

A
Citrus
Pilgrimage

Celebrating Citrus in Ivory Coast

Natty Mark Samuels

A

Citrus

Pilgrimage

Celebrating Citrus in Ivory Coast

©Natty Mark Samuels, 2020. African School.

Dedication

to

Thierry Duclos

for writing

'The Ivory Coast's Citrus Oil Industry' paper

and to

Christine Chambers

for her long time support of African School
and the Oxford Citrus Festival

A Citrus Pilgrimage

Narrator: If I should ever go, on a citrus pilgrimage through Ivory Coast, like Italy, I would begin in the north and then make my way south.

1st Voice (all to be chanted): Oranges, oranges.

2nd Voice: Odienne, Odienne.

Voices: Close to the border called Guinean.

1st Voice: Into the valley

2nd Voice: Just the citrus and me

Voices: Going to Odienne.

Narrator: Yes, I would commence with a visit to Odienne, in the north-west, to the orchards of the Massif du Dienguele Valley. To Odienne, the capital of the old Kabadougou Kingdom. Although it is thought that the Portuguese brought citrus to West Africa in the 16th century, commercial growth – originally for national use - was not established till after the Second World War.

And after time in Odienne, I would go south-east, to where the lemons grew: I would go to Dabakala. As with Odienne, Dabakala was the capital of a state and once again, it was ruled by a Toure: Vakaba Toure in Odienne, Samory Toure in Dabakala.

1st Voice: Dabakala,
Seat of an empire,
That's where the lemons grew.
Dabakala,
Throne of the citrus queen:
I come to pay homage to you.

Narrator: Carrying on south, past Bouake and the present capital, Yamoussoukro, to a town that is called Toumodi. I must stop there, because of *citrus aurantifolia*.

2nd Voice: Odienne had the oranges,
Dabakala the lemons:
Toumodi was a place for limes.
South-east of Toumodi
A place called Mamini,
Which also had a green citrus time.

Narrator: Rather than the criss-crossing, I'd carry on south, with the intention of working my way round to the west. So from Mamini, I'd continue on down, to a rendezvous with Agboville - and an encounter with two members of the Rutaceae family.

1st Voice (all to be chanted): Bergamot,

Voices: *Citrus bergamia*.

2nd Voice: Bitter Orange,

Voices: *Citrus aurantium*.

Voices: You might see them there in Agboville.

1st Voice: Bergamot,
Voices: Used in perfumery.
1st Voice: Bitter Orange,
Voices: Used in marmalade.
Voices: Does the town still offer a citrus thrill?

Narrator: As the pilgrimage continues, past the fields of cashew and cocoa, I'd make my way to Guitri, where three members of the citrus clan are cultivated. As well as the interaction with citrus, there'll be conversation with those I meet along the way, from north to south.

1st Voice: The growing of lemons.
2nd Voice: Talking with the Gur and the Anyi.
1st Voice: The growing of bergamot.
2nd Voice: Talking with Kru and Senufo.
1st Voice: The growing of oranges
2nd Voice: Talking with Akan and the Mande
Voices: Conversing with all ethnicities.

Narrator: Onward to Sassandra. Like Saranda in Albania and Calabria in Italy, Sassandra is on the southern tip of its country: in this case, warmed by the air from the Gulf of Guinea. Sassandra is known as the main location of bergamot cultivation.

1st Voice: Used in Eau De Cologne,
As well as Earl Grey tea:
2nd Voice: Sassandra on the Atlantic coast.
1st Voice: Sassandra
2nd Voice: Sassandra
1st Voice: Sassandra
2nd Voice: Sassandra
1st Voice: To you I raise my glass.
2nd Voice: To your citrus farmers I toast.

Narrator: Nearing the end of my journey, I make my penultimate stop in Soubre, then on to Issia: cultivators also of bergamot, in the south-west of the country.

1st Voice: Soubre and Issia,
2nd Voice: Last places of pilgrimage;
Voices: Of yellow, green and orange.
1st Voice: I'll sit in the shrines,
2nd Voice: Lulled by their aroma;
Voices: Content in my reverie,
Voices: Where darkness can't impinge.

Narrator: Through the orchards of citrus – past and present – of bergamot, lemons, limes and oranges – I shall celebrate the contribution of the *Rutaceae* family, to Ivorian society. Some, when planning their journey to Ivory Coast, will focus on Abidjan, or Yamoussoukro; but I will go elsewhere: for in that West African country, a citrus pilgrimage awaits me. I don't know how many orchards are still in operation, but to the keepers of these shrines, who have had to contend with political upheaval, fruit diseases and antiquated equipment, I celebrate you as well as your productions: I salute members of the human, as well as the citrus family.

Sources

'The Ivory Coast's Citrus Oil Industry' paper – **Thierry Duclos** - 2006

Wikipedia