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Thornton, J. cp. 2

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The development of commerce between Europeans and Africans

The success of Africans in resisting the early European attempts at raiding their coasts meant that the interactions that would follow would be largely peaceful and commercial – for it would not be until 1579 that a major war would develop, in Angola, and even there it rapidly became an indecisive standstill. There would be no dramatic European conquests in Africa, and even the slaves who would flood the South Atlantic and sustain colonization in America would be purchased more often than captured. This state of affairs was already being put in place by Diogo Gomes's expeditions in 1456–62 and would characterize relations between Europeans and Africans for centuries to come.

African naval victories might not necessarily guarantee that the commerce that grew up in place of raiding was truly under African control or necessarily served their interests (or the interests of the wealthy and powerful in African society). Indeed, many scholars in recent years have most often seen the commerce of Atlantic Africa with Europeans as destructive and unequal, with Europeans reaping most of the long-range profits and Africans unable to benefit or being forced, through commercial weakness, into accepting trade that ultimately placed Africa in its current situation of dependency and underdevelopment.

Perhaps the most influential scholar to advocate such a position was Walter Rodney, whose work on Africa's Atlantic trade concluded that the commerce with Europe was a first, decisive step in the underdevelopment of Africa. As Rodney saw it, this was because Africa was at a lower level of economic development than Europe and was thus forced into a sort of "colonial" trade in which Africans gave up raw materials and human resources (in the form of slaves) in exchange for manufactured goods – a form of dependency that certainly characterizes modern African trade.[1]

[1] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, pp. 95–113; idem, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (London, 1970), pp. 171–99.

Although not all scholars have shared Rodney's radical views on many aspects of the relationship, recent interpretations have continued to stress that African backwardness necessarily led it into a type of trade that diverted its potential to develop. Thus, Ralph Austen, whose views are much more conservative than Rodney's, still agreed that the commerce begun in the fifteenth century led Africa to greater marginality in the world economy and tended to stifle technological development and some lines of economic growth.[2]

An examination of African economic development by 1500 and the exact nature of the Atlantic trade, however, does not support this pessimistic position. Africans played a more active role in developing the commerce, and they did so on their own initiative. On the one hand, the Atlantic trade was not nearly as critical to the African economy as these scholars believed, and on the other hand, African manufacturing was more than capable of handling competition from preindustrial Europe.

In order to understand the role of the African economy in the Atlantic trade we need to examine two related issues, both of which are raised in the works of scholars who see Africans as junior and dependent trading partners. First is the assumption of African backwardness in manufacturing, based largely on the analogy with Africa's present lack of manufacturing capacity and its impact on modern African economies. Second is the assumption of commercial domination, in which Europeans somehow were able to control the market for African goods, either through monopoly or through commercial manipulation of some other sort.

Industry and terms of trade

Comparisons between the trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that of the present day linking industrialized with less developed countries are invalid. Although many of the goods that Africa imported before 1650 were manufactured goods (such as iron or cloth) and many of their exports were at most semimanufactured (hides, copper and gold, gum, ivory, and slaves), a closer examination reveals that early African manufacturing was in many ways quite capable of providing for the continent's needs.

Perhaps one of the most interesting facts of the early Atlantic trade was that Europe offered nothing to Africa that Africa did not already produce – a fact often overlooked in analyses of the trade. This immediately differentiates the early period from the present day, for today domestic African industry produces none of the manufactured goods that they import from the developed world.

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Europe exported a wide range of goods to Africa before 1650, of which we can recognize several categories. First and surely foremost in terms ~~of volume was~~ cloth ~~– a whole~~ world ~~of~~ textiles of dozens of types by the seventeenth ~~century.~~ Then there were metal goods, principally iron and copper, in raw (iron bars and copper manillas)[3] and worked form (knives, swords, copper basins and bowls, etc.). Next there was currency, consisting of tons of cowry shells. This trade was especially important in Benin and the Slave Coast though shells were also imported into central Africa. Finally there is what we might describe as nonutilitarian items, such as jewelry (beads for the most part), mechanical toys and curiosities, and alcoholic beverages.

What is significant about all of these items is that none were "essential commodities." Africa had well-developed industries producing every single item on the list, and although not all of them were produced in every district, a substantial number of these items were imported into regions where there was clearly no pressing need, in a strictly functional sense, to import them.

It was, in short, not to meet African needs that the trade developed or even to make up for shortfalls in production or failures in quality of the African manufactures. Rather, Africa~~'s trade~~ with Europe was largely moved by prestige, fancy, ~~changing~~ taste, and a desire ~~for~~ variety – and such whimsical motivations were backed up by a relatively well ~~devel-~~ oped productive economy and substantial purchasing power. The Atlantic trade of Africa was not simply motivated by the filling of basic needs, and the propensity to import on the part of Africans was not simply a measure of their need or inefficiency, but instead, it was a measure of the extent of their domestic market.

We can begin to see the complexities of the trade if we look at the trade in metals, and particularly iron, for iron was surely the best example of a commodity that was imported and could be used in tools and one where technique is essential to producing quality. The Portuguese exported little iron to Africa, perhaps because they felt obliged to honor papal injunctions against selling materials with potential military value to infidels. However, Christian Kongo received little Portuguese iron either, so the more likely reason was that they produced little themselves and could not make a good profit exporting it. The Dutch, with access to good German and Scandinavian sources, and the English, with iron of their own, pioneered the sale of iron into Africa, iron bars already being prominent in the gifts that van den Broecke gave out in 1605.[4] Iron

[3] A manilla was a horseshoe-shaped copper ingot, the most common form in which copper was transported and sold.

[4] Pieter van den Broecke, *Reizen naar West-Afrika van Pieter van de Broecke, 1604–14*, edited by K. Ratelband (The Hague, 1950), p. 5.

appears in Dutch trade lists of the seventeenth century as useful in every part of Africa, and they were sure to bring considerable quantities each year. Based on French and English trading company statistics, Curtin has estimated that Senegambia imported something on the order of 150 tons of European iron every year by the last half of the seventeenth century, although this figure is probably higher than earlier quantities.[5]

But Africa was an iron-producing part of the world, and Senegambia was already being served by producers in Futa Jallon (and perhaps also by some poor-quality local iron) at the time the Portuguese arrived.[6] Indeed, the Portuguese bought iron in Sierra Leone to sell in Senegambia and other points, as the books of the ship *Santiago*, sailing this route in 1526, clearly show.[7] But European trade with Senegambia in iron later on was not simply an attempt to compete with other West African producers in fulfilling the needs of an iron-poor region. Instead, the iron trade was more complicated.

The peculiarities of African iron production that made European iron attractive come, perhaps, from its earliest years. According to recent work on ancient African ironworking, the technology was developed by 600 B.C. or even earlier on the Sudanese fringe of the emerging Sahara desert, perhaps as a result of discoveries made in the copper-producing areas of the desert north of modern Nigeria. Because this was a fuel-poor environment, African ironworkers developed methods to conserve fuel, of which the most important was devising a system to preheat the air blast that entered the furnace, which prefigured techniques used in Europe only in the nineteenth century. This not only saved fuel, but it allowed Africans to produce an amazingly good-quality steel – perhaps the best steel in the world of the time, and certainly equal to or even better than the steel produced in early modern Europe.[8]

Certainly research into the quality of metal produced by African foundries in West Africa in modern times and recent archeology suggest that African steel was equal to that made anywhere in the fifteenth century.[9] But African steel still required considerable quantities of wood, and this was not always available, which meant that increasingly the best ironwork was done on the northern edge of the rain forest where there was a conjunction of wood supplies and iron ore (as well as abundant waterborne transportation). This sometimes made iron expensive in regions

5 Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 210.
6 Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chap. 33 (ed. Silva Dias), p. 96.
7 Avelino Teixeira da Mota, "A viagem do navio Santiago à Serra Leoa e Rio S. Domingus em 1526," *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* 24 (1969): 567, 572.
8 See Peter Schmidt and S. Terry Childs, "Innovation and Industry during the Early Iron Age in East Africa: The KM2 and KM5 Sites of Northwest Tanzania," *African Archaeological Review* 3 (1985): 53–94.
9 Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 207–11.

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10 See Candice Goucher, "Iron Is Iron 'Til It Rust: Trac
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Centuries," ibid. 23 (1982): 503–13.
11 Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 210–11.
12 On the replacement rate, see Poole, "Decline or Su
13 I have arrived at this figure by recalculating the de
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like Senegambia that were located some distance from the centers of production. As a result, European iron, even though of poorer quality, might be competitive in price and could be employed for those uses that did not require the qualities of steel.[10]

But even if its price were competitive, one should not imagine that imported iron came particularly close to fulfilling even the Senegambian needs for iron before 1680. According to Curtin's estimates, annual Senegambian imports of iron in 1680 amounted to 150 tons and was probably less in the half-century earlier. This iron would go to serve the needs of what might be a rather restricted iron-using population, along the coast north of the Gambia and inland along the Senegal to approximately Futa Tooro, where a local industry reduced the need for imported stocks. Curtin notes, in fact, that traders found little market for imported iron on the upper reaches of both rivers before the middle of the eighteenth century.[11]

If we assume that each household had a minimum tool kit composed of a hoe, axe, large knife (machete or cutlass for clearing fields), smaller knives for cutting, and some arrowheads and spears for hunting (excluding for the moment military uses), then we can estimate that each household owned approximately two kilograms of iron at a time, which required replacement every two years (for the locally produced iron; lower-quality, imported iron needed biannual or even triannual replacement), and thus each household had an annual consumption of one kilogram of iron per annum.[12] If we accept that this restricted coastal region had a total population in 1650 of about 1.5 million,[13] organized into perhaps 300,000 households,[14] then these households required 300 tons of local iron per year. But if they used imported iron (at the higher replacement rate) they would need at least 1,200 tons to meet their needs. Thus, imports could probably only have met about 10–15 percent of their needs.

& Euro iron was supplemental, not a necessity

These estimates of consumption are low, assuming minimum household consumption, and completely exclude military uses, one of the most important additional uses of iron. For example, the average Sene-

[10] See Candice Goucher, "Iron Is Iron 'Til It Rust: Trade and Ecology in the Decline of West African Iron-Smelting," *Journal of African History* 22 (1981): 179–89; L. M. Poole, "Decline or Survival? Iron Production in West Africa from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries," ibid. 23 (1982): 503–13.

[11] Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 210–11.

[12] On the replacement rate, see Poole, "Decline or Survival?" p. 507.

[13] I have arrived at this figure by recalculating the densities for the region given in Thornton, "Demographic Effect," pp. 710–14 by an approximate area for this part of the region.

[14] At five people per household. For these purposes, the total number of households roughly equals the number of males in the age-group 16–50, or about 20 percent of total.

gambian horseman, according to descriptions of the late sixteenth century, carried a sword, a broad-bladed spear, and seven or eight smaller throwing spears, and his horse and saddle also required a small amount of iron[15] – in all perhaps two kilograms. Thus a unit of 500 horse by itself used as much as a ton of iron, with a higher annual replacement because some supplies were expended before wearing out (such as throwing spears, which might, for this reason, be made of inferior iron from the imports), and even according to conservative estimates of cavalry forces, the perhaps 15,000 horsemen of the coastal and lower rivers region required thirty tons of iron – not to mention the numerous infantry, some of whose weapons must be considered in the earlier estimates of household consumption, but who probably demanded ten or twenty more tons total.

But if European iron was not simply to fill the needs of an iron-poor region, and surely not to replace poor-quality iron with better-quality metal (if anything, as we have seen, the relationship was the reverse), then European iron clearly played a more complex role. Thus, Africans in Senegambia and elsewhere bought cheap European iron in bars (perhaps the most common form of purchase) but they also bought high-quality steel swords, which were certainly used in their finished form. Africans could, of course, have made their own swords, for they possessed both the skills and the quality metal, but no doubt the imported sword was also an item of prestige whose value was not simply counted by its utility as a weapon. This might well explain why archeologists found a European sword in a burial site at Rao that must have been purchased (through the trans-Saharan trade) in the twelfth or thirteenth century.[16] The distance this sword must have traveled was far from simply being a measure of its utility.

This same point can be even more abundantly detailed in the issue of cloth imports, for unlike iron, whose distribution and working conditions predispose it to long-distance trade, cloth can be made almost anywhere. Certainly there were no Africans who bought European cloth simply because they lacked cloth themselves, nor should we believe that European cloth was necessarily better (in a functional sense of providing protection from the elements) or even cheaper than its African counterpart. Early European travelers praised West African cloth; for example, both Fernandes and Pacheco Pereira had much to say on the Mandinga

[15] De Almada, "Tratado breve," *MMA*² 3:241; Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fols. 18v–19.

[16] J. Joire, "Découvertes archéologiques dans la région de Rao (Bas-Sénégal)," *BIFAN* 17 (1955): 262.

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[17] Fernandes, "Descriçã," fol. 110v, 115; Pacheco P
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[18] António Carreira, *Panaria cabo-verdiano-guineense: A*
bon, 1960). On Senegambian cloth in general, see

[19] Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 3, chap. 2 (ed. Silv

[20] Alvitre de Pero Sardinha, ca. 1611, *MMA* 6:52–3.

[21] See statistics in Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, p. 34

[22] My estimate is based largely on ships' records of
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cloth they and their informants encountered.[17] This cloth was widely traded in West Africa, and the Portuguese even carried Mandinga weavers to the Cape Verde Islands, where they created the distinctive trade cloth that was a staple of West African commerce for the next several centuries.[18]

Some measure of the vitality of African textile industries can be seen in the central African case, where unlike European or Asian cloth (and even much of West African cloth), the local textile industry used tree bark to make a wide variety of cloth types. This cloth could be of very high quality, for Pacheco Pereira wrote in the early sixteenth century, "In this kingdom of Congo they make some cloths of palms, with a surface like velvet, and those with fancy work like velvetized satin, so beautiful that there is no better work done in Italy."[19]

This cloth was also plentiful, for African cloth makers appear to have been efficient producers as well as skilled ones. The Portuguese purchased considerable cloth from eastern Kongo for export to the lands to the east of Angola, and a memorandum on this trade in 1611 indicates that the eastern Kongo region was exporting over 100,000 meters of cloth to Angola alone per year.[20] Such a level of exports might indicate, when domestic consumption and exports to other parts of Africa are considered, total production perhaps twice as high. This level of exports, from a region whose total population probably did not exceed 150,000, places eastern Kongo on a par with the great Dutch textile-manufacturing centers of the same time (such as Leiden) – whose total annual production ran to the 100,000-meter range and whose total population (urban and rural) was also perhaps in the same range.[21]

That European imports did not simply go to clothe the naked is demonstrated by considering the consumption of the Gold Coast, a big importer of European cloth that absorbed something on the order of 20,000 meters of European and Asian cloth per year by the early to mid-seventeenth century.[22] This trade provided cloth to a population that we can tenta-

[17] Fernandes, "Descriçã," fol. 110v, 115; Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chap. 29 (ed. Silva Dias), pp. 86–8.

[18] António Carreira, *Panaria cabo-verdiano-guineense: Aspectos históricos e sócio-economicos* (Lisbon, 1960). On Senegambian cloth in general, see Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 211–13.

[19] Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 3, chap. 2 (ed. Silva Dias), p. 134.

[20] Alvitre de Pero Sardinha, ca. 1611, *MMA* 6:52–3.

[21] See statistics in Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, p. 347.

[22] My estimate is based largely on ships' records of the 1640s as cited in Ray Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics on the Seventeenth Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982), pp. 208–10 and 405, nn. 10–16. Kea has estimated that *each* of 200 ships that visited the Gold Coast between 1593 and 1607 carried 150,000 yards of cloth for a total of 30–40 million yards of cloth imports, or upward of 2,500,000 yards (2,300,000 meters) per year (p. 208, sources cited on p. 405, n. 10). But neither the documents he cites nor those in the note

tively estimate as being composed of 1,500,000 people, of which approximately 750,000 would be adults, roughly equal numbers of males and females.[23] It is possible to estimate, based on descriptions of clothing of ordinary Akan people presented in travelers' accounts, such as those of de Marees (1601) and Müller (1688), that each adult male wore about 3–4 meters of cloth, and each female perhaps 4–5 meters (including cloth for carrying infants), most of which was a single piece of cloth used to wrap the body.[24] If one makes some very minimal assumptions (to allow for the poorest slaves) and posits a two-year life for this supply of cloth, then the average adult required at least 1 meter of cloth per year, and thus the annual consumption on the Gold Coast ran to something on the order of 750,000 meters of cloth. Cloth arriving from Europe and Asia thus accounted for about 2 percent of total consumption, and even then this assumes no elite consumption (often many times higher than average), no child consumption, and no nonclothing use for textiles.

In fact, the consumption of cloth, much more than the consumption of iron, is a means of demonstrating prestige, because its principal use is as much bodily decoration as protection from the elements. Accumulations of large quantities of cloth and displays of this accumulation form a major part of conspicuous consumption, which, given the fairly low cost of some cloth, was available not just to the rich or powerful but also to ambitious and successful peasants, artisans, or petty traders. Acquiring luxury cloth, foreign cloth, and cloth with unusual colors, designs, textures, and shapes could also play a role in conspicuous consumption.

following (p. 405, n. 11) come close to supporting the very high per-ship totals. Instead, they appear to suggest that the 150,000 yards is for the *total*, giving annual imports at a level of 10–12,000 meters, rising throughout the century.

23 My estimate is based on the average density method used for Senegal, from data in Thornton, "Demographic Effect," pp. 710–14, for the southern half of the Gold Coast region. Kea (*Settlements*, p. 139) estimates the total population of this area at 656,000 (thus an adult population of 325,000) based on a projection from army sizes reported in the literature. In a note, however, he suggests that his multiplier (4) to convert armies to population is quite low (indeed, it would assume every adult male served) and cites an opinion of Marion Johnson that for the nineteenth century a number closer to 8 (which would give a population of 1,312,000, almost the same as my estimate) might be closer (p. 380, n. 64). Johnson's opinion is strengthened by the fact that unlike nineteenth-century armies, Kea has shown (pp. 149–67) that seventeenth-century armies were small elite forces and not mass armies, implying that an even higher multiplier should be applied.

24 Pieter de Marees, *Beschryvinge ende historische verhael vant Govt koninckvijck van Guinea* . . . (Amsterdam, 1602; modern ed. with original pagination marked, S. P. L'Honoré Naber, The Hague, 1912); English trans. with original pagination marked, Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602) (London, 1987), pp. 17a, 19b, 26a–b. Wilhelm Johann Müller, *Die Afrikansche auf der guineischen Gold Cost gelegene Landschaft Fetu* (Hamburg, 1673; facsimile reprint, Graz, 1968; English translation with original pagination marked in Adam Jones, ed. and trans., *German Sources for West African History, 1599–1669* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 150–9.

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25 Müller, *Afrikansche*, pp. 151–5.
26 Ibid., p. 152.
27 Ibid., p. 158 (Mandinga cloth sold for 1.5 pounds of g
by Europeans ran up to 2 guilders, p. 156).
28 Pero Sardinha, ca. 1611, *MMA* 6:53–4.
29 Nicholas van Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael aller ged*
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30 Alphonse de Saintogne, *Voyages advantureux*, fol. 55.
31 Kea, *Settlements*, p. 210.
32 Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 86, 93–8.

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Thus, Müller, in describing Gold Coast cloth consumption, chided the people for their vanity in hoarding and displaying cloth and for the great public show that wealthier members (and even commoners) of society made when going out.[25] With this in mind, we can understand better the dynamics of the demand for European cloth. The Akan "are so vain about what they wear . . . and whatever appeals to them at a particular time they must have, even if they have to pay twice as much for it."[26] Hence he observed that the price paid for cloth often was determined more by its prestige value than any measure of its utility. It is noteworthy that the most expensive and sought-after cloth was not a European import but Mandinga cloth imported from the regions north of the Gold Coast.[27]

We can make similar observations about the cloth horde displayed upon the death of the king of Loango in 1624. Although Loango was a region that produced an excellent cloth of its own and exported somewhere around 20,000 meters to Angola in 1611,[28] the ruler's heirs proudly displayed a horde that included a wide variety of European and Asian cloth and nearly 700 meters of cloth from eastern Kongo.[29] In the context of a display, intended to demonstrate the wealth and prestige of the ruler, foreign and luxury cloth held pride of place.

This feature of textile production can explain why so many African regions both exported their own cloth to Europeans and imported cloth from Europe, at times in the same transactions. Thus, João Afonso's guide for French traders of the 1530s lists cloth among items to be bought and items to be sold along the Kongo coast.[30] Even Benin, which exported as many as 5–10,000 meters of cloth annually from its ports to other parts of Africa (principally the Gold Coast),[31] also imported Dutch linen and Indian cloth.[32] In all probability, the reason that the very areas that produced large quantities of cloth were the same as the regions that imported it is that the market for cloth in those areas was well developed by the extensive local production. European cloth was imported into these areas to tap the ever-changing demands of a discriminating consumer who had already become accustomed to using large quantities of

[25] Müller, *Afrikansche*, pp. 151–5.
[26] Ibid., p. 152.
[27] Ibid., p. 158 (Mandinga cloth sold for 1.5 pounds of gold, while expensive cloth brought by Europeans ran up to 2 guilders, p. 156).
[28] Pero Sardinha, ca. 1611, *MMA* 6:53–4.
[29] Nicholas van Wassenaer, *Historisch verhael aller gedenckwaerdiger geschiedenissen die en Europa* . . . , eighth part, October 1624 to April 1625 (Amsterdam, 20 May 1625), fol. 28v.
[30] Alphonse de Saintogne, *Voyages advantureux*, fol. 55.
[31] Kea, *Settlements*, p. 210.
[32] Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 86, 93–8.

cloth and could be counted on to purchase more, especially if it was different and new.

Thus, some of the imports into cloth-producing regions, as in Loango, were intended for conspicuous consumption and a sign of prestige, but others, such as the cloth sold in Allada, were to undergo yet another transformation. According to the English captain John Phillips, who visited Allada in 1694, most of the "says and perpetuans" that they sold were unraveled and then rewoven into their own cloth and resold in other parts of Africa. Some of these Allada cloths even crossed the Atlantic, for Phillips noted that they fetched a crown each in Barbados.[33] Such complex remanufacturing of European cloth surely predated Phillips's visit, and perhaps a good number of the thousands of cloths from Allada being sold by the Dutch on the Gold Coast in the 1640s were of similar composition.[34]

All of this demonstrates that Euro-African trade cannot be seen simply as an exchange of essential commodities, fulfilling the needs of a deficient economy. In this context, it is easier to understand why Africans also demanded a wide range of trinkets and beads, such as the ubiquitous *alaquequas*, a yellow North African bead that Pacheco Pereira noted sold all along the Senegambian coast.[35] Various beads were long manufactured in Africa – akori beads, for example, have a respectable antiquity in the region of modern Nigeria.[36] But even more than in the case of cloth, beads were valued for their prestige and foreignness, and even perhaps their outrageous price! In the case of such commodities the idea of function must yield to consumer preferences.

Consumer preferences no doubt explain why Africans demanded such a wide variety of commodities from Europe. After studying the lists of Dutch imports to the Gold Coast, Kea estimates that as many as 150 different commodities were in demand, including 40 different types of cloth.[37] Furthermore, demand for this or that item shifted dramatically, often to the consternation of merchants who brought thousands of items only to find no demand for them. Such shifts are clear indications that the purchasers were responding far more to the changing fashions of nonessential commodities than a real need to trade to satisfy basic wants. As Müller noted about the consumer on the Gold Coast: "at one

[33] John Phillips, "A Journal of the Voyage in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694," in Awnsham Churchill and John Churchill, eds., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 5 vols. (London, 1732), 5:236.

[34] Kea, *Settlements*, p. 210.

[35] Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chaps. 26, 27, 29, 31 (ed. Silva Dias), pp. 79–91 passim.

[36] J. D. Fage, "Some Remarks on Beads and Trade in Lower Guinea in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of African History* 3 (1962): 343–7.

[37] Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 207–12.

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moment they like this new fashion, at another moment that; and whatever appeals to them at a particular time they must have. . . . This is why so many goods remain unsold and are sent back to Europe at great loss."[38]

Finally, most scholars who examine Afro-European trade often forget that Africa exported manufactured goods to Europe as well, including textiles. We have already mentioned the famous rewoven Allada cloths that Captain Phillips noted fetched a high price in Barbados, clearly showing that someone (could it have been African slaves?) was willing to pay dearly for it. Senegambian mats clearly went to the European market, and in large quantities. The trade is mentioned in the earliest sources, and such mats were often used in Europe as bedcovers. Not only that, but they must have been manufactured and exported in considerable quantities, for in the early eighteenth century an English factor at Sierra Leone was instructed to acquire no less than one million of them, "if they could be got." Africans also manufactured other items for European customers. Most famous of these were the "Afro-Portuguese ivories," including mostly spoons but also horns and saltcellars. These goods were artistically wrought in a hybrid art style and were definitely for elite consumption, but they were sufficiently numerous to go beyond simply curiosity production.[39]

In the end, then, the European trade with Africa can scarcely be seen as disruptive in itself, for it did not oust any line of African production, nor did it thwart development by providing items through trade that might have otherwise been manufactured in Africa, even if one differentiates, say, high-quality cloth from low or high-grade steel from low. There was no reason, therefore, that Africans should have wanted to stop the trade, or that their desire to continue it was based on necessity.

The market and the state in Atlantic commerce

Europeans did not pillage Africa, either as raiders or indirectly as traders from a more advanced economy. However, scholars (such as Rodney) have also proposed that whatever the level of economic development, Europeans may still have possessed some organizational advantages, either that they had more of a profit orientation than the Africans, possessed superior commercial organization, or were able to restrict imports to Africa in such a way as to exercise a partial monopoly. Any of these factors might have given the Europeans commercial advantages and

[38] Müller, *Afrikansche*, p. 152.
[39] The mat trade is discussed in Kathy Curnow, "The Afro-Portuguese Ivories: Classification and Stylistic Analysis of a Hybrid Art Form," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1983), pp. 61–2.

perhaps allowed them to extract high profits or force Africans into unwelcome lines of commerce.[40]

Before proceeding to an analysis of this aspect of the problem, we must note immediately that the interregional trade of the period was not a matter of groups of merchants from Europe traveling to Africa and buying whatever they wanted in African markets or from African producers, and in the exchange following the laws of supply and demand. Although village markets may have functioned in this way in both areas, and although merchants may have preferred the undisturbed flow of commerce, the long-distance trade was almost never so simple a transaction. This is because most governments, the world over, regarded long-distance trade as falling under their jurisdiction, to be ruled and controlled by them and ultimately to serve their needs ahead of those of the buyers or sellers.

Rulers in both Africa and Europe undoubtedly realized that they could not really control long-distance trade, for the distances, risks, and other market imperfections implicit in this type of commerce were too great. Indeed, the states would surely have lost money had they literally taken control of the trade, which bore very little resemblance to modern international trade with its currency regulations, international banking, security of lanes, and rapid communication. Instead, the states probably hoped that by claiming control over trade they could "bend" market forces enough to generate revenue and limit risks marginally, just enough in fact to make trade pay them. If we say their policies failed to attain their stated goals, we must add that such claims were more to establish the right in the international community to play the game of distorting the market than to actually accomplish it.

When examined from its organizational dimension, then, African trade with Europe was very much the mirror image of European trade with Africa. Both partners sought an "administered" trade, under state control, that attempted to eliminate or control the effects of market mechanisms like competition in the hope of securing maximum revenue from commerce. This was true even though the state usually preferred to allow private merchants to pioneer new trades (as in the case of early European exploration) or if possible to take the risks and absorb the costs. From the very start – Gomes's negotiations with a series of West African rulers – the commerce was controlled by the respective states of African and European countries, and although the mundane economics of supply and demand and the need to reward private initiative could not be wholly forgotten, they were always seen as secondary to the

[40] See Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast*, pp. 83–94, 122–51, 171–99; Austen, *African Economic History*, pp. 90–5.

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[42] After the publication of the crucial bull, *Roman*
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principal goal of all the controlling participants, which was to use the trade as a means of expanding state revenues. The expansion of revenues would take priority over other economic considerations, even those that might have increased volume or global revenues. If private merchants made profits, well and good, but it was not an essential part of state thinking, although most governments realized that only by ensuring some level of private profit could they expect trade to continue.

Often, this concern for revenue meant that states preferred to engage in trade themselves using salaried or commissioned agents and selling goods they obtained through their control of taxation and production. In other cases, they were content to simply tax a product, which then came under the control of the bourgeoisie, a group of merchants who lived principally on the proceeds of commerce. When possible they might enhance that bourgeoisie profit by ensuring favored members a monopoly or at least by distorting markets in their favor, and presumably increasing both the amount of profit (and hence tax revenues) and their ability to tax a single, visible source.

In the case of the northern Europeans after 1600, the state's role was vested in the hands of parastatal chartered companies, such as the Dutch West India Company, the English Royal Africa Company, or the French Senegal Company, which made their own arrangements with private traders. Often, the two types of trade, which we might crudely call private versus state-sponsored, coexisted or alternated uneasily as rulers sought to find a formula that maximized revenues and minimized efforts and costs.

Thus, we see that European merchants intending to deal in African markets often had to undergo a complex series of negotiations before actually exchanging commodities. Da Mosto, arriving on the Senegal River in 1455 and among the first to record such transactions, provides us with an interesting example. We can designate the Venetian merchant as a "private" trader, and his first action was to negotiate with the Portuguese state to obtain a license to sail in Guinea.[41] This requirement arose because the Portuguese king had claimed sovereignty over the trading lanes of the Atlantic Ocean, and through this claim of sovereignty, which popes[42] (but not all other European powers) recognized, also claimed the right to limit access, fix itineraries, or tax those trading in the area.[43]

[41] Da Mosto, "Novo Mondo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), pp. 11–13.
[42] After the publication of the crucial bull, *Romanus Pontifex*, 8 January 1455, in *MMA*[2] 1: 277–86.
[43] The legal complexities of the Portuguese claims are discussed in detail in Martina Elbl, "Portuguese Trade with West Africa, 1440–1520" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1986), pp. 243–55.

Having obtained his license from the state controlling the European end of the trade, da Mosto then sailed to where he had to undergo another series of negotiations with the ruler of Kayor, head of the state that controlled the African end. Although he does not reveal all the complexities in a setting that was in any case just beginning to be fixed, it is fairly clear that his discussions with the ruler and his extended lodging with a local noble were part of the transaction, by which he was eventually able to obtain a cargo.[44] The private African merchants with whom da Mosto had to deal no doubt had to make their own arrangements in Kayor, although he does not reveal these.

Later visitors reveal the changing nature of the relationships. When Pieter van den Broecke, a Dutch merchant operating without much European state interference, undertook a voyage to the same area in 1605, he sought no permission from Portugal, although he was aware that Portuguese ships could attack him for violating their claims to sovereignty – which in any case was being violated with impunity by English and French ships as well.[45] But Dutch merchants, like those of the other European countries that visited Africa in his time, soon found that they met restrictions at home, for in 1621 the Dutch West India Company was chartered and exercised similar claims to those of Portugal over Dutch merchants wishing to deal with Africa. This company provided the model for numerous other chartered companies operating out of France, England, and a host of other northern European countries, such as Denmark, Brandenburg, Sweden, and Kurland.

But for van den Broecke, and all those who followed, the African states still exerted a variety of state control mechanisms. Although he had no lengthy visits with the rulers of Kayor, he did have to make a courtesy visit to an "alcaide" of the ruler, to whom he paid a tax, presumably in exchange for the right to trade privately. On the other hand, when van den Broecke visited other parts of Africa, his experience resembled that of da Mosto. In Loango, which he visited three times between 1606 and 1612, he regularly had to visit the ruler and pay taxes and negotiate trading terms, as he did in Ngoyo and Nsoyo, other African states in the general central African region.[46] In spite of the fact that these states had been engaging in the Atlantic trade for well over a century when van den Broecke visited them, the necessity for state control still required negotiations, taxes in the form of presents, and courtesy calls on rulers.

These two visitors to Africa reveal some of the complexities that gov-

44 Da Mosto, "Novo Mondo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), pp. 49–50.
45 Van den Broecke, *Reizen* (ed. Ratelband), pp. 5–8.
46 Ibid., pp. 6, 22, 30–1, 59.

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Monopoly and competition

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47 Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chaps. 26, 28

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d. Gasparrini-Leporace), pp. 49–50.
Ratelband), pp. 5–8.

erned the African trade. On the one hand, there was a series of claims made on navigation by European powers or, as later Dutch, French, and English traders would reveal, by chartered companies from their home countries, which included taxation, control over routes and itineraries, or specifications concerning commodities to be bought and sold. On the other hand, there was another series of procedures required by the Africans concerning commodities to be bought, taxes or customs, prices for people of varying status, and the like, originating from the needs and requirements of the various African states.

Monopoly and competition in Atlantic trade

Although the strict control over the trading activities of Europeans was largely a matter of ensuring that trade be conducted according to state rules and for the benefit of the ruler and the exchequer, there was also at least to some degree an attempt to obtain a monopoly vis-à-vis African trading partners. Thus, at least part of the revenue-ensuring system of control also aimed to boost revenues by obtaining better prices through control over the supply of the goods. In short, Europeans trading in Africa did try to distort the market in their favor and against their African partners. The degree to which such a policy was successful might well indicate whether the Europeans were the senior, or dynamic, partners in the trading relationship.

It was in this regard that Pacheco Pereira, in his survey of Portuguese trade at the start of the sixteenth century, often complained that because the trade was not "well managed," the terms of trade in the sale of horses for slaves were slipping in favor of the Africans.[47] Clearly the implication was that as long as the Crown carefully controlled stocks and offering prices to Africans, the Africans would have to take that price, whose top would be fixed only by the much higher price set in the trans-Saharan horse trade or by other sources of supply.

As Pacheco Pereira and no doubt the Portuguese Crown as well saw it, creating a monopoly on the supply of European goods in the hands of the Crown or its designates would ensure a higher revenue position and an increase in the Crown's income. But, in fact, the Portuguese Crown and all other agents who attempted it failed. With that failure also came the failure to exploit the African commercial community.

There were two factors working against this policy on the European side (and we should definitely assume African hostility to it). First of all, there was the chance that foreign powers, cognizant of the rewards to be gained by African trade, would seek to trade on the African coast and

[47] Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chaps. 26, 28 (ed. Silva Dias), pp. 79, 82.

undercut Portuguese prices through competition. Second, there was the danger that Portuguese agents, either state officials or private traders operating with or without a license, would reduce the state's control or go into competition with each other.

To meet the first eventuality, the Portuguese Crown sought to obtain the recognition by other European powers of their claims to the Guinea trade. They obtained papal support for it and sought to win acceptance of their sovereignty from other European powers. Even though the popes recognized Portuguese claims to sovereignty, the recognition was never completely secure or widely respected. From the very start of the Portuguese navigations, there were Castillian competitors. Not until 1479 as a part of the general settlement of affairs between Portugal and Castille, did the Castillian Crown reluctantly accept Portuguese sovereignty over the sea lanes outside the Canaries, though its own records reveal that it did little to stop private sailings and even collected tax on their proceeds.[48] The Castillians were not alone, for in that same year Eustace de la Fosse undertook his voyage from Flanders to the Gold Coast, although it ended in his capture by Portuguese ships.[49] Plans for English voyages followed soon afterward, and by the early sixteenth century French ships were regularly sailing into the South Atlantic in violation of Portuguese claims and papal dictates.[50]

As was typical of the nature of the Portuguese claims, the Portuguese government sought to end the voyages on the one hand by seizing the vessels and their cargoes (a fate made more fearful by the fact that the Portuguese announced a policy of putting the crews into the sea) and on the other hand by making formal diplomatic petition to the home countries of the various rival European traders. Portuguese ambassadors in Spain, France, and England regularly sought to get the rulers of these states to order their subjects to desist in their plans to sail in the Atlantic; they met with various degrees of success.[51] The appeal to state powers to exercise this control over trade reveals the general European attitude concerning the role of the state in promoting trade, granting licenses to trade, and the like, even though all parties recognized that there would be some illegal voyages made privately in spite of royal displeasure.

At the same time that they were seeking to end foreign participation,

48 See Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," pp. 246–51, for a useful discussion of this issue. Spanish archival records that Elbl studied reveal numerous Castillian vessels traded in the area and paid the "fifth" upon their return (pp. 340–1).
49 See his account published in *MMA*[2] 1:464–79.
50 John Blake, *Europeans in West Africa (1450–1560)*, 2 vols. (London, 1942), 2:107; Teixeira da Mota, "As rotas maritimos," pp. 27–33.
51 Much of this diplomatic activity can be followed in the various early sixteenth-century letters in ANTT, Colleção São Vicente, vol. 2, fols. 258–60; vol. 5, fols. 156–62, 457–62, 463, 471, 519. See also M. E. Gomes de Carvalho, *D João III e os Franceses* (Lisbon, 1909).

the Crown was also trying to control par
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52 For details on this period see Elbl, "Portuguese Tr
53 Ibid., pp. 159–66.
54 ANTT, nucleo Antigo, vol. 799, fols. 115–58, as an
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55 Elbl's careful examination of the documents rev
("Portuguese Trade," chaps. 6 and 7).
56 John Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast, 1469–*
92. This trade seems to have remained profitable
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the Crown was also trying to control participation by its own citizens. Here the costs of supervising the trade had to be weighed against the benefits of monopoly, and the dynamic of these two factors shaped Portuguese policy in the earliest years. In general, the Crown sometimes sought to participate in commerce directly and at other times to avoid direct participation, for long-distance trade is always risky.

Therefore, during the earliest commercial voyages, the Portuguese ruler decided to allow private traders (whether of Portuguese nationality or foreigners, such as da Mosto) to obtain licenses in exchange for a fee.[52] In this way the Crown obtained some revenue from the trade but engaged in no risks, for unsuccessful voyages paid the fee along with successful ones. However, as the utility and value of some products were demonstrated, rulers were less content with a simple fee from merchants and began to insist on a royal monopoly to deal in an ever-lengthening list of products, beginning with gold and slaves but soon extended to various types of cloth, shells, and other trade goods that were used in Atlantic exchange.[53] Soon royal ships were being fitted to sail in the Atlantic; indeed, by 1504 there were fourteen ships employed in the African trade by the Crown.[54]

On the other hand, royal monopolies and direct participation in trading did not mean that the Crown simply took over commerce. For the most part the Crown still preferred to rent out commerce, exchanging the sure income of a rent (paid in advance) for the uncertainties that always accompanied a commerce that involved lengthy sea travel, faced a variety of pirates and privateers, and carried commodities that might perish or spoil before they reached the market. Thus, the Crown decided to rent out its monopoly power to private persons, giving them each a section of the royal monopoly in exchange for a fixed rent. The monopoly ensured the grant holder a greater certainty of profit and a larger volume, other (noneconomic) factors permitting, although in practice the Crown did little to assist in the enforcement and often violated the holder's monopoly itself.[55] Ultimately, the Crown rented out virtually all its rights save that to the trade in gold.[56]

One big problem that the Portuguese Crown faced in making good its claims to monopoly over European trade was the cost of enforcement. In

52 For details on this period see Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," pp. 253–9, 312–18.
53 Ibid., pp. 159–66.
54 ANTT, nucleo Antigo, vol. 799, fols. 115–58, as analyzed in Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," p. 619.
55 Elbl's careful examination of the documents reveals that realities were less clear-cut ("Portuguese Trade," chaps. 6 and 7).
56 John Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast, 1469–1682* (Athens, Georgia, 1979), pp. 58–92. This trade seems to have remained profitable for the Crown until the mid-sixteenth century, (Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," pp. 618–19).

order to ensure that the system worked according to its interests, the Crown began to send factors out to Africa – to Arguim in 1469 to supervise the gold and slave trade of the desert coast, to the Cape Verdes to oversee royal interests in Guinea, to Mina to supervise the royal gold trade, to São Tomé, and then to points along the African coast: to Cacheu in the "Rivers of Guinea," briefly at Ughoton to supervise trade in the Benin area, to Mpinda and Mbanza Kongo in Kongo, and eventually to the colony of Angola.[57] Such factors and officials associated with them had the responsibility of seeing that the royal trade in monopolized commodities was handled according to a set of rules, including a series of elaborate safeguards against official chicanery, and that private traders, foreign nationals, and the like were following Portuguese rules concerning licensing and commodity control.[58]

In the end, however, the fact that both private citizens and government officials (who typically were themselves rich merchants who had purchased their positions) participated in the trade helped to undermine the effectiveness of any monopoly on the terms of trade. In order to work properly, trade needed to take place completely under government supervision, and yet this was impossible on the African coast – particularly because private European traders and some officials rapidly discovered that African rulers were quite willing to permit them private concessions of their own that allowed them to profit from the trade instead of being simply agents. Private traders and low-ranking officials in Portuguese service, who chafed under regulation and who moreover realized that their place in the Portuguese system of rewards under controlled trade would remain permanently low, thus defected to the Africans, or at least offered their services to Africans in exchange for a higher place in the system than they might be offered by Portugal.

By the 1520s there were a number of unofficial settlers, often called *lançados*, who were widely distributed in Africa and who operated in league with the African authorities. The royal ship *Santiago* purchased goods from them in Sierra Leone in 1526, and travelers all along the coast noted their presence. By the late sixteenth century some held important positions in Senegambian states, and most of them in the Rivers of Guinea region were married to local women and were allowed to form their own settlements. Many of these settlers were from the Cape Verde Islands and had their connections to private trade from that area; not surprisingly a number were New Christians (converted

[57] Avelino Teixeira da Mota, "Alguns aspectos da colonização e do comércio marítimo dos portugueses na Africa ocidental nos séculos XV e XVI," *Anais do Clube Militar Naval* 101 (1976): 687–92.

[58] Ibid., pp. 690–2, for an analysis of the surviving *regimentos*, or instructions to factors.

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[59] Ibid., p. 687.

[60] Ibid., pp. 689–91.

[61] UBL: BPL, MS. 927, "Aenwijsingse van diversche
Africa," fol. 12v.

[62] Nicholas Villault, Sieur de Bellefond, *Relation de*
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1670), p. 84, is cited.

[63] John Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relatio
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[64] The books of four ships that visited Kongo in thi
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of the surviving *regimentos*, or instructions to factors.

Portuguese Jews), whose chances for advancement in Portuguese service were limited.[59]

Although the presence of a royal factory and close supervision limited the growth of this type of community on the Gold Coast,[60] groups of Portuguese from São Tomé and Príncipe found their way to most of the states of the Gulf of Guinea. Portuguese from São Tomé were certainly well in evidence at such places as Allada in the mid-seventeenth century and had an honored place in the government system: The Dutch trading guide of 1655 even noted the presents that should be given to "Portuguese."[61] Likewise, Villault, sailing down the coast in 1667, noted that Portuguese mulatto settlers living along the coast from Sierra Leone to Cape Mount completely dominated trade, allegedly having withdrawn to the interior from the coast under royal pressure in 1604.[62] Although the date is questionable, it is clear that these defectors also had local political connections – otherwise, they could not have dominated trade.

In central Africa where no gold trade attracted direct Crown interests, the same trend was even clearer. Portuguese settlers from São Tomé rapidly became a favored community in Kongo, and then in Ndongo as well, whose rulers were willing to support them against claims made by the Portuguese government against them.[63] Portuguese ships visiting Kongo in the period between 1525 and 1535 record making their purchases of slaves from locally settled Portuguese settlers – some, like Manuel Varela, who were established as officials in Kongo and enjoyed royal favor.[64] Like their counterparts in West Africa, many of the central African defectors were New Christians. An investigation conducted in Luanda in 1596–7 by the Inquisition of Lisbon revealed a whole chain of

59 Ibid., p. 687.
60 Ibid., pp. 689–91.
61 UBL: BPL, MS. 927, "Aenwijsingse van diversche Beschrijvingen van de Noort-Cust van Africa," fol. 12v.
62 Nicholas Villault, Sieur de Bellefond, *Relation des costes d'Afrique apellée Guinée* (Paris, 1669); the English translation, *A Relation of the Coasts of Africa called Guinea* (London, 1670), p. 84, is cited.
63 John Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation," *History in Africa* 8 (1981): 193–4.
64 The books of four ships that visited Kongo in this period have survived in ANTT CC, sec. II. All record the purchase of slaves from residents in Kongo; see 128/3, Book of *Conceição*, 28 August 1535 (misdated to 1525 on the archive cover sheet); 197/27, Book of *Santo Espirito*, 30 January 1535 (*MMA* 15:98–102); 203/16, Book of *Urbano*, 11 August 1535 (*MMA* 15:115–18); and 204/39, Book of *Conceição*, 6 October 1535 (*MMA* 15:124–30). Manuel Varela is listed as selling slaves on both the *Conceição* runs in 1535 (ANTT CC II/128/3, II/204/39) (*MMA* 15: 125). Other sources noted him as carrying a letter for Afonso I to Portugal (Afonso to João III, 25 July 1526, *MMA* 1:480). He also testified to losing over 70 cruzados worth of *nzimbu* money because ships did not come to pick up his slaves at the port of Mpinda (inquest conducted by Diogo I, 12 October 1548, *MMA* 2:200–1).

settlements established by New Christians throughout the area with posts in Kongo (and often positions in the church and administration of Kongo) and its eastern neighbors as well as in states in the Ndembu region and Ndongo.[65]

To counter the potential for these defectors to gain ground at the expense of the Portuguese state, the Crown attempted to group all Portuguese in supervised settlements under control of a royally appointed factor, though most such attempts yielded less, even to the Crown, than anticipated. The fact that they were not continued reveals that the Crown decided that the project was a failure. This seems to have been the result when the Crown tried to base all its Upper Guinea coast operations at a single point – maintaining that they could better protect their citizens against abuse by local people and fend off foreign "pirates." A fort was completed in 1591 and was attacked by the local people shortly thereafter, and although de Almada, who reported the whole episode, was clearly in favor of the move, it is also clear that it was bad for government trade and perhaps for those *lançados* who were resettled there.[66] Similarly, plans undertaken in 1606 for a "conquest" of Sierra Leone not unlike the one achieved earlier in Angola also included grouping merchants and resident Portuguese in one place under the control of a captain.[67]

Such ideas also lay behind numerous attempts on the part of Portuguese rulers to appoint a captain over the Portuguese community in Kongo, which the Kongo rulers sometimes supported, as long as it did not interfere with their own clients among the Portuguese community.[68] For example, in 1574 King Sebastião of Portugal sought to regroup the Portuguese community in Kongo again after having helped the king of Kongo drive the "Jagas" from his country.[69]

Ultimately, though, the Crown hoped that the establishment of the colony of Angola would accomplish what diplomacy in Kongo failed to accomplish. Although the colony certainly did help in maintaining control around the mouth of the Kwanza River, the Portuguese communities further afield continued local alliances and were thus unsupervised. To counter this, the policy of seventeenth-century governors was a variant of earlier ones. They forced trade to take place at *feiras*, markets under the direction of a Portuguese official, in the capitals of major

[65] ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, 159/7/877, Visita a Angola, 1596–7, fols. 23–23v, 54v–55v, 58, 63, 64–88v.
[66] De Almada, "Tratado breve," *MMA*² 3:285–6, 300–4.
[67] Donation of the Captaincy of Serra Leoa to Pedro Alvares Pereira, 4 March 1606, *MMA*² 4:129–39.
[68] Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations," pp. 195–7.
[69] Sebastião I to Francisco de Gouveia, 19 March 1574, *MMA* 3:120–1.

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[70] As implied in the statements concerning *res*
Lisboa, 159/7/877, Visita a Angola, e.g., fol.
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[71] Beatrix Heintze, "Das Ende des Unabhängigen
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[72] For a reasoned and up-to-date discussion of t
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ouveia, 19 March 1574, *MMA* 3:120–1.

trading partners of Angola. Similar official markets seem to have been organized by the late sixteenth century,[70] but the system was formalized only in the early seventeenth.[71] This system probably still failed to control the *sertanejos* – those Portuguese who continued to make their own arrangements with African authorities.

Thus policies to ensure the Crown's control and participation on its terms in the trade in Africa resulted in the conquest of Angola in the 1570s and lay behind plans for other conquests, especially those in the Rivers of Guinea and Sierra Leone. Indeed, all these attempts were ultimately outgrowths of the plan by the Portuguese Crown to centralize and monopolize trade, probably to obtain a monopoly price against the Africans, certainly to ensure its own revenue or the revenue of its licensees. But in the end, as long as African states preserved their sovereignty, the Portuguese Crown could never succeed in completely dominating the trade.

Throughout the sixteenth century the Portuguese made serious and often temporarily successful attempts to keep other foreign powers out of the African trade, although in the long run they failed even in the Gold Coast, where their strongest position lay. In part their failure was due to the impossibility of maintaining the sea power to keep foreign ships out, but mostly it was because the Africans were not under Portuguese rule and could not be made to refrain from dealing with foreigners any more than with agents and subofficers of the Portuguese Crown.[72]

These foreign traders of the sixteenth century were normally private traders, and their home governments did not necessarily support them against Portuguese claims (though they rarely actually accepted Portuguese demands that they stop their activity). But in the seventeenth century, the Dutch made a serious attack on the Portuguese monopoly claims. The Dutch argued that this was an extension of the Spanish war in the Low Countries, and because Spain absorbed the Portuguese crown in 1580, the Dutch were also at war with Portugal. The Dutch did not undertake this attack simply by sending out private traders, though Dutch merchants had been frequenting the African coast since the 1590s, but instead they chartered a company, the first Dutch West India Company, in 1621. This company, a reflection of the disparate and uncoordinated polity of the Dutch Republic itself, combined capital from each of

70 As implied in the statements concerning *resgates* and *feiras* in ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, 159/7/877, Visita a Angola, e.g., fol. 23 ("Cabonda, terra de Angola em q̃ os portugueses residẽ"), and passim.

71 Beatrix Heintze, "Das Ende des Unabhängigen Staates Ndongo (Angola): Neue Chronologie und Reinterpretation (1617–30)," *Paideuma* 27 (1981): 200–1.

72 For a reasoned and up-to-date discussion of the Portuguese policy on the Gold Coast, and English success in thwarting it, see Avelino Teixeira da Mota and P. E. H. Hair, *East of Mina: Afro-European Relations on the Gold Coast in the 1550s and 1560s* (Madison, 1988).

the towns that made up the state, and in exchange for paying dividends to the participating town councils from the proceeds of its trade (i.e., a sort of tax) it was granted the powers of a state. In short, it was a sort of state itself, and quickly began to operate in the trade as if it were a state.[73]

At the beginning of its career, the Dutch West India Company attempted to wrest control of the South Atlantic away from Portugal, conquering parts of Brazil and then moving systematically against Portuguese possessions in Africa – the post at Mina fell in 1637, those on Príncipe and in Angola fell in 1641, and that on São Tomé in 1647.[74] Although the Dutch had justified their attack on Portuguese monopoly claims by asserting the rights of freedom of the seas, they were quick to claim sovereignty in much the same way. Thus, when English, Danish, Swedish, French, and German companies organized on the same lines as the Dutch West India Company attempted to trade on the Gold Coast, the Dutch maintained that they had hegemony and sought to seize ships and cargoes.[75] Thus, in the 1660s the English and Dutch waged war over supremacy on the Gold Coast.[76]

But these claims, of course, did not extend to the actual African inhabitants of the coast. At best, like the Portuguese claims that they had now appropriated, the Dutch company hoped that they could dominate seaborne imports into Africa in such a way as to achieve a monopoly position in commerce. Like their Portuguese predecessors, the directors of the Dutch West India Company hoped that they could capitalize on their military capacity to limit competition in order to increase their profit.

In actual fact, however, the Dutch were even less successful than the Portuguese, as is clearly revealed in a retrospective report written by Heerman Abramsz to the directors of the Dutch West India Company upon his return to the Netherlands after long service as director of company operations in western Africa in 1679. The report shows how much the Dutch had been incapable of maintaining the monopoly they had wrested from the Portuguese, and how English, Swedish, and Danish companies had encroached on the trade, established lodges and posts, and made their own arrangements with African rulers, while

[73] Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (New York, 1965), pp. 21–9.
[74] Ibid., pp. 26–7.
[75] "Statement by Joost van Colster on the Attitude of the Dutch West India Company toward Interlopers and Foreign Ships," 1/11 August 1682, in Adam Jones, ed. and trans., *Brandenburg Sources for West African History, 1680–1700* (Wiesbaden, 1985), pp. 22–3.
[76] See "Captain Holmes, his Journalls of two voyages into Guynea in his Majesty's Ship the Henrietta and the Jersey in the year 1660/1 and 1663/4," Cambridge University, Magdalen College, Pepysian Library, MS. 2698.

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[77] Heerman Abramsz to Assembly of Ten, 23 Novem
and trans., *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674–17*
General State Archive at the Hague (Accra, 1978), pp.
[78] See ibid., pp. 13–20, and Short Memoir on Trad
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April 1681, and John Sowe, 10 June 1683; Oxford
Rawlinson C 745, fols. 209–10, 212, John Winder, 2
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steadily denying Dutch claims even in areas where the Dutch had posts.[77]

Even when they had given up their grandiose plans for control over the whole sea trade, such companies still hoped to form an exclusive relationship, usually by treaty, with a single African state in hopes that they could stabilize prices and eliminate competition. The constant complaints in companies' reports about undercutting prices paid by European rivals and the "inconstancy" of Africans who refused to be bound by trade treaties clearly reveal both the attempt and its results.[78]

The price-fixing aspects of such treaties were not successful, but the treaties did guarantee that the goods supplied would find a market. Thus, even if they could not impose a monopoly price on their African buyers, Europeans would at least be assured that their ships would be allowed to sell their cargoes ahead of those of other nations or companies in exchange for African goods. This took some of the risk out of trade – for no trader wants to undertake a long and hazardous journey only to find that there is nothing to buy. The hope that commercial risk would be reduced led Europeans to continue seeking treaty relationships with Africans – and the same reason perhaps motivated Africans to continue to agree to them. But these arrangements clearly did not amount to monopolistic distortions of trade.

If the problems of maintaining their probably rhetorical claims of primacy were not enough, the chartered companies, like the Portuguese before, could not necessarily control their "servants," the factors on the coast, from entering into service with the Africans or at least conniving with them. Instructions regularly emphasized the need to prevent company factors from dealing directly with or defecting to the Africans. Likewise, although the Dutch and other European powers found it convenient to deal with the previous group of defectors – the now well established communities of Portuguese (or their largely Africanized descendants) – they clearly hoped to get away from relying on them as well; these communities exemplified the potential for failure in their own attempts to control trade.

Company servants could easily be assimilated into trading communities under African sovereignty. Renegade servants of the companies sometimes went into business for themselves, perhaps through the re-

[77] Heerman Abramsz to Assembly of Ten, 23 November 1679, in Albert van Danzig, ed. and trans., *The Dutch and the Guinea Coast, 1674–1742: A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at the Hague* (Accra, 1978), pp. 13–20.

[78] See ibid., pp. 13–20, and Short Memoir on Trade within the Present Limits of the Charter of the WIC, 1670, ibid., pp. 10–12 (for Dutch reports); Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), T/70, vol. 1134, Henry Greenhill letter, 7 December 1680 and 6 April 1681, and John Sowe, 10 June 1683; Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MSS Rawlinson C 745, fols. 209–10, 212, John Winder, 24 June 1683; fol. 215, Mark Whiting, 26 June 1683; fol. 217, 30 June 1683.

sults of a fortunate marriage with a local woman. Thus, when the Prussian officer Otto Friedrich von der Gröben visited the English post at Bence Island (Sierra Leone) in 1682, he noted that most officers, including the governor, had "concubines," who had borne them children.[79] These concubines provided local connections. A report on the situation to the Royal African Company (to which all the officers had to report) noted that "every man hath his whore ffor whom they steal, &c."[80] From such communities there arose an English-oriented, racially mixed group of country traders all over Sierra Leone, with connections to both the companies and the African rulers.[81] By the eighteenth century these groups would be of special benefit to English trade.

African states and commerce

It is fairly clear, then, that European merchants, whether acting under the direction of states or companies, were unable to monopolize the trade of Africa. It is just as clear that African states, although attempting the same sort of thing, were ultimately no more successful. No African state ever really dominated the trade of any part of the African coast. African sovereignty was just as fragmented as the theoretical sovereignty that Europeans tried to maintain over the trade.

However, the African states did help to balance whatever economies of scale individual European merchants or companies may have had. Thus, it might be argued that a well-capitalized European merchant could have taken economic advantage, at least in the short run, of intense competition between hundreds of African traders. The African states' role in commerce limited this effect, however, thus offsetting whatever advantages a shipper's scale of operations might have afforded.

State requirements put a great number of legal and technical obstacles between European merchants and African buyers, as well as making the state itself a regular participant in the trade. A Dutch commercial guide of about 1655, for example, records the gifts and taxes that had to be paid in a variety of countries along the "Slave Coast" area from the Volta to Cameroon. Those at Allada were perhaps the most complicated, although perhaps only because the writer of the guide (apparently resident in São Tomé) understood them best. There, the prospective buyer

[79] Otto Friedrich von der Gröben, *Guineische Reisebeschreibung nebst einem Anhang der Expedition in Morea* (Marienwerder, 1694; modern facsimile ed., 1913), pp. 28–9. Adam Jones has produced a new (English) edition from manuscript sources (with original pagination) in *Brandenburg Sources*.

[80] Clarke to Company, 1 March 1684/4, PRO, T70/11, p. 134; quoted in Jones, *Brandenburg Sources*, p. 27, n. 10.

[81] Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast*, pp. 216–22.

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[82] UBL: BPL, MS. 927, "Aenwijsingse," fols. 12–1
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[83] Ibid., fols. 9v, 10v–11, 13v.

[84] Vogt, *Portuguese Rule*, pp. 82–7, 231, nn. 63–79.

[85] Ibid., p. 87; such transactions are numerous in
guese Trade," p. 640, n. 48, for a list of relevant

[86] ANTT CC, sec. I, 3/119, Nuno Vas de Castello B

[87] Traced in Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 43-

[88] Kwame Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coas*

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of slaves and cloth from Allada had to present a complex series of presents to dancers, food sellers, linguists, brokers, Allada nobles, and the king himself, both upon arrival and upon departure.[82] That such a system was not unique to Allada is clearly shown in the variety of customs the guide describes at Benin, Calabar, the Niger delta, and the Gabon region. Although few were as complicated as those at Allada, all involved gifts to rulers or councillors, with the amount varying by status or position.[83]

On the Gold Coast, where a Portuguese post and fort had existed since 1482, the lengthy personal visits of the traders were replaced by regular presents given by the Portuguese state to all the local potentates. Documents of the early sixteenth century are filled with notices of these presents, which are only indirectly tied to trade.[84] When conducting trade, the Portuguese still had to deal with, and pay, the *xarife*[85] (so-called by analogy to their own system), an official in charge of commercial affairs, who was sufficiently important in Efuto at least that he stood a chance of eventually becoming king.[86]

Sometimes the arrangements varied over time. In Benin, for example, the earliest Portuguese ships' books from the 1520s stress a lengthy series of gifts to officials and a visit to the ruler, who then "opened the market" for each of the commodities to be traded (including separate markets for male and female slaves). English visitors a half century later, on the other hand, negotiated only with the ruler himself, perhaps because their interest was largely in pepper and the king was the only producer, or perhaps because the political system in Benin had changed. Subsequent visitors in the seventeenth century found officials once again in charge of trade, and moreover, traders were no longer taken to the capital to negotiate but conducted their business at the port of Ughoton.[87]

Likewise, on the Gold Coast, the gifts paid by the Portuguese to local rulers gradually became an annual tax of rent, although always bearing the guise of a gift.[88] On the other hand, anyone trading in the region still had to deal with officials, even though these officials occasionally used the complexities of local politics to set themselves up as rulers of what seemed to be independent states. Even what seemed like private trade

[82] UBL: BPL, MS. 927, "Aenwijsingse," fols. 12–13v. The author of this guide seems to have resided in São Tomé and to have detailed information about the period 1647–54.
[83] Ibid., fols. 9v, 10v–11, 13v.
[84] Vogt, *Portuguese Rule*, pp. 82–7, 231, nn. 63–79.
[85] Ibid., p. 87; such transactions are numerous in the surviving records; cf. Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," p. 640, n. 48, for a list of relevant documents.
[86] ANTT CC, sec. I, 3/119, Nuno Vas de Castello Branco to King, 2 October 1502.
[87] Traced in Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 43–79.
[88] Kwame Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720* (London, 1970).

with merchant caravans, such as the Akani traders, was in fact state-sanctioned – hence carefully controlled.[89]

These negotiations, which were often time-consuming and which many European visitors thought to complain of, were essentially a manifestation of the insistence on the part of authorities in African states that they benefit first and certainly from trade. They were often willing to provide return gifts, sometimes of substantial value, after customs were paid (as van den Broecke noted in Loango),[90] as a way of making a special connection between themselves and the European with whom they were trading. But typically their desire was to ensure that they received first choice of the best goods and the best price, which perhaps constituted a second tax that went along with the gifts that made up the customs charges.

Thus, rulers generally insisted on getting a special price for their own goods and for the purchase of the European goods. Da Mosto noted that the ruler of Kayor with whom he dealt insisted on taking his pick of the goods, and their understanding that the trade was an extension of their friendship probably meant he also got a special price.[91] More specifically, the Dutch guide to trade at Allada emphasized that the king and his officials must get a better price on what they sold and on what they bought than the rest of the people when discussing maximum and minimum prices to fix for goods.[92]

Similarly, André Donelha noted that Gaspar Vaz, a Mandinga linguist and tailor who had once been a slave of one of Donelha's friends and was closely related to the "Duke" of Cassanga in the Gambia, could get him the "current" price for his goods, rather than the one usually charged to foreign purveyors of European goods.[93] Richard Jobson, an English merchant who was on the Gambia at the same time, shows how this special price was arranged. When dealing with the king iron bars twelve inches long were used, whereas with commoners the bars were only eight inches.[94] Thus, only by using a state connection could a foreign merchant avoid the general custom of paying special prices to high-status Africans.

Related to this was the concept that African rulers, should they deem it expedient, could start and stop trade at will. The ruler of Benin, as we have already seen, had the power to open and close the market – and

89 Cf. Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 226–36, 248–87.
90 Van den Broecke, *Reizen* (ed. Ratelband), p. 28.
91 Da Mosto, "Novo Mondo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), pp. 49–50.
92 UBL: BPL, MS. 927, "Aenwijsingse," fol. 12v.
93 Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fol. 25v.
94 Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade; or, A Discovery of the R. Gambia and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians* . . . (London, 1623; facsimile reprint, London, 1968), p. 120.

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95 Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 45, 167–9.
96 Afonso to João III, 18 October 1526, *MMA* 1:489–9
18 February 1549, *MMA* 2:231–7.
97 Jobson, *Golden Trade*, pp. 3–7, 62, 75–6.
98 Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fols. 29–29v; Jobsc

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23; facsimile reprint, London, 1968), p. 120.

there were separate markets for a wide range of commodities. It was surely for reasons of state, though these are unknown for certain, that the king of Benin decided to shut down the male slave market in the early sixteenth century, and then eventually to eliminate trading in slaves altogether.[95] Likewise, the king of Kongo occasionally instituted strict regulation or even prohibited commerce altogether. Both Afonso I and his successor Diogo regulated commerce in this way.[96]

But after African rulers had insisted on involving their sovereign rights to control trade or guarantee their profits, they were usually content to allow trade to take place freely once they had received their share. But very often even this trade was far from being the commercial free-for-all of a real market. This was because although African states allowed private trade, they played a major role in determining which Africans would be able to trade. The African bourgeoisie, like their counterparts in Europe, thrived largely because the state supported their position, and in many ways they used this patronage to their advantage.

Consider the case of the trade between Julas and various European traders along the Senegambian coast. Jobson's description of the commercial life of the Gambia in 1620 reveals that most of the commerce with visiting ships was handled by local Portuguese settlers (often from the Cape Verde Islands) near the mouth of the river (on whom, more later), while upstream it was in the hands of the "Marybuckes" (marabouts – traveling Moslem scholars who also traded). Jobson noted that the Marybuckes, whom he reveals in other contexts to be *julas* (a Mandinka term for merchants), possessed their own towns (worked by their own slaves) in a great network that stretched deep into the country, by which they were in touch with the commercial life of the interior.[97] André Donelha, for his part, also noted that as Moslem scholars these merchants were important counselors of the rulers and enjoyed a special relationship with and privileges from the state. Whether directly or indirectly, one of these privileges seems to have been the right to control trade and certainly to control the negotiations between the state and visiting traders.[98]

That these or other African merchant groups should have this favored position in the state is not surprising. Just as the European states found that it was better to leave commercial risks in private hands and charge a steady and sure tax and only monopolize lines of business that were of interest to state security, so African rulers adopted the same policies with

95 Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 45, 167–9.
96 Afonso to João III, 18 October 1526, *MMA* 1:489–90; Francisco Barros da Paiva to King, 18 February 1549, *MMA* 2:231–7.
97 Jobson, *Golden Trade*, pp. 3–7, 62, 75–6.
98 Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fols. 29–29v; Jobson, *Golden Trade*, p. 98.

merchants from their own region (or with Europeans and mulattos who defected to them). That such a concession would also be useful to the commercial group was, of course, part of the enticement rulers offered to attract settlers.

Of course, the close control of trade by African states had its origins in their legal systems and represented a type of market interference that their European counterparts followed as well. What happened in those areas where there was little state control demonstrates the value of state oversight and reveals how potentially dangerous and unpredictable trade in the early modern world was. For example, in the southern part of Sierra Leone, along the Gabon coast, and along what was variously called the Grain Coast, the Malaguetta Coast, or the Ivory Coast, European vessels often paid no taxes and engaged in no special negotiations in order to trade. Instead, Africans in groups of two or three would sail small canoes out to the ships for small-scale, impromptu bargaining over ivory, malaguetta pepper, foodstuffs, and occasionally gold.[99] But the commerce was always risky. Without the protection of a state, the Africans were sometimes carried away by the Europeans as slaves, or African traders would jump ship with European commodities in their possession before payment had been completed. Trading was always conducted with great caution and much bad faith on both sides – and perhaps in the end, without much profit.[100]

In Africa, as in Europe, of course, state attempts to monitor and control access to the market were defeated by some of the private merchants themselves. The Jula merchants involved in the Gold Coast gold trade did not hesitate to send their products to Senegambian or even North African markets if the proper quantity and quality of trade goods were not found on the Gold Coast. Francisco de Goes, the Portuguese factor on the Gold Coast in 1506, spoke of this tendency as the "Mandinga leak" in one of his reports complaining of the lack of suitable trade goods at his post.[101] Later, in the seventeenth century, Curtin has carefully documented the degree to which the Julas switched their trade from one port to another on the Senegambian coast to receive the best price and to thwart occasional attempts on the part of European companies to monopolize one region.[102]

99 Dierick Ruiters, *Toortse der zee-vaart*, p. 303 (Vlissingen, 1623; reprint, Hague, 1913), p. 71 (original pagination is marked, and followed hereafter).

100 Ibid., pp. 303, 316. See the remarks in Arent Roggeveen and Jacob Robjin, *The Burning Fen* (Amsterdam, 1687; facsimile ed., Amsterdam, 1971), pp. 19, 30. The book, though late in publication, probably reflects a view of the whole previous century of Dutch experience.

101 Francisco de Goes to King, 19 August 1506, ANTT, CC I/13/48, Manuel Góis to King, 18 April 1510, *MMA* 1:210–11.

102 Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 83–91.

In central Africa, one finds the same s
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103 John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil W*
1983), p. 26.

104 David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola:*
the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483–1790 (Oxford

105 For an excellent discussion and critique of contr
pp. 299–302; and Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," pp.

In central Africa, one finds the same situation with regard to the Vili merchants of Loango, who regularly sent slaves from as far away as Matamba to Loango to circumvent Portuguese attempts to restrict the trade to the Luanda market. This rivalry was behind Portuguese complaints of Vili behavior in 1655[103] and a similar attempt to get Queen Njinga to put them out of Matamba in the treaty of 1683.[104]

Thus, although the states of the Atlantic persistently sought to direct and control trade, their purpose was really more to enhance their revenue by marginally distorting the market and not to achieve the kind of real monopoly that would seriously change the overall terms of trade between African sellers and European buyers. For even though states wanted control, and even though they were fairly successful in gaining control at the point of any given transaction, the presence of private traders, their interconnections, and the military and political rivalries of both African and European state systems went a long way to reduce the potential impact of state control. Although the state might be a silent beneficiary, employ the trade as a tool for taxing traders, and insist that its own interests and those of its favored clients take precedence, trade remained competitive, probably favoring no particular national or regional actors – and certainly not Europeans at the expense of Africans.[105]

[103] John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison, 1983), p. 26.

[104] David Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483–1790* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 131–3.

[105] For an excellent discussion and critique of contrary views, see Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 299–302; and Elbl, "Portuguese Trade," pp. 614–17, 653–69.