

**A VOYAGE TO SENEGAL, OR, HISTORICAL,  
PHILOSOPHICAL, AND POLITICAL MEMOIRS,  
RELATIVE TO THE DISCOVERIES,  
ESTABLISHMENT, AND COMMERCE OF  
EUROPEANS IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, FROM  
CAPE BLANCO TO THE RIVER OF SIERRA LEONE**

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A Voyage to Senegal, or, Historical, Philosophical, and Political Memoirs, Relative to the Discoveries, Establishment, and Commerce of Europeans in the Atlantic Ocean, from Cape Blanco to the River of Sierra Leone by J. P. L. Durand

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**J. P. L. DURAND**

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THE DISCOVERIES, ESTABLISHMENTS, AND COMMERCE  
OF EUROPEANS IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN,

FROM  
*Cape Blanco to the River of Sierra Leone.*

TO WHICH IS ADDED AN  
ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY  
FROM  
ISLE ST. LOUIS TO GALAM.

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BY  
J. R. L. DURAND,  
FORMERLY GOVERNOR OF ISLE ST. LOUIS.

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*Translated from the French, & embellished with numerous Engravings.*

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## PREFACE.

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**S**INCE the activity of commerce, and the necessity of understanding its relations, induced the maritime powers of Europe to attempt fresh discoveries, all their efforts have been directed towards the new world. When the most fertile parts of that continent, and its still more productive isles, were discovered and explored, the enterprising spirit of navigators carried them even to the south pole; in short, the most distant and hazardous expeditions were undertaken, and immense sums were disbursed to find out a few corners of the earth which were uninhabited.

While, however, those navigators were pursuing their adventures, the discoveries which had long before been made, and the establishments which had been formed in the richest country in the world, a country most proper for producing colonial goods, and one situated nearest to Europe, were neglected. That country would probably have been abandoned altogether, if the necessity of obtaining for other regions its robust cultivators, had not drawn many vessels towards the part which exclusively afforded such a resource.

I allude to the western part of Africa, which, whether on the shores of the sea, or in the interior districts, is of the greatest importance in the double respect of agriculture and commerce. It appears that the ancients were only acquainted with the northern coast of Africa, which extends from the straits of Gibraltar to the isthmus of Suez, and with the eastern coast, contiguous to the Red Sea. The southern part was totally unknown to them; while their notions of the western coast were very confined, and they did nothing but sail along it: even this route, which is now so easy, was to them a dangerous adventure: the Phenicians, Persians, Greeks, Carthaginians, and Romans, successively attempted to re-

connoitre in this direction; and it is said, that the Phenicians cleared the pillars of Hercules, passed the straits, and established colonies and factories on several parts of the coast. But the accounts which we have received of all those expeditions, are so replete with fables, and evident contradictions, that it is difficult to place in them any degree of confidence.

According to Herodotus, a few Phenicians left the Red Sea during the reign of Necas, king of Egypt; and after a three years' voyage, returned to their country by the straits of Gibraltar, but they saw only the coast. Eudoxia, to avoid the wrath of Ptolemy Lathyrus, succeeded in the same enterprise; but no advantage was derived from her voyage. Satas, in the time of Xerxes king of Persia, and Hanno and Himilcon, by order of the republic of Carthage, made similar attempts at discovery, by proceeding from the pillars of Hercules: but they failed in their undertaking. The Nasamones, or ancient inhabitants of the kingdom of Tunis, undertook a similar voyage, though without success. Hence, all those navigators, and many others who might be mentioned, far from affording us information, only gave rise to doubts, and prove the general ignorance and fear which pervaded the ancient sailors. Certain it is, that if such expeditions did take place, the ships kept at a great distance from the continent: for we have no proofs of the appearance of these people, much less their residence, on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Romans, who were so ardent in extending their empire, did not succeed in fixing it on the western coast of Africa. It is believed that they penetrated from the isthmus of Suez as far as the Niger, and thence to Mount Atlas. But if they reached this famous mountain, it certainly stopped their discoveries in that part of the world: for they thought, that under the torrid zone, the lands burned, and the rivers were torrents of fire; an opinion which was long credited, even by the learned men of those times: and when the Christians, who were the first

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that presumed to suppose, the countries under the torrid zone to be inhabited, expressed such an opinion, they were looked upon as heretics.

The Spaniards, in more modern times, pretended to have examined all the coasts of Africa, several centuries before the birth of the Messiah; but they said nothing of the interior, and we must give them credit for their reserve. They pretended to have conducted to America the vessels of Solomon and Hiram, when they went in search of the treasures mentioned in scripture; but this pretension was seriously combated by the Portuguese, who insisted on the honour of having made the first discovery of those countries; and with such obstinacy did the latter maintain their opinions, that the subject was brought under legal discussion, and a verdict given in their favour. At this period, some Frenchmen of Dieppe interfered in the famous dispute, and proved, that they were the first navigators who had entered the Senegal, and that they had formed establishments on that part of the coast, long before the Portuguese and other navigators had made their appearance.

These expeditions of the merchants of Dieppe, took place at the commencement of the fourteenth century, and from that time they established themselves on the Senegal, and along the coast as far as Sierra Leone. In September, 1365, they engaged with some merchants of Rouen; and the next year they undertook the strongest maritime expedition which had till then been seen on the African coast. They formed factories at certain distances, which served as an asylum for their merchandise and the persons in their employ, by which the Africans always found a ready market, and the French vessels constant cargoes. From this beginning were produced the establishments of the Senegal, Rufisque, Goree, the river Gambia, Sierra Leone, and two others on the coast of Malaguette, one of which was called "Little Paris," and the other "Little Dieppe." In 1382, they erected forts at the gold mine on the coast of Guinea,



at Agra, and at Cormentin. The consequences of these discoveries, were immense wealth, and the best profit was probably that afforded by ivory. In 1392, owing to the violent agitation of France, in consequence of the civil war and the illness of Charles VI. the commerce of Africa was entirely abandoned; and the factories for which such great sacrifices had been made, fell into the hands of the Dutch, the Portuguese, the English, and the Spaniards. The Portuguese were the most ardent plunderers, as they were authorised by the Popes, who conceded to them in perpetuity all the territories which they might discover from Cape Bojador to the Indies inclusively; they therefore made several fortunate expeditions, and for a long time enjoyed a decisive superiority.

Pope Martin V. in the plenitude of his divine authority, very liberally granted to Portugal, the right of seizing and confiscating all the property of infidels, in order that they might have the opportunity of becoming converts, to which he added a plenary indulgence for the souls of those who might fall in such pious expeditions. This donation, which was made in 1432, was afterwards confirmed and augmented by Popes Eugene IV. Nicolas V. and Sextus IV.; and the kings of Portugal assumed the title of "Lords of Guinea and the Coast of Africa."

Spain now became anxious to have a share in the acts of temporal authority of the sovereign pontifs; and in 1492, Alexander VI. divided his liberalities, by investing Spain and Portugal with the territories of the East and West Indies.

The English were slow in their courses, and were restrained by the express orders of their court, which, out of respect for the Popes, and consideration for Portugal, would not permit its subjects to proceed towards the western coast of Africa; nor did they emancipate themselves from this restriction, till the middle of the sixteenth century, when being at war with Portugal, they directed their arms against her establishments, and gradually succeeded in destroying their power.

The French, who were the legitimate proprietors, recovered their rights, and regained several of their ancient possessions; but as these events took place gradually, and at different periods, I shall not here describe them, though I ought to say, that we maintained for a long time by force of arms, the possessions which we had acquired from Cape Blanco to the Cape of Good Hope; and that the French have always considered that vast extent of coast, as dependent on their commercial operations.

It will be equally needless to trace the progress of our commercial companies in Africa down to the present period. It is known, that in 1664, the merchants of Dieppe and Rouen sold their establishments to the West India Company, for the sum of 150,000 livres; and that the new owners, by the extent of their speculations, had more than they could manage, and were crushed beneath the weight of their own projects.

The English captured isle St. Louis and Senegal in 1758; the French regained them twenty years afterwards, and had the possession ensured to them by the treaty of peace with England in 1783, which also guaranteed to France, the isle of Goree, all the coast between Cape Verd and the river Gambia, and the factory of Albreda, situated at the mouth of that river; which, however, as well as fort James, is in the possession of England.

From the left bank of the river Gambia, which forms Cape St. Mary, as far as the river of Sierra Leone, the coast belongs exclusively to no foreign nation; but the French share with the English, the Portuguese, and all commercial people, the right of frequenting, and that of forming new establishments on such points as are not occupied.

Soon after the peace of 1783, it was proposed to create a company for the Senegal; when the king granted to the Guiana company the exclusive privilege of the gum trade for nine years; and this company ceded its new privilege in 1785, to a body of

merchants, who assumed the title of the Gum Company. By a decree of the council on the 10th of November, 1786, the king subjected the company to pay the colonial expences, which were fixed at 260,749 livres; and granted them in return, the exclusive right of the slave trade, with an extension of the commerce in gum for three years longer. It then took the name of the Senegal Company; but being badly organised, it met with little success, and was abolished by a decree of the Constituent Assembly in 1791.

Previous to this time, I belonged to the naval department, when the marshal de Castrées appointed me principal director of the company at Isle St. Louis. I therefore left Havre on the 13th of March, 1785, and arrived at my new destination on the 10th of April following; at which time, M. de Repentigny was governor-general, and to whom I was particularly recommended by M. Vergennes, the minister for foreign affairs. This wise and modest officer received me with the greatest kindness; and we lived together in the most perfect harmony, till he was succeeded by M. de Boufflers, whose talents and celebrity were of the greatest advantage to the country.

My memoirs were begun at Senegal, and terminated at Paris. I have shewn them to several persons; and the two great authors, Lalande and La Harpe, have published reflections on my journey to Galam; in consequence of which, and at the urgent desire of many friends, I have submitted my manuscript to the press. I shall only observe, that all the people of Africa are so much alike, that I have found it impossible to give a just and precise idea of them, without making what may be deemed repetitions; and as to the style of my work, I declare that I have no literary pretensions: I have only occupied myself in describing facts with accuracy and truth; while my object is to promote the power and riches of my country, with the hope that the inhabitants of Africa may thereby become more happy.