

African childhoods

**Source: NARRATIVE of the Enslavement of OTTOBAH CUGOANO, a Native of Africa;** **published by himself, in the Year 1787.** <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/cugoano/cugoano.html>

I was born in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn; my father was a companion to the chief in that part of the country of Fantee, and when the old king died I was left in his house with his family; soon after I was sent for by his nephew, Ambro Accasa, who succeeded the old king in the chiefdom of that part of Fantee, known by the name of Agimaque and Assince. I lived with his children, enjoying peace and tranquillity, about twenty moons, which, according to their way of reckoning time, is two years. I was sent for to visit an uncle, who lived at a considerable distance from Agimaque. The first day after we set out we arrived at Assinee, and the third day at my uncle's habitation, where I lived about three months, and was then thinking of returning to my father and young companion at Agimaque; but by this time I had got well acquainted with some of the children of my uncle's hundreds of relations, and we were some days too venturesome in going into the woods to gather fruit and catch birds, and such amusements as pleased us. One day I refused to go with the rest, being rather apprehensive that something might happen to us; till one of my playfellows said to me, "Because you belong to the great men, you are afraid to "venture your carcase, or else of the bounsam," which is the devil. This enraged me so much, that I set a resolution to join the rest, and we went into the woods, as usual but we had not been above two hours, before our troubles began, when several great ruffians came upon us suddenly, and said we had committed a fault against their lord, and we must go and answer for it ourselves before him.

Question:

What did Cugoano and his friends enjoy doing?

**Source: The History of George Dale, a native of Africa, 1790
(National Records of Scotland reference GD50/235/6).**

History of Geo. Dale [ ] now in Edinburgh, as related by himself at Edinburgh 6th Aug 1790

General Remarks as given by him, in answer to Queries put to him -

He says Nago, the nation he came from, is a good way up the Country - the nations contiguous to it, he calls Poppa, (which it seems extends Between Nago and the Sea Coast), Ibo, Cromanty, Congo etc. He says every Nation is governed by a Prince or King - that the Inhabitants are different, in their manners, language, Worship etc. - that there are a kind of Justices or Magistrates in almost every Town of any note among them, who takes cognisance of the actions of those within their Jurisdictions - that Murderers are always punished with death - that Adulterers are severely punished, generally by selling them for Slaves; tho' Polygamy is tolerated, and common among them - that they have no particular object of adoration, some worshiping one thing, some another - that their houses or huts are built of timber and Clay; and covered with a kind of long grass -

that their food consists of yams, cocoa, plantain, & Rice - He say the Kings or Princes of these nations are often at War with one another, and that the Prisoners taken in these wars are sold as Slaves - being asked what did he think was the cause of these wars? - Answered, he thinks the reasons is more owing to a desire of procuring slaves, than any natural propensity they have to fighting - he says the practice of kidnapping [fragment missing] Children is very Common in [the country] he cam from - that the [fragment missing] Countrymen for the most part [fragment missing] these depredations are owing to [fragment missing] given by Slave Merchants, always ready to [fragment missing] and reward those who bring them slaves.

George Dale appears about 30 years of age - rather above as under - pretty dark in the Complexion, and is lame - speaks very thick and broken English, so much so, that one would think, he had not left his Country at such an early period - seems open and undesigning, tho' not intelligent - and says he would scorn to Exaggerate any Circumstance, from any motive or consideration - from his appearance now, and his age when Carried off, it might have happened, about the Commencement of the American War [about 1775] - or perhaps somewhat Earlier - Edinburgh 6th August 1790.

Question:

What did George Dale say about his place of origin?

**Source: Account of James Will, Methodist Missionary Society, Special Series, Biographical,** **Various Papers, Anti-Slavery Papers 1774–1891, fiche Box 44, box 662(1); and Special Series, Biographical, West Africa, fiche box 4, box no. 593(1), fiche no. 123.**

I James Will, was born in the land of Akue. The place where I was born undoubtedly is about seven days journey to the sea shore. My father and my mother have not known the salt waters. This land is very fruitful, corn bear twice in a year, yams, cocoa, plantains, guinea corn and various other fruits, and many grow in bushes sweet to the taste and pleasant to the eyes. These are the fruits and vegetables which we live upon for the sustenance of our lives from age to age. Rice and flour is not in my country where I was born, and many other things which we eat in this country. In that country our clothes were made of cotton. The women made the cotton into thread and dyed it, some of it either black or blue or as they may want it, then men bought it of the, and made clothes of it, made white, check, stripe and other different cloth.

Question:

What kinds of things do children remember about their homeland and family?

**Source: William Moister, *Memorials of Missionary Labours in Western Africa and the West******Indies. With Historical and Descriptive Observations*. London. John Mason. 1850.**

Excerpt from Benomê’s Account

Little Benomê was born in the interior of Africa, at a place called Radda; and when she was about seven years of age, a report was brought that a neighbouring village had just been attacked by a slave-hunting party, and the inhabitants carried off into bondage. The people of Radda, knowing what to expect, fled into the words; and, during the night, they saw their own village in flames. Early the next morning the fugitives were overtaken in their retreat, when little Benomê with her mother, a brother, and an elder sister, and several others, were captured, tied together two and two, and marched toward the coast, like a flock of sheep for the market; whilst nothing was heard but weeping, mourning, lamentation, and woe. On coming to a large river which crossed their path, the sister of Benomê was the last to ford the stream, being occupied by a child which she carried in her arms. Annoyed at the delay, the cruel monster in charge of the slaves snatched the infant from the arms of its mother, and threw it into the jungle, where it was left to perish, and urged the poor captives onwards in their march! Having travelled for several weeks, they at length came in sight of “the great salt water,” which they beheld with trembling awe, knowing that they were to be carried across the foaming billows. After remaining for a length of time at Abbeokuta, Badagry, and other places, a slave ship arrived at the coast; and the poor slaves were taken on board and left their native land for ever.

Question:

Why was Benomê so afraid of the sea?

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Any questions? Get in touch!