

A View taken near Bain, on the Coast of Guinea in Affrica. Dedicated to the Feeling Hearts of all Civilized Nations.

Vue prise proche de Bain, sur la Côte de Guinée en Affrique, Dédiée aux Cœurs Sensibles des Nations Civilisées.

From sketches by C. B. Wadström



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The Swedish colonial theorist Carl Bernhard Wadström travelled to the coast of West Africa in 1787 with plans to set up an African colony based on utopian social and religious principles, free labour and free trade with Europe. His voyage was funded by the courts of both Sweden and France, and the account of his journey, *Observations on the slave trade, and a description of some part of the coast of Guinea*, was published by the British abolitionist printer James Phillips in 1789. This trans-European investment in Wadström's plans is an example of a growing speculative interest in Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which resulted in a series of European expeditions, the creation of societies such as the African Institution, and attempts to found new colonial and trading settlements in places like Sierra Leone, Bulama and Senegal. It also threw an unprecedented spotlight on the origins of the transatlantic slave trade, as European public attention turned to this part of the globe.

The print above was one of a pair of large, high quality mounted colour prints which were created from Wadström's original sketches of the coast of West Africa: one of Bain, "Dedicated to the Feeling Hearts of all Civilized Nations", and one of Joal in Senegal, "Dedicated to the Sound Politicians of all the Trading Nations of Europe". Both prints show a beautiful green and fertile landscape, an idyllic village and a group of slave traders in the foreground, caught in the act of carrying off another victim for the trade. The Bain image, shown above, is meant to appeal particularly to "feeling hearts", as the victim is torn away from her children, while the image of Joal emphasises the opportunities offered by West Africa to "trading nations", showing easy access to rivers and shipping as well as large potential markets for European goods suggested by the busy, well-populated scene. Wadström's publications were also created on a commercial model of building up subscriber lists, serial publications, and advertisements, including announcements of the Bain and Joal prints, to be sold separately. He successfully marketed this project to notables and diplomats from Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, France, and Britain, who were all listed as subscribers to the two part volume, *An Essay on Colonization*. He hoped to encourage European investment in West Africa for both philanthropic and economic gain.

Unlike the later 'Scramble for Africa' at the end of the nineteenth century, the model of investment outlined in Wadström's Essay was not based on competing European nationalisms. Wadström attempted to sell his own idea across Europe, while offering his collaboration on a number of other ventures at the same time (his Essay included plans for the settlement at Sierra Leone and the failed Bulama scheme). He claimed to promote "the wealth and prosperity of nations", in the plural through independent colonial projects, much like his vision for the early imagined community of Sierra Leone which would be placed "under the protection of Great Britain" but would have its own government and laws and be open to settlers from all over the world.¹ Wadström re-imagined the colony as a space for international cooperation, rather than a theatre of war. In a 1797 letter to the French foreign minister, he called for a truce between France and England, suggesting that the establishment of African colonies and the abolition of the slave trade should form the object of a friendly rivalry between the two powers, based on shared philanthropic aims.²

Bibliography

Carl Bernhard Wadström, *A View of Joal on the Coast of Guinea in Affrica. Dedicated to the Sound Politicians of all the Trading Nations of Europe* (mounted illustration, British Library map collections).

Carl Bernhard Wadström, *A View taken near Bain, on the Coast of Guinea in Affrica. Dedicated to the Feeling Hearts of all Civilized Nations* (mounted illustration, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London).

Carl Bernhard Wadström, *Observations on the Slave Trade, and a description of some part of the coast of Guinea* (London: James Phillips, 1789).

Carl Bernhard Wadström et al, *Plan for a Free Community upon the Coast of Africa, under the Protection of Great Britain; but Intirely Independent of all European Laws and Governments* (London: R. Hindmarsh, 1789).

Carl Bernhard Wadström, *An Essay on Colonization* (London: 1794-5).

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¹ Wadström, *Observations on the Slave Trade, and a description of some part of the coast of Guinea*, v.

² Wadström, 'Au citoyen Taleyrand, ministre des relations extérieures (Paris le 17 frimaire an 6)'.