



## SOJOURN OF ENRIQUE STANKO VRÁZ ON THE GOLD COAST

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**ABSTRACT:** The traveller and collector Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860–1932) spent the period from 1885 to 1888 on the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) where he collected zoological and botanical material, hunted animals and photographed. During the same period, Friedrich Louis Ramseyer, a missionary from Basel, spent time on the Gold Coast and photographed there as well. Contact between both men may be noted based on a comparison of the photographic material held in the collections of the Náprstek Museum and the historical photograph archive of the Basel Mission. Thanks to this association, several hitherto unknown persons as well as places from Vráz's negatives have been identified.

**KEY WORDS:** Gold Coast – Ghana – Basel Mission – Asante – Fante – British Empire – Abetifi

Almost 80 years after his death, our map of the life of the traveller Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860–1932) is still full of blanks. Many of them are located in the black continent – Africa.

One might assume that his sojourn on the Gold Coast (today's Ghana) would be well known to us thanks to his diaries, published as a book of memoirs compiled by his daughter Vlasta Adéla Vrázová with the title "Life and Travels of E. St. Vráz" /*Život a cesty E. St. Vráze*/ (Vrázová 1937: 5–50). However, Vlasta only published those parts of the diaries she considered important and interesting. A comparison between the original diaries and the published excerpts is not possible now as the diaries have been lost. They were not included in Vráz's papers, which that found their way to the Náprstek Museum after World War II, or in the bequest of his daughter, which came to the Museum's archives thanks to her friends in the 1990s. Vlasta A. Vrázová died on 28 October 1989. Vrázová supposedly discarded them with a view to protecting her father's reputation.

Another source of information concerning Vráz's sojourn on the Gold Coast are the articles he published in the *Světozor* journal, volumes 33–37, in 1894 under the title "From

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the Gold Coast of Africa: Travelogues of E. St. Vráz” („Od Zlatého pobřeží afrického. Z cestopisných zápisků E.St.Vráze“).

Vráz's adventures along the Gold Coast of 1898 were published as part of a set of travelogue sketches “From the Travels of E. St. Vráz“ /Z cest E.St.Vráze/, edited by Vráz's friend Bohumil Bauše (Vráz 1898: 154–208).

It is possible to add several pieces to the puzzle of Vráz's life thanks to a detailed examination of pictures Vráz took on the Gold Coast between 1885 and 1888. These 102 negatives and 23 slides form part of the photographic collection of the Ethnographic Department of the Náprstek Museum.

His very first journey outside of Europe led Vráz to the African continent. Beginning in 1880, he travelled through the north of Africa. Masked as an Arab merchant or a poor Jew he tried to join caravans heading from the coast into the African hinterland, to mysterious Timbuktu. This plan did not work out, so he decided to penetrate into Timbuktu from the West African coast. He eventually reached Bathurst (now Banjul) in Gambia in 1883 via Tenerife, part of the Canary Islands. At Bathurst he hunted and collected botanical and zoological material. He either sold the hunting trophies and collections to local Europeans or sent them to Europe. Vráz fell ill with malaria and red pestilence and left Gambia two years later with his health ruined. He never reached Timbuktu.

In 1885, he landed on the Gold Coast where he was treated for the diseases from which he suffered at the former Danish fortress of Christiansborg. Christiansborg, known in modern times under the name of Osu and forming part of Ghana's capital of Accra, was then not only the seat of the governor, but also the headquarters of the Basel Mission, an evangelic German-Swiss missionary society active on the Gold Coast from 1828.

During Vráz's sojourn one of the missionaries ordered a camera for himself, but died before the camera was delivered. Vráz decided to buy it from the missionaries. It was a wooden (also labelled 'travel') but rather heavy device produced by the Liesegang Company in Düsseldorf. It was placed on a tripod and used glass plates measuring 13 by 18 cm and weighing 125 g. The camera was delivered together with a painted linen screen.

As Vráz had never photographed before, he had to teach himself this new art. Vrázová comments on this in her book as follows: “And soon, the Gold Coast shows off her own modern European atelier that is in no way lacking in equipment: a screen brought from Europe and a chair from Koryčany (*a small South Moravian town, note JT*) in front of it, where people willingly sit down, not only his missionary friends, but their baptized pupils, Negroes proud of their partly European dress, as well as natives with pointy hairstyles supported with skewers” (Vrázová 1937: 44).

In Accra, Vráz used to meet with the British governor William Brandford Griffith<sup>1</sup> and his son of the same name who often posed for Vráz's camera, sometimes with his sister.

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<sup>1</sup> Sir William Brandford Griffith (1824–1897), ennobled 1887, governor of the Gold Coast during seven periods between 1880 and 1895 (1 December 1880 – 4 March 1881, 4 October 1882 – 24 December 1882, 24 April 1885 – 11 April 1886, 26 November 1887 – 30 June 1889, 18 February 1890 – 12 June 1891, 24 November 1891 – 12 August 1893, 7 March 1894 – 7 April 1895) – <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/goldcoast/goldcoastadmin.htm>, (27-05-2009). Between 1883 and 1884, he served as the vice-governor in Lagos (between 1874 and 1886 the territory was a part of the Gold Coast Colony). Griffith is credited with the introduction of cocoa cultivation on the Gold Coast (beginning in 1886, at Aburi, the summer seat with a botanical garden; cf. letter of W. Brandford Griffith Jr. to the editorial board of the Journal of the African Society, dated 20 June 1916 (Journal of the African Society, Vol. 15, No. 60, Jul. 1916, p. 400)). The Basel Mission was also involved in the spread of cocoa cultivation. The governor's son William Brandford Griffith (1858–1939) was a lawyer and an author of several legal studies.





Inv. No. Af I 7379 – Son of the governor of the British colony of the Gold Coast, William Brandford Griffith Jr. (1858–1939), Accra, 1885.

botanical and zoological material, some of which he sent to the shop of Václav Frič and to the National Museum in Prague. The collections left from the ports on the Volta River (e.g. Addah, today Ada). It is estimated that during the five years he spent in West Africa he collected approximately 15,000 insect specimens, 1,200 bird specimens, 600 mammal specimens and 800 other biological specimens.

Meanwhile he spent three months on the Canary Islands due to his bad health. He arrived there on 10 March 1887 and by June of the same year he felt healthy enough to leave the Islands and return to the Gold Coast.

At the end of March 1888 he set off for the town of Akuse located on the bank of the Volta River under the Akvapim Mountains. He then stayed in Aburi, an important missionary station in the mountains. He continued through the rain forest and mountains passing through a number of small towns and villages like Obosomasi (Vráz's spelling: Abusumase), Mampong, Koforidua, Kukurantumi, Tafo, Osiem (Oseem), Anyinam, Mpraeso (Bepong) eventually reaching Abetifi in the neighbouring Okwawu Mountains. At Abetifi, the Basel mission constructed an imposing house with a garden, a chapel and a school. Vráz was cordially welcomed there by the station's administrator, Ramseyer.

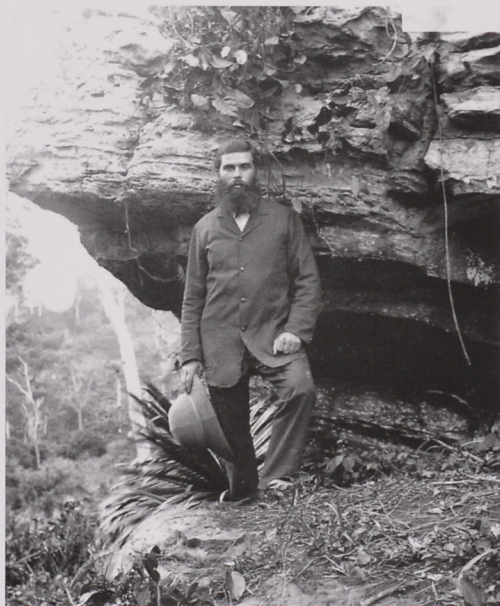
Friedrich August Louis Ramseyer (7 October 1840–6 August 1914) was a member of the Basel mission on the Gold Coast at the time of Vráz's sojourn there. In 1869, the Asante took Ramseyer captive together with his wife Rosa Luise Ramseyer-Bontemps (7 July 1841–9 April 1914), the missionary Johannes Kühne<sup>2</sup> and the French merchant Bonnet in

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<sup>2</sup> Missionary Johannes Kühne (25 February 1842 – 7 July 1902) was active on the Gold Coast beginning in 1866 as a merchant of the Trading Company of the Basel Mission. Together with Ramseyer he was imprisoned at Kumasi between 1869 and 1874. After his release he returned to Europe.

the region of Krepi. From there they were taken to the Asante capital of Kumasi, where they were imprisoned from 1869 to 1874 – a fact Vráz mentioned in his book (Vráz 1898: 178).

Ramseyer was also captivated by photography. A comprehensive set of his photographs is now kept in the collections of historical photographs in the Basel Evangelic Mission Archive.<sup>3</sup> It is a matter of debate whether Ramseyer really took all the photographs attributed to him, as the negatives are not preserved. Within the above mentioned collection, 12 photographs are marked with the name of E. St. Vráz. Seven of them have been matched with the negatives of the Vráz Files kept in the collection of the Náprstek Museum.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, other photographs kept in the Basel Evangelic Mission Archive may be attributed to Vráz.



Inv. No. Af I 7370 – One of the missionaries of the Basel Mission in Abetifi. Vráz's original caption: "to be sent to the Basel-Mission Gessellschaft Schweiz", 1885–1888.

<sup>3</sup> Basler Mission, recent name Mission 21, Evangelisches Missionswerk Basel, Missionsstrasse 21, CH-4003 Basel; [www.mission-21.org](http://www.mission-21.org). The fundament of the Ramseyer Files in the Basel Mission Archive is an album called „Achtzig Ansichten von der Goldküste (Westafrika) nach Originalaufnahmen des Missionars Fritz Ramseyer“, Neuenburg 1895.

<sup>4</sup> The negatives from the Vráz Files identical with photographs from the Basel Mission Archive: Af I 7371 = QL-30.013.0033 (Waterfalls Akropong), Af I 5393 = QL-30.013.0032, (without any title), Af I 7428 = QL-30.013.0034 (Road to Akropong), Af I 7386 = QL-30.013.0013 (Dr. Eckhardt in the bush), Af I 7368 = QL-30.013.0042 (Negro from Asante), Af I 5392 = QL-30.013.0021 (Dr. Smith in Kyebi), and Af I 7399 = QL-30.013.0015 (Mrs. Rottmann and daughter with girls).

The photographs from the Basel Mission Archive attributed to Vráz, the negatives of which are not in the collection of the Náprstek Museum:

QL-30.013.0014 (Querfurth in the bush), QL-30.013.0035 (Sanatorium Aburi),  
QL-30.013.0012 (Missionaries in Abokobi), QL-30.013.0026 (Kufur and wife) and  
QL-30.013.0008 (Missionaries in Akropong).

Vráz made a remark on the edge of one of the negatives that is of particular interest to us: "... to be sent to Basel-Mission Gesellschaft Schweiz" (Inv. No. Af I 7370). The picture shows a bearded man, obviously recognisable as one of the missionaries, with a tropical helmet in his hand standing in front of a cliff overhang. The shot was taken



Inv. No. Af I 7408 – Missionary Heinrich Hürlimann (1856–1912) with his sister and pupils from the missionary school, Aburi or Akropong, 1887.

in Abetifi. Another picture from the Basel Archive (Inv. No. QD-30.041.0048) shows a man resembling the one from Vráz's photograph. However, whether these two men are identical is questionable, as is the identity of the man.

Another missionary from Vráz's photographs was identified thanks to the information provided by the archive of photographs of the Basel Mission. Vráz described the negative Inv. No. Af I 7408 as "Basel missionaries with their helpers on the way from Accra to Aburi". An identical image (Inv. No. QQ-30.101.0070) from the Basel Archive is captioned as "Geschwister Hürlimann 26. September 1887", thereby identifying the Europeans as the Hürlimann siblings and giving the exact date when the photograph was taken.<sup>5</sup> The captions do not give the name of the author of the picture; however, as Vráz was around these places at the time in question and had the negative of the photograph in his possession, it is likely that it was he who took it. The missionary Hürlimann was also identified on another picture from the Vráz Files, namely Inv. No. Af I 7407, a group photograph of teachers and pupils of the missionary school at Akropong (identical to Inv. No. QQ-30.101.0073 of the Basel Archive).

<sup>5</sup> www.bmpix.org, 03-11-2009, Biography; Heinrich Hürlimann (6 January 1856 – 10 February 1912) worked for the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast between 1883 and 1888.

The cliff hangover of Abetifi also appears on other negatives from the Vráz Files, namely on the picture of Vráz with a shot panther (Inv. No. Af I 7396) and a picture of the very same panther (Inv. No. Af I 5350) arranged lying with its head raised and prey in its paws. Vráz attached a hand written note to this negative: "...a panther shot by myself in the mountains of Okvau (herein dead, with its head shored up), in a region where nobody had photographed before..."



Inv. No. Af I 5350 – A shot panther. Vráz's original caption: "... a panther shot by myself in the mountains of Okvau (herein dead, with its head shored up), in region where nobody had photographed before...", 1885–1888.



Inv. No. Af I 7396 – Vráz together with his servant standing by the shot panther in the mountains of Akvapim, 1885–1888.

A photograph, entirely identical to the negative, forms a part of Ramseyer's set under the Inv. No. QD-30.024.0031 (duplicates QD-30.041.0049 and QQ-30.101.0027). The authorship of the first two inventory numbers is assigned to Ramseyer, the third one to H. Hürlimann. But it is more probable that Vráz at first took a picture of his prey and then had himself photographed together with it.

The group of missionaries under the cliff hangover is found in the Vráz Files (Inv. No. Af I 7389ab), as well as on the photographs from the Ramseyer's set in Basel. Again, the negative Inv. No. Af I 7389b is identical to the photograph Inv. No. QD-30.041.0045.<sup>6</sup> A rather similar picture but with a different arrangement of the people in it is found under the Inv. Nos. QD-30.14.020, QD-30.041.0046, and QQ-30.101.0068. In the case of QD-30.14.020, the original caption is preserved: "Miss. Personal in Abetifi. Miss. Lehmann, Hausknaben, Fr. Ramseyer, Miss. Ramseyer, Miss. Tschopp."<sup>7</sup>



Inv. No. Af I 7389 – A group of missionaries, Abetifi in the mountains of Okwawu – Friedrich A.L. Ramseyer, his wife Rosa Luise Ramseyer-Bontemps, missionaries Johannes Lehmann (wearing a smoking cap) and Johannes Tschopp together with local boys of the personnel, 1888.

Tschopp and Lehmann are mentioned in Vráz's book as well: "... two Germans, Messrs Tschopp and Lehmann, attached to assist the missionaries" (Vráz 1898: 178).

The captions on Vráz's negatives from the collection of the Náprstek Museum provide us with the names of other missionaries, namely Mr. Rothmann (correctly Rottmann), Mrs. Eisenschmidt{ová} (correctly Eisenschmid{ová}) and Apply (correctly Aeppli).

<sup>6</sup> www.bmpix.org, 06-04-2009.

<sup>7</sup> www.bmpix.org 06-04-2009, Biography: Johannes Lehmann (13 February 1864 – 11 March 1896) worked on the Gold Coast from 1887 until his death. Johannes Tschopp (7 February 1860 – 17 January 1916) worked on the Gold Coast between 1884–1890.



According to the biographical entries published by the Basel Mission,<sup>8</sup> the Rottman couple belonged to an important merchant family on the Gold Coast. Hermann Ludwig Rottmann (26 May 1832 – 8 September 1899) was the founder of the Trading Company of the Basel Mission. His wife Regina Rottmann-Hesse (4 January 1832–1 September 1898, married 6 March 1857) worked on the Gold Coast as a teacher between 1851 and 1853. The Náprstek Museum's negative Inv. No. Af I 7399 bears the original caption made by Vráz: "Wife (and daughter) of the German missionary Rothmann; she is very kind, a thoroughbred Negro; two children, mulattos; daughter and several Negro girls, her pupils. Note the local knitted baskets".



Inv. No. Af I 7399 – Missionary and teacher Rottmann (1832–1898) with her daughter and pupils, Christiansborg, 1885.

The photograph made from Vráz's negative is kept in the Basel collection under the Inv. No. QL-30.013.0015; the former's caption places the picture in Christiansborg and presents Vráz as its author. Besides the daughter, the Rottmanns also had two sons – Wilhelm Jacob (9 September 1859–3 July 1917) who became a teacher, and Gottlob Samuel (5 May 1866–6 January 1951) who became a merchant. Their grandson Hermann Ludwig Samuel (born 22 May 1884) likewise worked for the Basel Mission between 1905 and 1908.

Another of Vráz's pictures shows Marie Eisenschmid-Stotz (20 December 1845–29 May 1916). She was (from 9 December 1879) the third wife of David Eisenschmid (16 April 1835–5 January 1891), who was active in Akropong since 1880. The negative Inv. No. Af I 7405 shows her with pupils at Aburi. An identical picture may be found in the Basel collection under the Inv. No. QQ-30.101.0066. Vráz's authorship is not given.

<sup>8</sup> www.bmpix.org, 13-01-2005.



Inv. No. Af I 7405 – Missionary Eisenschmid (1845–1916) with her pupils, Aburi, 1885–1888.

Another member of the Basel Mission, Heinrich Aeppli (13 July 1857–26 August 1895) worked on the Gold Coast (e.g. in Akuse on the Volta River) as a merchant from 1883 until his death. His wife, Johanna Aeppli-Plüss (12 January 1853–11 August 1930, married 27 June 1885) ran a girls boarding school between 1883 and 1885. However, this information contradicts the caption of the negative Inv. No. Af I 7414: “Missionary Apply, a Swiss, his wife died, we buried her. See my book ‘Exotic Tales: Story of a Female Missionary’.”



Inv. No. Af I 7414 – Heinrich Aeppli (1857–1895), Addah or Akuse, 1885–1888.

Inv. No. Af I 7386 shows another person whose biography is provided by the Basel Archive, namely Dr. Alfred Eckhardt (20 January 1859 – 24 April 1893) who served as physician at Christiansborg between 1888 and 1891. He was identified based on the address written on the box placed at his feet in the above-mentioned picture. His appearance was confirmed with other portraits of his from the Basel Archive.<sup>9</sup>



Inv. No. Af I 7386 – Dr. Alfred Eckhardt (1859–1893), physician at Christiansborg between 1888 and 1891.

Other negatives from the Náprstek Museum's collections match up with the photographs from the Ramseyer Files in the Basel Archive, but there they are not attributed to Vráz. The negative Inv. No. Af I 5356 joining with the photograph QD-30.041.0058 may serve as example.<sup>10</sup> Both show a group of women seated and standing in front of a white linen screen. Vráz's negative possesses the following capture: "At our place in Aburi and Akuapim, the Gold Coast, West Africa, women's hairstyles..." In the Ramseyer Files, it is assigned to Abetifi. Vráz's negative likely represents a copy from the original, possibly Ramseyer's photograph.

Other identical pictures are the negative Inv. No. Af I 7433 and the photograph Inv. No. QL-30.013.0050 presenting an atelier portrait of two girls. The Basel photograph's caption reads: "Negertypen aus Akem & Akuapem Goldküste". The location is designated

<sup>9</sup> www.bmpix.org,06-04-2005,Search:QS-30.001.0799.01, QS-30.003.0799.01. The authorship of QL-30.013.0013 is attributed to Vráz.

<sup>10</sup> www.bmpix.org,03-06-2009; duplicates QD-30.042.0024, QD-30.043.0025 and QD-32.024.0022.

as Mampong Akwapim; the author is not given.<sup>11</sup> It worth mentioning again that Vráz, on his journey from Aburi to Abetifi, visited Mampong in mid-1888.

Another photograph from the Ramseyer Files Inv. No. D-30.18.071 (duplicates QD-30.020.0048, QL-30.013.0042) is identical with the negative from the Vráz Files Inv. No. Af I 7368ab. It shows the “Royal Spirit”, an individual consecrated to the chief of the Asante. The negative bears Vráz’s original caption: “... Okvavu on the way to Asante. ‘Royal Spirit’, i.e. the messenger of the chief, delivering his commands through the land, wears a golden pendant around his neck. Ornaments, including stylized turtles and snake, made of red soil, in the background.”



Inv. No. Af I 7368 – “Royal Spirit”, the messenger of the chief of the Asante, Kumasi, 1885–1888.

The caption of the Basel photograph is quite similar: “Eine ‘Seele’ (ein dem König Geweihter) des Asante Königs. Die runde Platte auf der Brust ist aus Gold, der Faden ist weiss.” The picture’s caption challenges Ramseyer’s authorship, attributing it to the missionary Piton who gathered a collection of photographs from all around the world that he eventually donated to the archive.<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that Vráz is mentioned as author of Inv. No. QL-30.013.0042, we believe he was not. Vráz’s negative and the Basel photograph have an identical line or scratch on the right side. This scratch (a result of damage to the emulsion or of the glass board) did not originate on Vráz’s negative in the Náprstek Museum. This means that the damage was on an original that Vráz later photographed.

<sup>11</sup> [www.bmpix.org](http://www.bmpix.org); 04-11-2009.

<sup>12</sup> [www.bmpix.org](http://www.bmpix.org) 03-06-2009, Biography: Charles Philippe Piton (9 November 1835 – 29 August 1905) worked for the Basel Mission as a tradesman beginning in 1863, later he was sent to China. From 1884 until his death he lived in Switzerland.

There is no doubt then that Vráz was not the author of the picture. Whether Ramseyer, Piton or another unknown photographer was the author of the photographs remains questionable.

The period between 1885 and 1888, i.e. the three years Vráz spent on the Gold Coast, was a favourable time for travellers and natural scientists from both Central and South-East Europe. It was a period of relative peace and of a certain amount of anarchy in the southern part of present-day Ghana. In 1874, the British troops defeated the army of the Asante confederation and thereby reduced the power of its rulers along the shore belt. The Fante confederation disintegrated as well, and the rulers of individual states and petty states (usually referred to as chieftainships) enjoyed a relatively high degree of freedom.<sup>13</sup> The position of the British dependencies on the coast was thereby secured, and the inhabitants of the hinterland were taught that the Europeans should be approached in a friendly manner. Moreover, the defeated Asante federation fell into political turmoil caused by the clash between the pacifist and militarist factions among the ruling elites. The brief descriptions of Vráz's travels in then known parts of present-day Ghana serve as clear proof. The four year long imprisonment of the missionary Ramseyer and his companions was then a matter in the past (Metcalf 1964: 349).

It is more than probable that Vráz passed himself off as a Bulgarian. One Bavarian private collection preserves an album with a photograph showing merchants and hunters from Akuse, including young Vráz. A caption attached to it describes him as "Vraaz (Bulgare), Naturforscher". The photograph is all the more important as it shows Vráz in less formal dress. We can therefore assume that Vráz censored his photographs for the Czech public and published only those he considered "dignified".



A group photograph of merchants and hunters from Akuse, Vráz stands first from the right, the missionary Aeppli stands next to him, 1885–1888, private archive of the authors.

<sup>13</sup> Judging from the contemporary correspondence, it seems that each locality was an independent polity, some of them forming confederations ruled jointly by a group of chiefs (Metcalf 1964: 428, 430–431).

From the point of view of the archaeology of Vráz's life, even the places themselves that he visited in West Africa are of importance. In the 1880s, West Africa still represented a paradise to all naturalists and collectors and merchants of biological material. If war was not declared in a particular region, such a collector could operate anywhere on the coast or even in the hinterland. It is therefore interesting that Vráz worked in only the British colonies. His first stay in Gambia was unsuccessful from the traveller's point of view, or at least according to Vráz's own words. However, it was a success for a collector of biological material. It is noteworthy that the famous photograph of Vráz masked as an Arab merchant was taken much later in his own atelier on the Gold Coast. He is dressed in an over shirt, representing the ceremonial garment of a Hausa merchant or a chief, decorated with characteristic embroideries. He likely borrowed it from a member of the Hausa community present on the Gold Coast at that time.



Portrait of Vráz masked as an Arab merchant in the festive shirt of a Hausa merchant or a chief, the Gold Coast, 1885–1888, private archive of the authors.

His second journey was again directed to a British colony. Vráz could have settled, for example, in the French colony on the western coast of the present-day Senegal and use the local colonial towns, such as St. Louis, as a base for his journeys into Africa's interior. This did not happen. The reason may have been his ignorance of French. On the Gold Coast he could use both English (with the British and Africans) as well as German (with the missionaries from the Basel Mission).

Let us return to the political situation on the Gold Coast in the 1880s. The threat of Asante control over the coast was put off by means of the British victory, but was still existent. Furthermore, the Asante themselves were striving for revenge, and the Fante states were well aware of it. This caused many of the states to undertake an agreement with the British, putting their territories under the British protectorate. When Vráz departed from the Gold Coast, the territory was still relatively at peace. Only the end of the 1890s brought a new expansion of the Asante and the creation of the Crown Colony of the Gold Coast.

During his stay in Abetifi, Vráz participated in the negotiations between local chiefs and delegates of the British government concerning the establishment of the protectorate over the territory of Okwawu and the celebrations connected with this event. In his book, he recommended the event as being excellent for him as a photographer; he only regretted that he did not have enough glass plates or time. He also stressed the role Ramseyer played in the conclusion of the agreement: "It took three days until the locally-popular missionary Ramseyer managed to convince the local chiefs by many intercessions to sign the agreement. Then Okwawu received England's protection" (Vráz 1898: 193). The agreement was finally concluded on 5 August 1888.

The Basel Archive possesses several photographs recording the negotiations at Abetifi.<sup>14</sup> The chiefs together with a representative of the British government – a physician from Sierra Leone – sit under sunshades while one of the chairs remains empty. An almost similar picture – only the gestures of some people have changed – is included in the Vráz Files in the Náprstek Museum (Inv. No. Af I 5392) and in the Basel Mission Archive (Inv. No. QL-30.013.0021). The picture is described as follows: "Dr. Smith in Kyebi as ambassador of the English government." The authorship is ascribed to Vráz and the picture is localised to Kyebi (alternative writing of Kibi). The original capture of Vráz's negative (Inv. No. Af I 5392) explains the vacant chair: "Here he came (only as a prisoner), the first white person, this friend of mine, the missionary Ramseyer. And I am now taking photographs in these lands. My chair is left vacant – a huge sunshade – emblem of the 'kinglet' of Abetifi, placed next to me. Negro English soldiers of the Hausa nation, well-trying mercenaries England stationed here in the background. They are Mohammedans, kind-hearted, bright people."

<sup>14</sup> www.bmpix.org 03-06-2009, e.g. D-30.15.010 – „Annexion von Okwau“. The caption reads as follows: "Part of the ceremony when Kwahu was accepted into the British Gold Coast colony. NB the British official involved was a Sierra Leonian doctor (PJ 07.1998). Inv. No. QD-30.042.0088 [„5 mai 1885. Le commissaire anglais, le roi de l'Okwana at sa suite lors de l'annexion 5mai 1885" ] gives an incorrect date. The capture further specifies: "This ceremony definitely took place in 1888. NB the English commissioner is in fact an African from Sierra Leone. One can identify him by the sun-helmet he holds over his knees (PJ 7/98)." Other Inv. Nos.: QD-30.041.0042, QD-30.044.0108, QD-32.024.0279.



Inv. No. Af I 5392 – Negotiations between the chiefs of Okwawu and the representatives of the British government concerning the creation of the protectorate, Abetifi, 1888 (without Vráz).

The Basel Archive also contains the photograph Inv. No. D-30.15.009 presenting the negotiations at Okwawu on the occasion of the establishment of the British protectorate. It shows the seated chiefs, the representative of the British government – the physician from Sierra Leone – and the missionary Ramseyer. The original caption of the photograph reads: “Uebnahme des Nordens des Goldküste (Okwawu), mit Miss. Ramseyer v. Abetifi, je unter einem Schirm ist ein Häuptling.” The identity of the Sierra Leonean physician was established by Paul Jenkins in 1998, as it results from the caption to Inv. No. D-30.15.010.<sup>15</sup>

Vráz mentions the very same man: “At that point a physician was living in Abetifi, he was a Negro, educated in England, and sent there by the British government. He was accompanied by 24 Hausa soldiers. His task was to get the approval from the chieftains of Okvawu for their land to be placed under the protectorate of England.” (Vráz 1898: 193).

Obviously, any recognized British were able to act on behalf of the British Crown, in this particular case it was a physician from Sierra Leone.

At the sides stand the entourage of the chiefs. One among them may be identified, thanks to the description on the photograph Inv. No. D-30.14.056, as the overseer of

<sup>15</sup> www.bmpix.org, 09-04-2009, Search: D-30.15.009. Part of the ceremony when Kwahu was accepted into the British Gold Coast colony. NB the British official involved was a Sierra Leonian doctor (PJ 07.1998). Paul Jenkins of the University in Basel published a number of papers focused on missionary photographers in Africa.



sword bearers of the chief Odow Kwame from Abetifi.<sup>16</sup> The very same man is shown on the negative Inv. No. Af I 5370 and the slide Inv. No. Af II 1753 from the Vráz Files in the Náprstek Museum. They are likely copies from a single source.

The slide Inv. No. Af II 1762 showing the chief Odow Kwame with his entourage is probably made from the very same negative as the photograph Inv. No. D.30.14.049 from the Basel Mission Archive. The original negatives of these pictures are not included in the photograph collection of the Náprstek Museum. However, it does include the slide Inv. No. Af II 1764 which is almost identical with D-30.15.009 except for the detail that it is not Ramseyer, but Vráz who sits under the sunshade. This picture confirms the assumption



Inv. No. Af II 1764 – Negotiations between the chiefs of Okwawu and the representatives of the British government concerning the creation of the protectorate, Abetifi, 1888 (with Vráz).

that Vráz and Ramseyer were in contact and that they were in the same place at the same time. It is also very likely that they photographed each other, and that they exchanged their pictures. We may also assume with a high degree of probability that the number of pictures in the Basel Mission Archive taken by Vráz is actually much higher than the number that is attributed to him at the moment. In return, some of the negatives in the Vráz Files of the Náprstek Museum may actually represent a gift from Ramseyer.

After the events in Abetifi Vráz set out with his collections to the coast. Unfortunately, he fell ill with fever-and-ague. He was treated by the missionaries in the town of Begoro and after he recovered he continued to the final destination of his travels, namely Accra.

<sup>16</sup> [www.bmpix.org](http://www.bmpix.org), 09-04-2009. The photograph Inv. No. D-30.14.056 forms part of the album titled "Achtzig Ansichten von der Goldküste (Westafrika) nach Originalaufnahmen des Missionars Fritz Ramseyer", Neuenburg 1895, under No. 53. Other signatures of photographs of the sword bearer are Inv. Nos. D-30.14.057, QD-30.042.0058, QD-30.043.0058 and QD-32.024.0399.

In September 1888, Vráz left the Gold Coast and sailed to the Canary Islands, never to return to Africa.

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