by the King, while in a reclining posture and redelivered by a man outside, with the assistance of an old woman, as prompter, she is said to be one of the King's wives;³⁷⁴ this palaver was to the following effect: 'that when they had eaten the food before them, they would be very strong, to go to war.' then several of the men, one after another, addressed the King, the last speaker seemed to accuse the others of cowardice;³⁷⁵ then one or two women spoke upon the subject, words running high, silence was demanded, and the whole wound up with a chorus, and these garrulous warriors retired to feed.

Another party began dancing, it was precisely the same as the former, the monotony became irksome, I sent Narwhey to Mayhoo, Mayhoo went to the women's boundary, in front, of where I was sitting, knelt down and waited until an old woman said to be one of the King's wives came and knelt down opposite to him, Mayhoo then delivered my message, 'that I wished to retire, to get my dinner'. I was then led by Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar: Narwhey and Madiki following, opposite where the King was sitting; a tray with gin and glasses, was brought to us, and we had to drink, each, two glasses of neat gin, to the King, he appearing in the distance to do the same to me.

During my sitting, I had before me a table, with bottles, and glasses, but I did not try their contents.

I was rather amused, on my way home, by Madiki giving me, at the request of the Av-vo-gar, a lesson in etiquette, respecting my hat;³⁷⁶ I told him I was

³⁷³ Probably Madiki was translating the term *ahovi*, 'king's child', which was applied to the descendants of earlier kings, as well as children of the king currently reigning (Bay 1998, 8, 191).

³⁷⁴ On formal ceremonial occasions, the king did not speak directly to those from outside the palace, but via a female official, the Mahaikpa (cf. p. 66) or one of her retainers, who passed the message to the Tononun (chief eunuch): see Burton 1864, i, 249–50 etc.; Bay 1998, 11.

³⁷⁵ Cf. also p. 104. Accusations of cowardice were a prominent feature of discussions at the 'Annual Customs' of 1850, witnessed by Forbes (1851, ii, 92–6, 136–49).

³⁷⁶ Europeans were required to 'make a bow, standing and uncovered', when first introduced to the king, but could then 'resume their seats and put on their hats' (Dalzel 1793, ix; cf. Burton

very much obliged, but I had worn hats longer than any one in their country and I trusted I knew the use of them.

Day very fine. Ther[mometer] 86.2 Calm

I think my growl of yesterday had done good.

Beautiful starlight. Ther. 79.5 Wind, light

21st [Aug.] Morning very clear Ther. 71.8 wind very light

Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee's sticks arrived.

Out shooting two hours.

The King sent one calabash of Palaver sauce, one of Fowl, 1 wash-hand basin of Fowl, one calabash of dab-a-dab, one of something else, and to know if I would like 'to see drum'.³⁷⁷ Gave bearers gin and sent my compliments.

King's stick arrived during my absence. sent card in return.

am 12. Ther[mometer] 84° [wind] w[est] 1³⁷⁸ fine, light cloudy. Visited the market called 'Har-jar-hee' on the west side of the town,³⁷⁹ it is of some extent and is held like most, if not all the markets in this country, every fifth day.³⁸⁰ There were about sixty Goats; a good supply of country cloth, leather bags; a small supply of cotton, iron shovels, awls and fetish things; earthenware in considerable quantities; dried shrimps and fish; salt;³⁸¹ saltpetre;³⁸² granite stones about eighteen inches square each;³⁸³ flints; peppers; pieces of skins of animals; cord; calabashes; seeds, various; Indian corn; pipes; pipe-sticks; mats; ocro [= okra]; palm-nuts; beads; tobacco; armlets; snuff; palm-oil, in small quantities; black pepper,³⁸⁴ &c &c.

1864, ii, 115). The French officer Bouet earlier in 1851 had refused to remove his hat, unless he was given an umbrella to shield him from the sun, which was duly supplied (Bouet 1852, 59).

³⁷⁷ i.e. a ceremony marked by music and dancing.

³⁷⁸ Referring to the Beaufort scale of wind strength.

³⁷⁹ Later spelled 'Ar-jar-hee' (p. 83): Adjahi (or Ajdahimè), north-west of the royal palace (cf. Burton, i, 169–70; Forbes 1851, i, 70, says 'eastward' of the palace, presumably a misprint). The Adjahi market was also a site for public ceremonies (cf. p. 86). It no longer exists as a market, the site having been built over, but the name is still applied to the area.

³⁸⁰ In fact a four-day market cycle operated in Dahomey (as other British observers correctly registered: e.g. Forbes 1851, i, 55, 'on every fourth day'; 64–5, 'once in four days'; also Burton 1864, i, 335n.). Fraser probably reproduces literally the Fon idiom of inclusive reckoning: cf. Burton, *ibid.*, ii, 267, 'after five days, which here means the fourth'. See also p. 84.

³⁸¹ Salt was brought from the coast, where it was made e.g. at Ouidah (Law 2004a, 27).

³⁸² i.e. natron: cf. Duncan 1847, i, 122, giving the indigenous term 'akaowo [*akanmul*]'. Natron was imported from Borno, in what is today north-eastern Nigeria.

³⁸³ i.e. grinding stones, for corn, which were imported from the Mahi country, to the north (Duncan 1847, i, 122).

³⁸⁴ i.e. the indigenous 'Guinea pepper' (*piper guineense*), as distinct from red pepper (*capsicum*), introduced from America: contrast Burton 1864, ii, 345, 'red pepper is abundant, and the black variety is unknown'.

On the road, to the market, are the dried remains of a human being, upon a very high pole,³⁸⁵ but it is so decorated, with a blue and white cloth, that it has no horrors, except the bare fact of knowing what it was.

My horror and disgust, at the very idea of these exhibitions, renders me almost ridiculous, in the eyes of my attendants; their remark is:—‘Duncan was a proper soldier man, he always go look at them thing’.³⁸⁶

My orders are never to take me near anything of the Kind, if it was possible to avoid it, consequently hitherto I have only seen the one above described.

Here for the first time, since I have been in the country, I was addressed in the Mahometan style, by a jolly, respectable looking, well dressed old black,³⁸⁷ who was highly delighted to find I could return his salute, but my small stock of Arabic, soon exhausted his.³⁸⁸

P.M. 2	87.4	calm	Fine, light clouds
5	87.2	S.W. 3	d[jitt]o d[jitt]o

The performances before the King today, the same as yesterday, only by different persons.

Before a dance commences, Mayhoo kneels down, in front of the performers, his face towards the King and appears to proclaim it he has at these time[s] a stick in shape like the accompanying mark



and touches the ground with his forehead.

After the Mayhoo, has finished, all the performers, squat in a kind of circle and sing a Kind of opening chorus.

All the morning, some of the Mayhoo's young men have been singing and dancing, apparently rehearsing, in an adjoining yard. It sounds very much like a lot of English country labourers in a village pot-house.

³⁸⁵ Other visitors to Abomey also reported seeing sacrificial victims suspended on gibbets: Norris 1789, 100–1; Freeman 1844, 269–70; Duncan 1847, i, 219. At the ‘So-sin’ Custom witnessed by Burton in Jan. 1864, some of the victims were likewise hung up (1864, ii, 29, 100).

³⁸⁶ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 373, ‘The people say of [Duncan] that he was a good war-man, as he used to walk up to, and to inspect the corpses’. This evidently refers to an occasion when Duncan witnessed the decapitation of 4 victims, at sufficiently close quarters that his clothes were splattered with their blood (1847, i, 251–2).

³⁸⁷ For further reference to this man, see p. 79. Europeans frequently recorded meeting Muslims from the interior at Abomey: for other references, see Law 1986b.

³⁸⁸ Fraser's knowledge of Arabic (perhaps, as seems here implied, no more than some greetings) was presumably obtained on his visits to Tunis in 1846–7.

P.M. 8 79° W.S.W. 3 clear starlight

The music in general, resembles the tin-kettles of a London wedding and not half so musical as the 'marrow bones and cleavers'.³⁸⁹

Started a messenger, this evening, to Whydah, with a letter to Domingo, respecting Dassalu.³⁹⁰

Everything you give these people is received in the two open hands, placed side by side.

Received a present of a Fowl, from one of Mayhoo's men.

P.M. 9 77.1 W. 2 beautiful starlight

22nd [Aug.] am 6 73.8 W 2 & 4 cloudy

The Perenopteri, are very common, the birds soreings [= soarings], I think would be a good mark, for tracking out an unknown town or village, and according to their numbers, so might the size of that town be judged.

Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee's stick arrived.

Narwhey called.

King's stick, with four calabashes and the wash-hand basin of food, arrived.

Sent card to the King with my compliments, and should feel glad if he would appoint, the first leisure day for me to read trade book to him. This refers to Letters, nos 9 and 10.³⁹¹ Sent Madiki, to him, to request he would furnish me with his thoughts, that I might frame book for Queen.

am. 10 77° W. 1 Cloudy, very cold wind.

I have just had a visit from the Old mallam,³⁹² that accosted me yesterday in the market, he tells me his name is 'Kar-raf-fee'³⁹³ and is, if I understand him aright, the man whose name is mentioned so often by Duncan as 'Terrasso-wea',³⁹⁴ he is a native of 'Macjenna' which is nine moons journey from here,³⁹⁵ as he says, you come to a river, river no good, you sit down until water pass, and so on, takes up much of the time.³⁹⁶ The caravans [sc. from Macjenna] do

³⁸⁹ Used as musical instruments by butchers' apprentices in England.

³⁹⁰ Requesting him to trace and liberate the Christian captive Dassalu, taken in the recent war against Abeokuta (see Appendix 2, no. 14).

³⁹¹ i.e. the letters from Hutton's agent Prior, complaining about thefts at Ouidah (Appendix 2, nos 8–9).

³⁹² i.e. Muslim scholar (Hausa, from Arabic *mu'alim*).

³⁹³ Perhaps representing the Arabic name (al-)Qarafi.

³⁹⁴ A 'Mahomedan priest' whom Duncan claims to have met in the remote interior, beyond the Mahi country (1847, i, 75, etc.), but more probably met in Abomey: see Law 2001b.

³⁹⁵ Masina, which currently controlled Timbuktu, on the River Niger (in modern Mali).

³⁹⁶ The river to be crossed was perhaps the White Volta (in northern Ghana).

not come within three moons journey of Abomey, the name of the place [where they stop?] is 'Barrabar';³⁹⁷ he prayed for me, and went through some performances I never noticed amongst the Moors or Arabs,³⁹⁸ such as, drinking water before he left, saying a prayer over it and putting three drops upon the ground.³⁹⁹ I offered him a cigar, he took all that was in the case.

am 11	78.2	SSW 1 and 3	cloudy
12	80°	calm	d[itt]o

Visited Coomassie market, just outside the east Gate;⁴⁰⁰ before you can pass the Gate, you must alight from your hammock and walk through. The market is of considerable size, better supplied [with] cotton, than any I had previously observed; a tolerable supply of Fowls and chickens, mats, Herbs and most of the things generally offered at other markets.

The walls on either side [of] the Gate do not extend above ten or twelve yards each way,⁴⁰¹ the passage is over a rough bridge, as before described; but there is not any ditch only a hollow.

pm 3	83.8	calm	Fine, light clouds
3.30			Heavy rains
4	80.2	calm	rain ceased, thunder
6	79°	N.W. 1	Fair, cloudy, cold
9	77.5	calm	d[itt]o d[itt]o, dark

Madiki and Narwhey, called this morning, to deliver a message from the King; it was, to the effect, that this year the Portuguese had not bought one slave (how did Domingo, come by the Abbeokutans?)⁴⁰² see also conversation with the King on the 20th inst.[,]⁴⁰³ that his customs, had cost as much as ever, and that I was to make book to the Queen, to allow him to have two ships, he would make flags, to send his own slaves in; I cut this palaver very short, by telling them, it was impossible, for one slave to pass; that the Queen neither

³⁹⁷ Bariba (Borgu), situated in the interior north of Dahomey.

³⁹⁸ Again, presumably alluding to Fraser's visits to Tunisia in 1846–7.

³⁹⁹ The pouring of a few drops of water (or other drinks) on the earth (though usually, prior to drinking) was (and is) a standard procedure in Dahomey; it was linked to veneration of the ancestors (as noted by Burton 1864, ii, 122), and therefore an un-Islamic practice.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Kumasi' was actually the name of a royal palace, built by King Gezo (cf. Freeman 1844, 266; Duncan 1847, ii, 273–4; Forbes 1851, i, 71, etc.), the nearby market being called Houndjro (cf. p. 84). The name 'Kumasi' seems no longer to be recalled but the site of the palace (now officially designated '*Palais du prince héritier Guezo*') is recognized (and its gateway recently reconstructed). The city gate here was more accurately the 'southern' gate (as in Forbes 1851, i, 71; Burton, ii, 234).

⁴⁰¹ But Burton (1864, i, 288) describes the wall at the Cana gate as being '100 yards long'.

⁴⁰² A perhaps wilful misunderstanding on Fraser's part, since Martins had purchased these captives, not for export, but for ransom back to Abeokuta (cf. above, p. 75, with n. 369).

⁴⁰³ See p. 75.

would nor could do such a thing, and therefore if I made book, it must be something much better, than at present suggested. I referred to his Letter from Lord Palmerston, as to the Queen's word and my authority for speaking so positively; besides, I told them, the King had already made the same palaver to Consul Beecroft;⁴⁰⁴ that he must give me some new palaver and not keep going round and round the same post. I referred to De Souza's ruin and Domingo's rise, as I told him the latter was a sensible man and saw the thing in time, and by means of legal trade, had saved his property;⁴⁰⁵ if the King wished to save his he must change too, very soon.

They went away quite chagrined.

23rd [Aug.] am 7. 73.8 calm Fine, light clouds
10 77° S.W. 1 Fair, cloudy

A capital yarn for a cumming [sic]:⁴⁰⁶ a tree I fell in with, this morning, was so large that I had only to walk round it and shoot as fast as I could load. The trick is, it is it [sic] not the size of the tree but the disposition of the birds, as soon as the momentary fright caused by the report of the gun, was over, they returned, never I suppose having been molested, in that way, before.

Mayhoo's stick arrived.

Narwhey called.

The King sent two calabashes and a wash-hand basin of Fowl and Palaver sauce, two calabashes of Dab-a-dab.

am 12 79.7 S.S.W. 2 Fine, light clouds

King's stick also one from Ar-chil-lee (Caboceer of English town)⁴⁰⁷ arrived.

Sent card and compliments to the King.

⁴⁰⁴ See HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1850/1, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220, Journal of F. E. Forbes, 4 June 1850: Gezo had asked to be allowed, first to ship 3 ships, and then a single ship, with slaves on his personal account.

⁴⁰⁵ This view is echoed by Ross 1969, 25. But it is questionable, since in fact de Souza also had taken up the palm oil trade prior to his death in 1849 (Law 2004a, 206–7).

⁴⁰⁶ This phrase omitted in the HCPP version, presumably because it was found unintelligible. The only explanation which can be suggested (very tentatively) is that it is a miscopying of 'curning' (itself a variant of 'corning'), which is recorded as a name given in Cheshire for the custom of visiting houses on St Thomas's day (21 Dec.), to solicit gifts (including corn) for Christmas (Burne 1917, 295, 299): however, accounts of this custom do not clearly refer to story-telling as part of it, as Fraser's reference here seems to imply.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 105, giving the name as 'Hie-chee-lee'; HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1850/1, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220, Journal of F. E. Forbes, 29 May 1850, 'Heechelee' (here described as 'Caboceer of the British fort'). The term 'caboceer' in this context seems to mean, not the administrative head of the quarter, but a royal official assigned to collect taxes in it. Hechili is the name of a family in Ouidah, descended from a former Dahomian official there (Law 2004a, 104).

As my stay here is uncertain, I have reduced my suite, as much as possible, by sending my Two Croo Boys and William the Sierra Leone man, whom I found useless as an interpreter,⁴⁰⁸ to Whydah.

Had a war with Narwhey and Madiki, this morning, because I would not pay what they called, a King's man, who was to be sent with my people, this day, and besides, I refused to pay ten cowries for a pass for my Bull.⁴⁰⁹ I told them that my people and myself should pass free at all times, I wanted no 'King's man' my people knew the road, and as for his presents, which I did not require, he had better take them back again. Upon threatening to talk over this palaver, with the King, myself, Madiki, got in a rare way, and told me it was not King's palaver, it was only what my predecessors had done.

This is always the case, Englishmen spoil all places, it is a well known fact

p.m.	6.	81.6	N.S.W.	1	fine, light clouds
	7.	80°	N.S.W.	1	d[itt]o with a few light clouds
	8.	78.6	N.S.W.	3	clear, starlight
	9.	77°	W.	2	clear, starlight; lightning

24th [Aug.]—Sticks and compliments from the King, Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar
Sent card to King

am 8. 75° n. 1 very fine

Received from the Av-vo-gar, two live muscovy Ducks, a small basket of yams and a basket of plantains.

At-chil-lee[']s] stick arrived.

Narwhey called.

4 p.m. The King sent a calabash of Guavas

Sent my card and compliments.

5 p.m. The King has just sent three more messengers, with a large decanter of Rum and a bottle of Gin, [I was] compelled to drink the King's health in a bumper.⁴¹⁰

5.15 p.m. The King sent to say that he should like to keep my card, that he had not a card case and to request I would write, his name as well as my own, on a piece of paper, that he might forward it, when he sent to me, at Whydah. Did as he desired and begged he would keep the card case; sent him also twenty five American cigars and a bundle of manilla cheroots.⁴¹¹

Had a visit from Mayhoo, he presented me with some yams; promised to give him a tea-pot like the one in my canteen.

⁴⁰⁸This man had been hired at Whydah (see p. 40).

⁴⁰⁹The bullock received as a gift on 19 Aug. 1851 (p. 72), now being sent to Ouidah.

⁴¹⁰i.e. a glass filled to the brim.

⁴¹¹i.e. from Manila (in the Philippines).

am. 10	77.9	W. 1	Fine, light clouds
11	79°	W. 1	Fair, cloudy
12	81	calm	Fine, cloudy
pm. 1.	82.7	n.w. 1	Fine, cloudy
2.	83.6	n.w. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
3.	83.7	calm	d[itt]o d[itt]o
4	82.8	n.e 5 or 8	just sprung up, very cloudy
4.30			a light rain, wind abated
4.40			raining steadily, no wind
5.	77.7	calm	steady rain
5.10			rain ceased
7.	75.8	N ½	Fair, cloudy
9.	74°	calm	clear starlight

25th [Aug.] Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar

Four or Five calabashes of food from King

While out shooting, this morning, passed through 'Ar-jar-hee' market and a city gate, which I take to be the west one; after walking some distance mostly through plantations of Guinea corn, which the people were busy gathering,⁴¹² the country opened, giving a fine view of many many [sic] miles in extent, the land seemed to be a gradual descent and then a rise forming one immense valley, no mountains nor hills visible; it seemed to be thinly wooded.⁴¹³

My dinner today, consisted of Palaver sauce, some stewed leaves, very good, called 'La-too-too',⁴¹⁴ and some fish, which had been dried, cooked in Palm oil; I filled up with some fried plantains.

All is quiet, not a gun, drum nor voice, is heard, from King's place.

p.m. 6 The drums and voices have just struck up

The Mayhoo, has sent me a small cut goat

am. 10.	75.2	calm	Fair, cloudy
12.	80°	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
pm. 1.	79.9	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
2.	80.1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
3.	81.5	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
4.	82°	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
5.	83	d[itt]o	Fine, clear
6.	82.8	n. 1	d[itt]o light clouds
8	77.2	n.w. 1	d[itt]o, but cloudy

⁴¹²Cf. Burton 1864, ii, 237, 'the suburb here straggles out, and on all sides appear farms and plantations of palm trees'.

⁴¹³The valley of the River Kouffo, which runs about 15 km west of Abomey.

⁴¹⁴Not identifiable in Fon, but probably Yoruba *ilá tutu*, 'fresh okra' (there being many slaves and others of Yoruba origin in Abomey). The leaves, as well as the pods, of okra are used in West African cuisines.

9	76.6	n.w. 1	Fair,	dark cloudy
			the wind coming in occasional gusts	
10.	75.11	calm	Fair,	dark, cloudy

26th [Aug.]—Sticks from the King, Mayhoo, Av-o-gar and Cam-boodee

Sent card and compliments to the King

Calabashes of food from the King

The arrival in, and departure from, public, of the King, is announced daily, by the firing of muskets, beating of drums and shouting of the soldiers.

am. 7.	74°	calm	cloudy	
9.	75.5	d[itt]o	d[itt]o,	fair
10	75.6	w. 1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
11	77.4	w. 1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
12	78.1	s.s.w. 1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
p.m. 1	79.7	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o	fine
2	81.4	w. 1	d[itt]o	fair
4	82°	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o	fine
5	80.6	w.s.w. 3	d[itt]o	fair
6	78.9	w.s.w.	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
6.20			rain commenced	
7.	77.1	w. 1	Rain	
8.1[sic]	76.4	w. 1	clear starlight	
9.	75.6	s.w. 1 and in gusts—light clouds		

27th [Aug.]—Sticks from the King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee

Sent card and compliments to King

Narwhey called

The markets are thus distributed

Har-jar-hee held at Abomey, west gate

Oon-joo-lo “ Coomassie⁴¹⁵

Har-do-gwee “ Cannah⁴¹⁶

Me-hoe.Kee “ Cannah⁴¹⁷

So-bo-do “ behind Cannah⁴¹⁸

held, one, each day, in the order written, thus keeping up a continual round, without intermission, through the year⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵‘Hung-jooloh’ in Forbes (1851, i, 70); ‘Uhunjro’ in Burton (1864, i, 286): i.e. Houndjro, still today the principal market of Abomey, outside the city wall to the south.

⁴¹⁶‘Addogwin’ in Burton 1864, i, 219: i.e. Adogouin, the western market of Cana.

⁴¹⁷cf. earlier reference, p. 57).

⁴¹⁸Zogbodo, more commonly Zogbodomè, south of Cana (cf. p. 54).

⁴¹⁹This account is confused, since (as noted earlier, p. 77, n. 380) Dahomey operated a four-day market cycle. Burton later understood that the markets of Houndjro in Abomey and Mignonhi in Cana were held on the same day, the 2nd in the cycle, with Adjahi market on the 1st, Adogouin on the 3rd and Zogbodomè on the 4th (1864, i, 335n.). Cf. also Le Herissé 1911, 354.

The King has sent the usual allowance of food.

Horns, that is to say, small tusks of Elephants, with holes in them. keep blowing at sort intervals.

There is singing in the distance 9. p.m.

am. 7.	73.9	s.w. 1	cloudy	
10	76.3	calm	cloudy	
11	77.2	do	d[itt]o	fair
12.	78.4	w. 1	d[itt]o	
p.m. 1.	80.1	w. 1	Fine,	cloudy
3	82.4	s.w. by w 1	d[itt]o,	d[itt]o
4.	82.8	w. 1	do[itt],	d[itt]o
5.	81.5	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o,	d[itt]o
6.	80°	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o,	clouds light
7	78.4	w. 1	Fine,	with clouds
8.	76.8	w. 3	Starlight,	light clouds
8.30	the closing gun has just fired ⁴²⁰			
9.	75	w. 1	clear	starlight

28th [Aug.]—Threads are run from ear to ear, to deter the birds from taking the corn

I am told, I cannot go out of the town, by the North Gate, that 'King's fetish, go take water today, nobody must look 'em'⁴²¹

Narwey says, the King goes to the water, to wash.

Madiki says, he does not, that about one hundred women, go to fetch water for the King's drinking, and no one must see.

May this not be a precaution, against poison, that no person shall know, except the chosen few, from what places the King's drinking water is drawn.⁴²²

When I first went out this morning, I felt so sick and ill, I thought I must return; I had a fit of belching and all was right again. Was it, what I had taken, viz:—Three guavas and a glass of water, at rising, and a cup of tea before leaving the house?

Sticks from King, Mayhoo and Avvogar

Sent card and compliments to King

Food, as usual

⁴²⁰ i.e. to mark the King's return to his palace (cf. p. 84).

⁴²¹ Alluding to the Dido spring, the main royal source of water, which Fraser visited and described later (p. 95).

⁴²² Rather, it represented an application of the general principle that the King's wives should not be seen: see p. 56, with n. 258.

Signor Antonio de Souza, not having attended the Customs, this year,⁴²³ has this day sent a younger brother, in his stead,⁴²⁴ to attend a part of what is called the 'Hadj-jo-do', in memory of the King's father.⁴²⁵

Madiki talks of hurrying the King, that I may, as he says, cross the swamp before it is bad.⁴²⁶ Is it to suit himself[?]

Madiki and several of my people sick.

am. 7.	72°	w.s.w. 1	cloudy
11.	79	w.s.w. 2	fine, light clouds
12.	82.2	calm	d[itt]o, d[itt]o
p.m.1	82°	w. 1	Fair, d[itt]o
2.	84°	w.s.w. 1	Fine, d[itt]o
4.	83.4	w.s.w. 2	Fair, with some heavy clouds hanging about
5.	82.9	calm	Fair, cloudy
6.	81.1	d[itt]o	Fine, cloudy, from W to E
7.	78.8	w. 4	very cloudy
7.20	heavy rain, strong cold wind, distant thunder; the rain and wind lasted but a short time, the thunder continued		
8.	75°	w. 1	dark, cloudy, thunder, rain
9.	75.8	calm	d[itt]o, d[itt]o

29th [Aug.]—Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar, Camboodee and Har-dar-do-gwee (King's brother).⁴²⁷

Sent card to King

Narwhey called, begged a glass of brandy

More sickness amongst my people

More roguery, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Narwhey called to speak King's palaver, they say he is very busy at 'Har-jar-hee'⁴²⁸ and as I am in a hurry to

⁴²³ Cf. p. 26 (15 July 1851): Antonio de Souza was then at Ouidah, while most other 'principal personages' were attending the Customs at Abomey.

⁴²⁴ This is perhaps a misunderstanding, since Antonio himself arrived in Abomey 4 days later: see p. 90.

⁴²⁵ Cf. p. 91, which gives the name of the Custom as 'Hadj-ju-do', but this term is not otherwise attested. King Gezo's father was Agonglo (reigned 1789–97). This Custom must be distinguished from another which was also performed for the reigning king's father, which occurred later in the ceremonial cycle, immediately prior to the dispatch of the Dahomian army on its annual expedition (Forbes 1851, i, 19): see further Endnote 1.

⁴²⁶ i.e. before the onset of the second (lesser) rainy season, normally in Oct. Brue in 1843 noted that the Lama was 'impracticable after long rains' (1845, 59), and Duncan in 1845 that it was 'frequently impassable during the rainy season' (1847, i, 212). Forbes in Oct. 1849 did find it 'impassable', so took a circuitous route around its eastern edge, from Houègbo via Sèhouè, Massi and Hlagba to Zogbodomè (1851, i, 60, 62, 89), which is also that taken by the modern motor road.

⁴²⁷ Not otherwise attested.

⁴²⁸ Presumably, in performing ceremonies there.

leave, he sends the two first named to tell me book,⁴²⁹ that I may leave tomorrow and he will think the trade palaver over, by the time, the next messenger arrives from the Queen.

I told them, no more messengers would arrive, now I was stationed in their country, that I was in no hurry, that I could wait any number of moons, if the King *really* meant to write a good trade palaver, to the Queen, that since my time was the Queen's and at present at the King's service. I reminded them that I did not come to Abomey, on my own account, that the King sent for me,⁴³⁰ consequently I came to make book for him and was willing to remain to do so.

They seemed astonished, and said I had sent to the King, to say I wanted to leave.⁴³¹ I contradicted that and repeated my message to the King. That I sent to ask the King, to name a day, on which I could read, one or two letters, on trade palaver.⁴³² (The King is very deep in Mr Hutton's debt, I presume he was fearful that would be my palaver); they told me, the King had sent a messenger, to Whydah, and that was all settled. I told them, that was very well, but I had brought letters with me, and they must be read; Narwhey, here, interposed and wanted me to tell the contents, that Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar, were present and that was sufficient. I told him, not to interfere, that I should read the letters to no one but the King. When I came to Abomey, I settled all with the King and no one else.

They withdrew.

The whole time there was a continual harp upon, another messenger coming and I could send him, on to see the King.

The whole affair, I believe to be in a great measure, a trick on the part of Madiki, he wants to get back to Whydah.

Besides, it is very evident, that the King and all his headmen, have been spoiled, first, by the arrival of Mr Freeman, then Duncan, twice, Gov[ernor] Winniett, Mr Cruickshanks [sic], Comm[ander] Forbes, twice,⁴³³ each carrying handsome presents. [*in footnote*: Mr T. Hutton has been up twice,⁴³⁴ that is a very different thing].⁴³⁵ All that he or his headmen care about the English or

⁴²⁹ i.e. to dictate a letter.

⁴³⁰ Referring to the King's letter which Fraser had received at Ouidah on 30 July 1851 (p. 41), requesting a 'soldier' to visit him.

⁴³¹ As Fraser inferred, this impression had been given by Madiki; cf. below, this page.

⁴³² i.e. the letters from Hutton's agent Prior (see Appendix 2, nos 8–9).

⁴³³ An almost comprehensive, though not entirely sequential, listing of previous visits by British persons. Freeman had visited Gezo in 1843; Duncan in fact 3 times, in 1845 and twice in 1849; Winniett (accompanied by Freeman) in 1847; Cruickshank in 1848; Forbes in 1849 (with Duncan) and again in 1850 (with Beecroft).

⁴³⁴ Originally 'several times', corrected to 'twice'.

⁴³⁵ The last 3 words are missing from the ms. copy, but appear in the HCPP printed version. Hutton had visited Gezo in 1839 or 1840 (see Law 2004a, 204), but no subsequent visit seems to

the English Government, are the presents they expect to receive, judging from what has already been given to them.

For my own part, I would not give one of them another screw,⁴³⁶ and the King should be given to understand that.

If Commodore Fanshawe, had carried out his threat,⁴³⁷ it would have done more good, than all the other things put together, and I believe that it is the only thing, that will forward the views of the Government, with this wholesale butcher, and his confederates; let him see he is not the mighty man, he thinks he is.

Food from the King, but less in quantity.

Yesterday there was nothing but Palaver sauce and tough mutton, this I thought might be an accident; today, the Palaver sauce is little else, than Palm oil and pepper, the other dish, a little dried fish cooked in Palm oil, so I have been cheated out of two dinners, this does look, as if it was intentional.

My boy, has just returned, from the market with some Plantains, Bananas and Pine apples, which will help out my meal.

9 p.m. All is silent, except the frogs, crickets and an occasional horn.

am. 7.	72.6	calm	cloudy, drizzling rain
9.	73.8	s.w. 1	cloudy, the drizzle has just ceased
10	75°	calm	cloudy
11.	76.5	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
12.	78°	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
p.m.2.	81.4	d[itt]o	fine, with patches of clouds
3	81.1	d[itt]o	light rain
4.	80.8	d[itt]o	d[itt]o, which changed to heavy rain
5.	77°	w.s.w. 2	Heavy rain, thunder lightning
6.	75°	calm	steady rain
7.	75°	d[itt]o	very light rain
8.	76.1	d[itt]o	cloudy
9.	76°	w. 1	beautiful starlight

30th [Aug.]—This morning, is cloudy, with a Kind of thick fog or mist, in certain situations you can see it drifting along before the wind, like so much

be recorded prior to 1851. Presumably Fraser regarded Hutton's visits as 'different' because he was a private individual rather than a government official—though this was also, strictly, true of Freeman (a missionary) and Duncan on his first visit (when he was employed by the Royal Geographical Society).

⁴³⁶ Perhaps miscopied for 'another straw'.

⁴³⁷ Arthur Fanshawe, the previous Commander-in-Chief of the West African squadron, who had written to King Gezo 23 July 1850, warning him not to attack Abeokuta, and threatening a blockade of Dahomey if any harm came to British subjects resident there (HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1850/1, Class A, incl. in no. 225); the threat was not proceeded with, because of the defeat of the Dahomian attack on 3 March 1851.

smoke; much damp is falling, it is chilly and much resembles some of our English mornings, particularly in the north

Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee

Narwhey called

Dab-a-dab, Kankie, Palaver sauce, mutton stew and fish, this is the usual allowance, it is because I growled, indirectly, yesterday.

Sent card and compliments to King.

Today the Palaver sauce, is very good, but what I took to be mutton, proved to be bare bones, therefore had to make my dinner off some fowl.

am.8.	72.3	s.s.w. 1	cloudy &c as described beforehand
9.	72.6	calm	d[itt]o d[itt]o clearing off
10.	73.6	do	d[itt]o d[itt]o still clearing
11.	74.9	do	d[itt]o d[itt]o d[itt]o
12.	76.2	do	d[itt]o d[itt]o d[itt]o
p.m.1.	76	s. 1	Light rain
2.	78.4	s. 1	fine, light clouds
3.	79.8	s. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
4.	78.8	w.s.w. 3	fair d[itt]o
6.	77.8	s. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
7.	76.8	calm	fine, with a few light clouds
8.	75°	w. 1	clear starlight
9.	74°	w.n.w. 1	beautiful star and moonlight

All the afternoon, changeable, fair, fine very light rain and so on.

31st [Aug.] Sticks from Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar None from the King

Narwhey called

I woke at 3 am and was astonished to hear a gun fire, drums beat, and singing. Madiki says they are making Lightning Fetish, it is called 'Hav-you-so'⁴³⁸ and if I understand him aright rain also—for rain to come, that they may plant their second corn;⁴³⁹ the lightning to go away, as they appear to dread the damage it sometimes does. It strike and kill man; it fire house; it split stick (tree); that thing that goes



is no good for nobody.

⁴³⁸i.e. Hevioso, *vodun* of thunder, the name meaning 'So [= thunder] of Hevie', a village 20 km NE of Ouidah. Forbes had earlier referred to 'Soh' as the god of 'thunder and lightning' (1851, i, 171), but this is apparently the earliest record of the full name 'Hevioso'.

⁴³⁹Following the harvesting of the first crop, earlier in Aug. (pp. 85, 83); cf. also p. 90.

I had much difficulty to draw the above account from him.

Another of my women carriers fallen sick.

Chop from the King.

It sounds like women's voices that are singing today.

Oranges, were offered, this morning at three cowries, each, which is six hundred and sixty seven for one head or dollar.⁴⁴⁰

am. 8.	72.5	w. 1	cool,	cloudy
9.	73.7	w.n.w. 1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
10.	75.4	calm	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
11.	76.3	w. 2	d[itt]o	d[itt]o, very light rain
12.	77.3	calm	d[itt]o	
p.m. 1	78°	do	d[itt]o	
2	79°	do	fine but cloudy	
4.	80.1	w. 1	d[itt]o with light clouds	
5.	80.1	calm	very fine, a few light clouds	
6.	79°	do	very fine	
7.	77.7	do	beautiful moonlight	
8.	76.8	do	beautiful star and moonlight	
9.	75.5	s. 1	clear	d[itt]o d[itt]o

September 1—Sticks from King, May-hoo, Av-vo-gar, Camboodee

Chop from King

Not allowed to pass, the North Gate, again this morning.

Having lost a small knife, from my canteen, mustered all my people, searched their Kits, but without success.

Some, if not all, my people, asked if they ought to go to Whydah, and be sent for when wanted! What does this mean? Told them, they might all go, but those that did should never be in my employ again.

The 'Hav-you-so' was on last night, it is to last seven days and nights.

Signor Antonio de Souza arrived today.

Saw many calabashes of meat about three or four pounds, in each, this morning, on the market place; they told me the King was going to present two hundred, such, to his soldiers.

All the people are now busy, ridging the ground, for the second crop.

Oranges &c are ripening, leaves falling, trees looking half dead, it must be their autumn: although some birds are evidently preparing for a breeding season, as is shown, by their testes and ovaries.

am. 7.	71°	w.s.w.1	Fair,	cloudy
10.	74.8	w.s.w.1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
am. 11.	6.3	calm	Fair,	cloudy

⁴⁴⁰ Forbes also gives the price of an orange as 3 cowries at Ouidah in 1850 (1851, i, 110), but only 1 cowry (2,000 per \$1) at Allada in 1849 (i, 58).

	12.	78.3	d[itt]o	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
p.m.	2	79.9	w.s.w.1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
	3.	80.8	calm	d[itt]o	d[itt]o
	6.	78.5	s.w.3	d[itt]o	very cloudy
	7.	76.7	w.n.w.1	d[itt]o	cloudy in parts
	8.	75.8	s.1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o
	9	74.7	n.s.w.1	d[itt]o	d[itt]o d[itt]o

2nd [Sept.] Although awake almost every hour, during the night, I did not hear anything of the 'Hav-you-so'.

Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee

Mayhoo called, to know whether I wanted to see the King. I was out at the time.

Narwhey called and has sent for Mayhoo.

Told Narwhey of the morning calls, he had missed, paying me, asked him if he was getting tired already, he would not understand.

Mayo came, while here, he coveted a gilt chain, belonging to my boy, he wanted it, to suspend his fetish round his neck, he begged also a reel of cotton; I told him if King makes good book, to please Queen, I dare say she would send King another present and I would ask for one for him at the same time; but if the King no make good book, it was not likely the Queen would send any more. I told him I thought the Queen, has already, sent plenty and the King no keep his promise; he promise when next Custom come, he make good book, Custom come, King no make good book.⁴⁴¹

I told him I wanted to see King, to read trade book, to him, respecting the Fort &c &c, he promised to tell King and fix a day, when he would pass me⁴⁴² all one time.

I complained of, not being allowed, to pass the north gate;⁴⁴³ he said, that every fifth day, no one is allowed to pass; on the other four I might go.⁴⁴⁴ I complained, also, of the neglect I had suffered, that the King no send for me, when they make new drum; although he had promised: he said, I had seen 'Hadj-ju-do' custom⁴⁴⁵ and it was all the same. I told him I knew better, there had been a change, for I could hear the voices of women:⁴⁴⁶ He promised to send for me today.

⁴⁴¹ Referring to 1849–50: Gezo had told Forbes and Duncan in Oct. 1849 that he would give his answer to the British at the next Annual Customs; but when Forbes returned (with Beecroft) in 1850 his answer was negative.

⁴⁴² i.e. grant him a permit to leave.

⁴⁴³ See above, pp. 85, 90.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Every fifth day' here again probably means (by the Dahomian idiom of inclusive reckoning), every 4th day: cf. above, p. 77, with n. 380.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. 'Hadj-jo-do', p. 86; presumably this refers to the dancing by male soldiers which Fraser had witnessed on 20–21 Aug. 1851.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. p. 90.

The method of sowing is as follows:—a man, woman or child, for all do it,⁴⁴⁷ goes between two ridges, and with the right heel makes a hole in the top of the ridge on that side, the seed is thrown in, and a scrap[e] with the foot covers it over; the other ridge is served with the left foot, the same way, and so on alternately, right and left.⁴⁴⁸

Mayhoo, seeing the process of skinning and preserving birds,⁴⁴⁹ asked, if it was not possible, to serve a man so? I told him, no, fearing the King might request it to be done. He said, he had heard, we did it in England? I told him such a thing has occurred once (Van Butchell's wife)⁴⁵⁰ but it was a very difficult process.

Narwey, has just called, with a calabash of guavas from Mayhoo, saying Mayhoo had told the King, my palaver, the King thought I was too busy, to spare the time, the reason he has not sent for me. I was to prepare myself, to see some women dance today, and in a little time, he would send for me, to read the trade palaver, &c.

This shows the artfulness of the people. It is a mere excuse, because I would not make the book, that Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar came about the other day, because I have no presents, but I will not let him alone.

I told him to tell the King, that palavers, with me, stood first on the list, that all other things came after.

That if I had not found employment within myself, these three weeks, I should have fallen sick, I had been so neglected.

Narwey came for me, the place assigned to me and the arrangements, were precisely the same as on the former occasion,⁴⁵¹ it was evidently a got up affair;⁴⁵² the musical instruments, were the same sort as used by the men, played by women; all was done within the women's boundary; soon after I was seated, the instruments struck up, and about thirty women, advanced, forming a square, each entirely covered with a cloth, excepting the head, they

⁴⁴⁷ For other evidence on the sexual division of labour in agriculture in Dahomey, see Law 1995, 202: although most agricultural work was done by women, the initial clearing and planting was done by men.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Burton 1864, i, 40, 'The seed is sown by two sowers; one precedes, and drills the ground with a bushman's stick or a hoe handle; the second puts in the grain and covers it with the heel, an operation left to a third person if there be more than two'.

⁴⁴⁹ i.e. by Fraser himself, for his zoological collections.

⁴⁵⁰ Martin van Butchell (1735–1814) was a London dentist who, on his wife's death in 1775, embalmed her body and placed it on public display; the body was later exhibited in the Royal College of Surgeons.

⁴⁵¹ On 20–21 Aug. 1851 (pp. 75–8).

⁴⁵² i.e. something contrived for show or deception. Presumably, Fraser suspected that the real nature of the ceremonies was being concealed from him. However, the Mehu had explicitly informed him in the morning that the current ceremonies were 'all the same' as those had seen before.

were singing, they made an attempt at a dance, but their cloths, kept falling and were sadly in the way; they soon put these on one side, and the front rank, who afterwards proved to be the performers, were very smartly dressed, the rest squatted down, joined in the singing, in the back ground: there was no uniformity, in the color or patterns of their dresses, some having white, others dark blue, others again mixed colors; they all wore, a Kind of waistcoat without sleeves: drawers reaching down nearly to the knees, and cloths fastened round their waists, after the fashion of the men; only more securely, these cloths covered all, some were barred⁴⁵³ pattern, others figured. some uniform in color, but each person wore a different one: the dance, was much the same as the men's, but they not being so lithesome, the wriggling of the body, had not so much vulgarity about it, the capering and jumping about, was not altogether inelegant; some parts reminded much of the Ojibbeway Indians,⁴⁵⁴ there were more changes than in the men's dance, and there were many attempts, that might be likened unto Duvernay's 'Cachucha'.⁴⁵⁵ When they first entered two were armed with riding whips, others with light sticks, these were afterwards dispensed with; many had a kind of brush, which appeared to be made of hair from horses tails, attached to short handles,⁴⁵⁶ altogether I was much more pleased with them, than the men. There was not one, who could brag of the slightest beauty; they were all muscular and tolerably active. I cannot say much for their chastity, from what I have seen, if they are not all mothers, it is not their fault, as the numbers of children, running about, belonging to them, will testify. they did not rub themselves so much in the dirt as the men, touching the ground, with their foreheads, in most cases, seemed sufficient.

During this performance, which was from five to seven p.m. Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza came, and was seated, by my side, he is generally called the 'Ko-Koo',⁴⁵⁷ his brother was with him.⁴⁵⁸

Sig[nor] Antonio, leaves this evening.

De Souza apologized to me for not calling on me, saying, he was not aware I was in the town! This was an untruth.

⁴⁵³ i.e. striped.

⁴⁵⁴ The Ojibwa, of Ontario, Canada, noted for their war dances. Groups of Ojibwa had toured and performed in England in 1843 and 1845 (see Catlin 1852).

⁴⁵⁵ Pauline Duvernay (1813–1894), a French dancer who popularized the *cachucha*, a lively Spanish dance, in the 1830s.

⁴⁵⁶ i.e. fly whisks, for which horse-tails were widely used in West Africa (Law 1980, 168–9); in Dahomey, Burton later understood such fly-whisks to be 'the symbol of a professional singer or drummer' (1864, i, 46; also 212).

⁴⁵⁷ Nowadays commonly spelled 'Kokou'; this was not, as Fraser seems to assume, a title, but a version of the Akan name Kwaku, given to boys born on Wednesday.

⁴⁵⁸ i.e. the 'younger brother' of Antonio, whose arrival at Abomey was noted on 28 Aug. 1851 (p. 86).

Just before the conclusion of the dance at dusk, Mayhoo came, and enquired if he should ask the King's permission for me to retire? Of course, I said yes. He asked the same of Antonio and obtained the same answer. Mayhoo, knelt down in his usual place, but, in consequence of the confusion all this time I could not see what transpired. The King soon made his appearance, at our table, we shook hands, snapped fingers, and drank two glasses of gin, each, handkerchiefs being held before the King, as before, at which time there was a general hubbub, firing of muskets, &c.

I thanked him, for sending for me, to see the dance, told him I was much pleased; he enquired how my collections were getting on;⁴⁵⁹ said he had not sent for me, because I should procure a good many before I went away, and let him see them, which I promised to do. All hypocrisy! We shook hands, snapped fingers and bad[e] each other good night.

Sig[nor] Antonio went with the King.

Today, the Av-vo-gar, like Narwhey, had merely a cloth round his loins, hanging down to his knees, his upper parts being naked. I have not seen the King in any other attire.⁴⁶⁰

The men, generally, wear trunks (small drawers) under the cloths.

I have scarcely seen a fine or good looking woman, about the King.

Cripples, I have seen but one in the whole country, he is a hunchback, about four feet high, seems to be a great man.⁴⁶¹ At times, he carries an effigy of himself. Many have lost the sight of one eye.⁴⁶² Total blindness I have not seen.

Many are severely marked with the small-pox.

During my sitting, the King sent me four calabashes of chop, which I gave to my people. He sent some to Antonio at the same time. Many calabashes of chop and drink (water?) passed before us, which he was ordering the distribution of.

There were not more than one thousand on the parade, today.

Narwhey, called to bid me 'good' himself; also in the names of Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar.

am.	7	72.2	w. 1	fine,	light clouds flying
	10	77°	s.s.w. 2	d[itt]o,	do—sunshine occasionally
	11	77°	calm	cloudy	

⁴⁵⁹ i.e. of zoological specimens.

⁴⁶⁰ Forbes in 1850 described the King as 'plainly dressed, in a loose robe of yellow silk . . . sandals . . . and a Spanish hat' (1851, i, 77; see also the illustration, frontispiece).

⁴⁶¹ Forbes in 1850 also refers to 'the Chief of the Hunchbacks, who is a great man' (1851, ii, 70; cf. also Burton 1864, ii, 5).

⁴⁶² Burton in 1863 was also struck by the 'many' people with eyes (and hands) missing whom he saw in Ouidah, which he attributed to the use of excessive amounts of powder in muskets (1864, i, 21).

p.m. 1	77.2	s.s.w. 1	fair, cloudy
2	78°	s.s.w. 1	d[itt]o, d[itt]o
3	79°	w.s.w. 1	fine, d[itt]o
p.m. 4.	78.9	s.w. 1	fine, cloudy
5.	78	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o, light clouds
9	78.9	w. 1	beautiful star and moonlight

3rd [Sept.]—Started this morning, through the North gate, to the watering place,⁴⁶³ proceeded about one and a half miles, then the path was over a tolerable deep descent, formed by a cutting, it extended about a quarter of a mile, at which point, it may be perhaps thirty feet, from the surface, here the water is found, which as far as I saw, was a kind of pool, no doubt formed by the draining of the adjoining land; there was an immense concourse of women, many of them belonging to the King; I did not tre[s]pass any further, for fear of getting into a scrape. To go this road, is a great nuisance, as the bells belonging to the King's women, are constantly ringing,⁴⁶⁴ although I did not go out of my way, still my people had to fly, which constantly brought me to a stand still, particularly where the paths diverged.

Returned to the entrance of the cutting, Told my men, I wanted to see the Dab-a-dab hills,⁴⁶⁵ they all declared, the place where I stood was so called, that I knew to be incorrect; I pointed out the direction, I thought they must be in, and told them I must go that way, they declared there was not a path; conceiving this to be a trick, I struck across the grass, stubble and bush, until I found one. After some time, I came upon a gate, like those leading from the town,⁴⁶⁶ they told me that the King's soldiers, when they go to war, always pass that way; clouds beginning to gather all round, the wind getting up, fearing rain was coming, I beat a retreat, by a good path, with small patches of cultivation, on each side. About half a mile, before reaching the North gate, I passed through, a large rush enclave, filled with small houses, built with sticks and covered with grass: this they said had been erected, for Mon. A[ugus]te Bouet, to prove his shells upon; it appears he fired from the outside of the North gate, with the intention of destroying this fabrication, but they

⁴⁶³i.e. the royal water-spring (cf. p. 85), to the north of Abomey, named by Burton 1864, ii, 236, 241, as 'Diddo', i.e. Dido.

⁴⁶⁴To warn males to give way: cf. p. 56, with n. 258.

⁴⁶⁵These hills, so-called from their resemblance in shape to the 'dab-a-dab' or corn dough balls (see p. 103), were seen by Duncan in the distance to the east of the Mahi country (1847, ii, 38, 75); probably referring to the hills of Save, 85 km NE of Abomey. Duncan claimed in fact to have visited the hills subsequently, but this was probably a falsehood: see Law 2001b, 132–3.

⁴⁶⁶This refers to an outer defensive ditch to the north of Abomey, extending over a mile beyond the main city moat, and with two gates, to the north-east and north-west, more clearly described by Forbes 1851, i, 69, and Burton 1864, ii, 235–6).

say his experiment was a failure, some bursting in the air, others going far far away.⁴⁶⁷

Narwhey called.

Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee

Sent card to King

Chop from King

Mayhoo, sent to say, I could 'come and see drum[?]', it raining at the time, I desired Madiki to say if the rain continued I should not be there; it cleared off and I was for starting; Madiki, said he told Mayhoo, I was not coming. So I was obliged to stop at home. At which, of course, I was much pleased (?)

Madiki says, that Antonio has brought as dash for the King, two hundred muskets and two hundred large kegs of powder.

am.	7.	72°	w. 1	very fine
	10	76.3	w. 1	cloudy
	12.	78.1	n.n.w. 1	fine, cloudy
p.m.	2	82.1	calm	fine, very heavy clouds eastwards
	3	80.2	n.n.w. 1	fair, cloudy
	4	79°	n.s.w. 1	d[itt]o, d[itt]o
	5	78.5	n.s.w. 3	d[itt]o, d[itt]o
	6	77.2	s.s.w. 1	cleared off very fine
	7	76.2	s.w. 1	clear star and moonlight
	8.	75.2	n.w. 1	moonlight, light clouds
	9.	74°	n.n.w. 1 and 3	clear moonlight and starlight

4th [Sept.] Made another reduction in my party by sending some of the people to Whydah.

Sticks from King, Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Camboodee

Sent card to King

The King sent his compliments to say there would be another drum, today, I was to make myself ready, if I wished to see it

Chop from King

Took Duncan's route, the North road,⁴⁶⁸ there are more young Palm trees, in this direction, than I have before seen; the land is level, covered with coarse grass, and numerous patches of cultivation, every here and there on either side, [of] the road, may be seen, one or two houses. Birds were, as Duncan says, very scarce.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Bouet 1852, 71, for his demonstration of his guns, against a model of a village 'outside the town'; his own account acknowledges that the shells overshot the village, but suggests that the Dahomians were more positively impressed than is here implied.

⁴⁶⁸ In 1845, on his way to the Mahi country. Duncan left Abomey through the south-eastern gate, before turning north (1847, i, 276).

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Duncan 1847, i, 279: 'no bird of any description was to be seen or heard'.

I astonished my people, by telling them, this road led to the Mahee country,⁴⁷⁰ they having all along refused to shew me the path, declaring they did not know it.

The town of Abomey seemed surrounded by a thick hedge, very handsome and about fifteen feet high.⁴⁷¹

Soon after eleven, the messenger arrived for me 'to go and see new drum'. My chair was placed in the same place, as before, near the fetishes and close to the women's boundary. The introduction was the same, Mayhoo and Avvo-gar, on their knees, touching the ground with their foreheads, and rubbing their heads with dust; the King waved his hand, in acknowledgement of my presence. There were probably two thousand persons in the square.

A party of women came forward and made several attempts to sing, the drums did the same, all to no purpose; a party of men got up and wished to dance, but the women cried them down, and they were compelled to go back to their places. The first lot of women dispersed; a second formed probably forty or fifty, the two or three front rows, being nearly covered with large cloths, as the day before yesterday, they advanced, in the form of a square, singing, made their prostrations to the King and commenced, but apparently finding these cloths in their way, about twelve or thirteen retired and reappeared without them. These made a pretty and almost elegant appearance, everything being quite clean, if not new, of their shirts, or as I before called them waistcoats, some were white, others blue or coloured; figured or plain, according to the fancy of the wearer; the drawers were of different colours, some plain, some striped; their cloths, which were secured round their middles, and the fastening, caused a loop up, on the left side, à la Vestris,⁴⁷² and were very neatly arranged; some were black, others blue besides various colors and patterns. The toute ensemble being exceedingly good, which is more than I could say of those in the background, for they were dressed in very dingy country cloths, and looked like so many Cinderellas. The dancing although much changed, from the day before yesterday, still had the same characteristics, viz:—the jumping, striding, wriggling, twisting, squatting, &c.; their attitudes were various and many of their positions even graceful; their pirouettes were exceedingly good, and some did Gilbert's twirls exceedingly well,⁴⁷³ this

⁴⁷⁰ Mahi, NE of Dahomey, to which Duncan had traveled in 1845.

⁴⁷¹ Presumably alluding to acacia bushes which grew in the city ditch, as a defensive measure (Forbes 1851, i, 68); Burton, 1864, i, 289, says 'the moat is dense grown with trees, especially with the thick and thorny acacia bush in these lands one of the best defences'.

⁴⁷² Vestris was the name of a family of French ballet dancers: the reference is perhaps specifically to Auguste Armand Vestris Allard (1760–1842), a renowned ballet teacher.

⁴⁷³ Marie Dolores Gilbert, better known as Lola Montez (1818–1861), famous as an erotic dancer in the 1840s; the reference is probably to her frenetic 'Tarantula dance'.

and singing all the time, must be hard work. This dance lasted, without cessation, at least three hours.

During this dance, all the spare men and women, were ordered off, to receive a white man(?)⁴⁷⁴ on Cha-cha side.⁴⁷⁵ About half past three, the rain began, a party of women armed, about twenty, arrived at a rapid march, apparently with a message to the King: they knelt down and rubbed themselves with dust, after some communication, with the King, through one of the women, three new sticks, such as the Mayhoo uses, were given to them, and off they went as quick as they came; then a party of six or eight men, also, apparently with a despatch, they left their knives some eighteen or twenty feet behind, approaching the King with their muskets only, knelt down, besmeared themselves with dirt, I suppose they communicated, off they went.

At length the procession hove in sight, my seat was changed, my back placed to the King, as they said that I might have a better view.—the truth was it suited their own convenience. The King came to my table drank two small glasses of gin, with me, and saying, according to Madiki, that he was about to receive a white man, but it would not be proper to do so, until he had paid his compliments to me. He enquired how many birds, I had shot in the morning, I told him nine, that I had been on the Mahee road, he seemed astonished at my finding it out. He retired to his seat and the procession began to pass; the men, with their chiefs, some held on horses backs, with their large umbrellas, tom-toms &c. paraded round three times, dancing, capering, playing all sorts of wild antics and firing muskets occasionally I counted roughly two thousand passers by, they allow this to be divided by three, but I think by four or five would bring it nearer the mark;⁴⁷⁶ they were stowed away, in door-ways, passages, in fact every hole, and corner was filled, to make it look they were so numerous, that many were in the back, there was not space for them. Then came the women, in groups, about one hundred each, headed by four or five men, whom Madiki says are eunuchs, but one had a beard. I pointed him out, and told Madiki he could not be one, he then said, the others are and the King has about one hundred of them.⁴⁷⁷ The women were very dexterous, with their muskets, generally firing from the shoulder, which the men do not.⁴⁷⁸ I counted

⁴⁷⁴The question mark presumably indicates a person of mixed African and European descent (but regarded as a 'white man' in Dahomey).

⁴⁷⁵Meaning presumably either related to him, or perhaps acting on his behalf; he is described later in this entry as 'a younger brother of the Cha-cha's'.

⁴⁷⁶As made explicit later in this entry, Fraser believed that people processed by several times, in order to give the impression of greater numbers.

⁴⁷⁷For eunuchs in the Dahomian palace organization, see Bay 1998, 113–14, 269–70. Burton on one occasion refers to the Tononun leading 20 eunuchs in a ceremony (1864, ii, 15).

⁴⁷⁸Burton in 1863 also noted that the Amazons 'fired from the shoulders, not from the hip, as the men do to avoid the kick' (1864, i, 272).

five thousand, but the procession, I know, went round four times, as the last part contained a hammock, with a yellow lad (the white man) about fourteen or fifteen years of age, dressed in a straw hat, white jacket, waistcoat and trousers, said to be a younger brother of the Cha-cha's;⁴⁷⁹ during this part of the procession, I saw distinctly women going by fiftys, across the square and join another section of the parade, as soon as they had passed by the King. Most of the women's clothes appeared to be made of blue country cloth, of a, not, very dark blue, and consequently did not bear a very clean appearance: many of the caps were white with an ill shaped crocodile, of a black or dark blue color, upon them; their guns are very bright and in good order. As I have before stated, I roughly counted five thousand, I have shown this number must be divided by four at least; and I think by five or six would bring it much nearer the actual state of things.

The fourth time round, the youngster,⁴⁸⁰ alighted, was introduced to the King, with the same ceremony as myself, and by the noise and firing, the King and he drank together, four cannon were fired, at this time, the rain came very heavily and wetting me through the umbrella, I retired under a shed.

The women danced for a long time, in the rain, and must have been thoroughly drenched.

I have not seen a really good looking and scarcely a fine woman, since I have been in Abomey, where in the world, the King has managed together such an ill looking lot I cannot imagine, there are not two of them alike, and they seem to vie with each other in ugliness and shortness: much the same may be said of the men, they look a wild cut-throat set of fiends. Are all the fine and good looking ones sold?

Last time round, each chief, of the women only, and her followers, harangued, hurrahed and danced before the King. The hurrah consists of shouting and at the same time holding the muskets, in a slanting direction, with the left hand, as high as they can reach.

The bottle, glasses, basin &c. that were used outside, for drinking, formed part of the procession.

Everything and every body, seemed sent in, to swell the list, messengers, idlers, some of the dancing women had doffed their finery and mounted their more dingy war dresses. Rags are admitted both in flags and dresses.

Many of the Caboceers, wore war dresses, of a dingy brown color, dotted all over with small clusters of feathers of different colors, which gives them a very shabby appearance.

⁴⁷⁹This is apparently a different person from the 'younger brother' of Antonio de Souza who had arrived in Abomey on 28 Aug. 1851: cf. later reference to 'the two young De Souzas', in p. 104.

⁴⁸⁰i.e. the young de Souza.

The King sent Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar, with the youngster, that he might pay his respects to me; according to Madiki's version. He returned to his quarters, followed by a greater part of those that brought him.

The rain having abated, I sent to say I wished to retire, I was desired to return to my seat, the women were singing and making prostrations; after a little delay, a tray was brought, with four glasses of gin, two for myself and two for Madiki, we had to drink to the King, twice, he appearing to do the same to us. On my way home called in at the fetish place,⁴⁸¹ intending to see some dancing, but the rain coming on again, I thought it prudent to retire. I dashed, the head fetish man, a bottle of gin, for which I got all sorts of protestations, that the fetish hold the King strong, it should hold me strong, and that all the fetish people should do well for me all the way to and at Whydah.

What with my long walk, this morning, the drinking of gin, sitting for so long, for I did not return until five p.m., amidst shouting drums beating, muskets firing, cannons discharging, smell of powder, going so long without food, I had a slight headache, so I ate my dinner, laid down, slept for two hours, had a cup of tea, felt much better.

The common soldiers, talked a great deal about 'Bah';⁴⁸² Madiki told me, they were saying, they had a great many friends, there, and ought to weep for them. After my return to my quarters, I said, to some of my men, when those women made such a palaver about 'Bah' were they not asking to go again, and they would break it?⁴⁸³ They said, yes, that was what they were saying.

Madiki understands very little English and only tells me, just what suits the King.⁴⁸⁴

am	7.	72.1	n.s.w. 1	cloudy
	11	76.4	s.w. 1	d[itt]o
p.m.	6.	76.1	calm	fair, but very cloudy
	9.	74°	n. 1	fine, moonlight, light clouds

5th [Sept.]—Took a southerly course, this morning, and saw much more cultivation, than hitherto; crossed the road that runs from Coomassie, to Becco.⁴⁸⁵ Becco is not so far from Coomassie as Cannah is from Abomey.

⁴⁸¹ i.e. of Hevioso (cf. p. 89). Fraser gives no indication of the location of this shrine: the main shrine of Hevioso in Abomey was in the Ahuaga quarter, on the north-east of the town (Michozounnou 1991/2, 275).

⁴⁸² Egba, i.e. Abeokuta.

⁴⁸³ In Fon, the word *gbà*, literally 'break', was regularly used of conquest/destruction in war.

⁴⁸⁴ Ridgway in 1847 likewise complained that the Dahomian interpreters 'will not translate any thing that they think may displease the king' (1847, 306).

⁴⁸⁵ Gbèkon, a suburb of Abomey, outside the city walls to the south: cf. Forbes 1851, i, 71 ('Behkon'); Burton, i, 309 ('Bwekan'). Strictly, the Kumasi palace was situated within this quarter, rather than distinct from it, as the wording here implies.

During my absence Mayhoo called with a message from the King.
Sent to Mayhoo, directly after breakfast.

Mayhoo came, presented me with a curious leaf from the Anagoo country,⁴⁸⁶ which he did not know the name of. He begged some powder, to clean his bracelets; I promised to get it, if possible, at Whydah.

He said, I was to name a day, for King, to pass me to Whydah; I told him, I was ready, as soon as the King could spare time to read trade book, &c.

During the interview, a messenger from the King arrived with a letter addressed

‘On Her Majesty’s Service’
Louis Fraser, Esq
Her Britannic Majesty’s Vice Consul
Whydah

I read it, it was from Obba Shoron an Abbeokutan chief,⁴⁸⁷ dated Badagry,⁴⁸⁸ Aug. 11/51, desiring me, to interest myself with the King of Dahomey, to prevent him assisting Kosoko,⁴⁸⁹ if that was not successful, to give him timely information thereof.⁴⁹⁰

When I had done, Narwhey, wanted to know, who it was from, where from, how many days it has been on the road; I evaded his question, at last I told him, I never gave other people, the particulars of my letters, and he had no business to enquire. The letter was then demanded, which I refused in toto; words ran high, at last they told me, that as the King had received it, he must hand it to me himself. I was compelled to give way; and the messenger, took back the letter, much against, my will. Will they not shew it to the youngster, who arrived yesterday; if so, it is possible, he will make out, the names of the persons and places, therein mentioned.

From something, Madiki said, I inferred it was brought by Ant[onio] de Souza, if so, it has been here five days.

De Souza did not call upon me, while he was at Abomey.

⁴⁸⁶Anago, a term nowadays applied by the Fon to the Yoruba (a linguistic group occupying south-western Nigeria and adjoining areas of Bénin, and including the major states of Oyo and Abeokuta), but at this time perhaps meaning specifically the western Yoruba groups directly neighbouring on Dahomey (see Law 1997b).

⁴⁸⁷i.e. *Basorun*, the title of Somoye, the leading war-chief of Abeokuta (Biobaku 1957, 42).

⁴⁸⁸A town on the north bank of the coastal lagoon (in modern Nigeria), which currently served as the principal coastal port for Abeokuta: for Badagry in this period, see Sorensen-Gilmour 1995.

⁴⁸⁹Kosoko was King of Lagos, having deposed and replaced Akitoye in 1845. Following the civil war in Badagry (see above, p. 43, n. 146) forces from Lagos had attacked Badagry, in support of the defeated party, on several occasions in late June and July 1851; Somoye was commanding a force of soldiers sent from Abeokuta to defend Badagry (Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 310–14).

⁴⁹⁰See Appendix 2, no. 10, Basorun to Fraser, 11(?) Aug. 1851.

Narwhey, again, told me I must stop at Whydah, and take care of the Fort!! I told him I was an Englishman, and a Free Agent, and should go wherever I pleased, and no one should deter me except my own Queen.

Visited the fetish place, where they are keeping up the 'Hav-you-so'; the men were all young, and fine muscular fellows, some of them had strings of cowries hanging round their necks and over their shoulders, and trunks, or drawers, like our clowns, of various patterns; the women about thirty in number, some of whom were very old, were very gaily dressed and made a showy appearance, with their strings of white cowries,⁴⁹¹ round their heads, necks, wrists and ankles, which show exceedingly well on their black and shining skins; they wore handkerchiefs of various gay colors and patterns, tied over their breasts, with the two points hanging in front; between them; cloths as skirts fastened over the hips and reaching to their ankles, of various colors and patterns, red and white mixed being the favorite. The drums were placed in the centre of a yard and they danced and paraded round them, their dances consisted of striding and wriggling, the men were the most active I have seen, some representing maniacs, rushing about with their eyes distended and rolling, mounting the walls, and tumbling among the spectators, who were numerous, twirling round and round like a humming top, throwing themselves a distance from the ground, forming a circular twist, 'à la Gilbert' and recovering themselves very cleverly; one I noticed rolling head over heels, three or four times in succession, this is the only specimen of tumbling I have seen. The exercise is very severe for both sexes; I stopped nearly an hour.

They presented me, with a small decanter of rum, some of which, I had to drink, the rest I gave my people; they gave me also two koala nuts, or as Madiki calls them 'Collar nuts',⁴⁹² and a fig, saying I should live many years, at Whydah (I hope that will not be necessary) about six old women, during this drinking and palaver, stood in a row, in front of me, paying their compliments.

I am constantly accosted, as I go along, by the children with 'Yervo', white man.⁴⁹³

The performance in the square, and this above, may very well be compared to one of our large fairs in England, where there is a great deal of tinsel &c. to be seen outside, for nothing, and very little when you pay and go into the booth.

⁴⁹¹ i.e. cowries from the Maldive Islands (of the species *cypraea moneta*), as distinct from the larger cowries from Zanzibar (*cypraea annulus*), which were called 'blues' (Burton 1864, i, 143, n.).

⁴⁹² i.e. kola.

⁴⁹³ i.e. Fon *yovó* (cf. p. 41, 'evo'). Fraser seems to be the first European visitor to describe being thus harassed by local children—an experience familiar to modern visitors. Cf. also Burton 1864, i, 78, 'the children cheer and jeer White Face without any awe'.

I was desired, to take my book, with me, on the morrow, that I might put down on the spot what the King gave the people and the people gave the King.

Saw one deformed man at the fetish place, and a child, yesterday, this makes three.⁴⁹⁴

There are no poor.⁴⁹⁵

am.	6.	72	w. 1	cloudy
	7.	72.8	w.s.w. 1	cloudy
p.m.	2	81°	w.s.w. 1	fine, light clouds
	4.	81.3	w.s.w. 3	very fine, very light clouds
	5.	81.8	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
	6	80.2	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
	7.	78.8	calm	clear star and moonlight
	8.	76.7	w.n.w. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o
	9.	75.1	w.n.w. 3	d[itt]o d[itt]o

6th [Sept.] Sticks from King, Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar

Sent card to King

Narwhey called

Kankie, is Indian corn, ground very fine, and sifted, it is then boiled in water, kept stirred; until it is the consistence of thick paste, about a table spoon full is then put in a leaf and rolled up, when it is cold, it shakes like a leaf jelly.

Dab-a-dab, is Guinea corn, in a much coarser state, cooked in the same way, and laid out into cakes, about the size and thickness of muffins.

Just before twelve am. Narwhey looked in and said 'Come go'; mounted my undress coat⁴⁹⁶ and started: When I arrived on the ground, there was a large parade, of men and women, carrying vases or something of the kind, covered up, about twenty live sheep and goats; Ducks, Guinea and common Fowls; a good looking young woman probably twenty one years of age, dressed in a pale red and white check, skirt and cap, the latter of which, was in shape like a foolscap [= fool's cap],⁴⁹⁷ she was mounted on the shoulders of

⁴⁹⁴i.e. in addition to the cripple noted earlier, p. 94.

⁴⁹⁵The idea of the absence of poverty in pre-colonial African societies (supposedly reflecting a low level of economic differentiation and the existence of extended family and other support networks) has been a common stereotype among both foreign and indigenous observers: see the critique by Iliffe 1987 (though this makes no reference to Dahomey specifically). For European observers such as Fraser, this perception probably reflected mainly the lack of professional begging in non-Muslim societies (cf. Peel 1990, 468–9, on Yorubaland). But see above, p. 56, with n. 257, on the phenomenon of religious 'begging'.

⁴⁹⁶In military/naval usage, a simplified form of uniform for everyday, rather than ceremonial, use.

⁴⁹⁷As Fraser implies (later in this paragraph) this dress was indicative of their status as prospective sacrificial victims: cf. Forbes 1851, ii, 41–2, referring to 'a high red cap'; Burton 1864, i, 350, 'long white nightcaps'.

a woman, in the middle of the procession of the women under arms; two nice boys about ten or eleven years of age, on the shoulders of two men, dressed like the girl, in the midst of the men's procession many of which were unarmed and only a few armed; in the midst of all, was the King, under two umbrellas, one large the other small, attended by perhaps a hundred men and a band of drums, I saw him go round twice, then a stoppage and such a crowd, I could not see, what was going on. At length the King advanced and took his usual seat; then his men began to throw cowries amongst some hundreds, if they did not amount to two or three thousands, of nearly naked men. The cowries were thrown five string, at a time, attached together,⁴⁹⁸ when they opened out, resembling a star (a string should contain forty cowries, but I have not been able to find more than thirty three on those the King gives).⁴⁹⁹ occasionally there would be a cloth then a tussel [= tussle] ensues.⁵⁰⁰ It appeared to me that each man had a party there, I heard the names of 'Mayhoo's people' 'Camboodee's people', &c. I was seated, in the same place, as usual, with the two young De Souza's, by my side, one mob, came near where we were sitting, all the chief men, rushed out and beat them across the legs with switches. Once they appeared, all covered with red, as if they had been scrambling in a pit, pretty wretches they looked. Some of the men were mounted on the shoulders of others. After all was over they paraded round and round. (One I saw throw a hand spring side ways, or as it is technically called a 'Katherine wheel').⁵⁰¹ Then assembled in front of the King's seat, there they began the usual braggadocio⁵⁰² harangues, they seemed to be accusing each other of some thing, I supposed cowardice, the women spoke occasionally; the last man, that spoke, a great strapping fellow, the King told him, he was too weak to go against 'Bah' he was only fit to stop at home and take cloth. At another time the King said they were all very weak, that what they had done today (in two hours) formerly would have taken, three days; that by and by, he should be able to send, a long clay pipe, which was exhibited, amongst them, and it would be able to catch all the cloth, and bring it back to him. There were six-

⁴⁹⁸ 5 strings (200 shells) constituted a recognized unit of the cowry currency, called a 'bunch' (Burton 1864, i, 162, n.). An earlier account says that payments of cowries from the royal palace were made 'in branches of *strung* cowries, containing two thousand each'—perhaps an error for 200 (Dalzel 1793, xii).

⁴⁹⁹ Forbes in 1850 likewise noted that strings of cowries issued by the palace were subject to a 'charge' of one-seventh or 14%, implying that they contained 5–6 fewer cowries than their nominal 40 (1851, ii, 183–4).

⁵⁰⁰ This represents the ceremony of 'fighting for cowries', also witnessed e.g. by Forbes at the 'Annual Customs' in 1850 (1851, ii, 45–8), and by Burton, during the 'So-sin' custom (1864, ii, 3–5).

⁵⁰¹ A lateral somersault (nowadays, more commonly called a 'cartwheel'). Burton 1864, i, 205, n., also noted the performance of the 'cartwheel' in Dahomian dancing.

⁵⁰² i.e. empty boastful.

teen cloths produced, which had been scrambled for, and now laid before the King, these together with the cowries would not amount to more than £10 in value. This dirty mob was then dismissed, each successful one carrying his prize on his head. The drums struck up and a Kind of side step dance to slow time, took place, round and round the music; the women did the same. The King came forward and notified a wish to sing, which, of course, was acceded to; he did sing, it was true, with a cracked voice, all hands joining in chorus; he then retired, in a few minutes returned again, then himself and all hands sang together; after which, he put strings of cowries over a man's shoulders and poured loose ones over his back, perhaps altogether four hundred weight. This concluded he came to our table and drank with us, as usual two glasses of gin: said he believed I wanted to see him on a trade palaver. I said, yes, and a few other matters; he said he had a few things to look to, and then would see me. He returned to his seat. Afterwards he sang twice with the women soldiers and gave them cowries after the same fashion as he did the men, only more liberally; calabashes of chop and jars of pitto⁵⁰³ were then distributed, the women getting by far the largest share, a great quantity appeared to be carried back to where it came from. The girl and two boys, mentioned in the procession, were brought forward, it was intended to sacrifice them with the sheep &c. (Madiki says eight sheep and goats were killed, I saw twenty paraded) but the King made excuse, and as I understood they escaped, at least, I saw the caps taken off the boys.

Now the tables began to turn, the King had made his dashes, he must now be dashed in return; every headman gave something, some one, two heads of cowries; others less until it came as low as two strings; others brought in calabashes of uncooked vegetables, palm nuts, yams, cassada and bundles of wood, one sent two large drums, which were divided, between the men and women, the chief drummers of each party, tying them on the spot.

The women did not pay tribute.

Everything the King does, is received with the clapping of hands.

So much having been gone through, just before dawn, he came again to our table and drank with us two more glasses of gin, then told Mayhoo, to take the two De Souza's away and signified to me, to follow him, which I did, under the thatch of [the] next entrance to his house, where he sat himself, and pointed for me to do the same (my white trousers upon red mud). I showed him Forbes' book,⁵⁰⁴ which he returned to me immediately, saying he had seen it:⁵⁰⁵ next an Illustrated London News, he said he did not want that: then

⁵⁰³ i.e. beer, brewed from millet or maize. The word is not Fon, but Fante, *pito*.

⁵⁰⁴ i.e. Forbes 1851.

⁵⁰⁵ See further below, p. 127, which says the book had been given to the King by Domingos Martins.

showed him my list of Palavers, and began with Mr Prior's letters;⁵⁰⁶ he or rather Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar and Narwhey &c. stopped me two or three times, saying 'word had already been sent to Whydah, to settle that', which I knew to be false. I told them it was of no consequence, the letter was sent to me 'on service' and I must read it to the King. Having finished after much difficulty, they wished me to say whose canoemen, they were, who committed the robberies; but it would never do, to bring names in, just now, I passed it off by saying, what was done, was done, but what might be hereafter was my palaver.

Secondly—Repairs of Fort, he did not want to go into that, I told him I must have an answer, before I proceeded to the next subject. Here Mayhoo, introduced Obba Shoron's letter,⁵⁰⁷ which had evidently been opened, since I saw it, and all hands wanted that read. I told them that letter only came into my hands, yesterday, and consequently came last on my list.

The King said the Fort and all trade palaver belonged to Av-vo-gar (an untruth). I told him that was very good, now we were all together, was a good time. Av-vo-gar, said, yes, he would put the Fort in repair, but I must pay the people and expenses. I told him, no! that the Queen of England was given to understand that the King had promised, so to do, providing the Queen sent a representative.⁵⁰⁸ They wanted to pass to Obba Shoron's letter. I told the King, I must have an answer, to one thing at a time. The Av-vo-gar, then said, he would put the Fort in repair, but if the Queen would not pay for it, I must make him a present. I told him, no! then said he the Queen must; I told him I had nothing to do with that.

Thirdly, that all my goods and letters be free from inspection and duty. Yes, but Av-vo-gar added that I must make him a present. I said, no! At last it was agreed to.

Canoe house on beach and Lagoon.⁵⁰⁹ Granted.

To give me a trustworthy man, as a guide, messenger or anything else (to act as the Mamelukes do in the Mediterranean)⁵¹⁰

Handed him Comm[ander] Wilmot's despatch, no notice taken of it.⁵¹¹ The all engrossing subject being this said letter of Obba Shoron's. At last I

⁵⁰⁶ Complaining of thefts and failure to repair the fort: see Appendix 2, nos 8–9.

⁵⁰⁷ See above, p. 101.

⁵⁰⁸ No such assurance has been traced in records of earlier diplomatic exchanges between Britain and Dahomey.

⁵⁰⁹ This was not mentioned in Prior's letters, so was presumably a request of Fraser himself.

⁵¹⁰ This reference probably reflects, again, Fraser's experience in Tunis in 1846–7. The term *mamluk* in the Muslim world designated slaves (including, but not restricted to slave soldiers); in North Africa, since many such slaves were of European/Christian origin, they were ideally qualified to mediate between visiting Europeans and the local authorities and community.

⁵¹¹ This is presumably the letter which Fraser had initially refused to transmit: see p. 39, with nn. 107–108.

came to it, Narwehy had attempted to pick it out from my papers once or twice, since Mayhoo handed it to me, but I caught him, I told the King I was much displeased about this letter, and should write home and tell that it had not come by fair means, into his hands. He said it had come through the Anagoo country, per messenger, to him (an untruth?) I said he must remember, that I was the Queen of England's representative; I was no lie man; I did not come for cheat or play him any tricks; that it was now too dark, to read it to him, but I would tell him the purport of it; but he must bear in mind, in future, when a letter belonging to myself, either public or private, came into my hands, I should not deliver it up, as I had done this one, to gratify him. I told him it was from Badagry: that it had been sent to me as the Queen of England's representative, in his Kingdom, that it begged of me, to intercede with him, on the part of the Queen's people at that place, there being many missionaries, Traders &c., besides much British property, not to join Kosoko, against them. The King, said, with a degree of surprise, Kosoko is fighting on Queen side. I said no! He replied, that Kosoko had sent to him to say so (an untruth?).⁵¹² I folded up the letter, and Mayhoo claimed it. I told him, no, the letter was addressed to me, as Her Britannic Majesty's Vice Consul, consequently it was her property; he insisted, King did (almost) the same; Av-vo-gar was clamorous and Narwehy would have taken it from me, if he had dared. I put it in my writing desk, which I had with me, locked it up and told them that my letters and my life, were one and the same thing.

Madiki said something about my not having read it all.⁵¹³

The King said he wanted it, to send [it] away that he might give proper answer to it. I told him I should not part with it: all hands seemed to be in a fret and something was said about the morning. The King came out a very short way, with me, shook hands snapped fingers and parted.

I had several parties volunteering to carry my desk, but I would not trust one of the villains. I carried it myself and growled at Madiki all the way home.

Some heavy rain during the afternoon. According to my calculation, the King received, at least, five times as much as he gave away,⁵¹⁴ which must have paid him well for his singing.

Chop from the King, twice, this day.

⁵¹² Presumably a misunderstanding: perhaps what Kosoko said was that he was not fighting the British, but only Akitoye's supporters in Badagry.

⁵¹³ This charge is explicitly admitted by Fraser later (see p. 115); and cf. also his avowedly selective reading of the same letter on a second occasion, 7 Sept. 1851 (p. 108). The omission was probably of the last sentence of the letter, asking for information about Gezo's intentions, which was evidently the basis for the later accusation that Fraser was acting as a spy (see p. 146).

⁵¹⁴ At the Annual Customs of 1850 Forbes also observed that the king distributed in gifts much less than he received, 'about a halfpenny in the pound' (1851, ii, 173).

am. 7	73°	n.n.w. 1	Equally cloudy, all round a little wet falling
9	74.7	s.w. 1	d[itt]o d[itt]o d[itt]o
10	74.8	s.w. 3	Equally cloudy all round
11	75.2	w.s.w. 1	d[itt]o

7th [Sept.]—Sticks from Mayhoo and Av-vo-gar

Narwhey called before I was dressed, he called again and begged some brandy.

Chop from the King, quantity very small.

Most of these people take great pride, in their finger nails, which are of various lengths.⁵¹⁵ One old man, I noticed yesterday, had the nail of his little finger, left hand, nearly three inches long, and the next one nearly the same length, when besmearing himself with dust, he scraped with his hand, with his right, as the only means of preserving the appendage.

It is really a strange country; I sent my Croo boys, to Whydah, without the slightest fear of their being kidnapped and although [= despite] the unpleasantness which arose last night, about that letter, I slept as sound and felt as secure, as if I had been on the most friendly terms, with all hands.

Mayhoo, Av-vo-gar, Narwhey and two attendants, arrived: to talk King palaver and make book (which letter was given to Mr Consul Beecroft on the 22nd of Sept.),⁵¹⁶ after which Av-vo-gar asked where that letter was,⁵¹⁷ I told them in my room, he asked if I would read it to them, I said, yes and consequently read all that I considered I was justified in doing,⁵¹⁸ they expressed much obliged and said there would not have been all that palaver last night, if I had read it to the King. I explained to them, that I did not, I could not, read it last night, because it was dark, that I told them so, and no one ordered a light to be bought and the upshot was, my telling the King, only, what I remembered of it. At this juncture I was hurried outside, to receive some dash from the King, which I told them, they knew very well, it was contrary to my book, to receive or give presents. They said it was the King's pleasure. The present consisted of one country cloth, ten heads of cowries and a Keg (small) of rum. Then these worthies hurried off, contrary to custom, without a drink, although I reminded them of it.

On my return, I went to put my papers away, when I discovered I had been robbed of Obba Shoron's letter, which I had placed under my desk, to prevent

⁵¹⁵ Burton later noted that King Glele let his nails grow to 'mandarin-length', explaining that 'the African king must show he is an eater of meat, not ... fruits and vegetables' (1864, i, 233–4). More likely, long nails were a sign that a person was exempt from manual labour.

⁵¹⁶ i.e. when Fraser visited him at Fernando Po (cf. below, p. 113). For the text of this letter, see Appendix 2, no. 15; it basically blamed Abeokuta for the origin of its war with Dahomey.

⁵¹⁷ i.e. the letter from *Basorun* Somoye of Abeokuta.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. above, p. 107, with n. 513.

it blowing away.⁵¹⁹ No one had been in the place except themselves, five in number, for they were very particular in driving all my boys out of the place, before the palaver commenced. I mounted my full dress coat sword and cocked hat, hurried off to the King, who was in his usual seat; women were parading round and round with bags of Indian corn, yams &c, innumerable (three or four hundred) which had been dashed to him. On the way they wanted to get me into Mayhoo's house, that would never do. I was for the King. I put myself, contrary to ordinary custom, in a position that he might see me. I was taken forward, made me bow; then they wanted me to be seated as a spectator. I told them no, I did not come to sit. Umbrella, table, bottles, glasses &c were produced almost instantly. Two or three messages were carried to and fro and at last, the King came and said 'book no lost, I will find it for you'—without my asking about it. Showing he was cognisant of what had taken place. I told him they had no business to steal it, that no one had been in the place, but those he sent and they must have done it! During this time Narwhey and Mayhoo arrived. The King repeated it should be found. Narwhey was ordered off. King and I parted without shaking hands. Narwhey walked me home. When he got into the yard, I asked him what he was going to do? He said he was going to stop all my people.⁵²⁰ I told him it was useless trying to make a fool of me, that the letter was taken away and he knew it. At which he walked off.

Before parting from the King, I told him I should leave, that I would not remain another day, in a place where I was so grossly insulted.

Ordered the King's presents, back into the yard and told Madiki to return them. He said it was impossible. I told him they should not go away with me.

Ordered my boys to pack up; my carriers to start, this day.

There has been plenty of time, ere this, to copy that letter, even by a person not reading English.

[attached] Is a copy of Obba Shoron's letter as near as memory will serve.⁵²¹

Narwhey was in and out of the yard, several times, during the afternoon and I told him, I should not wait for anyone; when I was ready, I should leave, for I would not stop, in a place, where I was robbed by authority.

About five p.m. tired of waiting, to see my people off, and thinking perhaps there was some trick, knowing I must walk through the gate and past the Fetish place,⁵²² I started on foot, telling my people to follow quickly. I had been on the road, alone, about half an hour, when three or four breathless

⁵¹⁹The King later suggested that Fraser himself had destroyed the letter: see Lieut. T. G. Forbes' Journal in Appendix 3, no. 9, entry for 2 March 1852, pp. 258–9.

⁵²⁰i.e. arrest them, on suspicion of the theft.

⁵²¹See Appendix 2, no. 10.

⁵²²Cf. above, pp. 60–1.

men overtook me and desired I would return, that the King wanted to see me. I desired them to go back and tell the King, that I had been robbed by his own people, of my Queen's property, that I no longer wore the coat, she gave me, until I get English book, That, palaver about Queen's book now belonged to the Queen and King, and he must settle with her, that I should not return to please anyone. One of the men who arrived, being one of my attendants and attached to the Fort, Majerrika, he bowed, begged, howled, cried, rolled on the ground, entreating me to return, saying, 'You no go back, vex King'; 'No good palaver'; 'King want to see you'; 'Me, no tell lie'; 'Me, tell you proper palaver'; 'Naughty boy'; and in this way he followed an[d] annoyed me, for an hour, although I threatened him, with all sorts of things. A second party came after me, I gave them the same answer, as the first lot. Majerrika told, everyone he met on the road, his troubles; they all begged me to return; one man laid down, across my path and kissed the dust. At length I got enraged, at my man's importunities and flicked my handkerchief at him, which made him run, and the other people laugh; they told all the people on the road, how the white man had frightened him. I now had a little peace, it was beautiful moonlight. I reached Cannah at a quarter past seven p.m.

My people began to arrive at eight p.m.

I have very imperfectly described the whole scene of today, in consequence of the excitement it kept me in.

a.m. [= p.m.?] 10 75° calm cloudy all round, alike.

8th [Sept.]—Started from Cannah at 6 a.m. and arrived at Ahguimmay at a quarter to nine a.m.

11 am. Preparing to pass the swamp.

11.50 Entered the swamp, and walked to Woodroomey, in the centre, at which place arrived at twenty minutes past one p.m.

At two ten p.m. started again and walked to Harkpay, where I arrived at three hours forty minutes, p.m.

Swamp quite dry.

In passing through the latter part of the swamp, I was met by a messenger, with a letter from Whydah, telling me that an English man of war Barque (Atholl) was in the roads, firing guns as a signal for a canoe, but, unfortunately, there was not any canoeman at Whydah. Mustered my hammockmen, and promised them some extra pay if they would fetch Whydah on the morrow.

Had a fowl, killed and boiled, that, with a bottle of brandy, was to form my stock of provisions.

Left Harkpay at six p.m. arrived at Harlardah at eleven, thirty, p.m. rested for the night, most part beautiful starlight.

9th [Sept.] At three a.m. my people roused me, saying they were ready, but rain coming on, waited until five. Ate the remains of my fowl, having commenced it last night, and with a calabash of brandy and water, laid a foundation for the day.

Six a.m. started; my men began to flag, we did not proceed so rapidly as last night. The men stopped to rest at every station.

Remained some time at Toree, I walked until we came to a small swamp(?) near Sav-vee; at this place we made a lengthened stay and arrived at Whydah, about four p.m., where I found two bags of newspapers and letters; with a note stating that the Portuguese schooner, in the roads, had sent them on shore; that the Barque was the 'Atholl'. At this time she was under weigh, heading to windward.⁵²³

Received a letter from Mr Hutton.⁵²⁴

10th [Sept.] H.M. St. Bloodhound arrived.

Weather fine.

11th [Sept.]—Wrote a letter to Obba Shoron, (the copy is with Mr Consul Beecroft) and enclosed it to the Rev. Mr Gollmer.⁵²⁵

One p.m. on board H.M.St. 'Bloodhound, with my two Croo Boys, to one of whom, secretly, I entrusted the before mentioned letter.

Senior Officer's vessel 'Sampson' excepted [= expected], remained on board, to see Capt. Jones,⁵²⁶ in preference to risking another journey through the surf.

Weather fine.

14th [Sept.] H.M.S. 'Flying Fish', Commander Patey, hove to with senior officer's orders.

'Sampson' was at Princes Island;⁵²⁷ 'Bloodhound' to join her there; 'Flying Fish, leaves for same place, on Saturday; 'Harlequin' ordered to Fernando Po. There will, only, be two cruisers, left in the Bight. What a capital chance for the slavers.

'Hound' gone to the south, with Commodore's mail. Niger, gone to Sierra Leone, for mails.

⁵²³ i.e. west.

⁵²⁴ See Appendix 2, no. 16. This line illegible in ms., at bottom of page: supplied from printed version in HCPP.

⁵²⁵ See Appendix 2, no. 17, reporting the loss of Basorun's letter at Abomey, and warning him to expect an attack from Dahomey.

⁵²⁶ Capt. L. T. Jones, commanding the *Sampson*.

⁵²⁷ i.e. Principe.

Volcano arrived with Provisions, she takes the Harlequin's place off Badagry.

It appears there has been an expedition to Abomey, concocted, that Com[mander] Wilmot, is to be the principal, and the 'Harlequin' is to fetch Mr Beecroft to join him.⁵²⁸ Is this part and parcel of the despatch he wrote to the King[?] Too many cooks, &c.⁵²⁹ Let Commander Wilmot attend to his Brig, I will attend to the King and Kingdom of Dahomey. Should the expedition come of[f], I had better resign, for I shall do no good, hereafter, as every word I have uttered will become a falsehood. Resolved to see Consul Beecroft and relate to him all that I have said and done, that he may have a clearer notion of how things stand.⁵³⁰

Wrote a letter to Lieut. Patey, requesting a passage.⁵³¹

Joined the 'Volcano'.

15th [Sept.]—Arrived off Badagry.

Joined the Harlequin. A Tornado from the SE.

16th [Sept.] Left Badagry. Volcano in company. Com[mander] Wilmot says Mr Prior, Mr Hutton's agent at Whydah, is at Lagos, and in jeopardy. Should not an attempt be made to save him?⁵³²

French steamer 'Espadong [= Espadon]' with English mails, from H.M.S. Jackal.

A little rain in the morning. Cloudy all day. Night fine.

17th [Sept.] Much rain during the night.

Volcano in sight. Picked up cutter and proceeded. Poor Prior.

21st [Sept.] Arrived at Clarence⁵³³ at five p.m.

⁵²⁸ See HCPP, *Reduction of Lagos*, incls 6, 14, in no. 40, Bruce to Wilmot, Ascension, 28 June 1851, and to Beecroft, same date, suggesting a mission by Beecroft and Wilmot to Dahomey, with a view to concluding a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade. This was conceived as a response to Gezo's letter requesting the sending of 'a soldier with a good head' (see Appendix 2, no. 3), which Fraser himself had transmitted to the local naval officers.

⁵²⁹ Alluding to the proverb, 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'.

⁵³⁰ This paragraph omitted in HCPP version.

⁵³¹ i.e. to Fernando Po, to see Beecroft.

⁵³² Cf. HCPP, *Reduction of Lagos*, incl. 2 in no. 60, Capt. Jones to Bruce, off Porto-Novo, 6 Oct. 1851, which reports the embarkation of slaves in the *Relampago*, from Lagos (cf. TASTD, no. 4786), and that 'an English subject who was on shore at Lagos, and engaged to take a passage in the "Token", was detained on shore, and the vessel thereby detained the two days preceding and following the sailing of the "Relampago" and not permitted to embark'.

⁵³³ On Fernando Po, the site of the British Consulate.

22nd [Sept.] Breakfasted with Mr Consul Beecroft and related my story. Handed him the King of Dahomey's letter to the Queen of England and also a copy of my letter to Obba Shoron.

23rd [Sept.] Mr Consul Beecroft, has annulled the proposed expedition.⁵³⁴

There is some pleasure in serving under a man who will not be biased. My trip has not been fruitless;⁵³⁵ I can now go on with fresh spirit.⁵³⁶

24th [Sept.] Sailed for Whydah.⁵³⁷

Trusting that all inaccuracies may be excused.

Appendix

The Fort

The sooner this is occupied, by soldiers, (say one hundred, without white men, if possible) the better.

The fatigue party would keep it in repair.

The King and everyone, consider, the fort, English town and the people therein, besides a portion of the beach, as belonging to the English Government.

There are also many people from Sierra Leone, Accra and Cape Coast.

It will therefore be evident, that we have here, more ground and people than Cape Coast itself.

The late rains⁵³⁸ have reduced the Fort to a fearful state of dilapidation, the thatch is off the walls and sheds, the roofs of some of the latter have fallen in, the roof of the house leaks frightfully, the consequence is the ceilings are tumbling down.

Windows there are not any, which is a great inconvenience and does not tend either to comfort or healthiness; the shutters blinds and doors, are almost used up; the locks and bolts are so far gone, as to be mere[ly] nominal.

Mr Hutton has lately purchased a new and smaller house in town.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁴ i.e. the proposed mission to Abomey, alluded to earlier (p. 112).

⁵³⁵ i.e. his trip to Fernando Po, to consult with Beecroft (not his mission to Abomey, which had indeed proved 'fruitless').

⁵³⁶ This day's entry omitted in the version printed in the HCPP.

⁵³⁷ He sailed again on the *Harlequin* (HCPP, *Reduction of Lagos*, no. 48, Beecroft to Palmerston, Clarence, 4 Oct. 1851), arriving back at Ouidah on 15 Oct. 1851.

⁵³⁸ Since Fraser's journal was written up after his return to Ouidah on 15 Oct. 1851, this probably refers to the later/lesser rains, normally in Oct.–Nov., rather than to the main rainy season (May–July).

⁵³⁹ Thereby vacating the English fort for Fraser's use. Hutton was now in Ouidah (cf. Appendix 2, no. 16). The house which he purchased was presumably 'Boaventura's house', as noted in p. 117.

Although I had a long palaver, with the King, Av-vo-gar &c, at Abomey, as related in my notes, about putting the place in order,⁵⁴⁰ there has not been anything done, nor do I think they intend.

The sight [= site] is good, although now much blocked in by houses, which old De Souza built with a perfect understanding that if the English again occupied it, they were to be pulled down.⁵⁴¹

Should it be determined to occupy this place with soldiers, the addition of the Portuguese and French Forts would be valuable and give us much more extent and power. The French Fort has only a merchant in it and the Portuguese one, cannot be said, to be occupied I do not suppose those Governments place any value on them.⁵⁴²

It is absolutely necessary to establish signals, between the Fort and the men of War, with this view I purchased the only flags, I could find, and procured a copy of Wilmot's signals from H.M.S. Bloodhound, but these are not sufficient. A complete set of large flags, a proper locker to keep them in and at least one good telescope are wanting, before this arrangement can be completed.

A new and loftier flag staff, is wanted.

Domingo has offered his house, furniture, grounds, and beach sheds, all of which are very extensive, for £1500.⁵⁴³

Another large house and grounds, newly erected, is now offered for £1200. I believe the furniture is included.

I have had applications from the King, Cabooceers and Sierra Leone people, asking for a man, to learn children, to make book.

The only white men, at Whydah, are myself,⁵⁴⁴ two Frenchmen,⁵⁴⁵ three Portuguese⁵⁴⁶ and one from Madeira,⁵⁴⁷ there are some five or six mulattoes of

⁵⁴⁰ On 6 Sept. 1851 (p. 106).

⁵⁴¹ The main de Souza compound is a short distance from the fort, to the SW; the reference here may be to Kindji, immediately across the main street from the fort, which was allocated to Ignacio de Souza in the division of the first Chacha's property in 1849 (Law 2004a, 215).

⁵⁴² This judgement was overoptimistic. In fact, the French government had authorized the reoccupation of the former French fort by the merchant firm of Régis; the Portuguese fort had been subject to neglect since its reoccupation in 1844, but the link was revived later in 1851 (as noted below, p. 135).

⁵⁴³ Presumably, this reflects Martins' intention (not in the event fulfilled) to return to Brazil, noted in p. 42.

⁵⁴⁴ Fraser evidently regards himself as the only British 'white man' in Whydah; he therefore does not include Hutton's agents, presumably because these were 'mulattoes'.

⁵⁴⁵ The agents of the firm of Régis, occupying the French fort.

⁵⁴⁶ Presumably these included officers of the Portuguese fort, and perhaps one or more merchants.

⁵⁴⁷ The man from Madeira was Jacinto Joaquim Rodrigues, referred to subsequently as 'Jacinto' and 'Rodriguez'.

Portuguese(?) extraction. The De Souza's, Domingo and all the known men, are of Brazilian origin, and but one degree, removed from the negroes; it is a misnomer calling them Portuguese.⁵⁴⁸

My reception, here, may be judged, from the fact that I have not received a visit from a Frenchman or Portuguese, nor from any of the De Souza's, Domingo or other of that class, nor from the Av-vo-gar, perhaps his shyness arises from the Obba Shoron affair. But few of the Sierra Leone people have called.

No English merchant captain, although some have been on shore, has thought proper to call.

As for the vessels, that anchor in the Roads, English or otherwise, I have no means of ascertaining their names, destination trade or other particulars.

A colored man who can read and write stationed on the beach, would be able to furnish all particulars.

Domingo has not thought proper to acknowledge in any way, the letter I addressed to him respecting Dassalu.⁵⁴⁹

These people, when they fancy they have the upper hand; there is no limit to their tyranny; make them feel the contrary and they are the most submissive; there is no medium.

The abstracting of Obba Shoron's letter, I look upon as a more serious matter, then [= than] others may do.

The tenor of the letter, is such, as to enrage the King against Badagry, AbbeoKuta and myself. He will not only look upon me as a spy and an enemy of Dahomey, but as practising deception upon him, by not reading that portion which interested him most and, of course, was not intended for him to know.⁵⁵⁰

I believe the letter had been opened and the King knew the contents before I saw it.

From the following I believe the Av-vo-gar, was the one who stole it. When my Accra servant,⁵⁵¹ saw me in the yard, he thought it was time to clear away, and went into the room for that purpose, he found the Av-vo-gar, there, alone, who immediately gave him a box on the ears and turned him out again. If it is passed over, they will think and with some reason, they may play, not only with me but every Englishman, as they please. They will naturally say, 'the English talk; look at the Commodore's threat, he no come, that proves they are afraid of us.'⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁸ The de Souzas were the children of African mothers; but there is no evidence that Martins was of racially mixed ancestry.

⁵⁴⁹ See above, p. 79.

⁵⁵⁰ See above, p. 107, with n. 513.

⁵⁵¹ i.e. Coco (cf. p. 32).

⁵⁵² Cf. p. 88, with n. 437.

The Slave trade, is almost extinct, there is not a man amongst them, unless it be Domingo, who has any money, and it cannot be carried on without.

The system which they say is now much practised, is as follows:—one or more men send slaves on board, and trust to the honor of the Captain, for returns.

I need hardly say, there are very few, if any, with honor at all, so the shippers are victimized. I heard a man say, for the last lot that he shipped, his return was one doubloon.⁵⁵³

I firmly believe that every sole [= soul], in this place, are slaves, in some sense or another,⁵⁵⁴ and I expect before long to prove, that I am one.

Every person, I employ canoemen, Hammockmen, carriers, men and women and boys are slaves.

What am I to do?

I cannot go on without people.⁵⁵⁵

It is only the escape of a vessel now and then, that keeps life in the traffic. It is astonishing to see what an effect it has; every sole for a time thinks he shall have a chance next.

The stationing of a few soldiers, say ten or twenty, at each trading place, and I have little [doubt] but what I could gain the consent of the natives, would put an end to the trade and we should at the same time command the lagoon

It is with much satisfaction, that I learn, there are postal arrangements in contemplation, for this part of the world,⁵⁵⁶ and the few persons I have had an opportunity of mentioning it to, hail it as a great boon.

Trusting I shall be pardoned for the following, the substance of which every person acquainted with the coast, between the Rivers Benin and Volta, will own the necessity of.

There are several months, in the year, say four, in which it is quite impossible for a canoe (boats cannot at any time) to pass through the surf for days together, and then only at a very great risk of life and property,⁵⁵⁷ to meet which I have the following

⁵⁵³ A gold coin, equivalent in value to \$16. Fraser may have misunderstood the remark, since \$16/1 doubloon was in fact the standard commission received by merchants per slave on sales at Ouidah (Law, 2004a, 145).

⁵⁵⁴ The population of Ouidah was indeed predominantly of slave status or descent, although European observers such as Fraser evidently used the term 'slave' loosely, to include pawns (held in temporary servitude as security for debt) and perhaps even free clients (cf. Law 2004a, 77–8).

⁵⁵⁵ Presumably, Fraser is anticipating criticism for employing slaves.

⁵⁵⁶ Alluding to the projected official steam packet service, for which the British government had lately issued a tender (see p. 124).

⁵⁵⁷ The landing at Ouidah was especially difficult during the main rainy season, between May–July.

A large hulk,⁵⁵⁸ properly secured, close outside the surf, facing that portion of the beach, which belongs to the Fort, would serve, in the first place, as a victualling store, for the cruizers, which every naval officer, I am sure will admit, as being preferable to carrying provisions, on their own deck, as is now done.

2ndly, It would not be impossible, to throw a light (perhaps rope) swing bridge from her, over the surf, to the beach, Thereby avoiding all risk of life and property, which is very considerable.

The mails might then be sent up and down, the lagoon, in perfect safety.

A small toll might be demanded, for each person, parcel or cask, passing.

2. 'Scraps from the daily memoranda of Mr Vice Consul Fraser'

[15 October–29 December 1851]⁵⁵⁹

[1851]⁵⁶⁰ **October 15.** The King of Dahomey, sent an order to Mr Hutton⁵⁶¹ for eight Dane guns.⁵⁶²

Arms folded across, when speaking, would in England, be considered an attitude of defiance, he[re] signifies 'I am your slave, my arms are bound'.

These people must have some idea of a resurrection, or at least a better place hereafter, they are so fond of saving property, in this world, where they are not permitted to enjoy it,⁵⁶³ they are buried in their own houses, their property with them, and slaves being killed to attend on their journey, tends to corroborate this idea.⁵⁶⁴

Upon the death of a master of a house, the building is obliged to be closed and none of the family allowed to cut their hair for twelve months. When Mr Hutton went to occupy Boaventura's house,⁵⁶⁵ he found it in this state, nor

⁵⁵⁸ i.e. a ship, moored permanently offshore, to serve as a warehouse: such hulks were commonly used in the trade on the Niger Delta (see Lynn 1997, 133).

⁵⁵⁹ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 306–325.

⁵⁶⁰ '1852' in ms., but clearly in error.

⁵⁶¹ Hutton was now at Ouidah: cf. his letter to Fraser of 9 Sept. 1851 (Appendix 2 no. 16), announcing that he intended to be at Ouidah within 10 days.

⁵⁶² i.e. long-barreled muskets.

⁵⁶³ Forbes remarks, of Dahomian merchants at Ouidah, that 'neither in their dress, nor in any outward appearance could they be judged wealthy', because 'such show would expose them to cupidity of the government' (1851, ii, 113).

⁵⁶⁴ The term 'resurrection' is evidently inappropriate; but the rest of the paragraph correctly conveys the Dahomian concept of the Afterlife, as a parallel place of existence, essentially similar to life in this world, as described e.g. by Forbes 1851, i, 170–1; Burton 1864, ii, 156–7.

⁵⁶⁵ This man had recently died (cf. p. 118): he is perhaps to be identified with 'Bonaventure Gomez da Silva', a merchant from Brazil, recalled as the founder of the Gomez family of Ouidah (Agbo 1959, 192). Presumably this was the house which Hutton had recently bought (see p. 113).

would they open the windows, until he took the Yer-vo-gar⁵⁶⁶ to do it, as the family said, they were fearful, if they did, the King would punish them, thinking they were rejoicing too soon, all the chairs were huddled into one room, upside down, and Mr H[utton] had much difficulty in persuading them to let him use them, they being fearful the deceased would sit upon them in the night, his spirit supposed to visit the premises nightly. This is the general belief.

The leaves of the castor oil plant, tied on the crown of the head, eight or nine thick, is an infallible remedy for febrile symptoms an[d] even in delirium. I have advised several to try it, it always succeeded.

October 22. I gave Madiki, my letter to Mr Duggan to forward;⁵⁶⁷ Narwey was sent for and a consultation held over it, unknown to me, as they thought. It is very pleasant to know, your letters are subject to a detainer, which is frequently the case. Old de Souza introduced this system of espiry⁵⁶⁸ and they continue to carry it out.

Narwey, is the oracle worker and according to Brown⁵⁶⁹ it has eighteen heads, the same number as Napoleon's Book of Fate.⁵⁷⁰

When we called upon Narwey, the other day, he was coming through his doorway, with a large dish, piled up, of palm oil and animal fat, which he gave to the Vultures (*Perenopteri*); there were at least one hundred waiting for their feast, if they refuse it, it augurs badly.⁵⁷¹

Boaventura is said to have made this fetish a short time before he died, it was refused.

⁵⁶⁶ Fraser henceforth adopts this alternative spelling.

⁵⁶⁷ W. Duggan, supercargo on the barque *Severn*, currently at 'Appi Vista' (Cotonou). Fraser's letter to him concerned complaints of non-payment of wages to Africans in his service: see 'Case of Richard Graves', p. 177–84.

⁵⁶⁸ i.e. spying.

⁵⁶⁹ i.e. Joseph Peter Brown, Hutton's interpreter (cf. p. 73).

⁵⁷⁰ A book of divination found among papers captured from the Emperor Napoleon in 1813, supposedly derived from an ancient Egyptian manuscript, which was actually based on 16 rather than 18 questions (the latter figure being perhaps miscopied). The local 'oracle' compared to it is presumably the system of Fa (Ifa) divination, which is likewise based on a division into 16 sections (as later described by Burton 1864, i, 330–5, who also makes the comparison with Napoleon's 'Book of Fate').

⁵⁷¹ Probably referring to offerings of food placed at shrines of the *vodun* Legba, outside the entrances to households, which were commonly eaten by vultures, as noted later by Burton (1864, i, 79–80). Because of this habit of eating sacrificial offerings, vultures were thought to serve as intermediaries between men and gods (Falcon 1970, 73). Since Legba was thought to control an individual's good or bad fortune, their refusal to eat offerings to him may well have been considered a bad omen.

Oct. 24. Narwhey Batten's funeral procession passed at 10.30 am.⁵⁷² First came four men firing muskets, then an empty hammock, followed by some half dozen mulattoes, a coffin covered with a fancy cloth, something like a Union Jack borne by six men, there was a suit of clothes upon the coffin; over the head of the coffin were held three umbrellas; then came the tom-toms and about two hundred persons, mostly women, singing (anything but a lamentation) and some few dancing; chairs were also carried.

12.50 pm. The funeral procession repassed. The singing was much louder.

Singing, dancing and firing of muskets, continues night and day, at the outer gate of the deceased's house, as long as they can raise supplies. Mr Hutton gave them a puncheon of rum.

Sent to Yer-vo-gan a bottle of brandy, which he begged at Abomey,⁵⁷³ in return I got two cocoa-nuts [= coconuts].

Oct. 25. It is said, the Yer-vo-gan has locked up Narwhey Batten's house, until the real successor arrives, a boy now at school, at Cape Coast, messengers were started forthwith.

A canoe and cargo, belonging to Mr Hutton, and men from Ahgwey, have been seized on the Lagoon, by the people of ('Grigwee?') a town opposite Little Popoe.⁵⁷⁴ It appears that some man, belonging to the town, has been seized and sold, by whom it was uncertain, and these people had determined to seize the first canoe that passed.⁵⁷⁵

The canoe and cargo, is British property, but I cannot assist, I have no resources. Mr Hutton has applied to the Yer-vo-gan.

Old De Souza had one hundred and twelve children.⁵⁷⁶

If a black child cries, they say it is a sure sign, that the father will be sold; but if it laughs, the mother will be sold.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² Cf. further reference to this man's house at Ouidah, and his nephew and heir who was currently at school at Cape Coast, below, this page. Perhaps the same as a 'Mr Batten' who was employed in Hutton's factory at Badagry earlier in 1851 (Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 298–9, 309), although this man signed his name as 'J. Batten' in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 7 in no. 160, British Residents at Badagry to Capt. Foote, 16 June 1851).

⁵⁷³ See p. 73.

⁵⁷⁴ Glidji, the seat of the King of Genyi, to which Little Popo belonged. In ms. 'Little' is crossed out and corrected to 'Grand'; but the original text is correct, 'Grand-Popo' being a distinct place, 25 km further east (cf. p. 149).

⁵⁷⁵ A reference to the practice of 'panyarring', i.e. the seizure of persons (or goods) as hostages for the recovery of others (or payment of compensation); see Law 1994a, 62–3.

⁵⁷⁶ De Souza himself, in 1847, said that he had 62 children (Ridgway 1847, 195). The family history (de Souza 1992, 109) lists 63 children attested in surviving baptismal records.

⁵⁷⁷ Not corroborated elsewhere: but on the face of it, interesting evidence of the pervasiveness of popular fears of enslavement.

The Fetish women and their band, are parading the town daily.⁵⁷⁸ As they pass, the people young and old, go on their hands and knees, and they, the fetish women, touch them formally, with the tips of the four fingers of the right hand, something after the manner in which a Roman Catholic Priest, gives his blessing.⁵⁷⁹

Oct. 29. Two of the men, that were seized in Mr Hutton's canoe (Oct. 25) have been sold.

My canoemen, came to me in a fright, thinking they would be seized in their turn, in this town, asked for knives to protect themselves with, this I refused and assured them they were safe while in my employ.

During dinner Narwhey came with seven sticks and fourteen little Keada girls,⁵⁸⁰ from four to five years old, as a present to Mr Hutton, being according to slave custom,⁵⁸¹ to give the master of each vessel, two for himself.⁵⁸² Mr H[utton] had seven vessels at anchor, in the roads, a week or two since, processions were formed at the request of the Yer-vo-gan &c. Mr H[utton], his son, a boy about four years old,⁵⁸³ and five of his Agents, were made to represent the said Captains, received as such, and an account forwarded to the King.⁵⁸⁴

Old de Souza used to compare Duncan to July and August put together, they being the two months following each other, with thirty one days each.⁵⁸⁵

November 1. My Accra boy,⁵⁸⁶ had to pay three strings, because a fetish snake, passed over his box, during the night.

Nov. 2. Madiki tells me, the [men] captured in Mr Hutton's canoe, have arrived, they cost one hundred and twenty heads each, for their redemption.

⁵⁷⁸ It is not clear what ceremony this is: the main Ouidah 'fetish fetes' took place in Dec.–Jan. (Burton 1864, I, 88).

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Forbes 1851, ii, 4, 'As they pass, the people prostrate themselves . . . each fetish man places his hand on the heads of the prostrate blacks, and mutters a benediction'.

⁵⁸⁰ i.e. from Okeodan, which had been attacked and destroyed by Dahomey in 1849 (cf. Appendix 2, no.15).

⁵⁸¹ i.e. in the slave trade.

⁵⁸² Cf. Law 2004a, 129.

⁵⁸³ Evidently different from Calvert Hutton, mentioned later in the Journal (p. 131), who was an adult.

⁵⁸⁴ Referring to the formal ceremony of welcome, at the 'Captains' Tree' south of Ouidah, described by Fraser earlier (p. 35).

⁵⁸⁵ Presumably an allusion to Duncan's physical size: he was 6 feet 3 inches tall (O'Connor 2006, 73). Burton later reported that Duncan was given in Dahomey the nickname of 'Ho-ho', meaning 'the tall man' (1864, ii, 170, with n.); but in fact Fon *hoho* means 'twin'.

⁵⁸⁶ i.e. Coco (cf. p. 32).

A Cape Coast man, one of Mr Hutton's petty traders, became embarrassed⁵⁸⁷ and resolved to put an end to his existence; he had three wives and two children, he told them they must go with him, to which they quietly, as is usual, consented. In one of the rooms of his house, he rigged what he considered a proper affair and hung one wife, while the other two and children, were present, when dead he cut her down and laid her out properly on the floor, hung the second, served her the same way, then the third, afterwards the children one after another, all five being laid side by side, a girl, I suppose a slave, endeavoured to make an outcry, he pushed upon and attempted to kill her, but her screams brought some in, he shot himself.

A French Factor, some short time since, was fined two hundred dollars, for attempting to broach one of Old de Souza's slave girls.

It is said there is very little venereal disease, here, and that only amongst the lowest.

If a man goes with another's wife or one of his girls, both man and women, become the King's prisoners and are taken to Abomey in chains. Death I believe is the punishment.⁵⁸⁸ What are considered as white men, escape with a fine.

Nov. 4. 8.30 am. There is a tornado coming on, the people are exceedingly clamorous, as they hurry off for shelter, while the vultures (Perenopteris) are noiselessly taking their perch on the tops of the trees.

9 am. Heavy rain and thunder. All shutters closed, place in darkness—pleasant, very.

Nov. 5. H.M.S. Sampson arrived. She sent on shore, six men, from the crew of one of her prizes.⁵⁸⁹

Received the following from 'Sampson'

Copy

H.M.S. Sampson
Oct. 29 1851
Badagry

Sir,

I am employed on an important mission to Abeohkeutah.

2. It is important that the claims I make on His Majesty the King of Dahomey, in the event of his succeeding in the ensuing War, should be laid before His Majesty by some trustworthy person, should it not be convenient for you to deliver them in person.

⁵⁸⁷ i.e. indebted.

⁵⁸⁸ Compare Forbes 1851, i, 26, who says that adultery with the wife of the king or 'a high officer' was punished by death, but offenders 'of lower rank' were sold as slaves.

⁵⁸⁹ i.e. a captured slave ship.

3. I have to request you will be pleased to cause the enclosed letter to be read to His Majesty by some certain and interested person, as by misconstruction it might become a dangerous instrument if possessed by any Slave Merchant.⁵⁹⁰

I am Sir
Your obedient Servant
(signed) F. E. Forbes.

Comm[ander] R[oyal] N[avy].⁵⁹¹
on a Mission to Abeahkeutah

[To] Louis Frazer, Esq.
H.M. Consul,
Whydah

P.S. Of course you are aware that “delay is dangerous”.

Copy. To Gezo, King of Dahomey from F. E. Forbes R.N.

May it please your Majesty

Your Majesty is aware of the desire of the Queen of England to extend and protect missionary labour in Abbeokutah.

Your Majesty is aware that on going to war on Abbeokutah you are going to war on British Subjects resident there.

I am ordered to proceed to Abbeeah Keutah to protect British life and property.⁵⁹²

I shall be ready to meet any messenger from your Majesty at AbbeaKutah and to visit Abomey to arrange a treaty should your Majesty send the requisite protection to AbbeahKeutah.

I shall hoist the British Flag at AbbeahKeutah and proclaim my house a sanctuary so that should your Majesty gain the war, your officers will be aware of the position of H.M. subjects, in whose welfare I shall not fail to interest myself.

I am with all due submission to your Majesty

(signed) F. E. Forbes

Com[mander] R.N.

Emp[loye]d on a special mission to AbbeahKeutah.

Sent Madiki to Yer-vo-gar, to say I had received a letter of great importance, for the King, which I must deliver and read out myself, that he might send a messenger, forthwith, and I must have people, on the morrow, that could convey me in two days.

⁵⁹⁰ Presumably, because the British alliance with Abeokuta could reasonably be represented as a hostile act against Dahomey.

⁵⁹¹ This is the same F. E. Forbes (then a Lieutenant) who had undertaken missions to Dahomey in 1849–50.

⁵⁹² This was being economical with the truth: Forbes in fact delivered munitions to Abeokuta, and gave instruction in artillery, in preparation for the expected attack from Dahomey: see HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1851/2, Class A, incl. in no. 191, incl. in no. 192: F. E. Forbes to Bruce, Abeokuta, 16 Nov. and 19 Dec. 1851.

The Yer-vo-gar sent Madiki for the letter saying, he would send it. I refused, repeating that I must deliver and read it at once, there must not be any delay.

He sent word back that, I must wait until the messenger returned from Abomey.

Note: This is not in accordance with the arrangements made Aug. 20.⁵⁹³

Told him, very well, you make delay, not me; suppose the King find that palaver come too late; that be your palaver not mine.

Nov. 6: A new fetish 'Dagwee' or Snake, commenced last night, and is going on with full vigour, this morning.⁵⁹⁴

At Appi,⁵⁹⁵ during the period of menstruation, the girls and women, are not allowed to reside in the town, until it is all over.⁵⁹⁶

Received a flying message, not to fire guns, as the King's men, were coming to fire for him, they are being stationed along the road from Cannah⁵⁹⁷ to the sea.⁵⁹⁸

Told Madiki, to let the Yer-vo-gar know, that [if he] wished those under the English flag, to attend to his orders, he the Yer-vo-gar must, if he does not think proper to come himself, at least, send his stick and Narwhey or some

⁵⁹³ i.e. that Fraser 'should have, at all times, free and uncontrolled permission to go to any and all places within [the King's] dominions or to send any person or persons in my name' (see p. 75).

⁵⁹⁴ Dangbe, the royal python, one of the principal vodun of Ouidah (cf. p. 34). In recent times the main Dangbe festival at Ouidah has been held in Jan., but there were other ceremonies for him at other times (Law 2004a, 94).

⁵⁹⁵ 'Appi' (= Ekpè) is a village on the coastal lagoon, 50 km east of Ouidah, but more probably the reference here is to 'Appi Vista' (cf. p. 133), i.e. Cotonou, further west.

⁵⁹⁶ This practice was not, as Fraser's wording implies, peculiar to 'Appi': an earlier account noted that in Dahomey women during menstruation were required to 'retire to a part of the town allocated for their reception' (Dalzel 1793, xix).

⁵⁹⁷ Implying that the King was now resident at Cana (cf. also pp. 126, 129, 131), whereas at the time of Fraser's visit to the royal court in 15 Aug.–7 Sept. 1851 he had been at Abomey; and he was still (or possibly, again) at Cana at the time of Fraser's second visit to the royal court, 3–14 Jan. 1852. Several European accounts note that the King resided part of the year at Cana, though the details are unclear. Generally, it is said that he resided at Cana early in the year, after the army's annual campaign, before proceeding to Abomey to celebrate the Annual Customs there (e.g. Brue 1845, 59; Forbes 1851, i, 17). Fraser's evidence shows that, at least in 1851/2, there was also a second period of residence at Cana, later in the year.

⁵⁹⁸ See description of this 'firing' in pp. 126–9: on 9–10 Nov., the firing went from Ouidah to Cana and back, on 13–14 Nov. in the reverse direction. This Custom was mentioned earlier by Forbes, who called it 'the Royal Salute' (as noted in p. 129, below), but Fraser offers the first eyewitness account of it. A version of it was also described by Burton, who witnessed it from the northern end, on 25 Jan. 1864, and refers to it as the 'Firing to Whydah'; Burton refers only to one 'firing', from Abomey to Ouidah and back, but perhaps there were other ceremonies which he did not witness (1864, ii, 253–64). Burton likewise noted that at Abomey 'no discharge of guns is allowed in the town' during this Custom (ibid., ii, 254).

well authorized person, to give the notice, otherwise I will not be answerable for them being attended to.

They want all the attention paid to them, that will not do. If I, go to the Yer-vo-gar's, he will keep me waiting an hour or more. When Narwey, came with the Yer-vo-gars stick, the other day, he would not wait, two minutes. I told Yer-vo-gar of it.

My washerwoman, from Sierra Leone,⁵⁹⁹ said to me this morning. What? you come to fetish country and no want fetish? Do you want to go to Hell

Saw of copy of Tender for Screw Steam Vessels for mail service from England to the Bights &c.⁶⁰⁰

The skulls which decorate the walls around the King's house at Abomey,⁶⁰¹ are said to be those of thieves and murderers, not victims.⁶⁰²

Are the people improving by this law? And so account for the many vacancies noticed?⁶⁰³

Speaking of the Yer-vo-gar infringing the rule laid down, when I was at Abomey, 'that I should at all times be permitted to visit the King, without detention' I suggested he, the King, was engaged [in] making sacrifices and did not want white men? Brown nodded assent.

Nov. 7. Izay, one of Mr Hutton's domestic blacks, made the following statement to me, officially. At 4 p,m Tuesday (Nov. 4/[18]51) I left Ahgwey, in a canoe, belonging to Mr Hutton, with three canoemen, natives of English town, Ahgwey,⁶⁰⁴ together with a messenger from Accra? eighteen boxes and casks, by Lagoon; about the middle of the night we came to a place called 'Plar'⁶⁰⁵ and the people detained us there, about two hours. They seized all the things. I told them they belonged to Mr Hutton; and they said I must give them pay, before they allow them to pass. I say no! I tell the people, that Mr Hutton pay the King of Dahomey; they said it was no matter, whether Mr Hutton pay the

⁵⁹⁹Duncan (1847, i, 187), noted of the females among the Sierra Leonian settlers at Ouidah that 'Several of them are also engaged in washing, which they obtain from European slave-agents'.

⁶⁰⁰The tender was put out by the British government; the contract was awarded to the African Steam Ship Co. of London (later of Liverpool), which began the mail service to West Africa in Sept. 1852 (Lynn 1997, 105, 107).

⁶⁰¹Several European visitors to Abomey in this period reported that the palace walls were mounted with skulls: e.g. Freeman 1844, 268; Brue 1845, 60; Forbes 1851, i, 75; ii, 9–10.

⁶⁰²King Gezo sometimes claimed that he sacrificed only 'criminals': e.g. HCPP, *Despatches from the Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast*, incl. in no. 2, Cruickshank's Report, p.19.

⁶⁰³i.e. gaps in the lines of skulls. Forbes in 1849 (1851, i, 75) also noticed that some of the heads had fallen down and were 'not replaced'.

⁶⁰⁴Agoué was divided into two major sections, 'English Town' and 'Portuguese Town' (Strickrodt 2003, 210–17).

⁶⁰⁵Pla, the indigenous name of Grand-Popo, situated between Agoué and Ouidah.

King of Dahomey or not.⁶⁰⁶ They say I must give them a book to take them to Aghwey to get pay. I give them my country cloth.

This is the way the people are constantly served, the Lagoon is free.⁶⁰⁷ This is the second case within a week or so.⁶⁰⁸

About one hundred of the King's armed men, have passed towards the beach. It is said they are stationing men, to fire from Cannah to the sea, and back.

More processions of armed men.

10 pm. Some black fellow, speaking tolerable English, with two attendants, managed to pass the gates, came up the ladder, asked to see the English Consul. I told him it was not a proper time to come into any one's house and told him to call on the morrow. He was half drunk. He began to be abusive, so I turned him out. As he went away, he said 'this house, my house, don't care a damn'.

Very pleasant to be subject to visits from these half caste Brazilians, knives and all, for I have only three bits of black boys about me, and they would not be of any assistance.

Nov. 8, 9 am. Told Madiki to go to the Yer-vo-gar and say I wanted to see him, for which purpose I should be ready, in an hour's time.

I wished to tell him, as I had not heard from him or the King, it was absolutely necessary for me to start for Abomey, without further delay.

The Yer-vo-gar sent word to say he was too busy, to see me, as he must dance for the King.

12 am. A boy has come for Mr Hutton, saying the Yer-vo-gar is at his, Mr Hutton's house waiting to see him.

This does not agree with the message he sent me. What does it all mean?

Narwey has just been here. Asked him what he wanted. His answer was 'To see you'. Enquired why he had not called before? He said 'I be head man for all this place, you no give me cowries, cloth, brandy nor rum, why I come to see you?'

This shows that my conjectures have been correct. Presents !! Presents !!

I asked him, if he thought, the Queen of England sent me here, to find all man, chop? all man, cloth? all man, rum?

He shrugged his shoulders.

I told him Yer-vo-gar tell me, he too busy, to see me for Queen palavers (Forbes' letter) but he not too busy for go see Mr Hutton.

⁶⁰⁶ Grand-Popo was beyond the limits of Dahomian rule; as made clear in the statement from Gezo reported later, see p. 154.

⁶⁰⁷ This is a false assumption by Fraser; the existence of the toll-station at Grand-Popo was noted earlier by Duncan (1847, i, 110–11).

⁶⁰⁸ Following the earlier instance reported on 25 Oct. 1851 (p. 119).

The Yer-vo-gar did not go to Mr Hutton's today, for nothing. He procured a puncheon of Rum. It may be put down to his account, but it will never be paid.

Narwehy tried to get another, but it did not succeed.

The King sent a message to Mr Hutton, to say he was going to make a large white man's table (dinner)⁶⁰⁹ and also water the graves of his forefathers, at Cannah.⁶¹⁰ More slaughter? He did not invite Mr H[utton] but the stick remained for the day, and he had to have a banquet upon imagination.

Nov. 9. Narwehy called with Yer-vo-gar's stick and compliments, because he said, it was Sunday.

A Dahomian flag is flying at Sig[nor] Isidore's. About 10 am a fire of muskets ran down to the beach, there, it sounded [as] if two large guns went off (since I have ascertained there are two guns on the beach), then the fire of musketry returned, and would be continued on to Cannah. The men appear to be stationed every fifty yards.⁶¹¹

This was the fire from Cannah to the beach and back.

Nov. 10. The firing commenced at 8, am on the beach and returned at 8.52 am, having travelled to Cannah and back in fifty two minutes.⁶¹²

A party, singing, carrying something on a tray, covered with a cloth, appear to have left for Cannah.⁶¹³

This will be in all probability some offering, or dash, for the King, from the Cha-Cha.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. p. 129. Burton's account of the 'Firing to Whydah' (1864, ii, 261–2) also includes a ceremony of 'spreading a table'.

⁶¹⁰ 'Watering the graves' (in Fon, *sin kòn ny'àyí*, 'pouring water on the earth') was a euphemism for shedding the blood of sacrificial victims, and usually referred to human sacrifices at the royal graves which concluded the main 'Annual Customs', as witnessed by Forbes in June 1850 (1851, ii, 86–92, 128–74). But there were also similar ceremonies at other times: e.g. Burton refers to 'watering' ceremonies between 9–19 Jan. 1864, following the later 'So-sin' custom (1864, ii, 167–76), and also to a ceremony on 31 Jan., following the 'Firing' Custom, which involved 2 human victims who were 'offered up (officially)' to the late King Gezo, but in fact 'kept alive to sweep [his] grave' (ibid., ii, 24, n.). The royal graves were actually located at Abomey, but sacrifices were also offered to kings at the various palaces which they inhabited during their lifetimes. Bouet earlier in 1851 saw 'tombs' of kings located inside the King's palace at Cana (1852, 42, 74), but these were presumably symbolic cenotaphs.

⁶¹¹ Burton 1864, ii, 253, gives the intervals as 200–300 yards.

⁶¹² Cf. p. 129, reporting subsequent 'firings' as taking only 44 and 40 minutes. Burton later observed that the firing should take half an hour, but the one he witnessed in 1864 took an hour and a half (1864, ii, 259–60).

⁶¹³ Burton also refers to 'a blue bag' which was delivered to the King 'as a trophy from Whydah' (1864, ii, 260).

There is some ceremony about a bottle of sea water, going to the King;⁶¹⁴ and, another something about a woman, being hurried down to the sea, very rapidly, and back.⁶¹⁵

I find it extremely difficult to get good information, but time will tell.

Mr Hutton explains all my petty troubles as follows:—the Yer-vo-gar told him, he was sure, I came prejudiced against them, in consequence of that book Forbes make, 'he speak plenty of bad thing, he make us rogue'.

There may be some truth in this, only the shoe is on the other foot. It will be remembered that Domingo sent that book, first, to the King, of course, with remarks, and people do not like to see their names in print, unless it is very flattering.⁶¹⁶

Told Madiki to get a messenger for Abomey.⁶¹⁷

Madiki says he has told the headman (Majerrika) and he says, there is not one in the town.

I suppose they think, I intend sending a complaint, to the King, of my detention. It is only a note to Brown, who is there on Mr Hutton's account.⁶¹⁸

Told Madiki to go to Yer-vo-gar, about it.

Majerrika and two headmen, as they call themselves, came with a messenger.

Gave the messenger Brown's letter, and started him.

The Yer-vo-gar went, early yesterday morning, to Mr Hutton, to tell him a messenger has arrived, saying that Kosoko, had made bad palaver and the English had broke Lagos.⁶¹⁹

Nov. 11. Madiki says the Yer-vo-gar, is too busy to see me.

Today the De Souzas give a return dinner to the King, innumerable calabashes of food are prepared and sent to Dahomey. What a contrast !!!

The Mayhoo has the credit of being a great scoundrel.

⁶¹⁴In recent times, the collection of water from the sea has been a feature of a ceremony at Ouidah in honour of Hu, the god of the sea (Law 2004a, 94–5). Forbes understood that the Custom of 'Firing to Whydah' was 'a salute to the Fetish of the Great Waters, or the God of Foreign Trade' (1851, i, 18), i.e. presumably Hu.

⁶¹⁵The statement that the woman was carried to the sea 'and back' is perhaps a misunderstanding; Burton in 1864 noted that the 'firing custom' which he witnessed concluded (on 28 Jan. 1864) by the despatch of wives in hammocks non-stop to Ouidah as gifts for the Chacha and another Brazilian trader (1864, ii, 263–4).

⁶¹⁶Cf. p. 105.

⁶¹⁷sic: but this should be Cana.

⁶¹⁸From Brown's reply (see p. 131), Fraser's letter to him reported his receipt of the letter for the King from F. E. Forbes.

⁶¹⁹The report was false (or premature): Commander Wilmot was currently visiting King Kosoko at Lagos, but reported that he was 'kindly received': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851–2, no. 31, Beecroft to Bruce, off Lagos, 27 Nov. 1851. Following the failure of further negotiations, the British did eventually attack Lagos (unsuccessfully) on 25 Nov. 1851.

It is very evident, they are keeping Mr Hutton,⁶²⁰ to get what they can out of him; and myself; they do not care for to attend to, because they get nothing by it.

At-chil-lee, the Caboceer of English town, sent to borrow my horse,⁶²¹ for the morrow (for I have one, there are few in the country, they are small, not first rate, nor very high priced, they are brought from Abeakuta by way of Badagry).⁶²² Refused. Saw himself in the afternoon; he begged very hard for the horse. No, it was not English fashion. He said Mr Hutton did so. I told him Mr Hutton had lived in Africa so long, he was half a black man. He then said, all this place belong to me, all the people, the Fort and all that is in it; what belongs to the English, belongs to me, I told him, what he had, he was welcome to; but what belonged to me, was a very different thing, and I should take very good care to keep it to myself. I neither borrow nor lend.

Nov. 12. More applications from Atchillee for the horse. No.

This is the way these people are spoiled. Mr Hutton did lend him the horse, and now he makes a demand up[on] me for it, simply because he had it before.

Sent Madiki to the Yer-vo-gar to know if I was to take the letter to the King or send it back again.⁶²³ He sent word he was too busy to see me. That he was waiting the return messenger from the King.

They are performing custom at the Cha-cha's house.

The Yer-vo-gar and many umbrellas, went in procession, this morning, to the Cha-cha's house, now (2.30 p.m.) they are parading round the outer wall of it.

Every few minutes there is a cry of loo-loo-loo⁶²⁴ and a soldier runs by, from the Cha-cha's house, with something or other on his head: they say they are presents for the King: such as cowries, &c

Nov. 13. The musket firing came down from Abomey,⁶²⁵ and returned immediately.

They are parading the town with tom-toms and singing.

⁶²⁰ In a letter of 15 Nov. 1851 (see Additional Dispatches, no. 1), Fraser reported that Hutton and his family had been 'detained here [at Ouidah] for upwards of two months'.

⁶²¹ Fraser had evidently acquired this horse since his return to Ouidah in 15 Oct. 1851; a subsequent reference (below) implies that he got it from the trader Thomas Hutton.

⁶²² For the importation of horses into Dahomey from Abeokuta, cf. Law 1980, 56–7.

⁶²³ i.e. F. E. Forbes' letter to the King, received by Fraser on 6 Nov. 1851 (see p. 121).

⁶²⁴ Burton refers to the cry of 'ububu', expressive of 'wonder and pleasure', which was 'made by patting the mouth with the hand' (1864, i, 363), and a later writer renders this sound as 'bloo, bloo, bloo' (Skertchly 1874, 91 etc.): this was probably what Fraser was trying to represent.

⁶²⁵ Sic, but evidently an error, since other references make clear that the King was currently resident at Cana.

Forbes account of the 'Royal Salute' (vol.1 p. 18) is somewhat difficult as to date &c.⁶²⁶

Lots of firing and music at Cha-cha's.

It is estimated that this custom costs Sig[nor] Isidore fifteen hundred dollars.

Nov. 14. This is said to be the last day of this custom.

At 7.41 am the firing commenced on the beach and returned at 8.25 am having [covered] the distance there and back in forty four minutes, being eight minutes quicker, than the other day.

At 8.25'30" am It started for the second time and arrived again on the beach at 9.5'30" being only forty minutes.

Some few years since, one of Mr Hutton's agents applied to Sig[nor] Isidore for Palm Oil, at which he was very indignant. What! says Isidore, do you take me for a black man, that you think I deal in Palm Oil[?] Now, he and all the rest are glad to do so.

The loo-loo-loo has been going all the morning and men have been running off, at full speed, towards Abomey, with presents, on their heads, for the King.

Some two hundred armed men, are parading round the De Souza houses with music and singing.

3.30 pm. A procession, of about one thousand armed men passed, with umbrellas, tom-toms &c the Boayon about the centre, Yer-vo-gar last and one or two others held on small ponies. All the Chiefs lifted their hats to the Fort, as they passed. The principal personages were clean and well dressed. Wide awake hats,⁶²⁷ were fashionable; there was one particularly hol[e]y.

Nov. 15. Madiki says the custom which terminated yesterday is called 'Hus-sam-bee'⁶²⁸ that a large table is spread at Cannah, white man fashion, and everybody eats at it; the souls of the departed are supposed to flit round and help themselves, to what they like best, which serves them for the next twelve months.

A black, in Portuguese military uniform, is strutting about, he has four red stripes upon his arm.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁶Forbes says that this Custom occurred in July (1851, i, 18), but in 1851 the ceremonial cycle had presumably been delayed, by the late return of the Dahomian army from its annual campaign (cf. Endnote 1).

⁶²⁷Soft-brimmed felt hats.

⁶²⁸Fon *hùnzàngbè*, 'day of drumming' (*hùn* = 'drum'). Burton 1864, ii, 253, n., gives what seems to be a truncated form of this name, 'Azan'gbe', which he incorrectly explains as meaning 'birthday today'.

⁶²⁹One of the personnel of the Portuguese fort: cf. Appendix 2, no.40.

H.M.S. 'Niger' [omission?] sent my compliments to the Cha-cha, to ask for a canoe and men. Granted immediately.

Received a letter from Comm[ander] Heath,⁶³⁰ enquiring what I had received from the King respecting Comm[ander] F. E. Forbes' letter.⁶³¹

Wrote to Comm[ander] Heath, saying I had not been permitted to depart for Abomey as yet.⁶³²

Wrote to Comm[ander] F. E. Forbes to the same effect.⁶³³

To Rev. Mr Gollmer, saying I had been unsuccessful as yet, in my search for his protégé Dassalu.⁶³⁴

Comm[ander] Heath, at my suggestion, came on shore, saw the Yer-vo-gar, who harped considerably, upon my not giving up the letter and denied that I had permission to go to Abomey, when I liked. He also denied that Brown could do so. Brown most certainly does and I obtained the sanction from the King, when in Abomey, see note made Aug. 30 1851.⁶³⁵

Comm[ander] Heath, wrote a letter to the King, sent it [to] Yer-vo-gar, desiring him to forward it.⁶³⁶ The letter stated that Comm[ander] F. E. Forbes has gone to Abbeokuta; that I had a letter from Comm[ander] Forbes on Queen's business, which I must read to himself, and advising him to give me an interview at once. Stating also it was strange that the Yer-vo-gar's messenger, should be twelve days, without returning.

Nov. 19. Madiki came up to say, that the King was going to send people, to the English, French and Portuguese Factories and to the Cha-cha's, to do something, to make all the sickness in the town, go away.⁶³⁷ He says there is much sickness amongst the colored people and many of them are dying.

During the forenoon, the King's fetish people came into the yard, notwithstanding all I said against it; there were some eight or ten, they went round the yard, over the graves,⁶³⁸ and to every door, the foremost most [sic] had a small pot in his hand, which he put to his mouth occasionally, and at each door, he

⁶³⁰ Commander of the *Niger*.

⁶³¹ Not traced.

⁶³² Not traced.

⁶³³ Not traced.

⁶³⁴ Not traced.

⁶³⁵ This should be 20 Aug.: see p. 75.

⁶³⁶ Not traced.

⁶³⁷ From the description which follows, this evidently refers to a religious ceremony, but its precise nature is unclear. Certain *vodun* were concerned with sickness/healing, notably Sakpata, who was associated with smallpox (Burton 1864, ii, 145); but the reference to rituals at graves may imply that the sickness was thought to be caused by the spirits of deceased persons.

⁶³⁸ i.e. the burial ground in the yard of the English fort, mentioned earlier (p. 43).

blew from his mouth, something like smoke;⁶³⁹ another made a tinkling noise with a bell, one carried some three yards of a large iron chain;⁶⁴⁰ another had apparently a jar wrapped up, in a blue cloth, which he carried on his head: the rest had other things which I could not make out.

Nov. 21: Last night Mr Calvert Hutton got into a scrape, the particulars of which will be found at the end in a collected form.⁶⁴¹

Brown has returned from Cannah. He had much trouble with his people. He was compelled to [walk to] Har-lar-dah,⁶⁴² before the[y] commenced carrying him; they broke down in the swamp and he was compelled to walk through it and on to Cannah. After some difficulty he got the men imprisoned. He states the King ordered him to write the following letter, but afterwards recalled it, saying he could not see me just then, if I arrived and he should not like to detain me. That he should shortly return to Abomey,⁶⁴³ would then send for myself, Mr Hutton and Brown.

Copy of Extract

Cana, Nov. 14, 1851

“Your being detained at Whydah from what I can learn, the King knows nothing about the letter you have in your possession for him. It is not his wish that you should be detained at Whydah, at any time that you have a letter or message to deliver to him, send him a private message beforehand.

I am requested by the King to ask you to bring the letter you have in your possession with you.”

(signed) Brown

This is the game of fast and loose,⁶⁴⁴ I have daily to deal with.

Nov. 23. Brown sent for Narwey and told him that he wanted Hammockmen and carriers, for Abomey⁶⁴⁵ on the morrow: in consequence of which, the Yer-vo-gar went to the Cha-cha, saying that Brown had only arrived from Abomey four days since, that he wanted to go again and had not told him (Yer-vo-gar) what about? asking at the same time whether he should stop him.

⁶³⁹This may refer either to powder, blown from the extended hand (but previously poured from a bottle) or a liquid, blown directly from the bottle, both of which might be used in purification rituals: information from Luis Nicolau Parés.

⁶⁴⁰The symbolism of chains in Dahomian ritual iconography is discussed by Blier 1995, esp. 251–4; they may be used to control potentially malevolent forces, including ghosts of the dead.

⁶⁴¹See Fraser's summary of the case in Additional Dispatches, no. 2. Calvert Hutton was a son of the trader Thomas Hutton.

⁶⁴²Evidently, on his way from the coast to Cana.

⁶⁴³On 3–14 Jan. 1852, the king was still at Cana, but he had moved to Abomey by 13 Feb. 1852 (see p. 153).

⁶⁴⁴To 'play fast and loose' ('fast' in the sense of 'bound') is to ignore obligations previously made.

⁶⁴⁵Sic: but this should be Cana.

Brown saw the Cha-cha, in the evening, who told him to proceed, that no one would interfere with him.

Nov. 24. A pilot boat, with a black flag at the main, coming in (The Shooting Star)[,] sticks from Yer-vo-gar and At-chil-lee, saying a vessel was in sight.

All hands were much interested, at this moment, in a Pilot boat, lying at Aghwey, called the 'Veloz', which made about this time several attempts to ship slaves, but without effect.⁶⁴⁶

Some two years ago, the King sent down for a quantity of cloth, specimens were sent from the French Factory, which were approved of, the King ordered two hundred pieces; after keeping them twelve days, he returned them, soiled, to be exchanged, which M. Case, the French Factor, refused to do, while explaining himself, having a gauge in his hand, he struck the cloths several times, with it; this was reported, in Abomey, and a message sent to the Factor, saying by so doing he had insulted Mayhoo, that, he had hurt Mayhoo's cheek so much, that he could not speak, and M. Case must pay \$2000 for the offence, this he refused, and the tom-tom was sent round the town, telling the people, that they must not trade with the French Factory; His trade was stopped for forty days, when the fine being reduced, by sending many messengers to the King, to two hundred dollars, which the Frenchman was obliged to pay.⁶⁴⁷

This is a similar swindle to the one, now attempted upon Mr Hutton, for firing a gun.⁶⁴⁸

Countersigned a paper of which the following is a copy.

I hereby certify that it is a matter of public notoriety, that the sixteen children whose names are hereunto attached, were presented by the King of Dahomey, to Thomas Hutton, Esq, they are free and I request that the vessel, on which he is sending them to Cape Coast Castle, may not be detained or molested on their account⁶⁴⁹

Whydah, Nov. 17 1851

To the Capt[ain]s of any French or American men-of-war

(signed) S.[sic: = L.] G. Heath

Com[mande]r H.M.S. Niger

⁶⁴⁶ Not otherwise attested: not listed in TASTD.

⁶⁴⁷ This incident is referred in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 9 in no. 9, F. E. Forbes to Fanshawe, 1 Nov. 1849, journal entry for 5 Oct. 1849, which reports that French trade at Ouidah had been 'stopped', and the French agent was threatening to abandon Ouidah if it was not reopened.

⁶⁴⁸ i.e. Calvert Hutton, who had been fined for firing a gun during the 'Custom' (p. 131).

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. also the certificate issued earlier (p. 39): these certificates were intended to protect the bearers from any charge of slave-trading.

Louis Fraser
H.M.M. [= H.B.M.] Vice-Consul
Whydah Nov. 24 1851

Here follow the names

<u>Chardy</u>	<u>Dashang</u>
<u>Occa</u>	<u>Hoonsee</u>
<u>Tashee</u>	<u>Madanovee</u>
<u>Zohan</u>	<u>Ahhenah</u>
<u>Torsee</u>	<u>Kakery</u>
<u>Iyohen</u>	<u>Boo</u>
<u>Ahgowsavee</u>	<u>Winnehaow</u>
<u>Docee</u>	<u>Yahamea</u>

Mr Hutton offered me, as was consider [sic], one dollar each, for the entry of the above, but not being certain, that I should be right, I declined his offer.

Attended again, at the Cha-cha's, at the request of Mr Hutton, to hear a palaver, about a factory he was about to build to leeward,⁶⁵⁰ as it was a long palaver and was not made any farther, official, it is unnecessary to copy it.

The thing worth mentioning is, that Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza, the Cha-cha, improves upon acquaintance.

This morning two negroes, dressed in their best, were found hanging, face to face, close together, in the yard of the house they belonged to, a great many people had collected round about the premises.

Towards evening, with the Yer-vo-gar's permission, for these things cannot be done without, they were cut down, decapit[at]ed, and dragged by the heels, one man to each, and thrown in the bush, close to the town, as a treat for the hyenas, &c. All the negroes are disposed of, in this way.⁶⁵¹ The heads were forwarded to the King.

A doctor at Cape Coast, having recovered a man, after he was supposed to be dead, from drowning, returned him to his friends; they brought him back, to the Doctor, saying it had pleased God, to take him from them, and that he (the Doctor) had thought proper to restore him, he must now keep him; and he had to do so.

Nov. 26. The King sent to say Mr Hutton had given him the "craw-craw"⁶⁵² by making so much palaver about Harpay (Appa Vista).⁶⁵³ The Harpay people,

⁶⁵⁰ i.e. to east, referring to Cotonou (cf. below, this page).

⁶⁵¹ Presumably, this means 'all' those who committed suicide.

⁶⁵² 'Craw-craw' (or 'kra-kra') was a local West African name for scabies, an irritation of the skin; cf. e.g. Duncan 1847, i, 32, 'a loathsome disease called *craw-craw*, which bears some resemblance to the mange in dogs or horses'.

⁶⁵³ More usually 'Appi Vista', an alternative name for Cotonou: see HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1855/6, Class B, no. 28, Consul Campbell to Earl of Clarendon, Lagos, 6 Jan. 1856, 'called in the

on the other hand, say Mr Hutton shall not leave, they will make war on Dahomey sooner.

It is said that Old de Souza stopped all the Dahoman resources, when he went to live at Popoe,⁶⁵⁴ that if this place [i.e. Ouidah] is blockaded, the Dahomans cannot get supplies even from Popoe, the Ahgwey people would seize all; the trouble and expence is too much to get things from Badagry.

December 5. Sig[nor] Salvador one of the Cha-cha's cousins,⁶⁵⁵ said this morning, if the English would send 250 soldiers to the Fort, there would be a chance of improving the place, as his cousin, would have an excuse, and say he 'could not help it', there is an armed force here.['] It appears, the Cha-cha is sick of present arrangements, but dares not say so, otherwise they would get rid of him; saying this is what we get by having strangers; he being Popoe by birth.⁶⁵⁶

There is a deep waterway between Harpay (Appa Vista) and Cannah.⁶⁵⁷

Gave three certificates or passes, as follows

Copy I hereby certify that (José Maria
(Joaq[ui]n Jesus Albuquerque S[an]to
(Joao Antonio

the bearer, was landed here (Whydah) from H.B.M. Steamer Sampson⁶⁵⁸ and is now going on board the Portuguese schooner, or Pilot boat 'Veloz', whereof Sig[nor] Domingos da Costa Lages, is master, as passenger to Bahia

(signed) Louis Fraser
H.M. Vice Consul for the Kingdom of Dahomey,
Whydah, Dec. 5

To the Captains of any English, French or American men of war.

Took the three men and papers to the Cha-cha, who identified them and said it was all right.

Refused to except [= accept] my fee, from these poor wretches.

Shipments are not allowed to be proceeded with, during the time the King is at war.

Admiralty charts, Appi Vista, but ... known on shore by its native name, Kootenoo'. Hutton was trying to establish a factory there.

⁶⁵⁴ Referring to de Souza's role in the *coup d'état* which deposed King Adandozan in favour of his brother Gezo in 1818: de Souza had been imprisoned at Abomey, but escaped to Little Popo, and interdicted trade to Dahomey.

⁶⁵⁵ Not otherwise attested.

⁶⁵⁶ According to family tradition, Isidoro was born in Little Popo (in 1802), to a local woman married to Francisco Felix de Souza (de Souza 1992, 42).

⁶⁵⁷ i.e. the River Ouémé: see p. 43, n. 145 above.

⁶⁵⁸ Presumably, these were members of crew of an intercepted slave ship.

Dec. 15. It is reported that Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza has received a commission as Colonel, and is appointed Commandant of the Portuguese Fort. A Portuguese man-of-war is expected, shortly, with soldiers.⁶⁵⁹

Dec. 17. The large steamer, observed yesterday passing to leeward, returned this morning, fired guns and made signal for canoe. Sent one—she sailed to leeward before the canoe got off.

Dec. 18. Saw a letter from the 'Jersey Lass' which stated, that the large steamer seen yesterday, was H.M. Steamer 'Penelope' and has sent a notice, on board, saying that the coast from Long[itude] 1° to 4.30 E would be blockaded from the 1st of January next.⁶⁶⁰

Very strange, and hard, that I have not had notice given and some instructions, as to my movements for my own safety.

Dec. 20. The Yer-vo-gar sent for Mr Hutton's agent: afterwards for myself.

We had a long palaver about the blockade. I told him I knew no more about it, than what Mr Drake's letter told me.⁶⁶¹ He says, I was Caboceer, for all white men, and the representative of the Queen of England—the same as he was for the King of Dahomey and black men. If the King of Dahomey had anything to say, he sent to him, to make it known; when Governors for English, French and Portuguese Forts, were here, they received all white mans palaver first, and made it known. It was the same with me. Therefore, to say I knew nothing about the blockade was making lie palaver. This puts me in a very unpleasant position.

Mr Drake tells me, that before I arrived at the Yer-vo-gar's house, he asked him to write to Mr Freeman, at Cape Coast to send the King of Dahomey, some one who could read and write English and also to come him self.⁶⁶²

Sig[nor] Antonio de Souza, sent to enquire, if he could be granted a few days, to ship some Palm Oil.

⁶⁵⁹ A Portuguese warship, the *Nimpha*, Commander Lieut. Mariano Ghira, did call at Ouidah on 7 March 1852 (and submitted a protest about the British naval blockade), but it is not clear if it delivered any soldiers: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, no. 94, Bruce to Admiralty, 14 April 1852, with inclosures.

⁶⁶⁰ A blockade of the Bight of Benin, to begin on 1 Jan. 1852, was notified by Commodore Bruce, the commander-in-chief of the British navy's West Africa squadron, on 6 Dec. 1851 (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. in no. 186); it was intended to coerce the Kings of Dahomey, Porto-Novo and Lagos into accepting the abolition of the slave trade. Bruce was on board the *Penelope*, and reported that 'On the 16th of December I arrived off Whydah, and established the blockade': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, no. 71, Bruce to Admiralty, *Penelope*, Whydah, 11 Feb. 1852.

⁶⁶¹ Presumably the letter received from the *Jersey Lass*.

⁶⁶² The Rev. T. B. Freeman, the head of the Wesleyan Mission on the Gold Coast, who had himself visited Gezo's court in 1843, and (with Lieutenant-Governor Winniett) in 1847.

Told him to apply to the Commodore.

I am stationed here, like a fool, without instructions.

The Yer-vo-gar, asked if it was true, that the English had taken Badagry?⁶⁶³ because, says he, Badagry, belongs to the King of Dahomey⁶⁶⁴ and if that place is left open,⁶⁶⁵ we can get all we want, from hence.

Everybody is talking about the blockade, in the same strain, as they did when we took [sic] we war[r]ed with the Ashantees.⁶⁶⁶ They say it is the English will have the whole coast.

Dec. 21. An English man of war Brig, having anchored in the Roads, I sent the Commander a letter, of which the following is a copy.

British Consulate, Whydah
December 21. 1851

Sir,

I am in a very unpleasant situation, in consequence of a report, on shore, that the Commodore, has given notice to some of the merchant shipping, that the coast is to be blockaded.

The Chacha, has applied to me for explanations,⁶⁶⁷ but I have none to give, not being officially aware of the fact.

Yesterday, I had a long and by no means pleasant interview, with the Yer-vo-gar, upon the subject, which wound up by his telling me, my pretended ignorance, was a lie palaver.

A large steamer was observed on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, she fired two or three guns; before I could get a canoe off, she departed. I presume it was the 'Penelope'.

(signed) Louis Fraser &c &c.

To the Captain of H.M. Brig, Whydah Roads

Received two letters from Commodore Bruce⁶⁶⁸ and one from [= for] the King of Dahomey.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶³A British naval force, with Consul Beecroft, had been at Badagry on 19–20 Dec., but only to make arrangements for the intended second attack on Lagos: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, no. 34, Beecroft to Palmerston, off Lagos, 3 Jan. 1852.

⁶⁶⁴Forbes earlier also reported that the King of Dahomey 'claims the beach' at Badagry, as well as at Porto-Novo (1851, i, 20); but this was an aspiration, rather than a reality. See Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 220–1, 229–30, 256–7.

⁶⁶⁵Badagry had been excluded from blockade, on the grounds that it was understood that the slave trade had already been suppressed there.

⁶⁶⁶Asante, inland from the Gold Coast: referring to the Asante-British war of 1824–7.

⁶⁶⁷Sic, but not referred to in the Journals.

⁶⁶⁸H. W. Bruce, successor to Fanshawe as Commander-in-Chief of the British navy's West African squadron: see Appendix 2, nos 18–19.

⁶⁶⁹See Appendix 2, no. 20, Bruce to King of Dahomey, 17 Dec. 1851, announcing the blockade.

The Brig proved to be H.B.M. [= H.M.B.] 'Philomel', Commander G. T. Forbes.⁶⁷⁰

Upon the receipt of the above letters I sent for the Yer-vo-gar and the Cha-cha.

The Yer-vo-gar and his people came. I read and explained my letters and the blockade. Handed him, the letter for the King.

The Yer-vo-gar, talked much and was for my writing a letter, for him, for the Queen; I told him I was willing, but it was quite useless. That the English Government had tried for years past, to persuade the King of Dahomey, to suppress the Slave Trade &c., that it appeared quite useless; now they were determined to make him, there was no alternative: he had better send to the King and persuade him to sign a treaty, at once, and thereby entirely avoid the blockade.

I offered to go to Abomey, to read the King's letter and save time.

Mess[rs] Thomas Hutton and party returned from Abomey.

Dec. 22. The Yer-vo-gar's stick and compliments, saying he would not allow [me] to go off to the ship to day.

Sent word to the Yer-vo-gar, that he must stop me, at his peril, as I must go on board the man of war.

After five hours exertion, mustered my hammockmen, and started for the beach at noon.

Went on board H.M.B. 'Philomel' saw Comm[ander] Forbes, explained to him, that I did [not] conceive there was sufficient danger to guarantee⁶⁷¹ me leaving my post, as yet, therefore I should decline his offer of a berth and [= on] board his Brig. He said his instructions were very strict and showed me an especial order, which stated that neither himself nor any of his officers were to land under any circumstances, whatever.

Returned to Whydah the same afternoon.

My sextant and artificial horizon were this day placed on board H.M.B. Philomel agreeable to an order from Sn J Beaufoil.⁶⁷²

Sent letter to the Cha-cha.⁶⁷³

Received a letter in Portuguese from Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷⁰Sic: but the initials should be 'T. G.', i.e. Thomas George Forbes, who had succeeded L. J. Lewis as Senior Officer in the Bights Division. This man is to be distinguished from F. E. Forbes, who was currently (cf. p. 122) on a mission to Abeokuta.

⁶⁷¹i.e. warrant (meaning, justify).

⁶⁷²Not identified: presumably someone on board the *Philomel*.

⁶⁷³See Appendix 2, no. 21, asking him to persuade the King to come to terms.

⁶⁷⁴See Appendix 2, no. 22, signed by Isidoro de Souza as Governor of the Portuguese fort, and demanding the reasons for the blockade.

Dec. 23. Sent to Sig[nor] Isidore an answer to his epistle of last night.⁶⁷⁵

Sent letter to Comm[ander] Forbes of 'Philomel' Senior Officer.⁶⁷⁶

The above letter was conveyed by my private servant and he was detained until next morning, unknown to me, by the beach Caboceer.⁶⁷⁷ This was to give the Yer-vo-gar time to consider the propriety of allowing me to communicate with the cruiser.

It is reported that a party has come down from the King, to see and ascertain what he had best do.

The French Factor is furious; his vessel only arrived yesterday. Received a copy of a Protest from him; but as it is an useless document, I shall not copy it.

At-chil-lee, the Caboceer of English town, called to see if I had actually returned from the ship; He said, you must not go on board ship! Ship people must come to you!

Dec. 24. Narwhey called with stick and compliments from Yer-vo-gar. He asked, whether I sent off to ship, last night, being answered in the affirmative. He enquired What palaver? Told him, None! He did not tell me, my boy had been detained on the beach.

Three hundred and twenty seven men under Accatoy, have left Badagry for Lagos, to join our boats.⁶⁷⁸

Domingo Martinez, is on his road, here; he says that he does not think the King, will come to terms.

Dec. 25. Had a private meeting with Sig[nor] Antonio de Souza, at his request, respecting the blockade and what he should tell the messenger he was sending to the King.

Sig[nor] Isidore called upon me and showed me his commission and other papers as Portuguese L[ieutenant] Col[onel] and Governor.⁶⁷⁹ Told him under existing circumstances I could not acknowledge him.

⁶⁷⁵ See Appendix 2, no. 23, declaring ignorance of the Chacha's appointment as Governor.

⁶⁷⁶ See Appendix 2, no. 24, transmitting his correspondence with the Chacha.

⁶⁷⁷ A Dahomian official posted at Zoungbodji, mid-way between Ouidah and the beach, to monitor the movement of persons and goods (Law 2004a, 136).

⁶⁷⁸ Akitoye, the exiled King of Lagos, whom the British were now seeking to reinstate, in place of Kosoko. When Beecroft visited Badagry on 19–20 Dec. 1851, he arranged for 630 soldiers to be sent from there along the shore to support a second British attack on Lagos, though Akitoye himself re-embarked with Beecroft, and proceeded to Lagos by sea: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, no. 34, Beecroft to Earl of Clarendon, 3 Jan. 1852. The British again attacked, and this time conquered, Lagos on 26–28 Dec. 1851.

⁶⁷⁹ In response to Fraser's letter of 23 Dec. 1851 (cf. above, this page).

Dec. 26. The Yer-vo-gar called with King's stick and compliments.

The King's message was that I might go to Cannah⁶⁸⁰ and that he wanted the Captain of the man-of-war⁶⁸¹ to come up and read the letter.

Told the Yer-vo-gar, this could not be done, as no person was allowed to land from the man-of-war ship;⁶⁸² that I was exceeding my orders by going to Cannah, instead of the King sending to me.

The Yer-vo-gar got in a great rage at this, saying it was the King's orders and I must write for the man-of-war Captain to come.

Told him that the King had no power to order English Officers, that we had our orders from our own Government.

After some consideration, knowing the falseness of these people, I thought it might be advisable, to have a witness to what might transpire, and at the same time avert this newly created storm.

I sent this letter to Comm[ander] Forbes.⁶⁸³

Had another private interview with Sig[nor] Antonio, Sig[nor] Jacinto was present,⁶⁸⁴ they are both frightened out of their wits, they fear the natives will murder them. I do believe from what I am told, privately, that the whole of the so called Portuguese would have run for Popoe and Ahgwey, had I not remained on shore.

Sig[nor] Antonio tells me, the King has sent for him, he will take his clerk, Walter Hanson,⁶⁸⁵ that we may converse, privately, with the King.

Martinz promises to persuade the King to sign the treaty.

Martinz liberated all the slaves he had, ninety in number.⁶⁸⁶

Dec. 27. Rec[ieve]d answer from Philomel.⁶⁸⁷

Sig[nor] Antonio, wishes to put himself under British protection.

The liberated people from Bahia,⁶⁸⁸ applied to me, this morning, for British protection. Told them I thought it could not be done. They might send me in

⁶⁸⁰Where the King was by implication still resident.

⁶⁸¹i.e. Commander T. G. Forbes.

⁶⁸²Cf. above, p. 137.

⁶⁸³See Appendix 2, no. 25, requesting Forbes or one of his officers to accompany Fraser to Cana.

⁶⁸⁴i.e. Jacinto Joaquim Rodrigues, a prominent Portuguese (from Madeira) merchant at Ouidah (Law 2004a, 199). As later noted (p. 146), he spoke English, so could translate between Antonio and Fraser.

⁶⁸⁵Presumably the same as the 'Walter Hansen' who was a merchant at Lagos later in the 1850s, and described as a 'man of colour' from Accra (Smith 1978, 78); but other sources describe him as 'a native of Cape Coast' (Jones and Sebald 2005, 51, n.28).

⁶⁸⁶This action is not referred to in any other source (and is not discussed by Ross 1965), so that Martins' motivation is not known: perhaps it was an attempt to curry favour with the British.

⁶⁸⁷i.e. from T. G. Forbes: see Appendix 2, no. 26, declining to join Fraser on his mission to the King.

⁶⁸⁸Referring to former slaves who had returned to resettle in Africa. There was a substantial settlement of freedmen from Brazil in Ouidah, as also mentioned by earlier visitors (Duncan 1847, i, 138, 185, 201–2; Forbes 1851, ii, 71–2; see also Law 2004a, 179–82).

a memorial, and I would forward it. It appears the King of Dahomey, every year, sends down and demands so many slaves, from each, to go to war with.⁶⁸⁹

It is reported that Kosoko, has sent to the French, offering to put Lagos under their protection⁶⁹⁰ and that Domingo is doing his best to persuade Gezo to do the same.

It will never do to allow Sig[nor] Isidore to hold his Portuguese commission. He is the Cha-cha of this place, and in reality a slave to the King; even now he owns he is afraid to tell the King, what he thinks of this blockade, as he says, if it turns out well, the King will call him his 'dear friend' if the reverse he will take his life.

Domingo has said the same thing.

The towns people, to day, have refused to carry things to the beach, for Mr Hutton, because he did not give them a dash, when he returned from Abomey. The Yer-vo-gar has been applied to, but Mr H[utton] cannot get any satisfaction.

Domingo says the 'Teazer' can pass from Benin to Lagos, but not on to Badagry on account of the shallows.⁶⁹¹

The Yer-vo-gar, Narwhey and messenger from the King, with a message to myself and Mr T. Hutton, of which the annexed copy of letter will give you the particulars.⁶⁹²

I told them, it could not be done—it is only part of their artful scheme of proc[r]as[tina]tion.

The Yer-vo-gar and Narwhey seem determined, not to take my word at any price; this [is] exceedingly disagreeable and must be remedied, before things will go on smoothly.

I was compelled although much against my will, to write the foregoing letter to maintain peace.

I little thought to become an amanuensis⁶⁹³ to the Yer-vo-gar of Whydah and was still more surprised when I received the answer to find that Comm[ander] Forbes had power to alter the terms of the blockade.⁶⁹⁴ This

⁶⁸⁹ i.e. to serve as soldiers in the Dahomian army.

⁶⁹⁰ On the eve of the British attack on Lagos (which began on 26 Dec. 1851), Carlos José de Souza Nobre, one of the leading Brazilian slave-merchants there, was reported to have left for Ouidah, 'for the purpose of inducing the captain of any French or American man-of-war he might fall in with to proceed immediately to Lagos and there hoist the French or American flags in the town': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 73, Wilmot to Bruce, Lagos, 11 Feb. 1852.

⁶⁹¹ Referring to navigation along the inland lagoons: but in fact, in 1861 British steamships did go by the lagoon from Lagos to bombard Porto-Novo, west of Badagry (Videgla 1999, 145–7).

⁶⁹² TNA, FO84/886, f. 336, Fraser to Forbes, 27 Dec. 1851, transmitting a request from the King that merchant ships be allowed to stay at Ouidah until Fraser's return from his mission.

⁶⁹³ i.e. scribe.

⁶⁹⁴ TNA, FO84/886, f. 337, Forbes to Fraser, 27 Dec. 1851, agreeing the respite.

was quite a triumph for the Yervo-gar to find that the Captain of the ship could unsay my say.

Sent to the Yer-vo-gar and Cha-cha to say I had a book to read. Both declined to come.

Dec. 28. Sunday. Madiki came to say the Yer-vo-gar's message was, that I should go to him. Refused to comply.

After breakfast sent to the Yer-vo-gar to say I had book to read, if he thought proper to come.

He came. After all was over, they wanted me to pay the King's messenger; [I] declined saying it be King's palaver; that the messenger had come for and I was going up to oblige the King; that it was not my palaver and I would not pay.

It is said that Sig[nor] Domingo has sent Sig[nor] Ignatio de Souza, to the King, to explain every thing fully.

Sig[nor] Domingo sent his compl[imen]ts and a message, which caused the following letter.⁶⁹⁵

Called on Sig[nor] Antonio by particular request, he left immediately after for Abomey.

Sig[nor] Ignatio and Mr Walter Hanson left in the afternoon.

Dec. 29. Madiki came for Kings stick and cowries to pass the messenger—Refused the cowries.

Narwey and Madiki came for cowries to pass King's messenger and Narwey's self. Refused and told them, if they were not satisfied I would remain at Whydah.

Much trouble all day; cannot procure carriers nor hammockmen.

At 6 p.m. finding it impossible to collect my people, rode to the Yer-vo-gan's, to bid him good bye and tell him my position.

Rec[eive]d an answer from Comm[ander] Forbes.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁵ See Appendix 2, no. 27, transmitting to Forbes a request from Martins that the concession to merchant ships at Ouidah be extended to Porto-Novo.

⁶⁹⁶ TNA, FO84/886, f. 339, Forbes to Fraser, 28 Dec. 1851, declining Martins' request.

3. 'Facts relating to my second trip to Abomey'⁶⁹⁷

[29 December 1851–8 January 1852]⁶⁹⁸

1851. Dec. 29. At 6 p.m. finding it impossible to collect my people, rode to the Yer-vo-gar's to bid him good bye, as is the custom, and tell him, how I was situated.

At Sav-vee the hammockmen hid themselves, as they did not wish to proceed further.

Before reaching Torree, my horse fell lame, obliged to get into my hammock, only three of the men on duty. Arrived at Torree 10.20 p.m.

11 p.m. Endeavoured to muster my men and proceed, but impossible, they had hid themselves. Madiki arriving, told him I would allow five minutes to find the men, when I should proceed. Started without them, driving my horse before me.

30th [Dec.] 3.30 am. Arrived at Har-lar-dah, very much fatigued, having walked the whole distance from Torree.

Remained at Har-lar-dah, all day. Wrote to Sig[nor] Antonio de Souza, at Cannah, for hammockmen.

In the evening my hammockmen arrived. Proceeded.

Arrived at Hack pay.⁶⁹⁹ Here I found that little vagabond Narwee, no doubt my men have been acting under his orders, so that I might not arrive within hearing of the King, before him, whose duty it is to attend me, and be my obedient servant.⁷⁰⁰

31 [Dec.] Crossed the swamp. My men took five hours to do it, we met a messenger from Sig[nor] Antonio, with a letter about hammockmen.

Received a message from the King, saying I was to sleep at Ah-guimmay, this night.

Received a dash of five Fowls from the two headmen and some yam cooked in Palm Oil from the King's headman's woman.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁷ Sic: but in fact he visited the King at Cana.

⁶⁹⁸ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 245–250; also printed (with omissions) in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 1 in no. 6.

⁶⁹⁹ Earlier spelled 'Hark-pay' (p. 50), i.e. Akpè.

⁷⁰⁰ Forbes in 1850 also thought that Gnahoui's father, whose position he had inherited, was 'a servant in the British fort' (1851, ii, 175). This, however, was a misunderstanding of his status: he was in fact a royal official, bound to serve the king rather than the English.

⁷⁰¹ Presumably the same as the 'King's headman for women', met on the previous visit to Agrimè (p. 52).

1852

Jan. 1. Mayhoo sent fifteen men to assist in carrying me to Cannah. This seems to astonish Nar-whee, Madiki and all hands. Everybody very attentive and civil. Arrived at Cannah, in a very short time.

King sent Chop.⁷⁰²

No carriers arrived, no wash, changes of clothing nor drink.

King sent a message, to say we were not to walk out, until he had received us, which would be on the morrow.

In the morning May-hoo called and had a long private interview. He wants a ship of war to go direct to England, with a message from the King. Then he talked of all white men mustering, from all parts, to see the King, and such like nonsense.

2nd [Jan.] Reception today, the same as on previous occasion.⁷⁰³ Went in procession, to the King, whom we found under an open shed, outside the walls of what is called his palace. Nearly in front, of him, was a platform of three or four swish steps, covered with mats, forming a Kind of summer house, under which was his large war stool, on either side of which, sat a man, who occasionally sounded a bell, which hung over head: fetishes of every description, were arranged both inside and out, calabashes suspended the reverse way, with bundles of straw(?) hanging therefrom, small mats, &c; round the base of this structure, were many rude imitations, apparently wood; viz. of a large crocodile, large snake, a man driving two pigs in a string, green and yellow cats, one very good figure (European?) of a black man in his war dress, one white figure, I presume, intended to represent an Englishman, a piece of printed calico, made to represent a Boa constrictor, in a cage; an animal with one head and two legs, going one way and one head and two legs going the other. This appears to be intended for a monstrosity of a pig, two pigs, attached by the middle of the body; a sea animal in the act of swallowing a ship[,] men and all &c &c.

A considerable collection of guns, lay upon the ground, consisting of Chinese Gingalls,⁷⁰⁴ old Blunderbusses, &c, several four and six [pound] cannons, on one carriage, made to fire at one time, they looked very like 'Infernal machines'⁷⁰⁵ and the two Brass fieldpieces, brought by Lieut[enant] Bouet of

⁷⁰²The King was evidently resident at Cana, throughout the mission (until 14 Jan. 1852).

⁷⁰³On 16 Aug. 1851 (pp. 64–6).

⁷⁰⁴A form of light cannon.

⁷⁰⁵This weapon was already noted by a visitor to Abomey in 1772, as 'a blunderbuss with five barrels' (Norris 1789, 107); cf. also Burton 1864, i, 220, 'a *machine infernale* with five bell-mouthed brass barrels, mounted on a dwarf bed, and with a single flint lock'. The term '*machine infernale*' originally referred to an anti-personnel explosive device, but had been applied to a multi-barreled gun used in an attempt to assassinate the French king Louis-Philippe in 1835.

the French navy, on each of which is a French inscription, translated as follows: 'Given as a present to Guizot, King of Dahomey, by the President of the French Republic, 1851'⁷⁰⁶

Soldiers, both male and female, were squatting on the plain, at a considerable distance.

After we were seated, the usual ceremony of drinking having been performed, the women soldiers, advanced in companies, he [i.e. the King] seemed to be examining their equipment, these women carry a musket, slung on one shoulder, a bow on the other, quiver behind, a Knife or short sword, on the left side, in their practice they used the bow and musket alternately. One party, I think by a word from the King, each, held up to view a spare coat or waistcoat.

After the women were dismissed, the men appeared.

There might have been, in all, 2000 women and 3000 men, on the plain today.

Received chop from the King.

3rd [Jan.] Received sticks from the King, Mayhoo, Camboodie, Sig[nor] Antonio and Sig[nor] Ignatio de Souza.

Received chop from the King.

Received dash from the King, one goat two Fowls, Indian corn flour, peppers, salt and Palm Oil.

Found that two heads of cowries had been stolen from one of the bags, on the road.

Some of my carriers, have not yet arrived.

4th [Jan.] A man arrived, saying that the man-of-war captain,⁷⁰⁷ Mr T. Hutton, Yervogan, Cha-cha, Domingo and others were on the road and would arrive tomorrow.

This must be what Mayhoo referred to, on the 1st instant.⁷⁰⁸

5th [Jan.] Towards evening took hammock and met Comm[ander] G. T. [= T. G.] Forbes,⁷⁰⁹ Mr T. Hutton, Yer-vo-gar, Chacha, Domingo, Rodriguez,⁷¹⁰ Brandoa,⁷¹¹ and many others, strangers to me, seated under a tree, some

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. Nardin 1967, 77, which gives the original French text as '*Donné en present comme cadeau au Roi de Dahomey Guezo par M. le Président de la République française, 1851*'.

⁷⁰⁷ i.e. Commander T. G. Forbes.

⁷⁰⁸ When he talked of 'all white men mustering from all parts, to see the King' (p. 143).

⁷⁰⁹ See his own account, in Appendix 3, no. 8.

⁷¹⁰ i.e. Jacinto Joaquim Rodrigues.

⁷¹¹ cf. 'Brandon' in p. 151: perhaps the same as Thobias Barreto Brandão, listed among the Brazilian former slaves resident at Ouidah in 1863/4 (Burton 1864, i, 75, n.), or a relative thereof.

distance from the town, with a party of soldiers dancing before them. This was the Yer-vogar's reception.

It would appear that, after my leaving Whydah, a summons from the King arrived ordering all the above named persons to appear before him, that Mr Hutton wrote off to Comm[ander] Forbes requesting his attendance which was complied with.⁷¹²

It is putting me into bad bread,⁷¹³ complying with his request, after refusing mine. The Yer-vo-gar is exulting Why are two representatives required?

6th [Jan.] Mayhoo sent to say I was to join the general reception today. Everything to make a show with these people.

Reception the same as before.

Our procession consisted of seventeen hammocks.

Domingo was the only one that made any display. His hammock was very handsome, his bearers were dressed in caps, figured shirts, short trousers and broad new silk sashes.

After being seated, the males and females were presented in companies in rapid succession, evidently with a view of impressing the Commander, that it would be useless to attempt force.

There might have been 5000 men and 2000 women, but Comm[ander] F[orbes] thought not.

The Caboceers mustered in front, and paid their respects.

The King's sons, some of these were old men,⁷¹⁴ next came; Domingo was requested to join the group, as the King calls him, his adopted son.

Then came the King's sisters, some of these were quite old.

But relationship, is always badly interpreted.⁷¹⁵

Between the parade, of the men and women, came a collection of some 300 women, whom the interpreters called recruits.⁷¹⁶ They made a bit of a speech saying the white man come to see the King, why he no bring gun? that they could not go to war, as they were without arms.

All this was a mere show, for among them, were many exceedingly aged, others lame, some bearing children and others again mere children.

I do firmly believe that every available soul, has been mustered for this occasion.

⁷¹²See Appendix 3, no. 3.

⁷¹³i.e. in a disagreeable situation. The HCPP version of the text substitutes 'in bad odour', unnecessarily.

⁷¹⁴Cf. p. 76.

⁷¹⁵Meaning that, in the Fon language, kinship terms such as 'mother' (*non*), 'wife' (*si*), 'father' (*da*) and 'son/daughter' (*vi*) were often used metaphorically, to refer to relations of dependence and authority, rather than of literal kinship.

⁷¹⁶Presumably referring to women drafted from Dahomian families for service in the army, as recorded by Burton 1864, ii, 67; see also Bay 1998, 199–200.

It was at first translated, that the King, said it would take him 30 days, to examine his whole army, after the fashion of today.

Afterwards, the King said he should be six days, doing the same thing, as we had seen, today.

8th [Jan.] Immediately after breakfast we were summoned to attend the King.

After some delay, we were ushered into a large clean yard, where we found him, under a shed, surrounded by women, it was neatly hung all round with country cloths.

Commander G. T. Forbes' letter (Nov. 5) respecting his mission to Abbeokuta was demanded and handed over.⁷¹⁷

Commodore Bruce's letter was, then, broken open, by the King, and read by Commander Forbes.⁷¹⁸

After which there was a terrible muddle about the translation. Madiki tried. Narwey tried. Brown attempted, but they would not allow him.

At length Sig[nor] Jacinto Rodriguez, who speaks English as well as Portuguese, and Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza, speaking Portuguese and Dahoman, with some little assistance translated it, it was exceedingly well done.

Unfortunately, the first paragraph, which contained the following (I quote from memory) 'that he (the King) had asked, through me (Mr Vice Consul Fraser) for arms and ammunition to take against Abbeokutah' was denied by the King.⁷¹⁹ He accused me of framing the above, for the purpose of intriguing with the Commodore to bring about the blockade.

He afterwards made a formal complaint against me, for leaving Abomey, without his permission,⁷²⁰ and taking (the word thief was used) with me a (Obbashorons) letter, belonging to him, which I never returned,⁷²¹ thus completely reversing the facts.⁷²² That that letter proved that I did not come to his country as a friend, but as a spy, to see all I could and give information to his enemies, the Abbeokutans.⁷²³

⁷¹⁷ Sic, but clearly this refers to F. E. Forbes, currently at Abeokuta (see pp. 121–2).

⁷¹⁸ i.e. Bruce's letter to the King, 17 Dec. 1851 (Appendix 2, no. 20).

⁷¹⁹ The actual wording was that the King had 'instruct[ed] [Fraser] to convey his application to the Queen for arms and ammunition to enable you to carry on a war against Abbeokuta'. As Fraser later acknowledged, this was 'not strictly true' (see his letter of 17 Jan. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 3).

⁷²⁰ On 7 Sept. 1851 (pp. 109–10).

⁷²¹ See p. 107.

⁷²² Fraser claimed that the letter had in fact been stolen from him, after he had refused to hand it over to the King: see p. 108.

⁷²³ The Basorun's letter (in Appendix 2, no. 10) had asked Fraser for information about Dahomian intentions.

He made a third accusation. That I did not bring with me Comm[ander] Forbes and moreover had said he would not come, whereas Mr Hutton had brought him. Thus making me out a Liar.

This day's palaver was wound up, after a long interview, by his desiring Comm[ander] Forbes, to take me away with him when he joined his ship.

He requested that a person might be sent to reside in his country, to read and write for him.

This is really what he wants; a white slave, and not a person who will take an active part in what is going on.

After this, Mayhoo and Yer-vo-gar, refused to admit me to private conferences, nor did I receive notice to attend the King[s] place, when others did, it was always left until all hands were mustered, and then I was hurried off.

There was no change in the King's behaviour towards me, I only found it in Mayhoo and Yer-vo-gar. They think if they can get rid of me, they will get presents from the next one.

Here I shall terminate my notes, for this trip, or else I shall get splenetic, Comm[ander] Forbes having superseded me, I have become a mere cipher.⁷²⁴

Not that I wish to say one word against Comm[ander] Forbes, but I feel much annoyed that things have turned out as they have. I volunteered for my present appointment, to act with and serve under Mr Consul Beecroft, never dreaming that I should be subject to be walked over by officers belonging to a distinct service. Nor do I see any remedy for the above as long as the 'Vice' is attached to my title, those four letters making me the junior in rank of all the coast.⁷²⁵

During this trip I had a short, but very severe, attack of Dysentery, which left me weak for three or four weeks after.

4. 'Occurrences, gossip &c. at Whydah'

[19–22 January 1852]⁷²⁶

1852

Jan. 19. Flogged two English town men for robbery.

20 [Jan.] Much pain in the bowels, during the night.

The Yer-vo-gar's sticks, has been round, this morning, to summon all 'white men' to meet at the Cha-cha's, to hear a palaver from the King.

The stick did not come to me.

⁷²⁴But some account of the negotiations is included in Fraser's letter of 17 Jan. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 3. See also Forbes' account, in Appendix 3, no. 8.

⁷²⁵These two paragraphs, referring to Forbes, are omitted in the HCPP version.

⁷²⁶TNA, FO84/886, f. 253.

The palaver, was a notification, that in future, the King would monopolize the Palm Oil trade—his selling price would be \$12 per measure and \$4 per puncheon for rolling off the beach.⁷²⁷

21st [Jan.]. Gave pass to Cape Coast man, for boat and crew for which I received a fee of one dollar.⁷²⁸

Countersigned agreement (purchase of a house) between Sig[nor] Rodriguez and Mr T. Hutton, for which I received one dollar.⁷²⁹

22nd [Jan.]. Left Whydah for Aggwey, and windward treaties.⁷³⁰

5. 'Windward Treaties'

[22 January–2 February 1852]⁷³¹

Left Whydah on the 22nd of January 1852 at 12 am.⁷³²

Two of my boys, were seized at the Lagoon side and carried back to Whydah, not being allowed to accompany me.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Fraser to Beecroft, 17 Jan. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 3. The royal 'monopoly' of trade now proclaimed was probably not intended as a permanent arrangement, but a short-term emergency measure to meet the immediate crisis posed by the ending of the slave trade (Law 2004a, 223–4). The 'measure' of oil was 18 gallons, the standard 'puncheon' 120 gallons. The new price now announced represented a nominal rise of 50%, from the \$8 per measure reported as current earlier ('Commercial Report' in Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 197). However, it is not clear whether these prices are in actual silver dollars, or in cowries at the conventional value of \$1=2,000. If the latter, given that the cowry currency was currently subject to severe depreciation (cf. Endnote 2), the point may have been to restore the real price, rather than to increase it (for discussion, see Law 2004a, 231–2).

⁷²⁸ See TNA, FO84/886, f. 253. Addressed to 'the English, French and American Men of War', requesting passage for Quashie Daddy, on the Bristol ship *Patience*, from Porto-Novo to Ouidah. This was intended to obtain exemption from the blockade.

⁷²⁹ See TNA, FO84/886, f. 265, Agreement for the purchase of 'a house and tenements, situated on the Zomai Road, west side of English town, Whydah', from Joaquim Jacinto Rodrigues by Thomas Hutton, for 1500 heads of cowries, or \$750.

⁷³⁰ i.e. with coastal communities to windward (west) of Ouidah.

⁷³¹ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 251–252; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 2 in no. 6, but there given the incorrect title 'Account of Vice-Consul Fraser's Third Visit to the King of Dahomey'—presumably, it was the latter text which was intended to be included. Cf. Forbes' account of these negotiations, TNA, FO84/893, ff. 128–38, T. G. Forbes to Bruce, 5 Feb. 1852; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 6 in no.71 (not included in this edition).

⁷³² To meet Forbes at Agoué: Forbes' account explains that 'I communicated with Mr Fraser ... as to the best means of expeditiously concluding these Treaties, and finding it would be impracticable to do so, by calling at the different places mentioned, in the ship, owing to these towns being all situated some distance in the interior, and on the other side of the Lagoon, I decided on travelling by Land, moving the ship up the coast as I proceeded'.

Arrived at Grand Popoe at 6 p.m.

Sounded and took compass bearing of this portion of the Lagoon, It runs close to the sea, is very tortuous; seldom seeing more than ½ a mile ahead; water varying from two to four feet; breadth from fifty to three hundred yards; the wide parts are arms or elbows; much mangrove; many islands, oysters in abundance; birds scarce; no crocodiles seen going up. Before reaching Grand Popoe, there is an opening into the sea,⁷³³ which at times breaks on the north bank of the Lagoon, the crossing of which is at times dangerous, my canoe shipped three seas. Canoes are frequently swamped and even capsized here.

Very few villages I passed.

Left Grand Popoe at 9 a.m.

23rd. Arrived at Ahgwey at 3 a.m.

During the day Comm[ander] Forbes and his Purser,⁷³⁴ came on shore.

25th. Treaty signed at Little Popoe.

26. D[it]o Grom Cock-way or Gomalouta⁷³⁵

27. D[it]o Aboadrafo or Porto Segoor. Fish Town of the Government Charts.⁷³⁶

28. D[it]o Afflowhoo or Flohoo.⁷³⁷

29. D[it]o (Adaffie
(Aguinberweh and
(Daynoo⁷³⁸

“ D[it]o Adinner Cooma, Elmina Chica or Little Elmina⁷³⁹

30. D[it]o Blockhouse.⁷⁴⁰

Feb.1 D[it]o Ahgwey⁷⁴¹

⁷³³i.e. the opening nowadays called the 'Bouche du Roi'.

⁷³⁴i.e. John Tweedie.

⁷³⁵Goun Kopè, mid-way between Little Popo and Agbodrafo.

⁷³⁶Agbodrafo (also called Porto-Seguro), 20 km west of Little Popo.

⁷³⁷Aflao, 35 km west of Agbodrafo, just inside the boundary of modern Ghana.

⁷³⁸Denu and Adafienu, respectively 6 and 3 km further along the coast; 'Aguinberweh' (Agin-nohay' in T. G. Forbes' Journal) is not identified.

⁷³⁹Adina, 10 km from Denu. The name is a variant of Edina, the indigenous name of Elmina; 'Chica' means 'Little' (in Spanish), and 'Kuma' the equivalent in Fante (literally 'Junior').

⁷⁴⁰Blekusu, 13 km beyond Adina.

⁷⁴¹i.e. the party now proceeded back eastwards along the coast.

2 D[itt]o Grand Popoe

Here again I must refer to Comm[ander] Forbes for detail, he being the principal personage.

The fact of making me, a witness only, instead of a principal in the above treaties,⁷⁴² I consider very detrimental to the service, for instance, when palaver comes, these Chiefs, will say pshaw, he [= Fraser] is nobody, man-of-war man, he [= Forbes] big man, he make treaty.

We have only to refer back to December, for an example of this Kind, in the King of Dahomey, sending for a man-of-war Captain, when I was actually residing in his capital, thus employing two persons on one errand and doubling expense.⁷⁴³

6. 'Occurrences, gossip &c. at Whydah', continued [4–20 February 1852]⁷⁴⁴

Feb. 4. Returned to Whydah.⁷⁴⁵ On nearing the landing place, saw at one time, nine crocodiles, basking in the sun, on the mud bank, they varied from eight to eleven feet in length each.

Sent my card to Yer-vo-gar, as I am lame, in consequence of large boils.⁷⁴⁶

Received letter from Foreign Office dated Sept. 30 1851 ordering me to quit the Fort and find a private residence.⁷⁴⁷

5th [Feb.] Received some private letters, through Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza, who was very anxious to obtain a receipt for them.

6th [Feb.] Narwee called, [I] refused to take his proffered hand; asked him, why he had not called before? he said, I had not sent for him. Told him, I had sent my messenger and card to the Yer-vo-gar, as soon as I arrived, and it had not been acknowledged. He had better tell the Yer-vo-gar so.

Narwee came with the Yer-vo-gar's stick and compliments, to ask if I would allow him to put some Gunpowder in the Fort magazine? told him, I would consider of it.

⁷⁴² Although Fraser signed the treaties as a witness, Forbes' journal makes no mention of him as involved in the actual negotiations.

⁷⁴³ These final 3 paragraphs are omitted in the HCPP version.

⁷⁴⁴ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 253–259.

⁷⁴⁵ Forbes' Journal indicates that they reached Ouidah on 3 Feb. (at 5 p.m.), Forbes re-joining his ship on 4 Feb.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. later references to his skin disease, in pp. 163, 170, 173; and his letter of 8 May 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 6. Fraser later described his complaint as 'craw craw', i.e. scabies (TNA, FO2/12, Fraser to Wodehouse, 16 Feb. 1854).

⁷⁴⁷ See TNA, FO84/858, Palmerston to Fraser, 30 Sept. 1851: following representations from the firm of Hutton, asserting its claim to the fort, it was judged 'not expedient' for Fraser to continue to reside in it, and he was instructed to find a 'separate residence'.

If I am to remain here, I will not be troubled with these things; I should require a man on purpose, to keep tally, of things going in and out, besides the danger.

10th [Feb.]. Comm[ander] Forbes, wrote to Brown, the black interpreter, requesting him to enquire if Yer-vo-gar had received any message from the King.

The report today, is that our Cruizers are all laden with stones, ready to build Forts along the coast.⁷⁴⁸

Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza, is putting the Portuguese Fort, in repair,

11th [Feb.]. Brandon's house, was again burned⁷⁴⁹ during the night.

'Penelope' fired guns.⁷⁵⁰

Went on board as soon as possible

Saw the Commodore [i.e. Bruce], he was very brief, did not refer to the trip to Cannah nor the treaties to windward, but asked what I thought of sending another mission to the King of Dahomey.

I opposed it in toto and told him the King would think, we were playing with him, that it would be better to carry out the original intention.⁷⁵¹ He, the Commodore, might if he thought fit send a message, through the Yer-vo-gar, to say he was not satisfied, with the small portion of the treaty which he, the King, had acceded to, and unless the original treaty was signed, the blockade would be put in force.⁷⁵²

The Commodore said that Comm[ander] Forbes was very sanguine about the Kings signing the whole treaty and wished to go up again. Told him I was by no means sanguine, that it would be time enough to send up officers, when the King sent down to say he was ready to sign.

This was the whole of our interview.⁷⁵³

If I had known, that I was of such little importance, both in the past and future transactions, I certainly would not have risked my life, through the surf.

I shall pass over Comm[ander] Wilmot's trip to Porto Nuovo, without remark, although it comes within my Vice Consulate.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. also the rumour reported later, of a projected fort at Popo (p. 169).

⁷⁴⁹ Sic: but no previous occasion is reported in the extant Journals.

⁷⁵⁰ i.e. as a signal.

⁷⁵¹ Presumably, to maintain the blockade until a satisfactory treaty was signed.

⁷⁵² The King had accepted only one of the 9 articles of the standard treaty for the abolition of the slave trade which was initially proposed to him: see Forbes' account, in Appendix 3, no.8.

⁷⁵³ Implying that Bruce failed to mention his letter to the King, written this same day (see Appendix 2, no.32), which he transmitted via the interpreter J. P. Brown (cf. p. 153, with n. 765).

⁷⁵⁴ Wilmot had gone by the lagoon from Lagos to Porto-Novo, where he negotiated a treaty for the abolition of the slave trade with the king and chiefs, signed 17 Jan. 1852: see his account in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no.73, Wilmot to Bruce, Lagos, 11 Feb. 1852, with text of treaty incl. 2.

It is said (I have not received any communication on the subject) that the Commodore has ordered a strict blockade to be put on Whydah, Godomey, Cootenoo and Appi.⁷⁵⁵

If this is true it will certainly puzzle and enrage Gezo, to think one half of his Kingdom should be blockaded and the rest left open.⁷⁵⁶

Is it on account of the King of Porto Nuovo having signed a treaty?

Because Domingo Martinz' Porto Nuovo, on the beach,⁷⁵⁷ has nothing in common with the town of Porto Nuovo, which is some miles inland. If it was not from fear of Gezo, the King of Porto Nuovo, would have had Domingo's head long ago.⁷⁵⁸

Porto Nuovo, on the beach, belongs immediately to Gezo, and is monopolized by the only man (Domingo Martinz) that has had money of late years, to carry on the Slave Trade. He will make his fortune, and can well afford to send handsome presents to the King of Dahomey, not to sign the treaty, for the longer the blockade is on, the three named places, the better for him and his legitimate trade, which is considerable.

Again, the Lagoon is open between Ahgwey, Grand Popoe and Whydah, under these circumstances, the blockade, as now laid down, may be continued for ever, without being felt, except by a few inconsiderable individuals.

Of course, I shall have official notice of the Commodore's orders, then I shall be able to explain.⁷⁵⁹

13th [Feb.]. Slept on board the 'Philomel'.⁷⁶⁰

Rec[eive]d a letter from Mr Stanfield, Mr T. Hutton's agent.⁷⁶¹

Commander Forbes received a letter from Yer-vo-gar,⁷⁶² he went on board the Commodore's vessel, with alarm depicted in his countenance, he returned

⁷⁵⁵ i.e. the blockade was lifted on states which had signed satisfactory treaties, and maintained only on what were considered ports of Dahomey. Fraser subsequently refers to 'three named places', rather than four as here, so probably 'Cootenoo' and 'Appi' are really alternative names for the same place (i.e. Cotonou).

⁷⁵⁶ As explained subsequently, 'Porto-Novo on the beach', which was now excluded from the blockade, was actually subject to Dahomey.

⁷⁵⁷ The village on the beach which served as the point of embarkation, whose indigenous name is Sèmè, to which the name 'Porto-Novo' had in fact originally (in the 18th century) been applied.

⁷⁵⁸ Wilmot likewise reported that Martins was 'not on good terms' with the King of Porto-Novo, and 'It is rumoured that upon several occasions his life has been in jeopardy from poison': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no.73, Wilmot to Bruce, Lagos, 30 Jan. 1852. Cf. also earlier reference to tensions between Martins and the King of Porto-Novo, p. 43.

⁷⁵⁹ In fact, Fraser did not receive Bruce's notice of the partial raising of blockade until 22 March 1852 (p. 173).

⁷⁶⁰ Presumably, Fraser had gone on board the previous day (12 Feb. 1852), for which there is no extant journal entry.

⁷⁶¹ See TNA, FO84/886, f. 267, Stanfield to Fraser, 12 Feb. 1852, asking Fraser to intercede with Commodore Bruce, to permit the ship *Diadem* (presumably a ship of Hutton's) to take in cargo.

⁷⁶² Not traced.

with a desire from the Commodore, that I would accompany him on shore, to correct misstatements.

It appears that this said letter, states that the master of the French Barque, now in the roads, has reported that the vessels of war were going to destroy Whydah, in eight days, and he, the Yer-vo-gar, wished to know if it was true.

An officer was sent on board the Frenchman, of course he denied having said so.

Went on shore, with Comm[ander] Forbes, there was a nasty surf, but landed safely.

Saw the Yer-vo-gar, he seemed very doleful and dubious, talked much, saying he could not understand it; he thought all was settled when the King signed the book; this referred to reestablishing the blockade.

The blockade is in full force, this morning, canoes were turned back, that were going off to the Frenchman.

The Yer-vo-gar, asked permission to land some presents for the King.

Comm[ander] Forbes granted it; upon second thoughts, he asked what these presents consisted of? The Yer-vo-gar very coolly replied, seven cargoes, under Capt Dedrickson, this is a Hamburg master and supercargo.⁷⁶³

Fancy a Hamburg or any other firm making such a present.

Enquiries were afterwards made of Capt D[edrickson], who denied having any presents for the King and laughed at the absurdity of his seven vessels being intended for that purpose.

But how is Comm[ander] F[orbes] to get over his promise? he will find it much easier to deal with these people one week than many.

The Yer-vo-gar, is evidently angry at my going on board, for he told the Comm[ander] that the 'Queen of England' sent me to live in the Fort, that [= as] the Governor, and it no proper for me to go board ship.

I laughed and told him, that the Fort be my house on shore and the ship my house on the water.

Brown has not yet departed for Abomey,⁷⁶⁴ but has sent the letter.⁷⁶⁵ He is up to his tricks?

M. Case, agent for the French Factory, came, he is in a great rage, about the blockade. He sent a letter by the Comm[ander] to the Commodore.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶³ Lorenz Diedrichsen (cf. Newbury 1961, 40, 57).

⁷⁶⁴ Implying that the King had now moved from Cana to Abomey: he was at Abomey when visited again by Forbes and Fraser between 23 Feb.–2 March 1852.

⁷⁶⁵ i.e. Bruce's letter to the King of 11 Feb. 1852, which had been transmitted via Brown (see Forbes to Fraser, 17 Feb. 1852, in Appendix 2, no.34).

⁷⁶⁶ Not traced.

14th [Feb.]. Capt Grote⁷⁶⁷ of the 'Helen' from Hamburg came on shore, bringing with him a paper from the Commodore, which gave him permission to land or ship cargo, and that he might remain, on the coast, until he had completed his contracts !! Grote, has two vessels and is trading, entirely, with Domingo !!!

What is the meaning of all this ?

When I asked permission for the 'Diadem', yesterday, to take in a few cask[s] of oil,⁷⁶⁸ permission was refused and I saw, the Frenchman's canoes, turned back; but a Hamburgese, trading with the most notorious slave dealer, gets permission.

In the morning received a note from Comm[ander] Forbes, respecting suspension of the blockade.⁷⁶⁹

What does all this mean ?

Are they mad ?

There was another fire in the town last night.

Narwee has just received word, that one of his plantations, on the Abomey road,⁷⁷⁰ has been destroyed by fire.

15th [Feb.]. There is much singing, tom-tom-ing and shouting going on in the town.

About the middle of the day, two Caboceers, each with a party of armed men, tom-toms &c, paraded the town, they danced, for a few minutes, in front of the Fort gate, then Atchillee's stick came up; they passed on.

Sig[nors] Domingo and Antonio have arrived.

Sig[nor] Antonio sent his stick.

Called upon him. He seemed in a poor way, the following are a few of the principal questions &c he put to me, viz.

It seems I (Antonio) have offended all the English !

Q[uestion]. Why is Porto Nuovo, left free, whilst Whydah, Godomey and Cootoonoo are to be blockaded ?

Ans[wer]. Do not know.

Q. Did not the King, say his territory extended from the opening at Grand Popoe to Lagos ?⁷⁷¹

Ans. Yes.

⁷⁶⁷ Hermann Grote, an agent of the Hamburg firm of O'Swald (Newbury 1961, 57).

⁷⁶⁸ As requested by Hutton's agent Stanfield (see p. 152).

⁷⁶⁹ See TNA, FO84/886, f. 268, T. G. Forbes to Fraser, 14 Feb. 1852, reporting that Commodore Bruce had authorized the continuation of 'legal trade' until 1 March 1852.

⁷⁷⁰ Forbes reports (1851, ii, 175-6) that Gnahoui owned plantations at Tori, Houégbo, Agrimé, Zogbodomé and Cana, as well as Ouidah and Abomey.

⁷⁷¹ This statement was made in the King of Dahomey's letter of 13 Jan. 1852 (Appendix 2, no. 29). The 'opening' referred to is the outlet from the lagoon to the sea known as the 'Bouche du Roi', east of Grand-Popo (described earlier by Fraser, p. 149).

Q. The blockade being on, one day, and removed the next, is child's play !

Q. How long will the blockade last, if the King does not sign the book ?

Ans. For ever.

Domingo is afraid the King will think he has been trucking with the English, now his Porto Nuovo is free.

Received a note from Comm[ander] Forbes respecting the water the Yer-vo-gar promised him for the ship.⁷⁷²

The Yer-vo-gar is playing false, he cannot supply water, not having canoes, casks nor canoemen.

16th [Feb.] It is said the King has taken possession of all the Palm oil trees, and that he has sent, according to some accounts, 2200 people, others say 1200, down to collect the fruits.⁷⁷³

17th [Feb.] Sent to M. Case, at his particular request, a copy of Comm[ander] Forbes' note, see 14th inst[ant].⁷⁷⁴

Extract from a note, received from Comm[ander] Forbes.⁷⁷⁵

The tom-toms and people are parading round and round the Cha-cha's place, he is celebrating his birth day.⁷⁷⁶

Saw the Yer-vo-gar, read the portion of Comm[ander] Forbes letter, which referred to him.⁷⁷⁷ He said the King wanted the Comm[ander] and Brown to go up and read that letter.

The Yer-vo-gar ordered Brown, to write off to the Comm[ander], the King's message.

Brown says, he received orders on the 11th inst[ant] from the Commodore to prepare men &c for this trip.

18th [Feb.] There is a great palaver in Sig[nor] Ignatio de Souza[s] yard, which changed to singing and shouting.

This noisy party, is now parading and singing round the outside of Ignatio's walls. There are about 20 men, the first man, carries on his head, a round thing, like a calabash, wrapped up, in blue, with some little thing on the top of it; the others carried red and white handkerchiefs, over their shoulders, the same as those worn at Abomey, at sacrifices.

⁷⁷²Not traced.

⁷⁷³In implementation of the royal monopoly of the palm oil trade proclaimed on 20 Jan. 1852 (p. 148).

⁷⁷⁴See above, p. 154.

⁷⁷⁵See Appendix 2, no. 34, stating that Forbes had a letter to deliver to the King.

⁷⁷⁶Perhaps a misunderstanding, since nowadays the descendants of Isidoro de Souza celebrate his birthday on 3 Jan. (de Souza 1992, 44). However, it is possible that the ceremony was delayed on this occasion by the negotiations with the British mission.

⁷⁷⁷See Appendix 2, no. 34, asking Fraser to tell the Yovogan that he had a letter for the King.

I am told these people have brought from the King, four very small bottles of rum, one for Yer-vo-gar; Chacha, Antonio and Ignatio. This rum was given to the King by Old de Souza, thirty four years ago when he (Francisco) returned from Popoe;⁷⁷⁸ a little was poured over each iron fetish, belonging to his grave, and then a portion of water—ditto—; water was thrown on the ground, where they [i.e. the fetishes] are stuck.⁷⁷⁹

This must be sacrificing to the man's soul.

Each person present, at this ceremony, has a taste of this aged rum. It was said to be very clear but tasteless.

Signed bill of health for French merchant Barque.⁷⁸⁰

Received a note from Comm[ander] Forbes saying he would come on shore on the morrow.⁷⁸¹

19th [Feb.]. Visited Yer-vo-gar with Comm[ander]. Narwee is very anxious, that I should remain in Whydah, as he says, to read any letter that may come on shore.

It is said that the unfortunate individual, who accidentally fired the King's house,⁷⁸² was seized and taken before the King, for the purpose of obtaining an order to behead him.⁷⁸³ But to their great surprise, the King asked if his (the man's) house was burned? being answered in the affirmative He replied:— Well then, let him go and rebuild his house and I will rebuild mine.

I am told that the Yer-vo-gar, has sent round to say, that no person is to fire a gun in the town. I have not had the notice. Is this a trick to catch me?⁷⁸⁴

Comm[ander] Forbes wishes to start to-morrow morning, but Narwee seems determined we shall not.

Much trouble about carriers.

Comm[ander] F[orbes] went to the Yer-vo-gar late at night, about them.

The Yer-vo-gar promised to release fifteen prisoners as carriers.

⁷⁷⁸ i.e. in 1818. This was the date of the *coup d'état* which placed Gezo on the Dahomian throne, with the support of Francisco Felix de Souza; but de Souza family tradition gives the date of his actual return to Ouidah as 1820 (Law 2004a, 166).

⁷⁷⁹ A reference to sculptures of wrought iron, commemorative of the dead, called *asen*, as described later by Burton 1864, ii, 164–5: 'they plant over the dead an Asen, or short cresset-shaped iron, upon whose flat top water or blood, as a drink for the deceased, is poured'. *Asen* were originally used in the cults of *vodun*, and only adapted for ancestral cults in the 19th century (see Bay 2008); Fraser seems to provide the earliest evidence of their use for funerary purposes.

⁷⁸⁰ i.e. guaranteeing that it was not involved in the slave trade.

⁷⁸¹ Not traced.

⁷⁸² As Fraser found when he subsequently visited Abomey, the town had recently suffered a fire, in which it was 'almost all burned' (p. 159).

⁷⁸³ Arson was in principle a capital offence (see Law 2004a, 80).

⁷⁸⁴ Probably thinking of the earlier occasion when Calvert Hutton had been fined for firing a gun during the ceremony of 'Firing to Ouidah' (p. 131).

We shall have a nice party?

The Yer-vo-gar was very anxious to know, why I should go up.

20th [Feb.]. Much trouble with the carriers and hammockmen.

Much humbug with Brown.

Started at 11 am. called upon the Yer-vo-gar.

7. 'The last Mission to Abomey, February 1852' [20 February–4 March]⁷⁸⁵

1852

February 20. Started about 11 am.

Called upon the Yer-vo-gar.

Arrived at Har-lar-dar, after dark, much difficulty, in procuring quarters as Camboodee's house,⁷⁸⁶ was nearly all destroyed by fire.

No food from morning until late at night.

I was compelled to sleep in the open air. Much dew falling.

21 [Feb.]. Started early, arrived at Harkpay about mid-day, the Comm[ander] anxious to cross the swamp, but the Hammockmen stowed themselves away, until it was too dark.

Narwheel arrived. He is the root of all evil.

Slept here in an open shed.

22nd [Feb.]. Started at daylight.

Arrived at Ah'grim-may about noon, stopped two hours; rested at To-bo-dee⁷⁸⁷ and arrived at Cannah in the evening

Sent messenger to the King

Slept in an open shed.

Messenger returned about mid-night.

23 [Feb.]. Took breakfast and started for Abomey. At the fetish place, en route,⁷⁸⁸ they got Mr Tweedie⁷⁸⁹ out of his hammock, there was a bit of a riot about the Comm[ander] and myself, at length the men passed on.⁷⁹⁰ Arrived

⁷⁸⁵TNA, FO84/886, ff. 286–295v. Not printed in HCPP, though apparently in error (cf. above p. 148, n. 731).

⁷⁸⁶F. E. Forbes in 1849 also stayed at the Kangbode's house in Allada (1851, i, 57).

⁷⁸⁷Evidently miscopied for 'Zo-bo-doo', i.e. Zogbodomè.

⁷⁸⁸Described in Fraser's first journey to Abomey (pp. 60–1).

⁷⁸⁹John Tweedie, Purser of the *Philomel*.

⁷⁹⁰i.e. they refused to dismount from their hammocks, as custom required (cf. p. 60).

at the Leopard fetish, near the entrance gate to Abomey:⁷⁹¹ Brown and Madiki, had gone on, leaving Narwee to see that the fetish was properly observed. Mr Tweedie was ahead, they got him out of his hammock and walked off with it. The Comm[ander] and [my]self refused to get out. Narwee was furious, said it was all my fault, I spoil Comm[ander]; I tell him bad thing.

At length the Comm[ander] sent his stick, to the King, and after a time the messenger returned, with a bungling list of Comp[limen]ts, winding up with, we must walk and so we had to, under a scorching sun, through loose sand.

Arrived at our quarters in Abomey.

King's stick came.

Towards evening Mayhoo came, with a good allowance of chop.

Comm[ander] Forbes handed him over a present for the King, from the Commodore, in return for the cloth he sent him. This present consisted of a Powder magazine, two pistols, with screwdriver worms,⁷⁹² &c, and 700 rounds of ball cartridges and upwards of 500 percussion caps; all from Her Majesty's stores with word that he, the Commodore, would write to England for something more suitable.

Mr Tweedie, made a present to Mayhoo of some private things.

This is far from right, particularly the Commodore's public present. It is making my position worse.⁷⁹³

24 [Feb.] Chop but no stick from King.

Towards evening, Mayhoo came saying the King would see the Comm[ander] and Mr Tweedie on the morrow.

As, I was left out, I told the Comm[ander] that as he assumed to be my senior, in this expectation, I should expect, he would see to this and put all things in order.

I have no idea of being continually insulted in this way.

25 [Feb.] Chop from King.

Mayhoo came this morning, to say the King would see the Comm[ander] and Mr T[weedie] and shake hands with him to day, but not talk palaver. The question was asked, if I was to be present? Madiki answered that I could go and shake hands with the King, but not attend palaver.

Narwee came, at length, to say all was ready and we proceeded to the square in front of the King's house.

⁷⁹¹ Cf. earlier reference (p. 61).

⁷⁹² for cleaning gun-barrels.

⁷⁹³ Because Fraser himself had consistently resisted pressure to give gifts.

Everything was nothing particular going on.

A quantity of palm sticks, were carried past; one lot carrying three each, these were said to be contributions from two different places, towards a rebuilding the town after the recent conflagration.

Sticks from Porto Nuovo and other places, were presented, with their respective chiefs words of condolence for the loss of the town.

Abomey seems to have been almost all burned, judging from the quantity of new thatch.

After boiling under the partial shade of a tree, for an hour or more, we had permission to retire, and after several messages to and fro, permission to visit the markets &c

The King desired Comm[ander] F[orbes] would buy him something Handsome. This was taken as a joke. The Comm[ander] sent him a native hoe and hatchet, saying they were the most serviceable things he saw, they would do for the cotton.⁷⁹⁴

26 [Feb.] The following dash from the King, viz.:—For the Commander 1. Goat, 2 Fowls, 2 calabashes of Indian corn, some salt, peppers and Palm Oil For Mr Tweedie, Brown, Madiki and self; each 1. goat; 2 Fowls; 1 calabash of Indian corn, some salt, peppers and Palm Oil.

The Commander sent the King, five silk handkerchiefs and one cashmere shawl also an imitation necklace for one of the old women, which he chose to designate Queen!⁷⁹⁵

Tweedie sent a bead necklace to the same oldwoman.

Tweedie gave Mayhoo his card. Mayhoo begged a cardcase, he gave him a very nice leathern housewife,⁷⁹⁶ as a substitute.

The King returned the native hoe and hatchet, saying they were native and the Commander had better take them to England to shew what was used in Dahomey, and to remember he was in his, the King's, debt, so much. That he could buy him something in England and send it to him.

Chop arrived.

⁷⁹⁴Forbes (and presumably also Fraser) seems to have been unaware that this gift could be interpreted as an insult, since agricultural labour was considered incompatible with the military ethos of the Dahomian monarchy; according to Dahomian tradition, when the King of Oyo sent Gezo's predecessor Adandozan (1797–1818) a symbolic gift of a hoe, with instructions to cultivate the soil, he replied 'Our ancestors did not cultivate with hoes but with guns; the kings of Dahomey cultivate only war' (Le Herissé 1911, 313).

⁷⁹⁵See also p. 162. Probably a reference to the office of *kpojito*, the king's (official, rather than natural) 'mother', which was the highest rank among the palace women (Bay 1998, 71–2, 178–82).

⁷⁹⁶i.e. a case for needles, thread etc.

Towards evening went to Coomassie, to see some fetish dancing,⁷⁹⁷ it was all by women and one set was called the 'King's women';⁷⁹⁸ they wore broad silver bracelets, like Mayhoo, and large straw hats. The women were all of a large size and seemed to take their turn, in the hop, skip and jump sort of dance.

There was a country rope, stretched across to keep the gazers from the dancers.⁷⁹⁹

The people were very civil, made room and gave us their tom-toms to sit upon.

It was all over before dark and we were invited to come again on the morrow.

The King's women were marched home under an escort of armed Amazons.⁸⁰⁰

In the evening about 100 armed men, were running up and down, singing and dancing, in front of our gate.

27 [Feb.] After some six messengers had arrived, we were lead out to that portion of the King's place, opposite Mayhoo's house,⁸⁰¹ here we were seated under a leafless tree, after some palavering, we were allowed to shift our position to a more shady place.

After sitting there about an hour, we were bid to come go. We had to cross a large yard, similar to that at Cannah, there were some eight or ten articles of different sorts and sizes, all matted over, under a shed in this yard.

The King was lying under a shed, with some six of his women, at his feet, and three younger ones behind him; the place was covered with country cloths and the uprights, with red silks of European manufacture.

Mayhoo, Camboodee, Cow-pay,⁸⁰² Narwhoe &c. were in attendance.

He shook hands with us; he laughed heartily when he took mine, but I was not told what he said!

The Commander, then read three letters from the Commodore,⁸⁰³ one, private, referred to his present of the Pistols &c and promising to write to England for something more suitable for him.

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. further reference to 'fetish dancing' on the following day, p. 162. Apparently referring to a Custom in honour of the reigning King's father, performed prior to the departure of the Dahomian army for war: cf. T. G. Forbes, Journal, 24 Feb. 1852, in Appendix 3, no.9; and see further Endnote 1.

⁷⁹⁸ Presumably translating the term *ahósi*, literally 'King's wife', but applied to all women in the palace.

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. p. 75, with n. 372.

⁸⁰⁰ i.e. female soldiers, recruited from the palace women.

⁸⁰¹ i.e. the east of the palace.

⁸⁰² Cf. 'Caoopeh', described as the 'sub-treasurer' (i.e. assistant/deputy to the Kangbode) by Forbes 1851, ii, 18; given in the form 'Kakopwe' by Burton 1864, i, 230.

⁸⁰³ But Forbes (in Appendix 3, no. 9) refers to only 2 letters.

The King asked why, the Commodore did not send him some ship's muskets, meaning those with bayonets; the same as he asked me, on my first visit.⁸⁰⁴

The Commodore's official letters did not touch upon, those paragraphs which affected me,⁸⁰⁵ nor did it say one word about the insults and indignities, with which I have had to put up.

The Commander then attempted to read the Treaty⁸⁰⁶ and the Commodore's interpretation thereof, but the King would not permit it.

The King, then said it was his turn to speak, but first, he must commence with a parable, which was, as follows:—

Suppose, says he, I had a sweetheart and she came into this house to see me, we sit there some time; I wish to get her some rum to drink, and I leave her in this house, as I suppose, while I go to my store, which is at a little distance; when there, 'I let fly my wind' and on looking round, I find, she has followed me, to my astonishment. She immediately say, never mind, you did not know I was following me.

This specimen of royal wit, seemed to give great satisfaction, to his sycophants, male and female, for they laughed immoderately.

By this parable he intended comparing the Commander to his sweetheart. Having before seen and given him a letter for the Queen, he supposed he was on his way to England with it; when to his surprise he finds he has come again, to talk over the same palaver.

He, the King, talked loud and long, was evidently in a great rage; made a chart of his country, with his fingers, in the sand, to shew us its extent, and how easily he could get all he wanted, if we did blockade his ports.

He was evidently in a rage, about Porto Nuovo and also the places to windward for signing the treaty; said they were all small, they were only chiefs, but he was a King, and had a large country.

He said, he was told, we had 326 ships of war, coming to attack his country, that we could attack Whydah, if we liked and might land and take a few men, but we could not come to Abomey, because there was no water.⁸⁰⁷

He denied the treaty being the Queen's book, that we might blockade, if we pleased, but he should wait until the messengers came from Europe.

⁸⁰⁴In Aug. 1851 (see pp. 73–4).

⁸⁰⁵Presumably this means that Forbes, in reading out the letters, did not refer to these paragraphs: Bruce's official letter (Appendix 2, no. 32) included the statement that 'No one dare call himself a messenger of the Queen of England unless he had authority to do so', and that such messengers 'should be respected accordingly'.

⁸⁰⁶i.e. the full version of the standard treaty, which Gezo had refused to sign on the previous mission.

⁸⁰⁷From a later reference (p. 165), this apparently refers to drinking water, rather than water for British ships to sail on.

He said, the only people, he has any doubts about,⁸⁰⁸ were the Jaboos;⁸⁰⁹ he never had anything to do with them, therefore he did not know how strong they were.

That if he chose, he could stop the road from Badagry to Abbeokuta, and then white men could not go there [i.e. to Abeokuta], and the white men that were there, could not return to the sea.

He repeated that some Abbeokutans must come to him, to conclude peace.⁸¹⁰

Two or three attempts, were made to wedge in the treaty and the Commodore's note, but all to no purpose.

At the wind up, he remarked, that I had not spoken all the time and he concluded, I had arranged everything to my own mind.

I had some difficulty, to get the Commander to take notice of this, and when he did, it was slurred over.

He arose and we had a drink.

He walked into the middle of the yard with us. There I told him I was sorry he should give me bad name, but, I did not care, when he knew me better, he would see his mistake.

He laughed, and said, as he shook hands, that he did not give me a bad name, that I could remain in the Fort, what has passed was finished.

He said, if England, would send him, three merchants, and if they wished to go, severally, to Godomey, Cootoonoo and Porto Nuovo, he would put them there, and give them a place to build a house.

He promised to see us, on the morrow, to write a letter.

After dinner we started for the Ravine,⁸¹¹ but our men refused to pass the gate, because as they say, Mayhoo, was not acquainted with our intention.

It is very tiresome, to be under the controul, of every vagabond you employ.

The Commander had a great palaver with the men and promised them I know not what.

We, then proceeded by another gate, to Coomassie and saw the Fetish dancing, same as yesterday.

28th [Feb.] The King's oldwoman, whom the Commander, has thought proper to dub Queen, sent her decanter, saying she wanted it filled with the best we were drinking.

⁸⁰⁸ i.e. about Dahomey's military superiority over them.

⁸⁰⁹ Ijebu, NE of Lagos.

⁸¹⁰ i.e. the question of peace with Abeokuta was a matter for negotiation between it and Dahomey, rather than with the British.

⁸¹¹ Presumably, the depression to the north of the city, where the water-spring of Dido was located (cf. p. 95), which was a favoured viewing site for European visitors (cf. Forbes 1851, i, 71; ii, 82).

Sent Hollands.⁸¹²

The Commander sent her a lot of little presents, again, this morning
Towards evening, much wind, thunder and lightning.

29 [Feb.] Very much troubled with my boils.

Chop from the King.

Mayhoo came to dictate the King's palaver.

I wrote down a lot of trash, which he took away with him, it was as follows:—

1st. The first vessel that came to Whydah was a merchantman, the master came on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received him, he did his trade and he went away.

The second, brought a messenger from the King of England, he sent his stick on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received it, he came on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received him, he came to Abomey and the King received him, he sat down, broke open the King's letter, he read it, the King heard, gave his answer and he went away.

The third, was a steamer, man of war, the Captain's name was 'Conoo',⁸¹³ that he fired into a merchantman and burned her. The King of Dahomey, sent to England to know, if he sent him to do so? The answer was—no and a desire that the King should cut off his (the Captain's) head and send it to England!

Which was done!!⁸¹⁴

Much wind towards night.

March 1. Mayhoo called and presented us, in the King's name, with two heads of cowries each, to go to the market with.

Another long palaver about treaty with Mayhoo, but he would not, even listen.

Forbes is trying all he can to persuade two of the King's sons, to say they will go to England, he promises to take them.

What nonsense, to incur unnecessary expenses.

Mayhoo has a notion, that if the King signs the treaty, he will be selling his country.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹²i.e. Dutch gin.

⁸¹³The name has no obvious meaning in Fon.

⁸¹⁴Fraser later confessed to finding this parable 'so inexplicable at the time that little notice was taken of it' (see his letter of 9 March 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 5). But he later grasped (see p. 169) that, although reported here in the past tense, the story was intended to be normative, rather than historical, setting out the rules for the future conduct of Anglo-Dahomian relations.

⁸¹⁵This was repeated by the King himself on the following day (p. 165). It may allude to the payment of financial compensation for giving up the slave trade. However, although provision for such compensation had been made in earlier draft treaties presented to the King, none was included in the one actually signed in Jan. 1852. More probably, the remark represents a

There is much nonsense afloat, of one thing and another, this morning.
 Forbes is writing a letter to the Commodore, by means of a signal book;
 Tweedie another, with invisible ink.
 We are to see the King tomorrow and be passed.
 Mayhoo states, in the king's name, 'that if a man-of-war anchors off a town—it means War!!![']

2 [March]. Mayhoo called this morning, there is an ill omened expression upon his countenance, he seems fitful.⁸¹⁶

After breakfast, dressed, started off, and took our seats under the tree as before Jacinto arrived. He said, he had been summoned, but he did not know what for.⁸¹⁷

Mayhoo was lying, on a mat, outside the King's wall, under an open shed.
 Narwee was very anxious, to have writing materials, ready. This looked like business. Sent for my desk and the treaty.

After some considerable delay, we were shown, into the presence of the King, who received us very coldly.

After a few moments the King commenced a long harangue, he was in a furious passion: commenced by abusing Brown and Mr Hutton, said they were the cause of this palaver: he threatened to strip Brown, bind his hands and make him walk to Whydah naked, to be sent to England.

Talked much about making all white men, who come to him, take off their shoes and even their clothes.⁸¹⁸

He repeated Capt 'Conoo's' case, with some alterations.

He seems particularly angry, that the same treaty was sent to everybody.

He said he was a King and a great one, and was not to be treated like the small Chiefs, such as we had seen elsewhere. It would take time for a great King like him to consider.

That us four (Forbes, Tweedie, Jacinto and self) when arrived at Harkpay, we could each take different roads to Whydah and see the extent of his country.

That the Commodore might land forty men, to examine his country all over.

Dahomian idiom referring to the transfer of sovereignty. The Kings of Dahomey legitimized their conquest of other communities by formally purchasing the land from its inhabitants, and this was symbolically re-enacted in a distribution of money (cowries) at the installation of each new King, who was therefore said to have 'bought Dahomey'; in fact, when the French conquered Dahomey in 1892–4, it was said that they too had 'bought Dahomey' (Le Herissé 1911, 244). Hence, 'selling his country' here means surrendering sovereignty.

⁸¹⁶ Presumably the intended meaning is 'in a fit', i.e. apoplectic.

⁸¹⁷ Probably, as earlier (see p. 146) he was intended to assist in translation.

⁸¹⁸ i.e. to make them conform to Dahomian etiquette, which required persons in the king's presence to strip down to 'a tunic and a pair of drawers', and restricted the use of sandals to the King (Dalzel 1793, vii–viii), but from which Europeans were normally exempt.

He was very particular in pointing out, how easily he could procure things, from Porto Nuovo and Ahgwey, and that blockading Whydah, Godomey and Cootoonoo, would not affect him.

We might bring three hundred and twenty six ships, to break Whydah, land 20,000 men, but we could not touch him; one half would die on the road for want of water and he could fight the other half.

He made a terrible to do about the ships of war meeting the Commodore at Whydah, and ordered that it should not be done again, in fact, no man-of-war was to come to Whydah and the Comm[ander] was to be sure that the messenger from the Queen, did not come in a man-of-war, he might come in any other ship he pleased.

He ordered, that all ships be removed from the roadstead and complained sadly about the Commander not obeying his previous order, on the same subject.⁸¹⁹

He said, he supposed we thought, he could not do without our cowries, but we were mistaken, he could make coin. He asked whether Ashantee used cowries? being told that gold was their medium, he seemed taken aback. Then, said he, I will send and dig for gold.⁸²⁰

He produced his specimens of iron, tobacco and cloths.

We had a palaver about the three Forts, over and over again and many other things that have been repeated before.

He repeated Mayhoo's speech about signing the treaty, would be selling his country. That if the French and Portuguese Governments liked to give up their Forts to the English, they might; but he would not.

He desired the blockade to be most rigidly enforced and no man-of-war officers were to come on shore.

The Commander might come back in five years, and see if he would be a poor man or not.⁸²¹

If he ordered Domingo to stop the path,⁸²² no white man could go to Abbeokutah or return to the sea.

He was very indignant that the other Forbes, should go up with guns and train the Abbeokutans to the use of them.⁸²³

He said, he did not believe, Comm[ander] G.T. Forbes belonged to the Queen, nor did he believe that I did.

⁸¹⁹ See Forbes' journal, entry for 14 Jan. 1852, in Appendix 3, no. 8.

⁸²⁰ Implying that he had access to a source of gold. Duncan earlier reported that gold was 'abundant' in Dahomey, though not exploited (1847, ii, 307); but this claim is rejected by Burton 1864, i, 177–8.

⁸²¹ i.e. he was not dependent on overseas trade, and therefore could not be coerced by the blockade.

⁸²² Evidently, from Badagry inland.

⁸²³ i.e. Commander F. E. Forbes.

That when Comm[ander] F[orbes] went down, he was to take all the white (English?) men and their property, away with him, and also from Badagry; for he intended to break the latter place.⁸²⁴

At length it came to my turn, he shook his fist at me all the time he was talking, the old women, Mayhoo and all hands helped him, to abuse me. The only portion, of his palaver, that was interpreted, being that he again desired Comm[ander] Forbes, to take me, from his country.

I desired Comm[ander] Forbes to tell him, that it was not in his, Comm[ander] F[orbes]'s, power to take me away: that it being the second time he has expressed a wish to drive me from his country,⁸²⁵ and particularly after what he said on 27th inst[ant],⁸²⁶ I would not remain with him any longer to receive insults: and [would] report his behaviour to me, accordingly.

He seemed much surprised at my resolution and turning to his people, said, 'there you are'.

The Comm[ander] endeavoured to persuade him to have these things, put on paper, but he would not. Sometimes the Comm[ander] was desired to tell the Commadore, at others, he would say 'you can make book when you get home'.

After he had talked, for about four hours, in a violent passion, he told us, we might go to Whydah.

We drank aguedent⁸²⁷ together, but he never attempted to shake hands, or leave his seat and walk with us, as is customary, but dismissed us, as he would his own people.

To say the least of it, the whole affair from beginning to end, was extremely uncivil.

As we passed out, Mayhoo, told Sig[nor] Jacinto that his name had been mentioned. We saw no more of him.⁸²⁸

Returned to our quarters, and commenced packing up.

Mayhoo says the King has received bad news from Whydah, which make him so angry today.⁸²⁹

Much confusion about carriers. Narwee has withdrawn his fifteen men. Mayhoo [was] applied to. He replied he had no men. Sent for Mayhoo, who after exacting double fare, promised to forward our six bags of cowries.

⁸²⁴ Cf. later reference to Gezo's intention to attack Badagry, p. 169. For apprehensions of an attack at Badagry itself, see Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 320. But no such attack in fact took place.

⁸²⁵ The King had also demanded Fraser's removal from Ouidah on 8 Jan. 1852 (p. 147).

⁸²⁶ Sic, referring to 27 Feb. 1852, when the King had said, on the contrary, that Fraser 'could remain in the Fort' (p. 162).

⁸²⁷ aguardente, a form of rum (made from sugar cane, rather than from molasses).

⁸²⁸ See further p. 168 .

⁸²⁹ Presumably, news of the military defeat, reported 2 days later (p. 168).

This in my opinion, was a trick, between Mayhoo and Narwee, to exact cowries. There has been more cheating this trip than on previous occasions.

Started in the afternoon.

Arrived at Ah-grim-may.

During the night, a messenger from the King arrived, saying the King had heard that the Commodore, had been at Whydah, during the Comm[ander's] absence and has returned to Abbeokutah. He wishes to know if it was true

Comm[ander] F[orbes] said it was very likely.⁸³⁰

3rd [March]. No boxes,⁸³¹ consequently a little drop of brandy, is all we can get.

Received a letter from Mr Stanfield.⁸³²

At Har-lar-dah we saw four puncheons of rum and a large number of bags of cowries, on their way to the King.

March 4. Arrived at Whydah in the forenoon.

8. 'Occurrences, gossip &c. at Whydah', concluded [3–31 March 1852]⁸³³

March 3. Received a letter from Mr Stanfield, Hutton's agent at Whydah, dated March 1. 1852.

4th [March].⁸³⁴ Arrived in Whydah from Abomey. Called on the Yer-vo-gar. After the formalities of the visit were over, he handed over a letter addressed to 'The Lieut[enant] of the Philome!'⁸³⁵ containing three closely written pages of foolscap paper, purporting to be a list of his complaints against Mr Stanfield but as it contained many falsehoods, garbled statements and malicious trifles, I have not considered it worth copying. Its purport is evident. He has some fears as to the result of his conduct and being aware that Mr S[tanfield] had written to me, he frames this epistle to the man-of-war as a counterbalance.

⁸³⁰ Bruce had in fact been off Ouidah on 21–23 Feb. 1852, when he wrote letters from there (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, nos 80, 82–3), but the reference to him 'returning' to Abeokuta is garbled, the British officer currently there being F. E. Forbes.

⁸³¹ i.e. Fraser's luggage had not arrived from Abomey.

⁸³² See Appendix 2, no. 35: the letter concerned a dispute arising from Stanfield having accidentally injured a child.

⁸³³ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 259–263v. Despite the title, this in fact carries Fraser's journal beyond his departure from Ouidah on 8 March.

⁸³⁴ In fact, this entry seems to cover events on 5, as well as 4 March.

⁸³⁵ i.e. T. G. Forbes.

The copy of the letter to Comm[ander] Strange, Senior Officer, will give all the particulars of this interview having reference to this affair.⁸³⁶

This letter is founded upon the facts which transpired, when I had the case investigated, which will account for some slight discrepancies between it and Mr Stanfield's letter upon the same subject.

Received a letter from Comm[ander] Strange the Senior Officer.⁸³⁷

Reply to the above.⁸³⁸

It is reported that Agow, the King's head warrior,⁸³⁹ has been most disgracefully beaten. The Dahoman account is, that he killed, all the enemy, except one man.⁸⁴⁰

Some days ago Mr Calvert Hutton, sent a box to Porto Nuovo, containing about £80 in goods and money. Neither box nor man have since been heard of.

See Yer-vo-gar's remarks on stolen property, marked paragraph A in my letter to Comm[ander] Strange, on the fifth instant.⁸⁴¹

The Yer-vo-gar has seized and imprisoned all the servants belonging to Mr Stanfield, under the pretence that they stole the box.—Hum! He knows better.

6th [March]. Commander Forbes has sent some message to the King.⁸⁴²

After we parted, with Sig[nor] Jacinto at Abomey, he was detained by Mayhoo, for thirty hours, until he paid \$200 as a fine, for selling the house, before mentioned, to Mr Hutton.⁸⁴³ The King is trying to coax Mr Hutton again to Abomey, he will fine him for buying if he catches him!

The Dahoman defeat, mentioned on the 5th, is contradicted to day, and the following substituted:-

The Anagoos came down upon the town of G -----?,⁸⁴⁴ close to, but independent of Porto Nuovo and were severely beaten.⁸⁴⁵

⁸³⁶ See Additional Dispatches, no. 4.

⁸³⁷ See Appendix 2, no. 36, advising Fraser to leave Ouidah.

⁸³⁸ See Appendix 2, no. 37, agreeing to do so.

⁸³⁹ Agau (more usually, Gau), the commander-in-chief of the Dahoman army.

⁸⁴⁰ Cf. also HCPP, *Slave Trade* 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 89, Commander Strange to Bruce, 7 March 1852, reporting from T. G. Forbes a rumour that 'the King of Dahomey's army had been repulsed with great loss, in an attack on another town (supposed to be Ibadan), very recently'. Ibadan, north-east of Abeokuta, was at this time the most powerful of the Yoruba states, but it was certainly not the enemy in this campaign: see also below, n. 485.

⁸⁴¹ See Additional Dispatches, no.5: the Yovogan had said 'If a man steals anything and brings it to me, I keep it'.

⁸⁴² Not traced.

⁸⁴³ See p. 148: the payment was probably intended as a sales tax, rather than a 'fine' in the sense of a punitive sanction.

⁸⁴⁴ Presumably, the copyist could not read this name in full.

⁸⁴⁵ Not identifiable, but perhaps in the Egbado area, NE of Porto-Novo: by implication, this town was allied to Dahomey, and the Anago (i.e. Yoruba) attackers were probably from Abeokuta (or

An order has been issued that, no cowries, should leave Whydah, by Lagoon or otherwise.⁸⁴⁶

The following orders, were issued, this morning, which will explain the parables, the King related to us on the 29th Feb.⁸⁴⁷

1st. If merchantmen come to Whydah, they are to be protected and traded with.

2nd. If a messenger, comes from the Queen of England, he is to be received and protected.

3rd. If any fight men come on shore, they are to have their heads and hands cut off, and sent to Abomey.

4th. That the Dahomans are going to break Badagry: hitherto the King never told his people, what place he was going to attack, because he went for Slaves, but now, he did not want slaves, he did not care who knew where he was going; if the people, of that place, ran away, he would destroy the town, and if he caught any persons in it, they would lose their lives.

There is a report that we have introduced a clause, into the Popoe treaty, about erecting Forts; which is causing a ferment.⁸⁴⁸

8th [March]. All my traps gone to the beach.⁸⁴⁹

Arrived on the beach, received a letter from Comm[ander] Strange.⁸⁵⁰

Sent a messenger to Brown, the only available interpreter. He declined.

Joined H.M. Sloop 'Archer'.

Found my sea chest, broken into, several boxes quite empty, and others partially so. These depredations have been committed between the town and the beach.

9th [March]. Letter to Comm[ander] Strange with copies of the King's parables and orders.⁸⁵¹

10th [March]. Received a letter from Comm[ander] Strange respecting Portuguese territory.⁸⁵²

Answer to ditto.⁸⁵³

one of its allies), with which Dahomey had been disputing control of this area since 1845: for the context, see Folleyan 1972.

⁸⁴⁶ Presumably, this measure was to safeguard the money supply, in the face of the commercial blockade.

⁸⁴⁷ See p. 163.

⁸⁴⁸ No such clause was in fact included in either of the treaties with Little Popo and Grand-Popo.

⁸⁴⁹ i.e. preparatory to leaving.

⁸⁵⁰ See Appendix 2, no. 38, asking for someone to translate a letter received in Portuguese.

⁸⁵¹ See Additional Dispatches, no. 5.

⁸⁵² See Appendix 2, no. 39, relating to a complaint from a Portuguese ship's commander about the non-exemption of the Portuguese fort from the blockade.

⁸⁵³ See Appendix 2, no. 40.

13th [March]. Landed at Ahgwey, for the purpose of settling accounts, contracted at the time the treaties were signed.⁸⁵⁴

Boils so bad I cannot proceed, started messengers to the several places.

Received an application from Herr Petzmann of the Hamburg Barque 'Tombola' for leave to land powder.

Not having received instructions from the Commodore, applied to Comm[ander] Strange, Senior Officer, from whom I received answer.⁸⁵⁵

Permission granted to 'Tombola'.

Mr Calvert Hutton's box has not been recovered.⁸⁵⁶ The Yer-vo-gar insisted upon sending two of Mr Hutton's boys to Abomey, one a Cape Coast man, to be tried by the fetish.⁸⁵⁷ Stanfield knowing full well that one or other or both, stood a very good chance of being poisoned, refused. Upon which the Yer-vo-gar demanded a signed book, to say that the palaver was set and was not to be repeated.

Which Stanfield was compelled to do to save his boys, whom he knows to be innocent.

Three black men, with the Governor of Cape Coast's stick, passed on their way to Whydah, to arrest a man for debt.⁸⁵⁸

16th [March]. The Ahgwey people's account of themselves:—

They formerly belonged to Whydah;⁸⁵⁹ that Whydah was never conquered by the Dahomans.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁴ i.e. the 'windward treaties', signed with Agoué and other communities to the west of Ouidah, between 25 Feb.–2 March 1852 (see pp. 148–50).

⁸⁵⁵ TNA, FO84/886, f. 282, Strange to Fraser, 13 March 1852, stating that the prohibition on the landing of arms and ammunition was confined to 'Lagos and the Jaboo [Ijebu] country'.

⁸⁵⁶ See p. 168.

⁸⁵⁷ From the subsequent reference to poison, this evidently refers to a form of trial by ordeal, by the drinking of a prescribed substance. Repin in 1856 likewise heard that an accused might be obliged to drink 'a decoction of a certain bark', which if he vomited it up, proved his guilt (1895, 102). This, however, probably involves a misunderstanding: an early 20th-century ethnography which also refers to the administration of a poisoned drink (though this was now given to a chicken, rather than to the accused person himself), states rather that guilt was indicated by death (Le Herissé 1911, 74–5).

⁸⁵⁸ The Governor had no powers of 'arrest' in Ouidah, which was outside British jurisdiction, so the reference is probably to 'panyarring' as a means of enforcing payment of a debt (see above, p. 119, with n. 575).

⁸⁵⁹ A puzzling statement, since Agoué was founded (in the 1820s) by refugees from a civil war in Little Popo (see Strickrodt 2003, 188–91); perhaps the meaning is that Agoué had been subordinate to Ouidah before the settlement there of the refugees from Popo. Since, however, Fraser goes on to recount stories from Ouidah tradition, it may be that he spoke to some person or persons at Agoué who originated from Ouidah.

⁸⁶⁰ From what follows, this evidently means that the Dahomians were able to conquer the Hueda kingdom, including its port of Ouidah (in 1727), only with the assistance of the European forts there.

The King of Whydah, used to take off all the locks of guns, and send stocks and barrels, only, into the interior: until one of the Kings of Dahomey, married the King of Whydah's daughter. She presented her husband, with a gun, complete, which much pleased him, when he found he could fire it off at one time, without having resource to the poker. He then begged the King of Whydah to send him some perfect guns, which he was obliged to do; after which guns without locks would not sell.⁸⁶¹

In an affray among the natives, an officer's wife, was shot at the Fort window, by a black man, upon which the Fort, opened fire upon the natives, drove them all away, and gave Whydah to the King of Dahomey.⁸⁶²

18th [March]. Signor Norbury⁸⁶³ applied for permission to collect his debts in Lagos and to trade the 'Duos Irmão[s]' there.⁸⁶⁴

Not having received any instructions, I referred him to Comm[ander] Strange, the Senior Officer, for permission.

A messenger from Whydah, states that sixty houses, in that town, have been destroyed by fire. A fetish house and snakes⁸⁶⁵ also the Yer-vo-gar's premises were included in the conflagrations. The French Fort, caught, but was put out again.

Received two dollars for passes,⁸⁶⁶ for two coopers, joining the Duos Irmão[s].

Received from Mr W. Hanson, two dollars for passes, for one servant and one trade assistant.

⁸⁶¹This is a well-known story in Ouidah tradition, though more recent versions describe the princess who supplied the missing locks (named as 'Na-Geze') rather as a daughter of the King of Dahomey married to the King of Hueda (see Law 2004a, 66–7). The story is already alluded to by Forbes (1851, i, 21), but is told more fully by Fraser. It is usually told in connection with the Dahomian conquest of Hueda, although this link is only implicit in Fraser's account. Forbes earlier gave the selling of incomplete muskets as the cause of the Dahomian attack on Hueda; later versions generally cite the obtaining of complete guns as the explanation of the Dahomian victory.

⁸⁶²Another standard story in Ouidah tradition, of which Fraser appears to supply the earliest record. Later versions refer explicitly to the English fort as that which fired on the Huedas. The story seems in origin to relate to the repulse of an attack on Ouidah by its former inhabitants, now in exile to the west, in 1763, but is often transposed to the original Dahomian conquest (see Law 2004a, 67–8).

⁸⁶³i.e. the Brazilian merchant Nobre, who had left Lagos for Ouidah in Dec. 1851 (see p. 140, n. 690).

⁸⁶⁴Lagos was now under effective British control, following the military intervention to reinstate Akitoye as king there, at the end of Dec. 1851.

⁸⁶⁵Evidently the Dangbe shrine, across the main square from the Yovogan's residence, visited by Fraser earlier (see above, p. 34).

⁸⁶⁶i.e. to go to Lagos.

21 [March]. Sunday. Stanfield's canoemen came to this Factory,⁸⁶⁷ this morning, for subsistence &c; the agent⁸⁶⁸ refused to give it them, as they did not belong to him. A great palaver arose and they told Le Gresley (the Agent) they would break into the store, pay themselves and catch him. Mr Beart (the other agent), was threatened some time since, to be seized, tied and flogged to death. Called the headman of the gang and asked what it meant. He said Mr Stanfield sent them here for pay and Capt L[e] G[resley] refused to give it them. Told him he should have applied to me and not make threats, that I would give him a book for pay, that he and one other, must take it to Whydah.⁸⁶⁹

22nd [March]. H.M. Steam Sloop 'Archer' returned.

Very heavy rains, from the westward, for about two hours; the rain blowing in from the sides and roofs of the house. Pleasant to live in such a state?

Settled all my accompts [= accounts], although I have been in bed the whole time.

On arriving on the beach, the surf looked ugly, all assured me it was good; launched and got into the surf, between two breakers,⁸⁷⁰ there we remained backing and filling,⁸⁷¹ without any chance of getting through, at length a sea filled her; half the men jumped out, to prevent her capsizing, whilst the rest endeavoured to paddle through, after some time we succeeded immediately after which, all the rest of the hands jumped out, and swam her, except the boatswain, she was by this time, at least three inches under water, and I sitting there nearly up to my middle in it. The Archer's boat was at anchor, outside,⁸⁷² waiting for me, the boatswain hailed her, but all to no purpose, we were drifting fast to leeward,⁸⁷³ calling was useless, so I took a paddle and did my best, which amused the canoemen and seemed to give them fresh courage. The officer, in the boat, perceiving me at work with a paddle, began to think, something was wrong, he up anchor in a twinkling and came to my rescue; at the moment the boat came, a canoe which had seen our difficulty also came up, she had in her a white man (Portuguese) and a dressed black;⁸⁷⁴ she kept round and round, until she saw all was right; myself and things were passed into the Archer's boat, and we took the canoe in tow, until the men had time to bail her out. All my pigs and fowls were drowned, my clothing &c all wet,

⁸⁶⁷ i.e. Hutton's factory at Agoué.

⁸⁶⁸ i.e. of Hutton's factory.

⁸⁶⁹ See Appendix 2, no. 41.

⁸⁷⁰ i.e. between two of the sandbars which run parallel to the shore.

⁸⁷¹ i.e. moving backwards and forwards.

⁸⁷² i.e. seaward of the sandbars.

⁸⁷³ i.e. eastward (the direction of the prevailing current).

⁸⁷⁴ i.e. one wearing European clothes; a translation of the Portuguese term *vestido* (see Law 2004a, 187).

but nothing lost. I continued my cigar until I had been in the boat some time, when I began to feel very sick and threw it away. The 'Archer' lay a long way off and by the time we reached her, I was half dry, everybody on board told me, how pale I looked, and no wonder, after the sickness I felt. The Doctor (Yeo) gave me half a tumbler of brandy, changed my clothes, had a rub down, this was rather a difficult job, on account of my numerous boils.

Received on board, a letter from the Cha-cha of Whydah (which I have not yet been able to get translated)⁸⁷⁵ also from the Commodore.⁸⁷⁶

'Archer' sailed for Badagry, and anchored off there at night.

To say nothing of the delay, between the dating and delivery of the Commodore's despatches, above referred to, they do not mention the restrictions referred to in the Senior Officer's despatch, dated March 13.⁸⁷⁷

Ordered a passage in H.M.B. Spy, to Fernando Po.

Joined 'Spy'. Up anchor and departed. Felt sick, at stomach, for several days after being swamped at Ahgwey.

March 27. Arrived at Fernando Po.

31 [March]. My boils, have so upset my stomach and general health, that I have given myself up, to the medical treatment of Dr King, resident on this island.

⁸⁷⁵Not traced.

⁸⁷⁶See Appendix 2, no. 33, dated 11 Feb. 1852, but only now received.

⁸⁷⁷See p. 170.



Part 2
The Case of Richard Graves
October 1851



Richard Graves was an African from the Gold Coast, employed on a British ship which was trading at Cotonou and Badagry, east of Ouidah. His case is alluded to only once in Fraser's Journals, which refer to his sending a letter to Graves' employer William Duggan (supercargo on the British merchant vessel the *Severn*) on 22 Oct. 1851, though without any indication of the content or context (and indeed without mentioning Graves' name).¹ However, the material relating to the case was collected together by Fraser separately, presumably for submission to his superior Consul Beecroft, or perhaps directly to the Foreign Office. As it is of some interest as illustrating the conditions of employment of Africans on European ships, it has been deemed to warrant inclusion in this edition.

[Summary by Vice-Consul Fraser, undated]²

On the 18th of October 1851 I was applied [to] by a colored man, Richard Graves, son of an old corporal at Cape Coast Castle, and fifty eight (forming three sets) Elmina canoemen,³ the former for restitution of property and payment of wages, the latter, restitution of property and subsistence to enable them to reach their own country.

The rule is to return these men, to their owners,⁴ at the place at which they are engaged, if it is very inconvenient for the master to take them in his vessel, each set is presented with the canoe they have been working, together with a small dash; they will cheerfully find their own way home.⁵

On the 23rd of October Graves and the canoemen referred me to Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza, [he] stated he was present at the dismissal of the men;⁶ that he told Duggan he was doing wrong, and persuaded⁷ him to keep them on until their time was up and take them back to their own country, or at once

¹ See p. 118: i.e. document no. 9, below.

² TNA, FO84/886, ff. 352–353.

³ Fraser's own calculations of the cost of hire of a canoe crew at Ouidah assume a crew of 21 (Appendix 2, no. 6); but note that Duggan claimed (in no. 10 below) that one of the crews he hired left Elmina short-handed.

⁴ Seemingly implying that canoemen were normally slaves, or at least bonded workers: the canoemen themselves (in no. 7 below) stated that they were hired to Duggan from the King of Elmina.

⁵ This was standard procedure with canoemen hired on the Gold Coast for service further east (for earlier references, cf. Law 1989, 228–9).

⁶ This was presumably at 'Appi [Vista]', where Duggan currently was, i.e. Cotonou, where Antonio de Souza held a monopoly of trade (cf. Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 198).

⁷ Evidently, in the sense of 'urged', rather than 'convinced'.

to make them a present and given them a canoe to work their own way home, but he would not listen. Sig[nor] A. de Souza states, that to his knowledge they have detained things, on board, belonging to these men.

It will be seen by the Copy of Agreement (No. 1) that Graves was to be paid in Dollars, whereas Duggan sends cloth (no. 11)⁸ at two dollars each piece, the price on the same day at the English Factory only being 1¼. The poor fellow is obliged to sell them when they come to hand for 40 strings (3s. 4 sterling).⁹ I cannot call it anything else than cheating him at all corners, to say nothing of the £7.7.0 for goods detained and stolen on the ship, loss of time and having to pay his own expences back to Elmina.

No. 2 is evidently an evasion.

No. 4 I doubt Duggan's statement about the Boat's anchor. Taking for granted what Duggan states about Graves drawing goods in his (Duggan's) name, he stops 36\$ when only 17\$ were drawn.

No. 5 is very evasive and suspicious. Why should the Captain require the signatures of his mates and crew, if he did not suspect his words would not be taken.

No. 6 and 7. Are the applications they were originally written on the 18th, but I had to return them three or four times, as they were unintelligible.

No. 8. This letter I consider quite satisfactory and completely exonerates Graves from the charges made against him in no.4.

No. 10. Under no.8 I have stated that I fully believe this Graves statement.

The second paragraph is only relating what every body on the coast, is well acquainted with.

3rd paragraph. Canoemen do not, or can they act as hammockmen &c and it was unjust to expect it. You might as well set a waterman to drive a cab. The men engaged to work the 'Severn' and not the 'Barbara' (Lovell's vessel) and I think [were] quite right in demanding payment for extra work.

4th paragraph. Not worth notice.

5th " —. Part of which I know to be untrue and I believe the rest to be a fabrication.

6th —No specific agreement is made for taking the people back to Elmina or elsewhere, it is the rule of the coast or you give them a canoe and a present, they are satisfied, as before stated by Sig[nor] Ant[onio] de Souza.

I am perfectly aware that the whole of the beach natives along these coasts, are a precious set of scoundrels, and that such cases as Mr Duggan has tried to make out, do frequently occur, but the tables are turned this time.

There are several other complaints against this vessel, three of which I am informed, have been sent officially to the Admiralty.

⁸Misnumbered in original—actually no.12 below.

⁹i.e. strings of cowries, of 40 shells each.

Documents¹⁰

1. Copy of Agreement

Richard Graves agrees to go with Mr W. Duggan for twelve dollars per month as a cleark [= clerk] and subsistence according to this agreement.

Elmina June 1. 1851.

Paid Mr Rich[ar]d Graves one month advance

June 1. 1851.

**2. John Thomas Tusany [Mate of the *Severn*] to Richard Graves, Appia Roads,¹¹
14 October 1851**

Thear [= There] is no chest in the ship as I Knowes of But one that Belongs to on[e] of the Canowe men and that is all in pieces and it is worth nothink [= nothing] But if I should see one I shall Keep it for you But I Know that thear is non in the ship.

3. Vice-Consul Fraser to W. Duggan

18 October 1851

I have this day been called upon to officiate on the part of Richard Graves, a colored man, belonging to Cape Coast, and whom you engaged as Clerk to the vessel 'Severn', at Elmina: he claims from you three months and eight days pay at twelve dollars per month, and clothes and goods which he says are on board your vessel, to the amount of £7. 7. 0.

Also from three sets of canoemen, which you have sent, on shore, to find their way to Elmina, without subsistence: these canoemen also make a claim upon you, for goods to the amount of £38.11.0 the detailed list of which is before me.¹²

To save time and trouble, pray send me satisfactory answer to the above, without delay.

The Bearer will wait a reasonable time, that he may bring back your answer.

¹⁰ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 343–349.

¹¹ i.e. 'Appi Vista' (Cotonou).

¹² The list of 'All our things lost in Barque Severn' is in FO84/886, ff. 350–51 (not reproduced in this edition).

4. W. Duggan, Supercargo of Barque *Severn*, to Vice-Consul Fraser, Appi

21 October 1851

Yours of the 18th inst[ant] I duly Rec[eive]d Regret not being able to respond Earlier as your Letter had to go on Bo[a]rd, to in port [= part], be answered by the Master whose answer, I now beg to Enclose to you,¹³ as referring to the Canoemens “complaint” of Property belonging to them now remaining on Bord the Barque “Severn” to the amount of £38.11.0 and also Referring to the Property of “Richard Graves” to the amount of £7.7.0, I must beg to add that the only Property (if it may be called so) that belongs to them on Bord the “Severn” is a “Boatsanc[h]or” that the[y] stole off[f] “Badagry Beech [= Beach]”¹⁴ which, I have pledged my word to the owner to Deliber [= deliver] to them (an English Merchant)

In reference to “Graves” I have stoped his waiges for Drawing goods in my name during my Absence from Badagry.¹⁵

During my Absence from Badagry he Drew from “Mr Hutton’s” Factory 14 Gallons of Rum in my name, and in the mean time the Conomens were working for the same Establishment, on my return from this Place to Badagry I paid all the people I left, there [= their] Rum, (their cowries they always had in my absence) and after doing so, “Graves”, informs me that he had drawan [= drawn] 14 Gallons Rum for subsistence in my Absence and had signed my name for it which Bill I have had to pay a short time since vis. £3.3.0 Stirling [and] again in my absence to Abeakoota he Draws 2 Heads of Cowries for the repairing of Cannoes, when he only wanted about 18 small nails, I left the Cannoo fitted up with the exception of nailing on the Head Booard, he had so many [nails] in the yard that I have been obliged to ship some on Bord when last leaving Badagry he also Drawed 1 Head of Cowries to Purchase 2 Towels for my Cheif Mate when he come in shore to all of which he signed my Name I have stooped [= stopped] no other persons pay but his and had I been going to wineward [= windward] I would have put him in one of the forts¹⁶ I Have sufficient Evidence against him.

Respecting the Canoemens and others Discharged, they were all paid there subsistence on to Almina [= Elmina], which may be proved here, for on Sunday Week last they got Dubble [= double] subsistence.

¹³No. 5 below.

¹⁴Duggan was at Badagry on 17/18 June 1851, when he was among British residents there who signed letters to naval officers: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl 9 and 11 in no. 160.

¹⁵To go to Appi Vista, as explained subsequently.

¹⁶i.e. the British forts on the Gold Coast.

5. W. Sillis, Master, British Barque *Severn* [+ 10 other crew members], to Vice-Consul Fraser 20 October 1851

We the undersigned hereby inform to your communication of the 18th October that all things taken on board the Barque *Severn* belonging to Clerks Coopers and Cannoe men at various times and places, from the time of *Severn* leaving Elmina, up to the present time or date have been received by them.

In fact nothing belonging to them remains on board, There have been several cases of theft—among themselves they commenced stealing from each other on leaving Elmina and continued to do so the whole time they remained on board the said ship.

As regards their Luggage neither me or my officers took any accord [= record?] of it and know nothing concerning the thefts committed amongst themselves we have also to inform you that Capt. W. Sillis has detected them with ourselves plundering the *Severns* Cargo on several occasions.

6. Richard Graves to Vice-Consul Fraser, Whadah [= Whydah] 21 October 1851

Please be no objection I leg leave to Acquaint your honour that I summon Mr Duggan for you to claim my wages for me and my things which was lost in his ship As your poor Humble Servant has round [sic] some Debts and pawn[ed] his clothes, and get [= got] nothing again to defray such Expenses to go to my country and also the said Duggan promise me that if he end his business he will took [= take] me by his own ship to my country and by so doing it shall be considered a great favour to be received from you.

7. Quacoe Capo Dadie [= Daddy] the headman, Coffee Arwoolochee and Attah Coffee, to Vice-Consul Fraser, Whadah 21 October 1851

We beg leave to acquaint your honour that Mr Duggan take us from the King of Elmina[’s] hand, and he make agreement with the King that 5 months if he end his business, so he will took us back by his own ship to Elmina again that [is] the agreement he make to the King of Elmina, and at this time he told us to walk by land to Elmina, but from here to Elmina is long journey and much expences also he never give us no subsistence which is [our] right and therefore we beg your Excellency to try as you can and do this favour to the King of Elmina, also they took all our things in his ship, and we get nothing to maintain ourselves in the road to Elmina.

8. Richard Graves to Vice-Consul Fraser, Whydah

22 October 1851

Please be no objection that Mr Duggan order me to get rum from Mr MarKlostky¹⁷ for his canoe mens; and also he order me to get nails from Mr Sanderson¹⁸ and Mr Marklostky, I get none from them, and some of the canoeman told me that [there were] some in market and I told Mr Martins¹⁹ to get 2 Heads of cowries and I take 25 strings to buy nails and [the] remainder 1½ Head Capt Lovell's cleark and one of his own chief mates come up town and that time he (Mr Duggan) [was] absent to Arboucater [= Abeokuta] and take 1½ Head to buy some yarms [= yams] and fouls [= fowls] and eggs and fish for them to eat.

P.S. and also they brack [= broke] my Box and took some of my clothes and my wifes small chest full of country beads and some rock gold, and I been [= being] [on] Board ship so I ask the second mate who brack my chest he saith Capt[ai]n Sillis order him to arrange, my clothes for me he go to spoil, and I told the mate that is not right to Brack my Box without my known.

9. Vice-Consul Fraser to W. Duggan

22 October 1851

I have received your letter, dated Oct. 21st and also Capt. Sillis' Oct. 20, enclose[e]d, and have carefully noted the contents of both.

Graves does not deny the expenditure of monies, on your account and has explained the whole in writing.

It is a very hard case for these poor fellows, whom you have brought so far from their own homes, to be turned adrift, because they have no one to protect them; Graves has pawned all he had, and they do appear totally destitute.

Allow me to appeal to you on the score of humanity, Taking the gross amount claimed under the head of losses, which divided equally amongst those here, would not come to more than 16/- each surely this is no great sum for these people to possess, when every one knows, that they invariably bring goods with them, for the purpose of trading on their own account.

I would sincerely advise you to settle this, and let the people depart, for if they remain here, they must turn thieves, if not murderers, or else, how can they subsist, I will say nothing of my trouble and expenses.

¹⁷ William McCoskry, an agent of Thomas Hutton (Newbury 1961, 57).

¹⁸ Probably an error for J. G. Sandemann, another of the British traders resident at Badagry at this time (see Fraser's 'Commercial Report', in Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 198).

¹⁹ Not identified: the Rev. John Martin was currently head of the Methodist mission in Badagry, but he seems unlikely to be involved in this transaction.

In addition to their claims for losses, there will be Graves' wages and canoe hire for the carriage of these letters, to which I would add, one month's pay and subsistence for each.

If you have not dollars, you can send goods, if that is not convenient you may send me an order on your owners and I will arrange the affairs.

10. W. Duggan to Vice-Consul Fraser, Appi

25 October 1851

I have received your letter dated Oct. 22, 1851 to the First Paragraph I must beg to say that "Mr Graves" may explain what he thinks proper, but he will not explain the truth, and I consider myself Perfectly justified in the cause [= course] I af [= have] Pursuid [= pursued] towards him and will be quite prepared to meet all Charges brought against me on my return to "Almina" (should there be any) where I hope to be by the end of the year.

Allow me to Enform you that these three sets of cannoomens Receiv[e]d all there pay in Elmina, whither for two months, or twenty months, until my vessell was Loaded,²⁰ his [= is] each Head Man 2 oz, Second Headman 1½ oz, and each Canoomen besides 1oz besides there Custom,²¹ Consequently they have all Rec[e]iv[e]d Pay for eight months according to the usual wayges paid on the Coast,²² and because such is the Case, when in such a place as Badagry, they will work when they Pl[e]ase and as the[y] plase as they are aware there is no Law to Protect us, nor can we Punish them, if we treated them like the Portuguese they would serve us better,²³ I would also beg to ask who protects them when they go with those people.

As to an Appeal upon the score of Humanity, I must confess I have no pity for such scoundrills when I went to "Abbeokuta" some time back I could only get Eight small Boys out of 40 Payd men consequently was obliged to Employ men, I must further add that one set of cannoomens left "Almina" seven men short though I delayed the vessell eight hours, these are the men I have discharged with "Groves" [= Graves] and a few others, the others Discharged themselves the[y] wanted payment [for work] done to Capt Lovell's vessel during my absence at Badagry, when they were actually working for me in order to Facilitate the Loading of Capt Lovell's vessel that I may the sooner commence loading.

²⁰ Contrast the men's own account (in no. 7 above), that they were hired for 5 months.

²¹ Referring to payment in goods, valued in 'trade ounces', 1oz. being equivalent to £2 sterling, or 40s. (see Endnote 2).

²² Implying a 'usual wage' for canoemen of 5s. per month. Compare Fraser's calculations (in Appendix 2, no. 6, p. 210), which assume a monthly wage of 6s. (2 pieces of cloth, at 3s. each).

²³ According to Forbes, the Portuguese hired canoemen on long-term contracts, of 2 years, rather than by the month (1851, i, 122).

Capt. Lovell was going to take the Braken [sic] set of cannoemen 2 Coopers Carpenters Cook and Graves up with him, had it not been for there own Conduct, these other 2 sets of cannoemen when the[y] found they could get no pay for there work on Capt. Lovell's vessel sayed in the presence of Sig[nor] Antonio "Desuzu" [= de Souza] that they would go also and I told them they may go and at there own Request I went to the Caboceer and get them a Pass to leave the Place.

As to their turning thieves or murderers in Whyday [= Whydah] I think they Know the Lawes to[o] well there for that Besides they all Ready Employed and as to paying for there Losses (which occurred on various occasions at Badagry during the late wars,²⁴ when they deserted me, and overcrowded the Canoes with there things and Sapsised [=capsized] the Canoes and lost them in the surf) it is a thing I will not do, nor will I pay them either wayges or subsistence further than that they have got.

I Beg also to state that "Graves" has joined me as an "Elminio" man in his own handwriting and also that I am not bound to take one of them to "Elminio" there is no such agreements yet I am going there with six men I have here, and one at Badagry whose Expences I am now Paying for attendice [= attendance] through his illness.

I Begg also to Enform the "Vice Consul" that he has no Idea of the mass of Property now in there hands, how they have carried it to Whydah I cannot conceive.

As you have appealed for "Graves" in Particular though I know he is possessed of plenty Property now in "Whydah" I will pay him his wayges on your appeal, but not because he deserves it, I will pay him at the same rate I paid the Cook and others when he sends a messenger for it at his Expencc and risk.

11. Vice-Fraser to W. Duggan, Whydah

27 October 1851

Graves is detained here for debt and is compelled to send per messenger for what you have offered him.

12. W. Duggan to Vice-Consul Fraser, Appi

30 October 1851

I Herewith Forward per messenger Eighteen Pieces of "Chillow"²⁵ for the payment of "Graves" Wayges for three month from the Fifth of June to the Seventh of October, each Piece of Chillowes is (\$2) two Dollars.

²⁴i.e. the attacks on Badagry from Lagos, in June–July 1851.

²⁵Chelloe, Indian cotton cloth.

Part 3
Additional Dispatches
and Reports



1. Vice-Consul Fraser to Consul Beecroft, Whydah

5 November 1851¹

I take this, the first opportunity since the 'Harlequin' left² of forwarding, my Journal, &c.— if so it may be called, trusting it may meet with at least your approval.

It is true the 'Sampson' called here the other day,³ before I knew her name she was under weigh again.

I have received a letter for the King, from Comm[ander] Forbes,⁴ informing him of his mission to Abbeokuta, but I cannot get a pass from the Av-vo-gar, he says the messenger has not yet returned from Dahomey.⁵

Mr T. Hutton and his family have been detained here, upwards of two months, under one frivolous excuse and another,⁶ messengers arrive almost daily, but not the right one.

It is time they were brought to their senses.

Early in the morning of the 10th inst[ant], the Avvogar went to Mr Hutton, and told him a messenger had arrived, saying, that Kosoko had made bad palaver, and the English had broken Lagos.⁷

P.S.—I cannot get anything satisfactory, about Mr and Mrs Macauley.⁸ Madiki says Macauley died four days after you left;⁹ he does not know what became of his wife.

The Sierra Leone people know nothing of them.

2. Mr Calvert Hutton's Case

[22 November 1851]¹⁰

Attended at the Cha-cha's (Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza) at the request of Mr Hutton Sen[ior].¹¹

¹TNA, FO84/886, ff. 46–46v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 1 in no. 4.

²The ship on which Fraser returned to Ouidah, after visiting Beecroft at Fernando Po, on 15 Oct. 1851.

³On 5 Nov. 1851; see Journals, p. 121.

⁴i.e. F. E. Forbes.

⁵Cf. Journals, pp. 121–3.

⁶Cf. Journals, p. 128.

⁷Cf. Journals, p. 126.

⁸The name should be 'McCarthy'. On the mission of 1850 Beecroft and Forbes had learned that John McCarthy, a liberated African from Sierra Leone, with his wife and child, was held prisoner at Abomey, having been taken captive in the recent Dahomian attack on Atakpamé, and secured their release (Forbes 1851, ii, 105, 192–9).

⁹Beecroft and Forbes left Ouidah on 12 July 1850.

¹⁰TNA, FO84/886, ff. 340–342. Cf. Journals, p. 131.

¹¹i.e. Thomas Hutton, Calvert Hutton's father.

It appears that on the evening of the 20th inst[ant] Mr Calvert Hutton went to shoot some bats, at the first report, he was surrounded by some 150 men, who insisted upon taking him before the Yer-vo-gar, where in a back place, they gave him some straw, apparently for his bed, he demanded a chair, they gave him one. Narwhey and Madiki, were there.

They told him, by firing his gun, at this time, he has forfeited that gun, and must pay a fine or be sent to Dahomey. He desired them to send for his father. They told him he must not tell his father, that if his father fired a gun, they would fine him, one thousand dollars, one Puncheon of Rum, and sixty pieces of cloth.

Fearing he would be kept in that miserable place, all night, he signed for the exorbitant demand of, viz. 2 Casks Cowries one piece of velvet (in all £50?)

Mr Hutton Sen[jio]r refused to pay it, the following morning and the case was referred to the Cha-cha, this morning (Nov. 22) Some days ago the Yer-vo-gar was at Mr H[utton]'s house, he stated that the custom was over. Madiki and Narwhey, both, remember this, but creep out of it, by saying 'he did not say, you might fight gun'.

The rule, it appears, has been not to fire guns, until Old de Souza returned from the custom to town: but he is dead and gone. This time one of the Cha-cha's younger brothers is there, as his representative.

Neither myself, nor the Mess[rs] Hutton's knew anything of this rule until today.

To the foregoing, I added, that the Yer-vo-gar, had acted very improperly, by seizing and fining an Englishman, who was under my protection, without my acquiescence.

That I, was not aware of any transgression, that I had not received any official information, upon the subject. Then [I] repeated my note of the 6th inst, viz. that Madiki on that day, brought me a flying message, not to fire guns, as the King's men were coming to fire for him.¹² That I told Madiki, to let the Yer-vo-gar know, that when the King wished Englishmen, to [obey] his orders, he, the Yer-vo-gar, must, if he did not think proper to come himself, send his stick and Narwhey, or som[e] well authorized person, to give the information, otherwise it would not be attended to. That he must pay me proper respect, as I was the representative of the English Government.

According to Madiki's story about firing guns, it only referred to the time, the King's soldiers were down here, performing that custom. That no intimation was made respecting a fine, much more naming the amount. That he (Cha-cha) must be aware how difficult, it was, for strangers, not speaking the language, and the country not having books of laws, to ascertain these things. That if the Yer-vo-gar would come to me himself, or send his stick, from time

¹² See Journals, p. 123.

to time, as occasion required, giving me full particulars and the consequences, I would make book of it, which should be open to the inspection [of] all under the English flag; after which, if any person, under my protection, infringed I would see their fine was paid or some just punishment inflicted.

The Cha-cha most willingly, told my palaver to Narwhey, who was sent to retail it to the Yer-vo-gar, he told him also to send to me, on the subject. Telling me after Narwhey was gone, that if, I could not arrange with him, I was to let him know, and he would send a messenger to the King.

Thanked him and said I should not forget to inform Lord Palmerston for his Kindness.

When I returned to the Fort, Narwhey came and demanded payment for the signed paper. I recapitulated the foregoing, telling him, that Mr Calvert, from their account, had committed himself, by unwittingly firing a gun within a limited time, and the Av-vo-gar, has also unwittingly committed himself, by seizing and fining him, without informing me, or even giving me proper notice of such a law and such a fine.

That he, Narwhey, should take my Comp[limen]ts to the Yer-vo-gar, and beg of him, to reconsider all the points, if he wished, in the King's name, to keep friends with the English. This being the first time an Englishman had offended, he would do well to cry quits offence for offence.

Narwhey returned, with the Yer-vo-gar's Comp[limen]ts, saying he heard my palaver, that he must have payment, as he has sent word to the King.

I desired Narwhey, to tell the Yer-vo-gar, to send again, to the King, reporting all that had been said and done that day, and try if the King would not listen to the justice of my palaver.

In the evening, I related to the Cha-cha, what transpired, through Narwhey, between Yer-vo-gar and myself. His advice was, to leave it alone and see what course, they would pursue, then he would know how to act. He said, they will threaten much but will not do anything.

3. Vice-Consul Fraser to Consul Beecroft, Whydah

17 January 1852¹³

Comm[ander] Forbes,¹⁴ myself and Mr Hutton, &c, altogether a party of some 20—have been up to the King and I send you copies of the papers prepared—I will send you further particulars as soon as possible—I am just recovering from a slight attack of Dysentery and with medicine in me at this moment I am not much in the cue for writing Comm[ander] Forbes has orders

¹³TNA, FO84/886, ff. 155–156v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 21 in no. 4.

¹⁴i.e. T. G. Forbes.

from the King, to take me away with him¹⁵—the King has accused me of being a Spy—an Intriguer (bringing on the blockade) a thief (stealing a letter belonging to him, he refers to Obba Shoron)¹⁶ and a Liar—this is almost too ridiculous and at the same time it is very annoying to have such pretty titles added to ones name, by such a being—I was perfectly aware that I had a difficult game to play, before I engaged in it, but did not expect this conclusion.

The King, I suppose, has been persuaded, to deny everything; he denies the treaty as being original,¹⁷ the wording of the Commodore's letter as having authenticity;¹⁸ that any person has spoken to him about the Slave Trade or Abbeokuta.¹⁹

He only demands four different messengers to be sent to him—therefore doubting Comm[ander] Forbes word—he signed the Portuguese and French account of the letter,²⁰ although the day before he said they were incorrect[,] and refused to sign the English one, which he said was the only correct one—that was because it occupied two sheets and it was suggested to him, that we might re-write the first sheet and say what we pleased[.] The first paragraph of the Commodore's letter,²¹ was an unfortunate one, particularly for me, he [= the King] distinctly denies it, nor is it in reality strictly true, I did not write saying he wanted guns for Abbeokuta, that would only be the inference drawn, that if he got them he would take them with him to Abbeokuta.

The talking of leaguering the other African Chiefs against him,²² nettled him rather; he said, when England and Dahomey went to war, the world would come to an end Although he has signed the Slave Trade,²³ he refused to sign the conditions.²⁴

¹⁵ See Journals, p. 147.

¹⁶ This was the letter sent by the Basorun of Abeokuta to Fraser, which (by Fraser's account) had actually been stolen from him by the King's officers: see Journals, pp. 106–9.

¹⁷ This refers to the standard printed form for an anti-slave trade treaty (see Appendix 2, no.28), which had been offered for the king's signature, but rejected by him: see T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, 18 Jan. 1852 (Appendix 3, no.7).

¹⁸ i.e. Bruce's letter to Gezo, 17 Dec. 1851, announcing the blockade (Appendix 2, no. 20).

¹⁹ Since both the abolition of the slave trade and Dahomey's conflict with Abeokuta had, in fact, been discussed with Gezo on earlier occasions (especially with the Beecroft/Forbes mission of 1850), this presumably means that these matters ought to have been raised with him again, before the blockade was imposed.

²⁰ i.e. the letter written for Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12 Jan. 1852 (see Appendix 2 no. 29), of which translations into Portuguese and French had also been made: cf. Forbes to Bruce, 17 Jan. 1852 (Appendix 3, no.5).

²¹ Which stated that Fraser, on his mission to Gezo at Abomey in Aug.–Sept. 1851, had been asked for guns and ammunition to make war against Abeokuta.

²² Bruce's letter had warned that, if Gezo continued to defy the English, 'your brother African chiefs will be leaguered against you to destroy you'.

²³ i.e. its abolition.

²⁴ Gezo had signed only a single-clause treaty banning the export of slaves (see Appendix 2, no. 31); the 'conditions' were the additional clauses in the original printed form of treaty presented to him.

He refuses protection to missionaries.

He has made a law, that he is to be the only Palm Oil trader, that confiscation, is to ensue [= ensue], if any one in his dominions buys or sells oil to any other than himself. Whydah is to be the only port open, he has closed the rest—and raised the selling price of oil of 8 to 12\$ the measure and 4\$ extra for each puncheon being shipped.²⁵

Domingo is stopped in this town, and not allowed to go to Porto-Nuovo, where the whole of his establishment is. In this affair, the Portuguese have done us, and the King, has done them.—He, the King, says no more trade shall be done until he hears from England.

He has sent to Whydah, to tell the people, not to have bad heart; that the English are not going to destroy the place; so they had better play—the consequence is we are annoyed with dancing soldiers, fetish people and tom-toms all day.²⁶

Remember me kindly to all hands at Fernando Po.

[PS] All hands are detained, in Whydah, Comm[ander] Forbes having permission to go on board, under promise he will come back again, I believe this is until the Yer-vo-gar arrives.

4. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander J. N. Strange, Whydah 5 March 1852²⁷

The details of our late mission to the King of Dahomey, of course, will be related to you by Commander G. T. [= T. G.] Forbes.

I wish to draw your serious attention, to a most unwarrantable outrage, that has been committed by the Yer-vo-gar upon a young Englishman in this town.²⁸

Mr Andrew Stanfield, agent to Mr Thomas Hutton, whilst riding through the market place, on the 28th of February, accidentally knocked down, a slave child, about two years old, belonging to a Portuguese, and very slightly injured by the horse; it was examined, on the spot, by a Brazilian doctor, and everything was done that was necessary. Mr Stanfield promising, at the same time, to pay all expenses, of Doctor, attendance, &c. Both Doctor and owner refused to accept any remuneration, as it was purely an accident and a mere trifle.

²⁵This decision was announced at Ouidah on 20 Jan. 1852: see Journals, p. 148. The closure of other ports than Ouidah was not in practice maintained: Godomey and Cotonou were important points of embarkation of palm oil later in the 1850s (Law 2004a, 228–9).

²⁶Cf. Appendix 3, no.8, Journal of T. G. Forbes, 16 Jan. 1852.

²⁷TNA, FO84/886, ff. 272–273; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 96.

²⁸Cf. Stanfield's own account, in Appendix 2, no. 35.

On the 29th inst[ant] [sic], the Yer-vo-gar sent for Mr Stanfield, and told him he must ride very gently through the town, which of course, he promised to do, and expressed, at the same time, his sorrow that the accident should have occurred.

On the following day, March 1st, the Yer-vo-gar sent for him again and told him that he must pay 800 dollars for what had happened on the 28th, remonstrance was in vain, and he begged that judgement might be deferred until my return from Abomey. The Yer-vo-gar's reply was that he did not care for anybody and ordered him forthwith to prison, whereupon they seized and forced him into a filthy little shed, six feet long, four broad and five high; they also produced a neck-chain, which he had much difficulty, to beg of them not to use it. He remained in this horrid place from six in the morning until five in the evening, when feeling extremely sick, he was released, by paying from his employer's store one hundred heads of cowries, fifty gallons of rum, and twenty-five pieces of furniture stripes; equal to 250 dollars.²⁹

Yesterday I went to the Yer-vo-gar with Comm[ander] Forbes and Mr Tweedie, the Yer-vo-gar handed over a long letter, written in tolerable English containing a series of assumed charges against Mr Stanfield, and begging that he might be removed from Whydah.³⁰

I requested the Yer-vo-gar to send for the Portuguese, the mother, the child and Doctor, whilst I sent for Mr Stanfield and Quashie, a Cape Coast man, who was a witness.

After much objection on the part of the Yer-vo-gar, they were assembled; and the thing thoroughly sifted. Nothing could be proved except, what is above stated.

The Yer-vog-ar abused the Portuguese for not making a complaint.

It must be remembered, that, not one farthing of the fine, went to owner, mother or child.

I remonstrated with the Yer-vo-gar, upon the impropriety of seizing or fining an Englishman and told him, as I had done on a former occasion,³¹ that he should have referred to me. That, the fine was most unreasonable; moreover, he had compelled the young man to deliver up his employer's property, which was a theft. The Yer-vo-gar's answer was, that he did not care if I, or any other person was in Whydah, as the English representative, he should continue to imprison and fine Englishmen, as he thought fit, and as for the robbery "as you call it" If a man steals anything and brings it to me, I keep it. I told him I was aware, that such things were done, but now I had it officially.

²⁹The version of the text printed in the HCPP here adds 'or 62*l.* 10*s* sterling' (giving the value of 5*s.* to the head of cowries: see further Endnote 2).

³⁰Cf. Journals, p. 167.

³¹i.e. Calvert Hutton's case, in Nov. 1851 (see no. 2 above).

Life is in danger, by such imprisonment; property is in jeopardy, whilst such a system is permitted.

As it appeared his fixed resolution, by the answer I got above, not to change the judgement, I told him, it would be my duty to report it to higher quarters, to which he replied, yes, you can go, make bad palaver, as you have always done.

Mr Stanfield was received, by his own people, outside the Yer-vo-gar's house, and carried on their shoulders to his residence.

5. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander Strange, *Archer*, Whydah

9 March 1852³²

On the 29th Feb[ruar]y the King of Dahomey, sent to us to make book,³³ but it was so inexplicable, at the time, that little notice was taken of it.³⁴

It was as follows:—

The first vessel that came to Whydah was a merchantman, the master came on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received him, he did his trade, and he went away.

The second brought a messenger from the King of England, he sent his stick on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received it; he came on shore, the Yer-vo-gar received him; he came to Abomey and the king received him; he sat down, broke open the King's book and read it; the King heard, gave his answer, and he went away.

The third was steamer, man-of-war, the Captain's name was 'Conoo'; he fired into a merchantman and burned her. The King sent to the King of England to know if he sent this man to do so. The answer was No! and a desire that the King of Dahomey should cut off the Captain's head, and sent it to England, which was done!!

And on Sunday, March 7, the following orders, were given publicly, through the town.³⁵

The first three of which, seems to illustrate the King's three parables, above given.

1st That if a merchantman comes to Whydah, he is to be protected, and traded with.

2nd If a messenger, comes from the Queen of England, he is to be received and protected.

³²TNA, FO84/886, ff. 277–278; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 96.

³³i.e. write a document.

³⁴See Journals, p. 163.

³⁵See Journals, p. 169.

3rd If any fight men, come on shore, they are to have their heads and hands cut off, and sent to Abomey.

4th That the Dahomians, were going to break Badagry; hitherto the King never told his people, what place he was going to break, because he went for slaves, but now, he did not want slaves, he did not care who knew where he was going: if the people ran away, he would destroy the place, and if he found any persons there, they would lose their lives.

This 4th is exactly in accordance, with an order which the King gave Comm[ander] Forbes, at our last interview, March 2, which was translated as follows:

That, whenever Comm[ander] Forbes went down to Whydah, he was to take all the white (English?) men and their property, with him, and also from Badagry, for he intended to break the latter place.³⁶

Considering that our countrymen's lives and property are at hazard, I have thought it my duty to give you all the above extracts, from my notes, for your more mature consideration.

6. Vice-Consul Fraser to Consul Beecroft, Fernando Po

8 May 1852³⁷

Having sufficiently recovered, from the skin disease, of which I have been suffering for nearly four months,³⁸ more particularly since my arrival at Fernando Po, to resume my pen, I will attempt to give you an official account of my reasons, for leaving my station at Whydah.

On my first visit to Abomey, in September last, I was robbed, with the King of Dahomey's consent if not by his order, of an important official letter from Obba Shoron, for particulars of which, see my Journal.³⁹ Since which time I have been treated with marked disrespect, by the Dahoman officials.

Have been, in public, twice accused by the King, in person of being:—

- | | |
|------|-------------------------|
| 1st. | a Thief |
| 2nd | Liar |
| 3rd | Spy and |
| 4th. | Intriguer ⁴⁰ |

Explanation of the 1st accusation. The King claims Obbashoron's letter and says I stole it from him.

³⁶ See Journals, p. 166.

³⁷ FO2/7, ff. 70–71v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. in no.9. Inclosed in Fraser to Malmesbury, Fernando Po, 20 July 1852.

³⁸ i.e. boils, mentioned in Fraser's journal from 4 Feb. 1852 (p. 150) onwards.

³⁹ See Journals, pp. 108–9.

⁴⁰ See Journals, pp. 146–7 (8 Jan. 1852); the second occasion was presumably on 2 March 1852, when Fraser's Journal, p. 166, records merely that the King 'abused' him.

2nd. In denying that I stole the said letter: in professing to come to his country as a friend: and that I wrote to England saying that he wanted guns and Bayonets, to take against the Abbeokutans.

3rd. That Obba Shoron's letter proves, that I came to his country, solely for the purpose of procuring information, to forward to his enemies the Abbeokutans.

4th. That I left Whydah, to arrange with the Commodore, to blockade his country.⁴¹

In consequence of the foregoing, the King, in person, has ordered that I should be removed from his country—On my second and also on my third visit to his capital.⁴²

During my second visit I never received invitations to the Customs and conferences, as [= at] the same times, as others.

That Mayhoo and Yer-vo-gar would not allow me to be present, at private conferences, after the arrival of Commander T. G. Forbes.⁴³

In January last, an Englishman, was seized, confined and fined exorbitantly by the Yer-vo-gar, and upon my investigating, the Yer-vo-gar denies the authority of any person, Consul or otherwise to interfere: that he should seize, confine and fine Englishmen, as he thought fit.⁴⁴

The King, on my third visit gave notice, for all Englishmen to leave his territories.⁴⁵

An official letter, addressed to me, by Comm[ander] Heath of H.M.St 'Niger' has been waylaid and detained.⁴⁶

Mr Calvert Hutton was robbed in January last, of a box containing £80. no satisfaction, could be obtained from the Yer-vo-gar, although it was evident, he knew all about it.⁴⁷

Lastly, advice from Commodore Bruce, for the second time, that it would be most advisable, for me to leave Whydah.⁴⁸

The detailed particulars, of the above, will be found in my Journals.

Trusting that you will not think I have been hasty, nor that I have put up with more than was consistent with my position.

⁴¹ Referring to Fraser's absence from Ouidah, actually to visit Consul Beecroft at Fernando Po, between 11 Sept.–15 Oct. 1851.

⁴² See Journals, pp. 147, 166.

⁴³ Cf. Journals, p. 147.

⁴⁴ i.e. Andrew Stanfield, actually arrested on 1 March 1852: see no.4 above.

⁴⁵ Cf. Journals, p. 166.

⁴⁶ This letter had been transmitted to the Yovogan at Ouidah on 15 Nov. 1851 (see Journals, p. 130).

⁴⁷ Actually in early March 1852: see Journals, p. 168.

⁴⁸ Bruce had offered Fraser an opportunity to embark on a naval vessel to leave Ouidah on 17 Dec. 1851 (see Appendix 2, no. 19) and again advised him to do so on 4 March 1852 (ibid., no. 36).

P.S. Now I am so far recovered my other correspondence, shall be written up and handed to you, without delay.

7. 'Commercial Report'

[May 1852]⁴⁹

The Dahoman exports, are chiefly Palm Oil. Palm Nuts are sometimes included.⁵⁰

There is not any cotton. Ahgwey, Little Popoe and Porto Segoor, being the places for that commodity.

The imports are Rum and Role [= roll] Tobacco from Brazil;⁵¹ Cowries from Zanzibar and Europe;⁵² Manchester goods,⁵³ guns, powder and iron bars.

The first and second articles are brought by Portuguese vessels; the Zanzibar cowries by Hamburg vessels,⁵⁴ the other cowries from London, Bristol, France &c, cloths, guns, powder and iron bars, by the same. I have not had an opportunity of ascertaining the cargoes of the American, Sardinian nor Genoese vessels.

The imports and exports have been gradually increasing, for years, if we may judge by the number of ships that frequent the Bight.

Whilst the Slave Trade continues suppressed a gradual but great increase, in both imports and exports must be calculated upon.

There are no import duties, unless \$50 for vessel anchorage money, be considered as such,⁵⁵ dashes or presents are expected, particularly at Custom times.

The market places, are merely used by the natives, to retail goods to each other.

The wholesale trade is carried on, in the yards attached to the houses of the various merchants.⁵⁶ In each are stationed men, belonging to the King, who

⁴⁹ TNA, FO2/7, ff. 97–99: written at Fernando Po, transmitted to the Foreign Office on 15 May 1852.

⁵⁰ i.e. the kernels of the palm fruit, which were also used in Europe in the manufacture of soap; cf. also reference to trade in 'palm oil and nuts' in T. G. Forbes' journal, 13 Jan. 1852 (Appendix 3, no. 8, p. 255). Palm kernels became an item of export from the Bight of Benin only in the 1850s, these references by Fraser and Forbes being in fact apparently the earliest evidence for this (cf. Lynn 1997, 117–20, which cites no evidence earlier than 1856).

⁵¹ i.e. in rolls, which had a standard weight of 80 lbs.

⁵² All cowries came ultimately from the Indian Ocean: those from the Maldive Islands were imported via Europe, those from the East African coast direct from Zanzibar.

⁵³ i.e. cotton textiles.

⁵⁴ The importation of Zanzibar cowries direct from East Africa had been initiated by a Hamburg trader in 1845 and continued to be monopolized by Hamburg merchants until the mid-1850s (Hogendorn and Johnson 1986, 71, 74–5).

⁵⁵ Other contemporary sources give higher figures (see Law 2004a, 128).

⁵⁶ Cf. the similar remark by F. E. Forbes earlier about the slave trade: 'Slaves are never exposed in the market, but all sales are arranged privately in the houses of the dealers' (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 10 in no. 9, F. E. Forbes to Bruce, 8 Nov. 1849).

take a duty from the natives of, I believe, one gallon for every 18 sold;⁵⁷ when enough is collected in this way, it is sold to the Factor, in whose yard, it has been so collected. Much oil changes hands, after dark, when these taxgatherers are off duty.

Goods coming from the interior, pay a small duty or toll, to the Cabooceer of each town, through which they pass.⁵⁸

It is not permitted to export Indian corn.⁵⁹

Elephants are not found within the territories of Dahomey,⁶⁰ nor does the King permit Ivory to pass through his Kingdom as he fancies that the collectors would become richer and more powerful than [himself].⁶¹

Merchandise is not allowed to pass through Dahomey, unless occasionally, when he sends a party of his own traders.⁶² These I take to be nothing more nor less than spies.⁶³

The King and his head men are all traders.⁶⁴

Palm Oil has varied from 6½ to 8 heads, per measure of 18 gallons, since I have been in the country⁶⁵ (a head is 2000 cowries or equal to the dollar country price).⁶⁶

Long Dane guns, sell at five heads or three silver dollars.

⁵⁷The same rate is reported earlier by Forbes 1851, i, 35–6, 111; 18 gallons was the standard measure in which palm oil was sold at Ouidah.

⁵⁸Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 35: ‘there are collectors [of taxes] on all public roads leading from one district to another’.

⁵⁹No other source reports this prohibition, although there are references to other restrictions on exports: e.g. it was later noted that ‘it is absolutely forbidden to cultivate groundnuts for any other object than consumption’, supposedly because it would divert labour required for the harvesting of palm oil (Vallon 1860–1, i, 352; also Burton 1864, i, 181).

⁶⁰In the late 18th century elephants were reported to be ‘plenty’ and ‘often to be seen’ around Tori, inland from Ouidah (Norris 1789, 68; Adams 1823, 62); but Burton later confirms that ‘elephants have been killed out’ in Dahomey (1864, ii, 245). However, Forbes in 1850 described elephant-hunting, in the region of the Lama, by a specialist group of the King’s female soldiers (1851, i, 157–9).

⁶¹Duncan in 1845 also noted that ‘very little’ ivory was bought at Ouidah, but attributed this to the heavy export duty levied on it (1847, i, 122).

⁶²This is an oversimplification. Duncan in 1845 found traders of Dahomian ‘caboceers’, including the Mehu, operating in the interior north of Dahomey (1847, i, 297; ii, 29, 206), and the leading private traders were also licensed to trade beyond the frontiers of Dahomian jurisdiction (Law 2004a, 115).

⁶³Cf. Cruickshank’s report, in HCPP, *Despatches from the Lieutenant-Governor of the Gold Coast*, p. 15: ‘The ordinary plan is to send out traders to act as spies’.

⁶⁴Forbes in 1850 noted that the King’s ‘ministers’ were ‘all slave-dealers’: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 220, Forbes to Fanshawe, 8 July 1850.

⁶⁵This does not include the rise in price to \$12 per measure, reported by Fraser, *Journals*, p. 148 (20 Jan. 1852).

⁶⁶i.e. the conventional local valuation, as opposed to the exchange value against actual silver dollars, given in the following sentence as 5 heads = \$3: see further Endnote 2.

Degeo or American grey drill,⁶⁷ at four heads, per piece of 15 fathoms and is retailed at ½ a head per fathom.⁶⁸

Role Tobacco is purchased at six dollars silver, and sold again at 30 heads, per Role.⁶⁹

Rum, varies from 2s/6d to 4s per gallon.

With the other articles, I am not acquainted.

Whydah is the only Port open to the general trader.

Godomey, being monopolized by Sig[nor] Isid[oro] De Souza.

Cotoonoo, by Sig[nor] Ant[onio] De Souza.

Porto Nuovo, by Sig[nor] Domingo Martins.

This latter place, must not be confounded with the town of Porto Nuovo, which is some miles in the interior and totally unconnected with it.⁷⁰

The trade in Roll tobacco, is confined to twelve named merchants,⁷¹ of whom Sig[nor] Domingo Martins and the De Souzas, form the chief part and as these parties are too well known to be trusted, the tobacco is invariably landed at Ahgwey, where each person buys his one or more Rolls and brings it to Whydah, per Lagoon.

Dahomey not possessing ships, they cannot have special privileges.

There are only two European Factories in Dahomey and these are at Whydah, viz. the English (Mess[rs] Hutton) and a French one. A Mr Sandeimann [sic] is established at Badagry.⁷²

There are no regulations respecting entries or clearances.

Agriculture and manufactures, are in a very primitive state, the former, being confined to Indian corn, Cassada, Yams, Guinea corn and a small Kind of Beans, the latter to Earthenware (which is tolerably good, and monopolized by the King[]),⁷³ Ironware, made from iron bars,⁷⁴ a few country cloths and mats. It seems to have been the policy of the Government hitherto, to suppress industrial pursuits, so that all thoughts, and attention should be continually turned towards the forthcoming slave-hunt.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Coarse twilled linen or cotton fabric.

⁶⁸ i.e. purchased at 8,000 cowries per 15 fathoms, sold at 1,000 per fathom—a mark-up of 47%.

⁶⁹ i.e. purchased at 20,000 cowries, and sold at 60,000 cowries per roll—a mark-up of 200%.

⁷⁰ Cf. Journals, p. 152.

⁷¹ Presumably, this means that they were licensed by the Dahomian king.

⁷² J. G. Sandeman, agent of the London firm of Forster and Smith, established himself at Badagry in 1851, but moved to Lagos in the following year (Sorensen-Gilmour 1995, 60, n.47).

⁷³ Forbes 1851, i, 70, also says that the manufacture of pottery was 'a royal monopoly'.

⁷⁴ These were imported by European traders, and by implication had largely displaced local African iron-smelting.

⁷⁵ Perhaps echoing Forbes 1851, i, 21: 'Industry and agriculture are not encouraged', because 'the King is aware that, if the enjoyment of home and the luxuries of health [sic: = wealth?] and domestic happiness, were once obtained, he would fail on volunteers for the annual slave-hunt'.

The population, it is impossible to give an estimate,⁷⁶ but the numbers are exceedingly small, compared with the extent of country.⁷⁷

Public works, there are not any.⁷⁸

Vessels, here, do not enter and clear from one Port (except Porto Nuovo) but continue to run up and down the coast, for months, taking in a little at each time and place.

I had no means of collecting information to compile the Trade Returns. The few particulars, I have filled in, date from the time of my landing, viz. July 22 [1851].

Those vessels bearing Portuguese colors are chiefly from Bahia.

8. Vice-Consul Fraser to Consul Beecroft, Fernando Po 22 November 1852⁷⁹

According to your instructions,⁸⁰ I proceeded on H.M.St. Prometheus to Whydah, at which place we anchored on the 23rd of September.

Wrote to Senhor Isidore De Souza, the Chacha, notifying my arrival and the wish of the Commander⁸¹ and myself, to land on the morrow to receive the King of Dahomey's answers to the Commodore's letter respecting the razing [= raising] of the blockade.⁸²

Received a very civil answer to the above.

The Commanders of the Prometheus and Britomart⁸³ and self landed safely, through a rough surf on the 25th September.

Hammocks were in waiting, the Lagoon was deep, but did not appear broader than usual, the small swamps, we had to pass, were more extended, and had not been reduced to their usual black stinking state.

We changed our costumes at the English Fort, which is going fast to decay;⁸⁴ after which we visited the Cha-cha, who had assembled, all the principal (so

⁷⁶ Forbes in 1849–50 estimated the population of Dahomey at no more than 200,000 (1851, i, 14); Burton 1864, ii, 232, reduced this to 150,000.

⁷⁷ Cf. Forbes 1851, i, 12, 'The population is far from sufficient for an advantageous occupation of more than one third of the lands'.

⁷⁸ This is not entirely accurate, since other sources record that labour was requisitioned for public works, such as repair of the royal palace and road improvements (Dalzel 1793, xii, 171; Bay 1998, 122).

⁷⁹ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 354–5; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. in no. 18.

⁸⁰ See Appendix 1, no. 5, Beecroft to Fraser, 14 Sept. 1852.

⁸¹ Henry R. Foote, Commander of the *Prometheus*, and Senior Officer of the Bights Division; see Foote's own account, in Appendix 3, no. 10.

⁸² See Appendix 2, no. 42, Bruce to King of Dahomey, 12 June 1852. This letter had evidently been delivered to Ouidah previously.

⁸³ i.e. Foote and Commander A. Heseltine.

⁸⁴ The fort was now no longer occupied by any European. Hutton's agents had presumably vacated it earlier, when he bought another house in Ouidah (see Journals, p. 113), and in any case his current agent Stanfield had now (as indicated later in this letter) moved to Cotonou.

called) Portuguese, to the meeting. Here we waited, until the Yer-vo-gar sent to say, he was ready to receive us.

We were admitted soon after our arrival.

The Yer-vo-gar stated that the King had received the Commodore's letter respecting the razing of the blockade, and that Gezo wished me to return and live in the Fort.⁸⁵

Then Commander Foote produced the official letter about Stanfield.⁸⁶ We had a great palaver that the Queen of England and King of Dahomey be one, that I tried all I could do, to make them knock their heads together and winding up with the old tale, that I must go away and a man with a good heart, must come.

He said that all the things he take from Stanfield, he chop 'em,⁸⁷ not possible to get them again: this parley was abbreviated by Senhor Isidore, sending to say he was waiting break fast for us.

The Yer-vo-gar, walked to the outside of his gates, with us, as is customary, and gave me, amongst the rest a hearty shake of the hands.

We had an excellent breakfast and sat chatting and smoking until the sun was somewhat low; then a walk through the town, attended by a numerous retinue of Portuguese, after which we returned to Sen[hor] Isidore's and partook of a substantial dinner.

Before dinner was served Senhor Ignatio de Souza, came to me and said, that I must stop in the Fort, not to take any notice of what the Yer-vo-gar said; that it was the King's wish that I should. Others expressed themselves in very strong terms in favor of my returning.

Stanfield is at Cootonoo,⁸⁸ and, it appears has been going to the bad, since I left. I believe he has taken the coast complaint, drinking.

Isidore says he has 37 wives and 35 children alive.⁸⁹ His brother Antonio has 80 wives.

Sunday 26. The King's custom Ajubo, was finished, this day; he sent Antonio de Souza a girl for a wife, as is usual, on this occasion, there was great singing and tomtoming to celebrate the event.⁹⁰

The Commanders in attempting the surf this morning, were capsized.

⁸⁵ As Bruce had requested in a second letter, also of 15 June 1852: Appendix 2, no. 43.

⁸⁶ See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. in no. 14, Lord Stanley to Admiralty, 2 June 1852, requesting that the navy should assist in demanding compensation for the treatment of Stanfield.

⁸⁷ 'ate', i.e. consumed, or expended.

⁸⁸ i.e. Cotonou.

⁸⁹ Cf. Journals, p. 45, which says that Isidoro had 37 sons.

⁹⁰ For possible identification of this 'Custom', see Endnote 1.

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Since the above Comm[ander] Foote received his stick from Abomey, with a very civil message from the King, requesting I would return to Whydah, that I should be received properly and that he had given the Yer-vo-gar, especial instructions to be very civil to me.

By the above you will perceive that nothing has been effected.

I can only regret that the instructions were not carried out.⁹¹

⁹¹i.e. the instructions to obtain compensation for the treatment of Stanfield.



Appendix 1

Instructions given to Vice-Consul Fraser

1. Viscount Palmerston to John Duncan

29 May 1849¹

Her Majesty's Government having understood that you are about to proceed to Dahomey, on the African coast, for the laudable purpose of endeavouring to introduce into that country some of the arts of civilized life, whereby legal commerce will eventually be promoted, and the Traffic in Slaves discouraged,² I have to state to you that, with the view to assist and countenance your exertions in this undertaking, Her Majesty's Government propose to invest you with the temporary rank and character of British Vice-Consul within the dominions of the King of Dahomey, on the western coast of Africa; and I herewith inclose a formal letter authorizing you to act as such.

Your previous knowledge of the King of Dahomey and of African affairs, and of the habits of the Blacks,³ renders it unnecessary for me to give you any very specific instructions for the guidance of your conduct while you shall act as British Vice-Consul.

It is hoped that the influence which you may obtain may enable you to prevent misunderstandings between the chiefs and the crews of British vessels resorting to the ports of the Dahomey country, for the purposes of legal trade.

With a view to such results, you will endeavour to encourage the chiefs and people to till the soil, and to produce available exports, so that they may obtain by barter the European commodities of which they may stand in need.

You will take every suitable opportunity to impress upon the minds of the chiefs and of their principal councilors, the great advantages which they will derive from the extension of legal commerce with the nations of Europe and America; and you will assure them that Her Majesty's Government earnestly desire to contribute to their welfare and improvement.

You will transmit to me, from time to time, the best information which you can procure, as to the means by which commercial intercourse with the

¹ Printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, no. 1; original draft in TNA, FO84/775, ff. 3–8. Fraser was referred to these instructions to his predecessor for guidance when he himself was appointed in Dec. 1850: see no.2.

²Duncan planned to go to Ouidah to promote cotton cultivation, with the support of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

³In addition to his visit to Dahomey in 1845–6, Duncan had served on the Niger Expedition of 1841–2.

chiefs on the coast and in the interior can be extended, and as to the points of the coast, which may appear to afford the greatest facilities for commerce; and you will also state what kinds of European commodities are most sought after by the natives.

I have further to acquaint you that Her Majesty's Government are about to sanction the appointment of Mr John Beecroft to be Her Majesty's Consul for the ports of Benin and Biafra, including Dahomey, on the western coast of Africa. So soon, therefore, as you shall hear from Mr Beecroft that he has received his commission, you will put yourself under his orders, and attend to such communications as he may find it necessary to give to you.

It will be your duty, whilst you shall act as British Vice-Consul, to keep up a cordial intercourse and good understanding with Mr Beecroft, as well as with Her Majesty's naval officers on the West African station, and to communicate to them any information which may come to your knowledge from time to time respecting the Slave Trade; and Her Majesty's naval officers will be instructed to afford you every facility and assistance in their power for the purpose of better enabling you to accomplish the objects of your journey.

You will receive in another dispatch a copy of the general Consular instructions, and you will also be instructed in matters relating to the Slave Trade.

2. Viscount Palmerston to Louis Fraser

10 December 1850⁴

I have to acquaint you that Her Majesty's Government have been pleased to select you to be British Vice-Consul within the territories of the King of Dahomey, on the western coast of Africa, in the place of the late Mr John Duncan.

I herewith inclose a formal letter of authority under my hand and seal, to enable you to act as such.

The objects which Her Majesty's Government have in view in this appointment are fully explained in the annexed instructions, which were given to the late Vice-Consul Duncan, and which were returned to this office after Mr Duncan's death.⁵

You will consider these instructions as addressed to yourself, and you will take them as the rule of your conduct during the time you shall act as British Vice-Consul in Dahomey.

⁴Printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. 1 in no.16; original draft in TNA, FO84/816, ff. 327–328.

⁵See no. 1.

3. Viscount Palmerston to Vice-Consul Fraser

21 December 1850⁶

I have to state to you that you may charge in your contingent account the cost of any small present which, on your first appointment, you may find it indispensable to make to the King of Dahomey. But I have to instruct you to make it understood by the King and the chiefs with whom you may have to transact business, that the officers of the Queen of England neither give nor receive presents.

On your arrival on the coast of Africa you should go first to Consul Beecroft, and consult with him upon the matters connected with the duties confided to you as British Vice-Consul; and should Consul Beecroft think it advisable that you should go to Abomey at once, you will do so, but if otherwise you might delay your visit thither till a later opportunity.

4. Consul Beecroft to Vice-Consul Fraser, Clarence Fernando Po 4 July 1851⁷

You are hereby directed to embark, on board of her Majesty's Steamer 'Bloodhound' for passage to Whydah.

On your arrival off that place you will as early as possible put yourself in communication with Mr Thomas Hutton, or his Agent, requesting him as soon as it is deemed prudent, to send for your luggage &c.

After your landing, as early as convenient, you will wait upon the Yaa-vogar⁸ and explain to him that Her Majesty's Government have deemed it expedient to appoint you as British Vice Consul within the territories of the King of Dahomey.

You will desire him to send a messenger to His Majesty the King, acquainting him of your arrival and to state that you have dispatches of importance for him,⁹ Her Britannic Majesty's Government wishing to be made acquainted if he was desirous that it should be delivered personally or otherwise.

As it is expedient you should be provided with [a] canoe and a proper number of men to manage her, it not being at this period convenient to get either men or canoe I have to advise you under the existing circumstances to make arrangements with Mr Hutton or his Agent for the purpose of one for the present.

Should you consider it indispensable to make a small present to the King, you will procure from the above mentioned firm, Guns, Powder and cowries.

⁶Printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. 7 in no.16; original draft in TNA, FO84/816, ff. 337–338v.

⁷TNA, FO84/886, f.131–132; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 3 in no.4.

⁸i.e. Yovogan, the Dahomian Viceroy of Ouidah.

⁹i.e. Palmerston's letters to the King of 11 Oct. and 11 Dec. 1850: see Appendix 2, nos 1 and 2.

I do not deem it advisable that you should go to Abomey, at once, it had better be delayed until a later opportunity; particularly as it is the middle of the rains; but you will be pleased to be guided by your own judgement after you receive the King's answer to your message.

You will be guided in a great measure by your Consular Instructions relative to your communications about Trade &c.

You will be pleased to take the earliest opportunity of communicating with me your reception at Whydah &c.

5. Consul Beecroft to Vice-Consul Fraser, Clarence, Fernando Po

14 September 1852¹⁰

As it is a most favourable opportunity for you to visit Whydah, by Her Majesty's Steam Sloop "Prometheus," Captain H. R. Foote, I have to request that you will hold yourself and servant in readiness to embark on the 15th.

On your arrival, I should wish you to put yourself in communication with the "Yavogah", and to use your own political judgement, in gaining a reconciliation,¹¹ it will prepare him to listen to the dispatch, from Earl Malmesbury to the Lords of the Admiralty, relative to his unjust proceedings, against Mr Andrew Stanfield in March last.¹²

Captain H.R. Foote, will render you his valuable assistance if necessary, in a conciliatory manner, as coercive measures, are left for the consideration of the Commander in Chief.

¹⁰TNA, FO84/886, ff. 228–228v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. in no.15.

¹¹Following the breakdown in relations with King Gezo, and Fraser's abandonment of his post at Ouidah, in March 1852.

¹²HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 2 in no.14, Lord Stanley to Admiralty, 2 June 1852, instructing the Admiralty to demand compensation for Stanfield's alleged mistreatment at Ouidah.

Appendix 2

Documents referred to in the Journals and Dispatches

This chapter includes the great majority of the documents cited in Fraser's journals and dispatches; a few, of lesser substance, are omitted, but referred to and summarized in the annotation to the texts of the journals and dispatches. These documents are presented here in the order of their original composition, rather than of their appearance in Fraser's journals.

1. Viscount Palmerston to King of Dahomey 11 October 1850¹

I am commanded by Her Majesty to acknowledge the receipt of the letter which you addressed to her on the 4th of July last;² and I have in the first place to beg you to accept the best thanks of the British Government for the very kind and hospitable manner in which you received Mr Beecroft and Commander Forbes, during their late visit to your Majesty's capital of Abomey; and I beg to assure you, Sir, that this friendly conduct on your part has still more increased the earnest desire of the British Government to cultivate the most intimate relations between the Kingdoms of Great Britain and of Dahomey.

But as nothing more contributes to the maintenance of friendship than a frank explanation of mutual feelings and opinions, I deem it of importance to advert to the statement which you made to Mr Beecroft, that you intended to make war upon the chiefs of Abbeokuta,³ and I feel it right to inform you that the Queen of England takes a great interest in favour of that city and its people, and that if you value the friendship of England you will abstain from any attack upon and from any hostility against that town and people.

The British Government would be very sorry that you should make such an attack, 1st, because Her Majesty's Government would deeply regret that any evil should happen to the people of Abbeokuta; and, 2ndly, because Her Majesty's Government would feel much concern if anything should be done

¹ Printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. in no. 10; original draft in TNA, FO84/819, ff. 4–6v. This letter was delivered by Fraser to King Gezo on 20 Aug. 1851 (see Journals, p. 74).

² See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, incl. in no. 9.

³ See Forbes 1851, ii, 189–90.

by your Majesty which would lead to an interruption of the friendly relations between yourself and the Government of England.

With respect to what you have written about the Slave Trade, the British Government is much disappointed at your answer,⁴ for they had hoped and expected that you would have complied with their very reasonable request, accompanied as it was by a handsome offer of full compensation for any temporary loss which you might sustain by putting an end to the Slave Trade.⁵ But as you have declined to consent to what the British Government has asked you to do, the British Government will be obliged to employ its own means to accomplish its purpose, and as England is sure to succeed in any object which it is determined to attain, the result will be, that the Slave Trade from Dahomey will be put an end to by the British cruisers, and thus you will sustain the temporary loss of revenue without receiving the offered compensation.

But it is at least a satisfaction to Her Majesty's Government to think that your loss of revenue will only be felt by you for a short time, and that the profits which will arise to you from legal commerce will very soon amply repay you for any deficiency of revenue caused by the cessation of the Slave Trade.

2. Viscount Palmerston to King of Dahomey

11 December 1850⁶

The Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, my Sovereign, has commanded me to acquaint you that Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to direct Mr Louis Fraser, the bearer of this letter, to be the successor to the late Mr John Duncan as British Vice-Consul in the territories governed by your Majesty.

The reasons which have induced the Queen to station a British Vice-Consul within your territories were explained to your Majesty by the letter which I sent to you by the late Vice-Consul Duncan,⁷ and I beg again to tender to your Majesty the thanks of Her Majesty's Government for the kind and hospitable treatment which you gave to Mr Duncan.

⁴The King insisted that the revenues he derived from the slave trade were too great for him to give it up 'at once', and requested that it should first be stopped in neighbouring places, before he could consider abolishing it in Dahomey.

⁵The King was offered transitional compensation of £3,000 annually for 5 years.

⁶Printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. 5 in no. 16; original draft in TNA, FO84/819, ff. 12–13v. Delivered by Fraser to King Gezo on 20 Aug. 1851 (see Journals, p. 74).

⁷See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. in no. 2, Palmerston to King of Dahomey, 29 May 1849: in accordance with the instructions to Duncan (Appendix 1, no. 1, above), this explained that the Vice-Consul would prevent disputes between British merchants and the local authorities, and promote the development of commercial alternatives to the slave trade ('legitimate and peaceful commerce').

[Vice-]Consul Fraser is instructed to explain your Majesty that it is the fixed determination of the British Government that the African Slave Trade shall cease; that it is useless for any African Sovereign or chief to suppose that he can be able to carry on that Slave Trade in defiance of the determination of Great Britain to put an end to it; and that the best way of securing the goodwill and friendship of England is promptly and completely to put the Slave Trade down.

Mr Fraser is also instructed to explain to your Majesty on all suitable occasions the great advantages which you will derive from the increase of legitimate commerce; and he is also to assure you of the earnest desire of the Queen's Government to contribute in every way to your welfare and prosperity.

Her Majesty's Government trust that you will receive the British Vice-Consul with the due respect due to his character and rank, and that you will put entire faith in what he shall state to you in the name of Her Majesty's Government.

3. George Prior, for Gezo, King of Dahomey, to Queen Victoria, Whydah

26 April 1851⁸

The King of Dahomey sends his comp[liments] to Her Majesty greeting and wishes she would send him, as he expresses it a soldier with a good head to hear some Palaver from his mouth at the town of Abomey, so that he may report the same to Her Majesty.

For Gazoo
King of the country of Dahomey
(signed) George Prior

Given through Madakie as Interpreter

(signed) Edward Dennis witness.

4. Yovogan Dagba, for Gezo, King of Dahomey, to whom it may concern, Whydah

14 May 1851⁹

The Best Compliments of "Gezoo" King of Dahomey to all whom it may concern Greeting and says als[o] that the Queen of England was the first to send a white governor to Whydah to make friends with him before either the

⁸TNA, FO84/886, f. 138; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 9 in no. 4. This and the following two letters were handed to Fraser at Ouidah on 30 July 1851 (see Journals, p. 41).

⁹TNA, FO84/886, f. 136; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, inc. 7 in no. 4.

French or Portugueses settle here,¹⁰ he is anxious to have it understood that he is the friend of the English and that if they Lose anything he will find it and protect them and that he expects them to do the same for him.

For Gezoo King of Dahomey
Yervogar Dagwah his X mark

5. Yovogan Dagba for Gezo, King of Dahomey, to the Captains of the English Men-of-War, Whydah 14 May 1851¹¹

The King of Dahomeys Best compliments to the Capt[ain]s of the “Men of War” on the Coast and wishes to know if they [will] supply him with a few muskets Long Dane Guns and some musketoons.¹²

For Gazoo King of Dahomey
Yervogar Dagwah his X mark

6. Cost of canoe crew [31 July 1851]¹³

The following are the particulars, as detailed to me, of the yearly cost of a canoe-crew at Whydah.

A crew, of necessity, consists of two Head men, sixteen others and three lads, in all 21

	£	s	d
5 heads of cowries, per week ¹⁴	52	0	0 ¹⁵
3 Gall[on]s of Rum @ 2/6 per Gall[on] per week ¹⁶	19	10	0
19 men and boys 2 pieces of Romaul ¹⁷ each per month)	81	00	0
@ 3/- p piece)			

¹⁰This must refer, not to the original establishment of the European factories/forts in Ouidah (of which the first was in fact the French, in 1671, followed by the English in 1683, and the Portuguese in 1721), but to their reoccupation, after periods of abandonment, in Gezo's reign. The English fort had been reoccupied (by the trader Thomas Hutton) in 1838, the French in 1842 and the Portuguese in 1844 (see Law 2004a, 31, 33–4).

¹¹TNA, FO84/886, f. 137; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 8 in no. 4.

¹²i.e. short-barreled muskets.

¹³TNA, FO84/886, f.139; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 10 in no.4. Cf. Journal, p. 43.

¹⁴The ‘head’ was 2,000 cowries, making the total here 10,000. This presumably represents payment for subsistence, and works out at around 476 cowries per person per week, or 68 per day.

¹⁵Elsewhere, Fraser equated the head of 2,000 cowries with 4s. 6d. (Journals, p. 68), but here with only 4s.: for commentary, see Endnote 2.

¹⁶This seems to work out at around 1 bottle each per week: if these are ‘old wine’ gallons of 128 fluid ounces, and the bottle is 16 ounces, 3 gallons actually = 24 bottles.

¹⁷Indian cotton (or silk) cloth in small pieces, suitable e.g. for a headscarf.

1 Head man 3 pieces per month)			
1 do 4 “ do)			
		£152	10	0
Add to which 25 percent for purchasing them		<u>37</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>
		190	0	0
Incidental expenses, at least		<u>10</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
		£200	0	0

Besides purchase and breakage of canoes¹⁸

7. Rev. C. A. Gollmer to Vice-Consul Fraser, Badagry 4 August 1851¹⁹

In the late war of the King of Dahomey at Abbeokuta,²⁰ the Dahomians carried off a man, by the name of “John Baptist Dassalu” a convert of our church at that place.

Those Abbeokuta men whom Domingo at Porto Nuovo bought from the King of Dahomey and whom Domingo allowed to be redeemed by their relatives have stated to me and to others that “John Baptist Dassalu” was at Abomey and because he wore a shirt was looked upon as a liberated African and allowed to walk about at the time they were at Abomey and when they were brought down to Porto Novo [sic].

A few days since the wife of “John Baptist Dassalu” came from Abbeokuta, stating that her husband sent her from Whydah, and by a person who saw him, four cowries, which means that he hopes to see her by and by.²¹

My request to you Sir is to have the kindness to see whether you can not find out the man—this you can perhaps best effect, if you can procure an Abbeokuta (otherwise called *Egba*) slave who has been in the country for some time such a man might find “John Baptist Dassalu” perhaps without giving you too much trouble.

My further request would be to redeem the man if possible should even an unusually high price be demanded for him and should you be able to succeed please request Mr Hutton’s agent at Whydah, to advance the sum and place it

¹⁸ Compare the cost of ‘canoemen hired by Englishmen’ given earlier by Forbes 1851, i, 122: this gives a higher rate for subsistence (560 cowries each per week, 80 per day), but is otherwise similar.

¹⁹ TNA, FO84/886, f. 145–146; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 14 in no. 4. Received by Fraser at Cana, 14 Aug. 1851 (see Journals, p. 58)

²⁰ The unsuccessful Dahomian attack on Abeokuta on 3 March 1851.

²¹ On Yoruba symbolic messages generally see Gollmer’s own account (1885). Although this refers to the case of Dassalu (identified only as ‘D.’, 173–4), and analyses another message received from him, it does not explain the significance of the 4 cowries. However, another source states that 4 cowries strung face to face convey a message of ‘joy and gladness’ (a play on the Yoruba words *èrin*, ‘four’, and *èrin*, ‘laughter’) and hope of a meeting (Bloxam 1887, 299).

to my debit and I will either repay the factory here or at Whydah. I will write a line to Mr Prior to that effect.

And when you have the man in your power perhaps a ship-of-war or one of Mr Hutton's vessels will bring him down here, the land route is at present unsafe.

You have no doubt heard of the war at this place and the precarious position we are in, in consequence;²² it is impossible for us to tell how it will terminate Kosoko at Lagos has sent on several occasions large fleets of canoes from 100–200, containing from 10–25 men each, some mounted swivels—and there was a rather hot fight the week before last;²³ Kosoko tries all he can to get rid of the English.

Do you hear anything in your quarter, is the King of D[ahomey] likely to join Kosoko as is reported, to destroy this place.

Hoping you are in health, and thanking you beforehand for interesting yourself on my behalf and the poor captive "John".

8. George A. F. Prior, Manager of the British Factory, Whydah, to Vice Consul Fraser

9 August 1851²⁴

As you are about to visit the King of Dahomey, I take this opportunity of putting on paper a few of the principal inconveniences and annoyances to which myself and employers, Messrs W. B. Hutton and sons,²⁵ property are constantly subject to, trusting that during your stay at Abomey you may find some favourable opportunity of drawing his Majesty's attention to the same with a view [sic] of procuring some remedy.

1st Robberies by the canoe-men between the ship and the Beach.

Scarcely a canoe comes on shore but that the casks or cases have been opened and some of the contents extracted.

Secondly The trouble expence and waste of time in opening those cases and casks besides the damage due to the casks by opening them.

Thirdly The continual robberies by the carriers to and from the Beach and Fort which robberies I beleive [sic] to be principally committed at Kok-ro-ko.²⁶

²² Referring to the war between Badagry and Lagos, which followed the civil war in Badagry in June 1851.

²³ On 7 July 1851: see HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 4 in no.160, British Residents at Badagry to Capt. Jones, 11 July 1851.

²⁴ TNA, FO84/886, f. 142–143; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 12 in no. 4. Cf. Journals, p. 47.

²⁵ Thomas Hutton's parent company in London.

²⁶ i.e. Cakanacou, referring to Zoungbodji, the village mid-way between Ouidah and the beach, whose chief had this title (Law 2004a, 58, 108).

Allow me to observe that robberies have been less frequent since your rigid and just measures on your first arrival.²⁷

Fourthly I find it impossible to get any repairs done to the Fort, in consequence of which, the walls and sheds have fallen down and the whole place is going to total ruin, consequently it is impossible to keep stock or anything in the yard, which is a great inconvenience and loss.

The loss of Property and time above enumerated added to the duties paid to the Dahoman Government make the expenses of my establishment so formidable that they are discouraging to myself and very unsatisfactory to my employers.

9. George A. Prior to Vice Consul Fraser, Whydah 9 August 1851, 2.30 pm²⁸

As you are about to start for Dahomey and not being time to write an official letter, I take the liberty of addressing, this note to you.

I have just opened two casks of cloth 'Romalls'; one of them I find only twenty six pieces short, and the other only twenty five pieces short this I believe to have been robbed by the canoemen in bringing the casks on shore.

10. Chief Obba Shoron [= Basorun] to Vice-Consul Fraser, Badagry

[11] August 1851²⁹

You will doubtless be surprised at an entire stranger addressing you thus, but I trust you will pardon me. I am next to the King of Abbeokuta and commander of all the forces.³⁰

I have been here some time endeavouring to arbitrate between the people of this place and Lagos.³¹ Some of the chiefs (mentioning names) have accepted my terms, others (names again) have taken to the bush, where they lie in wait and kidnap all they can. Lately two of my own people have been caught and cruelly murdered.

²⁷ Fraser had flogged 3 porters accused of theft: see Journals, p. 38.

²⁸ TNA, FO84/886, f. 144; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 13 in no. 4. Cf. Journals, p. 47.

²⁹ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 153–153v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 19 in no. 4. Received 6 Sept. (see Journals, p. 101). The original of this letter was subsequently lost, and (as explained in Journals, p. 109) Fraser made this copy 'as near as memory will serve'. This copy is dated '4(?) Aug.', but in his original Journal the date is given as 11 Aug. 1851.

³⁰ There was actually no 'king' of Abeokuta at this time, but Okukenu the *Sagbua* was recognised as paramount civil chief (Biobaku 1957, 32); Somoye the *Basorun* was the senior military chief.

³¹ Following the attacks by Lagos on Badagry in June–July 1851 (see n. 22 above). Somoye's description of his role is disingenuous: he was rather sent to support Badagry against Lagos.

As there are several white people and much British property at Badagry, we beg of you to intercede, with the King of Dahomey, in our behalf.

Kosoko, the usurper of Lagos, has sent handsome presents to (naming 12 or 14 places) and lastly to Dahomey, in this part of the letter he called 'Gazo' 'Obba Dadda'.³²

This last power is the only one we fear.

I propose returning to Abbeokuta the beginning of September.

Should you not receive a favorable answer at Abomey, pray let us know, with all the information you can furnish, and I will endeavour to return with a sufficient force, in time, to avert the impending danger.

11. George A. F. Prior to Vice Consul Fraser, Whydah 12 August 1851³³

The enclosed letter³⁴ was landed yesterday from HM St Niger Mr Gollmer wished me to forward it to you, if you were not expected back soon, I arrived here, this morning, at 6 o'clock from Ahguay, the town is in a complete uproar, they are trying to starve them out, in the Factory,³⁵ no one is permitted to either buy or sell or have any intercourse with the Factory there is 3 guards placed at the gate to keep the people out of the place and to prevent them taking anything in it. Has been so now for eight days and some part of the time they would not allow a canoe to go off the Beach so Mr Beart³⁶ had to send the vessels away by signal and he tells me he does not know what is the reason of it all. The Cabooceer refuses either to see him or explain by messages. I hear from Badagry that the Lagos people have been defeated in their attempt to take the place but it was expected that Kosoko would come himself next time.³⁷

12. Vice-Consul Fraser to Rev. C. A. Gollmer, Cana 15 August 1851³⁸

I received your letter dated Aug. 4th per messenger, through the kindness of Mr Prior, and you may rest assured, that no effort on my part, shall be

³² *Oba*, Yoruba for 'king'; *Dada*, Fon for 'Father', an honorific term applied to the Kings of Dahomey.

³³ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 147–147v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 15 in no. 4. Received by Fraser at Cana, 14 Aug. 1851 (see Journals, p. 58).

³⁴ i.e. Gollmer's letter (no. 7).

³⁵ i.e. Hutton's factory.

³⁶ Hutton's agent at Agoué.

³⁷ Referring to the Lagos attack on Badagry on 7 July 1851.

³⁸ TNA, FO86/884, ff. 149–149v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 16 in no. 4. Cf. Journals, p. 58.

wanting, to restore to you and his friends, your poor *protégé*, John Baptist Dassalu.³⁹

I take this opportunity of assuring you, that you will always find me ready and willing to assist in a good cause, even to the risk of my life, or the detriment of my pocket.

With respect to your war, allow me to assure you, that you may expect, my friend and senior, Mr Consul Beecroft, almost daily, with full power, from our Government at home, to settle, should it even be, perforce,⁴⁰ the whole Lagos affair: without doubt, Akitoye will accompany him.⁴¹

I leave for Abomey (Dahomey, more correctly speaking) tomorrow, and trust ere long to report to you, that Dassalu is, at least, in my charge.

Hoping that the patience and perserverance of the Badagrians, will last a little longer.

P.S.—I have not heard of any intention on the part of the King of Dahomey to join Kosoko.

Domingo was created a Cabooceer of Whydah, a day or two since,⁴² the King gave him four wives, so he is now a fixture in this country.

13. Vice-Consul Fraser to George Prior, Cana 15 August 1851⁴³

Your messenger arrived yesterday, and I have to thank you for your kindness, in forwarding the Rev. Mr Gollmer's letter, which shall meet with every attention.

I regret to hear your account of the position of the English people and Factory at Aghuay, can you from your knowledge of the place and the people, suggest any means that will alleviate their present most unpleasant position, if so, let me know without delay, and nothing shall be wanting on my part.

Thanks for your "Illustrated London News," which will do admirably to exhibit to the King tomorrow.

³⁹In fact, Fraser failed to find this man, who was sent into slavery in Cuba, but subsequently traced, redeemed and repatriated to Africa (Gollmer 1885, 174).

⁴⁰i.e. by force.

⁴¹Akitoye had left Badagry in Jan. 1851, and was taken by Beecroft to Fernando Po. Beecroft, together with Akitoye, did call at Badagry on 15 Nov. 1851, en route to negotiating with Kosoko at Lagos (Smith 1978, 22, 24).

⁴²Cf. Journals, p. 58.

⁴³TNA, FO84/886, f. 151; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 17 in no. 4. Cf. Journals, p. 58.

14. Vice-Consul Fraser to Signor José Domingo Martinz, Abomey21 August 1851⁴⁴

At the request of the Rev. Mr Gollmer, Church Missionary, at Badagry, I have been in search of a man named 'John Baptist Dassalu' a convert to the Protestant Church, who was taken in the late Abbeokutan War, as it appears all the Abbeokutans, so taken have passed through your hands, I shall feel much obliged, if you will trace this man out, and send him to the English Fort, at Whydah, in my name.

I will arrange with you, about him, when I return to Whydah.

15. Mehu (for King of Dahomey) to Queen of England, Abomey7 September 1851⁴⁵

The King of Dahomey gives his best comp[limen]ts to the Queen of England and thanks her very much for sending me [= Vice-Consul Fraser] to his country, he has seen me and likes me too [= very] much—the same way he send, he like, and same way the King of Dahomey will send messenger to Queen of England, bye and bye.

The King says that the palaver that the Queen of England, send him, about no block Abbeokuta, he hear,⁴⁶ the King of Abbeokuta (Foolaka [= Sodaka])⁴⁷ was the King's friend before;⁴⁸ that Foolaka send him [= his] children to the King of Dahomey, and say go block one country for him, (called Keada), and the King block that country for him,⁴⁹ if Foolaka live, he the

⁴⁴TNA, FO84/886, f. 152; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 18 in no.4. Cf. Journals, p. 79.

⁴⁵TNA, FO84/858, ff. 297–297v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, incl. 2 in no. 23; also Class A, incl. 3 in no. 179. See Journals, p. 108.

⁴⁶i.e. asking him not to attack Abeokuta: referring to Palmerston's letter to Gezo, 11 Oct. 1850 (Appendix 2, no. 1), which had been transmitted by Fraser.

⁴⁷It is assumed that 'Foolaka' here and subsequently is a miscopying, the reference being to Sodeke (died 1845), who was not actually 'King', but the effective ruler of Abeokuta (Biobaku 1957, 21–2).

⁴⁸This early friendship between Dahomey and Abeokuta is corroborated in other sources: e.g. HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, no. 2, Beecroft to Palmerston, 21 Feb. 1851, journal entry for 14 Jan. 1851, reporting a statement at Abeokuta that 'six or seven years ago, [the King of Dahomey] sent the late chief, Sadokee, 200 horses' tails and 40 slaves, to secure a lasting peace'; also Bowen 1855, 109, referring to an 'alliance' made by Dahomey with Sodeke.

⁴⁹i.e. Okeodan, in the Egbado area inland from Badagry, which was destroyed by the Dahomians in Jan. 1849. The suggestion that Sodeke had requested Gezo to attack Okeodan must be a confusion (presumably on the part of the interpreter who translated the message), since Sodeke had died 4 years earlier; the Dahomian expedition in which Sodeke was allegedly complicit was in fact an earlier one, in 1845 (see n. 50, below). A modern account suggests that Okeodan in 1849, on the contrary, was allied to Abeokuta, and was attacked by the Dahomians for that

King of Dahomey, block Keada, and if he dies, he can block for him;⁵⁰ because the King of Dahomey block Keada for Foolaka, the Abbeokutans go block two countries for Dahomey, Kingside⁵¹ (one is called Ba-gee and the other To-soo)⁵² the Abbeokuta people, catch all the Cabooceers, for those countries, and cut the head for all—the above is the reason the King of Dahomey get vexed with Abbeokuta, he pass 45 peoples countries before he come to Abbeokuta and as he passes, he give 20,000 men⁵³ for one of these countries, and also leaving some men in each of the other countries as he passes, is the reason he no block Abbeokuta properly,⁵⁴ the reason he block Abbeokuta again⁵⁵ is the last time the Abbeokuta people catch and kill plenty of his men and also his wives,⁵⁶ and keep them to make their own wives.

The King says myself have [to] live [in] this country, by-and-bye, me and him can settle the Slave Palaver.⁵⁷

(Signed)

Mayhoo his X mark

P.S. The King say, anything belonging to the Queen of England. live at Abbeokuta, he can see every one, in his own hand.⁵⁸

The King say, this black man, kill this white man (Gee, at Badagry);⁵⁹ if the Queen of England send to him he can block his [= this] place;⁶⁰ he no like black man for kill white man for any way.

reason (Folayan 1972, 25). However, a contemporary account implies that Okeodan was in fact hostile to Abeokuta, reporting that Abeokuta 'rejoiced' at its destruction (Samuel Crowther, *Journal*, 25 March 1849, in Oyemakinde 2001, 59–60).

⁵⁰Sodeke died in Jan. 1845. The first military clash between Dahomey and Abeokuta occurred shortly afterwards, in Feb. 1845, when the Dahomians attacked an Abeokuta force which was besieging the town of Ado, on the road to Badagry (Folayan 1972, 20–21), and it is evidently this campaign which is confused here with the later attack on Okeodan, Local tradition in Abeokuta also recalls allegations that Sodeke had solicited this Dahomian attack (Ajisafe 1964, 82).

⁵¹Presumably meaning 'belonging to the king'.

⁵²Igbeji, another Egbado town, attacked by Abeokuta in 1850, as being allied to Dahomey (Folayan 1972, 23). 'Tosoo' is perhaps a miscopying of 'Toroo', referring to Itoro, a village close to Igbeji, and associated with it (see *ibid.*, 3).

⁵³Probably not to be understood literally: 20,000 is the number of cowries in a bag (the highest unit of the cowry currency), probably here used metaphorically for 'very many'.

⁵⁴Referring to the unsuccessful Dahomian attack on Abeokuta, 3 March 1851.

⁵⁵Referring to his intention to launch a further attack on Abeokuta, as recorded in Fraser's *Journals*, pp. 40, 100, 104.

⁵⁶i.e. his female soldiers (or 'Amazons').

⁵⁷i.e. the British demand for the abolition of the export slave trade.

⁵⁸Presumably a response to British demands for guarantees for the security of British lives and property at Abeokuta, in the event of a further Dahomian attack.

⁵⁹Gee, an employee of Hutton's factory at Badagry, was shot dead on the beach there on 2 July 1851, during an attack on the town by forces from Lagos (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 4 in no. 160, Residents at Badagry to Capt. Jones, 14 July 1851).

⁶⁰i.e. Badagry.

The witnesses to the above were Evogarm, Narwey, and two others from the King, Madaki being interpreter.

(Signed) LOUIS FRASER
Her Majesty's Vice-Consul for the Kingdom of Dahomey
Whydah, September 9, 1851.⁶¹

16. Thomas Hutton to Vice-Consul Fraser, Aghwey 9 September 1851⁶²

Your letter of 29th July,⁶³ reached me only a few days ago—I feel much obliged to you for your kind letter, and assure you that anything I can do for your welfare, you may depend upon. I expect to be at Whydah in the course of the next ten days when I hope to have the pleasure to meet you.⁶⁴ I have directed my Agents, to afford you every accommodation and assistance in their power, and to make you as comfortable, as they can.

17. Vice-Consul Fraser to Obba Shoron, Whydah 9 September 1851⁶⁵

Your letter, dated Badagry, at the beginning of August,⁶⁶ reached me at Abomey, through the King of Dahomey's hands, who told me it came through the Anagoo country.⁶⁷ He knew well where it was from. It has since been stolen from me, and I have left the King's place in consequence.

I could not obtain an answer from the King respecting his movements and motives towards Kosoko, but I suspect he will assist him.

Abbeokuta is marked out for a second attack; therefore be vigilant, let no time be lost, nothing left undone, and success is certain.

More care must be taken with official letters in future, as I am now in an unpleasant position through this miscarriage of yours.

⁶¹ This is the date of Fraser's arrival back at Ouidah.

⁶² TNA, FO84/886, f. 154; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class B, incl. 20 in no. 4. See Journals, p. 111.

⁶³ See Journals, p. 39.

⁶⁴ In the event, Fraser left Ouidah to go to Fernando Po on 11 Sept. 1851, so Hutton did not meet him until his return to Ouidah on 15 Oct.

⁶⁵ TNA, FO84/858, ff. 295–295v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, incl. 1 in no. 23; Class A, incl. 2 in no. 179. Sent via Gollmer at Badagry: see Journals, p. 111.

⁶⁶ See no. 10 above.

⁶⁷ Cf. Journals, p. 107.

18. Commodore Bruce to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Penelope*, Sierra Leone

6 December 1851⁶⁸

I have the honor to enclose a notice of my intention to establish a complete Blockade of all the Ports and Places in the Bight of Benin (except Badagry)⁶⁹ from Longitude 10 to 4030" East of Greenwich and I now beg leave to state the circumstances which have led to the adoption of this coercive measure.

1st. The King of Dahomey and the Chiefs of Lagos and Porto Nuovo, in defiance of repeated warnings from Her Majesty's Government persist in carrying on the Foreign Slave Trade, the suppression of which has been an unceasing object with all civilized countries for years past.

2ndly. Her Majesty's Officers endeavoured to persuade the King of Dahomey to desist from the barbarous practice of murdering Prisoners on Public Festivals, and the only result was the murder of ten or eleven victims, in the very presence of Her Majesty's Officers.⁷⁰

3rdly. The King of Dahomey and the Chiefs of Lagos and Porto Nuovo, have in the prosecution of their barbarous enterprises commonly known as "Slave Hunts" and against the remonstrances of British Officers, attacked and made war upon the towns of Abbeokuta and Badagry, where several British Missionaries and liberated Africans are located and places which Her Majesty's Government necessarily take an interest in, because they seem destined to be points from whence the lights of Christianity and Civilization may be spread over the adjoining countries.

4thly. The King of Dahomey, and the Chiefs of Lagos and Porto Nuovo, have declined to respect the lives of British subjects living at Abbeokuta and Badagry, should they at any time be enabled to force their way into these towns.

5thly. The King of Lagos forcibly detained a British subject on shore while he (the King) was shipping a Cargo of slaves on board a vessel in the roadstead.⁷¹

6thly. The King of Lagos declined to enter into any communication whatever with the Commander in Chief of Her Majesty's Naval Forces on this Station, and insultingly returned a letter which that Functionary had addressed to him; although the purport of that letter was merely to request that British life and property might not be injured by persons under his control.

⁶⁸TNA, FO84/886, ff, 326–327. Received by Fraser 21 Dec. 1851 (see Journals, p. 136).

⁶⁹Badagry was excluded from the blockade, because it was believed that the slave trade had already been ended there.

⁷⁰Referring to the mission of Beecroft and F. E. Forbes in 1850, which witnessed human sacrifices at the 'Annual Customs'.

⁷¹i.e. Hutton's agent George Prior: see Fraser's Journals, p. 112.

19. Commodore H. W. Bruce to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Penelope*, Whydah17 December 1851⁷²

Herewith I send a letter for the King of Dahomey which I request you will cause to be forwarded to him.⁷³

It's purport is to inform that King, that by Instructions from Her Majesty's Government, I shall institute a strict Blockade of all his Ports from the 1st of January next;—but that if he comes, or sends duly authorized persons, to make a Treaty from[= for] the complete suppression of the Slave Trade &c he will thereby avoid the ruin which otherwise, is impending over him.

The Blockade will be continued until a Treaty is effected.

You can communicate this to the authorities at Whydah.

A cruiser will be stationed off Whydah, and will receive you, should you wish to embark.

20. Commodore Bruce to King of Dahomey, *Penelope*, Whydah17 December 1851⁷⁴

In June last you requested that a soldier with a good head might be sent to Abomey to hear something which you wished to be repeated to the Queen, my Sovereign.⁷⁵

Under the impression that you were about to yield to the voice of reason and humanity, and accede to an agreement for the suppression of the infamous Traffic in Slaves, on the terms which were proposed to you by Commander F. E. Forbes and Mr Beecroft in 1850, Mr Fraser, Her Majesty's Vice-Consul at Whydah, complied with your request and proceeded to Abomey, where, instead of the good result he hoped for, he learnt that your object in seeking the presence of an Englishman at your capital, was to instruct him to convey your application to the Queen for arms and ammunition to enable you to carry on a war against Abbeokuta.⁷⁶

Now you must be aware, because you have been told it repeatedly, that the men of Abbeokuta are looked upon with favour by the British Government,

⁷²TNA, FO84/886, ff. 328–328v. Received by Fraser 21 Dec. 1851 (see Journals, p. 136).

⁷³i.e. no. 20.

⁷⁴TNA, FO84/892, ff. 282–284v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. in no. 194. Received by Fraser and transmitted to the Yovogan at Ouidah, 21 Dec. 1851, and read to King Gezo at Cana on 8 Jan. 1852 (see Journals, pp. 136–7, 146).

⁷⁵See no. 3 above, King Gezo to Queen Victoria, actually dated 26 April 1851, and delivered to Fraser at Ouidah on 30 July.

⁷⁶Bruce depends on the account of Gezo's request in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 179, Beecroft to Bruce, 14 Oct. 1851, whose accuracy Gezo later disputed (see Fraser's Journals, p. 146).

for the reason that they are assisting in the suppression of the Slave Trade; and, therefore, the Queen of England has commanded, not only that no assistance shall be given to you, to the prejudice of the Abbeokutians, but in consequence of your former attack on these people, your obstinacy in continuing to sell slaves to the Europeans living in Dahomey who are engaged in that Traffic, and your abominable practice of murdering prisoners on public festivals and other occasions—that your town of Whydah and the coast on [sic] the neighbourhood be blockaded, so as to prevent your having any trade, or receiving any supplies whatever from the sea; which blockade is to continue so long as you adhere to your present evil course.

You have set at nought the many warnings which you have received from the Queen's Government, Commodore Fanshawe, and myself.⁷⁷ You are now to be shown that these were not idle words, but meant, in the spirit of friendship, to put you on your guard against listening to the counsel of slave-traders, who consult their own personal interest, and not your honour and prosperity.

By coming yourself without delay to Whydah,⁷⁸ or by sending duly authorized messengers to enter into such a Treaty as I am empowered to make for the total suppression of the Slave Trade, and by preserving peace with Abbeokuta, you may yet save your country and yourself from the ruin and destruction which await it and you.

How can you hope far [= for] success in your present course? The Brazilians have given up the Slave Trade, so also have the Spaniards.⁷⁹ If you had your barracoons full of slaves, you could not sell them to these people, even at one dollar each; properly speaking, you are required not to renew the Slave Trade, for at this moment it may be said to be suppressed.

Dahomey is stated to be rich in various productions useful to the merchants of Europe and America. Let your subjects turn their attention to these and to the cultivation of the land and its produce, and you will have the support and encouragement of all civilized nations.

The advantageous terms which were formerly offered to you cannot now be given, that is to say, you will not receive any pecuniary compensation from

⁷⁷Fanshawe, Bruce's predecessor as Commander-in-Chief of the British navy's West African squadron, had written to warn King Gezo not to attack Abeokuta, on 23 July 1850 (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. in no. 225); Bruce had also written to King Gezo subsequently, 28 June 1851, but it does not appear that this letter was in fact delivered (HCPP, *Reduction of Lagos*, incl. 4 in no. 40).

⁷⁸Presumably, Bruce was unaware that the King was prohibited from seeing the sea, and hence from visiting Ouidah, by a religious taboo (Law 2004a, 99).

⁷⁹Brazil had finally passed legislation providing for effective penal sanctions against the slave trade in Sept. 1850. But the claim about the trade to Spanish Cuba was premature: although there was a dip in the number of slaves imported in 1850–1, the trade revived from 1852 onwards.

the British Government. If you continue still to hold out, the English will be your enemies, and your brother African Chiefs will be leagued against you to destroy you.

Should you be desirous of retaining your position as King of Dahomey, leave the Abbeokutians to themselves, and prove yourself worthy of the goodwill of the Queen of England,

21. Vice-Consul Fraser to Isidoro de Souza, British Vice-Consulate, Whydah

22 December 1851⁸⁰

I fear that the natives of this country, uneducated as they are, may not be sufficiently aware, of the serious nature of a blockade by the English squadron, such as I communicated to you yesterday.

Allow me to suggest to you, as a friend of the King of Dahomey, and the Cha-cha of this place, the propriety of explaining to the King and his head men, the ruin which must follow, if he refuses to comply with the stipulated terms.

22. Isidoro Felix de Souza to Vice-Consul Fraser, Ajuda [= Ouidah]

22 December 1851⁸¹

I, the undersigned L[ieutenant] Col[onel], Gov[ernor], Civil and Military of the district of the Portuguese Fort, John Baptist, of Ajuda, demands?, in the name of the Queen of Portugal, an authentic copy of the document forwarded to the King of Dahomey of the reasons, why your Government, blockade the port, thereby stopping the legal commerce.

23. Vice-Consul Fraser to Isidoro de Souza, British Vice-Consulate, Whydah

23 December 1851⁸²

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of yesterday's date.

Being wholly unacquainted with the fact of a Portuguese Governor, residing at this place, I have forwarded your application to the Senior Officer of Her Britannic Majesty's Forces, for his consideration.

As Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza, or the Cha-cha I will most willingly, permit you to take copies, of the particulars which I have received, respecting the blockade of this coast.

⁸⁰ TNA, FO84/886, f. 329. See Journals, p. 137.

⁸¹ TNA, FO84/886, f. 330. Cf. Journals, p. 137. Original Portuguese text not traced.

⁸² TNA, FO84/886, f. 331. Cf. Journals, p. 138.

24. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander T. G. Forbes, Whydah

23 December 1851⁸³

On my return to the Fort last night, I found the enclosed letter, excuse my attempt at a translation;⁸⁴ I also send you a copy of the letter, in answer, I sent him this morning.⁸⁵

You will please to write to Sig[nor] Isidore direct.

I do not consider myself, at present, in sufficient jeopardy, to authorize me deserting my post,⁸⁶ if I am ordered to do so, of course, I must obey.

I can hardly give any idea of the effects of the pending blockade, it takes time to penetrate, through their thick skulls. The whites, as they are called, who have something to lose, are panic struck, they, one and all, would have the King make an unconditional treaty, but there is not one, amongst them, bold enough to tell him so.

You have no idea of the effect, which the first account from Lagos, had upon the folks here, if that affair had been finished at one time, we should have had very little more to do.⁸⁷ As it is, they consider we were beaten, although they have made up their minds, that Lagos will be broken, still they say “it take them English two times to do it.”

For my own part, I am sorry that Badagry has been exempted, it is causing so much jealousy, it will, I fear, be one of the King of Dahomey's stumbling blocks, in the way of signing the treaty.

Will you be kind enough to give me an answer to the following question, which is put before me many times each day. For what reason is Badagry exempt? Is it English?

I am delighted to think, that something is, after so many years, to be done: it is high time, for the people are getting more and more uncontrollable; they have lost their leader in craftiness, Old de Souza, and they have not enough brains of their own to carry on.

Things here were thickening: first the case of robbing me, of Obba Shoron's letter, the non-attention to things, the King gave his word for, when I was at Abomey; the seizure of Mr Calvert Hutton and attempt at extortion; the detention of Mr Thomas Hutton for upwards of three months; the threatened attack upon Mr Hutton's people at Appa,⁸⁸ by an armed force of ninety

⁸³ TNA, FO84/886, ff. 332–333. See Journals, p. 138.

⁸⁴ See no. 22, from Isidoro de Souza.

⁸⁵ See no. 23.

⁸⁶ As Commodore Bruce had suggested: see no. 19.

⁸⁷ Referring to the first British attack on Lagos, 25 Nov. 1851, which was defeated. Lagos was taken at a second attempt, on 26–27 Dec.

⁸⁸ i.e. 'Appi Vista' (Cotonou), where Hutton had established a factory: see Journals, p. 133.

men;⁸⁹ and general conduct of the officials towards myself; to which must be added the King's neglect of Comm[ander] G. T. Forbes' letter⁹⁰ and also the one addressed to him by Com[mander] Heath.⁹¹

Mr T. Hutton requests a copy of my instructions respecting the blockade, am I authorized to let him have it[?]

25. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander T. G. Forbes, Whydah

26 December 1851⁹²

I have just received the King of Dahomeys stick and message calling me to Abomey.⁹³

I should like yourself or one of your Lieut[enant]s, to accompany me, more particularly as it would be in accordance with the King's wishes.

Things seem to be going on favorably, but I fear the 'sacrifices' will be the great obstacle.⁹⁴

26. Commander T. G. Forbes to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Philomel*

27 December 1851⁹⁵

The King's stick I suppose looks as if he will do something, my first Lieut[enant] being away in the pinnace, I do not like to leave the ship otherwise I would go up with you, however I send you Lieut[enant] Morrell who you will find an agreeable companion and as you say a Lieut[enant] will do, perhaps I had better look after things here I send you four bottles of brandy which may be of use. I have received the Keys (belonging to the sextant case &c)⁹⁶ let me know when you start and when I may expect you back in case of my having any communication with the Commodore.

[PS] I have just looked at my orders which will prevent me from sending Lieut[enant] Morrell unless under extraordinary circumstances.

⁸⁹This attack is not otherwise referred to, but it was noted in Jan. 1852 that the King had withdrawn the permission he had given to Hutton to trade at Appi Vista: see Appendix 3, no. 7, T. G. Forbes to Bruce, 18 Jan. 1852.

⁹⁰Actually, from Commander F. E. Forbes (see Journals, p. 122).

⁹¹See Journals, p. 130.

⁹²TNA, FO84/886, f. 334; also printed in HCPP *Slave Trade*, 1851–2, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 197. See Journals, p. 139.

⁹³Sic: but this should be Cana.

⁹⁴i.e. to concluding a treaty.

⁹⁵TNA, FO84/886, ff. 335–335v. See Journals, p. 139.

⁹⁶Cf. Journals, p. 137.

4. On no consideration do I consider it advisable that you should land yourself or allow any person under your Command to do so.

27. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander T. G. Forbes, British Consulate, Whydah
28 December 1851⁹⁷

Sig[nor] Domingo Martinz, has applied to me, to procure from you, the extension of the privilege granted to merchant ships, lying in these Roads, viz.—to remain at anchor, without communicating with the shore, until my return from Abomey.

His request is that the ships at Porto Nuovo be allowed the same privilege.

I do believe that Sig[nor] Domingo, at this moment is doing his best, to assist our cause, therefore comply if you can.

I purport leaving for Abomey tomorrow afternoon and shall be back in ten days or a fortnight.

On and after the 1st of January, if I should have occasion, to launch a canoe, she will hoist my small 'jack'.⁹⁸

28. Standard form of Treaty for the Abolition of the Slave Trade⁹⁹

Engagement between Her Majesty the Queen of England and the Chiefs of ***, for the abolition of the Traffic in Slaves.

ARTICLE I.

The export of slaves to foreign countries is for ever abolished in the territories of the Chiefs of *****, and the Chiefs of ***** engage to make and proclaim a law prohibiting any of their subjects, or any person within their jurisdiction, from selling or assisting in the sale of any slave for transportation to a foreign country; and the Chiefs of ***** promise to inflict a severe punishment on any person who shall break this law.

ARTICLE II.

No European, or other person whatever shall be permitted to reside within the territory of the Chiefs of ***** for the purpose of carrying on in any way the Traffic in Slaves; and no houses, or stores, or buildings of any kind whatever, shall be erected for the purpose of the Slave Trade within the territory of the Chiefs of *****; and if any such houses, stores, or buildings, shall at any

⁹⁷TNA, FO84/886, f. 338. See Journals, p. 141.

⁹⁸i.e. a small flag.

⁹⁹Text from HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, incl. 2 in no. 25.

future time be erected, and the Chiefs of ***** shall fail or be unable to destroy them, they may be destroyed by any British officers employed for the suppression of Slave Trade.

ARTICLE III.

If at any time it shall appear that Slave Trade has been carried on through or from the territory of the Chiefs of *****, the Slave Trade may be put down by Great Britain by force upon that territory, and British officers may seize the boats of ***** found anywhere carrying on the Slave Trade; and the Chiefs of ***** will be subject to a severe act of displeasure on the part of the Queen of England.

ARTICLE IV.

The slaves now held for exportation shall be delivered up to Commodore H. W. Bruce, or any officer duly authorized by him to receive them, for the purpose of being carried to a British colony, and there liberated; and all the implements of Slave Trade, and the barracoons, or buildings exclusively used in the Slave Trade, shall be forthwith destroyed.

ARTICLE V.

Europeans or other persons now engaged in the Slave Trade, are to be expelled the country; the houses, stores, or buildings employed as slave factories, if not converted to lawful purposes, within three months of the conclusion of this Engagement, are to be destroyed.

ARTICLE VI.

The subjects of the Queen of England may always trade freely with the people of _____ in every article they may wish to buy and sell in all the places and ports and rivers within the territories of the Chiefs of *****, and throughout the whole of their dominions; and the Chiefs of ***** pledge themselves to show no favour, and give no privilege to the ships and traders of other countries, which they do not show to these of England.

ARTICLE VII.

The Chiefs of ***** declare that no human beings shall be sacrificed on account of religious or other ceremonies, and that they will prevent the barbarous practice of murdering prisoners captured in war.

ARTICLE VIII.

Complete protection shall be afforded to missionaries or ministers of the gospel of whatever nation or country, following their vocation of spreading the knowledge and doctrines of Christianity, and extending the benefits of

civilization within the territory of the Chiefs of *****. Encouragement shall be given to such missionaries or ministers in the pursuits of industry, and in building houses for their residence, and schools and chapels; they shall not be molested or hindered in their endeavours to teach the doctrines of Christianity to all persons willing and desirous to be taught; nor shall any subjects of the Chiefs of ***** who may embrace the Christian faith, be, on that account, or on account of the teaching and exercise thereof, molested or troubles in any manner whatsoever. The Chiefs of ***** further agree to set apart a piece of land within a convenient distance of the town to be used as a burial-ground for Christian purposes. And the funerals and sepulchres of the dead shall not be disturbed in any way or upon any account.

ARTICLE IX.

Power is hereby expressly reserved to the Government of France to become a party to this Treaty, if it should think fit, agreeably with the provisions contained in Article V of the Convention between Her Majesty and the King of the French, for the suppression of the Traffic in Slaves, signed in London, May 29, 1845.

29. Gezo, King of Dahomey, to Queen Victoria, Cana 12 January 1852¹⁰⁰

In answer to a letter addressed to King Gezo, from Commodore Bruce, dated December 17, 1851,¹⁰¹ he sends the following reply to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria:

1st This letter was not written by the Queen of England.

2nd If two persons at a distance are seen laughing together, they must have something to amuse them.¹⁰²

3rd It is necessary, when two persons dispute or fight, that a third should intercede.¹⁰³

4th He has no palaver with the Queen of England.

5th The three Forts at Whydah, the former King made arrangements, with the English, French and Portuguese Governments, for building them, and a Roman Catholic Chapel was built in the Portuguese Fort. He appointed the

¹⁰⁰TNA, FO84/886, ff. 159–162; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852–3, Class B, incl. 24 in no. 4. As explained in Forbes' journal (Appendix 3, no. 8, entry for 12 Jan. 1851, p. 254) this letter was dictated, but not signed, by Gezo.

¹⁰¹No. 20, above.

¹⁰²According to T. G. Forbes (Appendix 3, no. 5), this means that the King of Dahomey and the Queen of England were friends.

¹⁰³Referring to Dahomey's dispute with Abeokuta, implying that Britain should mediate between the two, rather than supporting Abeokuta (cf. also section 14).

Yer-vo-gar to take care of these Forts, and the Portuguese sent a priest to take care of the King.

6th The reason he mentions these particulars, is, when there is any correspondence between white and blackman, the white man cannot forget the transaction, the blackman may forget it, for he cannot read or write.

7th The reason he says so, he wishes to call the attention of all white men present, that not one of them is his equal, because he is the King, and the Queen of England's friend; for all that, whenever he sees a white man come to his place, he gives him his hand, because he remembers the treaty that was made by his ancestor.¹⁰⁴ For instance he shakes hands with Mr Hutton and his son, without making any distinction. He gives his hand to all white men, who come here to see him, because the Kings and Queens of Europe, cannot come here. Therefore he gives his hand out of respect to their Sovereign.

8th It is nine years ago, since he had the first message from the Queen of England, about the suppression of the Slave Trade;¹⁰⁵ since which time he has received, one or two messengers, said to come from the Queen of England, he gave his answers, and expected they would return, which they have not done.

To prevent mistakes between himself and the Queen of England, he sent two boys and two girls to be educated in England, and he has not heard of them since.¹⁰⁶

9th He has not shipped slaves from Whydah for three years,¹⁰⁷ which is previous to Mr Beecroft and Lieut[enant] Forbes' mission from the Queen of England, to see his customs and report the cost, but they went away in the middle of them, and have not returned.¹⁰⁸

10th He does not know, why all his country should be blockaded, except Badagry: That his dominions extend from the opening at Grand Popoe¹⁰⁹ to Lagos, therefore he does not think the Queen of England sent that palaver.

11th Now about war and sacrifices. The reason he says this message is not from the Queen of England, because, if the Queen makes a law, and any breaks that law or causes revolution, they will be punished, on that account the Queen sends out her ships of war.

¹⁰⁴ i.e. the agreement for the establishment of the forts in Ouidah.

¹⁰⁵ Referring to the visit of the Rev. T. B. Freeman in 1843; Freeman did not in fact deliver a message to Gezo from the Queen, since he came as a missionary rather than in any official capacity, but he was entrusted by Gezo with a message to the Queen.

¹⁰⁶ These children were given to Freeman in 1843, in order to be educated at Cape Coast (Freeman 1844, 273). Gezo had also requested their return earlier: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, incl. in no.9, King of Dahomey to Queen Victoria, 4 July 1850.

¹⁰⁷ i.e. since Jan. 1849.

¹⁰⁸ In May/July 1850.

¹⁰⁹ i.e. the Bouche du Roi, described later by Fraser in his Journals (p. 149).

That is the reason he makes laws, and when they break them, he makes war with them.¹¹⁰ When two princes are fighting, and the weakest runs to him for protection, then he assists or makes peace.

When any of his traders are sent, with goods to any place in the interior, and they are seized, killed or beaten, that is the reason that he attacks the place. As in the case with the Attapams,¹¹¹ they seized one of his subjects, killed and gibbeted him, therefore he made war on them, and sent his people to bring those parties, to serve them the same as was done to his subject.

12th In answer to the letter brought by Comm[ander] T. G. Forbes, he will send a messenger to accompany Capt[ain] Forbes, to deliver him, to the Commodore, to be sent to England, with this letter, and return with the Queen's answer.

13th The reasons he makes war. For example: Kosoko and Attakoy [sic], both living in the same country, and they make war, Accatoy finding he has not sufficient force, applies to the Queen of England for assistance.¹¹² He says the Queen of England did not send the message for him not to make war.

14th Respecting Abbeokuta. When two kings are fighting the third will mediate; Abbeokuta sent a message to the Queen of England, which has been answered by a messenger from England. Previous to the Queen sending a messenger to the Chiefs of Abbeokuta, it would have been well to inquire the cause of his making war with that nation and to have sent a messenger, by sea, to Whydah to hear the cause of this war. It is necessary that the Queen of England and the President of France, send each a messenger to speak about this, because he does not live on the sea side, and if anything takes place at Whydah, he is not there.

15th The King says if white man, does not come to buy slaves, he cannot sell; but since the Queen of England and other nations prohibit the Slave trade, he distinctly declares that the Slave trade is ended and he will not sell any more. As the Queen of England, made this law, he will not break it and states that his line of coast extends from the opening at Grand Popoe to Lagos.

16th He says the reason the Queen did not send this message about Abbeokuta, because, when two parties are fighting a third party acts as mediator, therefore he wishes the Queen of England to send him an Ambassador and one from Abbeokuta, to hear the causes of this war. He asks, would the Queen of England, be pleased if he took it upon himself to attack any place,

¹¹⁰i.e. Dahomey had as much right as Britain to make war on other states, with good cause.

¹¹¹Atakpamè, west of Dahomey, attacked by it in early 1850 (see Forbes 1851, i, 16–17, where '1840' is clearly a misprint).

¹¹²i.e. again, if Britain had the right to go to war against Lagos, so did Dahomey against Abeokuta: cf. also section 16.

under the Queen's protection, without letting her know first[?] Now, the men of war attacked Lagos, without the Queen making it known first to him, because that is another blackman's country; not that Lagos is under his protection, that he says so, he merely gives this as an example.

He says that he is not responsible for Aghwey and Little Popoe.¹¹³

He says he wishes to be on good terms with the Queen, and if the Queen has any particular message, to send a messenger and he will listen to him, with attention, but not suddenly blockade his ports.

He now sends his best comp[limen]ts, and begs the Queen, to send a good gentleman, with a good head and a good heart, to come and stop with him.

30. Gezo, King of Dahomey, to Queen Victoria, Cana 13 January 1852¹¹⁴

Gezo, King of Dahomey, presents his most respectful compliments to the Queen of England, and begs to state that he has received a letter from Commodore Bruce, in the name of the Queen, in which letter he sees some words which he does not think came from the Queen to him; to prevent further mistakes he, the King, wishes her Majesty to send some person to him, respecting the above mentioned letter.

31. Engagement between Her Majesty the Queen of England and King and Chiefs of Dahomey, for the abolition of the traffic in Slaves, Cana,

13 January 1852¹¹⁵

I, Thomas George Forbes, of Her Majesty's ship 'Philomel' on the part of Her Majesty the Queen of England, and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey and the neighbourhood on the part of themselves and their country, have agreed on the following article and condition:

Article I.

The export of slaves to foreign countries is for ever abolished in the territories of the King and Chiefs of Dahomey; and the King and Chiefs of Dahomey engage to make and proclaim a Law, prohibiting any of their subjects, or any person within their jurisdiction, from selling or assisting in the sale of any slaves for transportation to a foreign country; and the King and Chiefs of

¹¹³These places lay west of the Bouche du Roi, and hence beyond Dahomian jurisdiction, although slaves from Dahomey were sometimes exported through them.

¹¹⁴TNA, FO84/886, f. 157; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852–3, Class B, incl. 22 in no. 4.

¹¹⁵TNA, FO84/886, ff. 158–158v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852–3, Class B, incl. 23 in no. 4.

Dahomey, promise to inflict a severe punishment on any person who shall break this Law.

In faith of which we have here unto set our hands and seals.

signed

Gazo, King of Dahomey, his mark

Tho[ma]s Geo[rge] Forbes, Comm[ander], HMS Philomel

Louis Fraser, H[er] B[ritannic] M[ajesty's] V[ice]C[onsul] King[dom] of Dahomey

Mayhoo, his mark

Yer-vo-gar, his mark

Witnesses

Signed

Isidore Fellis de S[ou]za

Ignatio Fellis de S[ou]za

Antonio Fellis de S[ou]za

Thomas Hutton

32. Commodore Bruce to King Gezo of Dahomey, *Penelope*, Whydah

11 February 1852¹¹⁶

Commander Thomas G. Forbes, the officer who waited upon your Majesty, has this day reported to me the result of his mission. In the first place I must thank your Majesty for the kind and hospitable manner in which you received and entertained that gentleman at your residence. I am confident that the Queen of England will be pleased at your courtesy to her representative. In the next place I shall proceed to notice some passages in your letter to Her Majesty,¹¹⁷ which appear to call for some explanation from me; and lastly, it will be my duty to lay before you a few remarks relative to the negotiations which I am directed to enter into with your Majesty.

I The Queen of England makes known her commands to her Ministers and from them they are communicated to me. In this part of the world I am her Principal Naval Officer, and have written neither more or less to your Majesty than my instructions authorized and required me to do; therefore, it would not be right in me to defer the pending arrangements until you receive an answer to your letter to the Queen, which on account of the distance, cannot be replied to for the next three months.

¹¹⁶TNA, FO84/893, ff. 265–269. Landed through J. P. Brown, and sent to Abomey (see Journals, p. 153); read to Gezo at Abomey, 27 Feb. 1852 (see Journals, p. 160).

¹¹⁷See above, no. 29.

The Government of England has always appreciated the kindly feelings which the King of Dahomey has shewn to the subjects of Great Britain; and if any person were sent by your Majesty to England, he would, in return, be received with every mark of friendship and distinction.

The fact of its being nine years ago since the Queen of England first sent a message about the suppression of the Slave Trade, and that message having been repeated on several subsequent occasions, shews how desirous Her Majesty is for the extinction of that barbarous traffic.

No one dare call himself a messenger of the Queen of England unless he had authority to do so, therefore your Majesty may be certain, whenever a person comes to you in that character, he should be respected accordingly.

The intelligence that your Majesty has not permitted Slaves to be shipped from Whydah for some time past, is very gratifying, and although the people at Dahomey may, during your reign, refrain from doing so, it is to prevent a recurrence to the practice that a full and complete Treaty is desired. Your friend, Commander Forbes, will further explain to you how unsatisfactory it would be for the Queen of England to receive the simple Engagement which you signed when he last visited you, unaccompanied as it is with those conditions, which make agreements of that nature clear to the knowledge of the world.

The children said to have been sent to England for instruction will, of course, return to their country, when their education is completed.

The Reason why the Blockade of the Coast of Dahomey territory has been established was fully explained in my letter to your Majesty of the 17th of December last,¹¹⁸ which letter was founded upon the very words sent to me by command of the Queen.

With regard to Abbeokuta I would refer your Majesty to former messages, and recommend that certain parties on both sides should be deputed to hold a palaver, and settle the quarrel without the necessity of going to war; if this is agreed to, I should be very happy to desire Commander Forbes or any other intelligent English gentleman you might name to assist at the negotiation so as to prevent the expense and misery, which always attend War between two powerful countries.

The persons who interpreted my last letter to your Majesty did not do so faithfully: I never intended it to be understood that England would league the Native African Chiefs against Dahomey, the meaning of my words was, that those Chiefs would unite themselves against your Majesty on the first favorable opportunity that presented itself, should the suppression of the Slave Trade not be accomplished and the Blockade thereby continued.

¹¹⁸ See no. 20 above.

We went to war with Lagos and destroyed it, and drove Kosoko out of his country, because he fired at our people when they went to him to hold peaceful “palaver”.

Lastly, I have determined on sending Commander Forbes to Abomey again to make known to your Majesty the contents of this letter and to represent the expediency of a formal Treaty being concluded according to the Form which he will lay before you, so that England and Dahomey may for ever afterwards know exactly the terms they stand upon with regard to each other, —trade, peace, and friendship exist between the two countries, and all further disagreeable palaver rendered unnecessary for the future.

I recommend Commander Forbes once more to your Majesty’s protection and hospitality; he speaks in the highest terms of your former kindness, and is in every respect worthy of your friendship.

33. Commodore Bruce to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Penelope*, Whydah

11 February 1852¹¹⁹

I have the honor to acquaint you, that the Ports and places named in the enclosed notice are now exempt from the operations of the Blockade established by me on the 6th of December last.

[viz.] Block-house, Elmina Chica, Adaffie, Flohow, Porto Seguro, Gomolutta, Little Popoe, Aghwey, Popoe, Porto Novo, Lagos, Jabo, Badagry, Abbeokuta.

34. Commander Forbes to Vice-Consul Fraser 17 February 1852 [extract]¹²⁰

Tell the Aveogar I have a letter from the Commodore to the King¹²¹ and am waiting for the answer to the letter which Brown took on shore for the King¹²² and who ought to have read it to Gezo and bring back his answer. This letter I am to deliver myself and when he sends his stick to say he is ready to treat I will go on shore.

¹¹⁹TNA, FO84/886, ff. 284. Received by Fraser only on 22 March 1852 (see Journals, p. 173).

¹²⁰TNA, FO84/886, f. 269. See Journals, p. 155.

¹²¹This seems to be a private letter, transmitting presents to the King, as mentioned in Fraser’s Journals, p. 160.

¹²²i.e. Bruce’s letter of 11 Feb, 1852, no. 32 above.

35. Andrew Stanfield to Vice-Consul Fraser, Rose Villa, [Whydah]1 March 1852¹²³

On the 28th inst[ant] [sic] in riding out in town a little Boy in running across the Road before I could stop the horse knocked him down but however did not hurt at all but took a little skin off his posterior parts about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch I got a doctor to see him on the spot to make sure that there was no other injury done to him when he looked he found none but what I have mentioned above.

The Avogah sent for me the next day and told me I must not ride in the streets but if I did I must ride softly but I have not rode a horse since the 28th inst[ant] on the 30th the Avogah sent to me to go to him which I did when he told me I must pay to him 800 dollars for knocking the child down I told him it was too much and that I should like to see yourself and Capt[ain] Forbes first and then we would settle the palaver and that I was sorry that the thing had happened he said he did not care for anybody and that I must pay for it I said I could not pay as I had not that amount by me and that it was better for to keep me for it then [= than] to take such a sum from me as it would almost ruin me he instantly told his people to put me in prison which they did driving me before them like a pig they put me in a small place six feet long five feet high and four broad I was nearly suffocated in such a hole at last I was obliged to come to terms feeling so faint that I was getting quite ill and have not been well since.

He made me stop from six in the morning until five at night and then he made me give him one hundred heads of cowries fifty gallons of Rum and twenty five pieces of furniture stripes and would not let me go till I had the things in his yard, the same child was running about the marketplace when I came home. The people at this place are very much against the English since you have left this place I told the Avoga that I appealed to you and if there was any damage done that I would pay for it but he would not listen to me at all and said he did not care for anybody and that he would show me what he was and ordered me off at once to the horrid place what [= which] I have mentioned I therefore beg of you to look into the case for me as I have been served so disgracefully it is because I cannot trade at the price oil is now Hoping you are quite well likewise Capt[ain] Forbes.

¹²³TNA, FO84/886, ff. 270–271. See Journals, p. 167.

36. Commander J. N. Strange to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Archer*, Whydah

4 March 1852¹²⁴

In consequence of the negotiations with the King of Dahomey having failed, I am directed by Commodore Bruce to communicate to you his opinion that it is most advisable that you should embark on board Her Majesty's Steam Sloop under my command or one of the cruisers.

Whenever you signify to me your wish to do so, I will have boats ready at the back of the surf to receive you and your property. I have to request that you will communicate to any of the British or Foreign Residents at Whydah that I shall be glad to receive them on board, this ship, or permit them to embark on board any of the merchantment now in the Road.

37. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander Strange, British Vice Consulate, Whydah

5 March 1852¹²⁵

I have to acknowledge the receipt of yours of yesterday's date.

I shall only be too happy, to follow Commodore Bruce's advice and your offer, more particularly as the King of Dahomey has, for the second time, ordered me from his Kingdom,¹²⁶ and from the perusal of the accompanying letter (Mr Stanfield's case),¹²⁷ you will perceive that British life and property are no longer safe.

I am busy packing up and shall join you without delay.

38. Commander Strange to Vice-Consul Fraser, *Archer*, Whydah

8 March 1852¹²⁸

It is of great importance that you should come off to the ship today, as I am going to have a correspondence relative to the blockade, with the Commander of the Portuguese schooner of war now in the Roads,¹²⁹ and I am desirous to obtain some information from you.

It is also desirable that you should bring off someone who can interpret Portuguese, or translate a Portuguese letter if such a person is procurable.

¹²⁴TNA, FO84/886, f. 274. See Journals, p. 168.

¹²⁵TNA, FO84/886, f. 275. See Journals, p. 168.

¹²⁶See Journals, p. 166.

¹²⁷See Additional Dispatches, no. 4.

¹²⁸TNA, FO84/886, f. 276. See Journals, p. 169.

¹²⁹Lt M. Ghira, of the Portuguese ship *Nimpha*: cf. no. 39.

39. Commander Strange to Vice-Consul Fraser, Archer, Whydah10 March 1852¹³⁰

Having been called upon by the Commander of the Portuguese Schooner of war “Nymph” for an explanation of the circumstance that the Portuguese Fort and District of St. John the Baptist at Whydah has not been exempted from the operation of the Blockade established by Commodore Bruce on the 6th December, 1851, upon the ground that the said Fort and District are a Portuguese possession¹³¹ I have to request that you will give me a reply to the following questions for the information of the Commander in Chief.

1st. What is the establishment of officials in the above mentioned Fort.

2nd. Have they to your knowledge claimed the said Fort and District as Portuguese territory, independent of the King of Dahomey

3rd. If they have done so, has their claim been recognized either by the Avogar of Whydah or the King of Dahomey

4th. What is the situation and extent of the territory so claimed.

5th. Have you ever received any remonstrance from the officials of the Fort of St. John the Baptist on account of its non-exemption from the Blockade, and if so what was the result.

40. Vice-Consul Fraser to Commander Strange, Archer, Whydah10 March 1852¹³²

I hasten to answer the questions contained in your letter this morning, respecting the Portuguese Fort and territories.

1st There is a Padré, Drummer boy, and one man, who occasionally struts about the town, in a kind of military costume, with four broad red stripes upon his arm.¹³³

They are all three blackmen.

The King of Dahomey’s Cha-Cha, Sig[nor] Isidore de Souza, sent me a letter some times since, of which the following is a translation:

[for text, see above, no. 22]

Answer to the foregoing

[for text, see above, no. 23]

¹³⁰TNA, FO84/886, ff. 279–279v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 8 in no. 94. See Journals, p. 169.

¹³¹HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 94, Lt Mariano Ghira to Commander Strange, 8 March 1852.

¹³²TNA, FO84/886, ff. 280–281; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 9 in no. 94. See Journals, p. 169.

¹³³Cf. Journals, p. 129 (15 Nov. 1851).

This new title was not acknowledged by myself or the Senior Officer, Comm[ander] G. T. [= T. G.] Forbes.¹³⁴

The above, four individuals, are all that are spoken of as being connected in any way, with the Portuguese Fort.

2nd Most certainly not. The Dahoman laws neither give or sell land, but grant permission for its being used for the time being.

3rd Most certainly not. Neither the King nor Yer-vo-gar, would acknowledge any such claim. Nor are they (the Portuguese) allowed to make laws, the whole being under the Yer-vo-gar.

4th The situation of the Portuguese Fort, is about 1½ or 2 miles, the other or Northern, side of the Lagoon, and may be half a square mile in extent.

5th No!! The only communication, on the subject, is given under Article no.1.

41. Vice-Consul Fraser to Andrew Stanfield, Ahgwey 21 March 1852¹³⁵

You have committed a great error, in sending your canoemen down here for pay, without a book upon this factory, and again by not remedying this, before you left yesterday, which might have brought on serious consequences, had I not been on the spot.

The canoemen came for pay, this morning, and were refused by Capt[ain] LeGresley, which brought on a great palaver: they threatened to break into the store, pay themselves, and seize Capt[ain] LeG[resley].

I therefore have to request that you will pay all that is due to those men, either from the stores under your charge or by book, on this Factory; also four heads for canoe and men, returning to Whydah, to suit your convenience, you will also make good to them, that book I gave them, my last day at Whydah and give them their proper discharge.

The men are perfectly well acquainted with the contents of this letter, and are, moreover, instructed to apply to the Chacha in case of your refusal.

Stanfield beware of another case before the Yer-vo-gar.

42. Commodore Bruce to King of Dahomey, *Penelope*, Ascension 15 June 1852¹³⁶

It is now my pleasing duty to acquaint your Majesty that the Queen's Gover[nmen]t have agreed to and ratified the Treaty which you signed with

¹³⁴i.e. Isidoro de Souza's claim to have been appointed Governor of the Portuguese fort.

¹³⁵TNA, FO84/886, ff. 283–283v. See Journals, p. 172.

¹³⁶TNA, FO84/895, ff. 96–96v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 102.

Comm[ande]r Forbes, on the 13th of Feb[ruary] last;¹³⁷ and that in consideration of the good disposition you have thus shown to put down that barbarous Traffic, they have directed me to raise the Blockade of your Sea Coast, which I have done accordingly. Therefore your Majesty will observe that Whydah and all the other ports of your dominions, are no longer blockaded by H[er] M[ajesty's] ships, but are thrown open as heretofore for the purposes of legitimate trade.

Having thus renewed our friendship with you, I trust it will never again be interrupted by any of your Majesty's Subjects and I am sure you will always find the officers and others in the ships belonging to the Queen of England, desirous of maintaining a good understanding with the people of Dahomey.

43. Commodore Bruce to King of Dahomey, *Penelope*

15 June 1852¹³⁸

Now that the differences which lately existed between us have been amicably settled, it is necessary for me to request that your Majesty will give orders for Mr Fraser to be re-instated in his office at Dahomey with the usual ceremonies.

¹³⁷ Actually, 13 Jan. 1852; see no. 31, above.

¹³⁸ TNA, FO84/895, f. 98; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 3 in no. 102.

Appendix 3

Letters from naval officers, etc. relating to Fraser's Vice-Consulate

1. Commander A. P. E. Wilmot to Commodore Bruce, *Harlequin*, Whydah

26 July 1851¹

In compliance with Instructions received in your letter of the 16th Inst[ant], H[er] M[ajesty's] Vice Consul, with all his baggage, was transported to this Brig on the ev[en]ing of the 19th Inst[ant], from the "Bloodhound," which Vessel proceeded the following morn[ing] at daylight, upon the service assigned to her, having been supplied by me with 100 Gallons of fresh water.

The V[ice] Consul received a communication from Mr Prior, in the name of Signor Antonio de Souza, a little before noon on Tuesday, 22d Inst[ant], to the effect, that if he came in a Man of Wars Boat to the break of the Surf, a canoe would be sent off to land him.

I accompanied the V[ice] Consul under a salute of 7 guns from this Vessel, and we were received by Signor Antonio de Souza, upon the Beach, and conducted by him to his trading residence there.

We there met Signor Domingo José Martines, the great Slave Dealer at Porto Novo, who had arrived the day before from that place, in the "Pallante" Sardinian Brig, and was on his way to Abomey, to pay his annual visit to the King, upon the occasion of the ceremony of the Customs.²

From Signor Antonio de Souza we learnt that the day was too far advanced, for us to be officially received, especially as some preparation was necessary, but that the officer acting in the Evogam's Absence,³ would meet us on the following afternoon. The Town of Whydah is 2½ miles from the Beach, two Lagoons, overflowing at this season of the Year, in consequence of the rains, having to be crossed in canoes to reach it.

The Vice Consul and myself accompanied Signor Antonio de Souza and Signor Domingo José Martinez, in the evening, to the formers house at

¹TNA, FO84/886, ff. 405–410v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. in no.171. Cf. Fraser's Journals, pp. 27–37.

²Contrast Fraser's account, in Journals, p. 31, that Martins was at Ouidah to ship palm oil. Fraser seems correct in this, as there is no reference to Martins subsequently attending the 'Customs'.

³i.e. the Boya: see Fraser's Journals, pp. 35–6.

Whydah, where we were most hospitably received and entertained by him. The respect paid by all classes of people here to both of these persons is remarkable, but more particularly so, to the latter, who was attended with drums and a large body of Slaves, the people prostrating themselves, and throwing dust upon their heads, in token of the greatest humility.⁴

On Wednesday at 5 o'clock in the evening we were taken from Signor Antonio de Souza's house, about ½ mile outside the town, and set down upon the public road near a large Tree,⁵ with our Faces towards the Town, chairs were there ready placed across the road, upon which we sat down.

I am informed that this ceremony is necessary, as all Officers or others coming in an official manner, are supposed to be approaching from the Beach, and w[oul]d of course be met p[er] those of the Dahomian Gov[ernmen]t, coming in a similar manner from Whydah to receive and conduct them to the Town.

Shortly after being deposited here, the Cabouceers advanced under a large umbrella, a mark of rank, with their attendants all armed with muskets, and short swords and beating drums, and playing all kinds of barbarous music:— The ceremony of advancing three times, round where we were sitting, bowing each time, having been gone through, they came towards us, shook hands, and welcomed us to Whydah. The Acting Governor then appeared, in advance of whom came a large body of soldiers, who commenced firing, dancing, singing, and making the most hideous faces that it is possible to conceive, all in honour of H[er] M[ajesty's] V[ice] Consul. The Acting Governor himself danced, and fired off a musket, which is considered a mark of the highest respect.

I should think that at least 5000 persons of all classes were present at this ceremony, and all joined in the shooting and in the noise.

After drinking water and spirits with the Acting Governor, which is supposed to indicate a mark of friendship, we got into our hammocks and were conducted to Whydah, round the Town, and thence into the English Fort, when the Union Jack was hoisted upon the Flag Staff, and a salute of 21 Guns fired, in honour of the Queen of England, from some old pieces lying upon the ground, without carriages, or anything else belonging to them, the muzzles being raised to load and fire.

The Soldiers and mob during our journey to the Fort, continued to fire their muskets, and to shout with all their strength and power. The Acting Gov[erno]r upon arriving at the Fort gates, again danced, and fired a musket

⁴Contrast Fraser's Journals, p. 31, which mention only the tom-toms at Ouidah, and reports the prostration from hearsay, as taking place at Porto-Novo.

⁵The 'Captain's Tree': see Fraser's Journals, p. 35, with n. 76.

in honour of the Consul. The V[ice] Consul and myself then entered the Fort, and went into the great room,⁶ where we held a Palaver, Signor Antonio de Souza being present and taking upon himself all power and authority, and receiving from the V[ice] Consul Lord Palmerstons letters to the King.

I questioned him very closely, upon his authority to receive Mr Fraser, as V[ice] Consul, and clearly extracted from him his power to do so.

The V[ice] Consuls position was then clearly laid down, and established—Protection to his person and property guaranteed; safe conduct given to him in all proceedings, and his authority acknowledged in all cases that called for his supervision, not only with respect to the lives and property of bona fide Englishmen, but as regard those who can lawfully claim British protection in any way, be they natives, servants, or liberated Africans.

All these important points were clearly laid down and recognized, and I am happy to inform you that a perfectly good understanding seemed to pervade the whole conversation, and upon no one single question of any kind, did the parties concerned differ.

It will be necessary and perhaps not uninteresting for me to acq[ua]int you that the “de Souza” family consists of 3 brothers, “Isidore,” “Ignacio,” and “Antonio.”⁷ The former is the eldest, and holds the high office of the “Cha Char,” which is the second rank at Whydah,⁸ having authority and jursiprudence over all white men;⁹ but as his wealth makes him all powerful with the King, I believe his word is law, not only at Whydah but over the surrounding country—From all the information I can obtain, he has the character of being a very honest and good man: the second brother, “Ignacio,” holds no official appointment,¹⁰ is the poorest of the three and has the worst character.

These two are at present at “Abomey” with the “Evogam” who is a native and possesses the highest rank, having authority over all the Blacks.¹¹ The meaning of the word “Evogam” is, “evo” man, and “gam,” large—large man, a great man.¹²

⁶ Called by Burton ‘the great hall’, and explained as the former ‘mess-room’ of the fort governor, his officers and visitors (1864, i, 86).

⁷ There were actually several other brothers, but these 3 were consistently recognised as the most prominent: cf. e.g. HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 10 in no.9, F. E. Forbes to Fanshawe, 5 Nov. 1849.

⁸ i.e. after the Yovogan, or Dahomian Viceroy.

⁹ Rather, he was the King’s principal commercial agent.

¹⁰ Actually (in common with other leading merchants in Ouidah), he held the rank of ‘caboceer [chief]:’ see Forbes 1851, ii, 3.

¹¹ In fact, the Yovogan’s authority extended over Europeans, as well as Africans—as illustrated, during Fraser’s Vice-Consulate, by the cases of Calvert Hutton and Andrew Stanfield (see Additional Dispatches, nos 2 and 4).

¹² Rather, ‘chief of white men’, as correctly noted in Fraser’s Journals, p. 41.

The third brother is “Antonio,” who also holds no official rank, but being rich, and from all accounts, a determined rogue in money matters, and transactions of other descriptions, has the King’s ear, and is called his friend.¹³ This makes him all powerful in the absence of his brother the “Cha-Cha” and the “Evogam” and will account for his taking upon himself the responsibility of receiving and acknowledging the V[ice] Consul as the official Representative of your Gov[ernmen]t.

The letters from Lord Palmerston to the King of Dahomey were forwarded¹⁴ the same evening from Signor Antonio de Souza’s house, the ceremony of receiving them, and the prostration of the most abject kind by those who were to be answerable for their safe conduct, having been gone through in our presence.

Messengers ran all night, being relieved every 5 or 6 miles on the road, and were expected to reach Abomey at daylight on the following morning.

Thus ended the ceremony of installing Mr Fraser, as the British V[ice] Consul to H[is] M[ajesty] the King of Dahomey, and from all I witnessed in the expression of the peoples feelings, they were at least sincere in their reception.

It is the Portuguese, however, and those connected to them, by ties of half blood and other close interests that prevent the people from rising from their present degraded state. These have the ear of the King, and by their wealth, can bribe him at any time to listen to their evil suggestions, so long as these people are permitted openly and without opposition from the authorities of this country, to continue the nefarious Traffic in Slaves, and drain the dearest blood of Africa, by means too horrible even to contemplate, so long will it be useless for British Treasure and British life, to be exhausted in resisting it—It is the King of Dahomey alone and his Chiefs that must first discountenance the selling of their people, by offers being made to him¹⁵ such as becomes a noble and powerful Empire, such as G[reat] Britain, which must be continued for years to come, until civilization has spread its roots, and branches over Africa’s burning sands, and until agriculture and commerce shall have turned its swamps and plains into lovely tracts of cultivated ground, and her children shall have possessed the true elements of health and happiness.

As the V[ice] Consul has not yet determined, whether he shall immediately visit the King at Abomey, or wait for some little time, I shall remain here till Monday 28th Inst[ant], when it is my intention to provision and relieve the “Flying Fish,” according to your orders of the 14th Inst[ant].

¹³ He had the honorific title ‘amigo del rey’ (Portuguese, ‘friend of the king’), as reported earlier by Forbes 1851, ii, 3.

¹⁴ i.e. to the King at his capital Abomey.

¹⁵ i.e. of financial compensation.

The “Jasper” and “Pallante” Sardinian Brigs are both here, I have it in contemplation to leave the Pinnacle of this ship behind me to watch their movements. The latter Vessel has been shipping a large quantity of matting and dozens of calabashes. This looks very suspicious;¹⁶ and they may be taken on board either for transmission to the “Jasper” at some other place, or for her own purposes whenever she can get a chance. Vessels will not ship [i.e. slaves] for the future at any of the old stations, such as Porto Novo, Lagos, Whydah, &c., unless their opportunity is certain; but I hear that all kinds of places along the coast, unknown to us except as a Coast line, will be tried henceforth.

The Vice Consul has a set of numeral Flags, and the “Boat Signal Book” by which he will be enabled to communicate any intelligence he may have to give, As he thinks it is not unlikely, that the people on shore may possess this Book also, I have changed the numbers to correspond with each as the enclosed will show.¹⁷

The French Consul is still at Abomey, and I understand has presented the King with two Brass guns.¹⁸

The French steamer “L’Espadon,” Capitaine de Frigate M. Adl. Villemain,¹⁹ anchored here on 23d Inst[ant], and sailed the following day, on her way to Lagos, from Quittah,²⁰ having relieved the “Brandon” which has gone to the S[outh]ward.

“Baguêda” and not “Bagdad” is the name of the place to windward of Porto Seguro.²¹

I beg to conclude by offering my services to the Comm[ande]r in Chief, in case at any time it may be found expedient to dispatch a British Officer to Abomey, either in company with the V[ice] Consul or on a separate mission.²²

P.S. Since attaching my signature to this letter, I beg to acq[ui]re you that the “Jasper” and “Pallante” have both sailed; the former for “Elmina-Chica,”²³ on her way to Cape Coast Castle, where she is to receive on board, from Mr Hutton, a considerable quantity of Gum-shell lac,²⁴ and then proceed to the

¹⁶ i.e. they suggested preparation for the embarkation of a cargo of slaves.

¹⁷ This paragraph omitted in the HCPP version.

¹⁸ Referring to the French naval officer Lt Auguste Bouet, currently on a mission to Abomey, from which he returned to Ouidah on 26 July 1851: see Fraser’s Journals, p. 38.

¹⁹ A member of the French navy’s anti-slaving squadron.

²⁰ Keta, on the coast of what is today south-eastern Ghana.

²¹ Baguida and Porto-Seguro (indigenous name, Agbodrafo), on the coast of modern Togo.

²² This suggestion was taken up by Commodore Bruce, but rejected by Consul Beecroft: see Fraser’s Journals, pp. 112–13.

²³ ‘Little Elmina’, i.e. Adina, in south-eastern Ghana.

²⁴ i.e. gum copal, used to make varnish.

Havanna—The latter for Bahia direct, having completed her cargo of Palm Oil to within a very few Casks.

I have seen the papers of both Vessels, and think that neither will risk the embarking of slaves this voyage, whatever they may do upon their return to the Coast again. Captain Dodero of the “Pallante” tells me he expects to be here again in November.

2. Consul Beecroft to Viscount Palmerston, Clarence, Fernando Po

4 October 1851²⁵

I have the honor to communicate that on the 21st ultimo Mr Vice Consul Fraser arrived here from Whydah, in Her Majesty’s Brig “Harlequin,” Comm[and]er Wilmot. He stated that he had a desire to see me personally. On his landing at Whydah, a letter was handed him by Mr Prior, agent for Messrs Hutton, from Gezo, King of Dahomey, stating at the same time that a deputation from Abomey arrived at the Fort, and requested him [= Prior] to write the King’s mouth to Her Majesty the Queen of England. He wrote the accompanying letter through Madakie, the interpreter.²⁶ Mr Vice Consul Fraser acceded to Gezo’s request and proceeded to Abomey. Whilst there, he received a letter from Obba Shoron, second in command of the Abbeokutan army at Badagry, with one thousand men for the protection of the Badagrians against the Lagos people.²⁷ A copy of Mr Vice Consul Fraser’s reply to Obba Shoron, I herewith enclose,²⁸ with a copy of Gezo’s letter to Her Majesty the Queen of England.²⁹ The “Harlequin” sailed on the 24th for Whydah.³⁰ On Mr Vice Consul Fraser’s safe arrival at his post, he will forward to me a full detail of his mission to Abomey. He stated that Gezo was anxious for presents, such as muskets, bayonets, powder, shot, and shell, to annihilate the Abbeokutans, if possible.³¹ At present, I have declined to accede to Gezo’s request. As the

²⁵TNA, FO84/858, ff. 291–291v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class B, no. 23. Beecroft also wrote in similar terms to Commodore Bruce, 14 Oct. 1851, in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 179.

²⁶Cf. Fraser’s Journals, p. 41, and text of the letter in Appendix 2, no.3, asking for an officer to come to see him.

²⁷Cf. Fraser’s Journals, p. 101, and text of the letter in Appendix 2, no.10.

²⁸Appendix 2, no. 17.

²⁹This letter was written at Abomey on 7 Sept. 1851: see Fraser’s Journals, p. 108; and text of the letter in Appendix 2, no. 15.

³⁰Returning Fraser there.

³¹This statement, when reported back to King Gezo by Commodore Bruce, in a letter of 17 Dec. 1851 (Appendix 2, no.20), provoked objections from Gezo, who insisted that it was a lie: see Fraser’s Journals, p. 146.

soldier with a big head has already paid him the visit he requested, and found whatever he had to state relative to signing treaties was all twaddle. He never intends it, until Her Majesty's Government deem it fit to coerce him to the path. His letter is what I have already stated; he is determined not to come to the point, for the best of all reasons: I do declare he is not the despot generally regarded—he has not his own will.³² I shall wait your Lordship's directions ere I proceed to Whydah to accede to Gezo's request.³³

3. Thomas Hutton to Commander T. G. Forbes, Whydah 30 December 1851³⁴

The Avogar and Chiefs of this town with express messengers from the King of Dahomey, have called upon me to request that I shall endeavour to prevail upon you to favour the King with an interview at Dahomey.

Mr Vice Consul Fraser who left for Dahomey last evening³⁵ informed me that in accordance with your Instructions it was not conceived advisable that you yourself should visit the shore, and such intimation I am led to infer has been made known to the King who appears most anxious that yourself being Her Majesty's Senior Officer on this station, should be present on this important occasion—the effecting a Treaty for the suppression of the Slave Trade.

The Avogar and Chiefs, the De Souzas and the principal residents here with Senhor Domingo Martines of Porto Novo and also myself, are invited to be present.

I am assured the King will feel much aggrieved if disappointed in the favour of your presence—permit me to hope that you will gratify him, as your presence will certainly tend to lessen difficulties and dispose him to bring this long-desired Treaty to a successful conclusion.

³² Beecroft had concluded from his experience of the 1850 mission to Gezo that the conventional view of absolute royal power in Dahomey was mistaken, the King being in reality 'under the control and opinion of several of his principal officers': HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, no. 9, Beecroft to Palmerston, 22 July 1850. F. E. Forbes likewise concluded that the king could not act without the 'concurrence' of his 'ministers', the two most senior of whom, the Migan and the Mehu, having 'if united, more power' than he (1851, i, 82–3).

³³ Palmerston's response directed that it was 'not fitting ... under present circumstances' for Beecroft or any British officer to undertake any further mission to Gezo: HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class B, no. 28, Palmerston to Beecroft, 24 Dec. 1851. By the time this was received in West Africa, however, it had been overtaken by the missions to Gezo by Fraser and T. G. Forbes, in January–March 1852.

³⁴ TNA, FO84/892, ff. 369–369v; also printed in HCPP *Slave Trade* 1851/2, Class A, incl. 3 in no. 197.

³⁵ Cf. Fraser's Journals, p. 142 (29 Dec. 1852).

4. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, *Philomel*, Whydah

31 December 1851³⁶

In a communication, dated 26 Dec[embe]r, from Vice Consul L. Fraser³⁷ I was under the impression that he only wanted me, or one of my officers to go to Abomey, more as a companion than a matter of duty—and as your Instructions to me express that on no consideration did you think it advisable for me to land or allow any persons under my orders, I therefore declined, particularly as I did not like to leave the Brig in charge of Lieut[enan]t Morrell, my Senior Lieut[enan]t being absent at the time.

I have this day received the inclosed letter, dated 30 Dec[embe]r, from Tho[ma]s Hutton, Esq.³⁸ which makes it appear to me that I should at once accede to King of Dahomey's wishes of [me] being present on this important occasion and therefore shall proceed early tomorrow with the King's express messengers, for Abomey.

5. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, *Philomel*, Whydah

17 January 1852³⁹

I have the honor to forward to you two Letters dictated by King Gezo, and addressed to Her Majesty, dated the 12th and 13th January, 1852.⁴⁰

The one dated the 12th January, requiring some explanation as to its true meaning, which I will endeavour to do:—

The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th paragraphs mean to express that having always been friends with the Queen of England, he does not believe that part of the letter⁴¹ which says he asked for arms to attack Abbeokuta, and, 2ndly, that if he did not comply with the Treaty, or come to terms, the Chiefs around him would be leagued against him; also Abbeokuta being exempt from the blockade,⁴² and that it should be put on without asking first to sign this Treaty, emanated or was written by Her Majesty's command—hence his expression, “This letter was not written by the Queen of England.”

The 2nd means to show the Queen and he are laughing together, or are friends; and the 3rd is relative to Abbeokuta and he wishes a person author-

³⁶TNA, FO84/892, ff. 365–365v; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1851/2, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 197.

³⁷Appendix 2, no. 25.

³⁸See no. 3 above.

³⁹TNA, FO84/893, ff. 244–7; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 72.

⁴⁰Appendix 2, nos 29–30.

⁴¹i.e. Bruce's letter to King Gezo, 17 Dec. 1851 (Appendix 2, no. 20).

⁴²Badagry, which was excluded from the blockade, was currently the principal port of Abeokuta.

ized by Her Majesty to inquire into the cause of the war, to decide who was the aggressor. The 4th, the term “Palaver” means he has had no dispute or bad feeling towards England. 5th and 6th, speaking of the three forts being built by his ancestor, he means to express that as they cannot read or write, they were built as a memorial of friendship never to be forgotten. The 7th is alluding to the Treaty made by his ancestor in building the forts as a memorial of friendship to the whitemen. The rest of the letter, though written in a curious style of diction, I consider sufficiently clear and requires no further explanation, except the two boys and girls spoken of, were placed under the charge of the Rev. J.[= T.] B. Freeman of Cape Coast Castle, where they are now, and are too young yet to return: one of them I am informed died some time ago.

This letter of the 12th January, when read to the King, he approved of, saying it was the true palaver (or what he dictated); the interpretation of the letter written by the Portuguese and French present, he disapproved of, saying it was not correct.

The next day he signed the French and Portuguese letter, and refused to sign this which he had approved of—the only reason I can assign for this was that M. Antonio de Souza hinted that it being written on two sheets of paper, one of them might be changed. He then wrote the other letter, which he signed and sealed, at the same time insisting the first letter (unsigned) should be sent with it. I was obliged to open this letter to explain it.

6. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, [*Philomel*],⁴³ Whydah

18 January 1852⁴⁴

I am sorry to inform you that the King Gezo has taken a great dislike to Mr Fraser, he accuses him of having stolen a letter written by Obba Shor[o]n from Abbeokuta in which he was requested to persuade the King not to assist Kosoko, and if unsuccessful to give timely information, in consequence he says he tells a lie that he is an intriguer and that he never told him he wanted arms to attack Abbeokuta and is very angry at his having left Dahomey without his leave. The King asked me to take Mr Fraser away with him, asked for a good man with a good head and heart to be sent. This I objected to and he is to remain at the Fort until you arrive.

Mr Fraser says they stole the letter and that it was addressed to him on H[er] M[ajesty's] service. There may be some want of tact in dealing with an uncivilized people which perhaps has been the cause of this dislike and will not expedite any further negotiation.

⁴³ **Portland* in ms, presumably in error.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO84/893, ff. 96–97.

7. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, *Philomel*, Whydah

18 January 1852⁴⁵

I have the honour to forward to you a Treaty signed by Gezo, King of Dahomey, for the total abolition of the Slave Trade.⁴⁶ I have to regret the printed form was not signed, as forwarded to me,⁴⁷ which up to the last day I fully expected would be done, with the exception of the religious customs,⁴⁸ which can only be effected as civilization extends. All the principal Slave dealers were present and who have great influence, Isidore De Souza, he calls his adopted son; Jose Domingo Martina [= Martins], a man of great influence, and one who has made the King, on several occasions, very large presents. These Slave dealers, one has his factory at Porto Novo, another at Appi Vista, and so on along the coast, the King not allowing others to go there without his leave to Trade,⁴⁹ which I think was the cause of the opposition to the conditions of the Treaty as they thought if we set up factories alongside them, our credit being the best, would prevent their having the monopoly in the Palm oil trade in these places.⁵⁰ The King had given Mr Hutton leave to go to Appi Vista and he had his stick for it, when without giving any reason he withdrew it, no doubt at the instigation of Antonio De Souza.⁵¹

The King appeared much displeased with some parts of the letter of the 17th December:⁵² 1st, saying he had asked for arms to attack Abbeokuta. 2nd, The threat of leaguering the chiefs against him if he did not comply, and for placing a Blockade without asking him first to sign the Treaty, and exempting Badagry, one of his Ports. Finding that no persuasion of mine would alter his mind and would only irritate him, I wrote the following Articles: 1st. Slave Trade to be forever abolished in the King of Dahomey's dominions—2nd. Peace with Abbeokuta—3rd. Protection for missionaries in entire good faith—4th. Protection to British life and property—5th. To have the privilege of the most favoured of nations in trade⁵³—This he would have nothing to do

⁴⁵TNA, FO84/893, ff. 104–6; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 71.

⁴⁶Appendix 2, no. 31.

⁴⁷i.e. the standard treaty for the abolition of the slave trade (Appendix 2, no.28), which Forbes had received at Cana on 10 Jan. 1852 (see no. 8 below).

⁴⁸i.e. the abolition of human sacrifices, stipulated in Article VII of the standard treaty.

⁴⁹Cf. Fraser's 'Commercial Report', in Appendix 1, no. 7, p. 198.

⁵⁰Article VI of the standard Treaty stipulated that British subjects should have freedom of trade throughout the King's territories, and that traders of other nations should be granted no privileges from which they were excluded.

⁵¹Appi Vista, or Cotonou, where Antonio de Souza enjoyed a monopoly of trade: see Fraser's 'Commercial Report', in Further Dispatches, no. 7, p. 198.

⁵²From Commodore Bruce (Appendix 2, no.20).

⁵³i.e. that foreign traders should be granted no privileges which were not also given to the British, as stipulated in Article VI of the standard Treaty.

with, and did not understand why his having said in his letter (which is not signed) the Slave Trade is ended, was not enough. Under all these difficulties I was glad to get the First Article signed, and I have no doubt the conditions in a short time will follow. I had not received your Instructions to have the Treaty in triplicate, therefore, I have only one to send you, the other having been left with the King. Mr Hutton gave me very great assistance, and without Mr Brown, his interpreter, who I employed on this occasion, nothing would have been done: he [= Brown] speaks English, Portuguese, Dahomey, Ashantee, Fantee,⁵⁴ and all languages along the Coast, and was able and did detect several times the Portuguese misrepresenting things to the King. The King having signed this Treaty, he then made a Law and intends to take all the Palm oil and nut trade into his own hands, should any one break this law by selling a measure of oil their property to be confiscated and no oil to be shipped from any place in his dominions (which extend from the opening at Grand Popoe to Lagos), except Whydah, and all to be measured on the beach. The Avogar having authority to punish any offender.⁵⁵ This law has upset the anticipated monopoly of the Portuguese along the coast in the Palm oil trade.

I have instructed Mr Fraser, the Vice-Consul, to defray the expenses I incurred on my mission to Mr Hutton and Mr Brown, the interpreter.

I have to acquaint you that I landed on the 1st January, expecting to go up to Cannah on that day, but from delays made by the Avogar it was the evening of the 3rd before we got away, and arrived on the 5th. On the 13th he [i.e. the King] signed this Treaty and the next day I proceeded to rejoin the "Philomel," which I did on the 17th.

8. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, *Philomel*, Whydah

18 January 1852⁵⁶

I have the honor to forward you my Journal of Proceedings on my mission to Abomey⁵⁷ for the purpose of making a Treaty for the abolition of the Slave Trade, from the 1st to the 17th January, the day on which I rejoined my ship.

Thursday, January 1. At 8.30 a.m. I left the ship and proceeded in hammock up to Whydah through a marsh of black mud and water, and crossed the Lagoon. On my arrival at Whydah the Chiefs and Avogar sent their sticks to welcome me and apologized for not firing a salute, as was intended. In the

⁵⁴In ms., 'Tantee', but evidently miscopied.

⁵⁵Cf. Fraser's account in Additional Dispatches, no. 3.

⁵⁶TNA, FO84/893, ff. 112–26; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. 5 in no. 71.

⁵⁷Sic, but in fact the mission met the King at Cana.

afternoon I returned their visits, and found from the Avogar, that we were not to start until tomorrow, in consequence of Domingo Martines not having arrived from Porto Novo, who was to accompany us.

Friday, 2nd. Found in the morning we were to be delayed until the evening, no reason assigned by Avogar, further than delay was necessary; the Avogar who was to accompany us not being ready. The troops and the Fetish people, out of compliment to me, were dancing round the town all day,⁵⁸ which perhaps was the cause of the delay.

Saturday, 3rd. We were still delayed all this day by the Avogar, until 4.30 p.m., when all the party, consisting of myself, Mr Hutton, his son and nephew,⁵⁹ Mr Brown, the Interpreter, Isadoro and Antonio De Souza, José Domingo Martines, with the Merchants of Whydah, left for Cannah. We halted at Toree,⁶⁰ a village about 15 miles distant; here the people turned out to welcome us with “tom-toms” and the friendly custom of offering water. We then proceeded to Alladah, where we arrived at 11 at night, and bivouacked under an open shed, on a mud floor, with a very heavy dew falling.

Sunday, 4th. At 3.30 a.m. left Alladah. We were now well in the forest, and not far from the bog, which extends about 7 miles.⁶¹ On entering the bog we found it so dark with a thick fog and dew, and from the badness of the foot-path, which was full of cracks and broken ground, we halted until daylight. This bog at times is impassable, and the greater part of the year over a man’s knee in water, it now being nearly dry, it was as much as four men could carry me through it. At 2 p.m. we arrived at Appee,⁶² a village prettily situated in the Forest, full of the most magnificent trees. The Avogar stopped us here, saying he must send to the King to say we had crossed the bog, and would not proceed until we had received an answer, which arrived about midnight. The Avogar came to me with the King’s answer, which was “to know if I was the same Captain he had sent for;” and when told I was, after kissing the ground, and throwing dust on his head, he retired, saying we might proceed in the morning.

Monday, 5th. Before daylight we started, and at 10 a.m. arrived at Agremey, where we halted to breakfast. This place is about six miles from Cannah, where the King was residing. It being the custom to enter a town where the King resides, late in the afternoon, we were detained nearly all day, and arrived at the entrance of Cannah at 5 p.m., where we were received with

⁵⁸ More likely, these ceremonies were part of the regular cycle of religious festivals in Ouidah: they were still continuing on 16 Jan. (see below, p. 256).

⁵⁹ The son was Calvert Hutton; the nephew was Mr Roberts, who had served one of Hutton’s agents at Ouidah in 1850 (TNA, FO84/816, Journal of Consul Beecroft, 14 May 1850).

⁶⁰ ‘Poree’ in ms, but evidently miscopied.

⁶¹ i.e. the Lama, called by Fraser ‘the swamp’.

⁶² i.e. Akpè (spelled by Fraser ‘Hark-pay’).

some degree of pomp and ceremony, by the Avogar and Chiefs, who after dancing and shouting with “tom-tom” three times round us sat down, water, and then spirits, were handed round.⁶³ This curious custom being ended, which lasted over an hour, we were allowed to proceed into the town to the different houses allotted to us, myself, Mr Hutton, his son and nephew, were placed under the care of Mayo, the King’s Prime Minister.⁶⁴ We were quartered in a long shed (about sixty feet long) partly inclosed by mats, and partitioned off with the same. Here we made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit, it being quite dark when we arrived.

Tuesday, 6th. This was an excessive hot day. At 10 o’clock we all had to proceed to the entrance of the town, where we were halted yesterday evening, to be received again with more pomp and ceremony, by the Chiefs and Avogar, who were attended on this occasion each with a company of soldiers and “tom-toms,” with their State umbrellas. Each Chief, according to his rank, walked round us three times, bowing each time as they passed, followed by their soldiers dancing and shouting. Their umbrella was then planted in the ground, where each Chief took up his position, and while the first was regaling us with a glass of water, and, after spirits, the other Chiefs in their turn were dancing round. When all this was finished, each Chief made a short “War dance;” and after shaking hands and snapping fingers, we were allowed to proceed up to where the King was waiting to receive us, with the Chiefs and their “tom-toms.” The King was seated in a large open shed (about 100 feet long), on his right was the Fetish house, full of birds, beasts, crocodiles, whales swallowing ships, with every sort of absurd device.⁶⁵ In the front in a very large open space his Amazons, under arms, were sitting on the ground, and a little distance on their right the soldiers. After our going through the custom of marching past the King in our hammocks, and round the Fetish house three times, we were received: he was glad to see me, and received me with marked friendship. After a glass of water and liquor, the Review began:—first, by the Amazons coming up with great rapidity, dancing, and shouting, they then marched off, leaving about one hundred, who went through the “War dance;” after this the soldiers came up and performed the same evolution, when a Company of the Amazons were marched up, and went through a sham fight, a very curious spectacle:—they rushed out of their ranks—dropped on one knee—placed the butt of the musket on the ground and

⁶³ Forbes curiously omits to mention meeting Fraser, who had arrived at Cana 4 days earlier. See Fraser’s account, in *Journals*, pp. 144–5.

⁶⁴ Some other European observers also equated the Mehu with the ‘prime minister’ (e.g. Duncan 1847, i, 217); but strictly, he was only second in status after the Migan, who was therefore more commonly designated ‘prime minister’.

⁶⁵ More fully described by Fraser, in his *Journals*, p. 143.

fired—they then retired to reload, should the supposed enemy be wounded, they lay their muskets down, and use their bows and arrows, and with their short swords go through the form of cutting off the head.⁶⁶

After the Review was over, the King's sons, the Chiefs, and the principal people of the town, together with officers of different rank in the army, and Amazonians, came forward to pay their respects and welcome me. The ceremony lasted until 5 p.m., when we had a parting glass, and the King showed me some old blunderbusses and useless guns, he also showed me the two 24-po[unde]r brass Field-pieces, a present from the President of France.⁶⁷ We then returned to our quarters, having experienced a very tedious hot day.

Wednesday, 7th. After breakfast I had an interview with Mayo, the Prime Minister; he listened with great attention to what I told him, and proceeded to the King on my leaving him. Nothing more was done this day except complimentary calls on the principal people. We experienced a heavy thunderstorm in the afternoon, which cooled the air.

Thursday, 8th. As usual, in the morning, the sticks of the King and several Chiefs came round, also the King's "Chop", which was on this occasion a bullock with Kan-key and other delicacies; also a summons to attend a "Palaver" after breakfast, which went off very well, and lasted three hours; the King was very angry with Mr Fraser for leaving Abomey on a former occasion without his leave and not pleased with his manner; he said, he was an intriguer, and that he took his [= the King's] letter away, and told a lie in saying that he [= the King] asked for arms to attack Abbeokuta.⁶⁸ He was also displeased at the Blockade being put on him before being asked to sign this Treaty, and denied he was asked to sign one before, and he was waiting for someone to give an answer to the last "palaver".⁶⁹

Friday, 9th. King sent a message for no one to go out; there would be no "palaver" to-day, it being the anniversary of his Grand-father having built a house, and gave a Feast to commemorate it, which is always kept up by him.⁷⁰

We were sent for with a request to attend. His soldiers (about 2,000) came up with large baskets on their heads, full of corn and fruit of all kinds these are placed on the ground before the King, he then goes out and appears at the head of his men dressed as a Chief, and presents the food to the "Chair" he

⁶⁶The term 'sham fight' is taken from F. E. Forbes (1851, ii, 122–6)—though the ceremony witnessed by the latter was more elaborate, involving a mock attack on a model village and taking of captives held inside it.

⁶⁷Delivered by Lt Bouet in 1851: cf. Fraser's Journals, p. 38.

⁶⁸Cf. Fraser's Journals, p. 146.

⁶⁹i.e. his letter to Queen Victoria, 7 Sept. 1851, which had been given to Fraser on his previous visit (Appendix 2, no. 15).

⁷⁰Gezo's grandfather was Kpengla (reigned 1774–89).

left, where a king is supposed to be.⁷¹ After this, there was dancing and shouting, the King joining, dressed as a War chief, with musket, bow, and sword. We then returned home, the King saying he would finish the “palaver” tomorrow, and “dashed” me with a fan, ten heads of cowries, and a piece of cloth for the Commodore, and one for myself, also twenty baskets of fruit. I sent him some brooches, which he seemed to be pleased with.

Saturday, 10th. Some delay this morning about the “Palaver”—The King sent to say he was waiting for a “book” from Abomey, which was written before, the wrong one being sent, he had to wait another message: this appeared to me to have been merely to gain time, as the letter was never alluded to or shown afterwards. Mayo sent for me to say the King was very angry about the letter of the 17th December, 1851, saying, if he did not comply with the Treaty, the Chiefs would be leagued against him, and also that Badagry would be exempt from the blockade—he treated the first with contempt saying, “What Chief would march into his country? It took a messenger five months to go to the end of it”, I told him if there was any offence given in the letter, it was not intended, and if he signed the Treaty, I am sure the Queen would write a letter he would be pleased with and explain any mistake, but I thought it might be through bad interpretation. In Badagry there are about 3,000 people who had claim for our protection and were friends.⁷² He said, that if he was going to attack Abbeokuta he would respect British subjects and property. He again referred to the Vice-Consul, and said he would not have him, and asked me to take him away.

I received this morning three forms of a Treaty,⁷³ also a public and private letter from the Commodore,⁷⁴ all of which I was obliged to give up as they were so suspicious, if I had withheld them I think we should have done nothing; and after a “Palaver” with Mayo for half an hour on this subject, and knowing there was nothing, but what might be seen, I told him that, to show him that I wished to keep nothing from the King, he might have them but not as a right, only out of courtesy. After this the Avogar took us to see them poisoning arrows in the Market place; which was, I suppose, more to impress on us their greatness. We were then told we should see the King to-morrow.

Sunday, 11th. After breakfast waited on the King, and he dictated a letter to Her Majesty, the purport of which was, he thought the Queen did not write the letter, or know the contents, he had received from the Commodore. First,

⁷¹ i.e. the spirit of the deceased King Kpengla. Cf. Burton's description of a custom performed in 1863 for King Gezo (now deceased) by his son and successor Glele, which refers to a 'shed' which 'contained the relics of the old King. His ghost is supposed to be present, and all bow and prostrate to it before noticing the present ruler' (1864, i, 354).

⁷² i.e. British missionaries and persons from the British colony of Sierra Leone.

⁷³ i.e. of the standard anti-slave trade treaty.

⁷⁴ Not traced.

that part which gave him offence was, saying he asked for arms to attack Abbeokuta which he denies, and says, it was Mr Fraser's lie "Palaver". Second, that if he did not comply with the Treaty, or come to terms, the Chiefs around him would be leagued against him; he said, that was impossible, that no Chiefs dare to come against him, that he was the King of black men, and if he and the Queen of England went to war, the world would come to an end. Third, about Abbeokuta being exempt from the Blockade. The letter being finished, the Portuguese and French wrote it in their language; but when read, he said, they were not the right "Palaver", and returned them. Mr Brown's interpretation was then read which pleased him, and he asked to have it written out for tomorrow. Their suspicion was so great, after dinner Mayo came to say that no communication would be allowed between us and the Portuguese until the letter was written, through fear of alteration.

Monday, 12th. After some difficulty in making any sense of the King's diction, it was accomplished, and read to Mayo and the Avogar, who pronounced it to be a true "Palaver".⁷⁵ We were employed all the forenoon in making copies, and went to the King's at 2 p.m. The King began by telling Domingo Martines that it was his doings and his fault about the attack on Badagry,⁷⁶ and the Portuguese had got him into this trouble; that the Portuguese had two faces and were full of intrigues, each wanting to be a greater man than the other, this brought on a very warm discussion, which lasted all the afternoon and made it so late he did not sign his letter to Her Majesty, and nothing was done.

Tuesday, 13th. Went to the King's before breakfast, and fully expected from what had been said that the Treaty would have been signed, but to my astonishment he would have nothing to do with the printed forms, and I have no doubt the stormy discussion of yesterday afternoon was the cause of this sudden alteration, some of the provisions having been interpreted privately to him wrong which I tried to explain, finding it was only irritating him, I wrote out on a sheet of paper five Articles:—Art. 1. Slave Trade to be for ever abolished in the King of Dahomey's dominions. 2. Peace with Abbeokuta. 3. Protection for Missionaries in entire good faith. 4. Protection to British life and property. 5. To have the privilege of the most favoured of nations in trade. This he would have nothing to do with and it was evident to me that he had been persuaded not to sign anything but the first Article of the Treaty, for on writing it out on a sheet of paper, without asking any questions except he could not understand why I wanted another "book", when he had already

⁷⁵ King Gezo to Queen Victoria, 12 Jan. 1852 in Appendix 2, no. 29.

⁷⁶ Presumably referring to the attacks on Badagry by forces from Lagos in June/July 1851: Martins was involved in that he had supported Akitoye, the exiled king of Lagos, who had settled there, with the support of Abeokuta.

said in his letter to the Queen, that the Slave Trade was ended [he signed it].⁷⁷ But this letter which he approved of (and refused the Portuguese and French) he would not put his name to, but signed their two letters, which he had said were not true "Palaver." After refusing to sign this letter he dictated another to the Queen,⁷⁸ and never left the table until he saw it sealed and directed, insisting at the same time the original letter should be sent with it, which I did, more as a curiosity, it not being signed. This "Palaver" lasted until after 5 p.m., and I had not tasted food the whole day. After dinner Mayo sent for us and said the King had made a law: "That all Palm oil and nuts he would sell himself, anything else his subjects might trade in, and if any one sold a measure of oil or broke this law, he would confiscate all his property, that ships of all nations were to come to Whydah for the oil and nuts, which would be measured on the beach under the Avogar, who would have power to punish those who break the law, and no oil or nuts must be shipped at any place along the coast in his dominions, except Whydah, from this day".⁷⁹ I think the Portuguese, in persuading the King not to sign the conditions, had their object, they being established at Porto Novo, Appi Vista, and other places, would give them exclusive right of trade, but the King's law, that all oil and nuts shall be shipped at Whydah, will prevent this monopoly, if carried out, which I much fear will not be the case. The Treaty being signed and the "Palaver" set, we returned home, hungry and tired, with leave to return to Whydah in the morning.

Wednesday, 14th. Up before daylight to get breakfast and be off, but, as usual, just as I was getting into my hammock a message came from Mayo, to tell me "the King wished that as soon as I got to Whydah, I would send all the ships away until everything was settled. He did not care for the blockade if it lasted forty years, as he could live without trade". This detained us until 1.30 p.m., when we at last got away, accompanied by Mayo, with about fifty men, to fire a salute. We halted at the entrance of the town, and received the cup of friendship on our parting. The salute was fired, and we proceeded on our return, passing through Zobado and Agremey and slept at Appee. Having been detained so long in Cannah, we did not arrive at Appee until 10 o'clock at night, having been obliged to walk through the bog (or else sleep in it) in perfect darkness, our light having gone out after about two miles. We suffered a great deal of fatigue in walking over the broken ground of the bog, and arrived at Appee wet through with dew and exertion; not having our luggage with us, we were glad to roll ourselves up in the country cloth and sleep on the ground for the night.

⁷⁷ Appendix 2, no. 31.

⁷⁸ King Gezo to Queen Victoria, 13 Jan. 1852, in Appendix 2, no. 30.

⁷⁹ Cf. Fraser to Beecroft, 17 Jan. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 3.

Thursday, 15th. At daylight we left Appee, in a thick fog and dew, for Whydah. Halted to breakfast at Alladah, a village prettily situated in the forest. We then went on to Torree⁸⁰ and rested an hour, and after some persuasion we got our hammock men to take us on to Whydah, where we arrived at 9 p.m., after a most fatiguing and harassing journey of forty-five miles.

Friday, 16th. My things not having arrived, and not wishing to go on board without the documents, I was obliged to put off my return on board until the morrow. The King sent a message down to Whydah, to tell the people not to have sorry hearts, that his “Palaver” had been good, and they were to make glad, in consequence there was rejoicing and dancing round the town all day, paying their respects to me.⁸¹

Saturday 17th. My things having arrived yesterday evening, I was prepared to go on board, when a messenger arrived for me to stop until the Avogar returned, as he had something to say from the King, which I would not accede to, but said, I would go on shore when he arrived. I returned on board at 12 a.m., and received letters from the Commander-in-Chief.

I have only to add, that throughout my stay at Cannah nothing could be more kind or courteous than the King’s attention towards me in every respect, sending me “chop” every morning and asking how I was, and if there was anything I wanted.

9. Commander T. G. Forbes to Commodore Bruce, *Philomel*, Whydah

6 March 1852⁸²

I have the honor to inform you on the 19th February according to your instructions, I left the “Philomel” in charge of Lieutenant Williams, and with Mr Tweedie who again volunteered his services, proceeded to Whydah to make arrangements for my mission to Abomey, which I accomplished and left on the 20th accompanied by Mr Fraser H[er] M[ajesty’s] Vice Consul,⁸³ Mr Tweedie and Mr Brown the Interpreter, we arrived at Alladah 7 p.m., and finding the shed I occupied on my first mission was burnt, we roughed it out as well as could be expected.

21st We arrived at Appe where we were detained all day by the Hammockmen going away and not returning until too late to cross the bog.

At dayfall on the 22nd crossed the Bog and rested at Agreemee, arriving at Cannah about 5 p.m., here we found my old Quarters stripped of all the

⁸⁰ “Porree” in ms.

⁸¹ Cf. Fraser to Beecroft, 17 Jan. 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 3.

⁸² TNA, FO84/894, ff. 37–44.

⁸³ See Fraser’s account, ‘The last Mission to Abomey’, in Journals, pp. 157–167.

mats and taken to Abomey;⁸⁴ this obliged us to sleep in the open shed. After Breakfast on the 23rd arrived at Abomey and were quartered in the Mayo's house.

On the 24th there was the usual delay, we could not see the King, because he was making Custom for his dead relations,⁸⁵ and were not allowed outside the Yards until after he had received us; on the 25th he sent for us, at the same time saying I was not to bring the letters,⁸⁶ he was receiving presents of Bamboos from some Mahee people and Messengers from Porto Novo and Badagry to condole with him for his late loss by Fire,⁸⁷ nothing was done and we returned to our Quarters.

26th was another day lost and having sent a request not to keep us long, on the 27th he received us, and commenced by an extraordinary Parable⁸⁸—He was in a great state of excitement about something and after hearing your two letters read, he said he would have nothing to do with the Treaty,⁸⁹ nor would he allow your explanation of it read, that he would not treat with one person but must have an Ambassador from England, France, and Portugal—He would receive the Abbeokouta Chiefs to settle their Palaver, and would like to have Mr Beecroft and any one you might appoint:⁹⁰—He was very angry at my not having taken home the letter he wrote to Her Majesty, myself, as he had ordered, and told Mr Fraser that what had been said was passed and he might live in the Fort.

28th We did not see him, it was quite evident he was waiting for answers to Messengers sent to different parties.

29th Mayo came to our quarters under pretence of writing a letter but for more delay, as may be seen from the nonsense he had written.

“The first vessel that arrived at Whydah was a merchantman, he made his Trade and went away—The second vessel brought a messenger from the King of England, he sent to the Yervogah, and the Yervogar received him, the Yervogar sent to Abomey, and the King of Dahomey received him,—He

⁸⁴ The King had now removed his residence from Cana to Abomey.

⁸⁵ Evidently, this was part of the custom ‘to the memory of [the king’s] father’, which was performed immediately before the departure of the Dahomian army on its annual campaign (Forbes 1851, i, 19). See also Endnote 1.

⁸⁶ Forbes later refers to 2 letters. One of these was Bruce’s official response to Gezo’s letter of 12 Jan. 1852, urging him to sign the full treaty (Appendix 2, no. 32, Bruce to King of Dahomey, 11 Feb. 1852). The second was a private letter (not preserved), transmitting gifts to the King, as mentioned in Fraser’s Journals, p. 160.

⁸⁷ The ‘bamboos’ were for rebuilding the royal palace, as is made explicit by Fraser, p. 159 (referring rather to ‘palmsticks’).

⁸⁸ See Fraser’s Journals, p. 161.

⁸⁹ i.e. the standard form of treaty, which he had refused to sign on the previous mission.

⁹⁰ i.e. to serve as mediator.

drinks a glass of grog to the King's health, He reads the contents of the letter, He gives his answer which is written down and sealed before him.

The third vessel, a Steamer, the Captain was called Conoo, that vessel caught fire at Whydah and was burned. He wrote book to the King of England to say that, that Steamer come and burned, the King of England say, that he never sent to the Steamer, and he requested the King of Dahomey to cut off the Captain's head and send it to England.

When Man-of-War Captain comes with his vessel and anchors off a Port, what can be his intention? It is nothing but War."

1st March—Mayo came and said, if the King signed the Treaty, "he would be selling his country." I explained every thing to him, and although he went away apparently satisfied, I was sure he King had been ill advised from his manner being so different the last time I was at Cannah.

I sent this day to the King to say, if he had no further commands, with his permission I would return to my Ship.

On the 2nd after breakfast we went to the King who received us with marked coldness and commenced in great excitement and rage to abuse Mr Brown saying, it was he and Mr Hutton who had brought this bad Palaver (meaning the Blockade), that he had a great mind to take off his boots and clothes, flog him, and make him walk to England.

That he was no Chief, but a King,⁹¹ and he would have nothing to do with the Treaty, that it was not the Queen's Palaver, and she did not send me, and would not treat with a Man-of-War Captain, but if an Ambassador was sent from England, he might do so, he told me to take all the ships and white men away, he did not care for the Blockade, he could do without trade, and I might come back in five years, and see if he could not live. He then produced different articles of country manufacture, and told me to take the white people and their property away from Badagry as he would break it; That the Commander might send 40 men to walk through his country and see the extent of it, and we might return to Whydah by three different roads and see also. We might send 320 Man of War ships and land 20,000 men, half of them would die before they crossed the bog for want of water, and the others he could fight; his people could walk in one day as far as ours could in five:—He was angry at so many vessels being here and said it was for war; This Palaver was finished by his saying, The Treaty was not from the Queen and I was not sent by her—that Mr Fraser (speaking of the lost letter) might as well tell the truth

⁹¹ More fully explained by Fraser, Journals, p. 164, stating that Gezo was angry that 'the same treaty was sent to everybody', because 'he was a King, and a great one, and was not to be treated like the small chiefs, such as we had seen elsewhere'.

and say he had burnt it,⁹² and did not believe him to be a Queen's Officer, and told me to take him away. I said I could not do so:—when Mr Fraser told him he had insulted him so often that he should leave the country. The King also said, that if he signed the Treaty he would be selling his Country—that the Officer got the Porto Novo Treaty signed under false representation by saying that Gezo had signed the Queen's treaty, when he had only signed his own,⁹³ He then said, we might go, but neither shook hands or walked to his gate, the usual custom of the country, and what he had done on former occasions.

I did not anticipate such uncalled for excitement, having given no offence, which he admitted on my saying I was sorry to see him so angry.

It was very evident that he had received bad advice between our interviews, as he would not have accused Mr Hutton (his best friend) of causing the Blockade and attacking Mr Fraser in the way he did, after having told him what was past was passed, and he might live in the Fort—and persisting it was not the Queen's treaty nor was I sent by the Queen, nor did he believe Mr Fraser was a Queen's Officer. He seemed to be annoyed at the Blockade being taken off Porto Novo,⁹⁴ and Badagry being exempt, and said that if he sent to Domingo Martinez he would cut off the communication between Abbeocouta and Badagry and stop all trade—I had on three occasions expressed my desire to Mayo, to procure for me private interviews with His Majesty to enable me to explain the error under which he was labouring—that far from wishing him to sell his Country it was our desire to improve his country and increase its revenue by legitimate trade, and that I would point out to him how he could do so—but finding that all my arguments were without effect, we returned to our quarters, packed up, and left at 6 p.m. for Agreemee where we arrived at 9 p.m. and slept there.

3rd March, at daylight started and crossed the Bog, arriving at Appee 10 a.m., rested during the excessive heat of the day, and proceeded to Alladah to sleep.

4th 2 a.m., started for Whydah, resting at Toree and Savee, and arrived at the Fort at 9 a.m., but could not go on board, my luggage not having arrived.

⁹²This was the letter from the Basorun of Abeokuta, which Fraser claimed had been stolen from him while at Abomey on his first mission to the king (see Fraser's Journals, pp. 108–9). Fraser's own journal of this mission does not record this allegation.

⁹³Referring to the treaty for the abolition of the slave trade made by Commander Wilmot with the King of Porto-Novo, 17 Jan. 1852. The latter did state that he would be 'guided' by the King of Dahomey's actions, which Wilmot took to mean that Gezo had already signed a treaty: Wilmot may well have told him that the treaty offered to him was the same as that proposed to Dahomey—in good faith, since he did not yet know the outcome of the Dahomey mission. See HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, incl.1 in no. 73, Wilmot to Bruce 11 Feb. 1852.

⁹⁴Bruce had lifted the blockade on Porto-Novo and other places which had signed satisfactory treaties on 11 Feb. 1852 (see Appendix 2, no. 33).

5th Had a heavy Tornado, with much rain and lightning, on its clearing off, went down to the Beach, but found the surf too rough to embark and returned to Whydah.

6th We again went to the Beach to embark, found the surf very heavy but with great risk and difficulty succeeded in getting through it, to rejoin my ship, reporting the result of my mission to Commander Strange of Her Majesty's ship "Archer".

10. Commander H. R. Foote to Rear-Admiral Bruce, *Prometheus*, Whydah

28 September 1852⁹⁵

With reference to your letter of 20th of July last and its inclosure from Her Majesty's Under-Secretary of State, instructing me to obtain compensation for Mr A. Stanfield, from the authorities at Whydah, etc.

I have now the honour to report to you, that I lost no time after my arrival on the coast in communicating with Mr Fraser, H[er] M[ajesty]'s Vice Consul in Dahomey, but who was residing at Fernando Po.⁹⁶ I embarked Mr Fraser on the 15th instant, and arrived at Whydah on the 23rd, when I immediately announced to the Avogar my desire to see him. It being intimated to me that the Yervogar would gladly see me, I landed on the 25th Instant, together with Mr Fraser and Commander Heseltine.⁹⁷

I first ascertained, what answer the King of Dahomey had given to your letter,⁹⁸ and Commander Coote's,⁹⁹ respecting the withdrawal of the blockade, and if the King had given orders for the reception of Her Majesty's Vice-Consul on his former footing. These questions being satisfactorily answered and my expressing the desire of H[er] M[ajesty]'s Government that all should go on amicably for the future, as if no misunderstanding had taken place, and some complimentary speeches passing between us I told the Avogar that I had one little affair to bring under his notice, respecting a Mr Stanfield, which I had no doubt could be easily arranged.

The bare mention of Mr Stanfield's name appeared to irritate the Avogar, however, I quietly and firmly stated the whole case to him and the demand I had to make. His reply I will give in nearly the same language as it was interpreted to me. "The Queen of England has her laws in her own country, and

⁹⁵ TNA, FO84/895, ff. 370–374; also printed in HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1852/3, Class A, incl. in no.112.

⁹⁶ See Fraser's account, in Additional Dispatches, no. 8.

⁹⁷ Commander of the *Britomart*, which went in company with the *Prometheus*.

⁹⁸ See Appendix 2, no.42, Bruce to King of Dahomey, 15 June 1852.

⁹⁹ Not traced. R. Coote was Commander of the *Volcano*: presumably it was he who had delivered Bruce's letter to Ouidah.

suppose white or black man break the laws they must be punished alike. The King of Dahomey has his laws, which if a white man break, he must pay for in money or be treated as a black man. The law Mr Stanfield break was that of drawing blood from a black child, which if a white man does, if only by accident, he must pay. "Besides, the Avogar said, Mr Stanfield is not a proper man, and this is not the first Palavra he has made, and since this Palavra about the child he has done many fool (mad) things, for which he has not been punished."

Mr Fraser and myself endeavoured to make the Avogar see that the fine inflicted on Mr Stanfield was excessive but I fear all our arguments were of no avail.

I at length told him that as I considered his treatment of Mr Stanfield unjust, I should refer the matter to the King and afterwards I made it a point to talk a little with the Avogar in a friendly and jocular manner and we parted good friends.

After leaving the Avogar I called on the Cha Cha, and spoke to him about Mr Stanfield, inquiring his character, etc.; I also took great pains to ascertain from the most respectable residents of Whydah their opinion of Mr Stanfield and the treatment he had received at the hands of the Avogar.

I am sorry to say for the sake of the English character, that they one and all agreed, that Mr Stanfield's conduct during his residence at Whydah and elsewhere, on this coast, was anything but correct, indeed, hardly that of a sane person.

I will just state, Sir, one or two of his late eccentricities, as they were told me, night and morning he caused six guns to be fired outside his residence and required the natives to pay him the same salutes and respect as they would to one of their own chiefs, for instance, in coming into his presence they were required to fall on their knees and kiss the earth. At the place where he is now residing (Kowtanoo), in the King of Dahomey's dominions,¹⁰⁰ he makes his native servants, carry him on their backs, although he has only to move a few paces. When his horse died, he caused a cow to be saddled for him.

I trouble you, Sir, with these trifling matters, to shew you the style of man we are called on to support and demand compensation for, at the same time I beg to assure you that I have only given the proper value to the statements I gathered from different persons with whom I conversed. I do not hesitate to assert, from my experience on the coast (nearly six years) and from all I can learn, that a well-disposed, sensible person may live for any number of years in Whydah without being molested, in the slightest degree.

¹⁰⁰i.e. Cotonou.

Taking all the bearings of this case into my consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it is impolitic to move further in this business, and that the character Mr Stanfield bears, renders him unworthy of British influence in this instance. It must be borne in mind, that at the time this alleged outrage was committed on Mr Stanfield, H[er] M[ajesty]'s cruizers were blockading Whydah, which state of things naturally irritated the Avogar and all the natives.

The following morning I sent a message to the Avogar begging that my stick might be sent to Abomey for the King, with my compliments, etc. etc. and that I did not intend to write to the King about the Palavra of Stanfield. Also that I hoped the Avogar would keep his promise, that all should go well for the future.

In conclusion I beg to offer my opinion that Mr Thomas Hutton should be written to, warning him that unless he in future appoints responsible steady persons, as his Agents in Dahomey, that H[er] M[ajesty]'s Gov[ernmen]t will not consider themselves called upon to interfere in their disputes with the Native Chiefs.¹⁰¹

Trusting that the manner in which I have conducted this business may meet with your approbation.

¹⁰¹ This paragraph omitted in the version printed in HCPP.

Endnote 1

The Dahomian ‘Annual Customs’

Dahomey was notorious for its ‘Annual Customs’ (translating the Fon term *Hwenùwá*, ‘Annual Ceremony’),¹ which were public ceremonies marked by the offering of human sacrifices and distributions of gifts among the assembled courtiers and others in attendance.² Louis Fraser’s journals (and also those of Commander T. G. Forbes, who accompanied Fraser on his second and third missions to the Dahomian royal court in January–March 1852) make several references to these ceremonies, but these are difficult to interpret, and more especially to correlate with information given in other contemporary accounts. The difficulties arise partly from the fact that no European visitor ever witnessed the entire annual cycle of ceremonies, but only particular ‘Customs’, and even these usually only in part. Moreover, although the ceremonies followed a defined sequence through the year, the precise dates of particular Customs varied, because the beginning of the cycle was linked to that of the return of the Dahomian army from its annual campaign, which varied: in both 1850 and 1851, for example, it is clear that the cycle was delayed, because of the late return of the army from the field. Further, several forms of public spectacle—such as human sacrifices (by decapitation or clubbing to death), military parades, enactments of fighting, processions of women exhibiting the royal wealth, and the scattering of money (cowry shells) to be ‘fought’ over by those present—were common to various ceremonies rather than unique to any one, so that descriptions of different Customs are often in practice very similar, rather than distinctively identifiable. The nature of the ceremonies was also evidently subject to evolution and variation over time.

It is also unfortunately the case that earlier attempts to harmonize different European accounts of the Customs have been inadequate, and sometimes even positively misleading. In particular, Richard Burton, in his very influential account of his visit to Dahomey in 1863/4, assumed that the Customs which he witnessed, held in December/January, were a variant of the main ‘Annual Customs’, which had been witnessed, for example, by the mission to Dahomey undertaken by Consul Beecroft and Lieutenant F. E. Forbes in

¹Literally ‘year-thing-do’. The Fon term was recorded by Forbes 1851, i, 17, ii, 6 etc., as ‘Hwae-noo-ee-wha’; he also offers the alternative form ‘Hwae-mae-noo’, i.e. *Hwemènú*, ‘yearly thing’ (ibid., ii, 171).

²The Annual Customs have received little detailed academic analysis: but see Coquery-Vidrovitch 1964.

May/June 1850.³ But in fact, the main ‘Annual Customs’ followed (and celebrated) the return of the Dahomian army from its annual campaign, whereas those attended by Burton clearly fell later in the cycle, shortly preceding the army’s departure to war.⁴ The term recorded by Burton for the Customs which he witnessed, *Hwetanú*, ‘year-head-thing’, refers to their being held at the end (‘head’) of the year,⁵ the new year being taken in Dahomey to begin with the onset of the main dry season, normally in December.⁶ The assumption made, following Burton, by many modern scholars (including myself, in earlier work) that *Hwetanú* was the name of the main Annual Customs is therefore incorrect.

Eighteenth-century accounts of Dahomey generally refer only to a single set of ‘Annual Customs’, also called ‘watering the graves’ (translating the Fon idiom *sìn kòn ny’àyĩ*, ‘pouring water on the earth’, and referring to human sacrifices offered to deceased kings of the royal dynasty),⁷ which were held at the capital Abomey normally in January/February,⁸ and which clearly correspond to the Customs witnessed by Beecroft and Forbes in 1850. The principal public ceremony was one at which animal and human sacrifices were thrown from a platform (*atò*) and decapitated, in the Adjahi market, to the north of the main (Agringome) royal palace in Abomey.⁹ By 1797, however, there were reported to be two ‘Customs’, said to be performed in December and June.¹⁰ The first of these seems to correspond to that witnessed by Burton in 1863/4, which was dedicated specifically to the memory of the reigning king’s father, now performed for the late King Gezo by his son and successor

³ Burton 1864, i, 345–7.

⁴ Burton himself noted that the Customs which he witnessed included (on 26 Jan. 1864) a formal ‘ceremony of declaring war’ (ibid., ii, 263); the army set out (against Abeokuta) on 22 Feb. (ibid., ii, 308).

⁵ Rendered by Burton as ‘Khwe-ta-nun’, but he translated it as ‘the yearly head thing’, incorrectly implying that it referred to sacrifice by decapitation (ibid., i, 345).

⁶ For the Dahomian calendar, see Le Herissé 1911, 355–9.

⁷ The Fon term was first recorded by Forbes 1851, i, 15, etc., as ‘See-que-ah-hee’; and later by Burton 1864, ii, 167, etc., as ‘Sin-kwain’. Strictly, the ‘watering’ was only one section of the Annual Customs, which was performed inside the royal palace, after the conclusion of the public ceremonies.

⁸ Dalzel 1793, xix–xxiv, says they began ‘soon after Christmas’ and lasted ‘about a month’. A visitor in 1772 witnessed part of these ceremonies between 3–16 Feb.: Norris 1789, 86–126.

⁹ Compare Norris 1789, 124–6, describing ‘the last day of the Annual Customs’ (16 Feb. 1772), involving a ‘stage’ erected near the palace, from which a single human sacrifice was thrown; and Forbes 1851, ii, 44–54, describing the Custom called ‘Ek-que-noo-ah-toh-me’ (i.e. *Hweniatòmè*, ‘Year-thing-at platform’), in Adjahi market (31 May 1850), this time with 11 human victims.

¹⁰ Pires 1957, 46: my thanks to Luís Nicolau Parés for drawing my attention to this reference. The dates were clearly variable: e.g. in 1804–10 the date of departure of the Yovogan from Ouidah to attend the second/main Customs varied between 1 April and 1 June (TNA, T70/1163, Day Books, William’s Fort, Whydah).

Glele.¹¹ By the 1860s, this Custom took different forms in different years: one—which was performed, for example, in December/January 1862/3—was a version of the ‘Platform’ Custom, as performed at the main ‘Annual Customs’, in the Adjahi market;¹² but that witnessed by Burton, in the following year, called the So-sin (‘Horse-tying’) Custom,¹³ involved the exhibition of sacrificial victims (who were clubbed to death, rather than decapitated) seated on stools on top of scaffolds or suspended on gibbets, in the Houndjro market, adjacent to the late King Gezo’s Kumasi palace.¹⁴ Burton inferred that these different ceremonies were regularly performed ‘on alternate years’.¹⁵

Burton was also told that this ‘So-sin’ Custom, although it existed earlier, had been elaborated by Gezo, in honour of his father King Agonglo (reigned 1789–97).¹⁶ It is clear, in fact, that under Gezo the ceremonial cycle was further extended, with several new Customs being introduced.¹⁷ For example, he instituted a new Custom which was performed at Cana, in commemoration of his defeat in 1823 of the kingdom of Oyo, to which Dahomey had earlier been tributary, which was held between the return of the army from its campaign and the main ceremony of Annual Customs at Abomey.¹⁸ Gezo also introduced the Custom of ‘Firing to Ouidah’, involving the discharge of muskets in succession by soldiers stationed along the road from the Dahomian capital to the coast, which was witnessed by Fraser in November 1851.¹⁹

The only account which offers a seemingly complete catalogue of the Customs performed throughout the year was given by senior Dahomian officials to Beecroft and F. E. Forbes on 2 July 1850 and recorded in their journals.²⁰ They both list six Customs to follow the main Annual Customs, which

¹¹ See Burton 1864, i, 361.

¹² See HCPP, *Despatches from Commodore Wilmot*, 8–9. King Glele referred to this ceremony as ‘customs in honour of his “Father’s Spirit”’: *ibid.*, 4.

¹³ So called because this Custom began with the confiscation of horses owned by Dahomian officials, which were released on payment of a fee.

¹⁴ Burton, 1864, i, 348–86; ii, 1–128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ii, 170.

¹⁶ He reports Glele as saying ‘His ancestors had built rough and simple So-sin sheds. His father, Gezo, had improved them when “making custom” for the ghost of Agongoro’ (*ibid.*, i, 361).

¹⁷ See Coquery-Vidrovitch 1964, 704–5; Bay 1998, 213–22. One of Gezo’s innovations was the institution of the ‘Bush King’, a second identity for the King, which required the performance of some ceremonies twice over: but this is not referred to by Forbes or Fraser in 1850–2, and probably had not yet been introduced.

¹⁸ Burton 1864, i, 198–9.

¹⁹ The idea of this Custom is said to have been suggested to Gezo by the Brazilian slave-trader Francisco Felix de Souza: *ibid.*, ii, 254.

²⁰ HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 2 in no. 220, Journal of F. E. Forbes, entry for 2 July 1850; TNA, FO84/816, Journal of Consul Beecroft, 2 July 1850. This information was offered in the context of discussions about the level of royal expenditure at the Customs, and hence of the financial compensation which Britain should offer for the abolition of the slave trade.

had just concluded,²¹ so the total number of ceremonies (including the main Customs) is seven.²² The two versions are essentially consistent, except that the sequence of the two ceremonies immediately following the main Annual Customs is given differently, Beecroft listing first ‘dancing’ in Singbodji Square, adjoining the Agringome palace at Abomey, to the south, followed by a ceremony involving the exhibition of wheeled model of a ship, while Forbes reverses this order. Forbes’ subsequently published book offers additional details on some of these ceremonies, but also omits one from his earlier list (the ‘dancing’ outside the palace gates), without explanation.²³ The three versions are given below in tabular format, for purposes of comparison:

	Beecroft’s version	Forbes’ version 1 (Journal)	Forbes’ version 2 (Book)
1	[Annual Customs]	[Annual Customs]	[Annual Customs]
2	<i>dancing at dad-gee-coo-dee</i> [i.e. Adanjrokode, a gate of the Agringome palace at Abomey] ²⁴	<i>the cleaning of the ship</i>	[Custom] ... <i>in honour of Trade, with music, dancing, & singing. A small schooner on wheels, laden with gifts, is then drawn round the capital, & the cargo afterwards scrambled for by the Dahoman army.</i>
3	<i>dressing the ship</i>	<i>dancing & singing at the Dangelahcordeh</i> [= Adanjrokode] gate	[omitted]
4	<i>dinner at Coomassee</i> [i.e. Kumasi palace, Abomey], <i>with the saluting the same time at Whydah</i>	<i>dinner & firing guns along the road to & from Whydah</i>	<i>The royal salute ... the soldiers are planted along the road from Abomey to the beach at Whydah ... At the moment when the king drinks, its announcement, by the first gun of a royal salute, is carried by the musketry to ... the beach at Whydah ... The boom of the first gun fired by the foreign forts at Whydah is echoed back ... to Abomey.</i>
5	<i>war palaver</i>	<i>war palaver at Cumassee</i>	<i>preparations for war ... & much palaver on war subjects</i>

²¹Strictly, they both refer to 7 other ‘Customs’, but these include the annual military campaign.

²²But this list is evidently not altogether comprehensive, omitting some ceremonies which were presumably considered of minor importance (or perhaps were private, rather than public): e.g. F. E. Forbes refers to a Custom for the King’s mother, performed at her birthplace Tendji, north-east of Abomey, in Oct. 1849 (1851, i, 84), and a ‘fetish’ Custom (i.e. one in honour of *vodun*, or gods), shortly after the conclusion of the Annual Customs, on 25 June 1850 (*ibid.*, ii, 177); and T. G. Forbes records a ‘feast’ in memory of the King’s grandfather (King Kpengla, reigned 1774–89), held on 9 Jan. 1852 (see Appendix 3, no. 8, p. 252).

²³Forbes 1851, i, 17–19.

²⁴Giving onto Singbodji Square, to the south (cf. Burton 1864, i, 295), where the dancing presumably took place.

	Beecroft's version	Forbes' version 1 (Journal)	Forbes' version 2 (Book)
6	<i>Small customs for [the King's] father</i>	<i>custom to his father at Ahgongroo</i> ²⁵	<i>Before going to war the king makes a Custom to the memory of his father, which generally lasts a month.</i>
	[war]	[war]	[war]
7	<i>Fetish Custom</i> ²⁶ <i>at Canno-Mina, after [the King's] return from war</i>	<i>Fetish custom</i>	<i>On the return from war . . . the king resides at Cannah, & what is termed "makes a Fetish", i.e. sacrifices largely & gives liberal presents to the Fetish people, &, at the same time, purchases the prisoners & heads from his soldiers.</i>

The discrepancy between Beecroft and Forbes over the ordering of the second and third Customs in this list is difficult to resolve: in what follows Forbes' version is preferred, because it seems more consistent with the evidence relating to the performance of the various Customs in 1850–1.

In his book, Forbes offers datings for several of the Customs, but these were clearly normative: the actual dates of ceremonies in both 1850 and 1851 were later, as noted earlier, because of the late return of the army from war. Taking Forbes' sequence of Customs as a starting point, the attempt is made here to identify the various Customs referred to by Fraser and T. G. Forbes. The relevant information is again presented in tabular form, with the references in the journals of Fraser and Forbes (and other evidence relating to 1851/2) given in the two right-hand columns.

Catalogue of Customs as per Forbes' journal	Normative dates, as per Forbes' book	Actual dates 1850	Actual dates 1851/2	Actual dates 1852
[war]	Nov./Dec.	Feb. ²⁷	March ²⁸	March ²⁹
[return from war]	Jan.	March ³⁰		
1. Cana Custom	Jan.		May ³¹	

²⁵ i.e. at Agonglo's palace, which was in Gbekon, the southern suburb of Abomey (Forbes 1851, i, 71).

²⁶ This term apparently means that the sacrifices at the Cana Custom were offered to *vodun*, rather than to the royal dead, as is made explicit by Forbes, *ibid.*, i, 32.

²⁷ The army's departure was delayed until 'the latter end of January' and the King reported to be 'still at war' on 27 Feb. 1850 (*ibid.*, i, 96).

²⁸ The Dahomian army was defeated at Abeokuta, 3 March 1851.

²⁹ See the report of the defeat of the Dahomian army, in Fraser's Journals, 5–6 March 1852 (p. 168).

³⁰ The King's return to Cana was reported to Ouidah on 11 March 1850 (Forbes 1851, i, 113).

³¹ See Bouet, in Nardin 1967, 125. Bouet gives May as the normal date for the Cana Custom, but it should be taken as the date when it was celebrated in 1851 (shortly before Bouet's arrival), when

Catalogue of Customs as per Forbes' journal	Normative dates, as per Forbes' book	Actual dates 1850	Actual dates 1851/2	Actual dates 1852
[King moves from Cana to Abomey] ³²				
2. Annual Customs	March	May/June ³³		
3. Dressing the Ship ³⁴	May/June	August? ³⁵	See Fraser's Journal, 15 July 1851, referring to the absence of the Chacha & other officials from Ouidah to attend ' <i>the Customs, at Abomey</i> ', & the return of the Chacha to Ouidah on 5 Aug. ³⁶	
4. 'Dancing & singing' at the royal palace, Abomey	[omitted]		Perhaps the same as the Custom called ' <i>Hadjodo, in memory of the King's father</i> ', described (in part) in Fraser's Journal, 20 Aug.–4 Sept. 1851	

the ceremonial cycle was in fact delayed. The Cana Custom was also celebrated in May in 1863 (Burton 1864, i, 199, n.): Burton likewise assumed that this was the normative date (*ibid.*, i, 346), but on this occasion also the cycle was delayed, the Dahomian army having returned from its campaign only in April (Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Archives, Box 263, Peter Bernasko, Ouidah, 30 April 1863).

³² Burton 1864, i, 346, implies that the King remained at Cana, following the Custom there, until Nov., but this clearly cannot be the case, given that the main Annual Customs which followed were performed at Abomey. In 1847 the King moved from Cana to Abomey on 4 April (Ridgway 1847, 407).

³³ The Annual Customs of 1850 were originally scheduled to begin on 13 March (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1849/50, Class B, incl. 10 in no. 9, F. E. Forbes to Commodore Fanshawe, 5 Nov. 1849), but in the event were delayed: the ceremonies in fact began on 15 May (HCPP, *Slave Trade*, 1850/1, Class A, incl. 1 in no. 198, Forbes to Fanshawe, 2 April 1850, journal entry for 16 March 1850), and concluded on 22 June (Forbes 1851, ii, 171).

³⁴ A complication in interpreting European references to ceremonial appearances of the ship is that these were evidently not restricted to the actual 'Ship' Custom: e.g. F. E. Forbes saw it exhibited on 31 May 1851, during the main Annual Customs (1851, ii, 48), and an appearance in May 1843 (Brue 1845, 60) seems also to have formed part of the main Customs.

³⁵ A French merchant witnessed a ceremony at Abomey on 18 Aug. 1850, in which the ship was displayed (Blancheley 1891, 575).

³⁶ These ceremonies (or part of them) were witnessed by the French officer Lt. Bouet, who returned to Ouidah from Abomey on 26 July 1851 (see Fraser's Journals, p. 38): his account does not refer to the procession of the wheeled ship, but a sketch he drew of his reception by the King shows it in the background (Bouet 1851, 60).

Catalogue of Customs as per Forbes' journal	Normative dates, as per Forbes' book	Actual dates 1850	Actual dates 1851/2	Actual dates 1852
5. Firing to Ouidah ³⁸	July		[King moves from Abomey to Cana, between 7 Sept./ 6 Nov.] ³⁷ Described in Fraser's Journal, 9–14 Nov. 1851 ³⁹	? See reference by Fraser to ' <i>The King's custom Ajubo</i> ', concluded on 26 Sept. 1852 ⁴⁰
6. War Palaver	Aug./Sept.		? Cf. military parades reported in Fraser's & T. G. Forbes' Journals, 6 Jan. 1852 See T. G. Forbes' Journal, 9 Jan. 1852, referring to a ' <i>feast</i> ' for ' <i>the anniversary of [the king's] grandfather having built a house</i> ' ⁴¹ [King moves from Cana to Abomey, between 13 Jan./ 23 Feb.] ⁴²	

³⁷ F. E. Forbes implies that the King remained at Abomey throughout the period from the Annual Customs to the departure of the army for its next campaign, but this was clearly not the case in 1851, since Fraser's Journals indicate that he was at Cana between 6 Nov. 1851–13 Jan. 1852.

³⁸ A version of this ceremony was also witnessed by Burton in 1864, but this took place at a later point in the ceremonial cycle—on 25 Jan., following the 'So-sin' Custom (1864, ii, 253–64). Presumably, either similar ceremonies were performed at different times in the cycle, or the ordering of the customs had been changed between 1851–64.

³⁹ Although Forbes and Beecroft state that the King was resident at Abomey (at the Kumasi Palace) during this Custom, Fraser's account in 1851 indicates that he was then at Cana. The version of this ceremony witnessed by Burton in 1864 also began at Abomey, but at the Jegbe Palace of King Glele, SE of the town, rather than Kumasi.

⁴⁰ See Additional Dispatches, no. 8, p. 200. The term 'Ajubo' is not otherwise attested. The identification of this Custom as the 'Firing to Ouidah' is tentative, based on the fact that its conclusion was marked by the king sending a wife to Antonio de Souza at Ouidah, which is paralleled in Burton's account of the 'Firing' in 1864, which concluded with the dispatch of wives to the Chacha (Francisco Felix de Souza, Junior) and another Brazilian trader at Ouidah (1864, ii, 263–4).

⁴¹ i.e. King Kpengla, whose palace was in the Adandokpoji quarter of Abomey, on the west of the town (Burton 1864, ii, 237). This 'feast' does not seem to be mentioned in any other source.

⁴² Burton says that the King normally moved from Cana to Abomey in Nov., but in 1863 this was delayed until 21 Dec. (*ibid.*, i, 304, 346). In 1862 the King moved from Cana to Abomey on 14 Dec. (HCPP, *Despatches from Commodore Wilmot*, 5).

Catalogue of Customs as per Forbes' journal	Normative dates, as per Forbes' book	Actual dates 1850	Actual dates 1851/2	Actual dates 1852
7. Custom for the King's Father	[Oct. or Nov. ?] ⁴³		See T. G. Forbes' Journal. 24 Feb. 1852, referring to a ' <i>custom for [the King's] dead relations</i> ' ⁴⁴	

⁴³The corresponding Customs witnessed by Wilmot and Burton were held later, between 15 Dec.–16 Jan. 1862/3, and 28 Dec.–8 Jan. 1863/4.

⁴⁴Forbes' allusion to the King's 'relations' probably refers specifically to a ceremony of 'watering' of royal graves which followed the Custom for the King's father, as recorded by Burton, between 9–19 Jan. 1864 (1864, ii, 167–76). Cf. also the 'fetish dancing' which Fraser observed at the Kumasi palace on 26–27 Feb. 1852 (Journals, pp. 160, 162).

Endnote 2

Monetary Values

Among the interesting information provided incidentally by Fraser's journals are numerous references to prices, wages and other charges in the local economy. Interpretation and understanding of these is, however, complicated by the variety of forms in which they are expressed, which therefore require some explication.¹

The local currency in use in Dahomey (and also in neighbouring areas), in which prices and other costs are commonly expressed, comprised cowries, the shells of a form of sea-snail, which originated from the Indian Ocean, initially from the Maldive Islands, and were imported into West Africa through the European trade.² Cowries were counted and threaded in units of 40, termed a 'string', with 50 strings in turn (2,000 shells) making a 'head', and ten heads (20,000) a 'bag'.

Alongside cowries, coined money also circulated, especially Spanish and Latin American silver dollars, imported from the Americas, so that prices and other charges are also commonly expressed in dollars. It is not always clear, however, whether prices given in dollars relate to actual silver coins, or to payments made in cowries. The dollar was regularly equated with the head of 2,000 cowries: hence Fraser refers at one point to 'one head or dollar'.³ This, however, was a conventional equivalence, referred to by Lieutenant F. E. Forbes in 1849/50 as the 'nominal value',⁴ and by Fraser himself in another passage as the 'country [i.e. local] price'.⁵ Actual silver dollars by the 1850s circulated at a premium above this nominal value: Forbes in 1849/50 reported that the dollar was in practice exchanged for between 2,400–2,600 cowries.⁶ By Fraser's time, in 1851/2, the silver dollar had appreciated against cowries still further. In his 'Commercial Report', compiled after his departure from Ouidah, but said to refer to the time of his original arrival there in July 1851, he gives the price of Long Dane guns as 'five heads or three dollars', giving the dollar a value of $1\frac{2}{3}$ heads (3,333 cowries), and conversely the head a value of only

¹ For more extended treatments, see Law 1991, 1994b.

² See generally Hogendorn and Johnson 1986, which includes much material relating to Dahomey specifically.

³ Fraser's Journals, p. 90.

⁴ Forbes 1851, i, 36.

⁵ Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 197.

⁶ See Forbes 1851, i, 36.

\$0.60;⁷ while a bill of sale for a house in Ouidah which Fraser countersigned in January 1852 gives the price as 1,500 heads of cowries, or \$750, making the dollar equivalent to 2 heads (4,000 cowries), and the head now to only \$0.50, or half its original value.⁸ This depreciation of cowries was due to the importation by European traders of cheaper supplies of them from the East African mainland opposite Zanzibar, which had begun in 1845.⁹

As an additional complication, many of the prices given by Fraser (and by other contemporary observers) are in fact expressed in terms of the British sterling currency—in pounds, shillings and pence (£ s. d.). These do not refer to payments actually made in British money, which was as yet little used on the West African coast, but reflect, here again, conventional equivalences, based on the value of the dollar. The matter is further complicated, however, by the fact that more than one valuation of dollars against sterling was current in West Africa. As Fraser himself noted, in presenting his accounts to the Foreign Office after his return to England, ‘The silver dollar, at Whydah, is generally 4^s/6^d but I have seen many exchanged for 5^s English money, and as much as 6^s/6^d offering and then not procurable’.¹⁰ Officially (since 1843) the dollar was in fact valued in British possessions in West Africa at 4s. 2d. [50 pence]; but in practice silver went at a premium there, and the dollar was usually exchanged at 4s. 6d. [54 pence], while on the Gold Coast it was conventionally valued at 5s. [60 pence], which was known there as the ‘currency’ value.¹¹ These ambiguities are reflected in Fraser’s journals and correspondence, in which, in fact, three different valuations of dollars/cowries against sterling can be found. With reference to a fine imposed on a British trader at Ouidah (in March 1852), \$250 is equated with £62 10s. [1,250s.] sterling, which makes the dollar equivalent to 5s. (and the pound sterling to \$4);¹² while in referring to the price of cotton in local markets (in August 1851), 4 heads of cowries (8,000) are equated with ‘about 18s sterling’, which gives the head a value of 4s. 6d.¹³ Of these, the first evidently follows the conventional ‘currency’ value of the dollar, while the latter is based on its actual current exchange rate. In a third passage, however, in computing the yearly cost of hire of a canoe-crew (in July 1851), 5 heads of cowries are equated with £1, making the

⁷ Additional Dispatches, no. 7, p. 197.

⁸ See Fraser’s Journals, p. 148, n. 729.

⁹ Hogendorn and Johnson 1986, 71–77. The Zanzibar cowries were of a different species (*Cypraea annulus*) from (and larger than) the Maldive cowries (*Cypraea moneta*).

¹⁰ TNA, FO2/7, Fraser, Statement of Accounts, July–Dec. 1851.

¹¹ For fuller detail and documentation, see Law 1994b, 61–2.

¹² Fraser to Commander Strange, 5 March 1852, in Additional Dispatches, no. 4. Strictly, this equivalence is not given by Fraser himself, but is a gloss added in the printed version of the text in the HCPP.

¹³ Fraser’s Journals, p. 68.

head equivalent to only 4s. [48 pence].¹⁴ This last valuation probably reflects the depreciation of cowries against the silver dollar, which was noted earlier: if the conventional ‘currency’ value of the dollar at 5s. is taken as the starting point, it would give the dollar a value of 1¼ heads, or 2,500 cowries, which is in line with the exchange rate reported by Forbes in 1849/50—although, as has been seen, cowries had in fact fallen in value even lower than this by Fraser’s time.

It should also be noted that when prices are given in shillings and pence sterling, these probably represent rough approximations rather than being calculated on the basis of precisely accurate exchange rates. Forbes in 1850 gives the value of the shilling at one point as 500 cowries (again, giving the head of 2,000 a value of 4s.), implying around 42 cowries to the penny;¹⁵ but in translating prices and wages at Ouidah into sterling, he does not adopt a consistent conversion, but evidently rounds up arbitrarily, giving the shilling a value varying between 545–625 cowries,¹⁶ and implying between 45–52 cowries to the penny. In translating smaller amounts, however, he consistently equates the penny with the string of 40 cowries. This equivalence is also explicitly made by Fraser in a note (of October 1851) which equates 40 strings with 3s. 4d. [40d.].¹⁷ In Fraser’s journals, likewise, it seems safe to assume that prices expressed in pence refer to strings of cowries. A charge of half a crown, i.e. 2s. 6d. [2½s./30d.] (paid as the daily wage for an interpreter), if calculated on the basis of 1d. per string, would be 1,200 cowries; but more probably, it represents half the conventional ‘dollar’ of cowries, i.e. 1,000.¹⁸

One recorded payment (of wages to canoemen), made at Elmina on the Gold Coast, rather than in Dahomey, is denominated in ‘ounces’:¹⁹ this refers to the ‘trade ounce’, a conventional unit of account in which goods were commonly valued, which was equivalent to £2 sterling, or 40s.²⁰

¹⁴ See Cost of canoe-crew, in Appendix 2, no. 6. Likewise, a list of property from Oct. 1851 values 22 heads of cowries at £4 10s. (90 shillings), giving the head a value of just over 4s. [in fact, 49 pence, 4s. 1d.]: TNA, FO84/886, f. 350 (not included in this edition).

¹⁵ Forbes 1851, ii, 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 110, 122: 25,000 cowries (the price of a bullock) = £2 [40s.], but 12,000 (monthly pay for a headman of a work gang) = 22s., 8,000 (for a sub-headman) = 13s., 5,000 (for a sheep) = 8s., 4,000 (for a turkey) = 7s., 1,000 (for a guinea-fowl) = 1s. 9d. [1¾s.]. One conversion, 2,500 (for a goat) = 6s., seems aberrant: perhaps this should be 5s.

¹⁷ See ‘Case of Richard Graves’, p. 178. Cf. also Duncan 1847, i, 176, equating 15 strings with 1s. 3d. [15d.] ‘currency’.

¹⁸ Fraser’s Journals, p. 40.

¹⁹ See ‘Case of Richard Graves’, doc. 10, W. Duggan to Fraser, 25 Oct. 1851, but referring to a transaction several months earlier.

²⁰ See Johnson 1966: but note that the suggestion that the trade ounce went ‘out of general use’ on the Gold Coast after 1826 (*ibid.*, 205) evidently requires qualification.



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