

Basel Mission Archives

"Martin to Basel"

Title: "Martin to Basel"

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Description: A reply to a circular from Mr. von Jacoby in Berlin, apparently over the question of the sale of spirits in German colonies. Martin makes clear that what he says is approximate - he has made enquiries, but sources do not always agree. There is no control over the sale of spirits in the German area. Indeed in some places it is used as a medium of exchange. In Kpando the Mohammedans trade in spirits. He met one who said the German-European was a good man - he let people buy spirits as and when they wanted to) and the Kpando catechist believes they drink it privately, too. Mohr gives some account of the production of palm wine, remarking that in the northern part of the district it is taken not so much from the oil palm as from the Adobe, Kube and Nkresia palms. Moderate drinking of palm-wine hurts one no more than moderate drinking of wine in Europe, though at great festivities palm-wine will be gathered for up to 14 days and mixed with pepper and meat - the resulting brew is very strong indeed. He knows of other local drinks: Honey beer from Salaga - very intoxicating. Atokosa, prepared from guinea-corn and presumably a hairy fruit, the mixture poured on water, allowed to simmer sweet when first made, but quickly ferments to a drink as intoxicating as palm wine. Awinsa, prepared from the cereal called Awi which is beaten in a mortar, the husks and later the other solid remains taken off in water, while the drink is boiled and later allowed to stand - only intoxicating in large quantities. A quite unintoxicating drink is prepared from yellow bananas. He also heard how to make rice beer from an old woman in Ntwumuru who had come from far into the interior. He and the two local pastors, Clerk and Hall, agree that there is nothing wrong with the local drinks - it is European spirits which 'spoils' people. He has asked in Kpando how far into the interior spirits are carried. The reply was that you see Mosis and Yendi people with them. He expressed scepticism, and learned that they speak Hausa and broken Twi or Ewe. He asked about the money needed to buy the spirits, and learned that they are bartered for local products. He has heard it said that you cannot buy a slave except with spirits or powder. The spirits are not sent into the interior in bottles, but in large tins of 90% spirits which are then mixed one part with to 2 parts water. Two such tins constitute one load. He once saw a caravan of approximately 15 carriers with 30 such tins mistaking them for petroleum (paraffin, presumably). They were en route for Krakye, from Agome-Kpalime, and he met them when he was on the way from Konsu to Worawora. Giving examples of the effects of spirits on African life he writes that the Vakpo people are one of the worst affected tribes. In their capital Avhue there is scarcely a single house in good repair. Amoyaw, the chief, replied to Martin's advice about drinking that if Martin would stop 'European wine' coming, he would leave off drinking. He also cites a case of what appears to be death from alcohol poisoning in Anfoe, and lasting disability from drinking a bottle of spirits in consecutive

Basel Mission Archives

swallows. Spirits in this area comes in tins from Keta (Keta is nearer than Lome and the spirits are cheaper). On Anfoe market spirits can be used as currency, a yam costing 1/- of one bottle schnapps. The town of Komfa (among the Dsemes west of Anfoe on the Volta) has 90-100 houses, but when he was last there half of them were falling down. The chief explained this by saying that everyone in the town was ill. Martin then reminded him that the year before he had found everyone drunk, and the chief agreed that this was really the problem and that whereas before there was plenty of cash in the town and that when he settled a case he was paid in money, now all the money is used for spirits, and he is paid in spirits. Offering a little information on local reactions to spirits Martin cites a Worawora elder who is on the side of the missionaries at least when they condemn spirits - Ampesa (He also cites hearing that Tutukple Kwadwo was protesting against the constant caravans of spirits passing through his country is when Mohr was in Adele in 1895). Families in Anum have been known to imprison hard drinking relatives because of the danger that such a person will bring the family into debt. A hard drinking chief has even been known to be destooled e.g. Begoro. Discussing spirits booths and arguing that from the point of view of control and revenue the German Colony should enforce licensing as the English Gold Coast does, Martin comments that there are many spirits -booths in Akwapim and Krobo, and while when he first came to Anum there were none, now in Anum there are 3, in Boso 1, and in Labolabo (on the Volta) 1 - with a prospect of an increasing number in the future. Spirits cost roughly twice as much west as east of the Volta - the English regulations about spirits in Keta are less harsh in order to keep in step with German regulations, but the English have a customs barrier up the Volta from Ada to the Afram mouth to check smuggling. Of course, he does not know what influence relations with the French have over German policy - he has no knowledge on this, and no experiences in the Franco-German border districts.

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