

Gomes Eannes de Azurara

THE CHRONICLE OF THE DISCOVERY AND CONQUEST OF GUINEA

ca. 1450

Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eannes de Azurara compiled accounts of the earliest voyages along the west African coast and the capture of Africans by Europeans.

CHAPTER XXV.

Wherein the Author reasoneth somewhat concerning the pity inspired by the captives, and of how the division was made.

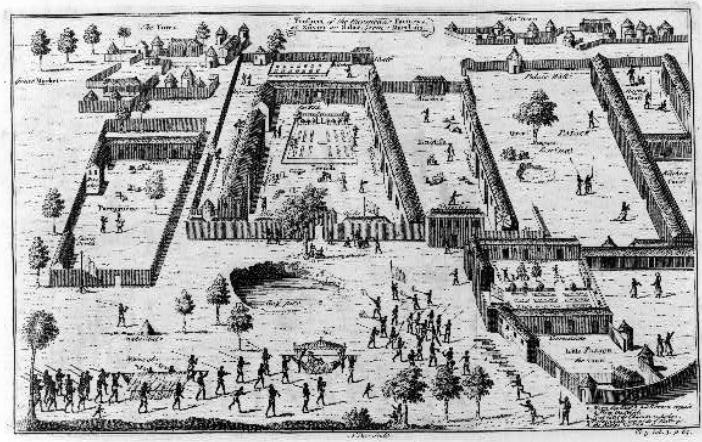
... On the next day, which was the 8th of the month of August, very early in the morning, by reason of the heat, the seamen began to make ready their boats, and to take out those captives, and carry them on shore, as they were commanded. And these, placed all together in that field, were a marvellous sight; for amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned; others were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a

lower hemisphere. But what heart could be so hard as not to be pierced with piteous feeling to see that company? For some kept their heads low and their faces bathed in tears, looking one upon another; others stood groaning very dolorously, looking up to the height of heaven, fixing their eyes upon it, crying out loudly, as if asking help of the Father of Nature; others struck their faces with the palms of their hands, throwing themselves at full length upon the ground; others made their lamentations in the manner of a dirge, after the custom of their country. And though we could not understand the words of their language, the sound of it right well accorded with the measure of their sadness. But to increase their sufferings still more, there now arrived those who had charge of the division of the captives, and who began to separate one from another, in order to make an equal partition of the fifts; and then was it needful to part fathers from sons, husbands from wives, brother from brothers. no respect was shewn either to friends or relations, but each fell where his lot took him.



Guinea propria, nec non Nigritiae vel Terrae Nigrorum maxima pars ,
1743 (details)





Slave compounds maintained by European traders on the Gulf of Guinea in what is now Nigeria, engraving, publ. 1746

O powerful fortune, that with thy wheels doest and undoest, compassing the matters of this world as pleaseth thee, do thou at last put before the eyes of that miserable race some understanding of matters to come; that they may receive some consolation in the midst of their great sorrow. And you who are so busy in making that division of the captives, look with pity upon so much misery; and see how they cling one to the other, so that you can hardly separate them.

And who could finish that partition without very great toil? for as often as they had placed them in one part the sons, seeing their fathers in another,

rose with great energy and rushed over to them; the mothers clasped their other children in their arms, and threw themselves flat on the ground with them; receiving blows with little pity for their own flesh, if only they might not be torn from them.

And so troublously they finished the partition; for besides the toil they had with the captives, the field was quite full of people, both from the town [Lagos] and from the surrounding villages and districts, who for that day gave rest to their hands (in which lay their power to get their living) for the sole purpose of beholding this novelty. And with what they saw, while some were weeping and others separating the captives, they caused such a tumult as greatly to confuse those who directed the partition. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI.

How Dinis Diaz went to the land of the Negroes, and of the Captives that he took.

. . . [A]s the caravel was voyaging along that sea, those on land [Africans] saw it and marvelled much at the sight, for it seemeth they had never seen or heard speak of the like; and some of them supposed it to be a fish, while others thought it to be a phantom, and others again said it might be a bird that ran so on its journey over that sea. And after reasoning thus concerning the novelty, four of them were bold enough to inform themselves concerning this doubt; and so got into a small boat made out of one hollow tree-trunk without anything else being added thereto. . . . And they came a good way out towards where the caravel was pursuing its course; and those in her could not restrain themselves from appearing on deck. But when the negroes saw that those in the ship were men, they made haste to flee as best they could; and though the caravel followed after them, the want of a sufficient wind prevented their capture. And as they [Portuguese] went further on, they met with other boats, whose crews, seeing ours to be men, were alarmed at the novelty of the sight; and moved by fear they sought to flee, each and all; but because our men had a better opportunity than before, they captured four of them, and these were the first to be taken by Christians in their own land, and there is no chronicle or history that relateth aught to the contrary.

And for certain this was no small honour for our Prince [Henry], whose mighty power was thus sufficient to command peoples so far from our kingdom, making booty among the neighbours of the land of Egypt; and Dinis Diaz ought to share in this honour, for he was the first who (by his [Prince Henry's] command) captured Moors in that land. And now he pushed on till he arrived at a great cape, to which they gave the name of Cape Verde.