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Postal Profusion and Archival Scarcity: Jacob Vitta's Photographs of Mining in the Gold Coast Colony as Prints and Postcards

Picture postcards originating from former colonial contexts are notably more prevalent than the photographic prints they were based on, and these postcards' abundance is mainly reflected in collections in those regions to which they were sent. Embedded in colonialist communication, these images continue to shape the history of colonial-era photography. This article examines the photographic practices of Jacob Vitta (?–1914), a photographer and publisher from the former Gold Coast Colony who documented the landscape ravaged by mechanized gold mining. I trace the practices and networks involved in the production and dissemination of Vitta's postcards and photographs in order to highlight the contradictory discursive contexts in which his photographs appeared.

Keywords: Jacob Vitta; photographically illustrated postcards; gold mining; copyright; transnational networks; environmental politics

A postcard, mailed in 1910 from Tarkwa in the British Gold Coast Colony—today's Ghana—to St. Columb in Cornwall, England, shows the reproduction of a precisely composed landscape photograph (fig. 1). The smooth and still surface of a river borders the bottom edge of the image. On the left, wooden canoes are fanned out on the water's reflective surface, which is only disturbed by a rough rock formation to the right. A sloped ramp equipped with rails extends from the riverbank to a simple wooden cottage; violently, it cuts a swath through the dense flora that dominates the image. Against the bright background of the ramp, the figure of a worker tending the boats is minute but clearly visible. We see part of the infrastructure of a mine, as we are informed by the caption, "Landing Stage, Broomasi Mines. Photographed and Published by Jacob Vitta Tarkwa." Emblematically, the photograph foregrounds an interpretative tension. It affirmatively displays the colonial-capitalist gold extraction as a visual fact, with its infrastructure and imposed order, while it simultaneously shows the environmental disruption and hints at the social cost underlying the exploitation of resources in the southwest of the Gold Coast Colony. What contemporary viewers, whether locally or in the metropole, may have read into the image was arguably dependent on their position.[1] Yet only one of these vantage points, namely that of colonizers and metropolitan audiences, is substantially reflected in the archival record, while traces of local reception are scarce. This imbalance reflects the structural conditions under which this photograph and others from the period have been preserved, and it poses a central challenge for assessing the work of photographers like Jacob Vitta (?– 1914).

Today, very little is known about the man who captured the scene at least five years before the postcard was mailed. Vitta was a local photog-

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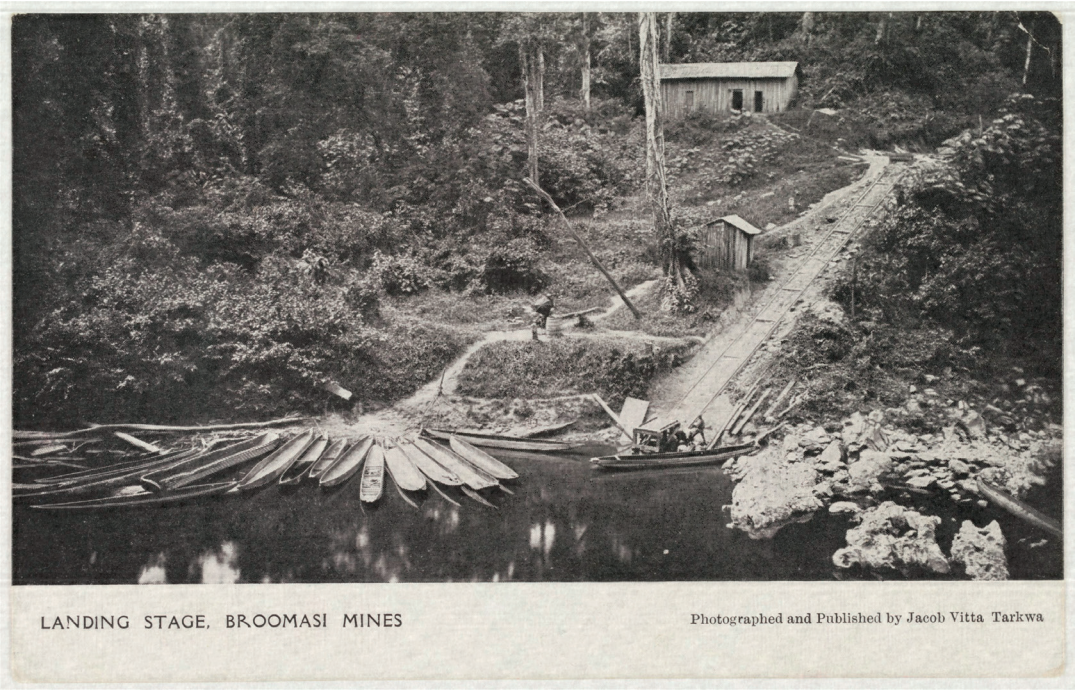


1 Jacob Vitta, *Landing Stage. Broomasi Mines*, ca. 1904, halftone print, 8.7 × 13.7 cm. Author's collection

rapher, most likely indigenous to the West Coast of Africa. However, few historical sources survive that testify to his life history, and his precise origins remain uncertain.[2] His case is similar to that of other African photographers whose European-sounding names render their identification difficult, and whose careers and biographies have only received intensified scholarly attention in the last two decades.[3] Catering to both Western and local elites, these photographers played an active role in shaping the visual culture of the colonial era that is only partially reflected by what remains of their work.[4] Vitta's photographs have survived mainly in the form of postcards like the one described above. From at least 1904 until 1912, he was based in Tarkwa, a town in the southwest of the Gold Coast Colony shaped by mining. There, he operated a photographic studio and worked as a publisher of postcards. During this rather short yet prolific period, he published more than 400 editions of postcards, with his total print run likely numbering in the hundreds of thousands.[5] Examples of these postcards are dispersed across numerous collections and are still offered for sale at auctions and various online platforms. By contrast, original photographic prints are rare. To my knowledge, only 72 prints from Vitta's career survived in institutional archives and private collections.

Outlining Vitta's practice, then, is a problem both of scarcity and of abundance. Postcards bearing Vitta's photographs, captioned, mailed, and collected by colonizing audiences, testify to their use-value in communication between colony and metropole. Their wide availability and the concurrent lack of other forms of Vitta's photographs, which might speak to how his images were received within the Gold Coast Colony, can obscure that his images subtly register a contradiction that complicates their implication in

colonial-capitalist tropes. Photographing the infrastructure of gold mining in the early twentieth-century Gold Coast Colony meant recording the environmental destruction and social disruption sustained by resource extraction. This tension demands a re-reading of Vitta's photographs that moves between the abundance of postcards and the scarcity of prints, and accounts for both their complicity in reinforcing narratives of colonial progress and control and their potential to unsettle those very narratives. Addressing the "implicit histories" embedded in Vitta's postcards, I approach them not merely as archival remnants of colonial communication but as sites where meaning remains unsettled.[6] To illustrate this, I trace the networks of production and distribution of Vitta's postcards and photographic prints by following three versions of the image described at the outset of this text. It has survived not only as a postcard; at least two other copies still exist as albumen prints. All three examples differ in their materiality, initial purposes, and current locations. I will trace the three copies of the image through three individual collections, each representative of a distinct archival context, reading them along the grain of these archival holdings to examine how specific contexts and material forms shape their interpretations and to outline Vitta's agency in the production and dissemination of postcards. Building on this, I resituate his photographs within the historical discourses surrounding their production in order to reconstruct some of the meanings that Vitta's images potentially held for local audiences, even in the face of meager archives of material evidence and biographical data.

"Photographed and Published by Jacob Vitta, Tarkwa"

Thanks to the extensive research of several scholars, we have substantial insights into the lives and practices of a number of Vitta's predecessors and contemporaries.[7] What these established figures among West African photographers have in common is that the availability of substantive biographical information enabled the reconstruction of their careers. Such data on Vitta is scarce. It is only the end of his life, in late March or early April 1914, that is documented. While he is now a completely obscure figure, Vitta achieved some prominence during his lifetime. Two Cape Coast-based newspapers, both published under African ownership and editorship, report on his apparently premature passing.[8] A correspondent for *The Gold Coast Nation* was, on 7 May 1914, the first to announce the "death of Mr. Jacob Vitta, the famous photographer" from Tarkwa, noting that "he served the town will [sic] by his profession and we deeply regret the loss of his honourable services."[9] *The Gold Coast Leader* followed just over a week later, on 16 May 1914: "The sad intelligence of the death of Mr. Jacob Vitta at Accra, wither he had gone for medical treatment, reached us here last week and threw the town into commotion. The deceased was well known here as a photographer of good fame, taking on jobs from both whitemen and natives and no doubt his death is one that will be greatly felt by the community at large."[10] Although he was clearly well known in his own time, beyond these notifications of his death and their mentions of Tarkwa as his place of residence—which may or may not also have been his place of birth—we know next to nothing about Vitta. There is no information about how he learned his trade and, as with many African photographers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, apart from postcards and a few prints, there are no known traces of any other material relating to his business, such as his negatives.

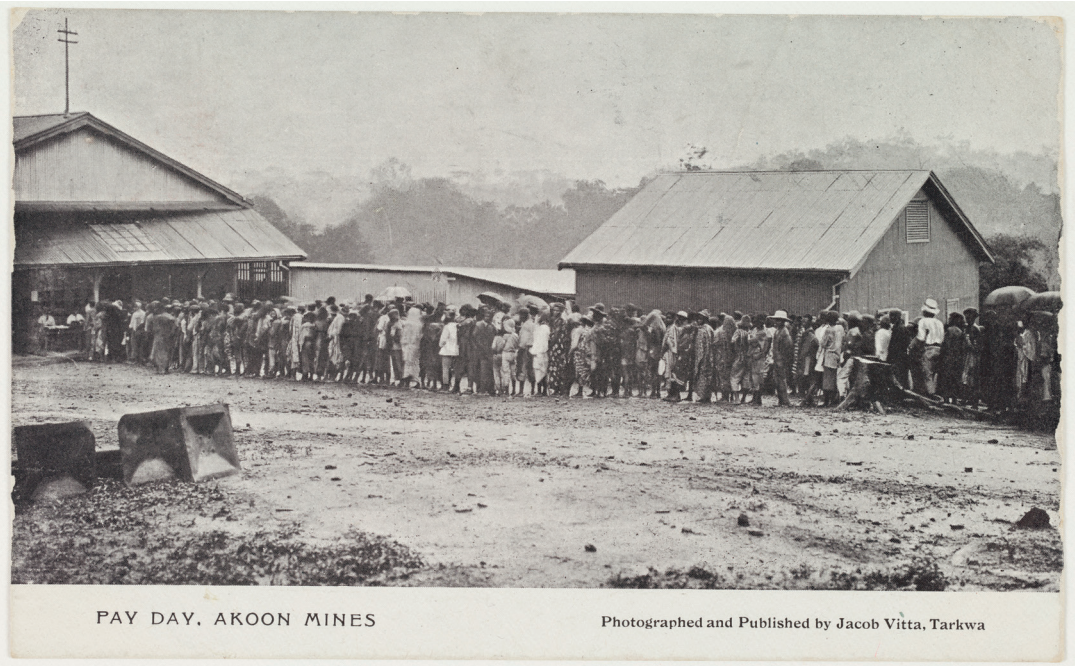
Despite the paucity of biographical data, it is possible to assess the extent of Vitta's postcard production by his use of the distinctive caption "Photographed and Published by Jacob Vitta, Tarkwa."[11] It is thanks to paratexts like this that we are able to identify his photographs as

both prints and postcards and to treat them as a reasonably coherent body of work. Only a few photographers of the period chose to publicly declare authorship of their images reproduced on postcards, as the cards more commonly were attributed to local businesses or large missionary publishers. Vitta, however, claimed two important roles in the production and distribution of postcards. Extant postcards with his statement of authorship show that he was active as a publisher at least between 1904 and 1912, as evidenced both by serial numbers printed on the postcards and by their cancellations once they were mailed. While the earliest known example of his postcards dates to 1904, we do not know if Vitta published earlier photographs or postcards without reference to his authorship before this starting year of his eight-year active period. Identification of Vitta's images is further complicated by the fact that he occasionally made his photographs available to local companies that then published them as postcards under their own names, with no credit given to him. Conversely, Vitta also published other photographers' work under his name. Often, but not always, in such cases he used an abbreviated caption to credit himself only as the publisher, but did not give the photographer's name.[12]

From his surviving postcards, we can establish that his work focused largely on a geographically narrow region surrounding Tarkwa in the southwest of the Gold Coast Colony. Tarkwa was intimately linked with one of his most important photographic subjects: mining. Located at the center of a region that was increasingly characterized by foreign mechanized gold mining, much of his known work depicts mining facilities and documents sites and infrastructure between the coastal city of Sekondi and the inland regional capital of Kumasi. This area underwent massive changes at the beginning of the twentieth century. Particularly in the five years before Vitta created his first documented postcards, the British further expanded their colonial rule and intensified capitalist exploitation of the region. In 1898, British colonizers began construction of a railroad line in Sekondi that by 1901 stretched to the towns of Tarkwa and Obuasi, and ultimately reached Kumasi in 1903. Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Kingdom, had been occupied by British troops since 1896, and following the end of the Fifth Anglo-Ashanti War in September 1900, the kingdom was formally annexed into the British Gold Coast as a 'protectorate' in 1902.

The consolidation of colonial rule and the construction of this new railroad line proved to be a boon for foreign gold mining.[13] Concurrently, other regions with substantial gold deposits, particularly South Africa and Western Australia, witnessed a decline in production capacity due to substantial shifts in their political and economic situations. Consequently, a large number of European, American, and Australian mining employees and managers migrated to the Gold Coast Colony.[14] The increase in population due to intercontinental migration and internal migration of African indentured laborers had a direct impact on the demand for means of communication. Precise numbers are difficult to pin down, as the yearly volume of letters and postcards varied. However, British government reports tied this fluctuation in correspondence volume immediately to "the interest aroused by the mining enterprise on the Gold Coast."[15]

While we do not know why Vitta began producing postcards—or at least postcards with his own imprimatur—in 1904, the concurrent rising demand may have been an incentive. In addition, mining companies may have hired photographers to document their facilities, and indeed some of Vitta's postcards state that they were created to be sold at specific mines. Certainly, the resulting photographs provided him with a lucrative business opportunity, images that could be repurposed as postcards in an economic offshoot of the mining industry. The region's transformations—colonial expansion, intensified



2 Jacob Vitta, *Pay Day, Akoon Mines*, ca. 1907, halftone print, 8.5 × 13.6 cm. Author's collection

mining operations and wage labor, railroad construction, and rapid demographic shifts—are vividly reflected in the postcards Vitta produced in the following years. In precisely composed views, his pictures capture numerous mines and extraction sites, and the surrounding housing estates and villages of local and Western workers and employees; these often appear set against the backdrop of the densely wooded landscape. Most cards include additional captions that indicate Vitta's awareness of recent industrial and infrastructural changes in the region. Existing postcards show almost all then-extant mining facilities. Not only does Vitta identify the locations of his photographs with precision; titles such as "Ashanti Obuasi Gold Mines Corporation (G.C.), W. Africa" or "The New Head Gear Taquah and Abosso Mines" also name the operators and indicate structural innovations. Certain locations are depicted on multiple occasions over the years, as evidenced by a number of images featuring the same subjects and titles, such as "Latest View Tarkwa Native Village (G.C.), W. Africa". Besides showing infrastructure, a few of Vitta's postcards also illustrate related activities identified by captions such as "Miners bringing out the Truck" or "Pay Day" (fig. 2).

Most of Vitta's surviving postcards show scenes from the region around his place of business. Some cards, however, also indicate a degree of itinerancy not uncommon among photographers at the time. The images reproduced on these cards show scenes from the neighboring territories of Sierra Leone, Togo, and Nigeria.[16] A single photograph now held by the German Historical Museum suggests that Vitta operated a studio in Cameroon at an unspecified point in time, as the image's stamp locates him in "Akwa Town Cameroons," rather than in Tarkwa.[17] While landscapes that show the infrastructure of mining are a central subject of a majority of Vitta's surviving postcards, his portfolio was

nevertheless broader. Some postcards show general views and street scenes of the region's towns while another group of postcards comprises reproductions of studio and portrait photographs. The latter were presumably created for local customers before Vitta repurposed these originally private images as postcards. The captions for these cards range from benevolent comments to generalizing and sometimes stereotyping attributions. A smaller number of cards also show specific, dated events such as "'The acting Governor giving Lecture Agri Show Sekondi 25th Nov. 1907 Sekondi' (G.C.), W. Africa." Additionally, a few postcards indicate that Vitta also took photographs at official functions of the colonial government, which he possibly printed on postcards to further his reputation especially with his Western clients.[18] Four postcards, for example, published by Vitta from 1908 onwards in several editions show meetings of local rulers with colonial officials that were held "at the request of G[old].C[oast]. Government."

Material Histories and Colonial Frames

The beginning of Vitta's verifiable photographic practice in 1905 coincides not only with an uptick in circulation of mail due to colonial expansion and a global redistribution of British mining, but specifically with a period of postcards' tremendous popularity. In the first decade of the twentieth century, photographically illustrated postcards had become a global mass medium circulating in the billions.[19] Not only did postcards provide a cheap and rapid means of communication with a global reach, but they were also one of the most widely disseminated forms of photographic images. Crucially, they were not neutral vessels. As a medium predominantly issued by Western photographers and publishers and used by an audience from the Global North and West, most postcards from colonial-era Africa were tailored to the expectations and preferences of this clientele.[20] Long undervalued as mere artifacts of mass culture, postcards have more recently become the subject of academic inquiry and have been reconsidered as vehicles of colonial ideologies that offer insights into Western perceptions and imaginaries. The abundance of postcards, both at their time of publication and now, has rendered them an "unexpected yet major source" for a global history of photography.[21] They are, however, a peculiar source that warrants closer scrutiny.

As a growing body of scholarship has emphasized over the last two decades, photographic meaning is not at all fixed, but contingent upon the contexts of reception and materiality.[22] Photographs gain meaning not only from what they depict, but also from how they circulate, are handled, inscribed, and displayed.[23] In the case of postcards, this approach has been particularly fruitful—as, in the words of Sophie Junge, "quintessential traveling objects" they can have divergent meanings depending on their location and the "changing social facts of ownership and display in different discursive contexts."[24] Characterized by hybridity between image and text, postcards, more than other photo-objects, often retain immediate traces of their use. The names of sender and recipient, added text, postage stamps, and cancellations are regularly available and inseparably embedded in the object, allowing the dissemination of postcards and communication through them to be substantially reconstructed.[25] Yet, these same traces can become overdetermining. While Elizabeth Edwards cautions that "the forensic 'noise' of the content, and the focus on ideologies of iconographies" can overshadow the wealth of information we can gain from photographs' material properties, in the case of postcards, there is a risk of the reverse.[26] The "murmur of small voices," as Naomi Schor has called the polyphony of fleeting and banal inscriptions embedded in postally used cards, can provide valuable insights into the perceptions of their Western audiences.[27] If left un-

questioned, that same "murmur," perpetuated by readily available postcards and their loquacious social biographies, may lend undue stability to colonial viewpoints that a closer reading would unsettle.

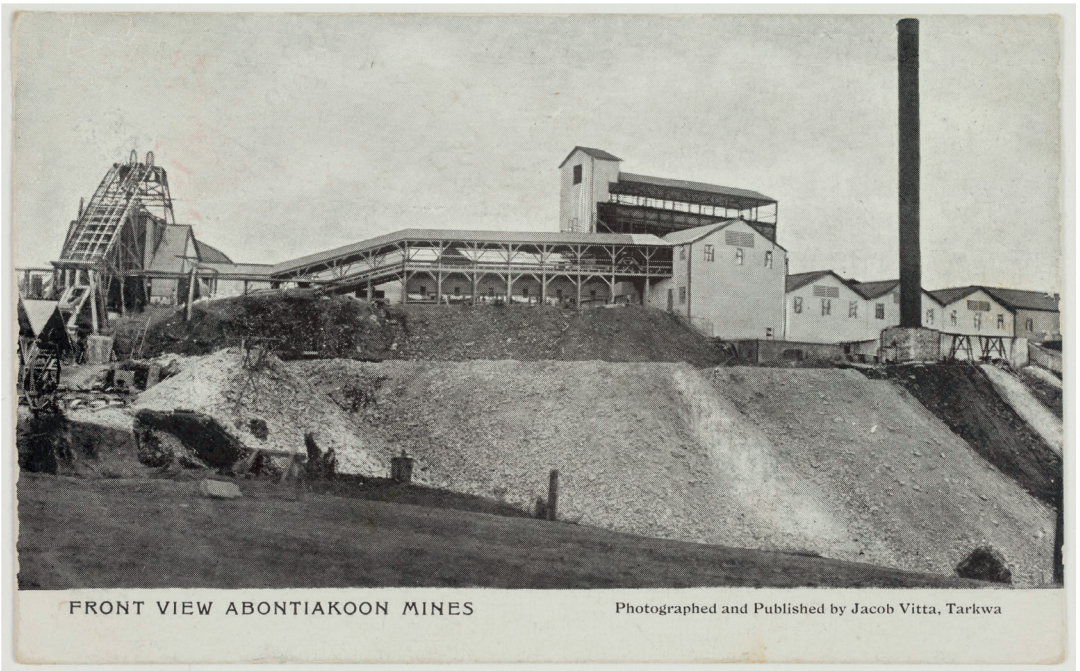
We can, however, revisit photographically illustrated postcards through a different lens. Exemplarily, they signify a shift that Geoffrey Batchen suggests was brought about by the advent of photomechanical reproduction—a "displacement of the photographic image from the photograph."[28] While such reproductions introduce a rupture between images and their origin, they remain "inextricably linked to the photograph itself."[29] Insisting on this link, we can approach postcards as proxies for the now-lost original prints in order to complicate presentist interpretations. Then, not in spite of, but because of their deep entanglement with colonial discourse, postcards remain a particularly instructive case for Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper's programmatic proposition "that metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized, need to be brought into one analytic field."[30] As tangible links between these poles, photographically illustrated postcards provide material evidence of how images circulated through imperial networks. At the same time, they preserve the images of photographers such as Vitta. By treating postcards as stand-ins, we can begin to trace the contours of absent photographic practices and their possible resonances.

Imaginative Landscapes

The tension between the material presence of postcards and their embedded colonial framing becomes particularly pronounced in Vitta's landscape photographs. The numerous surviving examples in Western archives confirm that Vitta's images circulated widely between Western colonizers in the Gold Coast and their metropolitan networks, posing precisely the methodological concerns outlined previously. To examine more closely how these postcards functioned in communication between colony and metropole, we can revisit the card showing the "Landing Stage, Broomasi Mines" introduced in figure 1. Such images can be readily integrated into an established narrative about the "African landscape" that must have been widely recognized by Westerners. In the words of James Ryan, "the dense foliage of Africa's tropical environments has been regarded by generations of Europeans as offering both the promise of abundant riches and the dangers of the unknown and death."[31] This trope, tried and tested not least via photography, is easily connected to Vitta's representation of the river scene: the dense vegetation encroaching on the fragile wooden structure and the narrow landing stage evokes inaccessibility and hardships, yet also the triumph of imposed order. For metropolitan viewers, such imagery validated both the risks and the rewards of colonial enterprise.

This postcard was one of at least 20 bearing Vitta's trademark that were addressed to a Miss Muriel Irene Hellyar in St. Columb, Cornwall (fig. 3).[32] Dispatched over a seven-month period from February through October 1910, some of the cards are signed, while others share identical handwriting, suggesting they were sent by the same individual. These postcards were preserved in a private collection compiled around the theme of mining, where they were grouped with other visual material related to global extractive industries.[33] The cancellations, where visible, show that they were all mailed from Tarkwa. The sender appears to have been a British mine employee who may have followed the emigration of Cornish miners after the collapse of the local mining industry. He selected those postcards from Vitta's portfolio that visualized the very reason for his presence in the region. All of them show the infrastructure of gold mining. The card with the earliest date details the sender's activities at the Abontiakoon mine near

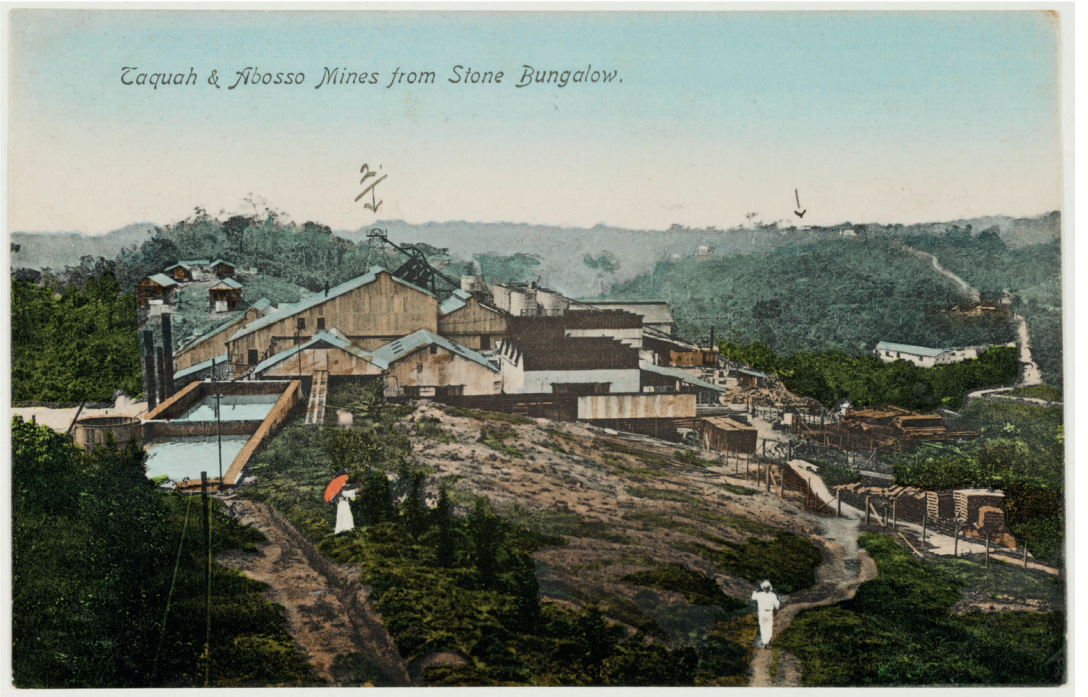
3 Hellyar convolute of 20 postcards by Jacob Vitta, ca. 1905– 1910, halftone and (colorized) collotype prints. Author's collection



4 Jacob Vitta, *Front View Abontiakoon Mines*, ca. 1907, halftone print, 8.5 × 13.6 cm. Author's collection

Tarkwa. Sent just three days after the event described, the inscription reads: "The mine I went over on 25/2/10. Down the shaft on the left which is 1900 feet deep" (fig. 4). The sender must have relied on the visual potential of the reproduced photographs, as most of his own added text is short and banal. However, two cards also testify to risks, both for the workers and for those who stayed at home. One of these reads, "the place I marked 2 is where your brother Dickie got hurt"; it therefore visualizes the location where an accident happened to the addressee's relative (fig. 5). Sent home as a regular sign of life, the cards testify to the sender's well-being and document his presence in the landscape, which appears to be due solely to the—sometimes dangerous—undertaking of colonial-capitalist exploitation of the gold deposits.

In this context Vitta's postcards establish what Junge calls a "colonialist iconography to be sent around the world."[34] They contribute to the proliferation of colonial orders of knowledge, which, as W.J.T. Mitchell posits, legitimize the subjugation of territories as the expansion of "'culture' and 'civilization' into a 'natural' space."[35] Reproduced on postcards, land is transformed into landscape—stripped of specificity, turned into a commodity, and circulated globally. Embedded in visual conventions and practices that render them nearly indistinguishable from those of their European counterparts, postcards produced by local photographers and publishers, such as Vitta's, contribute to the symbolic appropriation of colonized land.[36] Yet, as Edward Said reminds us, the discursive production of what he called "imaginative geographies" is not reciprocal: images used by colonizers to assert control over territory do not yield the same meanings for those subjected to that control.[37] This asymmetry becomes particularly apparent in the communicative function of the 20 postcards from Tarkwa. If the landscape de-

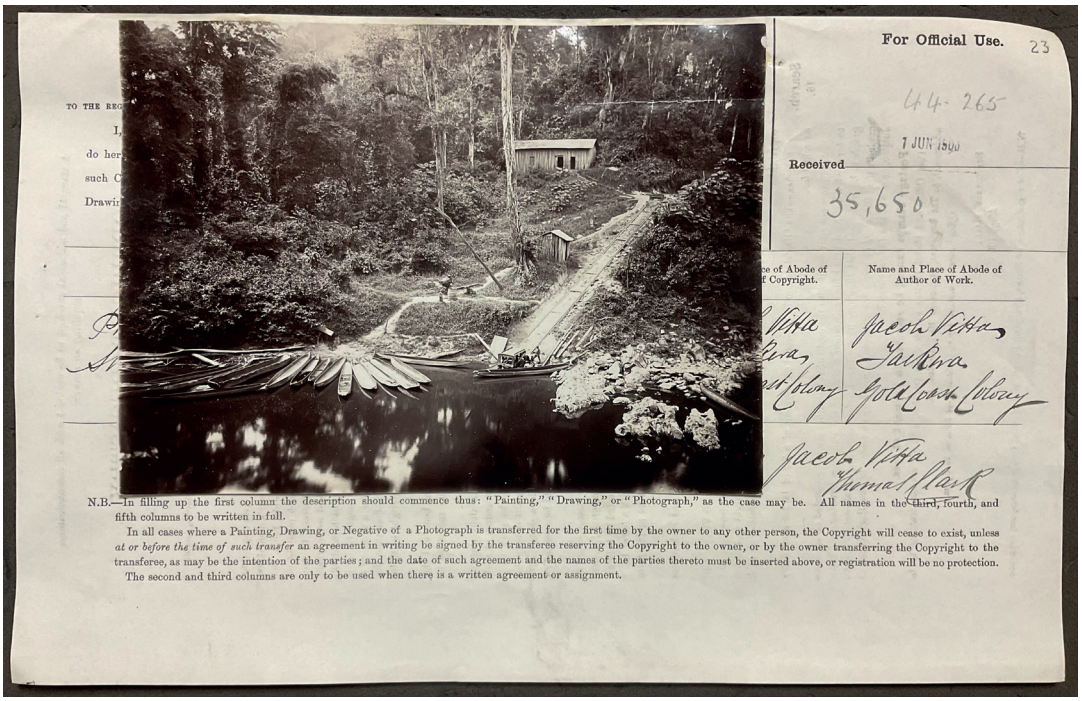


5 Jacob Vitta, *Taquah and Abosso Mines from Stone Bungalow*, 1908, collotype print, 8.9 × 13.7 cm. Author's collection

picted in these cards is subjected to a logic of extraction, this meaning derives not only, or even primarily, from the photographic image itself. Rather, it is shaped by existing iconographies and the postcard's material form, its addressees, inscriptions, circulation, and eventual preservation. In other words, while a colonial or "extractive gaze" may be inferred from the image's composition or iconography, that gaze is consolidated through use.[38] The traces of this use contribute to stabilizing the colonial meaning of Vitta's photographs and continue to shape how they are read today. Arguably, it risks reifying these valences into what Edwards has termed an "archival identity" that dominates any interpretation.[39]

From Photograph to Postcard to Archival Record

Tracing the networks of the production of postcards accounts for a far more entangled network than the one-sided trajectory of postal use suggests. While the production of postcards after 1900 was industrial and global in scale, few archival traces of the involvement of African actors have survived. Vitta's case offers a rare exception. Entered into the records of the London Stationers' Company in 1906 we can find a photographic print showing the same image as the postcard of the "Landing Stage, Broomasi Mines" (fig. 6). Apparently, the original photograph had already been to Europe before it was repeatedly mailed there, reproduced on a postcard. The largest extant body of original photographic prints associated with Vitta is held by the British National Archives in Kew, which keeps the re-



6 Copyright registration form with attached photograph: Jacob Vitta, *Photograph. The Landing Stage Broomasi Mines*, ca. 1904, albumen print, 14.9 × 20.3 cm. Kew, London, The National Archives, COPY 1/498/23

cords of the Stationers' Company's copyright office. The collection comprises 61 albumen prints, two half-tone prints, and two postcards, which Vitta submitted in three installments. Amid various visual materials from other postcard publishers and British amateur photographers alike, two sets of Vitta's prints were registered in quick succession on 31 May and 6 June 1906, with another following on 25 April 1907. Each picture is accompanied by a corresponding form used to register Vitta's copyright to the specific image. Nearly all of the registered images correspond to known postcards that Vitta published under his name. Furthermore, the albumen prints submitted for copyright registration are not merely archival records; they were the very same prints used in the postcard production process. As such, they served both as legal documentation and as source material for reproduction, likely handled by a London-based printer.

In seeking to copyright his photographs, Vitta was acting in a manner fully in keeping with contemporaneous discourse. The rapidly increasing demand for picture postcards at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a rising demand for photographic material. This lent a new urgency to debates about the unauthorized reproduction of photographs. Already in 1862, coinciding with the advancement of techniques of photo-mechanical reproduction, the British Fine Arts Copyright Act was amended to include photographic images.[40] This permitted the Stationers' Company in London to grant exclusive rights to reproduce images provided the authors were "a British subject, or a resident within Her Majesty's dominions."[41] At least four photographers from West Africa—Neils Walwin Holm, Frederick Grant, Jonathan Adagogo Green, and Jacob Vitta—made use of this legislation between 1883 and 1907.[42] Vitta was the last

of these, but he registered the greatest number of images. Vitta's registration of his photographs, along with his likely reliance on a London-based printer for their reproduction, shows how picture postcard production at the beginning of the twentieth century was already a transnational enterprise. Indeed, for European photographers, a "double pendulum swing" was characteristic.[43] They travelled to the African continent to take photographs, which were then returned to Europe to be printed. The resulting postcards were shipped back to the region where the images had been taken, to be sold and mailed, often again to Europe. African photographers like Vitta also participated in this system but followed a different rhythm. Already based at the site of photographic production, their engagement typically comprised half a pendulum swing less.

Although this was a highly interconnected industry, surprisingly little information is available on the exact processes of soliciting and fulfilling orders between Africa and Europe in the decades before the First World War. During this time, representatives known as "jobbers" were active worldwide on behalf of printers and publishers, distributing postcards and taking orders.[44] Vitta also appears to have relied on the services of such intermediaries. It is likely that a jobber or agent took Vitta's photographic prints, labelled them with his instructions, and brought them to London to be produced, as Vitta did not personally sign any of the copyright registration forms. Two are signed by a William Tylar, claiming to act as "agent for Jacob Vitta, Tarkwa." Tylar, a Birmingham-based camera manufacturer, also participated in the booming postcard business.[45] At the end of 1904, just a few months before the earliest known postcards by Vitta appear, Tylar placed an advertisement in *The Practical Photographe*r, a magazine which circulated among photographers on the west coast of Africa.[46] Here, Tylar offered the production of postcards in editions of between 250 and 1,000, advertising them as "beautifully reproduced in the collotype process."[47] Regardless of how Vitta and Tylar came to do business together, the result may have disappointed Vitta. The two postcards enclosed with the copyright registration forms signed by Tylar are halftone prints of extremely poor quality. As a result, Vitta seems to have started looking for alternatives, and the remaining applications of 1906 and 1907 are signed "per procurationem" by another middleman named Thomas Clark.

Looking at the albumen prints archived with the Stationers' Company, it is easy to see why Tylar's products were not likely to have satisfied Vitta's high standards. Measuring an average of 15 × 20 cm, the prints are meticulously crafted, with precise composition and fine printing, underscoring his aesthetic ambitions. They also testify to Vitta's efforts to transfer these qualities to his postcards. Many of the registered albumen prints show extensive and detailed retouching, likely carried out at Vitta's studio prior to being sent abroad. These interventions were clearly aimed at optimizing the printed results. While postcards were a lucrative commodity, Vitta's craftsmanship suggests he did not sacrifice quality for profit. Inscriptions on the albumen prints' versos indicate that Vitta ordered between 500 and 1,500 postcards per image. He reduced the median from 1,000 copies in 1906 to 500 in 1907, possibly adapting to sales. Nevertheless, the total number produced in those two years alone exceeded 50,000 copies. In addition, the versos of the original albumen prints in the archive carry handwritten captions and Vitta's characteristic author's line, most of which match the corresponding postcards.[48] The registration of copyright itself, to which we owe this archive, may also have been part of Tylar's offer and, later, Clark's. One print includes the instruction "Please register at the Stationer's [sic] Hall."[49] It is difficult to determine if copyright registration prevented the appropriation of images by other publishers. Although Vitta continued to have some of his postcards printed with the remark "Copyright,"

he did not register any prints after 1907. This may also be due to the fact that he moved the production of his postcards outside of British territories. The different layouts of the surviving cards suggest that Vitta frequently changed manufacturers, and at least one of these was not British but German. Indeed, Germany was home to a number of large printing houses that fulfilled orders for customers worldwide. Among these customers were several African photographers such as Neils Walwin Holm and his son Justus C. Holm, who published postcards under the label "photoholm" that were "Printed at the works in Germany." William Stephen Johnston, who worked along the coast of West Africa, had at least some editions printed in Trier, Germany.[50] Eventually, Vitta's business also crossed the domains of imperial powers—from 1908 onwards, he employed the services of the Leipzig-based company Dr. Trenkler & Co., one of the largest German printing houses, which supplied a global network of customers.[51] Characteristic serial numbers indicate that Vitta had his postcards printed there exclusively for the remainder of his career, until 1912.[52] Their products, high-quality collotypes, some colored by hand or by machine, seem to have provided Vitta with an adequate representation of his photographs. While we know nothing about how the collaboration with Dr. Trenkler & Co. came about, whether through a jobber, an advertisement from Trenkler's London office, or a contact Vitta met during his time in Cameroon, this underscores that the postcard industry exceeded immediate relationships between imperial powers and their colonies.[53]

Vitta's copyrighted photographs allow for insights into an industry that is otherwise poorly documented. They demonstrate that he was an active and invested participant in the transnational production of postcards. More than that, he took advantage of legislation that, in his colonial context, extended certain legal protections to colonized subjects. As a resident "within Her Majesty's dominions," he inscribed himself in an archive that preserved the photographs not for colonial knowledge production, but as intellectual property. The Stationers' Company archive in this respect operated less under an ideological rationale than an administrative one. Today, these prints offer the most immediate evidence of Vitta's aesthetic choices and professional ambitions. Situated between material photograph and intellectual property, they mark the transition from original image to mass-produced postcard. That they have survived is not incidental to the history they make accessible. Vitta's engagement with legal and commercial infrastructures preserved what is otherwise largely missing: the material traces of authorship.

Beyond the Postcard

Surviving postcards and copyright prints reveal much about how Vitta's photographs circulated within colonial communication practices and commercial infrastructures. Far less is known about how they were received and used in local contexts. A set of nine individual albumen prints, clearly attributed to Vitta, provides evidence of his Western clientele in the Gold Coast Colony. While the full scope of Vitta's commercial practice remains difficult to reconstruct, these prints offer a rare example of photographic formats beyond those used for the production of postcards and are potentially more reflective of Vitta's photographic latitude. Some of these prints resemble familiar postcard views, while others seemingly document private events and suggest that Vitta may have tailored his images for different audiences. Like the prints submitted for copyright registration, the nine prints in the set are uniformly sized to approximately 15 × 20 cm, roughly the dimensions of a full negative plate. However, they are mounted on larger cardboard supports measuring 25.3 × 30.1 cm, and bear a stamped logo crediting "Jacob Vitta, Tarkwa."

7 Jacob Vitta, *Scene. Ancobra River West Africa*, ca. 1904, 15.1 × 20.3 cm, mounted on cardboard. Author's collection

8 Jacob Vitta, untitled, before 1910, 15.1 × 20.3 cm, mounted on cardboard. Author's collection

Among these prints, we once again encounter a version of the familiar river landscape already seen both as a postcard and in the Stationers' Company archive (fig. 7). The name of the mine and the function of the site have been omitted from the caption, which now simply states, in stylized handwriting, "Scene. Ancobra River, West Africa." This generic, commodifying caption suggests that Vitta intended such images for sale as ready-made prints, appealing to buyers interested in landscape views rather than specific mining sites. Two additional prints in the set show scenes that are also known from Vitta's postcards and were likely available both as prints and as cards. A third print is similar in style and content, although no corresponding postcard has yet been identified. These four images indicate that Vitta maintained a portfolio of reproducible views intended for sale, likely available at his studio or through intermediaries. The remaining five prints in the set, however, stand apart from this group and show a more bespoke aspect of Vitta's practice. They appear to document specific events and were likely commissioned by individual clients. One print, as is suggested by an inscription which may or may not be accurate and which was added later in felt-tip on the verso, shows "the author and his crew of natives, on construction work." Two other photographs show mourners at a funeral (fig. 8), and the final two show variations of a "Miner's Farewell Dinner."

The provenance of the prints is largely unclear, but one bears a handwritten Vancouver address on the verso as the only clue to their trajectory. They were sold by a Vancouver-based auction house on eBay, from where I eventually acquired them. Although we cannot identify the original clients or trace the route by which these prints arrived in Canada, their subject matter suggests that Vitta's practice included commissioned photography alongside his postcard production and that his images circulated in more personal and variable ways than the standard postcard format. While, like postcards, these prints also followed the vectors and hierarchies of colonial-capitalist extraction of resources and views, they simultaneously highlight the absence of similar material for local reception.

Contemporary newspapers, especially the two Cape Coast-based outlets, *The Gold Coast Leader* and *The Gold Coast Nation*, offer limited but telling references that suggest a circulation of Vitta's photographs within the Gold Coast Colony. *The Gold Coast Leader*, in its obituary on Vitta, con-

firms that he did cater to the demands of "both whitemen and natives." If only implicitly, we can assess the extent of Vitta's work commissioned by local customers through the studio portraits that he repurposed as postcards. The numerous examples suggest that this was an important part of his enterprise. In general, selling formerly private commissions to the public was a practice so widespread among publishers at the time that it evoked critical responses by contemporary commentators concerned with privacy and consent.[54] A local reception of Vitta's images other than private commissions is suggested again in *The Gold Coast Leader*. On 22 February 1908, a very brief tribute to Vitta praised his work, noting "the photographic Almanacs of the views of the mines & c. by Mr. Jacob Vitta are absolutely works of art and Mr. Vitta has our congratulations."[55] The reference to "almanacs" suggests an outlet for his work that has since been lost but possibly refers to an illustrated yearbook even though the exact format remains unclear. More significantly, the description of the photographs as "art" introduces a register of aesthetic appreciation that differs markedly from those outlined above. This same newspaper gives important context by suggesting a local public interest in photography, particularly landscape photography. In advance of an agricultural show held in Sekondi in November 1907, the paper's editors issued a request for prints to be displayed in the "Photographic Section" of the fair: "The loan of interesting photographs of West Africa, especially of tropical foliage and scenery, will be gratefully accepted, and special steps will be taken to ensure their safety."[56] While the fair mainly addressed a Western audience, and we do not know whether Vitta responded to this call, we do know from several of his postcards that he photographed the fair itself. Taken together, these fragments indicate that there was at least some public interest in photography within the local African press and possibly among its readerships. This supports the proposition that Vitta's images may have circulated locally in ways that differ from the postcard format, and that their interpretations might have been shaped by experiences and concerns that diverged from the extractive gaze of colonizers.

Picturing Political Forests

In order to establish a possible context in which Vitta's photographs, now absent, might have functioned in their original local context, I suggest that it is instructive to return to the prints and postcards in Western archives, but to shift the focus from the objects to the images themselves. Indeed, Vitta may have pursued more nuanced forms of image production than is initially suggested by the postcards used for communication between colony and metropole or the prints he submitted for copyright and sold as commodities.

The aesthetic coherence of Vitta's compositions and the detailed retouching on the prints and postcards described above indicate remarkable care in their production. He meticulously embedded the infrastructure of the gold mines in his landscape compositions; at other times, he devoted large parts of the image to the flora surrounding a mine. People often appear as small figures, deliberately staged to provide a sense of scale for both landscapes and the technical structures of the mining facilities. The effort of staging is reflected in the degree of precision with which Vitta arranged the compositions of many of his photographs. However, this precision does not always result in harmonious or picturesque images. This tension is particularly evident in one of the photographs in the set of nine prints discussed above. The image shows only sparse remnants of a forest and is captioned "Recreation, Room, Abontiakoon, Gold Mine" (fig. 9). It stands out for its unusual composition. The building described in the caption occupies only the upper part of the image. The lower half shows a barren slope, hardly worth photographing if it

9 Jacob Vitta, *Recreation, Room, Abontiakoon, Gold Mine*, before 1910, 15.5 × 20.3 cm, mounted on cardboard. Author's collection

were not for the large tree stump that dominates the foreground, even though it appears slightly out of focus. The composition not only places the stump prominently within the frame but visually aligns it with the building and a group of human figures above. The camera's focus is on seven workers on a deck just outside of the "Recreation Room." Although these figures appear small in the image, they also seem to have been deliberately posed there. The workers are looking at the photographer, who has positioned himself in front of the tree stump, so that it appears in their line of sight. Two of them hold a large saw between them, visually and symbolically connecting them to the deforested foreground. This compositional intention suggests that the stump, the saw, and the posed figures together may form a legible motif of labor and environmental transformation. The photograph draws attention to ecological disruption as something made visible, framed and potentially meaningful within the image itself. Indeed, in many of his photographs, Vitta repeatedly allocates considerable space to the disruptive traces of the gold-mining industry by foregrounding deforested wastelands, cut timber, or tree stumps. In a particularly striking example, Vitta photographed a sharply cleared hillside crowned with a small complex of buildings, captioned in the corresponding postcard as "Coronation Hill, Akoon Mines" (fig. 10). The hill

10 Jacob Vitta, *Photograph of Coronation Hill, Akoon Mines*, before 1907, 14.9 × 20.3 cm. Kew, London, The National Archives, COPY 1/508/312

is stripped of vegetation, its surface marked by scattered tree trunks and stumps, and a winding path leads the viewer's eye toward the structures at the top. Framed by tall, still-standing trees at the image's margins, the composition centers absence rather than the buildings themselves. As with the previous example, this photograph focuses on the visible scars of deforestation and reinforces the impression that such ecological transformation was a recurring concern for Vitta—one, as I will show in the following, that resonates with the wider debates of his time.

It is instructive to consider Vitta's more idiosyncratic compositions and his discernible interest in the traces of gold mining in the landscape against the backdrop of a very public controversy that spanned most of the first three decades of the twentieth century. The years of Vitta's career fell in a time of several political, social, and economic upheavals. Among them were intense debates triggered by the massive deforestation caused by the timber trade, agriculture, and the fuel needs of the gold-mining industry. Beginning around the turn of the century, the British colonial government sought to regulate the use of forests in the Gold Coast Colony. As in other British colonies, forest areas were to be subjected to state ownership and European-style forestry management.[57] In the Gold Coast Colony these plans met sustained opposition, particularly from local elites who feared that a "Forest Ordinance" would have far-reaching consequences

for indigenous land rights and disrupt local social formations and established power structures.[58] Such legislation, these critics stressed, would affect indigenous farming and forestry practices much more than the mostly British-owned mining companies. Eventually the Forest Ordinance was introduced repeatedly in the early twentieth century, but withdrawn due to resistance and not implemented until 1927. During this period, the issue became a frequent topic in the local press—again, especially in newspapers under African ownership such as *The Gold Coast Nation* and *The Gold Coast Leader*. These outlets were closely aligned with the anti-colonial politics of the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (ARPS), which had formed in 1897 to oppose the Crown Lands Bill, a bill to distribute land and grant concessions to mining interests. *The Gold Coast Nation* identified itself as the "Official Organ of the Gold Coast Aborigines Rights Protection Society" and *The Gold Coast Leader* was edited for a time by ARPS co-founder Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford. Another ARPS member, Emmanuel Joseph Peter Brown, articulated the tension at the core of the issue in a speech entitled "In the Matter of the Forest Ordinance 1911," which was reprinted in *The Gold Coast Nation*, stating that if "the sole object is to conserve the forests, because of the alleged reckless deforestation of the natives, then permit me to point out, Sir, that those who are really deforesting the Country are the Mining Companies."[59] The mobilizing potential of the issue becomes palpable in the lyrics of a song printed alongside the speech, calling to "crush the oppressor" in "the Battle of the Forest Bill" to "drive from place and power those who robbed the public long."[60]

On the other side of the debate, colonial officers like Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, who would later become governor of the Gold Coast Colony, supported forest regulation and blamed environmental degradation on indigenous agriculture. Together with his wife, Decima Moore, he undertook an extensive tour of the region in 1905 and 1906, which they documented and published in a 1909 travelogue. In their account, they portray Tarkwa as a "bare hill dotted with blackened tree stumps," and lament that new indigenous farm clearings were "eating their way into" the remaining forest. They warned that "in the near future the Highlands would practically be denuded of trees" if "some check is not placed on the wholesale work of clearing at present in progress."[61] The book is richly illustrated with 145 photographs but names no photographers. However, at least four of Vitta's images feature among them. As only those already known from postcards can be securely attributed to Vitta, others may also be his.

These competing narratives around deforestation underscore the extent to which the transformation of the landscape was both visible and publicly debated in the early twentieth-century Gold Coast Colony. Significantly, Vitta's photographs circulated within this contested discursive field. Printed on postcards and sold as commodities, these photographs were likely understood by his Western clients as visualizations of the conquest of inhospitable nature and as records of both the hardships and the achievements of colonial-capitalist exploitation of resources. If a discursive subjugation of nature as landscape is evident in these uses of Vitta's photographs, the attempt of the colonial government to establish "political forests" represents a legislative counterpart to these ambitions.[62] In this respect, it is easy to see how they served Guggisberg and Moore, staunch supporters of forest regulation, to illustrate their account. At the same time, Vitta's photographs may well have had quite different valences for those local viewers whose positions were shaped by their social and political investments in opposition to such regulation. Vitta, as a prominent and prolific photographer in Tarkwa, a town at the center of these debates, was likely aware of these tensions. In his framing and compositional choices, he continuously seems to dwell on the

destructive intervention that the expansion of the mines and the extraction of gold inevitably entailed. He does so to an extent that sets his work apart from that of his local contemporaries and other colonial-subject photographers, many of whom catered to Western tastes by producing picturesque views and adhering to visual conventions that emphasized beauty and harmony while avoiding signs of social conflict or political tension.[63] By contrast, Vitta's photographs can be read as taking up the highly contentious topic of deforestation directly. While we cannot know Vitta's intentions, we can place his photographs within a discourse that differs significantly from the aesthetic and ideological expectations that made his postcards and prints appealing to Western customers. This dimension of his work, his sustained attention to the traces of gold mining as marks of environmental disruption, would likely have gone unnoticed by the European addressees and collectors of his postcards, and it did not hamper his success with them. Still, they relate to both a colonialist discourse on resource exploitation and the very indictment of the same. Rather than neatly aligning with either perspective, Vitta's photographs hover deftly between interpretive poles, allowing viewers of varied standpoints to see what they wanted to see in the same prints.

Conclusion

We may have little information about Jacob Vitta's life and working methods, but what survives suggests a position of mediation: a photographer who worked within the colonial context while maintaining a presence in the local culture. His focus on the mining industry enabled him to occupy a distinct market niche. By extension, he profited from the extraction of gold by catering to Western clients. His postcards, widely sent abroad and still circulating among collectors, clearly appealed to this clientele. Now held in numerous private and institutional collections, these postcards are valuable sources for a global history of photography that allow for insights into the preferences and selections of their users. The abundance of postcards in European archives, however, may privilege interpretations centered on their role in colonial communication. Given the scarcity of other material remnants of Vitta's career, this creates a "risk of oversignifying" the available images and information.[64] A lack of material evidence does not mean that Vitta's photographs did not circulate outside of colonialist discourses, only that the meanings local audiences may have derived are harder to recover. Rather than interpreting the archival scarcity of Vitta's photographic prints as evidence of their nonexistence, we should consider this absence as a symptom of broader colonial erasures that have shaped the visibility of African photographic histories.

The limited availability of prints that would allow further study of Vitta's practice might be remedied by future archival discoveries. But rather than relying on the filling of archival gaps, we can already gain a productive understanding by considering indirect evidence of Vitta's practice. From the few existing prints, we can establish that producing postcards was only part of Vitta's business. Written sources, too, offer critical insight. Two local newspapers, *The Gold Coast Nation* and *The Gold Coast Leader*, help to situate Vitta within the local visual and political culture. From them we learn that he took commissions from local customers and that his images circulated in different material forms and in a range of contexts within the Gold Coast Colony. Both newspapers published obituaries at the time of his death, indicating that he occupied a position of public visibility. *The Gold Coast Leader* went further, praising his photographs of the mines as works of art. It is all the more remarkable that this same newspaper took a vocal stance against colonial forestry legislation and consistently framed the rule over forest

lands as a political issue tied to economic exploitation and land rights. In this context, Vitta's repeated attention to altered landscapes takes on additional weight. His photographs align, even if implicitly, with a broader discourse that saw deforestation and environmental transformation as a contested political issue.

By treating Vitta's postcards as proxies, "inextricably linked to the photograph itself," we can situate the reproduced photographs within their historical context. That these images circulated within the former Gold Coast Colony while land rights were fiercely debated suggests that a local reception differing from the postcards was both possible and, given the political climate, likely. Even if we cannot recover original prints or specific instances of local engagement with these photographs, we can reasonably assume that this reception was informed by local experience rather than the extractive gaze of Western customers. As such, the extant postcards become markers of a negative space in the archive that allow us to explore photographic practices in relation to the material, social, and discursive contexts of their emergence, and contour how these practices extended beyond the materials we can directly access. Photographically illustrated postcards, then, are not just mere artifacts of colonial communication, but objects deeply entangled in the local social and political discourses in which the photographs were taken. In Vitta's case, their proximity to radical politics that countered colonialist claims to control over land and resources, and their representation of the environmental consequences of colonial expansion, complicate their role in colonial communication and show both the congruencies and moments of radical incommensurability that Jacob Vitta had to navigate.

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1 I use the term 'metropole' to designate imperial homelands. The terms 'metropole/colony' themselves can perpetuate a binaristic understanding of colonial relations. I will apply them in this essay not to imply a hierarchical order, but to distinguish the places where Vitta's images circulated, and to acknowledge the lasting effects of the resulting imbalance of power.

2 Vitta's position is at the threshold of historiographical attention. His postcards are mentioned in several publications on photography in colonized Africa, while only a few make assumptions as to his background. Christraud M. Geary most decidedly speaks of Vitta as an African photographer: Christraud M. Geary, Early Photographers in Costal Nigeria and the Afterlife of Their Images, 1860, in: Martha G. Anderson and Lisa Aronson (eds.), *African Photographer J. A. Green: Reimagining the Indigenous and the Colonial*, Bloomington 2017, 37 – 81, here 71.

3 Erin Haney, *Photography and Africa*, London 2010, 9.

4 Geary 2017 (as in note 2).

5 For the most comprehensive overview of Vitta's work, see Terence A. Dickinson, *Gold Coast Picture Postcards*, Dronfield 2003, 142 – 162. Dickinson lists 383 postcard editions, though the existence of some others can be inferred from gaps in the serial numbering. I have identified several editions not included in Dickinson's catalogue, suggesting that the total number likely exceeds 400.

6 Daniel Foliard, Photography as Absence: Implicit Histories, in: *Material & Fieldwork in African Studies* 4, 2023, 65 – 84.

7 See, e.g., Charles Gore and Neils Walwin Holm, Radicalising the Image in Lagos Colony, West Africa, in: *History of Photography* 37, 2013, 283 – 300; Olubukola A. Gbadegesin, "Photographer Unknown": Neils Walwin Holm and the (Ir)retrievable Lives of African Photographers, in: *History of Photography* 38, 2014, 21 – 39;

Julie Crooks, *Alphonso Lisk-Carew: Early Photography in Sierra Leone*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, SOAS 2014; Anderson and Aronson 2017 (as in note 2). Also of relevance is Erin Haney, Lutterodt Family Studios and the Changing Face of Early Portrait Photographs from the Gold Coast, in: John Peffer and Elisabeth L. Cameron (eds.), *Portraiture & Photography in Afric*a, Bloomington 2013, 67 – 101.

8 Audrey Gadzekpo, *Women's Engagement with Gold Coast Print Culture from 1857 to 1957*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham 2001, 273 – 274.

9 *The Gold Coast Nation*, 7 May 1914, 396.

10 *The Gold Coast Leader*, 16 May 1914, 3.

11 The caption varies slightly depending on the edition, the main differences being the spelling of the places.

12 Christraud M. Geary, *Postcards from Africa: Photographers of the Colonial Era. Selections from the Leonard A. Lauder Archive*, Boston 2018, 20. A well-known photograph taken by Jonathan Adagogo Green that Vitta had printed as a postcard is not credited with the photographer's name. The caption reads: "Published by Jacob Vitta, Tarkwa, Westafr."

13 For a history of gold mining and wage labor in the colony, see Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, *Mediators, Contract Men, and Colonial Capital: Mechanized Gold Mining in the Gold Coast Colony, 1879 – 1909*, Rochester 2018, esp. 37.

14 Ibid.

15 *Annual Report of the Colonies: Gold Coast 1902*, London 1903, 49.

16 Dickinson 2003 (as in note 5), 149, 151, 159; Terence A. Dickinson, *Sierra Leone Postcards*, Cadsden 2013, 157.

17 Jacob Vitta, *Deutsches Paar in Kamerun*, ca. 1910, 16.5 × 10.7 cm, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, ref. no. Ph 2016/65. The title and date are attributed by a third party, and it is not clear if the date is accurate.

18 See Jürg Schneider, Fotomarketing: Werbestrategien west- und zentralafrikanischer Fotografen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert, in: *Fotogeschichte* 36, 2016, no. 141, 25 – 33, for the promotional strategies employed by West African photographers.

19 See, e.g., Frank Staff, *The Picture Postcard and its Origins* [1966], London 1979 and Julia Gillen, Writing Edwardian Postcards, in: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17, 2013, 488 – 521, here 490.

20 Christraud M. Geary, Different Visions? Postcards from Africa by European and African Photographers and Sponsors, in: Christraud M. Geary and Virgina Lee Webb (eds.), *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*, Washington and London 1998, 147 – 177, here 163; Richard Vokes, Reflections on a Complex (and Cosmopolitan) Archive: Postcards and Photography in Early Uganda, 1904 – 1928, in: *History and Anthropology* 21, 2010, 375 – 409, here 381.

21 Geary 2017 (as in note 2), 71.

22 For a foundational collection of essays on the material turn in photography, see Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, New York and London 2004.

23 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford and New York 2001, 14.

24 Sophie Junge, Groet uit Java: Picture Postcards and the Transnational Making of the Colony around 1900, in: *History of Photography* 42, 2018, 168 – 184, here 170.

25 Vokes 2010 (as in note 20), 381.

26 Elizabeth Edwards, Photography and the Material Performance of the Past, in: *History and Theory* 48, 2009, 130 – 150, here 136 – 137.

27 Naomi Schor, Cartes Postales: Representing Paris 1900, in: *Critical Inquiry* 18, 1992, 188 – 244, here 238.

28 Geoffrey Batchen, Double Displacement: Photography and Dissemination, in: Thierry Gervais, *The "Public" Life of Photographs*, Toronto 2016, 39 – 74, here 72.

29 Ibid., 67.

30 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda, in: eidem, *Tensions of the Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1997, 1 – 56, here 9.

31 James B. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*, London 1997, 38.

32 Another card sent to this address is held by the Museum Rietberg in Zurich.

33 This set of postcards, compiled under the theme of mining, was originally collected by Dr. Günter Grundmann and kindly made available for this research.

34 Junge 2018 (as in note 24), 183.

35 W.J.T. Mitchell, Imperial Landscape, in: idem (ed.), *Landscape and Power* [1994], Chicago 2002, 5 – 34, here 17.

36 Felix Axster, *Koloniales Spektakel in 9 × 14. Bildpostkarten im Deutschen Kaiserreich*, Bielefeld 2014, 27.

37 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1979, 49.

38 The idea of an "extractive gaze" has recently been proposed by Siobhan Angus, *Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography*, Durham and London 2024, 14.

39 Elizabeth Edwards, Looking at Photographs: Between Contemplation, Curiosity, and Gaze, in: *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive* (exh. cat. Neu-Ulm, The Black House, The Green House, The White Box), ed. by Tamar Garb, Göttingen 2013, 48 – 54, here 54.

40 Batchen 2016 (as in note 28), 72.

41 Quoted from an excerpt of the legal text printed on the verso of the copyright registration form used by the Stationers' Company.

42 Schneider 2016 (as in note 18), 25 – 33, 32 – 33. For individual photographers, see Geary 2017 (as in note 2); Christraud M. Geary, African Photographer Frederick Grant and Registering Copyright in 1884, in: Roslyn A. Walker (ed.), *The Power of Gold: Asante Royal Regalia from Ghana,* New Haven and London 2018, 57 – 68.

43 Enrico Sturani, Das Fremde im Bild: Überlegungen zur historischen Lektüre kolonialer Postkarten, in: *Fotogeschichte* 21, 2001, no. 79, 13 – 24, 13.

44 Howard Woody, International Postcards: Their History, Production, and Distribution (circa 1985 – 1915), in: Geary and Webb 1998 (as in note 20), 13 – 45, here 23.

45 *The Practical Photographer*, no. 15 (supplement), December 1904, 10.

46 Another contributor to this journal, which he imported to West Africa, was Neils Walwin Holm. See Charles Gore, Intersecting Archives: Intertextuality and the Early West African Photographer, in: *African Arts* 48, 2015, 6 – 17, here 10.

47 *The Practical Photographer*, no. 18 (supplement), March 1905, 15.

48 Vitta appears to have been more precise than the typesetters in attributing authorship. Some of the copyrighted prints show images that were likely taken by other photographers. The prints are captioned on the verso "Published by Jacob Vitta," while the resulting postcards state "Photographed and Published by Jacob Vitta."

49 Jacob Vitta, *Photograph. Native Village Wassaw, Gold Coast Mining Co Ldt, Adjah Bippo,* ca. 1904, albumen print, 14.9 × 20.3 cm, Kew, London, The National Archives, COPY 1/498/24.

50 "Printed in Treves" likely refers to the printer Schaar & Dathe.

51 Heinz-Jürgen Böhme and Günter Clemens, *Bilderbogen: Leipziger Ansichtskartenserien von 1895 – 1945*, Leipzig 2010, 51.

52 Dickinson 2003 (as in note 5), 147 – 155.

53 Junge 2018 (as in note 24), 171.

54 Won Hu Nos, Sympathetic Criticism: XII. Photographers, in: *The Gold Coast Nation*, 30 January 1913, 215.

55 *The Gold Coast Leader*, 22 February 1908, 3.

56 Ibid., 13 July 1907 (supplement), 1.

57 See Christian Pilegaard Hansen, To Reserve or not to Reserve: The Battle over Forest Conservation in the Gold Coast, 1889 – 1927, in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 50, 2023, 65 – 75, here 65.

58 Ibid., 69.

59 Emmanuel Joseph Peter Brown, In the Matter of the Forest Ordinance 1911, in: *The Gold Coast Nation*, 30 May 1912, 55 – 57, here 57. The speech is divided over two issues. For the first part, see *The Gold Coast Nation*, 23 May 1912, 49 – 50.

60 S. D. Andersen Jr., The Battle-Song of Labour, in: *The Gold Coast Nation*, 30 May 1912, 57.

61 Frederick Gordon Guggisberg and Decima Moore, *We Two in West Africa*, London 1909, 99, 314.

62 On "political forests" as a means of colonial statebuilding, see Nancy Lee Peluso and Peter Vandergeest, Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, 2001, 761 – 812.

63 Martha G. Anderson, Envisioning Africa: From Ethnographic Types to Picturesque Views, in: Anderson and Aronson 2017 (as in note 2), 317 – 256, here 229 – 230.

64 Foliard 2023 (as in note 6), 79.

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