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THE ^{ME 19.19}
PORTUGUESE EXPEDITION

TO

ABYSSINIA

IN 1541-1543.

AS NARRATED BY CASTANHOSO,

WITH SOME

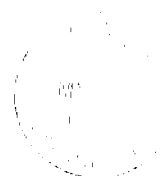
*CONTEMPORARY LETTERS, THE SHORT ACCOUNT
OF BERMUDEZ, AND CERTAIN EXTRACTS
FROM CORREA.*

Translated and Edited

BY

R. S. WHITEWAY,

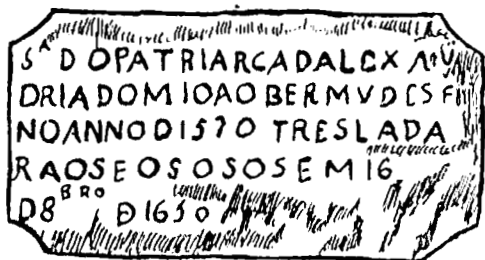
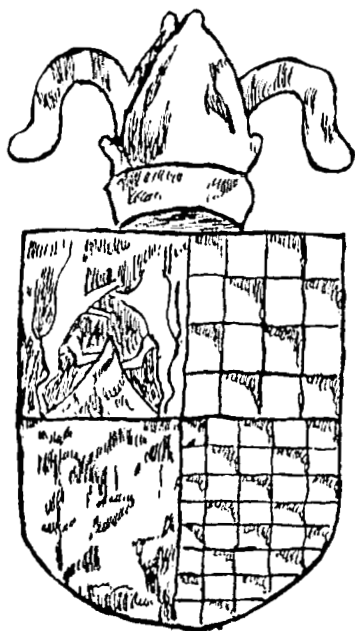
BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE (RETIRED).



ÆTHIOPIA was saved by four hundred and fifty Portuguese, who displayed in the field the native valour of Europeans, and the artificial powers of the musket and cannon.—GIBBON, chap. 47.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY.

M. DCCCCLII.



BERMUDEZ' MONUMENT.

(From the edition of his Book published at Lisbon in 1875.)

This is a short account of the embassy which the patriarch D. João Bermudez brought from the Emperor of Ethiopia, vulgarly called Preste John, to the most Christian and zealous-in-the-faith-of-Christ King of Portugal, D. João, the third of that name, dedicated to the most high and powerful and of happiest auspices King, also of Portugal, D. Sebastião, the first of that name.

In which, too, is related the death of D. Christovão da Gama and the fortunes of the Portuguese, his companions.

In Lisbon, at the house of Francisco Correa, Printer to the Cardinal Infante, in the year 1565.

delicate as *sinabafas*,¹ and *beatilhas*,² so fine that a piece of thirty or forty ells could be held between the hands. They found also much gold in pots and vessels, and buried under the hearths in their huts, where they used to hide it as the most secure place; they themselves showed it to our men to escape death. The King would not stay here long, as he did not intend to do them great damage; merely to frighten them. The winter, too, was drawing near, and it was necessary to return to his country before the rivers rose, which are heavily flooded in that part and quite stop travel on the roads; because the winters are very rainy and the land mountainous; the rivers collect much water from these mountains, and swell vastly. We therefore very soon left that rabble, and marched towards Damute, which lies nearly due west of the Gafates.

CHAPTER LI.

Of the Kingdom of Damute, and of its Provinces, and of the great riches there are in it, and of certain marvellous things.

THE kingdom of Damute marches on the western side with the Gafates, of whom I have above spoken; it is on the bank of the Nile, at the spot where it cuts the equator.³ This province stands rather surrounded by the Nile than on either side of it, for that river makes here many and considerable bends. The approach to this kingdom is most difficult, by reason of the rugged crags there are on the banks of the Nile. Besides that these are rugged, there are among them certain passes made artificially in rocks bored by a crowbar, and closed by gates guarded by armed

¹ *Sinabafa*; see Yule's Glossary, *s.v.*, *Shunbuff*.

² *Beatilha*; see Yule's Glossary, *s.v.*, *Betteela*, a kind of muslin

³ An error of nearly 700 miles; Damot is not on the equator.

men: so that a small force can resist and prevent the entry of those enemies who desire to pass without their permission. When the Emperor goes there these gates are broken, and opened freely to all who desire to enter. The kingdom of Damute is large, with several subordinate provinces.¹ The chief part is inhabited by Christians, but some provinces belong to pagans. In all are found great stores of gold and of rock crystal. All the country is well supplied and fertile, especially the part nearest the Nile, which has more hills and streams than the rest. It breeds numerous animals, wild and tame, worms (*bichos*), and strange and poisonous serpents. They breed cattle, horses, buffaloes, mules, asses, sheep, and other flocks; the cattle are larger than ours, so much so that some of them are almost as large as elephants. They have huge horns; some of them will even hold a pitcherful of wine. They are used to transport and store wine and water, as pitchers and barrels are here.² I dare to say this, because D. Rodrigo de Lima brought one of these horns of this size to this kingdom during the lifetime of the King, your grandfather, when there accompanied him the Ambassador Tagazauo and the Padre Franciscalvarez. There is found

¹ Damot is on the right bank of the Blue Nile, at the opening of the great bend that river makes, and just south of its source. Gafat lies on the south of it, the Gojame district on the east, and Agoumeder on the west. It is part of the province of Gojame, which itself includes the whole of the great bend. Many of the stories told in this chapter are also in Alvarez, chap. cxxxiii. See Basset, *Histoire*, p. 54 *n.*, for further information.

² The size of the oxen which carry these large horns is grossly exaggerated here; perhaps a sentence in Alvarez (chap. cxxxiii) may be responsible. Lobo (p. 70), with his love of the fabulous, says these oxen with the large horns are fed on cows' milk; sometimes a single one requiring that of three or four cows daily. As a matter of fact, these cattle are of the usual size, but for some reason the horns of both sexes are at times abnormally large. Salt (p. 259) speaks of horns nearly 4 ft. long and 21 ins. in girth. Raffray (p. 247) says he measured the capacity of one, which he found to hold 14 litres, or rather over three gallons. They are not peculiar to this part of Abyssinia.

in this country a kind of unicorn, which is wild and timid, of the shape of a horse and the size of an ass.¹ There are there elephants, lions, leopards, and other wild beasts which we do not know here. Near Damute is a province of women without men, who live in the manner told of the ancient Amazons of Scythia, who at a certain time consented to the visits of some men, their neighbours; of the children, they sent the males to their father, and kept the females, bringing them up in their own customs and manner. Those of Ethiopia act in the same way; they also burn the left breast like the others did, in order to more quickly draw the bows they use in war and the chase. The queen of these women does not consort with men, and is therefore worshipped by them as a goddess.² They are suffered and preserved, as it is said they were founded by the Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon. In the country of these women are griffins, which are birds so large that they kill buffaloes, and raise them in their claws as an eagle lifts a rabbit. It is said that in certain precipitous and uninhabited mountains is born and lives the bird phenix, which is sole and alone in the world, and is

¹ The Portuguese editor takes this to apply to the rhinosceros; it is more likely the oryx antelope, which, when standing in profile, appears to have only one horn. A rhinosceros was no novelty, as one was seen in Portugal in 1515, and Castanheda's description (Bk. III, chap. cxxxiv) was published in 1552. Lobo (p. 69) describes the unicorn as an animal so timid that it can only be seen dashing from one thicket to another, and as in appearance like a large well-made bay horse, with black points; he distinguishes between those from different provinces. He adds that they are so fearful that they go always in company with other animals, especially the elephant, to whom all stags and gazelles resort for protection against beasts of prey.

² Alvarez' account is different. He says the queen does not marry, but has children; also that there are permanent male residents, but the women take the lead in everything. It is, of course, useless to search for the origin of this tale in Abyssinia, but Bruce speaks of a Princess Fatima, called "Negusta Errum," or Queen of the Greeks, who in the early seventeenth century reigned at Mendera, near the Atbara river (35 deg. east longitude, and just north of the 15 deg. north latitude). The ruler of the state was always a woman, who was sovereign over a Greek colony

one of the marvels of nature. The dwellers in those countries say that there is this bird there, and that they have seen it and know it, and that it is a large and beautiful bird. There are other birds there so large that they cast a shadow like a cloud. Up the Nile, towards the south, there is, on the borders of Damute, a large province called Conche. This is subordinate to Damute, and there dwell there pagans: the chief is called by the name of his title, Ax Gagce, which means lord of riches, as in fact he is.¹ When he needs them, the Ax Gagce collects ten thousand horse and over twenty thousand foot. He has with his army one thousand hand mills, worked by women, who grind in them the meal needed for the army. When we were in Damute this chief was in rebellion against the King of Damute; on this, King Gradeus said to me that, as a prelate and mediator of peace, I should send word to him, that his majesty was much enraged against him because of his rebellion and disobedience, and had determined to destroy him by means of the invincible and superhuman strength of the Portuguese, whom he had brought with him for that purpose. I did this, and told him he should obey his Emperor, and bring him his tribute and visit him, as I pledged myself that his majesty would treat him with clemency and kindness. He agreed, and sent a large sum of gold, and many cows and other supplies, sufficient for all the army, and many slaves, mules, and asses for the transport. The Ax Gagce supplied the Emperor's camp completely, nothing being wanting. At length he arrived, accompanied by many people well equipped, both horse and foot, and he very richly clothed. When he arrived at the point where he

¹ What this name is cannot be said. Ludolf (Bk. I, chap. iii) mentions a Galla country called Gajghe, but gives no indication of its position. Pearce (vol. II, p. 10) speaks on hearsay of the Coucha Gallas as separated from "Coffa" by a river.