

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

*Books of enduring scholarly value*

### History

The books reissued in this series include accounts of historical events and movements by eye-witnesses and contemporaries, as well as landmark studies that assembled significant source materials or developed new historiographical methods. The series includes work in social, political and military history on a wide range of periods and regions, giving modern scholars ready access to influential publications of the past.

### **Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone in West Africa is the subject of this 1803 work by English physician Thomas Winterbottom (1766–1859). In the 1790s he spent four years there working for the Sierra Leone Company (established by abolitionists to resettle ex-slaves), and combating diseases such as malaria and scurvy. He displays none of the pejorative views of Africa or its inhabitants that some of his contemporaries expressed, but has a very positive opinion of the country. Winterbottom describes the women as beautiful and graceful, and he dismisses racial differentiations based on skin colour as being absurd. In Volume 1 he draws a many-faceted picture of the climate, history and traditions of Sierra Leone, describing the limited diet of the inhabitants (consisting mainly of rice and palm oil), and seeking to give scientific answers to such questions as why the hair of the inhabitants is mostly of a ‘woolly’ type.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection will bring back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone

*To Which is Added, An Account of  
the Present State of Medicine Among Them*

VOLUME 1

THOMAS WINTERBOTTOM



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108020862](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108020862)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2010

This edition first published 1803

This digitally printed version 2010

ISBN 978-1-108-02086-2 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect  
the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published  
by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or  
with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

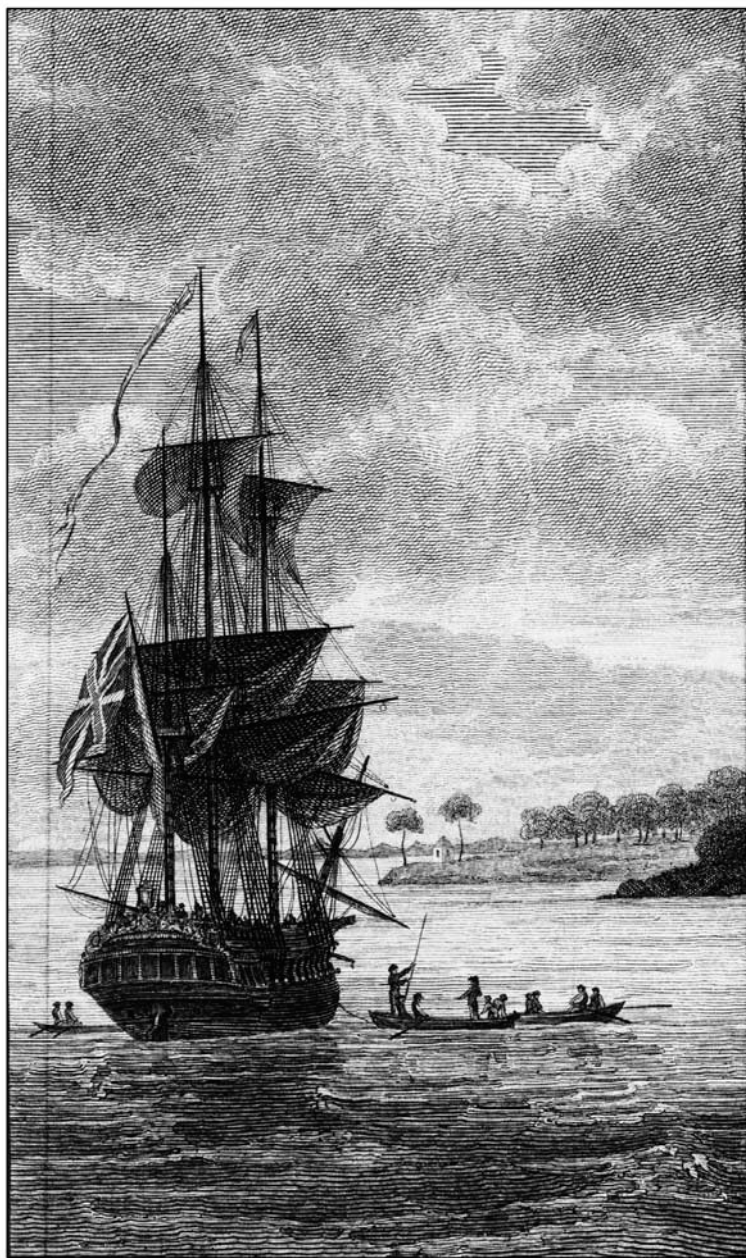
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*Drawn by W.A. Bowles; General of the Creek Nation.*

*A. Vien*



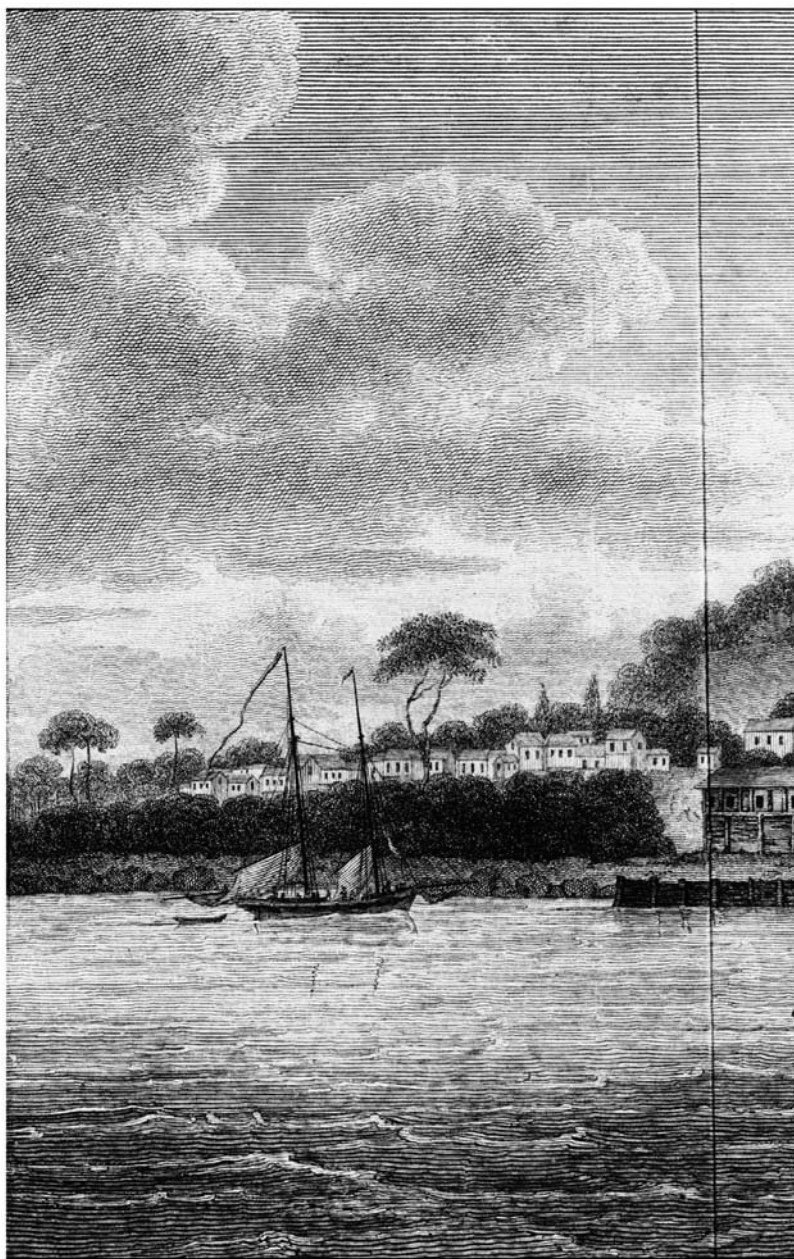
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*of Free-town on the River Sierra*

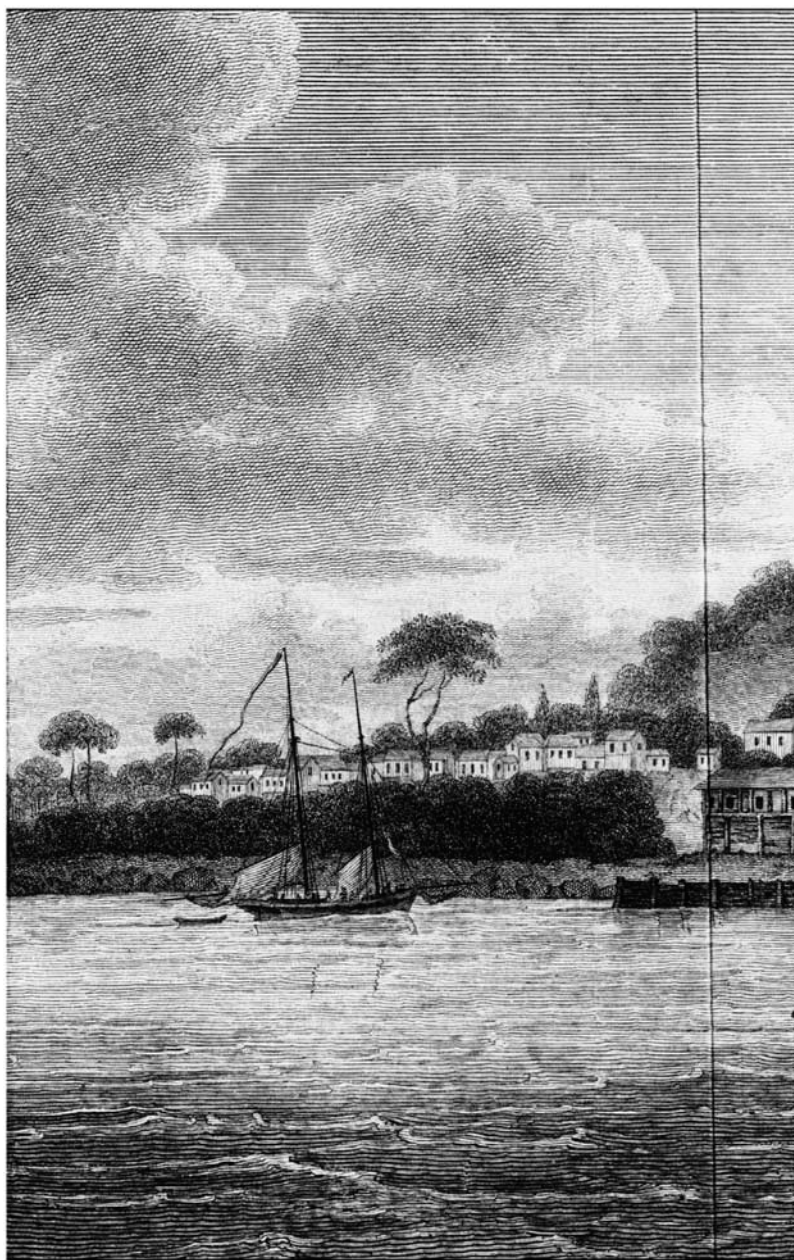
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*View of Free-town on the River Sierra*



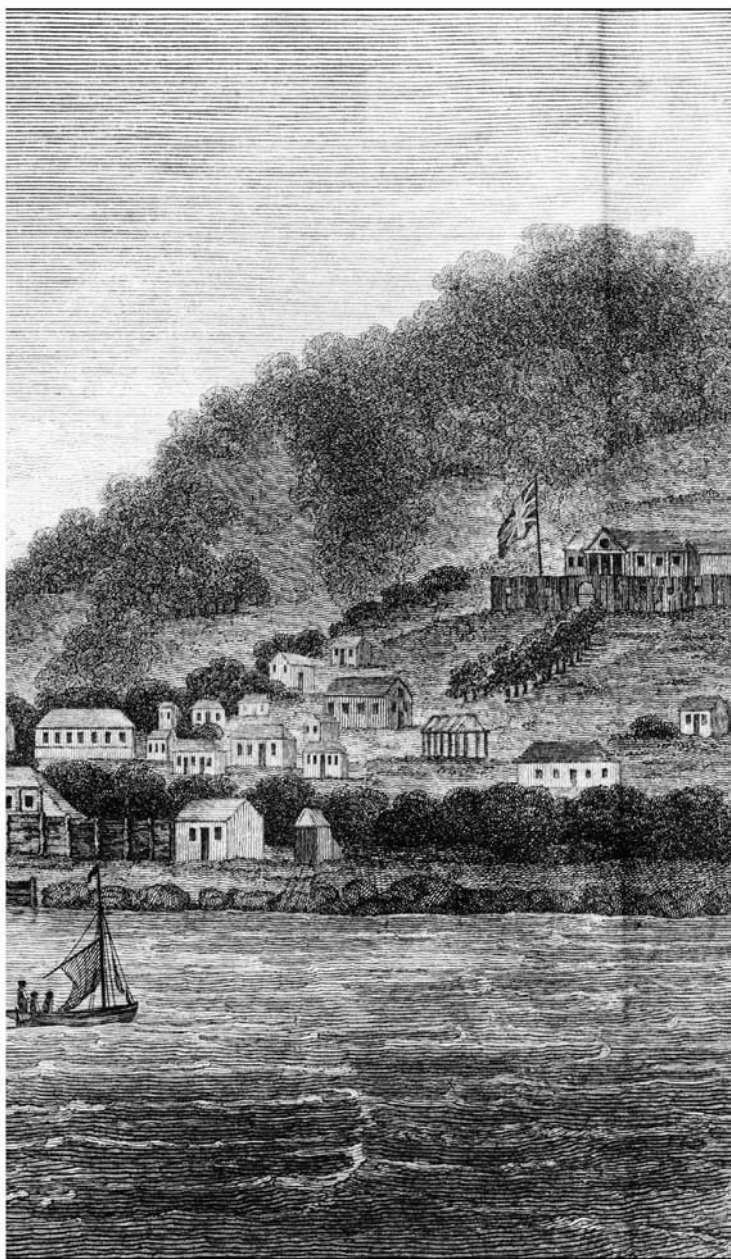
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



*Sierra Leone?*

*Engraved by J. Collyer*



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1  
Thomas Winterbottom  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

AN  
ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
*NATIVE AFRICANS*  
IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF  
SIERRA LEONE;  
TO WHICH IS ADDED,  
AN ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
PRESENT STATE OF MEDICINE AMONG THEM.

---

Come fanciul ch'a pena  
Volge la Lingua e snoda;  
Che dir non sa, ma 'l piu tacer gli è Noia  
Così 'l desir mi mena  
A dire: —  
Mi palpita il cor: — ma forse diran  
.....che un primo. Errore  
Punir non si dovea; che un Ramo infermo  
Subito non recide saggio Cultor.

---

BY  
*THOMAS WINTERBOTTOM, M. D.*  
PHYSICIAN TO THE COLONY OF SIERRA LEONE.

---

VOL. I.

---

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM,  
*Dean Street;*  
AND SOLD BY JOHN HATCHARD, 199, PICCADILLY,  
AND J. MAWMAN, POULTRY.

---

1803

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE.

---

THE Author does not presume to offer any apology for laying the following work before the tribunal of the Public: but, before their sentence upon it be pronounced, he wishes to observe, that it is offered merely as a rude sketch of the domestic economy, and medical knowledge, of the inhabitants of the windward coast of Africa; or rather, as a collection of gleanings which have either escaped the notice of more successful reapers in that extensive field, or which have been passed over as of little importance. If this work should be found to add little to our present knowledge of Africa, the Author hopes that it may at least tend to remove some prejudices respecting its inhabitants, whose customs have, in various instances, been misrepresented.

The work is divided into two parts, the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

iv

## PREFACE.

latter of which, first engaged the Author's attention ; to this was subjoined a brief account of the manners and customs of the people whose diseases had been noticed. But this account having increased so much by successive additions, as greatly to exceed the limits originally marked out for it, and the medical part being thought likely to prove uninteresting to many who might be desirous of perusing the rest of the work, it seemed advisable to alter the arrangement, and print each part in separate volumes, in order that the general reader might be at liberty to purchase the one, without being obliged to purchase the other also.

The Vocabularies placed at the end of the work, will probably appear to many to be too extensive and cumbrous ; but the Author hopes they may prove useful to Europeans who visit that part of the African coast to which his account relates, by facilitating the acquisition of a more accurate knowledge of the native languages, a point of indispensable necessity to those who desire exact information.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## PREFACE.

V

The difficulty of procuring satisfactory intelligence from the natives of Africa, respecting themselves or their country, is known only to those who have made the experiment; they frequently lead Europeans into error by answering questions in the affirmative, merely to avoid trouble and escape importunity. The questions themselves sometimes awaken the jealousy of those to whom they are addressed; feeling no desire to institute similar inquiries, they are apt to suspect that the curiosity of Europeans has some sinister end in view. It requires also much time, and a fund of patience, to propose the necessary queries; to vary them in such a manner as to enable the natives to comprehend their precise import; and to compare the testimonies of different individuals in order to avoid the risk of misconception. Even interpreters are not to be implicitly relied on, as they are apt to give to answers that colour which they perceive will be most agreeable to their employer.



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

vi

PREFACE.

The author begs leave to return his sincere acknowledgments to his excellent friend, Z. Macaulay, Esq. formerly Governor of Sierra Leone, for much valuable information, and likewise for the Map of the Coast which accompanies this work.

DIRECTIONS

FOR

PLACING THE PLATES.



1. Map of the Coast . . . . .	to face page	1
2. Chart of the River Sierra Leone . . . . .		14
3. A View of the Colony of Sierra Leone, . .	<i>the Title</i>	
4. A Negro climbing a Palm Tree . . . . .		61
5. The Game of Palm Nuts . . . . .		117
6. Nests of the larger Termites . . . . .		299
7. Nests of the smaller Termites . . . . .		309
8. Representation of the Insects . . . . .		311

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## EXPLANATION

OF THE

## PLATES.

---

**P**late I. Map of the Coast.

Plate II. A Chart of the River Mitombo, including the Bullom Shore, and part of the peninsula of Sierra Leone, sketched by my much respected friend William Dawes, Esq. Governor of Sierra Leone. This chart, though sufficiently accurate, is not intended for nautical purposes.

Plate III. A View of the Settlement at Sierra Leone, see page 275.

This view takes in only one half of the town; but the remainder very nearly resembles the part which is here represented. The flag displayed at the governor's house is in return to the compliment paid by the vessel, supposed to be just arrived from England. The large building close to the wharf or public landing place, is the Sierra Leone Company's store or magazine. Round the first point, at the North East extremity of the town, is a small bay called Susan's Bay; and round the second, upon the extremity of which is built a small hut, is another beautiful bay, having a fine sandy beach, very convenient for careening or repairing ships. From hence the land is seen running to form a third point, called Foro Point, and opening into a bay, called Foro Bay, at the bottom of which is placed Granville Town. See p. 274. The bright spots on the sides of the mountain are patches of ground which have been cleared of wood, for cultivation.

Plate IV. represents a Negro at the Summit of a Palm Tree, and just about to remove the calabash which had been left to col-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

ix

lect the palm wine. The man at the foot of a tree is giving the other some instructions. The woman crossing the Savannah is going to the neighbouring town with a load of yams, oranges, and pine apples. She leads one child by the hand, and carries the other at her back, secured by a broad cotton cloth fastened over her breast. See page 61.

Plate V. Represents two young women who have been playing under the shade of a plantain tree, at the game of palm nuts, described page 117. The houses resemble those in the Bulom and Timmanee towns, and have each a *bunting*, or mud bank, running round the outside.

Plate VI. fig. 1, represents the hill nest, raised by the termites *bellicosus*, described page 298.

a a a. Turrets by which their hills are raised and enlarged, p. 299.

Fig. 2. A section of fig. 1, as it would appear on being cut down through the middle from the top, a foot lower than the surface of the ground, p. 301.

A. A. An horizontal line from A on the left, and a perpendicular line from A at the bottom, will intersect each other at the royal chamber, p. 301. The darker shades near it are the empty apartments and passages, which it seems are left so for the attendants on the king and queen, who, when old, may require near one hundred thousand to wait on them every day. The parts which are the least shaded and dotted are the nurseries, surrounded, like the royal chamber, by empty passages on all sides, for the more easy access to them, with the eggs from the queen, the provision for the young, &c. N. B. The magazines of provisions are situated without any seeming order among the vacant passages which surround the nurseries.

B. The top of the interior buildings, which often seems, from the arches carrying upward, to be adorned on the sides with pinacles, p. 305.

C. The floor of the area or nave, p. 304.

E E. The bridges, p. 307.

Fig. 3. (In the corner of the plate) the first appearance of an hill nest by two turrets, p. 299.

b



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

Fig. 4. A tree, with the nest of the termites arborum, and their covered way, p. 310.

F. F. F. F. Covered ways of the termites arborum, p. 318.

Fig. 5. A section of the nest of the termites arborum.

6. A nest of the termites bellicosus, with Europeans on it, seemingly observing a vessel at sea, p. 300.

7. A bull standing centinel upon one of these nests, while the rest of the herd is ruminating below, p. 300.

G. G. G. The African palm trees, from the nuts of which is made the oleum palmæ.

Plate VII. fig. 1 and 2. The Turret Nests, with the roofs of the termes mordax, and a termes atrox as finished, p. 309.

Fig. 3. A turret, with the roof begun.

4. A turret, raised only half its height.

5. A turret, building upon one which had been thrown down, p. 309.

6. 6. A turret broken in two.

Plate VIII. fig. 1. A Termes Bellicosus, p. 293, No. 1. and p. 311.

Fig. 2. A king. N. B. A king never alters his form after he loses his wings, neither does he apparently increase in bulk.

3. A queen, p. 315.

4. The head of a perfect insect magnified.

5. A face, with stemmata magnified, p. 293, No. 1.

6. A labourer, p. 311.

7. A labourer magnified.

8. A soldier, p. 311.

9. A soldier's forceps, and part of his head magnified, p. 311.

10. The termes mordax, p. 293, No. 2.

11. The face with the stemmata magnified, p. 293, No. 2.

12. A labourer.

13. A soldier.

14. The termes atrox, p. 293, No. 3, and p. 308.

15. The face and stemmata magnified, p. 293, No. 3.

16. A labourer.

17. A soldier.

18. Idem.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

xi

Fig. 19. The termes destructor, p. 293, No. 4.

20. The face and stemmata magnified, p. 293, No. 4.

21. The termes arborum, p. 293, No. 5, and p. 310.

22. The face and stemmata magnified, p. 293, No. 5.

23. A labourer.

24. A soldier.

25. A queen, p. 317.

N. B. In the figures 5, 11, 15, 20, and 21, the two white spots  
between the edges are stemmata.

CONTENTS.

VOLUME I.

CHAP. I.

<i>DIVISION of the African Coast—General Account of the Country in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, its Inhabitants, and their Languages—Discovery of the River Sierra Leone, and Origin of its Name—Description of the River, its Islands and the adjacent Country .....</i>	Page 1
---	-----------

CHAP. II.

<i>Division of the Year—Rains—Tornados—Temperature of the Air—Prevailing Winds—Appearance of the Sky and the heavenly Bodies—Noise of Crickets, &amp;c. at Night—Length of Day—Smokes—Humidity of the Atmosphere—State of the Thermometer and Barometer—Effect of Dews and Rain—The Hartmattan .....</i>	21
--	----

CHAP. III.

<i>Agriculture—Clearing the Ground—Cultivation of Rice, &amp;c.—The Articles of Food—Fruits—Various Uses of the Palm Tree. ....</i>	46
---	----

CHAP. IV.

<i>Diet—Art of Cookery—Bread—Animal Food—Milk and Butter—Spirituous Liquors—Tobacco—Kola .....</i>	64
--	----

CHAP V.

<i>Situation of African Towns—Houses—Palaver House—Towns of the Mahommedans .....</i>	78
---	----

CONTENTS.

CHAP. VI.

	Page
<i>Ordinary Employments—Fishing—Manufacturing Leather— Blacksmiths—Manufacture of Mats—Nets—Earthen Ves- sels—Cotton—Blue Dye—Dress of Men and Women— Mourning—Mode of painting and anointing their Bodies— Pointing their Teeth—Tattooing—Circumcision .....</i>	89

CHAP. VII.

<i>Amusements—Singing and Dancing—Musical Instruments— Riding—Mahomedan Literature—Games of Chance— Negro Tales—Salutation.....</i>	108
---	-----

CHAP. VIII.

<i>Government—Administration of Justice—Ordeals—Red Wa- ter—Divination—The Purrah .....</i>	124
---	-----

CHAP. IX.

<i>Situation of Women—Marriages—Polygamy—Population— Period of Child Bearing—Names of Men and Women.....</i>	144
--	-----

CHAP. X.

<i>Wars—Revolt of the Mandingo Slaves—Implements of War— Africans unjustly accused of being Anthropophagi.....</i>	153
--	-----

CHAP. XI.

<i>Trade—Mandingo Merchants—Trade with Fools—Bar Trade—Money Medium—Modes of Calculation—Singu- lar Mode of Trading on the Banks of the Niger .....</i>	168
---	-----

CHAP. XII.

<i>Persons of the Natives—Supposed Causes of their black Colour— Woolly Hair—Features and Form of the Negroes—Their Rank in the Creation.....</i>	180
---	-----



CONTENTS.

CHAP. XIII.

	Page
<i>General Character of the Africans as given by different Authors— Their Pride—Sensibility—Deference to old Age—Hospita- lity—Genius—Oratory—Schools—Fondness for Literature.</i>	205

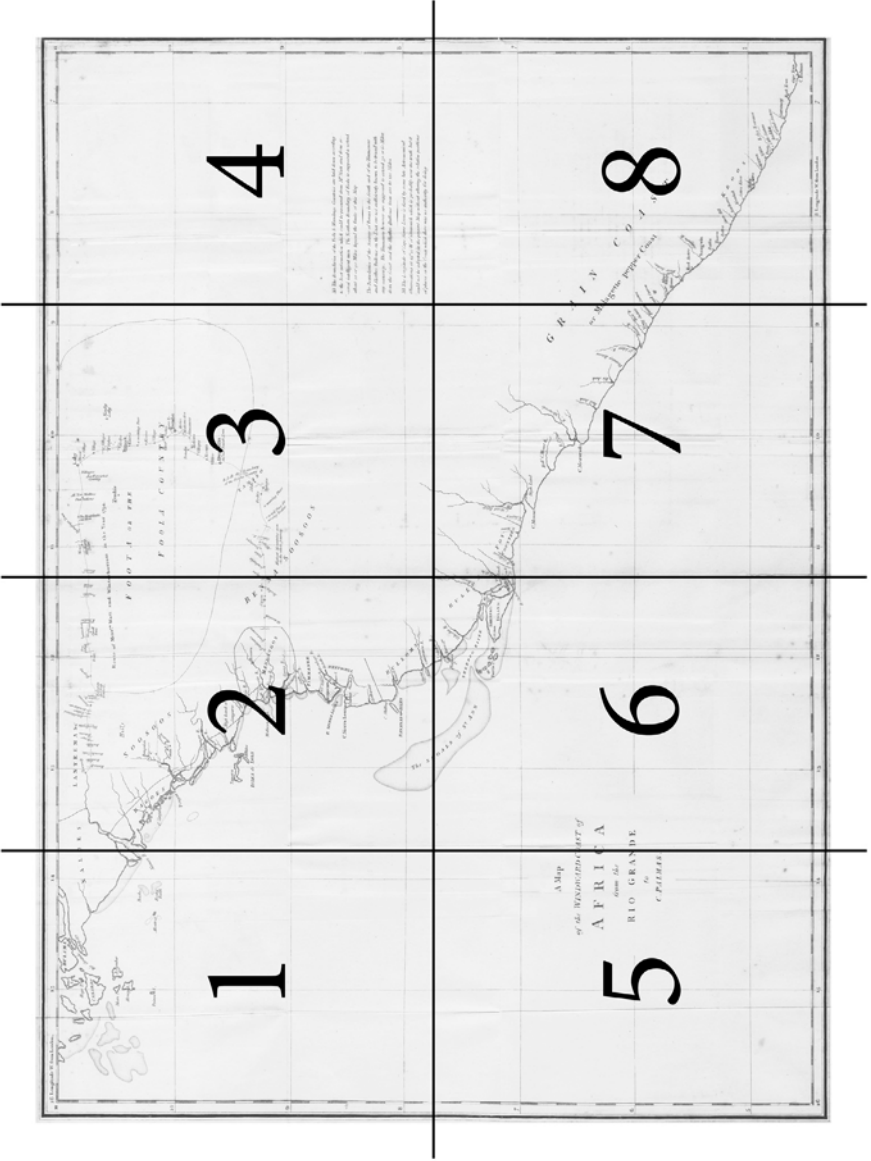
CHAP. XIV.

<i>Religion—Worship of Demons—Idea of a future State—Snake Worship—Mahomedanism—Trial and Punishment of Of- fences among the Mahomedans—Funerals—Mourning— Singular Society of Women—Mahomedan Burials—Ac- count of a Mahomedan Impostor .....</i>	222
--	-----

CHAP. XV.

<i>Union of Medicine with Magic—Superstition of the Africans— Greegrees or Amulets—Treatment of sick Persons to avoid the Effect of Witchcraft—Practice of Obi—Art of poison- ing—"Blowing" .....</i>	251
---	-----

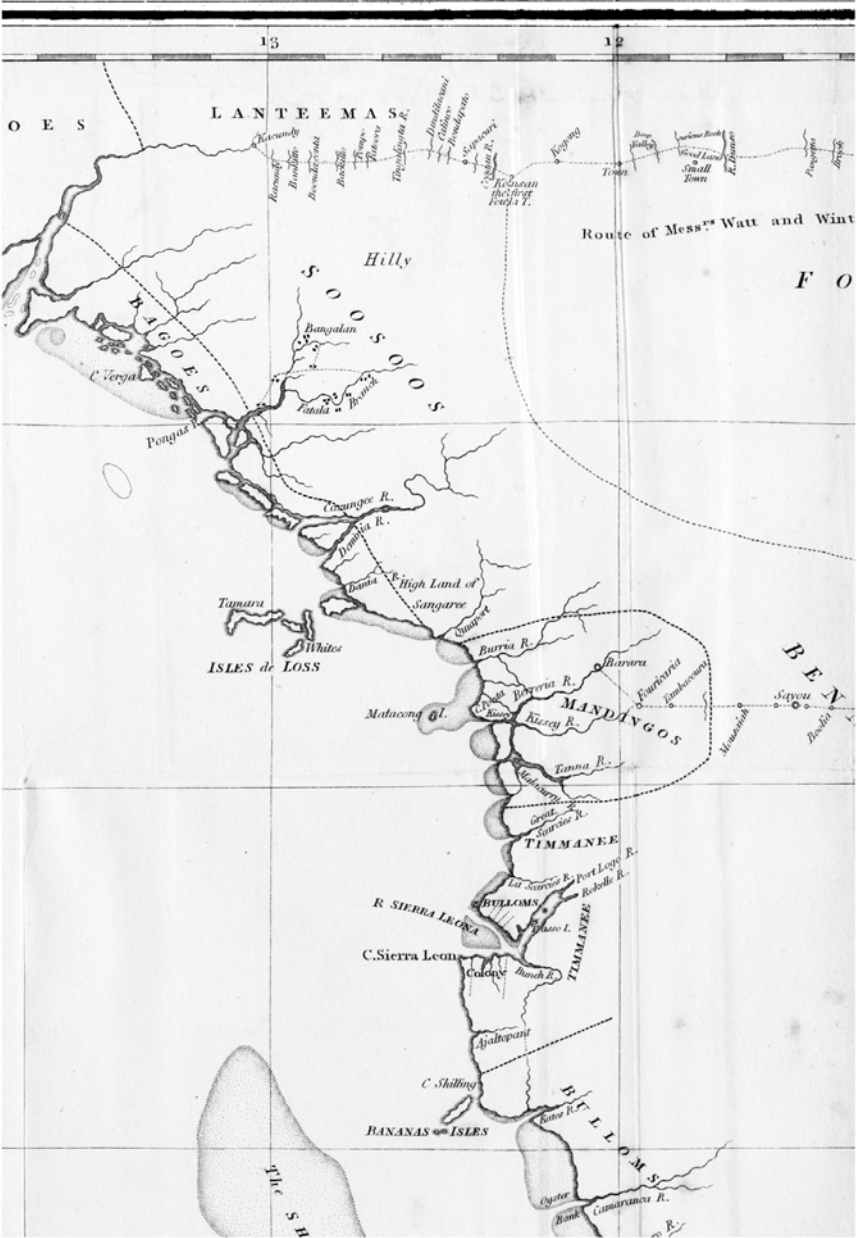
<b>APPENDIX. NO. I.</b> <i>Description of the Colony of Sierra Leone</i>	273
II. <i>Meteorological Account of Sierra Leone</i>	281
III. <i>Account of the Termites .....</i>	292
IV. <i>Vocabulary of the Bullom and Timmanee Languages .....</i>	337
V. <i>Vocabulary of the Soosoo Languages .....</i>	352
<b>INDEX.....</b>	363



Key to following pages.

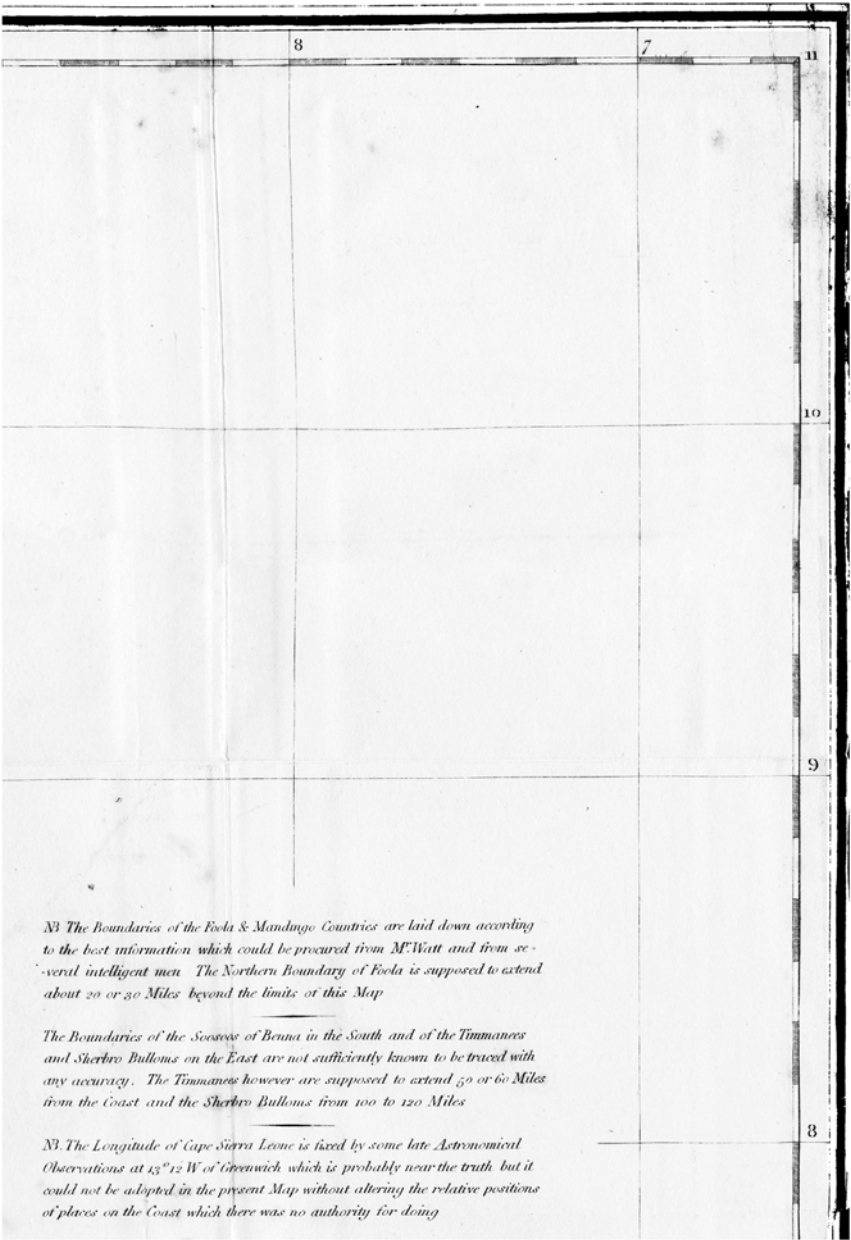
Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1  
Thomas Winterbottom  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)











Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02086-2 - Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of  
Sierra Leone, Volume 1

Thomas Winterbottom

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

