

Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon
Thomas Bluett (1734)

The person whom white author Thomas Bluett calls "Job, the son of Solomon" had the Arabic name Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. Diallo was born into an upper-class Muslim family in Futa Toro, a kingdom in the Senegambia region of western Africa. As a young man, Diallo was kidnapped by members of a rival ethnic group, sold to a British slave trader, and transported to North America. Once whites realized that he came from an elite background, Diallo was freed by repurchase and transported back home. Thomas Bluett, who tells the story, was a judge working in colonial Maryland who helped secure Diallo's freedom.

About fifty years ago, Hibraham, 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 the same time, high priest, or *alpha* [...] Sometime after the settlement of this town, Hibraham died; and as the priesthood is hereditary there, Salumen his son, the father of Job, became high priest. [...] 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 Hibraham 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. [...]

In February 1730, Job's father, hearing of an English ship at Gambia River, sent him, with two servants to attend him, to sell two Negroes and to buy paper and some other necessaries—but desired him not to venture over the river, because the country of the Mandingoes, who are enemies to the people of Futa, lies on the other side. Job, not agreeing with Captain Pike (who commanded the ship lying then at Gambia in the service of Captain Henry Hunt, brother to Mr. William Hunt, merchant, in Little Tower Street, London), sent back the two servants to acquaint his father with it and to let him know that he intended to go farther. Accordingly, having agreed with another man, named Loumein Yoas, who understood the Mandingo language, to go with him as his interpreter, he crossed the River Gambia and disposed of his Negroes for some cows.

As he was returning home, he stopped for some refreshment at the house of an old acquaintance [...] It happened that a company of the Mandingoes, who live upon plunder, passing by at that time and observing him unarmed, rushed in, to the number of seven or eight at once, at a back door and pinioned Job before he could get to his arms, together with his interpreter, who is a slave in Maryland still. They then shaved their heads and beards, which Job and his man resented as the highest indignity, though the Mandingoes meant no more by it than to make them appear like slaves taken in war.

On the 27th of February, 1730, they carried them to Captain Pike at Gambia, who purchased them; and on the first of March, they were put on board. Soon after, Job found means to acquaint Captain Pike that he was the same person that came to trade with him a few days before, and after what manner he had been taken. Upon this, Captain Pike gave him leave to redeem himself

and his man; and Job sent to an acquaintance of his father's, near Gambia, who promised to send to Job's father to inform him of what had happened, that he might take some course to have him set at liberty. But it being a fortnight's journey between that friend's house and his father's, and the ship sailing in about a week after, Job was brought with the rest of the slaves to Annapolis, in Maryland, and delivered to Mr. Vachell Denton, factor to Mr. Hunt, before mentioned. [...]

Mr. Vachell Denton sold Job to one Mr. Tolsey in Kent Island, in Maryland, who put him to work in making tobacco; but he was soon convinced that Job had never been used to such labor. He every day showed more and more uneasiness under this exercise and at last grew sick, being no way able to bear it, so that his master was obliged to find easier work for him and therefore put him to tend the cattle. Job would often leave the cattle and withdraw into the woods to pray; but a white boy frequently watched him and, whilst he was at his devotion, would mock him and throw dirt in his face. This very much disturbed Job and added considerably to his other misfortunes, all which were increased by his ignorance of the English language, which prevented his complaining or telling his case to any person about him.

Grown in some measure desperate by reason of his present hardships, he resolved to travel at a venture, thinking he might possibly be taken up by some master who would use him better, or otherwise meet with some lucky accident to divert or abate his grief. Accordingly, he traveled through the woods till he came to the county of Kent, upon Delaware Bay [...] There is a law in force throughout the colonies of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, etc., as far as Boston in New England, viz., that any Negro or white servant who is not known in the county, or has no pass, may be secured by any person and kept in the common jail till the master of such servant shall fetch him. Therefore, Job, being able to give no account of himself, was put in prison there.

This happened about the beginning of June 1731, when I, who was attending the courts there and had heard of Job, went with several gentlemen to the jailer's house, being a tavern, and desired to see him. He was brought into the tavern to us but could not speak one word of English. Upon our talking and making signs to him, he wrote a line or two before us and, when he read it, pronounced the words *Allah* and *Mahommed*; by which, and his refusing a glass of wine we offered him, we perceived he was a Mahometan but could not imagine of what country he was or how he got thither, for by his affable carriage and the easy composure of his countenance, we could perceive he was no common slave.

When Job had been some time confined, an old Negro man who lived in that neighborhood and could speak the Jalloff language, which Job also understood, went to him and conversed with him. By this Negro, the keeper was informed to whom Job belonged and what was the cause of his leaving his master. The keeper thereupon wrote to his master, who soon after fetched him home and was much kinder to him than before, allowing him a place to pray in and some other conveniences in order to make his slavery as easy as possible.

Yet slavery and confinement was by no means agreeable to Job, who had never been used to it; he therefore wrote a letter in Arabic to his father, acquainting him with his misfortunes, hoping he might yet find means to redeem him. This letter he sent to Mr. Vachell Denton, desiring it might be sent to Africa by Captain Pike; but he being gone to England, Mr. Denton sent the letter enclosed to Mr. Hunt in order for it to be sent to Africa by Captain Pike from England. But

Captain Pike had sailed for Africa before the letter came to Mr. Hunt, who therefore kept it in his own hands till he should have a proper opportunity of sending it. It happened that this letter was seen by James Oglethorpe, Esq., who, according to his usual goodness and generosity, took compassion on Job and gave his bond to Mr. Hunt for the payment of a certain sum upon the delivery of Job here in England. Mr. Hunt, upon this, sent to Mr. Denton, who purchased him again of his master for the same money which Mr. Denton had formerly received for him—his master being very willing to part with him, as finding him no ways fit for his business.

He lived some time with Mr. Denton at Annapolis before any ship could stir out, upon account of the ice that lay in all the rivers of Maryland at that time. [...] In March 1733, he set sail in the *William*, Captain George Uriel commander, in which ship I was also a passenger. The character which the captain and I had of him at Annapolis induced us to teach him as much of the English language as we could, he being then able to speak but few words of it, and those hardly intelligible. [...] By the time that we arrived in England, which was the latter end of April 1733, he had learned so much of our language that he was able to understand most of what we said in common conversation, and we that were used to his manner of speaking could make shift to understand him tolerably well.

During the voyage, he was very constant in his devotions, which he never omitted on any pretense, notwithstanding we had exceeding bad weather all the time we were at sea. We often permitted him to kill our fresh stock, that he might eat of it himself, for he eats no flesh unless he has killed the animal with his own hands or knows that it has been killed by some Mussulman. He has no scruple about fish but won't touch a bit of pork, it being expressly forbidden by their law. [...]

On our arrival in England, [...] I went [...] to the African Company, who [...] showed me the orders [...] that Job should be accommodated at the African House, at the company's expense, till one of the company's ships should go to Gambia, in which he should be sent back to his friends without any ransom. [...]

Job's mind being now perfectly easy, and being himself more known, he went cheerfully among his friends to several places, both in town and country. One day, being at Sir Hans Sloan's, he expressed his great desire to see the royal family. Sir Hans promised to get him introduced, [...] and he was soon clothed in a rich silk dress, made up after his own country fashion, and introduced to their Majesties and the rest of the royal family. Her Majesty was pleased to present him with a rich gold watch; and the same day, he had the honor to dine with his Grace the Duke of Mountague and some others of the nobility [...] 'Tis not possible for me to recollect the many favors he received from his Grace and several other noblemen and gentlemen who showed a singular generosity towards him; only, I may say in general, that the goods which were given him, and which he carried over with him, were worth upwards of 500 pounds, besides which he was well furnished with money in case any accident should oblige him to go on shore or occasion particular charges at sea.

About the latter end of July last, he embarked on board one of the African Company's ships, bound for Gambia, where we hope he is safely arrived to the great joy of his friends and the honor of the English nation.

Source: Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon* [...] (London: Printed for Richard Ford, 1734), 13-26, 30-33 (sections 1-2), <https://books.google.de/books?id=kwJcAAAAQAAJ>. Public domain.

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