

An early Cover from Klein Popo

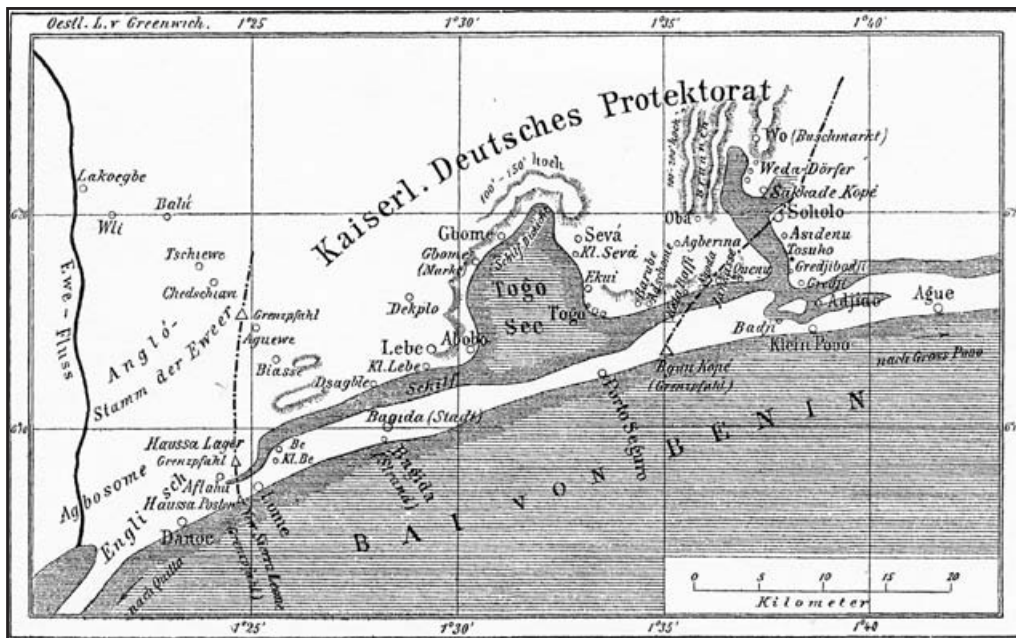
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Sometimes first impressions can be deceptive and the cover introduced here falls into that category. It illustrates the importance of delving into historical and geographical background when describing a piece of postal history.

A basic misconception is to assume that the borders shown on a 20th century map of any of the German colonies reflect the area that was annexed back in the early days of colonial acquisition. Borders were continuously re-drawn, in some cases right up to 1914 as new acquisitions were made by treaty, conquest or territorial exchanges.

We should look at Bismarck's intent when joining the *Scramble for Africa*. The initial instruction to Gustav Nachtigal was not to establish colonies, but to enter into treaties with chiefs along the coast who had not yet signed treaties with other European powers, so as to give the German traders in these areas some form of formalized protection, both from encroachment on their turf by other colonial powers and from harassment by the local natives. After treaties were entered into, the traders were left very much to their own devices, with no police or military support - apart from periodic patrols by the navy. Bismarck's idea was not to colonize, but to have chartered companies that looked after their own interest with very little state interference. Germany's financial obligations were to be kept to a minimum.

Before Consul Nachtigal signed the first treaty at Bagida 5 July 1884 with chiefs claiming to rule over a coastal stretch from Lome to Porto Seguro, various German trading posts (so-called "Faktoreien") were dotted all along the West African coast. Most were in areas that either Britain or France laid claim to. This was the case with Klein Popo, whose chiefs had signed a treaty with France. It was only later that Togo's coastal strip extended to include Klein-Popo, when it was transferred to Germany by the French in exchange for German interests in Dubreka on the coast of Guinea on 24 December 1885. Even then there was no defined border to the north at all, as can be seen on the 1885 map shown below.



Map from "Die Deutschen Besitzungen an der Westafrikanischen Küste - Das Togoland", an early account by the Journalist Hugo Zöller (Berlin 1885, p.64) showing the original "Protectorate" stretching from just west of Lome to just east of Porto Seguro; Klein Popo outside of the border and the Hinterland as *terra incognita*.

Remembering that Klein Popo only became part of the coastal strip under German “protection” on 24 December 1885, the cover shown below with an arrival postmark of Schwerin dated 15 September 1885 emanates from the “Bremer Factori” in **French** Klein Popo. It was taken westward along the beach of the newly acquired German territory and then taken on board at the British Gold Coast village of Quittah some time in August of 1885 to be transported by the steamer “Erna Woermann” as a German sea-post item. The stamp was either from stocks held by the “Bremer Factori” or, more likely, applied on the “Erna Woermann” after payment in cash by the company’s messenger. It was cancelled on arrival in Europe with the boxed “Aus West-Africa/mit/Hamburger Dampfer” (used on the railway T.P.O. between Verviers and Cologne for mail arriving in Belgium by German steamer from West Africa).



August/September 1885:
 At first glance a Togo
 “Vorläufer” --
 but in fact a German sea-
 post cover transported
 by Woermann steamer
 from Quittah on the
 Gold Coast, originating
 in Klein Popo, a village
 that was at this time still
 part of the French sphere
 of interest. France ceded
 Klein Popo to Germany
 on 24 December 1885.