



## The African Homeland of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (Job ben Solomon)

*Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of the Solomon High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who Was a Slave about Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, Was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734*

by Thomas Bluett, London, 1734, EXCERPTS

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (named Job ben Solomon in England) was born into a family of Muslim clerics in Senegambia, in the Bondu region near the intersection of Senegal River and the Faleme River (which forms the present-day Senegal-Mali border).<sup>1</sup> In 1730 Ayuba, when in his late twenties, was captured during a trading journey, enslaved for two years in Maryland, then freed through the efforts of attorney Thomas Bluett, who compiled and published Job's memoir in 1734. Bluett helped Ayuba return to Africa (via England) "where we hope he is safely arrived to the great joy of his friends, and the honour of the English nation." Ayuba died in Gambia in 1773.

Sections I and III of *Memoirs of the Life of Job*, presented here, describe aspects of Ayuba's family and the Fulbe people, as compiled and narrated by Bluett. (Section II describes his capture, two-year enslavement in Maryland, emancipation through intermediaries including Bluett, and his return to Africa.<sup>2</sup>)



### SECTION I.

*An Account of the Family of JOB; his Education; and the more remarkable Circumstances of his Life, before he was taken Captive.*

**J**OB's Countrymen, like the Eastern People and some others, use to design [identify] themselves by the Names of their Ancestors, and in their Appellations mention their Progenitors several Degrees backward; tho' they also have Surnames for distinguishing their particular Families, much after the same Manner as in *England*. JOB's Name, in his own Country, is HYUBA, BOON SALUMENA, BOON HIBRAHEMA; *i.e.* JOB, the Son of *Solomon*, the Son of *Abraham*. The Surname of his Family is *Jallo*.

JOB, who is now about 31 or 32 Years of age, was born at a Town called *Boonda* in the Country of *Galumbo* (in our Maps *Catumbo*) in the Kingdom of *Futa* in *Africa*, which lies on both Sides the River *Senegal*, and on the south Side reaches as far as the River *Gambia*. These two Rivers, JOB assured me, run pretty near parallel to one another and never meet, contrary to the Position they have in most of our Maps. The Eastern Boundary of the Kingdom of *Futa* or *Senega* is the great Lake, called in our Maps *Lacus Guardae*. The Extent of it, towards the North, is not so certain. The chief City or Town of it is *Tombut*, over against which, on the other side of the River, is *Boonda*, the Place of JOB's Nativity.

About fifty Years ago *Hibrahim*, the Grandfather of JOB, founded the Town of *Boonda* in the Reign of *Bubaker*, then King of *Futa*, and was by his Permission sole Lord Proprietor and Governor of it, and at

National Humanities Center, 2009: [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/). Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who was a Slave About Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, was Set Free, and Sent to His Native Land in the Year 1734*, by Thomas Bluett, London, 1734. Some punctuation and paragraphing modernized by NHC for clarity. Full text online in Documenting the American South (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), at [docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bluett/menu.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bluett/menu.html).

<sup>1</sup> Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1967/1997), pp. 19, 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> For excerpts from Section II, see the Resource Toolbox "Becoming American: The British Atlantic Colonies, 1690-1763," at [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/growth/text5/text5read.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/growth/text5/text5read.htm).

the same Time High Priest, or *Alpha*; so that he had a Power to make what Laws and Regulations he thought proper for the Increase and good Government of his new City. Among other Institutions, one was, that no Person who flies thither for Protection shall be made a Slave. This Privilege is in force there to this Day, and is extended to all in general, that can read and know God, as they express it; and it has contributed much to the Peopling of the Place, which is now very large and flourishing. Some time after the Settlement of this Town *Hibrahim* died, and, as the Priesthood is hereditary there, *Salumen* his Son, the Father of *JOB*, became High Priest. About the same Time *Bubaker* the King dying, his Brother *Gelazi*, who was next Heir, succeeded him. *Gelazi* had a Son named *Sambo*, whom he put under the Care of *Salumen*, *JOB*'s Father, to learn the *Koran* and *Arabic* Language. *JOB* was at this Time also with his Father, was Companion to *Sambo*, and studied along with him. *Sambo*, upon the Death of *Gelazi*, was made King of *Futa*, and reigns there at present.

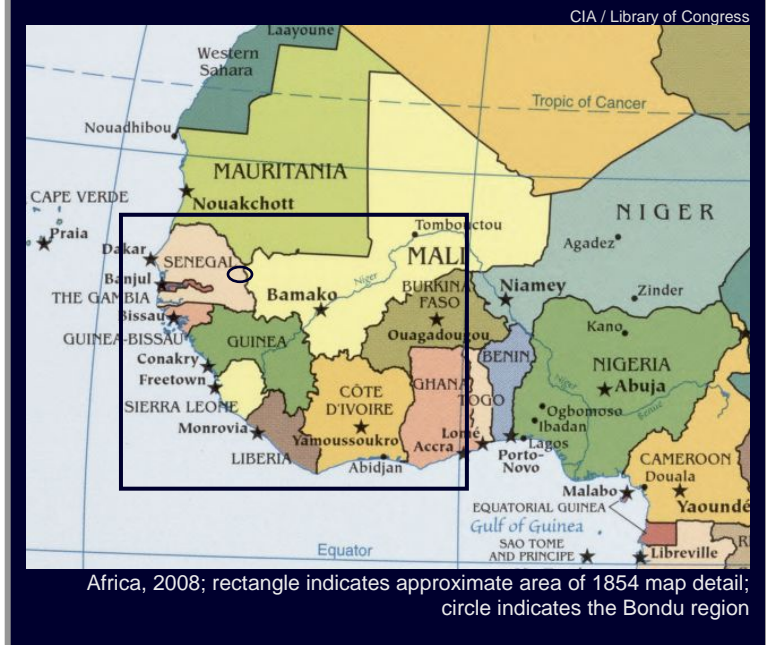
When *JOB* was fifteen Years old, he assisted his Father as *Emaum*, or Sub-priest. About this Age he married the Daughter of the Alpha of *Tombut*, who was then only eleven Years old. By her he had a Son (when she was thirteen Years old) called *Abdolah*, and after that two more Sons called *Hibrahim* and *Sambo*. About two Years before his Captivity he married a second Wife, Daughter of the Alpha of *Tomnga*, by whom he has a Daughter named *Fatima*, after the Daughter of their Prophet *Mahommed*.

Both these Wives, with their Children, were alive when he came from Home.

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Colton's illustrated & embellished steel plate map of the world, 1854, detail; oval marks the Bondu region near the intersection of the Senegal River and the Faleme River (which forms the Senegal-Mali border)



Africa, 2008; rectangle indicates approximate area of 1854 map detail; circle indicates the Bondu region

### SECTION III

*Some Observations, as related by JOB,  
concerning the Manners and Opinions of his Countrymen.*

I Don't pretend here, as I hinted before, to trouble the Reader or myself with a full and regular History of *JOB*'s Country. Those who have the Curiosity to inform themselves more particularly in the History



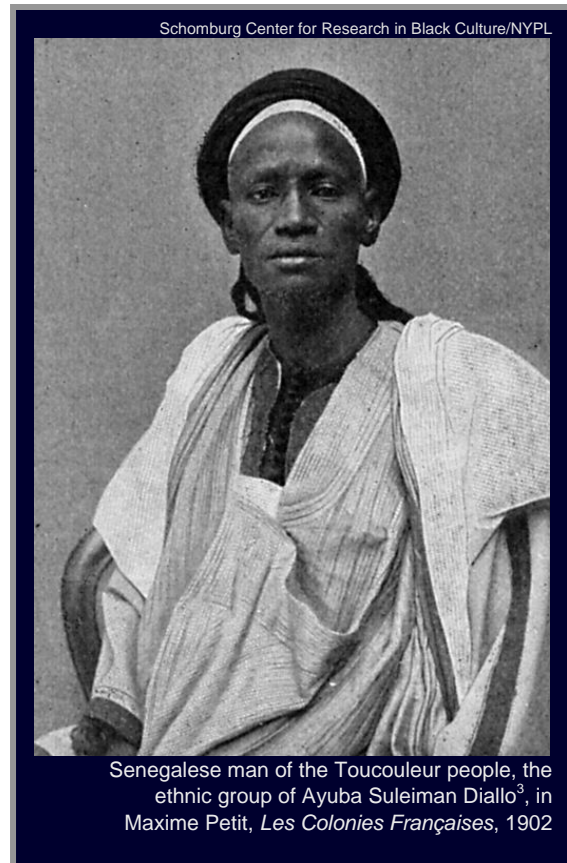
of those Parts of the World may consult the Voyages that are already published on that Subject. I shall only take Notice of some occasional Remarks upon the Customs of the Country, as I had them in Conversation from JOB himself.

It is pretty commonly known that the *Africans* in general, especially those in the inland Countries, are inured from their Infancy to a hard and low Life, being great Strangers to the Luxury and Delicacy of most of the Countries of *Europe*. They have the Necessaries of Life, 'tis true, and might have many of the Conveniences of it too; but such is the Simplicity of their Manners, occasioned chiefly by their Ignorance and want of Correspondence with the politer Part of the World, that they seem contented enough with their plain Necessaries, and don't much hanker after greater Matters, tho' their Country in many Places is capable of great Improvements.

In JOB's Country the Slaves, and poorer sort of People, are employed in preparing the Bread, Corn, &c. And here they labour under a great many Difficulties, having no proper Instruments either for Tilling the Ground or reaping the Corn when it is ripe, insomuch that they us'd, in Harvest-time, to pull it up, Roots and all. To reduce their Corn to Flour, they rub it between two Stones with their Hands, which must be very tedious. Nor is their Fatigue in Building and Carriage less, for they perform the whole by mere Dint of Strength, and downright Labour. The better Sort of People, who apply themselves to Study and Reading, are obliged to read whole Nights together by the Light of the Fire (having no Candles or Lamps, as we have) which must be very troublesome in that hot, sultry Country. These, and several other Difficulties which these People labour under, we hope will be removed by JOB's Return; his Friends here having suited their Presents very judiciously to the Necessities of his Countrymen; and there is scarce any Tool or Machine that can be of real Use to them which JOB has not had from some Friend or other, and their several Uses have been shown to him with a great deal of Care.

Some of those People spend a great Part of their Time in Hunting, particularly after the Elephants, with whose Teeth they drive a great Trade. One of those Hunters affirmed to JOB that he had seen an Elephant surprise a Lion (to which Beast, it seems, the Elephant bears a very great Hatred) and carry him to a Tree, which he split down, and putting the Lion's Head thro', let the Tree close again on the Lion's Neck, and there left him to perish. JOB did not say that he knew this Fact to be true. but it seems to be the more probable, upon account of what he assured me he had been a Witness to himself, *viz.* that an Elephant having catch'd a Lion, carried him directly to a great Slough, and thrusting the Lion's Head under the Mud, held him there till he was smothered.

One Day JOB finding a Cow of his Father's that had been killed, and partly devoured, resolved, if possible, to surprise the Devourer. Accordingly he placed himself in a Tree near the Remains of the Cow; and, in the Close of the Evening, he saw two Lions making up to it with great Caution, moving slow, and looking carefully about them. At last one came up, which JOB shot with a poisoned Arrow, and wounded so deadly that he fell immediately upon the Spot; the other coming up soon after, JOB shot another Arrow and wounded him, upon which he roared out and fled, but the next Morning was found dead about 300 Yards from the Place.



<sup>3</sup> Curtin, p. 23.

The Poison they dip their Arrows in, is the juice of a certain Tree, and is of such a Nature that it infects the Blood in a short Time, and makes the Creature quite stupid and senseless. Altho' it is so deadly a Poison, it does not hinder their eating the Flesh of the Animal that is shot, for as soon as it is stupefied enough to drop down, they catch it, cut its Throat, &c. as their Law directs, and then eat it. If a Man is wounded with one of these Arrows, they have an Herb, which, if immediately apply'd is a sure Remedy, and extracts the Poison.

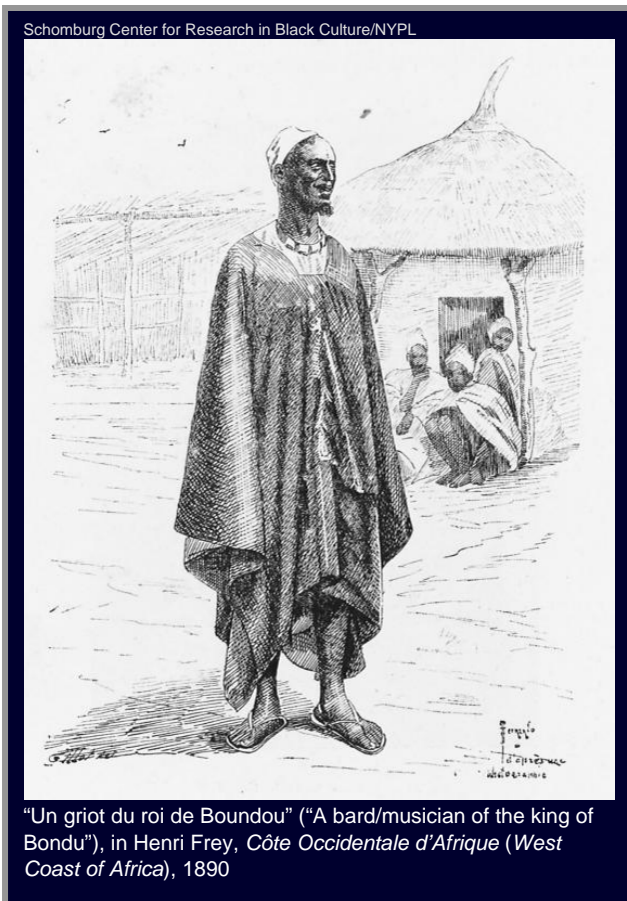
And here I would observe two Things, as well from my own Observations abroad, as from what I have just mentioned. First, that in all Countries, where these wild Beasts are, at least where I have been, Providence has so ordered it that they will all fly at the Sight of a Man and will never attack him if they have any room to escape by Flight. Secondly, that all Poisons, of what Nature soever, have their Antidotes generally near them. One Instance of which I shall mention, as being somewhat extraordinary.

The Milk, or Liquor that is squeezed from the *Caffavi*, or Caffader Roots (of which Roots is made the Bread of that Name, used in *Barbados*, *Jamaica*, all the Leeward, *Caribbean* Islands) is so deadly a Poison that one Pint of it will soon kill any Creature that drinks it. Yet I knew a Cow, which drank a hearty Draught of it and immediately (as if sensible of the Danger she was in) went and fed on a Shrub, which grows common there, called the *sensible Plant*, from the shrivelling up of its Leaves upon the least Touch; and altho' we expected every Minute to see her fall down dead, it so expelled the Poison, that she received not the least Hurt by it.

The Manner of their Marriages and Baptisms is something remarkable. When a Man has a mind to marry his Son (which they generally do much sooner than in *England*) and has found out a suitable Match for him, he goes to the Girl's Father, proposes the Matter to him, and agrees for the Price that he is to pay for her, which the Father of the Woman always gives to her as a Dowry. All Things being concluded on, the two Fathers and the young Man go to the Priest and declare their Agreement, which finishes the Marriage. But now comes the great Difficulty, *viz.* [namely] how the Young Man shall get his Wife home,

for the Women, Cousins, and Relations take on mightily and guard the Door of the House to prevent her being carried away; but at last the young Man's Presents and Generosity to them makes them abate their Grief. He then provides a Friend, well mounted, to carry her off, but as soon as she is up on Horseback, the Women renew their Lamentations and rush in to dismount her. However, the Man is generally successful and rides off with his Prize to the House provided for her. After this they make a Treat for their Friends, but the Woman never appears at it; and tho' the Ladies here in *England* are generally more free after Marriage than before, with the Women in *JOB's* Country it is quite contrary; for they are so very bashful that they will never permit their Husbands to see them without a Veil on for three Years after they are married; insomuch, that altho' *JOB* has a Daughter by his last Wife, yet he never saw her unveiled since Marriage, having been married to her but about two Years before he came from home.

To prevent Quarrels and keep Peace among their Wives, the Husbands divide their Time equally betwixt them, and are so exact in this Affair that if one Wife lies in, the Husband lies



"Un griot du roi de Boundou" ("A bard/musician of the king of Bondou"), in Henri Frey, *Côte Occidentale d'Afrique (West Coast of Africa)*, 1890

alone in her Apartment those Nights that are her Turn and not with the other Wife. If a Wife proves very bad, they put her away and she keeps her Dowry, and any one may marry her after her Divorce; but they don't use to put them away upon slight Occasions. If a Woman puts away her Husband, she must return him her Dowry, and she is look'd upon always after as a scandalous Person, no Man caring to have anything to do with her.

All their Male Children are circumcised; but, besides, they have a kind of Baptism for all Children of both Sexes. When the Child is seven Days old, the People that are invited meet together at the Father's House; the Father names the Child, and the Priest writes the Name of the Child on a piece of smooth Board. Then the Father kills a Cow or Sheep, according to his Ability, part of which is dress'd for the Company, and the rest distributed amongst the Poor, after which the Child is wash'd all over with fair Water, and then the Priest writes the Child's Name on Paper, which is rolled up, and tied about the Child's Neck, where it remains till it is wore or rubb'd off.

The Ceremony at their Burials has nothing remarkable in it. They put the dead Body in the Earth and cover it up as we do in *England*, saying some Prayers over it, which JOB told me were intended only for the Benefit of the Bystanders and not of the dead Person, for they are not of opinion that the Dead can reap any Advantage by their Devotion at that Time.

Their Opinions and Traditions in Matters of Religion are much the same with those of the Generality of the *Mahometans* [Muslims], tho' the learned Sort of them give a more plausible and refined Turn to the gross and sensual Doctrines of the *Koran* than those in *Turkey* and some other Places. They have a strong Aversion to the least Appearance of Idolatry, insomuch that they will not keep a Picture of any kind whatsoever in their Houses; and the Popish [i.e., Roman Catholic] Worship at the *French Factory* in their Neighbourhood has much confirmed them in an Opinion that all Christians are Idolaters. But I shall not say any more here upon this Head, since their Religion, and the Ceremonies relating to it, are pretty well known.

I might add several other Particulars, concerning their Dress, their Houses, Economy, and the like, but these too being described at large in several Books already published, I shall make an End of this Section, and so pass on.

