

## NOTICE

### Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "*used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.*" If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

**New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT)** library reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

### Fair use Guideline (Section § 107)

Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 106 and 106A, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include –

- (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- (2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
- (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
- (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

The fact that a work is unpublished shall not itself bar a finding of fair use if such finding is made upon consideration of all the above factors.

**Printing Note:** If you do not wish to print this page, then select "Pages from: first page # to: last page #" on the print dialog screen.

## Slavery and African social structure

If Africans were experienced traders and were not somehow dominated by European merchants due to European market control or some superiority in manufacturing or trading techniques, then we can say confidently that Africa's commercial relationship with Europe was not unlike international trade anywhere in the world of the period. But historians have balked at this conclusion because they believe that the slave trade, which was an important branch of Afro-European commerce from the beginning, should not be viewed as a simple commodity exchange. After all, slaves are also a source of labor, and at least to some extent, their removal from Africa represented a major loss to Africa. The sale of slaves must therefore have been harmful to Africa, and African decisions to sell must have been forced or involuntary for one or more reasons.

The idea of the slave trade as a harmful commerce is especially supported by the work of historical demographers. Most who have studied the question of the demographic consequences of the trade have reached broad agreement that the trade was demographically damaging from a fairly early period, especially when examined from a local or regional (as opposed to a continental) perspective. In addition to the net demographic drain, which began early in some areas (like Angola), the loss of adult males had potentially damaging impacts on sex ratios, dependency rates, and perhaps the sexual division of labor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Thornton, "Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade"; also see idem, "Sexual Demography: The Impact of the Slave Trade on Family Structure," in Martin Klein and Claire Robertson, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1983): 39-48; and (for a later period) idem, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth Century Angola: Effects on Demographic Structures," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14 (1980): 417-27; Patrick Manning, numerous articles, e.g., "Local versus Regional Impact of the Export Slave Trade," in Dennis Cordell and Joel Gregory, eds., *African Population and Capitalism: Historical Perspectives* (Boulder and London, 1987): 35-49. More recent work dealing with the constantly evolving statistical study of exports (but mostly concerned with the eighteenth century) is

In addition to these demographic effects, historians interested in social and political history have followed Walter Rodney in arguing that the slave trade caused social disruption (such as increasing warfare and related military damage), adversely altered judicial systems, or increased inequality. Moreover, Rodney argued that the slave trade increased the numbers of slaves being held in Africa and intensified their exploitation, a position that Paul Lovejoy, its most recent advocate, calls the "transformation thesis."<sup>2</sup> Because of this perception of a widespread negative impact, many scholars have argued that the slave trade, if not other forms of commerce, must have been forced on unwilling African participants, perhaps through the type of commercial inequities that we have already discussed or perhaps through some sort of military pressure (to be discussed in a subsequent chapter).

When Rodney presented his conclusions on the negative impact and hence special status of the slave trade as a branch of trade, it was quickly contested by J. D. Fage, and more recently, the transformation thesis has been attacked by David Eltis. As these scholars see it, slavery was widespread and indigenous in African society, as was, naturally enough, a commerce in slaves. Europeans simply tapped this existing market, and Africans responded to the increased demand over the centuries by providing more slaves. The demographic impact, although important, was local and difficult to disentangle from losses due to internal wars and slave trading on the domestic African market. In any case, the decision makers who allowed the trade to continue, whether merchants or political leaders, did not personally suffer the larger-scale losses and were able to maintain their operations. Consequently, one need not accept that they were forced into participation against their will or made decisions irrationally.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence for the period before 1680 generally supports this second

reviewed in Paul Lovejoy, "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of African History* 30 (1989): 365-94.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Walter Rodney, "African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the Atlantic Slave Trade," *Journal of African History* 7 (1966): 431-43. Rodney modified his views in this article in response to criticism; see idem, "The Guinea Coast," in *Cambridge History of Africa*, 8 vols. (London, 1975-85), 4:223-324. For a recent modified restatement, see Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 108-34, 269-82.

<sup>3</sup> The original Rodney-Fage debate, in the *Journal of African History* (1966-9), is reprinted in J. E. Inikori, ed., *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (New York, 1982). Fage returned to the theme in "Slaves and Society in Western Africa, 1440-c. 1700," *Journal of African History* 21 (1980): 289-310. More recently, the issue has been argued by David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 72-8 (largely for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and in a more general way by Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, "Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the Pre-Colonial Era," *American Historical Review* 93 (1988): 936-59.

position. Slavery was widespread in Africa, and its growth and development were largely independent of the Atlantic trade, except that insofar as the Atlantic commerce stimulated internal commerce and development it also led to more widespread holding of slaves. The Atlantic slave trade was the outgrowth of this internal slavery. Its demographic impact, however, even in the early stages was significant, but the people adversely affected by this impact were not the ones making the decisions about participation.

In order to understand this position it is critical to correctly comprehend the place of the institution of slavery in Africa and furthermore to understand why the structure of African societies gave slavery a different meaning than it had in Europe or the colonial Americas. The same analysis explains the reasons for slavery's extension (if indeed it was extended) during the period of the Atlantic trade and its correlation with commercial and economic growth.

Thus, as we will see in this chapter and the next, the slave trade (and the Atlantic trade in general) should not be seen as an "impact" brought in from outside and functioning as some sort of autonomous factor in African history. Instead, it grew out of and was rationalized by the African societies who participated in it and had complete control over it until the slaves were loaded onto European ships for transfer to Atlantic societies.

The reason that slavery was widespread in Africa was not, as some have asserted, because Africa was an economically underdeveloped region in which forced labor had not yet been replaced by free labor.<sup>4</sup> Instead, slavery was rooted in deep-seated legal and institutional structures of African societies, and it functioned quite differently from the way it functioned in European societies.

Slavery was widespread in Atlantic Africa because slaves were the only form of private, revenue-producing property recognized in African law. By contrast, in European legal systems, land was the primary form of private, revenue-producing property, and slavery was relatively minor. Indeed, ownership of land was usually a precondition in Europe to making productive use of slaves, at least in agriculture. Because of this legal feature, slavery was in many ways the functional equivalent of the landlord-tenant relationship in Europe and was perhaps as widespread.

Thus, it was the absence of landed private property – or, to be more precise, it was the corporate ownership of land – that made slavery so pervasive an aspect of African society. Anthropologists have noted this

<sup>4</sup> This argument is found in a number of analyses of African political economy, e.g., Jack Goody, *Tradition, Technology and the State in Africa* (London, 1971), and more recently in Ralph Austen, *African Economic History*.

feature among modern Africans, or those living in the so-called ethnographic present or traditional societies.<sup>5</sup> Anthropologists have regarded the absence of private or personal ownership of landed property as unusual, because it departs from the European pattern and from the home cultural experience of most anthropological observers, and has therefore seemed to require an explanation.

For example, Jack Goody argued that technological backwardness and low population densities made land plentiful, and hence personal property in land had to await technological change. Likewise, he and others, perhaps influenced by European socialist thinking or the liberal economic notion of opportunity for all, argued that the absence of private property in land also meant an absence or at least a mitigation of exploitation and inequality.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence, however, does not necessarily support such explanations. For example, African population densities in many areas were surely large enough to warrant division of land, if landed property is somehow the result of competition for land. The average density in seventeenth-century Lower Guinea (roughly the southern half of Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Nigeria) was probably well over thirty people per square kilometer, or well over the average European density of the time.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Capuchins who visited the area in 1662 regarded it as so populated it resembled "a continuous and black anthill" and noted that "this kingdom of Arda [Allada] and most of this region [Lower Guinea] exceed in number and density [the population] of all other parts of the world."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, African societies surely did possess inequalities and exploitation, as we shall see.

One must remember that landownership is ultimately simply a legal fiction. Owning land in the end never amounts to more than owning dirt, and it is ownership of the product of the land that really matters. European landowning actually established the right of the owner to claim the product or a rent on the product. Landownership was therefore really ownership of one of the factors of production, with a concomitant right to claim the product of the factor. The division of land was

<sup>5</sup> A general description, based on extensive anthropological investigation, can be found in Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin, *Africa and Africans*, 3d ed. (Prospect Heights, Ill., 1988), pp. 129-46.

<sup>6</sup> This is the core argument of *Tradition, Technology and the State*, and is adopted in a variety of ways in other work, such as Austen, *African Economic History*, John Iliffe, *The Development of Capitalism in Africa* (London, 1983), and more recently idem, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987). For a position rooted in liberal economics, see A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973), pp. 22-7.

<sup>7</sup> For this estimation, built on the possible "carrying capacity" of the area for the slave trade, see the argument in Thornton, "Demographic Effect."

<sup>8</sup> Biblioteca Provincial de Toledo, Colección de MSS Borbón-Lorenzana, MS. 244, Basilio de Zamora, "Cosmographia," fol. 50.

more the result of legal claims than simply a reaction to population pressure. In any case, population pressure itself has historically often been more the result of unequal landownership claims than a product of demography.

But there are other ways to establish a claim of social product, such as taxation (through the rights of the state or other corporate group) or slavery and other personal relations of dependency. Thus, just as ownership of land as a factor of production establishes a right to the product of that factor, so, too, ownership or control of labor (people or slaves) can provide the same right. African law established claims on product through taxation and slavery rather than through the fiction of landownership.

The African social system was thus not backward or egalitarian, but only legally divergent. Although the origins and ultimate significance of this divergence are a matter for further research, one important result was that it allowed African political and economic elites to sell large numbers of slaves to whoever would pay and thus fueled the Atlantic slave trade. This legal feature made slavery and slave trading widespread, and its role in producing secure wealth linked it to economic development.

Exploring this legal divergence can help to elucidate this important factor in African participation in the Atlantic economy. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European observers were fully aware that African societies were both politically and economically inegalitarian and that these inequalities were represented in social and legal structures. But their understanding of those social and legal structures was usually shaped by European terms and the institutions they represented. Thus, although some recognized the absence of landed private property, many made Africans into landholders in spite of themselves.

European witnesses, after all, came from an area where the concept of landownership and income based on its lease to tenants was the fundamental starting point of law. Church law on landed property placed its origin in ancient times and made it a universal principle of "Natural Law."<sup>9</sup> The *Siete partidas*, the Castillian law code that formed the basis for most Iberian law and had a major impact even on modern law codes, argued that all land should have an owner and that if land was not owned by private persons, it ought to be owned by the state. Thus, productive resources would be divided up (the purpose of law being to

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Innocent IV, *Commentaria doctissima in Quinque Libros Decretalium* (Turin, 1581), 3.34.8, fol. 176v, quoted and discussed in James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels* (Liverpool, 1979), p. 8.

allow everyone to "know his own") so that people could derive their support and income from the production of their own part of these resources.<sup>10</sup> Considerable space was devoted to specifying how ownership of land was established, to preventing tenants from claiming ownership of their landlord's land, and the like.<sup>11</sup>

Coming from this background, the idea that land was not private property was inconceivable. One common way to reconcile African law and the concept that landed property was a natural and essential part of civilization was to describe land in Africa as being owned by the king (as a substitute for corporate ownership by the state). Hence, in 1602, the Dutch trader and traveler Pieter de Marees described the rulers of the Gold Coast as owners of the land, their income being a form of ground rent,<sup>12</sup> and the Italian Capuchin missionary Giacinto Brugiotti da Vetralla spoke of royal ownership of all land in Kongo in 1659.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps conscious that royal ownership might not be the best explanation of African revenue systems, others sought to explain royal incomes through the idiom of taxes. In European law, the state had the right to tax land without owning it, and hence when states took income that did not derive from rent, this might be seen as a tax. In Europe, of course, the tax was assessed on land, and thus owners paid tax based on how much land they owned and its assessed value. But in Africa people rather than land were taxed, another indication of the absence of landed property. Thus, a text of about 1628 referring to Kongo noted that a source of royal income was a universal tax charged by "the head" rather than on land.<sup>14</sup> The idea that people were charged rather than land was also applied by some observers to Benin, where the entire population

<sup>10</sup> *Las siete partidas del Rey D. Alfonso el Sabio* (ed. Gregorio Lopez, Madrid, 1555; indexed edition of Joseph Berni y Cefalá, Valencia, 1767), pt. 1, title 1, law 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 3, title 30, laws 1-5; pt. 4, title 30, law 5; pt. 4, title 28, laws 34-8.

<sup>12</sup> De Marees, *Beschryvinge*, pp. 47a-49a, 56a. For a full discussion of this and other sources, see Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 16-20, 112-22.

<sup>13</sup> Giacinto Brugiotti da Vetralla, "Infelicità felice o vero mondo alla roversa" (lost MS of ca. 1659), summarized and quoted in Giuseppe Simonetti, "Il P. Giacinto da Vetralla e la sua missione nel regno di Congo," *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 10 (1907): 374.

<sup>14</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vaticana Latina, 12156 (anonymous text of ca. 1628), partial French translation in Jean Cuvelier, *L'ancien Congo d'après les archives romaines* (Brussels, 1954), pp. 133-4. For a commentary on this text and its possible authors, see John Thornton, "The Correspondence of the Kongo Kings, 1614-35: Problems of Internal Written Evidence on a Central African Kingdom," *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 408-14. For a fuller discussion of Kongo's tax system, see Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 23-7. Note that in this discussion, these taxes are described as "rent" (in large measure because Kongo economic texts used the term *renda*, meaning "rent-bearing land or estate" in Portuguese), but this should be taken as economic rent rather than rent in the legal sense; see Barry Hindress and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London, 1975), pp. 221-55.

was regarded as being "slaves of the king" (although other types of slaves were recognized as well).<sup>15</sup>

One might also note that African systems of taxes, or state dues, included more than simple money charges: They might also include rights to labor and service. Hence, in describing the rights of kings in Sierra Leone, the early Portuguese resident Alvaro Velho (who lived there from 1499 to 1506) noted that "none of the kings . . . draw any income from their subjects, except when they wish to cultivate or sow or gather the harvest, then everyone in their jurisdiction must provide them free labor, or to build houses and town walls or go to help him in war."<sup>16</sup>

Since taxes, in the European concept, were charges assessed with the specific purpose of paying for a particular government service, some writers, noting the more general-purpose nature of African assessments, thought of them as "tribute" – payments owed a sovereign by virtue of his authority. It was in this regard that Alvaro Velho noted of the ruler of Falop (a state in modern Guinea-Bissau) that "no king in Ethiopia is so well paid his tribute as this king."<sup>17</sup>

These points converge to imply corporate ownership of land by the state, a convenient half-way house that modern research supports. But even in this case the state's real control was exercised more over people (as in Benin) than over land. The same claims might also be made by a family unit (as a corporation); that is, a kinship group can also be seen as owning both people and land. Modern anthropologists who have examined African kinship systems have found that most African societies have (or had in the recent past) kinship systems that define fairly large units of people. Each group is descended from a (usually mythical) common ancestor, and descent is often defined in such a way that an egalitarian unit is created.<sup>18</sup> These units often control access to specified tracts of land. Restated in religious terms, land is often said to have been claimed by some ancient ancestor, typically the first to settle on unoccupied territory, on behalf of his descendants. Alternatively, a tutelary deity might be seen as owning the land and giving it to a descent

<sup>15</sup> Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (Utrecht, 1704; first English trans., London 1705; facsimile, with annotations, by John D. Fage and Ray Bradbury, London, 1967), p. 430. This passage states directly that all were free men but treated as slaves, though it was judged to be an honor to bear the title of "king's slave."

<sup>16</sup> Fernandes, "Descriçã," fol. 129.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 118.

<sup>18</sup> On the ideology of lineage in a modern context, see Pierre Phillipe Rey, *Colonialisme, néo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme* (Paris, 1972), for a full development of the idea of a "lineage mode of production."



group. In some societies, the issue of land is secondary, and the lineage actually "owns" its people.<sup>19</sup>

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources rarely give the kind of detailed information that will allow a description of the ideology of landownership or revenue claims or how kinship groups or lineages were constructed, but the traditions of states, especially their origin traditions, that survive from the period do provide some ideas. These traditions typically related to the foundation of the state and define others by kinship or other relationships with the founder. Such traditions were recorded for the central African states, such as Kongo and Ndongo.<sup>20</sup>

The Italian Capuchin Girolamo da Montesarchio, who spent twenty years in Kongo, observed that before any Kongo authority could collect income or exercise authority, he first had to pay homage to the *kitomi*, a priest of the tutelary deities (or ancestors) of the region.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, the rulers and officials of the states of Sierra Leone often governed their states and held their authority as members of "congregations" devoted to tutelary deities called *corofims* in Portuguese sources<sup>22</sup> (probably the modern Temne term *krifi*). The close connection between ancestral and territorial deities in much of Africa represents a merger of the corporate claims of lineages and different sorts of claims made on behalf of states. Furthermore, in the Ndongo traditions at least, the complex genealogy of the founding lineage that is included in the story of foundation certainly points to the idea of a particular lineage "owning" a state.<sup>23</sup> But we cannot go farther except to say that the basic idiom of these traditions

<sup>19</sup> For a particularly clear explanation, see Philip Curtin, Stephen Feierman, Leonard Thompson, and Jan Vansina, *African History* (Boston, 1978), pp. 156–71 (a contribution by Stephen Feierman, based on East African data but applicable in general).

<sup>20</sup> Kongo traditions are discussed in Thornton, "The Kingdom of Kongo, ca. 1390–1678: The Development of an African Social Formation," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 22 (1983): 325–42. For an overview of the Ndongo traditions (though not with this exercise in mind) see Beatrix Heintze, "Written Sources, Oral Traditions and Oral Traditions as Written Sources: The Steep and Thorny Way to Early Angolan History," *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 263–88.

<sup>21</sup> Girolamo da Montesarchio, "Viaggio al Gongho," fols. 26, 32v–33. A modern edition, Calogero Piazza, *La Prefettura Apostolica del Congo alla Meta del XVII secolo: La relazione inedita di Girolamo da Montesarchio* (Milan, 1976), reproduces this with the original pagination, which I follow here. In my examination of the original in the Archivio Provinciale dei Cappuccini da Provincia di Toscana, Montughi Convent, Florence, I found the pages numbered consecutively on alternate pages, rather than only on the recto (and the text is so cited in Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*).

<sup>22</sup> Fernandes, "Descrição," fols. 1321v, 139; de Almada, "Tratado breve," MMA<sup>2</sup> 3:351–2; Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (henceforward BSG), Manuel Alvares, "Etiopia Menor e Descrição da Provincia de Serra Leoa" (ca. 1617), fols. 67–68v.

<sup>23</sup> For a full elaboration of the various versions of these traditions, collected mostly in the mid-seventeenth century, see Heintze, "Written Sources."

conforms to modern patterns, and thus the ideology may have been the same.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in other ideological statements, kings might claim the right to tax from the right of conquest. The Kongo traditions, for example, stress that the founder of the state had conquered the people of the country, and his rights to govern and tax them derived from this, rights he partitioned out to "captains" who were appointed by him, not for life but for the performance of service.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the traditions of the Mane, who dominated Sierra Leone from the later sixteenth century onward, stressed their conquest of the region.<sup>26</sup> Seventeenth-century travelers also recorded traditions of subjugation and tribute exaction as the basis for income in Allada, as well as noting revolts that broke this control.<sup>27</sup>

If state ownership or at least corporate control by the state and its officials can be defined in this way, then obviously lesser property would not exist. But the travelers' accounts often speak of "nobles," occasionally as "owners" of land or at least as those who exercise rights over it. Yet these people ultimately derived their rights from their position in the state and not as landowners in the European sense. Thus, they can be regarded as noble because they held titles but not because they owned land.

For example, John Hawkins, describing Sierra Leone in 1562-8, contended that the nobles "owned" the land, and everyone else had to pay a rent (the payment appropriate for private land) for the right to use it.<sup>28</sup> But in Sierra Leone, as elsewhere, the real owner was the state, and these estates with their rents were really delegated state charges, or revenue assignments. André Donelha and André Alvares de Almada, two Cape Verdians who knew Sierra Leone well at about the same time as Hawkins, and Portuguese Jesuit Manuel Alvares, who resided there for a long time in the early seventeenth century, provide better observations of land and revenue.

As they understood it, the *solatiguís* (the "nobles" of the other descrip-

<sup>24</sup> For a full discussion of political ideology, see Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion in Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>26</sup> A good synthesis of these traditions, which, however, probably takes them too literally, is found in Rodney, *Upper Guinea Coast*, pp. 38-70. Rodney does identify the continuity between Mane ideology and economic exploitation.

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of these traditions, see Robin Law, "Problems of Plagiarism, Harmonization and Misunderstanding in Contemporary European Sources: Early (Pre-1680s) Sources for the 'Slave Coast' of West Africa," *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 348-9. Echoes can also be found in Biblioteca Provincial de Toledo, MSS Bourbón Lorenzana 244, de Zamora, "Cosmographia," fols. 47-8.

<sup>28</sup> See the account of his voyage in Richard Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations of the English Nation* . . . (1598-1600), in C. R. Markham, ed., *The Hawkins voyages* (London, 1878), p. 20.

tions) did not obtain their territorial jurisdictions by heredity, could not sell or alienate it, and could not pass it on to their progeny (so it was clearly not "theirs"). Instead, it was given to them by the kings as a source of income while they served him as officials. These officials were dismissible at will and could not take their income when they lost office, though they could seek employment (and further income) from a neighboring king.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, rather than being private estates where tenants were charged rents, the nobles' "lands" in Sierra Leone were revenue assignments, as we have already seen. It was thus from charges levied by state authorities that the wealthy nobles lived. On the Gold Coast, for example, de Marees noted that the peasants had to work one day per week on land assigned to officials as a part of the tax system (though he still saw the ultimate owner as the king).<sup>30</sup> A similar system obtained in the central African kingdom of Loango, where peasants were required to work a special field set aside for them to support the nobility or state officials.<sup>31</sup> In the state of Allada on the Lower Guinea coast, Capuchin travelers of 1660-2 noted that when a *fidalgo* ("noble") died, his office could be reassigned by the king, who also took half of his movable goods and divided the other half among the other nobility, indicating that property rights in income were very limited.<sup>32</sup> In Warri, a small state in the Niger delta, the king could replace members of the two governing councils at will when they died,<sup>33</sup> while in nearby Benin, with a similar system of government, the king's will was even more important for noble success and fortune.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, in Kongo, state officials, like those of Sierra Leone, had no right to income other than that assigned by the state, for if they were

<sup>29</sup> De Almada, "Tratado breve," MMA<sup>2</sup> 3:334-6; Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fol. 35; BSGI, Manuel Alvares, "Etiopia Menor," fols. 58-58v, 60.

<sup>30</sup> De Marees, *Beschryvinge*, pp. 56a-7a; see also Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 123-36, for an extended discussion of revenue systems.

<sup>31</sup> Olifert Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten . . .* (1st ed., Amsterdam, 1668; 2d ed., cited here, Amsterdam, 1676), p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> Biblioteca Provincial de Toledo, Colección de MSS Borbón-Lorenzana, MS 244, Basilio de Zamora, "Cosmografía o descripción del mvndo" (1675), fols. 64-5.

<sup>33</sup> Bonaventura da Firenze, "Come entrò la Fede di Giesu Christo nel Regno d'Ouere per la Prima Volta," fols. 16-16v, published in Vittorio Salvadorini, *Le missioni a Benin e Warri nel XVII secolo: La relazione inedita di Bonaventura da Firenze* (Milan, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 29; Alonso de Sandoval, *Naturaleza . . . de todos Etiopes* (Seville, 1627); composed 1624; modern ed., Angel Valtierra, *Instauranda Etiopia salute: El mundo del esclavitud negra en America* (Bogotá, 1957), p. 80; Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, p. 127. Alan Ryder has proposed, on the basis of careful reading of some of this literature (and other documents not cited here), that the councils in Benin gradually usurped power from the king during the course of the seventeenth century; a major civil war was necessary to return control to the king (*Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 12-20).

dismissed they possessed no income at all.<sup>35</sup> Our understanding of this might be confused because the Kongo themselves chose the Portuguese term *renda* (meaning "rent," or "rent-bearing property") in their own administrative and judicial texts to describe the revenue assignments they received. But if these lands bore "rent," it did not derive from the holders' claims, for Kongo texts clearly show that a *renda* could be taken away and reassigned freely by the king.<sup>36</sup>

In all this it is clear that what at first appears as private property, or what historians of early modern Europe sometimes call "great property," was not property at all. In each case the holders of titles and owners of income derived from property were beholden to larger corporate groups, sometimes lineages but typically the state, for their income. This was certainly not a source of freely disposable, personal income, even for the head of the corporation or state.

Although many European observers thought that the king or ruler of the state was the ultimate owner of all land, it is more accurate to see land as being owned by the state as a corporation and the ruler as collecting income or acting as an official (perhaps a senior executive officer) of the state. We can see this clearly in a well-documented state like Kongo, where, as we have already noted, many observers thought of the king as owner of the land, and where succession to office was apparently hereditary (though, it might be added, through a complex familial unit).<sup>37</sup> But though a king's son or brother was often the successor in Kongo, the ultimate choice of king lay in a group of electors who were stakeholders for the state. Some kings laid claim to the throne through hereditary rights, and some did not bother too much with the election, but the legal fiction that an election was necessary confirmed

<sup>35</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MSS Vaticana Latins, 12516, in Cuvelier, *L'ancien Congo*, pp. 133-4. For a fuller discussion of these aspects of Kongo's fiscal system, see Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 38-55. For a different interpretation that stresses trading and control over resources as the source of Kongo's fiscal system (but also corporate property and taxation), see Ann Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 19-49.

<sup>36</sup> See the early and significant usage by Afonso I in his letter to King Manuel I of Portugal, 5 October 1514, MMA 1:295. See also the use in the legal inquest conducted by King Diogo I in the 1550 plot by Pedro Nkanga a Mvika to overthrow him, ANTT II/242/121, passim and esp. fol. 7v (my pagination of an unpaginated text) (this text, with significant omissions and errors of transcription, can also be found in MMA 2:248-62). I must confess to contributing to the confusion in my own discussion, for I consistently used the term "rent" in its economic form (as an exploitative charge) rather than its legal form, borrowing from Marxist concepts of rent as well (*Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 17-20, and "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750," *Journal of African History* 25 [1984]: 159-61).

<sup>37</sup> I have dubbed this unit the "house" as it included both descent and clientage in its composition, though seventeenth-century traditions clearly show that houses defined themselves by descent from common ancestors; see Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 47-55.

the idea that the state was not the property of the king or even of his family.<sup>38</sup> The concept of ultimate election by a group of officials was commonplace in central Africa. The same principles were found in neighboring Ndongo as well, where election of one sort or another ratified succession within a family, but here, the genealogical nature of traditions does suggest a stronger, though still checked, tradition of lineage ownership than in Kongo.<sup>39</sup>

Other regions had similar systems, and indeed, although sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources routinely refer to African rulers as "kings," the term must always be qualified by noting that in many cases they were elected by officials, even if family or hereditary claims were honored and the rulers were overwhelmingly powerful relative to the electors. In Biguba, a state on the coast of modern Guinea-Bissau, Alvares de Almada observed that the executive ("king") was elected from among a group of related families, called *jagras*, and sometimes long civil wars were fought over the position.<sup>40</sup> In Sierra Leone, officials elected the ruler, but he in turn had the right to dismiss them at will upon his accession.<sup>41</sup> A similar process of election by officials of a powerful ruler who could dismiss them was noted by the sources of Dapper's account of the region around Accra on the Gold Coast about 1650.<sup>42</sup>

In Benin, though succession was deemed hereditary by seventeenth-century witnesses, the ruler's accession to the throne had to be confirmed and accepted by two senior officials.<sup>43</sup> He could then appoint or dismiss these officials at will, and he often chose his officials from foreigners (typically from the neighboring Yoruba areas) so as to ignore the claims of the officials' families.<sup>44</sup> A similar system also operated in Warri, south of Benin, where members of the two councils of nobility selected a king, but they could be replaced by the king only when they died, not at his will.<sup>45</sup>

In some cases, these elections did not result in a strong executive, nor were they necessarily limited to particular families. In many of the Gold Coast states, elections enthroned weak rulers or rulers who were checked by the officials. De Marees and early Portuguese sources both noted that

<sup>38</sup> See the discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 44–7. For a detailed discussion of Kongo legal views and conflicting claims by various Kongo kings in their own correspondence on the issue of rule of succession, see Thornton, "Correspondence of the Kongo Kings," pp. 414–18.

<sup>39</sup> On the complicated situation in Ndongo, see John Thornton, "Legitimacy and Political Power: Queen Njinga, 1624–63," *Journal of African History* 32 (1991): 25–40.

<sup>40</sup> De Almada, "Tratado breve," *MMA*<sup>2</sup> 3:323.

<sup>41</sup> BSGI, Alvares, "Etiopia Menor," fol. 58; de Almada, "Tratado breve," *MMA*<sup>2</sup> 3:334.

<sup>42</sup> Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, pp. 82–3, 120.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 130.

<sup>44</sup> De Sandoval, *Instauranda*, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Bonaventura da Firenze, "Come entrò," fol. 16–16v.

rulers were elected "by the people" (leading families) or "by captains" (officials).<sup>46</sup> The executive power of such an official might be limited; Andreas Ulsheimer, visiting the Gold Coast in 1601, thought that "a village mayor in our country has more authority than such a king."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, at Guinala, a state on the coast of modern Guinea-Bissau, Alvares de Almada described elections by two groups of people, one of which he called "nobles" and the other "commons" (perhaps on the analogy of Republican Rome), that often chose someone who was old and weak and would not challenge them.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in states where kings were powerful and could make some sort of hereditary claim on succession, describing the state and its revenue as the king's property might be reasonably correct. Likewise, cases where the officials laid hereditary claim on their offices and revenue assignments also might be seen as a form of private property not unlike the great landed estates of the European nobility. Michal Tymowski, for example, has argued that in the Songhay Empire of the Niger valley, certain sixteenth-century revenue assignments of rice-producing estates and hereditary grants of income from villages constituted the birth of "great landed property."<sup>49</sup> But even here, great property was limited by ultimate corporate control, at least in legal terms.

We have good reason to believe that Africa did not have small property, that is, plots of land owned by cultivators or let out to rent by petty landlords, just as it did not have great property. Of course, this must be conditioned by saying that African legal systems did ensure security of tenure for petty cultivators. What little we know about peasant land tenure in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Africa suggests that those who cultivated land had fairly secure rights to farm but probably not to sell, alienate, or rent this land. However, we have every reason to believe that Africans owned *products* of the land (but not the land itself), for they clearly could alienate any agricultural or manufactured product by sale, and therefore it is clear that African law recognized a law of property in general. Presumably this right also protected crops under cultivation and perhaps even fallow land, thus

<sup>46</sup> De Marees, *Beschryvinge*, p. 47a ("ghemeen volk" probably does not mean all the common people, but rather common in the sense of not being "noble"); Agustin Manuel y Vasconcellos, *Vida y acciones del Rey D. Juan el Segundo* (Madrid, 1639, translation based on a Portuguese original of 1624, which is no longer extant), pp. 81, 84.

<sup>47</sup> Andreas Ulsheimer, "Warhafft Beschreibung etlicher Rayssen . . . in Europa, Africa, Ostindien und America" (1616), fol. 47a, modern edition (with English translation) in Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources*, pp. 97-129.

<sup>48</sup> De Almada, "Tratado breve," *MMA* 3:334-6.

<sup>49</sup> Michal Tymowski, "Les domaines des princes du Songai: Comparaison avec la grande propriété foncière en Europe au début de l'époque féodale," *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 25 (1970): 1637-58.

providing secure land tenure that protected cultivated crops and the immediate agronomic rights of producers but did not extend to land as income-producing property.

Dapper, in describing land tenure in Loango, wrote that land was held in common (hence, no private property), and to secure the right to cultivate land, one had to do no more than begin farming in vacant land, although the rights would be surrendered once the peasant ceased cultivation.<sup>50</sup> Peasants in the Gold Coast, according to de Marees, had to seek royal permission to cultivate uncultivated land and agree to pay tax as a condition (hence very close to rent), but they were not bound to the land so cleared or vulnerable to expulsion.<sup>51</sup> The peasants might have individual tenure of the land, or they might work it in common. Dionigio Carli da Piacenza, an Italian Capuchin who lived in Kongo in 1667–8, gave a good description of communal tenure in which the whole village worked land together and divided the product by household “according to the number of people in each.”<sup>52</sup>

At first glance, this corporatist social structure seems to allow no one to acquire sources of income beyond what they could produce by their own labor or trade if they were not granted a revenue assignment by the state. Modern commentators on Africa have occasionally noted this, and precolonial African societies have sometimes been characterized as unprogressive because the overdeveloped role of the state inhibited private initiative by limiting secure wealth. In particular, these commentators believed that the absence of any form of private wealth other than through the state greatly inhibited the growth of capitalism and, ultimately, progress in Africa.<sup>53</sup>

It is precisely here, however, that slavery is so important in Africa, and why it played such a large role there. If Africans did not have private ownership of one factor of production (land), they could still own another, labor (the third factor, capital, was relatively unimportant before the Industrial Revolution). Private ownership of labor therefore provided the African entrepreneur with secure and reproducing wealth. This ownership or control over labor might be developed through the

<sup>50</sup> Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, p. 167.

<sup>51</sup> De Marees, *Beschryvinge*, pp. 56a, 57b; Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 16–21.

<sup>52</sup> Dionigio Carli da Piacenza, “Relation nouvelle et curieuse d’un voyage au Congo, fait ès années 1666 et 1667,” in Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Relation historique de l’Ethiopia occidentale*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1732), 5:131–3; see another version in idem, *Il moro trasportato nell’inclita città di Venezia* (Bassano, 1687), pp. 43–5.

<sup>53</sup> These conceptions are notable in Marxist writing. For instance, Maurice Godelier proposed applying the concept of the “Asiatic Mode of Production” to African societies; his views were followed up and modified in Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch’s classic article, “Towards an African Mode of Production,” in David Seddon, ed., *Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology* (London, 1978).

lineage, where junior members were subordinate to the senior members, though this is less visible in older documentation.<sup>54</sup>

Another important institution of dependency was marriage, where wives were generally subordinate to their husbands. Sometimes women might be used on a large scale as a labor force. For example, in Warri, Bonaventura da Firenze noted in 1656 that the ruler had a substantial harem of wives who produced cloth for sale.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the king of Whydah's wives, reputed to number over a thousand, were employed constantly in making a special cloth that was exported.<sup>56</sup> Such examples give weight to the often-repeated assertion that African wealth was measured in wives, in the sense both that polygamy was indicative of prestige and that such wives were often labor forces.

Of course, the concept of ownership of labor also constituted slavery, and slavery was possibly the most important avenue for private, reproducing wealth available to Africans. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that it should be so widespread and, moreover, be a good indicator of the most dynamic segments of African society, where private initiative was operating most freely.

The significance of African slavery can be understood by comparing it briefly with slavery in Europe. Both societies possessed the institution, and both tended to define slaves in the same way – as subordinate family members, in some ways equivalent to permanent children. This is precisely how slaves are dealt with in *Siete partidas*, following a precedent that goes all the way back to Aristotle, if not before.<sup>57</sup> Modern research clearly reveals that this is also how Africans defined slavery in the late precolonial and early colonial period.<sup>58</sup>

Seventeenth-century African data do not deal with the legal technicalities, though we have little reason to believe that they differed from those uncovered by modern anthropological research. For Kongo, where the

<sup>54</sup> However, it is much discussed in modern anthropological literature, for example, in Pierre Phillipe Rey, *Colonialisme, néo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme* (Paris, 1974). In many cases, however, the idiom of kinship was simply the ideological expression of dependency or inferior status, and not necessarily the cause of it.

<sup>55</sup> Da Firenze, "Come entrò," fols. 16, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Phillips, "Journal of a Voyage Made in the *Hannibal* . . . to Africa . . . [1693–4]," in Awnsham Churchill and John Churchill, eds., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 6 vols. (London, 1732), p. 236.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., *Siete partidas*, pt. 1, title 1, law 3; pt. 3, title 30, law 3; pt. 4, title 25, law 2. For deeper Greek and Roman roots, see Aristotle *Politics* 1.2 and Justinian *Digest* 41 1.10.

<sup>58</sup> For a lengthy discussion of data and debate, see Suzanne Meiers and Igor Kopytoff, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in idem, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977), pp. 1–84. Although I accept many of their observations about differences between African and European or Euro-American slavery with regard to role and treatment, legally the institutions were indistinguishable, and I see no need for the use of quotation marks when using the term "slavery" in Africanist texts.



remarkable documentation allows glimpses of the underlying ideology, the term for a slave, *nleke*, was the same as for a child, suggesting the family idiom prevailed there.<sup>59</sup>

Where the differences can be found is not in the legal technicalities but in the way slaves were used. In theory, there might have been no differences in this respect either, but in practice, African slaves served in a much wider variety of ways than did European or Euro-American slaves. In Europe, if people acquired some wealth that they wished to invest in secure, reproducing form, they were likely to buy land. Of course, land did not produce wealth by itself, but usually the land was let out to tenants in exchange for rents or was worked under the owner's supervision by hired workers. In neither case would such people have to have recourse to slaves to acquire a work force.

From what we know of slave labor in Europe in this period, it would appear that they were employed in work for which no hired worker or tenant could be found or at least was willing to undertake the work under the conditions that the landowner wished.<sup>60</sup> As we shall see, this lay behind most of the employment of slaves in the New World as well. Consequently, slaves typically had difficult, demanding, and degrading work, and they were often mistreated by exploitative masters who were anxious to maximize profits. Even in the case of slaves with apparently good jobs, such as domestic servants, often the institution allowed highly talented or unusual persons to be retained at a lower cost than free people of similar qualifications.

This was not necessarily the case in Africa, however. People wishing to invest wealth in reproducing form could not buy land, for there was no landed property. Hence, their only recourse was to purchase slaves, which as their personal property could be inherited and could generate wealth for them. They would have no trouble in obtaining land to put these slaves into agricultural production, for African law made land available to whoever would cultivate it, free or slave, as long as no previous cultivator was actively using it.

Consequently, African slaves were often treated no differently from peasant cultivators, as indeed they were the functional equivalent of free tenants and hired workers in Europe. This situation, the result of the institutional differences between Europe and Africa, has given rise to the idea that African slaves were well treated, or at least better treated than European slaves. Giacinto Brugiotti da Vetralla described slaves in central Africa as "slaves in name only" by virtue of their relative freedom

<sup>59</sup> Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 21-2.

<sup>60</sup> For a survey of slave employment in early modern Europe, see Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques*.

and the wide variety of employments to which they were put.<sup>61</sup> Like-wise, as we shall see, slaves were often employed as administrators, soldiers, and even royal advisors, thus enjoying great freedom of movement and elite life-styles.

This did not mean, of course, that slaves never received the same sort of difficult, dangerous, or degrading work that slaves in Europe might have done, although in Africa often such work might just as easily have been done by free people doing labor service for the state. In any case, Valentim Fernandes's description of slave labor in Senegambia around 1500, one of the few explicit texts on the nature of slave labor, shows that slaves working in agricultural production worked one day a week for their own account and the rest for their master, a work regime that was identical for slaves serving in Portuguese sugar mills on the island colony of São Tomé in the same period.<sup>62</sup> Slaves employed in mining in Africa may have suffered under conditions similar to those of slaves in European mining operations, though the evidence is less certain.<sup>63</sup>

On the whole, however, African slavery need not have been degrading or the labor performed by slaves done under any more coercion (or involving any more resistance) than that of free laborers or tenants in Europe. Therefore, the idea that African dependence on slave labor led to the development of a reluctant work force or inhibited innovation is probably overdone.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Giacinto Brugioti da Vetralla, "Nelle schiavi che si cōprano e vendero nel regno di Congo" (ca. 1659), Archivo "De Propaganda Fide," Scritture originali referite nel congregazione generale, vol. 250, fol. 28.

<sup>62</sup> On Senegambian slaves, see Fernandes, "Descrĩa," fol. 92v (the page is placed backward in the manuscript in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Codex Hispanicus 102). The text at this point in the manuscript is independent in many places of da Mosto's (1455-6) description of Senegambia. Da Mosto describes slavery in general, but the passage on work days is only found in the Fernandes MS. (cf. fols. 344-47v and note the terms of trade in horses given on fol. 91, marginal note per 1455). For slavery on São Tomé around 1540, see "Navigazione da Lisbona all'isola di San Tomé, posta sotto la linea dell'equinoziale, scritta per un piloto portoghese e mandata al magnifico conte Rimondo della Torre . . .," Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Delle navigationi et unghi*, 3 vols. (Venice, 1550-9; facsimile ed., Amsterdam, 1980; modern reedition with new pagination, ed. M. Milanese, 6 vols., Milan, 1978), 1:579.

<sup>63</sup> See Kea, *Settlements*, pp. 201-2. Kea bases this assessment on two sources: a passage in Fernandes (mentioning slaves in mines and the establishment of slave households fed from royal stocks) and a second one in a memorial of 1572 proposing a Portuguese-sponsored project to seize and work the gold mines. Kea argues that the proposals reflected local use patterns and supplies some archeological evidence in support of enclosed work camps. One should note, however, that it also resembles European mining using slaves in Colombia (New Granada) in the same period (see Chapter 6).

<sup>64</sup> My position differs from that of Lovejoy (*Transformations in Slavery*), who sees slavery moving from a marginal institution to a central one and focuses on changes in the "mode of production" (i.e., a labor regime) rather than the institution. Unfortunately, Lovejoy's analysis is marred by his inability to quantify the number of slaves in Africa in 1500 (and hence to judge the real growth) and his decision not to distinguish between

For Europe and the European colonies in America, the distinction between the productivity of slave and free labor may have validity (though even there it is a matter of intense debate),<sup>65</sup> in Africa the distinction is probably less applicable. The exact nature of the labor regime, rather than the legal status of the workers, is more relevant to a description of African economic history, and in this instance, different legal structures led Africans and Europeans to develop the institution of slavery in substantially different ways. Consequently, the conventional wisdom concerning slavery developed from the study of European or colonial American societies with landed private property simply cannot apply in Africa.

African slaves were typically used in two different ways. First of all, slaves became the preeminent form of private investment and the manifestation of private wealth – a secure form of reproducing wealth equivalent to landowning in Europe. Second, slaves were used by state officials as a dependent and loyal group, both for the production of revenue and for performing administrative and military service in the struggle between kings or executives who wished to centralize their states and other elite parties who sought to control royal absolutism.

The private employment of slaves as heritable, wealth-producing dependents was perhaps the most striking African use. Dapper, in describing private wealth in Kongo, noted that although the households of the nobility were not wealthy in ready cash, nor did they possess much in the way of luxury goods, they were wealthy in slaves. This, he believed, was the main form of wealth in central Africa.<sup>66</sup>

Likewise, slaves represented the way to achieve wealth for ambitious commoners in the Gold Coast states, and the state did attempt to regulate their acquisition. According to de Marees, a commoner who had become wealthy through trade might be able to attain noble status by sponsoring an expensive ceremony in which nobility was conferred upon him. Although the ceremony was ruinously expensive, the noble-to-be was willing to undertake it because it allowed him to acquire slaves,<sup>67</sup> which, as Dapper noted a few years later, would make it possible for him to recover the expenses of the ceremony, for “as soon as he

slavery as a legal institution and slavery as a “mode of production,” in that he assumes people called “slaves” in documents all had a similar labor regime. For a blanket assessment of slavery as an essentially nonprogressive form of labor control (and a source of African backwardness), see Iliffe, *Development of Capitalism in Africa*, chap. 1.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1974), and the stormy critique led by Herbert Gutman (*Slavery and the Numbers Games: A Critique of Time on the Cross* [Urbana, 1975]) and Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch (eds., *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* [New York, 1976]).

<sup>66</sup> Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, p. 202.

<sup>67</sup> De Marees, *Beschrijvinge*, pp. 85b–87a.

gets some goods he bestows them on slaves, for that is what their wealth consists of."<sup>68</sup>

Recently, several historians have followed the careers of some prominent Gold Coast merchants who rose from relative obscurity to become great economic and political actors on the coast, using documentation from the records of the Dutch, English, and Danish commercial houses. In all these accounts, the acquisition of slaves to carry goods, cultivate lands, protect the household, and assist in trading figures prominently as an essential step.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the careers can in some ways be seen as parallel to that of the European commoners who invested first in land and then in titles of nobility, though in Africa, of course, the investment was in slaves and then in nobility.

Slaves as reproducing wealth figured prominently among the Julas and other Moslem commercial groups of the western Sudan and Senegambia. Richard Jobson, the English gold trader who spent considerable time traveling up the Gambia deep into the Sudan in the 1620s, noted that the Julas ("Juliettos") had constructed a chain of villages worked by their slaves, who provided them with provisions and served as carriers on their commercial expeditions.<sup>70</sup> The heads of these villages acquired special rights (in some ways equivalent to those of nobility) from the rulers of the states in which they settled. Philip Curtin's detailed study of the Julas and other Moslem commercial groups in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries emphasizes their extent and organization.<sup>71</sup> Yves Person, focusing on a later period, compared them to the French bourgeoisie rising from common to noble status or seizing power if thwarted: hence he compared a series of "Dyula Revolutions" from the late eighteenth century onward to the French Revolution.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, in Africa the development of commerce and of social mobility based on commerce was intimately linked to the growth of slavery, for slaves in villages performing agricultural work or carrying goods in caravans or working in mines under private supervision were essential to private commercial development.

This last point is significant to consider in the transformation thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, p. 114. This passage occurs in a section of Dapper that was clearly drawn from de Marees's account and can be taken to be a commentary upon it.

<sup>69</sup> Daaku, *Trade and Politics*; David Henige, "John Kabes of Komenda: An Early African Entrepreneur and State Builder," *Journal of African History* 18 (1977): 1-19; Kea, *Settlements*, esp. pp. 288-320;

<sup>70</sup> Jobson, *Golden Trade*, pp. 62-70 and passim. Jobson typically calls the Julas "Marybuckles" (marabouts), emphasizing their religious profession, but on occasion he mentions them as "Juliettos" (Julas).

<sup>71</sup> Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 59-91. Curtin pays relatively little attention, however, to domestic uses of slaves; see pp. 153-6.

<sup>72</sup> Yves Person, *Samori: Une révolution dyula*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1968-75).

Both Rodney and Lovejoy, advocates of the idea that the development of the Atlantic slave trade extended slavery and resulted in larger numbers of people being enslaved and being worse treated, see this as a direct external input, foreign to African political economy. Yet, the development and extension of slavery, if it did take place (and this point is never proved by either author),<sup>73</sup> might just as well be seen as the result of economic growth in Africa, perhaps stimulated by commercial opportunities from overseas, perhaps by a growing domestic economy. Even the increased incidence of maltreatment (another point that is completely without proof) may indicate only more aggressive use of the labor force by entrepreneurs, just as the European work force faced increased exploitation during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

The use of slaves by private people to increase and maintain their wealth was just one of the ways in which slaves were utilized in African societies. Another one, almost of equal importance, was their use by the political elite to increase their power. Slaves employed by the political elite might be used as a form of wealth-generating property, just as they were in private hands, or they might be used to create dependent administrations or armies. In this latter capacity, Africa created many wealthy and powerful slaves.

Most large African states were collections of smaller ones that had been joined through alliance and conquest, and typically the rulers of these smaller constituent states continued to exercise local authority, and the ruler of the large state found his power checked by them. Developing private resources that would answer only to themselves was an important way in which African rulers could overcome such checks and create hierarchical authority centered on their own thrones. Slaves, who could be the private property of a king or his family or might also be the property of the state, were an ideal form of loyal workers, soldiers, and retainers.

The powerful Sudanese empires relied heavily on slave armies and slave administrators to keep a fractious and locally ascendent nobility in check. These nobles were often descendants of the rulers of the constituent smaller states; this was probably the status of the territorial rulers of Mali in al-'Umari's fourteenth-century description.<sup>74</sup> These constituent states were called *civitas* by Antonio Malafante, a Genoese traveler who

<sup>73</sup> In order to prove the point, one would need statistical information on the numbers of people enslaved before and during the slave trade era relative to the overall level of population. The study of African demography is still in its infancy, and there are no data except manipulated assumptions (as, e.g., in Lovejoy, "Impact of Atlantic Slave Trade," pp. 390-2) on the numbers of slaves in any African society before colonial statistical inquiries of the late nineteenth century.

<sup>74</sup> al-'Umari, "Masalik al-absar," in Hopkins and Levzion, *Corpus*, p. 260.

left a description of the empire of Songhay and its neighbors in 1477, a term that implies both subordination and self-government in Latin.<sup>75</sup> An anonymous description of the "Empire of Great Fulo" written about 1600 states that it dominated the whole Senegal valley and was composed of some twenty smaller units.<sup>76</sup> In accounts of the western provinces of Mali during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Portuguese travelers describe local "kings" (heads of constituent states) as virtually sovereign in their local rights and government, yet simultaneously describe Mali as a powerful overlord.<sup>77</sup> These descriptions and later ones of Mali and Kaabu, a state that based its authority on being a province of Mali, all reveal apparent local sovereignty coexisting with the apparently strong rights of the overlord, who at least extracted tribute and obedience and might even intervene in local affairs.<sup>78</sup>

One can observe the same with regard to a somewhat shadowy kingdom of "Kquoja" that dominated Sierra Leone from a capital near Cape Mount in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although Alvares de Almada noted that the Kquoja kings collected regular tribute and taxes<sup>79</sup> from local rulers, historians have generally not seen it as a unitary state.<sup>80</sup>

In some cases, perhaps including both Kaabu and sixteenth-century Mali, the strength of local states did cut in on revenue and authority exercised by their overlords, but slaves often offered a way around this. Alvise da Mosto's description of Jolof in the mid-fifteenth century provides a good example. Here, according to da Mosto, the king was beholden to three or four other powerful nobles, each of whom controlled a region (clearly the constituent states), gave him revenue when they chose, and moreover exercised the right to elect him. But the king was

<sup>75</sup> "Copia cujusdam littere per Antonium Malafante a Tueto Scribe Juane Johanni Mariono, 1447," edited with French translation in de la Roncière, *Découverte*, 1:153-5.

<sup>76</sup> Anon., "Relacion y breue suma delas cosas del reyno del Gran Fulò," in Avelino Teixeira da Mota, "Un document nouveau pour l'histoire des Peuls au Senegal pendant les XVème et XVIème siècles," *Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa* 24, no. 96 (1969), p. 48 (reprint Agrupamento de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, no. 56, Lisbon, 1969). Teixeira da Mota has attempted an identification of the units mentioned in this document on pp. 16-25.

<sup>77</sup> Fernandes, "Descriçã," fols. 106-7v (clearly describing the prerogatives of local kings within "Mandinga") and 108-108v (a separate sheet, not genuinely connected to this first one, describing the powers of the emperor of Mali); see also Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 1, chap. 29 (ed. Silva Dias).

<sup>78</sup> de Almada, "Tratado breve," MMA<sup>2</sup> 3:271, 283, 298; Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa*, fols. 15v-16v; BSGL, Alvares, "Etiopia Menor," fols. 8v, 10, 13, 133, and passim. Historical debates concerning when the empire of Mali declined arise because of the various interpretations of these texts; cf. Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London, 1973), pp. 94-102, with Madina Ly, "L'empire du Mali a-t-il survécu jusqu'à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle?" *Bulletin, Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique noire* 38 (1967): 234-56.

<sup>79</sup> De Almada, "Tratado breve," MMA<sup>2</sup> 3:359-60.

<sup>80</sup> See Adam Jones, "The Kquoja Kingdom: A Forest State in Seventeenth Century West Africa," *Paideuma* 29 (1983): 23-43.

able to obtain revenue of his own by distributing slaves in villages to each of his several wives; this income belonged to him. Not only did this give him independent support, but it allowed him to develop a large retinue of dependents who carried out his administrative tasks, numbering some 200 people in all. Unfortunately, the fact that at least one of his subordinates, "Budomel" (title of the ruler of Kajoor [Kayor]), was doing the same thing at the local level may well have ultimately limited his capacity to develop more central power.<sup>81</sup>

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century evidence from the *Tarikh al-Fettash*, a locally composed source on Songhay, shows quite clearly how the development of an army and administration of slaves helped that empire to become centralized. Tymowski has analyzed this text and showed that rice plantations worked by slaves, as well as villages of slaves settled throughout the country, supported an army of slaves and a bureaucracy of slaves through which the emperors conducted their business,<sup>82</sup> neglecting whatever obligations they may have had to the local nobles.

Slavery probably also aided centralizing monarchs in central Africa as well as West Africa. Kongo seems to have originally been a federation of states, at least as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition and law described it. The original kings of the federation owed their election to the votes of several electors, who were the heads of the member states.<sup>83</sup> But collecting slaves into a central place gave the Kongo kings great power – the capital city of Mbanza Kongo and its surrounding area formed a great agricultural center already in 1491,<sup>84</sup> and probably had ten times the population density of rural areas a century later.<sup>85</sup> The slaves, many of whom occupied estates around the capital, provided Kongo with both the wealth and the demographic resources to centralize. As early as 1526, documents from Kongo show that the provinces

<sup>81</sup> Da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (ed. Gasparini-Leporace), pp. 42–3, 54.

<sup>82</sup> Michal Tymowski, *Le développement et régression chez les peuples de la boucle du Niger à l'époque précoloniale* (Warsaw, 1974), pp. 86–97. Tymowski occasionally depends upon corrupt versions of the texts of these *Tarikh*s relating to slave groups, which were clearly inserted in the nineteenth century to justify local conditions. On these groups and the textual history of the *Tarikh al-Fettash*, see Nehemia Levtzion, "A Seventeenth Century Chronicle by Ibn al-Mukhtar: A Critical Study of the *Ta'rikh al-Fettash*," *Bulletin, School of Oriental and African Studies* 34 (1971): 571–93. I have checked Tymowski's references against the apparatus of the Arabic text (published by Oliver Houdas and Maurice Delafosse [Paris, 1913; reprint, 1964]) and found that most of the crucial ones (to slave villages given as gifts to *sharufa* or the rice plantations, as well as administrative and military positions) occur in the uncorrupted MS. A as well as in MS. C.

<sup>83</sup> This interpretation is found in Thornton, "Kingdom of Kongo,"

<sup>84</sup> It is described in a text of 1491 as equaling the Portuguese city of Evora in size (letter of the Milanese ambassador to Portugal, 7 November 1491, in Adriano Capelli, "A Proposito di conquista africana," *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, ser. 3, 10 [1896]: 416).

<sup>85</sup> John Thornton, "Demography and History in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1550–1750," *Journal of African History* 18 (1977): 524–7.

(constituent states) were in the hands of royally appointed people (mostly kinsmen),<sup>86</sup> and by the mid-seventeenth century local power and election were regarded more as a curse than a blessing.<sup>87</sup>

Slavery played a role in the centralization of nearby Ndongo as well. Like Kongo, Ndongo rulers may have benefited from the concentration of slaves in their capital – for Kabasa, Ndongo's capital, was also described as a large town in a densely populated area.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the ruler had villages of slaves who paid revenue to him scattered around in his domain. These villages were called *kijiko* (which actually means "slave" in Kimbundu), which a document of 1612 rendered as "populated places whose residents are slaves of the said king."<sup>89</sup> Perhaps more significant in Ndongo, however, was the use that the kings made of slaves as administrators, for the ruler had officials, the *tendala* and the *ngolambole* (judicial and military officials, respectively), who supervised subordinates and collected tax and tribute from his slaves.<sup>90</sup>

We have already seen that African rulers were sometimes limited in the amount of absolute power they could exercise. Some societies had rules of election that allowed officials to choose a weak ruler. In some of the smaller states, the use of slaves may have helped rulers develop more autocratic systems of government. In dealing with the states of the eastern Gold Coast, for example, Dapper noted that they were all quite strongly centralized and, moreover, had an abundance of slaves.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Alvaro Velho noted that among the smaller states of Sierra Leone, the income that rulers obtained from their slaves was their only steady source of income.<sup>92</sup>

Thus slaves could be found in all parts of Atlantic Africa, performing all sorts of duties. When Europeans came to Africa and offered to buy slaves, it is hardly surprising that they were almost immediately accepted. Not only were slaves found widely in Africa, but the area had a well-developed slave trade, as evidenced by the numbers of slaves in private hands. Anyone who had the wherewithal could obtain slaves from the domestic market, though sometimes it required royal or state

<sup>86</sup> See Afonso I to João III, 18 March 1526, *MMA* 1:460–2. Afonso revealed that such practices were already in force as early as 1506 in Nsundi province at least (and probably earlier still) (Afonso to Manuel I, 5 October 1514, *MMA* 1:294–5; and more explicitly in his no longer extant letter of ca. 1508, summarized in de Barros, *Decadas de Asia*, I, bk. 3, chap. 10).

<sup>87</sup> Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 38–43.

<sup>88</sup> Francisco de Gouveia to Diogo Mirão, 1 November 1564, *MMA* 2:528.

<sup>89</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Papeis avulsos, Caixa 1, 4 March 1612, quoted in Beatrix Heintze, "Unbekanntes Angola: Der Staat Ndongo im 16. Jahrhundert," *Anthropos* 72 (1977): 776, n. 131.

<sup>90</sup> Heintze, "Unbekanntes Angola," pp. 788–91.

<sup>91</sup> Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge*, pp. 86–7.

<sup>92</sup> Fernandes, "Descrição," fol. 92v.



permission, as in the Gold Coast. Europeans could tap this market just as any African could.

Moreover, the most likely owners of slaves – wealthy merchants and state officials or rulers – were exactly the people with whom European traders came into contact. Because merchants selling gold, ivory products, mats, copper bracelets, pepper, or any other trade commodity in Africa would also be interested in the buying and selling of slaves, European merchants could readily find sources. This was not so much because Africans were inveterate slave dealers, as it was because the legal basis for wealth in Africa lay in the idea of transferring ownership of people. This legal structure made slavery and slave marketing widespread and created secondary legal mechanisms for securing and regulating the sale of slaves, which Europeans could use as well as Africans.

The significance of African slavery in the development of the slave trade can be clearly seen in the remarkable speed with which the continent began exporting slaves. As soon as the Portuguese had reached the Senegal region and abandoned their early strategy of raiding for commerce, 700–1,000 slaves were exported per year, first with caravans bound for the Sahara (after 1448). After Diogo Gomes's diplomatic mission to the West African rulers in 1456, which opened markets north of the Gambia, exports took a dramatic turn upward, reaching as many as 1,200–2,500 slaves per year by the end of the century.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, from 1450 onward, even before their ships actually reached the Senegal River, Portuguese merchants were buying slaves from northward-bound caravans from the post at Arguim, tapping a long-standing trans-Saharan trade.<sup>94</sup> It is not surprising that Avelino Teixeira da Mota has been able to document the diversion of the Saharan slave trade from North Africa to the Atlantic coast in the same period.<sup>95</sup> The reason that such dramatic numbers were reached immediately may indicate nothing more, therefore, than that a preexisting engagement with foreign markets was transferred to Atlantic ones. Most of the early European slave trading with West Africa, even that with such relatively remote regions as Benin and the Niger delta, known in the sixteenth

<sup>93</sup> Magalhães-Godinho, *Descobrimentos*, 2:520–30 (especially for the period 1400–50). Magalhães-Godinho's figures for century's end are what Curtin calls a "capacity estimate" (actually based on observations of Pacheco Pereira), and such figures were probably not reached every year. For a more conservative estimate (though not much different) based on actual statistics collected from quantitative fiscal sources not consulted by Magalhães-Godinho, see Elbl, "Portuguese Trade." One should note, however, that if capacity estimates tend to overestimate the long-term volume of trade, fiscal records probably underestimate it, both due to the erratic survival of relevant records and to the illegal and unrecorded exports.

<sup>94</sup> See the comments of Diogo Gomes, "De prima inuentione Gujnee," in Fernandes, "Descriçã," fols. 275–8v.

<sup>95</sup> "Aspectos da colonização," pp. 680–1.

century as the "River of Slaves," was simply an internal trade diverted to the Atlantic. Pacheco Pereira mentioned that the country of "Opuu," probably the Jukun kingdom on the Benue River, was a major source of slaves for the region.<sup>96</sup>

The slave trade of the Benin coast shows another interesting aspect of African slavery and the export slave trade. The Saharan trade was mainly an export trade, but it also involved some internal trade. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Portuguese resold a large number of the Benin coast slaves to the Gold Coast. We know that such slaves were not simply used in the coastal mines (though we can be sure that many were) because the king of Portugal ordered this trade to cease (unsuccessfully, as it turns out) to prevent them from being sold to Moslems.<sup>97</sup> These Moslems had to be northern Jula merchants who also visited the coastal goldfields, and thus these slaves may well have been employed in goldfields located quite far in the interior.

That existing internal use and commerce in slaves lay behind the export trade is even more strongly suggested by the trade of central Africa. Unlike the West African trade, which drew on an ancient slave trade with North Africa and might thus have already been affected by external contacts, the central African region had no such external links. Nevertheless, the king of Portugal regarded Kongo as sufficiently important a potential exporter of slaves that he granted settlers in São Tomé privileges to engage in the slave trade in 1493, just a few years after the development of official trade there.<sup>98</sup> Kongo indeed became an important source of slaves for the Tomistas by 1502.<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately we possess no early statistics for the volume of this trade, but Valentim Fernandes noted that around 1507, in addition to some 2,000 slaves working on sugar plantations, the island held 5,000–6,000 slaves awaiting reexport.<sup>100</sup> Presumably these slaves were recent imports who had probably arrived within the last year, and certainly half, but probably the majority, originated in central Africa. When the books of the royal factor on the island were inspected by Bernardo da Segura in 1516, they showed annual imports, mostly from Kongo, of nearly 4,500 slaves.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo*, bk. 2, chap. 7 (ed. Silva Dias), p. 119. This identification is based on the identification of Opuu as *apu*, the Jukun word for "man." Other identifications have been proposed. Raymond Mauny suggests that it was the kingdom of Nupe in his notes to the French translation of Pacheco Pereira (*Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis* [Bissau, 1956], p. 119), which would not change the tenor of this argument. Ryder's suggestion (*Benin and the Europeans*, p. 35) that Opuu was a name for the Igbo, would weaken it, but on the whole seems unlikely.

<sup>97</sup> De Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 3, chap. 3.

<sup>98</sup> License to settlers in São Tomé, 11 December 1493, *MMA* 15:15.

<sup>99</sup> See the legend for Kongo on the Cantino Atlas, drawn about 1502 and reproduced in Cortesão and Teixeira da Mota, *Portugalliae monumenta Cartographica*, p. 149.

<sup>100</sup> Fernandes, "Descriçã," fol. 198.

<sup>101</sup> Bernardo da Segura to Crown, 15 March 1517, *MMA* 1:378–80.

Slaves from central Africa were so numerous that they soon exceeded the capacity of São Tomé and the Mina trade to absorb them, and so they began the long journey to European markets. Although most of the slaves available in the port towns of Lisbon, Valencia, and Seville in the 1470s and 1480s came from western West Africa, Jolof in particular,<sup>102</sup> by 1512 "Manicongos" were arriving in Seville,<sup>103</sup> and Portuguese reports of 1513 mention a whole ship from Kongo making delivery in Europe.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, at some point, probably within twenty years of first contact, central Africa was able to supply exports of slaves equal to the entire exports of West Africa. Clearly this sort of volume could not simply have been the occasional export of odd misfits. Nor have we any reason to believe that the Portuguese were able to either acquire the slaves themselves (except as clients of the Kongo kings) or force the Kongo to obtain the export slaves against their will. Instead, the growth of Kongo's trade had to draw on a well-developed system of slavery, slave marketing, and slave delivery that preexisted any European contact.

We must therefore conclude that the Atlantic slave trade and African participation in it had solid origins in African societies and legal systems. The institution of slavery was widespread in Africa and accepted in all the exporting regions, and the capture, purchase, transport, and sale of slaves was a regular feature of African society. This preexisting social arrangement was thus as much responsible as any external force for the development of the Atlantic slave trade.

<sup>102</sup> Da Mota, "Aspectos da colonização," p. 681.

<sup>103</sup> P. E. H. Hair, "Black African Slaves at Valencia, 1482-1516," *History in Africa* 7 (1980): 132; Alfonso Franco Silva, *Registro Documental sobre la esclavitud sevillano (1453-1513)* (Seville, 1979), no pagination, showing first Kongo slave in 1512.

<sup>104</sup> Alvará to Gonçalo Lopes, 19 September 1513, *MMA* 1:278-80; and Alvará to Almojarife of Ponte do Lima, 13 March 1514, *MMA* 1:285 (on "our ship from Manicongo," implying an annual shipment, perhaps of 300-500 slaves, bound for Spain).