Research Note

A Harvard Physician's Reports on an 1857 Visit to the Saamaka

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Abstract

In 1857, Harvard professor and anatomist Jeffries Wyman traveled to Suriname to collect specimens for his museum at Harvard (later the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, founded in 1866 and curated by Wyman). Though his main interest concerned amphibians, he had a secondary interest in ethnology and, apparently, a desire to demonstrate current theories of racial “degeneration” among the African-descended population, particularly the “Bush Negroes.” This research note presents a letter he wrote his sister from Suriname, excerpts from his field diary, and sketches he made while visiting the Saamaka and Saa Kiiki Ndyuka. Wyman’s brief account of his visit suggests that Saamakas’ attitudes toward outside visitors (whether scientists, missionaries, or government officials) remained remarkable stable, from the time of the 1762 peace treaty until the Suriname civil war of the 1980s.

Keywords

Saamaka – Suriname – Maroons – history of medicine

In late 2018, CW wrote to RP to tell him of a book he was writing on the history of racial science and slavery in U.S. medical schools, with a strong Atlantic World and transnational grounding. The previous year, he explained, he had come across Harvard professor Jeffries Wyman's 1857 travel journal to Suriname, which included a trip up the Suriname River. Wyman, he noted, had received an official letter from the governor to permit his visit and that letter was then carried by "Joannis Arabbi 'one of the great captains'" who then brought the letter to "Abraham, the Gramman." He had also found a letter from Wyman, written in Suriname, to his sister Elizabeth, dated April 26, 1857, that reads in part:

We shall be gone ten days or a fortnight, & hope through the assistance of the Governors influence & the orders which he will send forward in advance of us, to get higher up the river than travellers have generally been, heretofore. The country in the upper Surinam is inhabited by the "Bush-negers", who are the descendants of the runaways in the early days of the colony, & have relapsed into a state of complete barbarism. Though inoffensive & friendly, they have objected, on account of some jealousy as to their right, to the whites coming among them & have not allowed it beyond a certain distance; but a treaty was recently made, which we shall be among the first to enjoy the fruits [of] by which the country has been more freely opened.¹

CW asked RP whether he would like to collaborate on a brief publication about this document, and the following research note is the result.

First some background on Wyman (1814–74) and his reasons for going to Suriname. By 1857, Jeffries Wyman had emerged as a well-known physician and comparative anatomist, occupying the Hersey Professorship of Anatomy in Harvard University's new school of science (a novel department at the time). Wyman graduated from the Medical Department at Harvard University in 1837, and before taking up the Hersey Professorship, he served as the Demonstrator

¹ Wyman is referring to the treaty of 1835, which renegotiated certain terms of the original 1762 peace treaty between the Dutch Crown and the Saamaka People (see Anon. 1916).

of Anatomy at Harvard, Curator of the Lowell Institute in Boston, and the Professor of Anatomy at Hampden Sydney College's medical school in Richmond, Virginia. Throughout his career, Wyman took many collecting trips similar to his journey to Suriname, travelling to Cape Cod (1849), Florida (1852), Europe (1854), and the Rio de la Plata (River Plate, 1858), among other later trips. Prior to his trip to Suriname, Wyman had also spent considerable periods in various slave states in the United States, working in Richmond for five winters and in his youth convalescing for a spring in Charleston, South Carolina. Thus, by the time of his trip to Suriname, Wyman had spent considerable periods of time observing slavery and socializing with slaveholders.²

Also worth noting, during his medical education and career, Wyman learned and propagated many racial assumptions that would inform his descriptions of the Saamaka. Throughout his tenure as the Professor of Anatomy at Harvard beginning in 1806 and ending in 1847, John Collins Warren—who trained Wyman in the 1830s—collected specimens for the racial skull collection in the school's anatomy museum, which ultimately included more than 150 specimens. Likewise, he even told his students (including Wyman) that African descendants had longer arms than Whites (Jackson 1870:699; Willoughby 2018: 595). Thus, as a student, Wyman had learned well how to medically describe the supposed differences between black and white people. Wyman also contributed to Harvard's racial skull collection throughout his career, and he wrote multiple scientific publications in support of white supremacy, although today his ideas would be considered pseudoscience.³ Thus, when Wyman arrived in Suriname, he had a well-developed racial worldview, and he expected to see “degeneration” among the African-descended population, and this goal partially created his desire to visit the Saamaka.

The central purpose of Wyman's trip, however, was to collect comparative anatomy specimens for his museum at Harvard (later the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology which was founded in 1866 and curated by Wyman). Primarily, it was this goal that brought Wyman deep into Suriname's interior. Wyman traveled to Suriname with two former medical students, John Green and John C. Bancroft. In a biographical sketch of Wyman (likely written soon after his death in 1874 as an obituary), the author described Wyman's

2 Manuscript Biographical Sketch of Jeffries Wyman, 1–4, Jeffries Wyman Papers, Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts.

3 1850 Descriptive Catalogue of the Museum of the Mass. Medical College, 42, 215, Records of the Warren Anatomical Museum, Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School. See also Wyman 1865.

trip to Suriname: "He arrived in Paramaribo in April and immediately began his exploration in Natural History, ascending several of the rivers of the vicinity. It was here that he investigated the embryology of the Surinam toad."⁴ Wyman's primary goal for visiting the Saamaka, then, was collecting specimens, but his notebooks also reflected his broader interests in what was then called ethnology.

What follows is the transcription of a manuscript letter, in full, from Jeffries Wyman to his sister Elizabeth A. Wyman, dated May 19, 1857, into which we have interspersed relevant extracts (in italics here) from Wyman's diary of his trip up the Suriname River. Together, these two documents contain everything we found to be of interest about Wyman's brief sojourn among the Saamaka people and the Saa Kiiki (Sara Creek) Ndyuka people, living in what was then the cluster of Maroon villages along the Suriname River that were closest to the coastal plantations.⁵

Paramaribo May 19th [18]57

Dear Lizzie,

In my last letter I wrote you that we were about starting on an excursion up the river. Well we have been absent 18 days, got back all well, & have enjoyed the trip very much, though all our expeditions were not realized. Our first night after leaving this city was passed at a plantation where we received a very hearty welcome, & were treated like princes. The manager is a Scotchman out & out, & although we reached his house at nine in the evening he insisted on giving us a regular dinner, for which we had very good appetites, & to which justice was done. When the time came for retiring he pointed out the hooks on which we, in our hammocks with us in them, were to be suspended for the night. In fact, one gauge of a man's hospitality is the number of hooks he has for his friends or for strangers.

4 Manuscript Biographical Sketch of Jeffries Wyman, 6–10. Quote on page 8. John Green to Jeffries Wyman, June 23, 1860 and John C. Bancroft to Jeffries Wyman, July 30, 1857, both in Jeffries Wyman Papers.

5 These documents are located in the Center for the History of Medicine, Countway Library, Harvard Medical School. CW is responsible for the transcriptions, RP for the footnotes. The diary pages that concern Wyman's trip up the Suriname River represent pages 74 to 99 of a 109-page manuscript. They include 33 sketches (of houses, shrines, people, and artifacts), lists of various kinds (names [often illegible] of Maroon captains without specifying villages); air temperature; prices paid for a chicken; and other miscellanea; as well as a good bit of narrative.

It is a common custom here for a people here to carry hammocks when they are travelling, & as they involve no bed making, a nights lodging is no great inconvenience to anyone. We passed each night with few exceptions at plantation houses, & in them we remained for two or three days, & had ample opportunities of testing Dutch hospitality. Some of the incidents seem rather odd—for example a servant attending table with nothing but a shirt on, & others with even less.⁶ The common custom among many the wealthier ones seems to be to give coffee on rising, breakfast or rather ‘bite’ at 8. Breakfast is understood by the Surinamese at 12 or 1. Sleep till four, tea again, & dinner from 8 to 10 in the evening.⁷ All the stopping

6 Wyman’s “servants” would in fact have been enslaved men, women, and children. Outside observers in Suriname frequently commented on the scantiness of dress required of those who served at table on plantations. John Gabriel Stedman, in a famous passage, wrote: “here [on a plantation in the Commewijne region] We Saw Which to Us hetherto had been a Novelty Viz that the Young Negro Women Who Attended as Servants at Table And Who Were Come to the Age of Puberty Should all be Stark-Naked, Without so much as a fig Leaf—Had in my Cheeks at this time been left Any Blood, I must have Blushed—however Asking the Cause of this Strange Phenomen I Was Answered by the Lady that it Was intended so by their Mothers and Matrons to Promote their Growth, by thus being Detected in theyr too Early Cohabitations With the Other Sex, that other Wise took place.—And indeed finer figures I never beheld, Who Were a Treat to Every spectator of a real Taste, Let pruders and Coquets Say What they Will, Nature Will be Nature Still, And no Stays, Gowns or Petticoats Can Ever Correct the Cimetry and Native Graces of a Well Proportion’d Young Woman, but indeed may serve to hide theyr Defects—While the Strength, liveliness & Agility Anex’d to a Natural State, are Great Inducements to Plead in its favour. And While even in the Black Women theyr Sparkling Eyes.—Ivory Teeth, and remarkable Cleanliness All over, fully Compensates for the Silk Ribbons, Gold lace, and Borrow’d Feathers that Grace the to[o] many Languid Looks, Sallow Complexions, deform’d Bodies, And Broken Constitutions, of our European Contrivemen” (Stedman 1988[1790]:368–69).

7 Here is Stedman’s description of the typical planter’s meal schedule (we omit here the whippings and other atrocities he watches over during the day): “A *Planter* in Surinam When he Lives on his Estate/Which is But Seldom, they Preferring the Society of Paramaribo/Gets out of his Hammock With the rising Sun, viz. about 6 OClock in the Morning ... Goes to Breakfast About ten OClock, for which A Table is Spread in the large hall, Provided With a Bacon ham, hung-Beef, fowls, or pigeons broil’d hot from the Gridiron; plantains, & Sweet-Cassavas, roasted; Bread, Butter, Cheese &c to Which he Drinks Strong-Beer, such as Ale, & Porter And a Glass of Madeira Ranish to Mozel wine And while the Cringing Overseer Sits at the further end keeping his Proper Distance, both being Served by the most beautiful Slaves that Could ever be pick’d out; And this is Call’d Breaking the Poor Gentlemans fast. After this he takes a Book, Plays at Chess, or Billards—Entertains himself With Musick &’, till the heat of the Day forces him to Return to his Cotton-hammock to enjoy his Meridian nap With Which he would no More Dispense than a Spaniard With his *Siesta*, and in Which he rocks to and fro, like a Performer on the Slack rope, till he falls Asleep, Without Either bed or Covering, & during Which time he is fan’d by a Couple of his black Attendants, to keep him Cool &c—About 3 OClock

places were either sugar plantations or wood grounds, is generally indicative of a splendor which has long since culminated.⁸

At a place called Berg en Daal “mountain in the valley,” we had the best reception. Among the amusements got up for us were a corial [dug-out canoe] excursion & a negro dance. We had three corials or canoes, each “manned” by from 6 to 8 pairs of paddles in the hands of young negro girls, dressed in their gayest colours. The corials were loaded within an inch of the water, at least so it was with the one I went in; so that I was in constant fear that we should be swamped. However, they paddled so steadily & kept so still that although we were going at times very rapidly no accident happened. The three corials kept side by side, mine in the middle, & all the strokes of the paddles of the three were in perfect time & accompanied by a song from some prima donna with a chorus by the whole crew.⁹

We ascended in this way three miles up the river, & as the time was just at evening, when the banks with trees, vines, flowers, &c. looked their best, the effect was very striking, & if depicted in the language of the novels, I think I might say that it was a scene which might occupy the space

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he Awakes by Natural instinct When having Washed, And Perform'd himself he sits Down to Dinner, Attended as at Breakfast by his *Deputy Governor* And Sable pages, Where nothing is Wanting that the World Can Afford, in a Western Climate, of Meat, fowls, Venisons—fish, Vegetables, Fruits &c. While the Most exquisite Wines are often Squander'd Away in Profusion; After this a Cup of Strong Coffee, and A Liqueur finish the repast ... The Evening Spent With weak punch, Sangaree, Cards and Tobacco—His Worship, Generally begins to Yawn About 10 or 11 O'Clock—When he Withdraws, And being Undressed by his sooty pages, he retires to rest, where he passes the Night in the Arms of one or other of his Sable Sultanas, for he Always keeps a Seraglio” (1988[1790]:363–66).

- 8 By the 1850s, Suriname's plantations were at the end of a long economic decline (see, among many relevant sources, Oostindie 1989 and Van Stipriaan 1993).
- 9 Stedman describes plantation slave rowers “continuing to tug night and day sometimes for 24 hours together and Singing a Chorus all the time to keep up theyr Spirits when/theyr naked bodies dreeping with Sweat like post horses/ they headlong one and all plunge into the river to refresh” (1988[1790]:92) and again, he writes that such singing “is much practiced by the barge rowers or boat negroes on the water, especially during the night in a clear moonshine; it is to them peculiarly animating, and may, together with the sound of their oars, be heard at a considerable distance” (1988 [1790]:659); slave song, he also noted, was characterized by a call-and-response structure, “melodious but without Time; in Other respects it is not unlike that of some Clarks reading to the Congregation, One Person Pronouncing a Sentence Extemporary, which he next hums or Whistles, when all the others Repeat the Same in Chorus, another sentence is then Spoke and the Chorus is Renew'd a Second time & So ad perpetuum” (1988[1790]:516). What seems unusual in Wyman's account is that the paddlers of canoes (not rowers of plantation tent boats or barges), who are also doing the singing, are enslaved “girls,” not men.

of several pages. After making a stay at a place called Victoria, where we swung our hammocks in a thatched attic, to the rafters of the building with the usual rubbish of an attic scattered around us. This was our last of civilization.

[excerpt of Diary, May 5:] *Bush negro comes down the river in the afternoon & reports that the news of our arrival has been circulated & tomorrow a messenger will be dispatched to bring us up to Sara Creek. When asked how long it would take us to go to the creek [he] indicated it by a certain space in the heavens which would require an equal time for the sun to pass through.*

FIGURE 1

Apparently, the “Bush negro” who spoke to Wyman and served as guide

From Victoria to we passed to Sara Creek, the lower limit of the country of the Bush negers, & here a corial came to meet us, & to conduct us to the first landing place which was the entrance to a Negro village.

[excerpt of Diary, May 7:] *At noon we arrived at the hook or point below Sara creek & according to the instructions which had been given to us we fired a [UNCLEAR] of [UNCLEAR] or 14 guns, but after waiting some time we moved slowly on no one appearing to answer us. As we approached the mouth of the creek a corial was seen coming down loaded c̄ [with]¹⁰ rice & other produce & soon after another came down the Surinam with a captain, who informed us that we might pass up a short distance & he would go on & hear what was said by Uiolo [?] up the river. In the meantime he conducted*

¹⁰ The symbol c̄ (for Latin *cum*) was a common medical abbreviation for “with.”

us to a landing where we went ashore & preceded by the several negroes, carrying paddles.

We walked about a fourth of a mile in a path overhung with thick woods, preceded by three nearly naked negroes, carrying their paddles on their shoulders. The village, consisting of huts made of palm leaves, seemed to resemble more the pictures of scenes in the Sandwich Islands, than anything else I can compare them with, & was with all neat & cleanly. We were conducted to the hut of the Captain of the village who received us with ceremony. He was dressed in a chintz dressing gown & another captain who was with him wore a flunky hat with a cockade & silver lace band.¹¹

FIGURE 2

Apparently, the captain with flunky hat

We took seats opposite to them on little crickets about six or eight inches high, & which were so unstable as to require great circumspection on our part to keep the balance true.¹²

[excerpt of Diary, May 7:] *We were escorted to a small village very neat & cleanly consisting of about 25 to 30 palm leaf huts, in front of one of which*

- 11 We have not encountered the term “flunky hat” elsewhere but assume it meant “servant’s hat.” In his diary, Wyman made a crude sketch of a man wearing a hat that seems to have a cockade and therefore might be the “flunky hat.” In the 1780s, a Moravian observer described one Saamaka captain’s uniform, provided by the colonial government, as “a jacket, a vest, trousers of the finest striped linen, a hat with golden tassels, a lace shirt with cuffs, and a captain’s staff made from cane and topped with a large silver and heavily-gilt knob” (Riemer 1801:370–71). “With all this finery,” added the missionary, “he nonetheless went barefoot.”
- 12 Saamakas have always sat on low stools (called by Wyman “crickets”). From the earliest outsider description made at the ceremonies marking the peace treaty with the colonists in 1762, where the government negotiator described how the men were seated on “low blocks of wood” (Price 1983:178) to the beautiful nineteenth-century carved stools now in museums (Price & Price 1999:194–98), and their modern counterparts (Price & Price 1999:200), low stools have been among the most valued artistic items made by Maroon men.

was a piece of white cotton cloth attached to a pole, & this was the hut of an old captain. He came out with an aid, & welcomed us. The captain an old man [UNCLEAR] [UNCLEAR] was dressed in white duck trousers, a blue coat with silver lace & which rusty [?] buttons & old hat. His aid had on a grey [?] chintz dressing gown. We were asked to sit on crickets.

We then explained the object of our visit, but the idea of our coming there for snakes, toads, &c. seemed to them rather ludicrous.

[excerpt of Diary, May 7:] in the meantime, women & children gathered around the door & the naked negroes who came with us were seated near the door. The old captain sat on a bench by himself. After some conversation, water was presented to us. He had but one glass. We drank in turn; after the first had drunk the glass being half full the girl who handed it was required to drink the remainder in order to get it out of the way. As she presented each glass she [encountered or curtsied?] & [share or show?] of the awkwardness of her position [?] began to laugh. The ceremony concluded. We took leave & after paying our respects to a lame man who had wounded his foot with a knife, we returned to the river[?] & took dinner.

The introduction over we returned to the boat for supper, & at night to lodge assigned us in which to swing our hammocks. Being distinguished personages, they gave us the most private hut in the place which was next the chiefs, but unluckily according to their ideas of distinctions was closed on all sides except a small door. There was barely room enough for our hammocks to swing clear of each other.

FIGURE 3 Lodge May 9th, [18]57

Before retiring they proposed to get up a negro dance, which in course of time came off though the artistes were a long while in making up their minds to exhibit their accomplishments before white folks.¹³ The drums were procured from a neighboring village & the dance began, with an accompanying drumming & singing. The dancers all females stood together swinging & at the same time shrugging & thrusting their shoulder as if afraid to venture further. At last one started off alone, keeping one foot on the ground, stamping with the other & at the same time moving around in a circle. By some movement which seemed to me a rather difficult one, the foot on the ground ploughed a furrow wherever she went, so that the figure of the dance was traced in all its details. Having finished her round she returned when all the other dancers gave an affectionate embrace & another went through the same thing. This came off in the open air by moonlight, the group being a curious one to our eyes at least.¹⁴ We all got in a circle with a background of men, women & children, the women rigged out in their bright coloured clothes, yellow & blue predominating.¹⁵ We got off as soon as possible in the scare [?] of fatigue, & retired to our first nights rest beyond civilized life.

[excerpt of Diary, May 8:] *Last evening. Proposition was made for a dance which we accepted. A long delay ensued & at length about 9 the drums were brought out ... Women & children ... & after a while 5 or 6 tall women & one short began the dance. This was preceded by a song & a wriggling & shrugging of the shoulders, after which one of the number advanced to the center one foot on the ground which was used to turn [?] in a [furor or furrow?] & the other beating time. After this was ended at some time [UNCLEAR] of [UNCLEAR] she was enclosed by each of the others & was followed in turn by them. We returned soon after ten when the dance broke up.*

The next day we moved further up the river to another village¹⁶ & went again through the reception ceremony.

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- 13 In fact, white masters on Suriname plantations had long watched such spectacles (see, for example, Dirk Valkenburg's famous 1707 painting—Price & Price 2005:168) and ever since the 1762 peace treaty, it has been customary for Saamakas to stage dances whenever Whites or other "distinguished" outsiders visit, as it still is today.
- 14 On styles of dancing, including historical examples, see Price & Price 1999:245–50.
- 15 On women's clothing colors, see "Cloths and Colors," Chapter 4 of Price & Price 1999.
- 16 Identified in Diary of Nov. 8 as "Koffy camps" [Kofikampu] with its captain being "Laugua Janni."

[excerpt of Diary, May 8:] *Accompanied by Jushi [?] & Sochoma & two others. Fired guns as usual & approach Captain with hut & band[?], [UNCLEAR] bent down in front & he behind. After ceremony, dinner & at 2 h 10' go through woods to Abraham.*

On this occasion the Captain, a venerable negro wore a flunky hat, with the brim turned down in front & behind so as to be nearly perpendicular. He was a stooped old fellow & hard of hearing. However, he gave us a good airy hut for lodging in, which, except for the bats that flapped around our heads at night, & an owl that took up his position quite near to us & kept up an incessant hooting, which sounded like who are you? afforded us good night's rest. It was not till the next day that we knew what our neighborhood really was. While walking through the village, one of the party came to me saying that there was a great snake to be seen near our hut. On going there I found some of our boatmen very much frightened, not daring to speak & requesting me neither to look or speak. However the snake was not visible, but as they said had gone into a tree. After a while I saw him on the ground about ten feet long, moving slowly along among the neighbouring huts, & finally going into one of them. Before he disappeared however, a woman brought out her child, held it toward the snake & at the same time saying something. We then ascertained that the serpent was one of their gods & was held in great veneration.¹⁷ We then learned further the huts in our immediate neighbourhood were fetish houses, for incantations & religious ceremonies. In one of them eggs & other food are placed for the snake, in another were vessels, rattle, rattles &c., & a third was closely fastened, & all my attempts to find out its contents were unavailing as it had no windows & the doors were locked. Outside was hung up various articles such as a poisonous snake, spines of fishes, &c. A fourth had various images in clay painted, representing the Papa snake which is a kind of Boa. Near this last house was a splendid Kankan tree, which is a worshipped by the Negroes.¹⁸ It is one of the

17 Wyman's snake appears to have been an anaconda, the carrier of a Saamaka god called *watawenu*. For more on snakegods and shrines, see Price 2008:41–47, 375–76, 379–91, *passim* and Price & Price 2017.

18 In the 1780s, a Moravian missionary among the Saamaka wrote of this tree, that “The negroes designate it as their greatest idol, using the branches and leaves on various important occasions and making staffs out of the wood which they hang with tyger teeth and various Obia herbs, and they worship such decorated staffs as a travel-Gado” (Riemer 1801:322). The tree-felling prohibition is confirmed by Stedman, writing of contemporaneous slaves in Suriname, who “bring their Offerings to the *Wild Cotton tree* Which they Adore With high Reverence. this Proceeds/Said an Old Black Man to Me/from the follow-

longest trees in the country, growing upon this was a kind of “Bush rope” about as large as the longest cable & twisted with as much regularity. It reached from the ground to a branch 60 or 70 feet above without a single brand or leaf. I went to the captain & asked permission to cut off a piece of it, but he refused saying we might cut anything but that.

[excerpt of Diary, May 9:] *A snake appeared near our lodge which excited great fears among our negroes. The snake was about 10 ft. long slender & held sacred by the native, though not feared by them. One woman brought out a child & held it towards the serpent & at the same time repeating something. Others came & looked but expressed no fear. The snake ascended a tree & afterwards entered a house which had been built for it, & which immediately adjoined our lodge. In front of the house was a wooden fetish, & in it several others. are [?] seven [?] fetish houses in the village besides a kan kan tree which is also held sacred. We asked for permission to cut a bush rope, exactly resembling in its regularity a large cable, but were told we might cut anything but that.*

We paid a visit to the Gaaman, or principal chief, who received us very politely dressed in a moth eaten military coat, white pants but not shoes. He kept up considerable state, & was surrounded by several small captains & various dignitaries of coloured citizens.¹⁹ Here we had to go through the ceremony of introduction & an explanation of our object, after which according to custom, we presented him with something to drink, before partaking of which he poured one glass full on the ground

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ing Juditious Cause, having no Churches on the Coast of Guinea and this Tree being the largest and most beautiful Growing there. Our People Assembling often under its branches to keep free from the Heavy Show'rs of rain and Schorching Sun Shine, when they Are Going to be instructed; do not You Christians Pay the Same homage to Your bibles &c. We well know that our tree is but A Wooden Logg Covered With Leaves of Green, Nor is your book Assuredly any more than a Piece of Lumber Composed of Leaves of Paper—Under this tree the Gadoman or Priest Delivers his Lectures and for which the Vulgar Negroes have much Veneration, that they Will not Cut it down upon any Consideration Whatever” (1988[1790]:520–21). For more on sacred trees and the prohibition on cutting, see Price 2008 and Price & Price 2017.

- 19 On the Matyau-clan gaama Abraham Wetiwoyo (1835–69), see, for example, Oudschans Dentz 1948 and Price 1990:273, 430–31. In 1835, an observer described the previous gaama's uniform, “which he wears for solemn occasions” as “a blue dress coat [robe?] trimmed with gold braid on the collar and with cuffs on the sleeves; a three-cornered hat with gold braid, an orange cockade, and a black strap; and a gilded crescential breastplate, and a staff of office with a gilt knob” (Van Eyck 1830:265). In the first part of the twentieth century, Maroon elders were still wearing a kind of “dressing gown” (called *langa hempi* in the Saamaka language)—for an image, see Herskovits & Herskovits 1934: facing p. 24.

as did the captains after him, each muttering some jargon or other which I could not understand. I was expected to do the same thing, but not knowing exactly what etiquette required. I dodged the drinking except a small sip, (for the drink was gin the only court liquor recognized here,²⁰ & which is essential to every interview with the dignitaries) & poured the rest on the ground as they had done, at the same time saying with as much gravity as I could *e pluribus unum* which nearly threw Green off his balance. The Gamman pretended to be favourably disposed towards us, told us we might go where we pleased, but afterwards we found so many obstacles thrown in our way that it was clear they were determined we should not go a step farther.

[excerpt of Diary, May 8:] *After sitting, Ab[raham] approach c̄ [with] staff in hand. military [?] coat, white pants, no shoes. Dignified. Told him our object. Seemed friendly. Thought we should be sent on [little or better] Exploration. Ceremony of drinking. Pouring gin on ground ... Present to Ab.*

[excerpt of Diary, May 9:] *At 10 summoned to come to receive an answer from Abraham the reply is that it is necessary to send to Johannis Arabi²¹ before we can go farther. We endeavored in every way to avoid the delay but to no purpose; & after a long discussion we concluded to wait till morning. Although the delay is very vexatious, we fear that it will be necessary to go through the same formality where we go & thus by long delays render the journey fruitless. Two other captains present ... Sent present of [UNCLEAR] [UNCLEAR], fish hooks, tobacco, [UNCLEAR] to Abraham. All the natives very peaceable & friendly. Do not interfere in any way with us.*

[excerpt of Diary, May 10:] *Passed a very uncomfortable night on account of mosquitoes & the intolerable itching of hands & feet. Noises of birds ... Examined one of the foetish houses, & found that it contains a small furnace in clay, two discs on feet, & one of them two serpents in clay lid parallel to each other & [UNCLEAR] the secon[sic] one, all painted with black rings²²*

...

20 Well into the twentieth century, Dutch *genever*, bought in grey pottery containers, was the preferred offering to gods and ancestors. By mid-century, Martiniquan rum (bought by men working in French Guiana) had largely replaced it, although the old-style bottles were still kept in ancestor shrines for pouring libations of water while praying.

21 Captain "Johannis" Alabi, Gaama Abraham Wetiwoyo's right-hand man, especially in dealing with outsiders, appears to be the son of former gaama Alabi, who died in 1820.

22 This appears to be a shrine to the *papagadu* spirits, who reside in boa constrictors (see Price & Price 2017).

FIGURE 4 "Snake house"

FIGURE 5 "Disc on feet [with] two serpents in clay"

No return from Joannis Arabi as agreed yesterday. Negroes seem friendly but cause us great delays. Begging for powder, tobacco, &. At 3 PM B & Capt B think it best to return to Victoria. G & myself to await an answer. I decide for the latter. Think it best to carry [UNCLEAR] alive [?] information to the governor. So far they impede us with delays only, expressing a willingness to have us go up the river. Should a refusal come, then it will be in violation of the treaty with the colonial government ... Tried to enter the foetich house near our lodge, but found it locked with a circular wooden lock²³ surmounted by a foetich [sic] head like that in front of the "snake house."

FIGURE 6 "Foetich house"

FIGURE 7 Uncaptioned sketch of a shrine on the same page as the Foetich house

²³ On Maroon wooden doorlocks, see Oudschans-Dentz 1935/36, Van Panhuys 1925, and Price & Price 1999:186–87, 318–19.

After waiting for two days for the corials which they promised to send for us, we finally took leave & descended the river again.²⁴

The “Bush Negers” are a curious people & I was very glad of an opportunity of going among them, although we failed in going as far as we wished. It is nearly a hundred years since their ancestors ran away from the colonists, & in the meantime they have reverted to a nearly savage life, & have reestablished fetishism & other customs common to the African negroes. They are for the most part athletic, go without clothing, exposed to the full force of the sun on the river as well as on land.²⁵ They number about 8,000, are perfectly independent & in fact exact tribute from the colonial government.²⁶ Several ineffectual attempts have been made to subdue them. The soil sustains them with its spontaneous growth, or with but very little cultivation. Fish are abundant in the rivers & creeks, & they eat almost anything. One of the first things which I saw when landed a girl carrying an enormous eel; on examining it I found it was an electric eel half putrid, on its way to be cooked. A large worm infecting the palms is considered a great dainty.²⁷

[excerpt of Diary, May 10:] *The vilages [sic] five or six which we have seen are all very neat & consist of huts thatched with palm leaf. These may all be rendered to a few kinds, 1st a simple roof open at sides & [UNCLEAR]; but the sides of the roof descending quite low within two feet of ground. 2d opening by a door at each end, 3d closed all round with a small door in front & this provided with a curtain or mat.*²⁸ *It was in one of this last kind that we slept*

24 For an early twentieth-century visit that involved similar apparent cordiality on the part of the gaama (in that case, Moana Dyankuso) toward Melville and Frances Herskovits and their servants/guides, followed by their (more or less gentle) expulsion from Saamaka territory—which, again, involved the visitors’ decision to leave early, see Price & Price 2003.

25 This is an exaggeration, as seen through northern eyes. Adult Saamakas have always worn “clothing”—at the least, men breechcloths and women skirts (plus jewelry).

26 Annual (later, biennial or triennial) tribute (cloth, pots, axes, guns, tools, salt, et cetera) was a central part of the Saamaka treaty of 1762 and continued until well into the nineteenth century, see Price 1990.

27 Stedman had earlier waxed poetic about Maroon love of palm grubs, for example, “We even Discovered Concealed near the Trunk of an Old Tree [in the forest, while chasing Maroon rebels] a Case *Bottle* With Excellent *Butter* Which they ... Made by melting and Clarifying the fat of the Palm-tree Worms And Which fully Supplied the Above ingredient While I absolutely found it more Delicious” (1988[1790]:409–10).

28 These three kinds of houses (an open sided structure [Saamaka *gangasa*] used as a kitchen; a house with front and rear door; and a house with front door only) remained

the first night. 7 legs [?], gates & C. No regularity in the distribution of the houses. Fires in the middle of floor. Kitchen article from whites. Some clay bowls.

FIGURE 8 Fish-trap (*Saamaka bakisi*). For a version made by enslaved men, see Stedman 1988[1790]:497.

But I think I have made a long story enough & will mention one more incident with a visit to a Charib Indian camp. The Charibs are a wandering race & may be seen everywhere; but remaining nowhere long. They are indolent & dirty & though they no longer flatten their heads, they have the curious custom of wearing a band around the legs of the girls, at the ankle & below the knees. There are permanent & as the legs grow they become very enlarged between the band, so as to give them very ugly (or as they think elegant) shapes; as the legs do not grow where they are surrounded by the band, they look as if they might be snapped off with the greatest ease, however the process does not practically interfere either with the strength or the movement of the limb.²⁹

On my return home I found Dr. Crogin very sick, is still in a dangerous condition, though today he seems improving. I have watchers with him

the principal styles of buildings (other than those devoted to gods) in Saamaka villages until the 1980s (see Price & Price 2017).

29 On Amerindian and Maroon calfbands, see Price & Price 1999:70–73, 303.

two nights, & am sorry that I can do so little for him, he has been kind & friendly to me during my stay here as well as on former occasions. The Cuba sails next week, but I shall wait for another vessel. Our long voyage cut down the time sadly, & all agree that the climate is healthy till August or September. I suppose I shall sail by the middle or last of June.

Love to all, affectionately
J.W.

1 Some Takeaways

Wyman's brief writings on his 1857 visit join those of colonial official J.W.S. van Eyck (1830) and Moravian missionary J.H.P. Voigt (1837) in tracing a description of mid-nineteenth-century Saamaka life. None match the richness of the eighteenth-century missionary accounts compiled in Price 1990 but, together, they strongly support the view that if "in 1690, Saramaka society and culture had not yet been born, by 1765, when the first window [on Saamaka society and culture] opened to the outside, it was already fully formed. The miracle of creolization, then, occurred over just several decades" (Price 2008:298–99). What we see in Wyman's reports is this remarkable continuity—that Saamaka in the 1850s looked much as it did when the Herskovitses arrived seven decades later or when the Prices did yet four decades still further on.

It is striking to what extent mid-nineteenth-century Saamakas acted like their twentieth-century descendants toward visitors (whether explorers, missionaries, or anthropologists): outward cordiality—staging dances and other entertainments—combined with deep suspicion, and arranging for (even assuring) as rapid a departure as possible from Saamaka territory (without ever being outwardly impolite). Such attitudes and behaviors clearly persisted in the relations between Saamakas (including Gaama Dyankuso) and anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovits in the 1920s (Price & Price 2003) and between Saamakas and the latter-day Harvard "scientific explorers" S. Allen Counter and David L. Evans in the 1970s (see Counter & Evans 1981; Price 1982) as well as during the early months of the Prices' own encounters with Saamakas in the 1960s (Price & Price 2017). However, since the end of the Suriname Civil War in the 1990s, and the influx of significant numbers of tourists, this stance of hard-won sovereignty and pride—like so much else of Saamaka life—has largely evaporated.

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