

This anonymous British publication recounts what was, at the time, a famous incident: the deceptive enslavement, by a British trader, of a young Fante man from an elite family, who became known to the English-speaking public as William Ansa Sessarakoo (though this publication refers to him only by the nickname Cupid). Sessarakoo's father was head of the government of Annamaboe, a seaport in present-day Ghana that supplied slaves for the trans-Atlantic trade. A British slave trader arranged with Sessarakoo's father to transport Sessarakoo to England to be educated there, but instead the trader sold Sessarakoo in the Caribbean colony of Barbados. Five years later, Sessarakoo was located and recovered by the Royal African Company, a trading firm sponsored by the British government, which wanted to maintain good relations with Sessarakoo's father. Sessarakoo spent two more years abroad in England, being hosted like a minor foreign royal, then returned home to Annamaboe.

This account alludes briefly to religion in the context of decrying the immorality of the British trader who sold Sessarakoo into slavery. But the text is also of interest for its ambivalences around race: its highly circumscribed sympathy for the enslaved and its criticisms of anti-black prejudice, deployed alongside patronizing attitudes toward Africans and claims about the innate virtues of the English.

The Fantin country is as happily situated as any upon the Gold Coast, lying pretty near the heart of it. [...] As for the people of Fantin, they form a free republic, the chief magistrate in which is the *braffo* of Annamaboe. This title, in the language of the country, signifies *leader* or *chief*, and he is assisted by the *caboceiros*, sages or old men of the town. [...] The liberty which these people enjoy makes them both powerful and rich; so that the English, the Dutch, and the French neither have, nor pretend to have, any coercive power over them, nor ever had, though the town of Annamaboe lay immediately under the guns of the English fort. [...] The source of this power of theirs was, in the first place, their capacity of keeping the fort continually blocked up and cutting off supplies of provisions, by which those in the place must have been quickly starved. [...] Therefore, notwithstanding their fort, [the English] were at all times obliged to live upon good terms with the inhabitants and braffo of Annamaboe, as their business in that country was commerce, not dominion. [...]

The braffo (head caboceiro, or Negro chief) values himself upon his English name, which is John Corrente [...] He is a very considerable trader himself in gold, slaves, and whatever else the country affords, and lived always upon very good terms with the servants of the African Company, who have, on their side, taken care to pay him his rent very exactly for the fort [...]

Now it must be observed that the French, who are very well established at Whydaw, have been for many years desirous of having a share in the trade of Annamaboe, and for that purpose took extraordinary pains to gain the goodwill of the caboceiro John [...] they boasted mightily of the great power of their king, the magnificence of his court, the extent of his dominions, the number, wealth, and politeness of his subjects. Honest John Corrente [...] seemed to doubt whether all they said was true, upon which they took occasion to propose his sending one of his sons over to France [...] the Negro chief began to reflect within himself upon the [...] advantage that must

arise from having one of his children more knowing, and by far better bred, than any of his countrymen ever were; and [...] in the end, he consented to their proposition [...]

The young Negro was sent over to France [...] and [...] was received with all the honors due to a prince. He was not only clothed, lodged, maintained, and attended, but educated, in all respects, in a manner suitable to one of that dignity and, as such, was received and treated at court [...A]fter he had remained in France a proper time, and all imaginable care had been taken to show him everything that might give him high ideas of the king and people, he was sent home in one of the company's ships, in a very handsome manner, and with fine-laced clothes to dazzle the eyes of the Negroes and to draw the father over entirely to the French interest. There is no doubt to be made that he was very welcome to the old caboceiro, who was highly pleased to see his son safe returned to Africa and to hear what mighty honors had been paid him in Europe; he expressed himself in very full terms upon this subject to the French agents, with whom he dealt more largely than formerly but without estranging himself from the English. [...]

It was not only with the English and French companies that the caboceiro of Annamaboe maintained a close correspondence, but with the separate traders of the former nation also, who in modern times have much improved and extended their commerce in those parts [...] A certain captain, who was one of the principal directors of this kind of commerce [...] labored with all the address of which he was master to render himself a favorite with the caboceiro of Annamaboe [...] It was to this captain, particularly, that the caboceiro of Annamaboe opened himself frequently upon the head of his son's voyage to France [...F]inding how useful the knowledge which one of his sons had acquired by travel was, by his serving as an interpreter with one set of people, he had a mind to procure the like advantages by employing another son to enter as thoroughly into the affairs of another nation [...]

The son he intended to send to England [...] was his greatest favorite; his mother was not only a free woman and his chief wife, but also the daughter of one of the principal persons in the country. The youth [...] had lived for a time, when a perfect child, in the fort with one of the African Company's principal officers, where he had learned to speak English and had acquired a great confidence in, as well as a sincere affection for, the nation. [...] When, therefore, the old caboceiro expressed, in general terms, his wish that some opportunity might offer of sending him to England, that he might be educated there and acquire that knowledge which rendered white men so much superior to themselves and to the rest of the Negro nations, it was very agreeable news both to the lad and to the captain.

The former—to whom the English had given the name of CUPID, as most expressive of his sweet and amiable temper—showed the greatest willingness imaginable to enter into his father's scheme and to make a voyage to Europe, as, on the other hand, the captain seemed to be ravished with the proposal [...] What returns both the old caboceiro and his son have met with for their friendship, hospitality, and favors, the world is not unacquainted with; and what right they have to treat with the most ignominious and contemptible language the Negroes in general, mankind will likewise judge. But supposing them as low and mean as those who hate and despise them most can represent them, this can afford no justification for deceiving or maltreating them. There is certainly no credit to be acquired by outwitting the ignorant, nor will it prove a recommendation, in any country under the cope of heaven, for men who have a good education

to compass their own ends by imposing false colors upon such as they look upon as beneath them in every respect. What grounds there is for this opinion, or how man can differ from man but by the superior virtues of the mind, the best judges will find it hard to distinguish, since as to all other advantages, they are merely accidental, and he who makes the best use of them is the best man, let his complexion be black or white.

At length the time came that the captain had finished his affairs upon the coast and was to leave it, which gave great pleasure to all parties [...] The sprightly youth, full of the fond hopes of seeing the world, was impatient to depart; the captain gave not the least check to their hopes but, on the contrary, continued to inspire his pupil with a passionate desire of viewing all the beauties of an island, the most celebrated in the known world. [...] Under this happy delusion, he completed his voyage from the road of Annamaboe to Bridgetown, in Barbados [...] the unfortunate youth had not the least foresight of the impending evil till, like a torrent, it came pouring upon him all at once—and but for the interposition of Providence had irretrievably buried him in misery and despair.

When the captain had sold him, and he was put into a boat to be carried to his master, he thought he was going on board the ship that was to carry him to England. But what language can express his surprise when, from the rough usage that he met with from two slaves that were in the boat, he had no room left him to doubt that his condition was the same with theirs? It must be left to the reader's imagination to frame a notion of his distress, which will be so much the harder, as the freedom and happiness of our situation hinders us from ever beholding a sight that any way resembles it. It must assuredly have struck him with a horror for white men in general—have filled his mind at once with as black thoughts of them, and with better foundation, than some of these affect to have for those of his country with very little cause. [...]

It was some relief to him that he fell into the hands of a gentleman of distinguished character, where he was treated with much humanity, which abated somewhat of the bitterness of that sudden and undeserved reverse of fortune, revived him a little, and encouraged him to breathe and live. [...] He saw numbers in the like condition, from a variety of accidents, but none of them in any degree comparable to that which had brought this heavy lot upon him. He was ashamed, however, to show less courage than the rest or not to oppose misfortune with equal steadiness of mind; he resolved, therefore, to bear, though he could not be reconciled to, his fate and to sustain, without complaining, a calamity it was out of his power to remove. [...] But neither time nor these transient comforts could so far dissipate the sense of his condition as to remove that melancholy which followed his first consternation [...]

The captain, [...] soon after his selling his pupil, transmitted to the caboceiro of Annamaboe an account current, upon the foot of which [the caboceiro] was considerably in [the captain's] debt; the justice of this, however, [the caboceiro] has since controverted. But be the matter how it will, it seems [...] that if procuring satisfaction for his debt was all the captain had in view, he might as well have obtained it by keeping the young man in his custody till the father had satisfied his agents [...] However, not long after this, the captain died and left the young African in circumstances as miserable and as desperate as could be imagined [...]

The French continued to keep up their intimacy and close correspondence with the caboceiro of

Annamaboe, in which they had all along so much found their account, and [...] the commerce of Annamaboe fell almost wholly into the hands of the French, which, as it was very natural, gave great distaste to the servants of the Royal African Company [...] They did not spare either endeavors or expostulations with the caboceiro, but to very little purpose [...] He told them very plainly that he did no more than he had a right to do and that he meant, for the future, to deal not only on what terms, and in what manner, but with whom he pleased.

This declaration needed no commentary; and therefore, those who were entrusted with the African Company's concerns resolved [...] to recur to the only means now left to set affairs to rights, which was force. Accordingly, at the request of one of the company's principal agents, the king's frigate stood in as near the town of Annamaboe as could be done with safety and began to fire upon it. [...] The company's agent [...] took an opportunity of sending [...] a message to the caboceiro, importing that as he had always valued himself upon being an Englishman, and that the nation was now at war with the French, it was not only improper but unlawful for him to correspond with them. At the same time, [the agent] put [the caboceiro] in mind of his former good correspondence with the company, the sincere regard they had always shown for him, and the great readiness on their part to forget what was past and to renew their old friendship.

The Negro caboceiro [...] insisted upon the kind usage his son had met with in France, and the outrage and insult that had been offered him by the captain who, under color of carrying his child to be educated in England, had sold him for a slave, which fact he looked upon as sufficient to release him from all former obligations. However, [...] provided satisfaction was made for the injustice that had been done him, he was very willing that things between them should be once more set upon their former foot [...]

It was promised to the caboceiro John that the company would inquire after and recover his son, that he should be carried to England and taken care of there, after which he should be also sent safely home. [...] The son of the caboceiro of Annamaboe was without much difficulty found, and, a valuable consideration being given to the gentleman who bought him, he was happily restored to liberty and to his former good opinion of the candor of the British nation. For the pains taken on his behalf, and the great zeal expressed to wipe off the aspersion occasioned by his ill usage, satisfied him fully that his misfortune befell him from the disposition of a single person and was entirely disapproved by Englishmen of every denomination, those even of the lowest rank expressing a just disdain of such iniquitous practices, not more incompatible with the doctrines of religion, or the principles of morality, than with the natural candor and generosity of a true English soul [...]

Upon his coming to England, his case was properly represented and the facts relating to it, [...] which have entitled him to that high protection, that generous and kind notice, which has been taken of him by those who have a becoming concern for natural equity and justice, as well as for the reputation and honor of the British people. This, as every measure of the kind will be, has been received with a voice of universal applause; the nation has ratified and confirmed the rectitude of this action shown by the government, and have taken a just share in that wise and well-judged compassion which the case of this noble and unfortunate stranger so apparently deserved.

Source: *The Royal African: Or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe* (London: Printed for W. Reeve, G. Woodfall, and J. Barnes, [1749]), <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20235090>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

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